Farjeon Benjamin Leopold

London's Heart: A Novel

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
IN WHICH MR. PODMORE DECLARES THAT HE IS NOT ACCOUNTABLE FOR HIMSELF

The scene opens in the locality of Soho-that labyrinth of narrow paths which always wears a depressed and melancholy air, as if it had just gone into mourning. If Soho ever had bright days in the shape of a sunny youth, it must have been very long ago. No trace of them remains; a settled sadness lies upon its queer narrow thoroughfares now and for evermore. The very voices of its residents are more subdued and resigned than other voices are in other places.

No locality in London contains so strange a variety of life's phases as may be found in Soho. And yet it is full of mystery, and its ways are dark and secret. Men and women may live there

for years, and their antecedents and present modes of life shall be as little known as if they lived in the most remote corner of the earth. Soho is the molehill of the Great City. You may have a thousand pounds a year and spend it in Soho, and your neighbours not only shall not notice it, but shall be as utterly indifferent to you as if you lived on tenpence a day-as hundreds of poor fellows are doing at this present moment. Hard-working mechanics live there; weary-eyed needlewomen; libertines; ballet-girls, whose salary is twenty shillings a week, and who wear furs and false hair and diamond rings; and man-owls, who sleep by day and prey by night. On the doorstep of some of the houses in which these persons dwell, children in the afternoon play with marbles and broken pieces of crockery. Here is a group composed of half a dozen dirty-stockinged little girls, who look at you shyly as you pause before them, and put their fingers in their mouths and giggle surreptitiously. Speak to this one-a clear gray-eyed girl of some eight summers, with intelligent well-formed face and beautiful light hair. Question her, and bribe her with pence, and you may obtain from her the information that she lives in the next street, at the baker's, on the second-floor back; that mother and father live there, of course; that seven brothers and sisters live there, making a family party of ten in all; that they have only one room, in which mother cooks the meals, and in which they all sleep; and that sometimes Uncle Bob pays them a visit, and eats and sleeps with them for a few days. Wondrous is the inner life of Soho. It is the abode of much seediness and much

suffering. Many a poor gentleman eats his bread-and-dripping there, and, if he can afford it, cooks his herring there, and thinks sadly of times, gone by, when his life had its days of sunshine. He looks forward yearningly to the time to come; but rich as is the harvest that grows in the fields of Hope, the chance of its ever being gathered is a dismal one indeed. The poor gentleman, ill-fed, ill-dressed, reads faded letters in his garret, kisses pictures there, and dreams hopefully of the future, which contains for him nothing but a grave.

In one of Soho's quiet streets-belonging to that peculiar family of streets which are invariably round the corner-is a tallow-chandler's shop, ambitiously designated by its proprietor, J. Gribble senior, as an oil and colour warehouse. This designation glares at you from over the blue shopfront in yellow letters-glares at you defiantly, as if it is aware beforehand that doubt of its assertion must necessarily rise in your mind. The window of the shop, in which the stock is displayed, is dusty and dirty, and everything behind it has a faded and second-hand appearance. In a corner of the window is a sheet of note-paper, on which is written-in feeble and uncertain letters-"Down with Cooperation!" There is an exception, however, to the generally dusty aspect of the window. In a centre pane, which is kept clean, is a square of blue cardboard, on which the following announcement is neatly written, in yellow round-hand:

J. GRIBBLE JUNIOR,

PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY

Broken Ribs or Bones

Carefully Re-set or Neatly Mended;

In fact

The Whole Frame speedily Recovered on Moderate Terms

J. G. junior informs the neighbouring Gentry that he has had a most Extensive Practice, and that, although he has had

Incurable.

J. G. junior has had Numerous Patients brought to him Partly Deformed or Weakened through Improper Treatment, and has in a very few Hours invariably restored to them their Original Strength.

Consultations, Examination, and Operations performed Daily

from 8 a.m. till 10 p.m

Patients admitted on application, and without the vexatious delay which is occasioned by references being required

NO CURE, NO PAY. ADVICE TO ALL GRATIS

J. G, junior's Royal Umbrella and Parasol Hospital, Second-floor Front.

The stock has not a very inviting appearance: comprising, for the most part, candles, mouse-traps, balls of twine, bars of

yellow soap-so arranged as to be suggestive of prison-windows-and limbs and wings and dead bodies of flies. These latter seem to be the peculiar attribute of shop and parlour windows in Soho. One might almost be pardoned for the supposition that every discontented fly in London makes it a practice to go to Soho and die.

The shop has its public entrance for customers, and its private entrance for the residents of the house-so private indeed, so circumscribed and squeezed up, that scarcely one out of fifty passers-by would know that it was there; and that one, seeing it by merest chance, might well be lost in wonder at the perplexing idea of a stout man struggling through the narrow passage into which the mockery of a door must necessarily open. Three bell-handles display themselves on each side of the door to snare and entrap the uninitiated; a goggle-eyed knocker (with a face so hideous that babies have gone into convulsions at the sight of it) also adds to the entanglement of ideas. For, knowing that the house contains many inhabitants who have no connection with each other, and some of whom may indeed be at variance, the uninitiated brings confusion upon himself by ringing the wrong bell or knocking the wrong knock. A woman, who lodged somewhere in the vicinity of the coal-cellar, was often the occasion of much distress to the knockers and ringers. This woman, who always made her appearance fresh from the washing-tub, and who came up-stairs invariably wiping her wet arms upon her apron, was afflicted with the perpetual

conviction that a ring or a knock, whether single, or double, or treble, was certainly intended for her; and as her temper was none of the sweetest, unpleasant scenes occurred. Many a box on the ears did youthful knockers and ringers receive from the damp hands of the disappointed woman, and many an angry mother would make her appearance in the passage a few minutes afterwards and exchange shrill civilities with the bad-tempered castigator. Sometimes these angry mothers would go almost into hysterics because the woman below declined to comply with such invitations as, "Come up, and I'll show yer!" or, "Come up, and I'll scratch yer eyes out for yer!" or, "What d'yer mean by slappin' my boy Billy about on the 'ead, which was weak from a babby? What d'yer mean by it, yer minx? – What d'yer mean?" (This last *fortissimo*.) "Come up, and I'll tear the 'air out of yer 'ead!" After which challenges and defiances the angry mothers, with very white faces, would issue into the street, and form the centres of little knots of female neighbours only too willing to discuss the matter and express their opinions. A facetious person, who had called several times at the house, and who was never able to solve the mystery of the bells, once hit upon what he conceived to be a happy idea. He gave a postman's knock; but the rush of eager feet from all parts of the house, and the glare of angry faces that met his smiling one when the door was opened, were sufficient warnings to him never to try it again; and he never did.

In the front room of the first floor of this house sits an old man, working in somewhat idle fashion on a few wooden castors

or wheels. It is Saturday on a summer evening in June. The window is open; on the sill are two flower-pots. The room, which is a humble one, is very clean and tidy, and there are evidences of comfort, even of refinement about it, humble as it is. Some cheap graceful ornaments are on the mantelshelf: a pair of shells; a shepherd and a shepherdess, condemned by the exigencies of art to live apart from each other, notwithstanding their languishing looks; and, in the centre of the mantelshelf, a vase with two of yesterday's roses in it. These roses, as they are placed in the vase, touch the photograph of a young girl, which hangs in a frame above them. She is pretty and fresh-looking, and there is a smile upon her face which induces gladness in the beholder: as spring flowers and bright skies do. On either side of the portrait, hung on a higher level, is a picture of the same young girl, disguised. On the right-hand side of the mantelshelf she is dressed in a Spanish costume; on her shoulders is a black-lace shawl arranged with the most charming negligence; and as she looks at you from behind a fan, you catch just a glimpse of laughing eyes. On the left-hand side of the mantelshelf she is dressed in the costume of a century ago, in brocaded silk dress, and with black beauty-spots on her cheeks; she wears a white wig, and, in the act of curtseying, looks at you saucily and demurely, coquetting the while with a white handkerchief which she holds in her fingers. The stove is hidden by an ornament of paper flowers, the colours and arrangement of which are more artistic than the majority of those sold in the streets. There is one singular peculiarity about the furniture in

the room: everything movable is on wheels. The chairs, the table, a footstool, the very ornaments on the mantelshelf-all on wheels made expressly for them. There is no carpet on the floor; but the chairs make no noise as they are moved, for the wheels (made of box or deal, according to requirement) are covered with leather. Even the flower-pots on the window-sill have wheels, and the old man is at present occupied in making wheels for a work-box, which it is not difficult to guess belongs to the young girl whose portrait hangs above the roses. He works noiselessly and slowly, and with great care. It is evident that he is engaged on a labour of love. He handles the wood as if it were sensitive; he looks at his handiwork fondly, and holds it up to the light and examines it with loving interest. Once he rises and stands before the mantelshelf, and gazes with a tender light in his eyes at the picture of the young girl. Then he returns to his tools, and resumes his work. A slight sound disturbs him, and he pauses in his work to listen. As he listens he raises his hand to his ear, and directs his eyes towards a screen, which makes, as it were, a second apartment of the cosiest corner of the room. Something that the old man loves lies behind this screen, which is so arranged that the pictures on the mantelshelf and the roses and the ornaments of paper flowers can be seen by the person lying there. A pale, thin, bent old man is he: not bent by age, but by constant stooping; with long hair-a fringe of it only round his head-nearly white, and with a thoughtful expression on his face that would well become a student; which this old man is not, in the ordinary acceptation

of the term. Among the decorations on the mantelshelf is the smallest of clocks, in a case of wood, carved most likely by Swiss hands. As the old man sits and works, a click from the Swiss clock warns him that another hour is nearly gone. "Five minutes to nine," he whispers, and he steps softly towards the screen, and moves it so that, when he returns to his seat, he can see what it has before hidden from his sight. With the exception of the click, and presently of the striking of the hour in thin bell-notes, not a sound is heard in the room; for the old man has list slippers on his feet. The shifting of the screen has disclosed a single iron bedstead, on which lies a woman asleep. She is careworn and middle-aged; and when her features are composed, a likeness may be discerned in them to the picture of the girl on the mantelshelf. But at the present moment her lips wreathe distressfully, and an expression of pain rests upon her face.

So, in this quiet room, the sick woman sleeping and the old man working, the minutes pass swiftly, and the click of the little Swiss clock is heard again. Five minutes to ten. The old man, who has been growing restless, and who has several times gone to the bed to see if the woman is awake, grows more restless still as he hears the last click. "Alfred promised to be here by this time," he says, with an anxious look at the door as he lays his work aside. On a little table near the bed are two medicine bottles, one large and one small, which, with their labels tied nattily round their necks, look ridiculously like clergymen with their bands on. The old man takes one of these medicine bottles, and reads

the directions: "Two tablespoonfuls to be given immediately she awakes, and after that, the same quantity every four hours."

"And she won't take it from any other hand than mine or Lily's," he muses. "If Alfred doesn't come home, and she doesn't wake, I must get somebody to go for Lily."

As he stands debating with himself what is best to be done, he hears a tap at the door. It heralds the appearance of a young woman, one of the lodgers in the upper part of the house. She has her hat and shawl on, and a basket is on her arm.

"Ah, Mrs. Podmore," he says abstractedly, "will you step inside?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Wheels," she answers; "I'm in a hurry. How's your daughter to-night?"

"Not so well, not so well," he says. "She's wandering a little, I think. The doctor was here in the afternoon, and I could tell by his face that he thought she was worse. And I have to give her her medicine directly she wakes."

"I'm sorry she's not well. We've all got our trials, Mr. Wheels! My sister's little boy's down with the fever too. I'm going to take a run round to see how he is."

"Not serious, I hope?"

"I don't know," replies Mrs. Podmore gravely; "he seems to me to be sinking-but we're all in God Almighty's hands. One thinks of one's own, Mr. Wheels, at such times. Thank God, *our* little one's upstairs, asleep, safe and well. But we feared we was going to lose her in the spring, and I never see a child struck

down but I think of *her*."

"I often think of little Polly, too," says the old man sympathisingly, "and of how near she was to death. Do you remember how Lily grieved?"

"Remember it!" exclaims Mrs. Podmore, with grateful enthusiasm. "I shall remember it to my dying day. What I should have done without her I don't know. When Polly was a-laying there so quiet and solemn and white, and my heart was fit to break, Lily used to come and cheer me up. She was the only comfort I had, bless her kind heart and pretty face!"

"Yes, yes," cries the old man eagerly; "and how Polly took to her after that! and how fond she was of my girl! But who could help being that-who could help being that?"

"I had enough to do, what with looking after Jim and Polly," continues the homely woman. "What with keeping the place clean and sweet, and making the things the doctor ordered, and mending Jim's clothes, and getting his dinner and tea ready for him every morning before he went out; and what with him coming home dead-beat and worried with anxiety about Polly, I wonder how I ever got through with it. As for doctors, my blood curdles again when I see them looking so steady and cold at somebody that's a-dying before their very eyes. Our Polly had been abed nigh upon three weeks, when the doctor comes and looks at her and feels her pulse, and shakes his head. My eyes was never off his face for a second; and when I saw him shake his head, I turned so faint that I thought I should have dropped.

He was going away without a word, when I stopped him in the passage. I tried to speak, but I couldn't, and I thought it was cruel of him to be so particular about buttoning his gloves, while I was in that state of agitation that I could hardly stand. 'Don't take on so, Mrs. Podmore,' he said; 'you've done your best, and that ought to be a consolation to you.' As if anything could have been a consolation to me! I asked him if he couldn't give me a bit of hope; but he shook his head again, and said, 'While there's life there's hope.' I knew what that meant, and I had to catch hold of the banisters to steady myself. Then I went and sat by Polly's bed, and began to cry. It seemed to me that she was gone from us already, and that home wasn't home any more. And I was frightened when I thought of Jim. His heart's bound up in Polly, you see, Mr. Wheels; they used to have quite a little play between them of a morning. She'd creep close to him in bed, and put her arms round his neck, and there they'd lay a-cuddling one another for half an hour before he had to get up. When he had had his breakfast and had kissed her a dozen times, and was out in the passage going to work, she'd call him back and make fun of him, and they'd laugh together that cheery like that it did my heart good to hear 'em. Sometimes she wouldn't call him, and he'd wait in the passage. She knew he was waiting, and she'd set up in bed, with a cunning little smile on her lips, and her head bent forward, and her pretty hand raised, listening. He knew what was going on inside that little head of hers, and he'd stamp his feet and pretend to go downstairs. Then she'd call out to him, 'Father, father!' and

he'd say, 'Here I am, Pollypod!' and they'd have another romp together, until he said, 'Now I *must* be off, Pollypod!' and away he'd run, waking half the people in the house with his clatter. I was always easy in my mind about Jim when he went away like that. I thought of all this after the doctor gave Polly up, and I was frightened. Jim was very late that night, and Lily was with me when he came home. 'How's my little Pollypod?' he said; but he didn't wait for an answer-he saw it in my face. I thought he'd have gone mad; but we got him quieted after a bit, and Lily sat up with me that night watching. Well, it was a little past four o'clock in the morning, and Jim was asleep, and Lily and me was watching and fearing, watching and fearing! Ah! it's an anxious time that watching of a night, when you fear you're a-going to lose something that's dearer to you than life! The tick of the clock then isn't like the tick of the clock at any other time. It seems to bring a warning to you, like; it sounds so solemn, that it brings a creeping feeling on you, and you're almost too frightened to look over your shoulder. That night we could have heard a pin drop, everything was so quiet. Polly was so still that I put my face close to hers on the pillow to catch her breathing, and I was laying like that when she opened her eyes quite wide. It gave me a dreadful turn, for I didn't know what was going to happen. But she opened her eyes for good, thank God! 'Where's father?' she asked. I couldn't have heard her, she said it so soft, if my face hadn't been close to hers, and if my heart hadn't been in my ears. 'Where's father?' she asked. I motioned to Lily, and she woke

Jim; and Polly moved her thin little hand towards him and smiled. She wanted to put her hand on his neck, but she was that weak she couldn't. So Jim, with the tears running down his face, but making believe to laugh as if they was having a game together, puts his face quite close to hers, and kisses her, and from that moment Polly mended; and father and her they romp together in the morning as they used to do, and pretend more than ever, I think."

Here Mrs. Podmore wipes her eyes, and asks the old man to forgive her for being such a gossip. "I've come to ask you, as you're going to stay in, to tell Jim, if he comes home before I'm back, that I won't be gone long."

"I'll tell him; and perhaps, Mrs. Podmore, you wouldn't mind my asking your husband if he would go to the music-hall, and bring Lily home. I can't leave my daughter, you see, and Alf's not here, and I don't like the idea of Lily walking through the streets by herself."

"Ask him and welcome," says Mrs. Podmore; "but, love your heart Mr. Wheels, Jim'll be that sleepy when he comes upstairs that I don't think he's to be trusted. He can hardly see hisself home when he's done work, he's that worked off his legs; and he's worse on Saturday than on any other night. How he manages to tumble through the streets is more than I can tell; it's a mercy he ain't run over. He always waits in the passage for me to come and help him up, and when he *is* up, he tumbles down dead beat. That's why I asked you to tell him about my being out, you

being nearest the street-door. To be sure Jim is a little brighter sometimes than others, and he may be so to-night."

The old man clings to this hope, and nods to Mrs. Podmore, who hurries out of the house. Then the old man falls to counting the seconds until Mr. Podmore makes his appearance. He has not long to wait. In a short time he hears the street-door opened and slammed-to. "That's Mr. Podmore," says the old man, starting from his chair and listening anxiously; "I hope he's not too tired to go."

Mr. Podmore seems to be not only too tired to go, but too tired to come. When he has slammed the street-door, he leans against it, and dozes. He has no need to close his eyes, for they were closed when he opened the door. He remains in this position for a few moments, then shuffles along the passage. Coming to the stairs, he sits upon the lowest step, and yields to the soft-sleeping murmurs which are overpowering him. Rousing himself, he sets himself in motion again, and begins to ascend the stairs, dragging his feet wearily, and falls asleep again before he arrives at the landing. In this way he reaches the old man, who is waiting to speak to him, and who is already tormented by the fear that this is not one of Mr. Podmore's bright nights.

Mr. Podmore is followed by a dog-a rough, yellow Scotch terrier-every hair in whose body bristles with watchfulness. It is a small dog, viciously faithful, and as it waits patiently and intelligently upon its master's movements, observing every motion with its watchful grey eyes, it declares clearly, "Here

am I, wide awake, and armed at all points. Touch him if you dare with any but a friendly hand! Address him at your peril in any but a friendly voice! I'm on guard, faithful and true, and I can distinguish friends from foes. I can smell them." No signs of impatience are visible in the dog's demeanour at Mr. Podmore's slow progress upstairs. It follows its master's footsteps with serious attention, watches while he dozes, pricks up its ears as he sets himself in motion again, and now stands on the landing before the old man with its nose close to its master's legs.

"Good-evening, Mr. Podmore," says the old man.

"Good-evening."

He blinks at the light which the old man holds in his hands, closes his eyes, and shows so decided a disposition to lean against nothing, that the old man has to save him from falling. This arouses him for a moment, and seeing the door open, he staggers into the room, and sinks into a chair. He is a well-made man, thirty years of age perhaps, and belongs unmistakably to the working classes-to one of the most perilously-worked of the working-classes. He carries a blue-cotton pocket-handkerchief containing an empty basin and plate which has held his dinner, and his hands and face are black with dirt. As he sits in the chair, having fallen rather heavily into it, the dog stretches itself under the seat, with its nose between its master's legs. You can see nothing of it but the tip of its nose and its two watchful grey eyes, steady and clear and humid, on the look-out for squalls.

"Where's my wife?" murmurs Mr. Podmore drowsily.

"She asked me to tell you," replies the old man, regarding Mr. Podmore doubtfully, "that she's gone to see her sister's child, who is ill. She'll be back soon."

"All right," says Mr. Podmore, upon whose ears the old man's gentle voice falls so soothingly that the soft sleep-murmurs take more complete possession of him; he sways forward in his chair, and is on the point of falling to the ground on his face, when he recovers himself by a sudden convulsive movement.

"Hush!" says the old man, casting an apprehensive look towards the bed. "Don't make a noise."

"Never fear," murmurs Mr. Podmore. "I have enough-noise-every day-to last me-my life-time."

He does not say this all at once, but breaks off two or three times to doze. Seeing him in this condition, the old man relinquishes his intention of asking him to go for Lily; his great anxiety now is to get rid of the tired-out man. But Mr. Podmore, overpowered by exhaustion, and wooed by the quiet that prevails, is so desperately bent upon falling into a deep sleep, that the old man has much difficulty in arousing him.

"Come, come," he urges, "rouse yourself, Mr. Podmore. Don't you think you would be more comfortable in bed?"

"I'm comfortable-enough," says Mr. Podmore, leaning his head on the old man's breast; "if you'll-let me be. I'm dead-beat. Where's my-precious-little Pollypod?"

"Up-stairs. Waiting for you. I want to take you to her."

Mr. Podmore rises unresistingly, and they stagger up-stairs to

his apartment on the third floor. The dog follows them. A candle is alight in the wash-bowl, and Pollypod is in bed, asleep. The dog, satisfied that a safe haven is reached, leaps upon the bed, and after licking Pollypod's face, curls itself at the foot of the bed, following its master's movements now with lazily-watchful eyes. Mr. Podmore clings to the old man, who assists him on to the bed, and determines to wait until the tired-out man is asleep. Mr. Podmore, nestling close to Pollypod, thinks it necessary to enter into an explanation before his senses entirely desert him, and he mingles his apologies with expressions of endearment towards his child.

"You see, Mr. Wheels," he murmurs, at intervals, "When a man's-a pointsman-(my little darling!) – and has to be at it-fourteen and sixteen and eighteen-hours a day-he ain't accountable-for hisself. The company says-he is-and the public says-he is; but I'm-a pointsman-and I know-better. (Don't I, Pollypod!) I've been on duty-now-since five o'clock-this morning-and I'm dead-beat. (Dead-beat, Pollypod!) What'd the public-say to that-if they knew it? I'm dead-beat-and I ain't accountable-for myself. (Am I, my pretty?) I wish the public-and the company-'d try it theirselves, – for a month. (To-morrow's Sunday, Pollypod, thanks be!) Last week-there was a-a accident-on our line-you saw it-in the papers. One woman-was killed-and others was-shook. The papers had articles on it-and the pointsman-who was dead-beat-was took in custody-and the coroner-said-said – "

But what the coroner said is not repeated on the present occasion, for Mr. Podmore falls into utter unconsciousness, and being undoubtedly as dead-beat as it is in the power of mortal to be, sleeps the deepest of deep sleeps. While the faithful dog, cozily coiled up on the bed, blinks and blinks at the candle, in a state of uncertainty as to whether a lurid star which gleams in the long dull wick is friend or foe.

CHAPTER II
IN WHICH DRIBBLE JUNIOR DISCOURSES ON CO-OPERATION

The old man, leaving Mr. Podmore in paradise, walked slowly down-stairs, and paused before a door on the second landing, on which was inscribed-again in yellow round-hand on a blue ground: "Umbrella and Parasol Hospital. Knock and enter." After a slight hesitation, he knocked and entered.

J. Gribble junior was hard at work mending ribs and bones, and speedily recovering frames on moderate terms. Mrs. J. Gribble junior was also hard at work on silk and gingham. The heir of the house of Gribble junior was asleep in a corner under an umbrella tent.

There could not have been fewer than a hundred umbrellas and parasols in the room, and there was not one of them which did not show signs of having seen a great deal of life-evidently much more than was good for it. Here was one reclining against the wall, surmounted by a great knob set upon one side of its head. It had a rakish and dissipated air, and seemed to declare that it had been out late at nights, in all sorts of company and all sorts of weather, and liked it; and that when the slits in its silk coat were mended, it intended to resume its dissolute life. Here was one, a sad-looking gingham, very faded and worn, telling

by the plainest of signs the story of its poor life and that of its owner. In your fancy you could see the faded gingham, on its rickety frame, being borne along through wind and sleet; and if you peeped beneath the awning you would see a patient-looking woman, meanly dressed, and you would know, without being told in so many words, that the burden of life had withered all the roses that once bloomed on her cheek; for a dozen years since she could have been but a girl, and could not have been otherwise than pretty. Here was one, thin and sleek, with ivory handle, which said, "I am faded gentility." It needed no great stretch of the imagination to see the hand in its well-worn and much mended glove that had clasped that handle in the streets for many months. Here was one which proclaimed, "I have been dropsical from early youth, and there is no cure for me;" and indeed all Gribble junior's skill would not avail him if he endeavoured to get the bulge out of it. In addition to these and other types-almost as various as the types to be found in human beings-were naked umbrellas and parasols which had been stripped of their clothing. Here was one battered and bruised, with half-a-dozen ribs broken. Here was one which asserted proudly, "I am Paragon, and I glory to show myself!" Here was the dainty frame of a parasol standing like a shamefaced girl by the side of the frame of an old-man umbrella that had led a bad life.

"Ah, Mr. Wheels!" said Gribble junior. "I thought it was too late for a patient. – Mrs. J. G., a chair."

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Gribble," replied the old man.

"I'll not sit down, please. The little one well, Mrs. Gribble?"

Mrs. Gribble junior went to the umbrella tent, and softly raised it. But the face of the heir of the house of Gribble junior was hidden by a parasol, of which the child had made an inner tent, like the box-within-a-box Chinese puzzle, and which it held tightly in its hand.

"Quite well, thank you, Mr. Wheels," said the mother. "How is your daughter to-night?"

"I don't think she's improving. She wanders a good deal."

Gribble junior, who had been gazing with a satisfied air at the umbrella tent, nodded gently two or three times to express sympathy with the old man, who remarked, speaking of the child, "He takes to the business early, Mr. Gribble."

"Took to it from a baby," said Gribble junior complacently. "He sucked in the umbrella and parasol business with his mother's milk, as a body might say. For the top of his cradle was made of two umbrellas, and when he opened his little eyes and looked up, the only roof he saw, until he could crawl, was a roof of silk and whalebone. Nothing like commencing young! That there young un's going to be a useful member of society. I made up my mind to that before Mrs. J. G. made up her mind to present him to me, as a body might say. He can use his left hand as well as his right. No rights and lefts for me. They shall both be rights. It's robbing a young un of half his chance in the world to train him up to a useless hand. You might almost make up your mind to train his left leg to limp. That's not the way to keep moving.

I shouldn't wonder if, when the young un's a man, he invents a new umbrella to astonish the world and make our fortunes."

The old man smiled, and remarked that Gribble junior was at work late.

"Obliged to be. My motto, you know-keep moving. I always think," and Gribble junior sent a pleasant merry look in the direction of the old man, "that it's going to rain to-morrow, and that people'll want umbrellas."

"Very good of you, very considerate," murmured the old man.

"It wouldn't be so bad," continued Gribble junior, "if other people, whether they're professors of anatomy or not, would think the same way; if *they'd* think it was going to rain to-morrow, and if *they'd* prepare their umbrellas to-day-as a body might say."

"Surely, surely," said the old man, contriving by an effort to arrest his wandering thoughts. "And how's business, Mr. Gribble?"

"Never was so bad," replied Gribble junior cheerfully. "Father's experience'll carry him a good deal farther back than mine will, as you may guess, Mr. Wheels, and he says times never was so bad as they are now."

(It is remarkable, be where you will and at any period, here or in any other part of the world, now or twenty years since or twenty years to come, that "times never were so bad" as they are certain to be at the moment of inquiry.)

"What is the cause of the bad times?" asked the old man, who

had not yet found the opportunity of introducing the object of his visit, and who knew that Gribble junior must always "have his say."

"Well, Mr. Wheels," said Gribble junior, hammering softly on a dislocated rib, "some *will* have it it's because the Queen don't come out more; but that's an old cry, and I don't believe in it. Though I think it would be better if the Queen came amongst us more than she does. It's queer how people *will* stick to old cries. Old cries are like old boots. You wear tight boots long enough, and they'll become easy and comfortable, and you don't like to throw 'em off. Father says it's the co-operative stores, and he's bitter on 'em accordingly. If father's got a sore place, it's co-operation. You should start him on the subject one night; he'd open your eyes for you. There isn't an article you can mention that co-operation hasn't laid hands on-except cats'-meat, perhaps. The co-operative men don't draw the line nowhere, except at cats'-meat. There isn't a thing that father sells that they haven't gone into: not that father's business is the only business that's put upon. They go into coffins, and that's going far enough, I'm sure-as a body might say. They take a penny off everything; tallow-dips, yellow soap and mottled. As for scented and brown windsor, father hasn't sold a cake for a month. And if things don't sell, they spoil. Dust won't be denied. Then soap withers. It's like us, Mr. Wheels; the bloom goes off, and we ain't worth as much a pound as we were once on a time. We don't weigh so much neither: the sap goes out. Flies make inroads. They're like

co-operation; they touch everything. The very mouse-traps get blown. As for what ought to be inside of 'em-mice-I needn't tell you what a hole *they* make in profits. I pity the small grocers now that co-operation's got hold of things."

During the brief pause that followed, the old man listened for a sound from the sick-room. Mrs. Gribble observed his anxiety, and knowing her husband's weakness when he was on a favourite theme, rose and said,

"Do take a chair, Mr. Wheels. I'll go and sit in your room for a few minutes."

The old man gave her a grateful look as she went out, and sat down patiently. He had not, long to wait before Gribble junior resumed.

"When trade began to fall off, I painted that sign outside for father, and I think it did a little good, but not much. Trade soon fell back again, and co-operation kept moving. Then he wrote, 'Down with co-operation!' on a bit of writing-paper, and put it in the window, as if that'd stop it. I told father not to do it, but he wouldn't take my advice. What's the consequence? The paper's fly-blown, and co-operation keeps moving. Father says he doesn't know where it's going to stop, and what's going to be the end of it, and says that people ought to set their faces against it. But catch 'em doing it when they think they can get a penny off everything, and catch 'em doing it as long as the women's got the buying of things. When they get the chance of making the market penny, they're sure to try and make it into the market shilling That's the

way of women, bless 'em!"

The old man nodded in satisfaction, for although Gribble junior's words might have sounded very like grumbling from another man's lips, they bore the most refreshing construction as they fell from his. He had one of the pleasantest faces that eyes ever looked upon, and his voice was as pleasant as his face. Everything about this small plump man was round and agreeable. He was one of that kind of men who go out walking with their wives on the day of rest, and who carry their babies in the streets, and enjoy it. Gribble junior was often seen in this position, and, as he walked along by the side of his wife, would occasionally hold up his son and heir to the gaze of the public, as much as to say, "Here he is; he can use his left hand as well as his right, and is going to keep moving. Here is the cleverest baby in the world: what do you think of him?" There is a great deal of character to be learnt by observing the manner in which fathers carry their babies in the streets, and notwithstanding that the custom is considered by the majority of people to be namby-pamby, it is often not an unpleasant sight to witness. One father carries his treasure carefully and proudly, and proclaims, "This is Ours, and we think all the world of it!" While another holds his burden loosely, and proclaims, "This is Ours, and I wish it was Yours!" See this last specimen of the British father slouching along, and his wife walking discontentedly a few steps behind him. He carries his baby in the most uncomfortable of positions, with its head hanging down. He is a miserable dissatisfied man.

He does not look this way or that, but straight before him, surlily and wearily. He seems to say, "A nice kind of thing this is, after my hard week's work! I can't go out for my Sunday walk without dragging the brat along with me. What a fool I was to get married!" And though really the burden is as a feather's weight in the strong man's arms, his discontent makes it as weighty as so much lead. There isn't a bright bit of ribbon in the child's dress, and if you could see into the man's heart, you would learn that it would not be a very great grief to him if the child were to die quietly in his arms. You may depend upon it that the home of this man and woman is not a happy one, and that life is truly a burden to them. See this other and better specimen. Working-man father and working-woman mother, in precisely the same position of life as the discontented man. He carries the baby carefully and tenderly, and the mother walks briskly by his side. There are refreshing bits of colour about the woman's dress, and the baby's dress is, pretty and bright. Sometimes the man pauses, and his wife uncovers the baby's face, and they both look at it lovingly while she makes a fuss and pretence about setting something right with the baby's hood. He gazes about him cheerfully and seems to say, "This is one of my brightest bits of sunshine. I shouldn't enjoy my Sunday's walk without it. What a happy day for me was the day I got married!" And he thinks that soon-in twelve months, perhaps-his little treasure will be able to toddle along by his side, and throw bread to the ducks in the Park. And though the child is plump and heavy, love makes it light. Happy

father! Happy home!

No such reflections as these passed through the mind of Gribble junior as he continued the enunciation of his sensible philosophy.

"My way is, to take things as they come, and to keep moving. You knock your head against things, and you're sure to rasp your skin. What's the use of fretting? You only chafe yourself, and nobody takes any notice. Make the best of things. That's what I tell father; but he doesn't agree with me. The consequence is, that he shows his weak hand, as a body might say. And that's not wise. If you have a weakness, keep it to yourself. Don't let the world see it. Father said to me one night last week when he was shutting up-(he'd only taken three and fourpence the whole day, and that's enough, I own, or isn't enough, perhaps I ought to say, to drive a shopkeeper wild) – that if he could catch hold of a co-operation manager, he'd pitch into him. I told him that if he did, he'd very likely get locked-up for it; and he said, 'Never mind, I shouldn't be the only martyr that's suffered in a good cause.' The fact is, Mr. Wheels, father belongs to the old school-he won't keep moving; and as all the world's on the move, he's left behind. I belong to the new school; and I run along with the tide as fast as I can. Mrs. J. G. belongs to the new school, and so does her brother. His name is Thompson. He's got a shop about half a mile from here. He advertises himself everywhere as Thompson the Great. He has thousands of bills circulated: 'The great Thompson! the unrivalled Thompson! Thompson the First! Come and see him

to-night. No charge for admission. Where's Thompson? Who's Thompson?' That's his style. He has an illumination over his shop every night, with his portrait in the middle-although he's not a handsome man by any means. And what do you think his business is? He keeps a little paper-hanging shop. By-and-by he'll have a big paper-hanging shop. He keeps moving."

Here Gribble junior gave a finishing tap to the patient in hand, and whipped off his apron.

"I've done work for the night," he said.

At the same moment Mrs. Gribble entered, and whispered to the old man that the woman down-stairs was sleeping soundly.

"That's where it is," said the old man, with a disturbed look; "that's what I've come in for. She's got to have her medicine given to her directly she wakes, and she won't take it from any other hand than mine or Lily's; and it's now half-past ten o'clock, and I ought to be at the Hall to bring Lily home, although it'll be an hour yet before she's ready. Lily can't walk home by herself, especially on Saturday night, when there are so many roughs about and so much money spent in drink."

"Where's Alf?" asked Gribble junior.

"I don't know; he promised to be here at ten o'clock; but he hasn't come."

"Do you want Mrs. J. G. to sit with your girl down-stairs while you go and fetch Lily?"

"Didn't I tell you," said the old man fretfully, "that my daughter's got to have her medicine given her directly she wakes,

and that she won't take it from anybody but me or Lily?"

"Well, then," asked Gribble junior, with great good-humour, "do you want me to go and fetch Lily?"

"Yes-yes-yes," with a jealous little sigh between each yes, as if the speaker were unwilling to give to another a task that he would fain perform himself. "I came in to ask you. I thought of Mr. Podmore at first; but he's dead-beat."

Gribble junior's coat was off before the old man was finished, and he was plunging his face in water.

"What makes Lily late to-night?" he called out in the midst of his plashing.

"They've changed the programme, and she's got a new song to sing; and her turn won't come on until past eleven o'clock. The manager's an artful man, and knows what an attraction Lily is; the people'll stop to the last to see her pretty face and hear her pretty voice. My Lily!" He uttered the last words softly to himself, in a tone of infinite tenderness. "Here are the tickets. This admits to the Hall; show it to the man at the door, and he'll let you in. Wait until Lily comes on; and when she has finished-which'll not be until they call her back two or three times-go out at once, and ask your way to the stage-door. This ticket'll admit you to the side of the stage. Tell Lily I couldn't come because mother's not awake, and that I've sent you to take care of her, and to bring her home."

"All right," said Gribble junior, twisting himself into his coat, delighted at the opportunity of getting free admission to a music-hall. "Get supper ready, Liz, by the time I come back. I'll bring

Lily safe home, Mr. Wheels."

With a parting nod, the cheerful little man skipped down the stairs and into the street, and the old man went back to his room. The woman was still sleeping. He took up the work-box on which he had been working, and looked at it affectionately. "My Lily!" he murmured again, in the same tone of tenderness he had used before; and so sat musing, with that yearning of deep love which is almost painful in its intensity. Soon the Swiss clock struck eleven, and the old man laid the cloth for supper. There was the little cruet on wheels, and the breadbasket, and the salt-cellar; and each plate and dish had a wooden rim on the bottom, in which very small wheels were inserted. He took these and the remains of a small joint of roast beef from a cupboard on the landing; placed the vase with the roses in it in the centre of the table; went out for beer; and when he returned, arranged the supper-things again and again, until he was satisfied that everything was in the exact place to please his darling.

CHAPTER III
INTRODUCES THE ROYAL WHITE ROSE MUSIC-HALL

Gribble junior had the finest spirits of any man in London. Nothing jarred upon him. From the days of his infancy, when he used to munch his knuckles contentedly, to the present time, he was never known to be out of temper. He had never had a ten-pound note to call his own, and he was always blithe and happy. His father had been a struggling small tradesman all his life, taking just enough over his counter to keep body and soul together, as he expressed it; and therefore, although Gribble junior was his son, he could scarcely be called his heir. But the lucky junior came into a rare inheritance from his mother-the inheritance of a cheerful nature. Such a patrimony is worth more than great estates and much money.

He was in one of his happiest moods as, in accordance with his own maxim, he pushed along and kept moving towards the Royal White Rose Music-hall. It was not ten minutes' walk from his lodgings in Soho; but it might have been situated in another land, so great was the contrast between his quiet street and that in which the Royal White Rose asserted itself. The difference between the two localities was something similar to that between a poor peaceful woman treading life's path humbly

and unassumingly, and a flaunting shameless madam, painted and bedizened, with everything glaring and everything false about her. The narrow pathway that led to the Royal White Rose was almost blocked up by the busy crowd of men and women and boys and girls with which it was filled. The living stream moved, it is true; but the waters were unhealthful and turbid, and ran sluggishly. In one part of the thoroughfare it was dark, and the shops were closed; in another-that portion which was in immediate contiguity to the Royal White Rose-every shop was open and driving a busy trade. Hansom cabs, with senile men and painted women in them, were rattling along; man-rakes and boy-rakes-from the twelve-year-old smoking his penny cigar with his hands in his pockets, to the fifty-year-old with his hat on one side and his black whiskers and dandy cane-sauntered idly this way and that, and often stopped to exchange light words and looks with the girl-rakes and women-rakes, who out-vied them in numbers and boldness. Unrestrained license prevailed in this saturnalia. Laughing indecency, painted misery, and flagrant violations of all that is modest and good, unblushingly proclaimed themselves in the very eye of the law. The corruption was open. There was no attempt at disguise in this legalised Mart of Shame, through which, as it forms an important lung of the City, many good men and women must necessarily walk. How innately pure must be that rose of modesty that can escape defilement, when brought into contact with it!

The Royal White Rose Music-hall was situated almost in the

centre of the Mart of Shame, and Gribble junior paused for a moment at the entrance of the Hall, which was blazing with light. Dozens of pompous and fascinating announcements, in the largest letters and in the most brilliant of coloured inks, lined both sides of the passage which led to the pay-place. Upon these announcements Gribble junior gazed admiringly. The Great This will appear. The Great That was engaged. The Inimitable Noodle, who had been patronised by Royalty, would sing his choicest songs. The Flashiest Man in London to-night. The Pretty Lily at half-past eleven. The Incomparable Lackbrain (the Pet of the Drawing-room) would sing "Fie, for Shame!" and "The Only Way to enjoy Life." And so on and so on.

Gribble junior made his way into the Hall, which was crowded to excess with flash men and women, with working people of both sexes, and with boys and girls sucking in bad and foolish lessons eagerly. The Incomparable Lackbrain was on the stage, singing "Fie, for Shame!" to the intense delight of his hearers. He was a tall lank man, with a painfully vacuous countenance, and "Fie, for Shame!" was the recital of the doings of a young man and a young woman who had met on a penny steamboat, and whose vulgar words and allusions continually elicited from one or the other the exclamation, most enjoyably uttered, "Fie, for Shame!" The title of the song was the refrain of the chorus, in which the audience were invited to join by the singer. Amazing were the zest and vigour with which they complied with the invitation; the men and women laughed and

winked at one another, and cried, "Fie, for Shame! Fie, for Shame!" and when the Incomparable disappeared, after many an ungainly slouch, they clapped their hands and shouted for him to return. The Chairman struck twice upon his bell, and the well-known signal provoked another burst of applause. In the interval between the songs, Gribble junior observed and admired; for it would be useless to deny that the honest fellow enjoyed the scene immensely. His ticket admitted him to the stalls, where the Chairman, with a dyed moustache and a large nose, sat upon his throne, the cynosure of a thousand admiring eyes. Gribble junior managed to squeeze himself into a seat near this potentate, who was looked upon with awe by the youthful portion of the audience, and whose chief duty appeared to consist in smoking unlimited cigars and drinking unlimited brandies and whiskies hot at the expense of certain favoured frequenters of the Hall. In the programme, which Gribble junior had purchased for a penny, was a portrait of the Chairman, in which his large nose was considerably toned down, as a body might say (to use one of Gribble junior's favourite phrases), and his moustache presented a noble and imposing appearance. A biography of the distinguished man was also given, in which he was credited with many rare qualities, and from which you would infer that his career was one of spotless virtue; but had you been aware of the true facts of the case, you would have regarded the biography with considerable doubt. Gribble junior read also in the programme an advertisement of an eminent

music-seller in the West, who had published those justly popular and refined favourite songs, "Fie, for Shame!" and "The Only Way to enjoy Life!" with a portrait of the composer on the title-page. As he was reading this, the band struck up a well-known air, and the Incomparable Lackbrain appeared in an outrageous costume to instruct the audience in "The Only Way to enjoy Life." According to his laying down of the law, the only time to enjoy life was after midnight; the only place, in the streets; and the only method, to drink champagne and brandy hot until you reeled home to your bed at three o'clock in the morning in a state of intoxication. The Incomparable illustrated the last phase. He set his hat at the back of his head, pulled his hair over his eyes, untied his cravat and let it hang loose, hitched his coat off one shoulder, buttoned his waistcoat awry, and pulled one leg of his trousers nearly up to his knees. In this condition he reeled about the stage, and drivelled and laughed like an imbecile; and, having thus distinguished himself, retired, after an egregiously stupid speech, in which he returned ungrammatical thanks to his admirers for their appreciation of his efforts. Then another singer appeared, who sang only one song; for as this was the last night of his engagement, it was the Chairman's policy to show by his indifference that the popularity of the Royal White Rose Music-hall would not be diminished by the retirement of this performer. Consequently he did not lead the applause by rapping on the table with his little hammer, and did not give the usual signal on the bell for the singer's reappearance. But he did

rap very loudly before he rose to announce, with great pleasure, the fascinating Lily; and when he sat down he led the applause smartly and vigorously. Gribble junior was not the only one who joined in the applause with spirit. Nearly every person in the Hall lent a hand, and great clapping came from a private box at the corner of the stage, towards which many a curious and envious gaze had been directed during the night. There was a little table in that box, on which were a champagne-bottle and glasses, and two gentlemen were there, one sitting and the other standing. The one who was standing was the well-known manager and proprietor of the Royal White Rose Music-hall, and every now and then he leant from the box and surveyed his patrons, some of whom nudged each other, and pointed him out as the great manager who had risen from nothing. About an hour ago a bottle of champagne had been sent down from the box to the bottle-nosed Chairman, who had filled his own and one or two other glasses, and, before he drank, had looked towards the donor with a half-respectful, half familiar glance. These small circumstances had rendered the box an object of interest to the audience.

A working-man said to his wife, "There's a swell up in that box; he's drinking champagne, and treating the manager."

"What's champagne like, Bill?" the wife asked.

"Don't know; never tasted it," was the gruff rejoinder.

"It must be dreadfully nice," said the wife, with a woman's longing for things.

These paradoxical phrases are not confined to working-

women; ladies in polite society are in the habit of giving utterance to such unmeaning combinations of words that we may expect presently to hear certain matters spoken of as sweetly murderous or delightfully disgusting.

The gentleman in the box, then, who sat with his back to the audience, applauded energetically when the fascinating Lily was announced, and the manager, as in duty bound, applauded also, but more graciously than the other.

"You've only seen her once," observed the manager.

"Only once," replied the gentleman. "I strolled in last night to kill half an hour, and was surprised to see such a little beauty come on the stage. How long has she been out?"

"Nearly eight months. There's nothing very striking about her, but she's pretty and simple and innocent – "

"Pretty-and simple and innocent!" interrupted the gentleman, with a light laugh.

"Yes, I'm hanged if she isn't!" exclaimed Storks energetically.

"And been in the Royal White Rose Music-hall, or any other music-hall, rose or dandelion, for eight months?" interrupted the gentleman again, in the same light manner.

Manager Storks looked displeased. "You've got the common notion," he said; "because a girl's a ballet-girl or a singer, she can't be honest, I suppose! You don't know so much about them as I do, that's clear."

It came into the gentleman's mind to answer, "I don't suppose I do; *I* didn't marry a ballet-girl." But as Manager Storks did marry

a ballet-girl, who was a good and industrious wife, and as he was at present master of the situation, the gentleman wisely held his tongue. Storks proceeded:

"I could show dozens of ballet-girls who'd reckon you up in no time, and who'd snap their fingers at your – "

"There, there!" cried the gentleman, putting his fingers in his ears. "Stop it, there's a good fellow. I don't want a lecture upon the virtues of ballet-girls. I only meant that it's against the order of things for a pretty girl to be in a music-hall for eight months, and to be as simple and innocent as you make out Lily to be. She may be as goody-goody as a missionary's daughter, for all I care."

But although he expressed himself in this indifferent manner, he was not at all indifferent when Lily came on the stage.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, under his breath, "she *is* a little beauty!" And he clapped his hands, and threw a handsome bouquet to her.

As Lily stooped and picked up the flowers, the applause was redoubled. She stood before the motley assembly with the flowers in her hand, and her sweet innocent face beamed like a star amidst the atmosphere of smoke and heat. Truly, what had been enacted previously within the Royal White Rose Music-hall gave the lie to the title; but here was a rose, a pure white rose, which justified it. She was dressed in white silk, and had white flowers in her hair. She recognised Gribble junior, and gave him a little smile, which filled him with delight and made him look round with pride. The gentleman in the box saw the smile, and

the individual at whom it was directed.

"Does she know that cad down there?" he asked of Manager Storks curiously. He would have given something for such a smile, but Lily did not raise her eyes to the box.

"Seems like it," was the reply.

"He looks like a potman. Hush! What a sweet voice she has!"

The sweetest of voices-pure and fresh, sounding strangely indeed in such a place. There was not one in the Hall to whom her simple song and almost childlike manner did not afford pleasure. "How pretty she is! How young! Is that hair all her own? She paints o' course. What a stunnin' little foot she's got! Let's 'ave 'er in agin. Ah, *she'll* soon get spoilt! Lackbrain's awfully sweet on her, I heerd. So is that gent in the box." Suchlike comments were made freely in the Hall, as were also a few others of a different nature. Said one painted young woman in pink silk to another in blue, "She's the very image of my sister Bess as she was twelve years ago. I've got a picture of her at home." And another, a faded woman-you could see she was that, notwithstanding all her finery-sighed and said to her companion, "That was mother's favourite song. Many's the time she's sung it to me." And the memory of the days when she led a better life acted upon her parched heart for a few moments like drops of dew. But the softening influence soon died away in the glare and the smoke and the bad surroundings.

The noise in the Hall was at its highest as Gribble junior pushed his way through the pleasure-and-pain seekers. Being

directed by the attendant, he soon found himself on the stage. It was dark and almost quiet. The last song had been sung, and the last strains of music had died away; the curtain was drawn up, and the waiters were collecting the glasses and assisting to the door two or three "jolly dogs," who were unable to assist themselves.

Gribble junior surveyed these proceedings with considerable interest. It was the first time in his life that he had ever been behind the scenes, and he was surprised to find the place dirty and shabby and unattractive. Although the Hall was closed, and no more business was supposed to be done, there were a dozen persons at least drinking at a bar in a corner. The Incomparable Lackbrain, the Inimitable Noodle, and the Flashiest Man in London, were there, laughing and drinking with the manager and the gentleman who had occupied the private box. He was a fair man, in the prime of life, and had just ordered a fresh bottle of champagne. As he raised his glass to his lips, he glanced towards the stage, and saw the shadow of Gribble junior, who was advancing towards Lily.

"Oh, Mr. Gribble," she said, "how strange to see you here! Where's grandpapa?"

"He sent me for you, Lily," answered Gribble junior, "and told me to tell you that he couldn't come for you himself, because your mother wasn't awake, and he had to give her her medicine."

"You must wait a little while," said Lily, with something of disappointment in her voice, "as I have to fold my dresses. I always put everything in order Saturday night. I sha'n't be long."

And she tripped away, leaving Gribble junior looking after her admiringly, and thinking what a bright little creature she was.

"Who's that fellow?" asked the gentleman at the bar of the manager.

Manager Storks did not reply; but, being jealous of strangers, and probably having the fear of detectives in his mind, walked on to the stage, followed by his friends. When Gribble junior explained that he had come to fetch Lily home at the request of her grandfather, Manager Storks grumbled, and told him to tell the old man to come himself for Lily for the future.

"I can't have all sorts of strangers knocking about my stage," he said.

Gribble junior received the rebuke humbly; he was fully sensible of the privilege he was enjoying in being allowed to linger, if only for a few minutes, behind the scenes. Some of the singers and performers had followed Manager Storks, and they stood about in little groups, talking-not in the most refined language, it must be confessed. The luxury of adjectives was by far too freely indulged in. Gribble junior did not think so; he positively glowed with delight. Was he not almost rubbing elbows with the Inimitable Noodle and the Flashiest Man in London, whose dress and walk hundreds of boys in London were imitating! As for Lackbrain the Vacuous, his dull common face was regarded with reverence by Gribble junior. In such enchanting company the minutes flew away until Lily appeared, with the bouquet and a little bundle in her hand. Gribble junior

was advancing toward her when he was pushed aside by the gentleman of the private box.

"A friend of mine is anxious for an introduction, Miss Lily," said Manager Storks.

The friend of the manager, who was introduced as Mr. Sheldrake, raised his hat, and Lily bowed and cast just a look at him; he murmured his pleasure at being introduced to such a charming lily-"the fairest flower in the entire Royal White Rose bouquet," he said gallantly. Ready of speech and smooth of manner was Mr. Sheldrake as he addressed Lily. He was not satisfied with Lily's bow, but held out his hand, on the little finger of which was a plain band of gold, in which a valuable diamond was set. Every respect was paid to the young girl, who replied with smiles and simple words to the civilities of speech with which she was greeted by one and another. Lackbrain the Vacuous offered to see her home.

"Thank you," she said, advancing to Gribble junior; "I have an escort." And she placed her hand on Gribble's arm, and gave him the bundle to carry.

"Let me have the pleasure of driving you home," said Mr. Sheldrake in his most agreeable voice; "my brougham is at the door."

Lily shook her head laughingly, and thanked him, but she preferred to walk.

"Then I'll walk a few steps with you," he said pertinaciously.

Gribble junior did not like the proposal, neither did Lily

approve of it; but Mr. Sheldrake was not to be shaken off. When they left the Hall it was half an hour after midnight. The Sabbath-day had commenced, and had not commenced well. The glare of a noonday sun could scarcely have been more powerful in its effect than the bright light which fell from the open shops on the people and the thoroughfare. Fish-shops and glove-shops, cigar-shops and refreshment houses, the first and last especially, were driving a brisk trade. The pushing, the struggling, the anxious faces, the drunken forms, the senseless enjoyment, the joyless mirth, the fevered life, the various aspects in which human nature was there presented, were sad to witness. Here and there in the scene were patches of shade formed by narrow thoroughfares where no light was, and at the corners of these thoroughfares, standing in the shade and forming part of it, policemen might occasionally be seen, waiting quietly to play their part in the torrent which the law allows to flow. Before one of these guardians of the peace-most paradoxical designation in such a scene-two men of the lower classes paused, and were immediately desired to move on. They were costermongers; their appearance was as rough as their speech. But that one of them at all events was logical, and that there was reason in his logic, were in some measure proved by his speech.

"This is Sunday, ain't it?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the policeman good-humouredly, "and time for you to be abed."

"Thank yer for nothin', Bobby," he said, swaying slightly

before the policeman; "but my mate 'ere wants me to arks yer somethin' fust. He wants to know why these 'ere swell shops is allowed to keep open arter twelve o'clock on Saturday nights, and why he was summonsed afore the beak for sellin' wegetables last Sunday?"

"Come, move on," was the only reply from the policeman.

"But, look 'ere now," urged the costermonger; "'ere he is with 'is barrer – "

"Yes, that's it, Dropsy!" exclaimed the second man, illustrating the position with eloquent action. "That's it. 'Ere I am with my barrer – "

But the policeman, not at all disposed to parley, and not at all curious to know the history of the man's "barrer," used effectual arguments to relieve himself of the controversial costermongers, who consoled each other, as they staggered away, by agreeing that "it was a blazin' shame, that's what it was!"

Through such scenes as this, Lily and her escort walked to the humble home in Soho. Mr. Sheldrake almost entirely monopolised the conversation, talking much about himself, and about the pleasure it would give him to improve an acquaintance so agreeably commenced. Notwithstanding that it was past midnight, he threw out hints that nothing could afford him so much pleasure as being invited into the house; but as no invitation followed the expression of this desire, he was compelled to bid Lily good-night at the street-door.

When he was alone, he stood in the quiet street, looking up

at the light in the room where the old man had been waiting anxiously for his darling Lily.

CHAPTER IV
MR. DAVID SHELDRAKE COMES TO A SHREWD CONCLUSION

Mr. David Sheldrake, smooth and bland in voice and manner, lingered about the streets for several minutes. It was a beautifully clear night, and he may have been inclined for meditation. His appearance was sufficiently respectable for such an indulgence, and a policeman who stood in the shadow of a doorway quietly observing him did not think it necessary to interfere with him. He glanced up at the first-floor window, and saw the shadow of a woman upon the blind. "I wonder if that is her room," he thought. "What a little nugget she is!" He wished that somebody would come to the street-door, that he might ask if Lily lived on the first-floor; but no one came, and the narrow street was still and quiet. "David," he said to himself, "that girl's pretty face has quite bewitched you." He seemed to take pleasure in the thought, and smiled to himself complacently. It was evidently not the first time that he had been bewitched by a pretty face. He took his cigar-case from his pocket, and, turning to a doorway to obtain a light for his cigar, saw the policeman.

"A fine night, policeman," he said.

"Yes, sir," acquiesced the policeman civilly.

"Been on this beat long, policeman?"

"A considerable time, sir."

"Pretty quiet about here, isn't it?"

"Pretty quiet, sir. But we get enough trouble out there;" with a nod of his head in the direction of the Royal White Rose Music-hall.

"Ah, I daresay. Saturday nights especially."

"As you say, sir; Saturday nights especially."

"A cigar, policeman?"

"No, thank you, sir; not allowed to smoke."

Mr. Sheldrake coughed, and the policeman coughed in sympathy.

"Can we get anything to drink about here, policeman?"

"Not to-night, sir," said the policeman somewhat stiffly. "The houses shut at twelve, Saturday nights."

His two bribes having been refused, Mr. Sheldrake bethought himself of another. But first he said, as he put his hand into his pocket,

"Who lives in that house opposite, policeman?"

"Quite a number of people, sir. Half a dozen families, I should say."

Here the jingle of money fell upon the policeman's ears. It produced a curious effect upon him. He coughed a little cough, which might have been interpreted, "Behold me, one of her Majesty's servants, always ready to do my duty." Then he looked up at the sky, and down on the pavement, and round on the houses, and anywhere but in the direction where Mr. Sheldrake

stood; murmuring at the same time dreamily, in a soft musing tone,

"*Quite* half a dozen families, I should say, sir."

As he murmured this, his hand may be said to have resembled a sly rascal peeping round the corner, to find out things without wishing to draw observation upon himself. Mr. Sheldrake's hand sought that expressive hand, and found it in a lurking-not to say slinking-position, hiding itself demonstratively in the cuff of the policeman's coat. He slipped a piece of silver into it, and the jaws of darkness instantly devoured it up. The policeman was evidently in an unconscious state; for with the air of a man whose thoughts were far away, he received the coin obliviously, and, in an absent manner, conveyed it to the nearest pocket; then he coughed again, and assumed the air of one just aroused from a little sleep.

The "open, Sesame," having been thus discreetly administered, Mr. Sheldrake learned from the policeman as much as that functionary knew concerning Lily. Yes, Lily was her real name; everybody about here knew her, and everybody liked her-children especially. She *was* very pretty and very young: not more than nineteen, he should say. Yes, she lived on the first-floor of that house. She sang at the Royal White Rose Music-hall, you know; his missus had often heard her, and was quite in love with her. So was a good many others-not women, you know. But she was different from some other girls in that establishment who lived about here. How different? O, better,

you know. Couldn't tell how long that would last; no more could any one else. He had seen a good many stage girls commence well and end badly. How badly? Well, fast, you know. It was enough to turn a girl's head; the lights, the music, the dresses, and the lots of swells with money hanging round 'em. Didn't think it would turn this one's, though. Any relatives? O, yes, she had a brother. Younger than her? No, a couple of years older, he should say; very much like her; come home late sometimes; a little fast, the young fellow was. And a mother, bedridden; the doctor often goes there. And a grandfather; a strange old fellow-a character. Immortality Wheels, people call him. Was that his proper name? O, no; nicknames both of 'em. Why Immortality? Well, he didn't quite know himself, but he'd been told it was because the old fellow was fond of talking about the immortality of the soul. Why Wheels? Well, he *did* know that. Because the old fellow was always saying that everything in the world ought to go upon wheels. Perhaps there was something in the notion; things certainly would go easier. He *had* heard that the old fellow had made wheels for everything in his place. Harmless old fellow; but curious notion, wasn't it? So the young fellow's a little wild, eh? Well, most young fellows are, nowadays. Very fond of each other, brother and sister are.

While the policeman was distilling these scraps of information in a leisurely manner, he and his companion were walking slowly towards the Royal White Rose Music-hall, and just at the point of his asking whether the old man's fancy was not a curious

notion, they became suddenly aware of a street disturbance in a thoroughfare not many yards ahead of them.

The policeman strolled leisurely in the direction of the noise, pulling his belt tighter as he neared the spot from which the sounds proceeded. Presently they came upon an angry crowd of men and women of all ages and degrees, most of whom, judging from their excited demeanour and noisy exclamations, had a personal interest in the disturbance. "Let 'em go! What do you mean by pushing people about? Bonnet 'em! Great hulking fellows like you!" Then a woman's voice, very shrill, "Who am *I*, interfering? I'm a honest woman, that's what I am! Ain't I? I'll make you prove your words! You want the papers down on you agin, that what *you* want. We sha'n't move on! We'll stop here as long as we like!" And in the midst of all a clear and angry voice, crying, "Take your hands off me! Take your hands off me, I say!" The voice acted like a charm upon Mr. Sheldrake; he made his way into the centre of the crowd, and soon ascertained that it was nothing but an ordinary street row common to the neighbourhood, caused in the first place by two or three persons lingering on the footpath, and being desired to move on, and perhaps touched on the shoulder by a policeman. The principal offender, and the most violent, was a young man with a handsome face, the sight of which produced on Mr. Sheldrake the same effect as his voice had done. And yet it was the first time that these two had ever met. Upon such slight chances often does the future hang, that men who have fought life's battle with all

their strength, and been bruised and bruised, may sometimes be pardoned for thinking that it is mockery to struggle.

At the moment of Mr. Sheldrake's appearance upon the scene, the young man, in a state of great excitement was explaining to the people about him that he was doing no harm; he was simply talking to a friend about the Northumberland Plate, the race that was soon to be run at Newcastle-on-Tyne, when the policeman pushed them into the road, and said he would take them into custody if they stood there a moment longer. The crowd cheered him as he spoke, and the police began to lose their temper. The policeman who had accompanied Mr. Sheldrake, and who fancied that that gentleman, from the interest he exhibited, knew the offender, whispered to him, that if he wanted to save the young fellow from getting into trouble, he had best get him away as quickly as possible.

"Now, then, *will* you move out of this?" exclaimed another official, about to lay hands upon the young man; Mr. Sheldrake quietly stepped between them, knowing that the touch of the policeman's hand would be adding fuel to flame. But for Mr. Sheldrake's interposition it would have fared ill with the young fellow, who had worked himself into a most unreasonable passion.

"Come, come," said the peacemaker in a persuasive tone; "you don't want to be locked up all night. The policemen have their duty to perform, and you mustn't obstruct them."

"I don't want to obstruct them, and I don't want to be locked

up," said the young man; "but what right had they to interfere with me and my friends? Ask any one here if I was in the wrong."

A dozen voices supported him in various ways, all of them uncomplimentary to the police, one of whom grew so exasperated that he exclaimed, in a tone of dangerous decision, "Now, then, if you don't move off this minute, we'll march you to the station-house." He produced his stave, and the others followed his example. This action caused many among the mob to take to their heels, and they scampered away, hooting as they ran.

"They had *no* business to interfere," whispered Mr. Sheldrake hurriedly, placing his arm in that of the young man; "but don't you see, that though you might have been in the right at first – "

"Might have been!" interrupted the unreasonable young fellow hotly. "I was!"

"Well, although you *were* in the right at first, you are in the wrong now. Come, take the advice of a friend, and let us get out of this. I don't like to see a young gentleman like you mixed up in such an affair. Look at the riff-raff about. Where are your friends? Why, *they've* gone off, you see, and didn't mind leaving you in the lurch. – All right, policeman, we're going."

Thus urging and humouring, Mr. Sheldrake induced the young man to move with him through the throng of people, who were inclined to hoot him now for showing the white feather. The excitement, however, being over, they rapidly dispersed, grumbling at the peaceable issue of the affair. Soon

Mr. Sheldrake and his charge were in a quieter part of the neighbourhood, when the latter, still almost at fever-heat, asked offensively, as if it were absolutely necessary he should fall foul of somebody,

"Perhaps you'll tell me who you are, interfering with my affairs. I don't know you."

"I don't suppose you do," replied Mr. Sheldrake with perfect good humour. "Are you going home?"

"What business may that be of yours?" asked the young man, not abating his offensive tone.

"I'll walk a little way with you if you are, that's all. Shall I make a shrewd guess, and say that you live in Soho? Come, come; I see that you are angry with me for interfering; but you must admit that the position you are in now is better than being hauled along by half-a-dozen policemen, with a mob hooting at their heels. Come, now, admit that."

"I sha'n't admit anything," exclaimed the young man sulkily.

An angry impatient look passed like a flash of light into Mr. Sheldrake's face at the young man's uncivil manner: but he suppressed it instantly. They were walking slowly as they conversed, and Mr. Sheldrake, allowing his companion to lead the way, observed with secret satisfaction that they were walking in the direction of Lily's house.

"And neither should I, if I were in your place," he said. "I should feel as indignant as you feel; it is only natural; but at the same time, I think I should acknowledge to myself-not to any

one else-that it's better to be indignant and to cool oneself alone here in the quiet streets, than to be dragged to the station-house, and have the clothes torn off one's back. You were not born yesterday! *You* know what the police are, and how the magistrates side with them. They'll swear anything when their blood's up; and there's never any telling what kind of a scrape a man may get himself into with them. I daresay you wouldn't like your people at home to see your name on the wrong side of a police-court report."

"That's true," said the young man in a somewhat softer tone, though still with constrained manner; "it wouldn't be a nice thing for them."

"Say that you had a sister now, how would she like it?"

As Mr. Sheldrake hazarded this question, he threw a sharp look at his companion, and smiled in self-approval when he heard the reply.

"She wouldn't like it at all, and I wouldn't like it because of her." He struggled to rid himself of his ungracious bearing, and partially succeeded. "It seems to me, after all, that I have to thank you for getting me out of the mess."

He held out his hand. Mr. Sheldrake shook it cordially, saying,

"A nice state of things it would be, if one gentleman wouldn't assist another in such a case! Let us suppose that you are under an obligation to me. Wipe it off by giving me a promise."

"What kind of a promise?" asked the young man.

"Why, that when you come upon me in a similar scrape to

that I found you in to-night, with my blood up, hot and naturally indignant, you'll come and help me out of it as I've helped you. You'll see how I'll take it! I shall be savage with you of course, at first, but give me time to cool down, and you'll not find me backward in acknowledging that you have acted by me and stood by me like an out-and-out friend."

The young man laughed and promised, but did not express himself confident of being able to act as judiciously as Mr. Sheldrake had done. "For you're cool, you know," he said, "and not so easily fired up as I am. Why, if you had answered me as I've answered you, I couldn't have helped quarrelling with you."

"I'm glad for one person's sake that I managed to escape that unpleasant contingency," observed Mr. Sheldrake.

"Do you mean for your own sake?" asked the young man coolly.

"Not this time," replied Mr. Sheldrake, mentally confounding the young fellow's impertinence.

"For whose, then, may I ask? Not for mine, I hope; if so, you may save yourself from farther anxiety upon the point."

"O no, not for yours; for your sister's."

"For Lily's! You know her then; and that's the reason of your coming to my assistance."

Mr. Sheldrake accepted this interpretation, and said,

"If you tell her of what has occurred to-night – "

"Of course I shall tell her," interrupted the young man. "I tell Lily everything."

"You may mention, then, that the gentleman who had the pleasure of walking home with her to-night did you a little service. She spoke of her brother to-night as we walked home. Your name must be Alfred."

"Yes; that is my name."

"Mine is Sheldrake. I shall be glad to improve our acquaintanceship-that is, if you are willing."

"O, I'm willing enough," replied Alfred half graciously; "but I'm not a swell, you know."

"Meaning that I am. None the worse for that, eh?"

"No," said Alfred, throwing sufficient expression in his hesitating manner of uttering that small word to express, "No, you're none the worse for it; but I consider myself as good as you, or any man."

"And it isn't a bad thing to be a swell nowadays, let me tell you," remarked Mr. Sheldrake genially, clapping Alfred on the shoulder. "One gets behind the scenes, and sees all sorts of things, and learns all sorts of things. And after all it's only a question of money. Once a gentleman, always a gentleman."

"That's true," assented Alfred complacently, being now on very good terms with himself.

"Only a question of money," repeated Mr. Sheldrake, slowly and thoughtfully; "and there's plenty of ways of making that."

"That's true again," exclaimed Alfred eagerly, accepting a cigar from Mr. Sheldrake's cigar-case. "Plenty of ways. I know a way. I'm going to make a heap."

"With a little luck and a little pluck, a man with brains-which you've got, I'll be bound-can be as good as the best of them. He can go up like a rocket."

Mr. Sheldrake did not carry the simile farther. The rocket being in the clouds, it suited his purpose to leave it there. "Plenty of ways of making money! I should think there were, indeed; and these are just the times."

The speaker was evidently of the opinion that some of his words were pearls of price, which should not be lost sight of. His utterances just now seemed to be thickly studded with these pearls, for he repeated thoughtfully, "Just the times."

"So they are-so they are. You know a thing or two, I see."

"Know a thing or two!" exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake, with modest boastfulness. "Well, yes, I fancy I do."

"I can put you up to something good," said Alfred, with a furtive glance at his companion, "if you like, and if you'll keep it quiet."

"Ay," returned Mr. Sheldrake, with an appearance of gratitude; "I'll keep it quiet enough."

"Do you do anything in racing?"

"A little now and then. Between you and me, I made a good thing on the Derby."

"I thought so!" cried the young fellow in an exultant tone. "I thought you knew all about racing! I say, do you keep a book? Do you belong to any of the Clubs? Let's take a turn up the street."

"But isn't it time for you to be in?" suggested Mr. Sheldrake,

as if unwilling to carry the conversation farther.

"No, no; it doesn't matter for a few minutes. Lily's sure to wait up for me. Besides, I have a latch-key. I wish we could go and sit down somewhere, and have a chat and a drink. But all the places are shut, worse luck."

"Didn't I tell you that I was behind the scenes?" said Mr. Sheldrake airily. "One never need be at a loss in London if he knows the ropes. Now I'll be sworn there's a house ready to receive us within a hundred yards of where we stand, although it is past one o'clock on Sunday morning. I know others, but they are too far away." Alfred followed every word with admiring interest. This man of the world, this swell who was behind the scenes, and who seemed to know everything worth knowing, was a superior being in his eyes. "Let us walk towards the policeman. Don't be surprised; it will, be a pleasant meeting enough, although your late experience might lead you to an opposite opinion."

"But why towards a policeman?" asked Alfred.

"He'll tell us of a house of entertainment, where we can have that chat and a drink you proposed. If a thief wants to hide, let him hide in a crowded city. If you want to do an illegal act, do it in the eye of the law. As I'm going to do this, with of course a proper application of the magic key."

Alfred thought his companion one of the most genial and brightest of men, and inquired what Mr. Sheldrake meant by the magic key.

"Tip," replied that gentleman; "the greatest institution of the age. Tip, the palm-tickler. If it hadn't been for that, how do you think I could have got you out of your scrape to-night? I've travelled about here and there, and I don't think there's a city in the world where the institution of Tip is so thoroughly understood and appreciated as in this very city of London. It will carry you anywhere, effect any object, get you out of any scrape, if you know how to apply to it. But it requires to be administered delicately, its nerves being very fine."

In front of them they heard the policeman's measured step. From the rear came the sounds of a man racing towards them. His hurried tread sounded in the quiet night like the rattle of steam feet rushing along. As they turned, the man passed them. He was panting for breath, and his clothes seemed to have been hurriedly thrown on. His braces were hanging loose, and he was struggling with his coat as he ran, suggesting the idea that he was racing and dressing himself for a wager. He did not notice the faces of the men as he passed them, but Alfred recognised him, and cried, "Why, that's Mr. Gribble!" The next moment Gribble junior was round the corner and out of sight, and the calm footstep of the watchman of the night heralded Mr. Sheldrake's friendly policeman. He touched his hat to Mr. Sheldrake, and while that gentleman held brief conference with him, his slinking hand asserted itself up his coat-sleeve, where it may be said to have lurked, thirsting for Tip. The comedy, which had been so successfully performed once before during the night, having been

repeated successfully, the policeman (awaking from another little sleep) leisurely led the way, Alfred being in the rear. As they walked thus in single file, Mr. Sheldrake's thoughts, put into intelligible language, would have read thus: "That was a shrewd conclusion you came to, David, when you heard this young cub's voice, and guessed that it belonged to Lily's brother! A nice young fool he is! But he'll serve your turn, David, with that little nugget-he'll serve your turn. Make the pretty Lily grateful for having befriended her brother, and get the young fool himself quietly in your hands, and the rosy-cheeked apple falls plump into your open mouth, David-plump into your open mouth!" The contemplation of the rosy-cheeked apple falling plump into his mouth was so agreeable, that David Sheldrake smiled frequently, and in a gay and airy manner blew a kiss in the direction of Lily's house.

They paused at the side door of a house of entertainment, closed according to the law, and the mystic summons of the policeman gained them admittance.

"Let us have a quiet room, and some brandy-and-water," said Mr. Sheldrake to the waiter who had opened the door, and who, with his shirt-sleeves tucked up and his thick bull-neck, looked like a prize-fighter. "Policeman, you'll come in and have a drink?"

"No objections, sir."

The liquor having been brought, the policeman treated his conscience to "something hot," and departed to pursue his duties,

ready at any moment with his slinking hand to prove himself a worthy watchman of the night and a proper guardian of the public peace.

CHAPTER V
MR. DAVID SHELDRAKE DOES A GOOD NIGHT'S WORK

Mr. Sheldrake helped himself to brandy-and-water, lit a fresh cigar, threw his cigar-case to Alfred with the air of an old acquaintance, and seemed as if he would have been perfectly satisfied to smoke and drink without conversation. But Alfred was not so disposed.

"So you did a good thing on the Derby," he commenced familiarly; "backed the Zephyr Colt, eh? I wish I had!"

"Backed it at the right time, my boy; backed it in April, and got thirties to one three times in hundreds."

"Nine thousand to three hundred," Alfred put in rapidly and enviously.

"That's a good calculation of yours, and quickly done," observed Mr. Sheldrake, with a nod of approval.

"O yes, I'm good at mental arithmetic," was the conceited answer.

"That's what's wanted in racing matters. You go to a race, and you hear the odds bawled out, and you want to hedge, perhaps; the odds are constantly changing, and you've got to seize them at the proper moment. To do that properly, you must be smart at figures, and then you're all right. I know many a man who can't

write anything but his own name, and who makes pots of money because he can calculate the odds quickly. It's a gift, and you've got it, my boy. Fill up your glass."

Alfred filled his glass, his face beaming with conceit.

"Go on with the Zephyr colt," he said. "You stuck to the bet, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't; I hedged, like a fool."

"Ah, *I* shouldn't have done that!"

"No more ought I, and no more should I, if I had had some one to advise me. You know it was at the commencement of April that the colt was at thirty to one, and a fortnight afterwards it was at twelve. I hedged at those odds to win my three hundred pounds, and make myself safe."

"So you stood to win five thousand four hundred and to lose nothing," said Alfred rapidly, having been looking out for another opportunity to exhibit his prowess in mental arithmetic.

"What wonderful calculation!" exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake in admiration, to Alfred's intense delight. "You could make a fortune in the ring."

"Do you think so? *I* think I could."

"I'd give a thousand pounds this minute to be able to reckon up figures as you can."

"You make plenty, though, without that."

"I only do what any man can do, if he keeps his head cool. Did you back anything for the Derby?"

"Yes, worse luck," replied Alfred, with a groan, emptying

his glass to wash down a rising remorse. "I wish I had known you then. You might have told me to back the Zephyr colt. You would, wouldn't you?"

"That I would, for your pretty sister's sake. I wish we *had* known each other then! What did you back?"

"Three horses-Bothwell, King of the Forest, and Digby Grand. Everybody said Bothwell was sure to win, and that's why I backed it, although I didn't fancy it."

"It's a bad thing to back three horses; never back more than one, and stand to it to win a good stake."

"That's what I'm going to do on the Northumberland Plate. I ought to have backed the Baron's horse, for he always runs straight, doesn't he?" There was something painful in the speaker's eagerness as he looked for consolation in the face of his companion. "And you won over five thousand on it, and I might have done the same if I had known. If only one of my three had come in first, I should have been right. As it is – "

Alfred paused, and beat his foot fretfully on the floor.

"As it is," prompted Mr. Sheldrake, with a keen watchfulness of Alfred's manner.

Alfred stirred his empty glass with the spoon. He had drunk more than was good for him, and this may have been the cause of the sudden paleness that came over his face. He laughed nervously, and said,

"Well, it's only the same predicament that hundreds of other young fellows are in-I owe a little money, that's all. When I saw

the horses coming round Tattenham-corner, and saw King of the Forest running so strong, I made sure that it was right. All the people round me cried out, 'King of the Forest wins! King of the Forest wins!' It was all over in a moment, and the Zephyr colt shot by the winning-post like a flash of lightning. I should have won a couple of hundred if it hadn't been for that. But I shall make up for it all right on the Northumberland Plate. Christopher Sly's sure to win; don't you think so? All the prophets say he can't lose. Look here;" and he pulled out a handful of letters and papers, and, trembling with eagerness and excitement, made selections, and read from them. "Hear what Pegasus says: 'Never in the Annals of racing has there been such a certainty as Christopher Sly for the Northumberland Plate. The race is as good as over, and those who were fortunate enough to back the horse when it was at twenty to one will have a rare haul. Indeed, the money is as safe as if it were in their pockets.' Here's Delphos: 'Christopher Sly has been especially reserved for this event; he is meant to win, and nothing can stop him. The race is a dead certainty for him.' Delphos ought to know, oughtn't he? They all say the same; all the prophets in the daily papers go in for him. What do you think? Don't you think he's sure to win?"

"It looks very like a certainty. If the odds were a little longer on him, I'd back him for fifty myself."

"You'd do right! I've got all sorts of odds about him-fifteen to one in one place. You can only get six to four about him now," said Alfred exultantly. "But what does it matter about the odds

if you're sure to win?"

"What do you stand to lose?"

"O, I don't know. I know what I stand to win-over three hundred. I shall pay off what I owe then, and go in for something big."

"That's the sort!" cried Mr. Sheldrake gaily, clapping the young fellow on the shoulder. "Nothing venture, nothing have. You're just the stamp of man to break the ring. When it's known that you can afford to lose a few hundreds, you must join the Clubs. I'll introduce you. I'd keep quiet till then, if I were you."

Alfred nodded and laughed; all traces of anxiety had vanished from his countenance. He became pressing in his advice to Mr. Sheldrake to back Christopher Sly, admired that gentleman's cigar case and his diamond ring, and boasted of the gimcracks he intended to buy for Lily and himself when he received his winnings. By the time they had finished their brandy-and-water it was half-past two o'clock in the morning; and when they reached the streets, Mr. Sheldrake gave Alfred his card, and said he would be glad to see him at his office.

"All right, old fellow," said Alfred; "I'll come."

"And look here," said Mr. Sheldrake, hooking Alfred by the button-hole, "I wouldn't say much at home of what we've been speaking about. Wait till you make a haul. It's best always to keep these things to oneself."

Alfred nodded acquiescence.

"If you want a friend at any time," added Mr. Sheldrake,

"you know where to come to; and you'll find that what David Sheldrake says, David Sheldrake means."

They shook hands and parted, Alfred going his way impressed with the conviction that Mr. Sheldrake was one of the best fellows in the world, and that gentleman going his impressed with the conviction that he had found a fine tool to assist him in working into pretty Lily's favour.

"You've done a good night's work, David," said the modern man of fashion, communing with himself, according to his favourite habit; "a very good night's work. You can win that nugget through her fool of a brother. Lily! What a pretty name! Lily! Charming Lily! Why, David, the girl's bewitched you!"

CHAPTER VI
GRAVE NEWS

It was with a feeling of shame that Alfred put his boasted latch-key into the street-door. He knew that Lily was waiting up for him, and that it was inconsiderate in him to keep the young girl from her bed until so late an hour; and although his brain was disturbed by drink, he strove to administer a salve to his conscience by thinking that Lily would do anything for him; but the effort was not quite successful. Something whispered to him that it was unfair to take advantage of the girl's love and devotion for him, and to cause her anxiety. This was not the only unwelcome thought suggested by the silent monitor that keeps watch in the mind of a man whose sense of right is not entirely blinded; and Alfred received the points of these nettles discontentedly, as others are in the habit of receiving them, making excuses in response which he vainly strove to believe were not shallow. He fell back at last upon the most ordinary of all subterfuges. "What's the use of bothering?" he thought. "I'm not the only young fellow who keeps out late once now and again." It is the commonest thing in the world for us thus to throw the responsibility of our own inexcusable actions upon other people's shoulders. "O, well, I am not worse than my neighbours!" is the ointment we apply when our conscience

mildly pricks us but we cannot deprive the nettles of their sting by suchlike sophistry.

As Alfred closed the street door behind him, a stream of light fell upon the stairs from the room on the first-floor. Lily had heard him come in, and now glided down to meet him.

"I am so glad you have come home," she said, with her arm round his neck. "How late you are!"

Something in the hushed tones of her voice, some new tenderness in her manner, expressive of pity for herself and for him, struck strangely upon his senses. At the same time, he was ashamed of himself for the condition he was in. His gait was unsteady, and his voice was thick. His senses were not so clouded, however, as not to be able to perceive that something of a grave nature had occurred in the house. Lily seemed to cling to him for comfort, and, hiding her face in his neck, strove to shut out creeping fears by which she was oppressed.

"How's mother, Lily?" he asked.

The sound of his voice came upon her like a shock. She was inexpressibly grieved to learn from it that he was drunk. Her first impulse led her to shrink from him, but only for a moment. The next she linked her hand in his arm, and besought him to come up-stairs quietly. He stumbled up by her side, and every slip he made caused her to quiver with keenest pain. That he should come home at such a time and in such a condition was one of the greatest sorrows the young girl had known. He was about to enter the room where his mother was lying, but Lily laid her hand

upon his arm with nervous force.

"No, no!" she whispered, but so clearly and with such intensity that her whisper was almost a cry; "no, no! Not there, Alfred; not there!"

"Why not?" he questioned wonderingly, and inclined to force his way.

But she stood before him, and said,

"Not as you are, Alfred; not as you are! You will be sorry! Come into my room."

He obeyed her sullenly, and she, keeping tight hold of his arm, drew him into her little room, where he sank unsteadily upon her bed. There was no light in the room, and she made no attempt to light a candle for she felt that it would be greater shame to see him drunk than to know he was drunk and not look upon his face. But her suffering showed itself in her voice. All that she said was, "O Alfred, Alfred!" and sank upon her knees by the bedside, and hid her face in the clothes, sobbing quietly. In a blundering way he drew her to him; but even while she lay with her head upon his shoulder, she seemed to shrink from him and to be ashamed of him.

"Are you making all this fuss because I've taken a glass too much to drink?" he asked. "There! be quiet, and I'll promise not to do so again."

Promises were the easiest things in the world for him to make. Weak pliable natures such as his are continually building airy havens, in which they do painless penance for their faults.

Before Lily could answer, the door was opened, and old Wheels entered with a light. He looked at the young man half sternly and half sadly. So significant in its rebuke was his look, that Alfred, glad of an opportunity of attacking somebody in his own defence, started to his feet in unreasoning anger. But, what with his passion and his condition, the words that came from his lips were not distinct; and old Wheels raised his hand with an action almost of horror, and exclaimed,

"At such a time, at such a time! Are the sins of the father really visited upon the children?" Then, with a compassionate glance at Lily, he muttered, "I pray not, I pray not-for *her* sake!"

"What do you mean, grandfather?" cried Alfred. "Is it such an unheard-of thing for a man to come home an hour later than usual, that you should treat me as if I have committed a crime?"

"Crime!" echoed the old man, looking steadily into Alfred's eyes. "God keep you free from it!"

Whatever answer Alfred was prompted to give, it did not pass his white and trembling lips. But presently he mustered up a blustering courage, and cried in an injured tone,

"I won't stand it; I'll go away this minute! Let me go, Lily! I'll get a bed somewhere else."

He knew his power over her; and even in this moment of weakness, when he felt himself at such disadvantage, and so clearly in the wrong, he had the cunning of a weak mind, and used it. He smiled in selfish triumph as Lily's arms tightened round him.

"He does not know, grandfather!" she said, in an imploring tone. "Don't speak harshly to him; he does not know."

"O, I know very well, Lily," he said, thinking she referred to his condition; "I've taken a glass too much. I'm not ignorant of that; and if grandfather thinks he can bully me without my answering him, he is mistaken. He takes advantage of your being here, and of my being fond of you, to cast out all sorts of insinuations against me."

"I have not accused you of anything, Alfred;" said old Wheels sadly.

"You hoped I should be kept free from crime," exclaimed Alfred violently.

"Hush, Alfred," implored Lily, in awe-struck tones; "you don't know what has occurred. Don't speak so loud! Your voice sounds sinful used in such a way, and at such a time."

"I don't understand you, Lily. What's the matter with the time? It's a little late, that's all."

"Lost to all sense of shame!" muttered old Wheels. "It is like fate. So I parted from the father, and the son is before me, with the same curse upon him."

"O, I can't stand this, and won't!" exclaimed Alfred roughly. "I'll see if mother is awake, and then I'll go to bed."

He was moving towards the door, when Lily's terrified look, and the old man's solemn gesture, made him pause. For the first time a fear fell upon him.

"Why do you look so?" he asked of her; and then of his

grandfather, "and why do *you* seek to prevent me going in to see mother?"

"Because you are drunk, and in your present state would not desire to appear before her, if you knew – "

"If I knew what? Is mother worse? Why don't you answer? I *will* go in and see her!"

"Stop, Alfred," said the old man, quietly and solemnly; "Your mother is dead!"

CHAPTER VII
THE IRON BOX

The shock of the news sobered Alfred instantly; the full disgrace of his condition came upon him, and made him ashamed to look his sister in the face.

"You-you have been very hard to me, grandfather," he said hesitatingly.

"I have been to you as you deserved, Alfred. Has your conduct to-night been such as should make me affectionate to you?"

"I have no excuse to make," replied Alfred, thoroughly humbled; "but you will do me the justice to believe that it would not have been so with me had I known."

"The remorse of a too-late repentance, Alfred, is a bitter experience."

A resentful answer rose to Alfred's lips, but he checked it.

"When-when did mother die, sir?" he asked.

The words were long in coming. It seemed to him a hard question to ask.

"An hour ago. I saw a change come over her, and Mr. Gribble ran for the doctor." Alfred remembered seeing Gribble junior tear along, struggling with his coat, and it was another sting to him that a stranger should have performed his duty. "When the doctor came she had passed away."

"What did she say? Did she ask for me?"

"She did not speak; she was unconscious."

"And she died without a word to you or Lily, grandfather? without a thought of me?"

"Who can tell her thoughts? Her mind may have been awake. She passed away in her sleep-peacefully, thank God! Her life has not been a happy one; and it is God's mercy that she was spared in her last moments the pain of seeing you as you are. It would have recalled her bitterest memories."

"I am better now, grandfather. May I see her?"

"Yes. Lily, my darling!" and the old man took her in his arms and kissed her; "you must go to bed-you are tired."

But she clung to him, and entreated to be allowed to sit up with them.

"No, dear child," he said; "we shall want you to be strong to-morrow. What is that you say? You are frightened! Nay, nay, dear child! Sleep will compose you. Alfred and I have much to talk of, and we must be alone. Good night, dear child!"

When they left the room, Lily looked round and shuddered. The silence was full of terrors for her, and it was with difficulty she restrained herself from calling out. The events of the night had unnerved her. She went into the passage, and, listening, heard the buzz of voices in her grandfather's room. She could not catch the words, but it was a comfort to her to hear the sound; it was companionship. She crouched upon the ground, and lay there, with her head against the wall. A thousand fancies crowded

her brain: the music-hall, with its glare of lights, and its great concourse of people, laughing, and drinking and applauding, presented itself to her in a variety of fantastic shapes, each image being perfect in itself and utterly engrossing, and yet fading entirely away in a moment, and giving place to a successor as vivid and as engrossing as any that had gone before. Other images presented themselves. Mr. Sheldrake, with his studied polished manner, and his smooth voice; Alfred and she in the dark passage; her grandfather, with a stern bearing quite unusual to him: the doctor, with his grave face and measured tones; and her mother lying dead, with grey stony face. Everything but the image of her mother was quick with life; through all the bustle and vivid movements of the other figures in her fevered fancies, that one figure presented and intruded itself in many strange ways, but always cold, and grey, and still. Presently the entire interest of her dreams centred itself in this image. Between her and her mother no great love had ever existed; the dead woman's nature had been repressive; an overwhelming grief had clouded her life, and she had yielded to it and sunk under it. She had hugged this grief close, as it were, and so wrapped herself in it, that her natural love had become frozen. So that the feeling which Lily experienced now in her dreams, for her dead mother, had nothing in it of that agonising grief which springs from intense love. And yet she shuddered at the part she was playing towards that grey cold form. It was lying before her, and she, dressed in bright colours, was dancing and singing round it. The

contrast between her own gaiety and the dreadful stillness of the form she was dancing and singing to, impressed her with horror, and she strove to be still, but could not. Her struggles made her hysterical in her sleep-for Lily was sleeping now-when suddenly peace stole upon her, and she was calm. But it was not a comforting, refreshing peace; it was oppressive and painfully intense. A man stood before her, with his eyes fixed steadily upon hers. This man was one who, a few weeks before, had performed for a benefit at the music-hall. He was an electro-biologist, and Lily had been terrified by his performances. He had stolen away the wills of some of the persons upon whom he had operated, and made them do this and that at his pleasure; to pull down the moon; to drink water and believe it wine, then soapsuds; to shiver with cold; to be oppressed with heat; to dance; to stand still; to be transfixed like stone; to form friendships, hatreds, and a hundred other things as strange and inexplicable. She watched him do all these things. When the performance was over, the man, coming off the stage, had noticed the interest with which she had followed his experiments, and had said to her, "You are a good subject; I could do with you as I please." She was terrified at his words, and tried to move away from him, but could not, and could not take her eyes from his face. Perceiving this, he said to her, "Stretch out your arm," and she obeyed him; "Take my hand," and she took it, surrendering her will entirely to him. At this point they were interrupted, and she escaped him, thankfully; but for hours afterwards she was dazed, and thought much of

the incident, dreading to meet the man again. Now he stood before her in her dreams, and commanded her to rise; she had no power to resist him, and she rose at his bidding. Here a diversion occurred by the word "Father!" falling upon her ears. It was not fancy, being uttered rather loudly by one of the speakers in the room, and it raised the image of her father. The last time she saw him, she was quite a little child, and then he was drunk, and was leaving her mother with words of anger on his lips. As he turned his face, in her sleeping fancies, towards the form of her mother lying dead before her, it suddenly changed to the face of Alfred, and she was pained and grieved at the likeness between father and son. Thus far the running commentary of her dreams.

Meantime an impressive scene was being enacted between her brother and her grandfather. Alfred went behind the screen, and uncovered the face of his mother. It was hard and cold in death, as it had been hard and cold in life. The light of love had not illumined her latter days, and strength had not been given her to fight with grief. Alfred was awed into good resolution as he looked at the dumb inanimate clay. "I won't drink so much," he thought, "I'll try and be better. If Christopher Sly wins the Northumberland Plate, I shall be able to be better." And then a strange half-prayer dwelt in his mind, that Christopher Sly might win the race.

To his side came old Wheels.

"She looks like an old woman," he said; "almost too old to be my daughter."

Alfred turned his eyes to the old man's face. Youth had not departed from it; it seemed indeed younger than the face of his dead daughter.

"You were her first-born, Alfred. Think of the joy that filled her when she first pressed you in her arms, and look at her now. Time is but a breath-but a breath-but a breath!"

Old Wheels mused of the time gone by, and wondered, as we all must wonder when we think of them and now, and of the changes that have occurred in our lives. The gay spirit chilled; the cheerful heart dulled by long suffering; the hope that made life bright dead and cold long, long ago-killed in the battle we have fought! But if love be left! —

Ay, if love be left, all the bruises we have received in the fight, all the hurts and wounds, shall not make life despairing. The flowers we have gathered and held to our hearts shall never wither if love be left!

"She looks very peaceful, grandfather," said Alfred almost in a whisper.

"She *is* at peace; she is with God and nature."

Better influences were stirred into action by the old man's words, and Alfred sank upon his knees by the bedside, and perhaps loved her better at that moment than ever he had done before.

"I have heard," continued the old man, "that many faces in death assume the beauty they possessed in youth. I would give much that it had been so with your mother, and that you might

have seen her face as it was when she was young."

The old man's thoughts travelled back to the time when he first looked upon the baby-face of the cold hard grey form before him. He recalled the thrills of pleasure that hurried through him as he held the pretty child in his arms, and looked at his wife smiling happily in bed. His wife had died soon after the birth of this their only child, who had been a comfort to him until trouble came. It was all over now, and a new life had commenced for her.

"I have thought sometimes," he said aloud, pursuing the commentary of his thoughts, "of the strangeness of spirits meeting under certain conditions of things."

Alfred looked up in wonder, and the old man answered the look.

"Ay, of spirits meeting. If you believe in immortality, you must believe in the meeting of spirits. What shape or form do they bear? Here, before us, is my daughter and your mother, an old woman in looks, aged by a grief that was hard enough to bear without being made harder by constant brooding. When my wife died, your mother was a babe, and my wife was almost a girl. So they parted. How do they meet now? This child of mine looks old enough to be the mother of my wife. How do they meet? – as mother and babe again? It is a strange thought, not to be answered. Yet by and by it shall be made plain to us."

Alfred listened and wondered. Although he had not been unaccustomed to hear his grandfather speak of such matters, he had never before been impressed by them. As he bowed his

head to the bed, other thoughts than selfish ones came to him, – thoughts which brought with them a consciousness of something higher than the aspirations by which he had hitherto been guided. If such influences as those which softened him and made him better for the time were less fleeting and more endurable, we should be the gainers. But in most cases they are as intangible in their effect as a breeze that touches us lightly. Winds come, and rain, and heavy clouds; and the unhealthful passion and desire that are stirred by the storm sweep the chastening thought into a lost oblivion.

The old man looked hopefully upon the form of his grandson in its attitude of contrition and softened feeling, and he waited long before he desired Alfred to rise. With a distinct purpose, which he was anxious not to disguise, he at the same time moved the screen, so that, as he and Alfred sat at the table, the bed upon which the dead daughter and mother lay was not hidden from sight.

"Alfred," the old man said, after a slight pause, "have you anything to tell me?"

"What should I have to tell you, grandfather, except-except to repeat that I am ashamed of myself for coming home dr – not quite sober, and that I beg your pardon?"

The old man did not look up; he toyed with Lily's workbox, which was on the table, and said gently, pointing to the bed,

"Ask pardon there. But you have done that, I think."

"Yes, grandfather, indeed."

"That is something. At such a time as this we should be considerate of one another. These occasions happily come but seldom in life, and sometimes they open the road to amendment. Tell me, Alfred, have I been kind to you?"

"Yes, grandfather."

"And you look upon me as a friend?"

"Yes."

"Yet you have nothing to say to me-no confidence to repose in me?"

"Nothing particular that I can think of."

A shade of disappointment passed across the old man's face like a cloud. But a rift of light chased it away as he said,

"You love Lily?"

"Indeed I do that, grandfather."

"She has but you and me, Alfred, as protectors; and she needs protection. She is surrounded by temptation. I am growing very old; my strength may fail me any day, and you may be called upon suddenly to play the part of guardian to her. You are young for it."

"But I'm strong enough, don't fear, grandfather. Lily will be all right; I'll see to that! I'll take her away from the music-hall soon. I don't like her being there – "

"You forget, Alfred, she earns our living."

"Yes, I know; but it isn't to be expected that she should always do that."

"I am glad to hear you say so. Yet you yourself are doing but

little at present; you only earn – "

"Fifteen shillings a week. I know! Tickle and Flint are the stingiest old brutes in London. Of course I can't do much out of fifteen shillings a week. I must have clothes, and other things; and I can't help spending a shilling or two, and somehow or other it all goes. I must do as other young men do. I asked Tickle and Flint for a rise once; but the old screws shook their heads, referred to the agreement, and told me not to ask again."

"They were right. If you are industrious and painstaking, a prosperous future is before you."

"O, but it's too slow!" exclaimed Alfred, with an impatient shake of the head. "I am bound to them for three years more before I can make a start. It's preposterous! Never mind, I'll show them! I know a way."

"What way?" asked the old man suddenly, looking at his grandson.

"Never mind now," replied Alfred evasively. "You'll see by-and-by."

"There is but one way," observed the old man quietly-"the straight way. Alfred, go to the cupboard, and bring me a small iron box you will see there."

A sudden paleness came over Alfred's face.

"A small iron box, grandfather?" he echoed, with a curious indecision, and with a nervous trembling of the lips.

"Yes," said the old man sadly; "you know the box. You have seen it many times."

Alfred hesitated for one moment only, and then, as if much depended upon prompt action, walked swiftly to the cupboard, and taking out a small iron box, laid it before his grandfather. The old man took a key from his pocket, and put it into the lid, but did not turn the lock.

"I daresay," he said, slowly and distinctly, "you have often wondered what was in this little box. Every house, every family, has its skeleton. This box has contained ours."

"Why speak of it to-night, grandfather?" asked Alfred, nervously. "Surely it is time to go to bed. Leave this matter till to-morrow."

"Nay, it must be spoken of now, in the presence of your dead mother and my daughter. I asked you a few minutes since if you had anything to tell me. You answered not in the manner I hoped and expected. I ask you again now. Have you anything to say to me? Is there anything on your mind that it would relieve you to speak of? Think a little. Errors may be repaired; but a time comes when it is too late for reparation. Look at your mother, and say if it is not too late to make reparation for unatoned suffering. If I wrong you in speaking thus to you, I ask your pardon, my boy; but I am speaking with a strong fear upon me-a fear that a life may be wrecked by wrong-doing, as was one very near to you."

Alfred, who had listened with eyes averted from the table, caught eagerly at the last sentence.

"You *do* me wrong, grandfather," he said, in tones which he vainly strove to make firm-"a cruel wrong-in speaking in this way

to me! I don't understand you. It is not the first time to-night that you have thrown out these insinuations. What did you mean by saying to me that the remorse of a too-late repentance is a bitter experience? And then, saying, God keep me free from crime?"

"I repeat it, Alfred. Once more I pray to God to keep you from crime! Once more I say that the remorse of a too-late repentance is the bitterest of experiences!"

"I deny your right to say these things to me!" cried Alfred violently. "I deny it entirely. I'll not stand it, grandfather! I shall go!"

"Stay!" exclaimed the old man in a tone of command. "I made a promise to your mother to speak to you this night of your father."

"My father!" Alfred caught at the table, and his heart beat wildly at the thought of what was to come.

"I have never spoken of him to you before, but the wishes of the dead must be respected. Sit down and listen. In this box I have been accustomed for years to put by small savings for a special purpose, of which you shall presently hear. Lily's earnings lately and my own trifling pittance were more than sufficient for our wants, and money was saved, little by little, until a fortnight ago I had very nearly one hundred pounds in this box. When you learn to what purpose this money was to be applied, you will better understand my motives for speaking of it in this manner. One hundred pounds was the exact sum required, and I hoped in a month to have counted it out, and to have

completed a tardy atonement for a life's disgrace." Alfred turned to his grandfather in amazement, but did not speak. "Shilling by shilling," continued the old man steadily, "the little heap grew and grew. No miser ever valued gold and silver more than I did the money this box contained. I hoarded it, counted it, reckoned upon my fingers how many days would elapse before the sum was reached. No one knew of it, as I thought, but your mother and I. Certainly no one but we two knew the purpose to which it was to be applied. Three weeks this night, leaving the box in the cupboard, I went to bring Lily home from the hall. I was away for more than an hour. When I returned, I found your mother strangely agitated, but could not ascertain the cause. I questioned her, but learned nothing. The following day I opened this box. It was empty. The money was gone!"

He turned the key and opened the box. It contained nothing but two pieces of faded yellow paper.

"See," said the old man, directing Alfred's attention to the box; "there is nothing in it but these sheets of paper. Every shilling was stolen."

"I see, grandfather," said Alfred, with a furtive look into the box. "Do you know who took the money?"

"No, I do not know."

"Did mother know?"

"I am not sure."

"How not sure, grandfather?" asked Alfred, with an effort to appear at his ease. "Did mother speak of it?"

"No; and I spared her the grief that telling her of the loss would have caused her."

"Then how can you say you are not sure whether mother knew? If she had known, she would have spoken. You know," added Alfred, his manner, which had hitherto been moody and embarrassed, brightening a little, "that I am going to be a lawyer, and lawyers are fond of asking questions."

The change in Alfred's manner produced a singular effect upon the old man; it rendered him more sad and troubled. Hitherto he had exhibited a strange eagerness when Alfred showed most embarrassment; and as this disappeared, and Alfred became more at his ease, an expression of absolute grief stole into the old man's face.

"The lock has not been tampered with," observed Alfred, examining the box carefully; "how could it have been opened? You kept the key in your pocket always, of course?"

"I have been foolish enough on occasions to leave it on the mantelshelf, but on those occasions I think I may say with certainty that the cupboard in which the box was placed was always locked. I was never without one key or the other. Say that once when this occurred, the thief, knowing that the box contained money, watched me out of the house. That then he entered the room, and, going to the cupboard, found it locked. That, being baffled by this circumstance, he saw upon the mantelshelf a key, which he guessed was the key of the iron box; that he took an impression of this key – "

"In what?" interrupted Alfred, almost gaily. "In wax or putty? If he had either by him he must be a professional burglar. There are plenty of lodgers in the house, but I hardly suspected there was a person of that description here."

"I don't think there is a person of that description in the house. Remember, Alfred, that what I am narrating is merely guess-work."

"Capital guess-work, I should say, grandfather; you ought to have been a lawyer. But go on."

"That he took an impression of this key," continued the old man, "in wax or putty, as you suggest. He may have come in prepared, or taking an impression in either may have been an afterthought. That from this impression he had a false key made. That on this night three weeks, when I had gone to the music-hall for Lily, the thief entered the room, found the cupboard open-it *was* open, I remember-and completed the robbery."

"A good case, grandfather, but quite circumstantial, you know."

"Yes, I know, Alfred; quite circumstantial. In my thoughts I go farther even than this. I think that when the thief was opening the box, your mother may have been awake, or perhaps in that half-wakeful condition during which fancy and reality are so strangely commingled as not to be distinguishable one from the other. I think that, being in this condition, she saw the robbery committed, and that perhaps she knew the thief – "

"Grandfather!" The exclamation was forced from Alfred's

trembling lips; he could not have repressed it for his life.

"What is the matter, Alfred?"

"Nothing," stammered the young man; "it is late, and I was not well when I came home. Go on."

"That knowing the thief, and not knowing whether what she saw was reality or a trick of the imagination, she dreaded, for a reason you shall presently be made acquainted with, to assure herself of the truth. I saw the dread in her watchful face and manner whenever I went to the cupboard; I saw the subject upon her lips and the fear to speak. I saw gratefulness struggling with doubt, as day after day went by and I did not refer to the loss. She yearned to know, and dreaded to ask. For had she asked and learned the truth, the bitterness of the past would have been sweet compared to the bitterness of the present! And so she passed away and was not sure."

"I don't understand all this," said Alfred sullenly; "you are speaking in enigmas, and I'm not good at solving them. I have no doubt that one of the lodgers took the money."

"It would not be very difficult to ascertain, Alfred. There were notes in the box of which I have the numbers, and a shrewd detective would most likely soon discover where the false key was made. But I have resolved to let the matter rest; perhaps I, like your mother, dread to know the truth."

"Suppose you leave it to me, grandfather?" suggested Alfred with nervous eagerness: "it will be practice for me you know."

"Yes, Alfred, I will leave it to you; I promise not to stir in the

matter myself. You may be able to recover the money, or part of it, and it may be applied to its original purpose."

Alfred gave a sigh of relief, and his manner brightened again, as he inquired what was the purpose to which his grandfather referred.

"Do you remember your father?" was the question asked in return by the old man after a pause.

"But slightly grandfather. I was very young when we lost him."

"When we lost him!" mused the old man. "What memories come to light at the thought of that time! To what end your mother made me promise to tell you the story of her life and to speak plainly of your father, it is not for me to say, but I believe she intended it to act as a warning to you."

"There again!" exclaimed Alfred fretfully. "Why as a warning?"

"That is for you to answer. Perhaps she saw in you the faults that brought shame to your father, misery to her. As you sit before me now, so sat your father when he asked me for my daughter's hand. I did not know the vices that were in him, or I would have seen her dead at my feet rather than have given her to him. She loved him and had already pleaded with me for him. We were living then near Gravesend. I had money and a house of my own. Remembrance of the happy life she lived there before she was married caused her last week to express a wish to be buried there, and I shall respect her wish. Your father, I thought, had a fair future before him. I gave him my daughter's

hand, and they came to London to live-not in such poor lodgings as these, but after a better fashion. I gave my daughter such a dower as I could afford, and they started in life with the fairest of prospects. It was not long before troubles came; it was not long before your mother learned that she had married a drunkard-worse, that she had married a gambler. These things are hard for me, your mother's father, to tell, and hard for you, your father's son to hear. But they are true, and if they serve to point a warning finger to the quicksands of life where, if you do not avoid them, all that is honourable and good for you may be engulfed, they will not be told in vain! I spare you the pain of a long recital; I simply tell you that step by step your father sank, and dragged your mother with him. He would not work, and constant appeals were made to my purse to supply the means of living. I gave and gave; spoke to your father again and again; appealed to his self respect, to his feelings of honour; and received in return-*promises* of amendment, promises of amendment, promises forgotten as soon as each temporary want was provided for. Shall I tell you more? Shall I tell you that, so low did drink and gambling bring him, he raised his hand against his wife – "

"No, no, sir!" cried Alfred, with a beating heart.

"It is true," said the old man sternly; "it is true, and it must be told. He raised his hand against the wife who had loved him and been faithful to him. And yet there was a time when he would have been as shocked as you are now, had such an accusation been made against him; but he was weak and easily

misled; unstable as water, as Reuben was; selfish in his desires and pleasures; with no gratitude for love; with no thought that life has solemn duties, and that there is in it something purer, brighter, sweeter, than the false glitter that attracts weak minds; therefore he wrecked his life and broke your mother's heart-your mother, whose sufferings you can imagine when I tell you that she was once as trustful as Lily, as tender as Lily! You were born; Lily was born. The downward course went on, and he and all of you sank into deeper misery, deeper shame, until I thought the worst had been reached. But I was mistaken."

The old man paused, reluctant to proceed; but Alfred said,

"Go on, sir; I must hear all now."

"It is right that you should. You will understand how, under these miserable influences, your mother's nature changed; how gradually, from a light-hearted trustful girl, she became a hopeless despairing woman. I gave up my house, and came to live with her. Your father was away sometimes for days together, and your mother had no dependence but me. One night late, long after we had retired, your father came home without warning. He stole into my room stealthily, and roused me. He had been in hiding for weeks; the police were after him, and were hunting him down; a warrant was out for him. He told me the shameful tale. I knew that he was a drunkard and a gambler, but I did not know before that night that he was a thief!"

Alfred sank on his knees in uncontrollable agitation, and hid his face in his hands.

"Circumstances had unfortunately placed it in his power to embezzle a large sum of money; he obtained possession of it, and drank and gambled it away. What was to be done? The name that I bore had never had a stain upon it. I and mine had lived honourable lives. I loved your mother, loved you and Lily. I had no others belonging to me-you were my all. If I made no attempt to save him, we should in the eyes of the world be sharers of his crime and his disgrace. His shame would have clung to you all your lives. He gave me the name of the man whom he had robbed. By daylight I was in the wronged man's house, by his bedside. This man loved money better than justice. I represented to him that he could not have both. He chose the first. I made terms with him, and sacrificed all but a bare pittance. Between us we compounded a felony. But I had not sufficient to pay the whole of his claim. I promised, however, to pay the rest as I could, and he took my word. Alfred, little by little I have been all my life since that time wiping off the debt of disgrace. One hundred pounds only remained to be paid, and very nearly that sum has been stolen from this iron box. Whoever stole that money stole the honour of our family!"

A long pause ensued. A new day was dawning, and the faint light rested upon the solemn face of the dead woman, to whom peace had come at last. Alfred turned his eyes towards it, and shuddered. Then he turned to the old man, and said in a low voice,

"And my father, sir?"

"In this iron box are two papers," said the old man; "one from him, promising never to trouble his wife and children more, and one from the man he wronged, giving quittance of what is set down as a debt. Your father kept his word. I have never seen him since that time."

Alfred kissed his mother's face, and covered it. Then he held out his hand to his grandfather, who took it in silence, and looked at him wistfully. But Alfred only said, humbly,

"I am tired, sir. You have been very good to us, and I will try to deserve it."

They went to the door, and the old man opened it, and saw Lily lying on the ground.

"Lily!" he cried, in alarm.

The girl slowly rose and stood before him. Her eyes were closed; she was asleep.

"Lily, my darling!" he said, tenderly placing his arm round her, "Why have you been sleeping here?"

The girl did not answer, but nestled in his arms as if she found comfort there. He led her into the room, and she accompanied him unresistingly.

"She has been overwrought, poor child," said the old man in a troubled voice.

They stood in silence for a few moments, almost fearing to speak; she still sleeping, with her sweet face turned towards the morning light, which, gradually growing brighter, illumined the strange group.

CHAPTER VIII
THE REVEREND EMANUEL CREAMWELL STOPS THE WAY

The parish of Stapleton, of which the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell was pastor, was situated a very few miles from London, and contained, it is to be presumed (and not to do violence to the science of divine things), an equal number of human bodies and souls. The number-reckoning the two as one-was not large, and the tithes were small, a circumstance which it is waste of time to mention, for what minister loves his emoluments better than his church? And yet in common minds a mean suspicion is sometimes engendered as to the comparative value of one and the other in the eyes of the clergy. Without indorsing this suspicion-rejecting it, indeed, as the vilest of calumnies-it is curious to observe that, when a minister has a "call," the summons from heaven generally holds out the promise of an increased earthly income. It is a proof of the base depths of which the mind is capable, and the fact of the divine summons being very generally joyfully responded to, should engender a tittle of suspicion. But unfortunately there are in the world men to whose moral perception purity of motive is a human impossibility; to such men the flesh-pots of Egypt contain the most powerful argument it is possible to conceive.

Stapleton was a tumble-down little parish, and bore unmistakable signs of being badly off. Everything in it and about it had been crumbling away for many generations. Magnates there were in it of course-most of them elderly gentlemen, with puffy faces and big stomachs, at whom the poor children of the parish, in dirty pinafores, their large eyes staring upwards, and their hands behind them, would gaze in worship. The predecessors of these great men were crumbling away in the picturesque old churchyard, making the soil rich for buttercups and daisies, with which the dirty children played and pelted one another. There were many picturesque bits of scenery about Stapleton; notwithstanding its poverty, it was not an undesirable living for a clergyman, and the patching-up and medicining of souls-which, according to doctrinal teaching, are always lame and diseased, coming into the world so, and so remaining-went on pretty much in the same way and quite as unsuccessfully as in most other parishes. Doctors for bodies and doctors for souls are so abundant, and increase and multiply so amazingly, that the human machine on two legs which walks the earth, and which Leigh Hunt's fish so very properly laughed at, may be said to be in a very bad state indeed.

Such, at all events, the preaching of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell went to prove. According to his pulpit-doctrine, corruption was the normal state of man-and woman also, of course. This condition was bad enough in all conscience, but it was a miserable thing to be compelled to believe that it could

never be bettered. The conviction was forced upon them by their pastor; his utterings were destructive of hope. He had preached to them a library of sermons, and middle-aged sinners of his congregation had grown old during his term. Inevitable time was pushing them nearer and nearer to the grave; but there was no more hope for them now than there had been long ago, when there were many years of life before them. Sinners then, sinners now. How was salvation to be obtained? They went to church, and listened to their pastor's words, but found no consolation in them. The refrain of his sermon was the same now as it had been the first day on which he ascended the pulpit, and preached to them not salvation but the other thing. As he and the members of his flock grew older, he grew more stern, and they more disconsolate. The time for them for reaching grace was getting very short, and still corruption held them fast, would not let them go indeed. When the Sabbath service was ended, they wended their way home, depressed and in the saddest of moods. For their pastor hurt and bruised the miserable sinners without mercy. He said, "This shall ye do out of fear of the Lord;" and no suggestion of love brought light to the benighted ones. He told them to cleanse their souls; he had told them to do this any time for twenty years, but he did not supply them with the divine soap and water necessary for the operation. He spoke in parables, and left them to draw the moral. He presented problems to them, hard nuts of divinity which they found it impossible to crack. He used the Bible like a catapult, and from this engine he,

week after week, hurled terrible inflictions at their hands, until some impressionable souls grew to believe that God was a very dreadful creature, and that it would have been better for them if they had never been introduced into this world of sorrow, which was to be followed by another full of penalties.

Not one of his parishioners loved him. But they thought he was a good man, notwithstanding-so good, indeed, that goodness became disagreeable in their eyes, and some of them deemed that it must be exceedingly pleasant to be naughty. The fact of this man having the charge of many precious souls (to use the stereotyped vernacular), and preaching the highest and holiest lessons for years to persons who did not, could not love him, was one of the strangest of anomalies. In his exhortations he seemed to declare, "I am sent to bruise, not to heal; here is a stone for you; here are vinegar and salt for your wounds; here are shadows and awful images to appal you, and to make your death-bed agonising; here are the waters of grace-taste them, and find them bitter!" After such exhortation, how could they love God? – how could they love His minister? Prisoners do not love their gaolers. And this man, having the charge of souls, held them in grim custody with the hard spirit of a gaoler.

They writhed and suffered in his grasp, but they had no word to say against him. He was an eminently respectable man; had never been seen to smile; and they touched their hats to him, and paid him every deference. But it was remarkable that no person had ever been known to utter a word in praise of him.

Women-especially women in humble life-did not like him; and he produced a curious effect upon children. Sometimes they cried when they saw him, and sometimes they stood aside as he passed, with a kind of fear on them-petrified as it were. The effect was something similar to that which Medusa's head might have produced upon them.

His home was like his preaching. There was no light in it. It was dark and sombre. All the furniture was of dark wood; the paper on the walls of every room was dark. In the whole house, from roof to basement, there was nothing graceful in form or colour. The ornaments on the mantelshelf were ugly figures in dark wood and stone. Flowers were never seen in the house. The gas was never lighted until night had completely fallen. Nothing more oppressive can be conceived than the effect which this gloomy house and the gloomy fashion in which it was conducted would produce after a time upon a sensitive spirit. In the eyes of many, all this added to his respectability as a man of God. What wanted he with pomps and vanities? It was his mission to preach against them. Should he, then, indulge in them?

How many are there who exhibit an outward pride in living thus-who raise their eyes and hands against harmless enjoyments-whose words would rob life of its sunshine and flowers and tender feeling, and who grudge to the hungry every sweet morsel that kind impulse and kinder nature hold out to them with pitying hand! If the inner and private lives of these moralists were laid bare, what kind of lesson would they teach?

It must not be supposed that this reflection in any way touches the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell. There was not a visible stain upon him; the breath of slander had never been raised against him; he was above reproach. He may have been a little stiff and uncompromising, a little too severe in his notions of this and that, but his morality and goodness were not to be questioned. As for his judgment there were at least two persons in the parish who relied implicitly upon it.

These two men were Justices of the Peace. Their names, unlike themselves, are of no consequence. It would be hard to give any other reason for their being appointed Justices of the Peace than that one was a retired colonel and the other a retired sugar-baker; and doubtless it would be a distinct libel to declare that they knew as much of law as the man in the moon. Undoubtedly they must have been worthy; undoubtedly they must have been just. What is known as "Justices' Justice" has been a theme for satire and rebuke as long as we can remember, and it is a blessing to live in a land where it would not be tolerated that one in power having committed a gross injustice-having, perhaps, helped to make infamous what might have been made beneficial-should be permitted to retain an authority which is only used to be abused. So perfect are our institutions, that it would be next to impossible that one who had proved himself by his acts to be unworthy of the distinction should be allowed to sit in judgment on his fellows year after year, to dispense unequal and merciless justice. It would be monstrous otherwise.

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell was to these two Justices as a staff to lean upon-a staff that would not yield or bend, however great the pressure. He frequently sat upon the Bench with one or the other, or with both, and prompted and advised them, and indeed directed their verdicts; so that it might almost be said that they spoke out of his mouth. Dressed in his little brief authority, the retired colonel or the retired sugar-baker would sit in state pompously, with his reverend counsellor by his side, and strike terror to the heart of the hardened criminal. As thus:

A boy of tender years, in the employ of a baker, was charged with stealing a pound of flour, valued at twopence, from his master. Thefacts of the case were somewhat singular. The master discovered the theft, and in hot temper sent for a policeman, who straightway locked up the ferocious thief. Then the master repented of his hasty action, made inquiries, and from what he learned, deemed that the boy was more deserving of pity than of blame. When he made his appearance in court, he stated that he was anxious not to prosecute, and he begged that the boy might be discharged with a caution.

"But he stole the flour?" asked the Justice, prompted by his reverend counsellor.

"It wasn't worth twopence," was the evasive reply; "and I have learned since – "

"We don't want to know what he learned since," remarked the Reverend Mr. Creamwell to the Justice. "Did the boy steal the flour, or did he not?"

"Yes," echoed the parrot Justice; "we don't want to know what you have learned since. Did the boy steal the flour, or did he not?"

"He did," replied the tradesman; "but – "

"What have 'buts' to do with facts?" exclaimed the wise administrator. "The boy is a thief, and he must-eh? yes, certainly; quite proper-he must go to prison for three months, with hard labour."

So the criminal (whose first offence it was, and who had never been known to steal before) was sent to prison, where, surrounded by gentle associates and humanising influences, he learnt some salutary lessons.

Or thus:

One very cold winter evening, a poor woman-so poor that she could not afford to buy two-penny-worth of coal-was walking to her cheerless home. The sharp wind pierced to her very marrow, and the prospect before her made the cold colder. She was a charwoman, and had been unsuccessful in obtaining work during the day. Jane Plummer was her name. Her toes peeped out of her boots. Hapless Jane Plummer! She had to pass by the side of a wood which belonged to wealthy Mr. Icicle, and she saw a few rotten branches on the ground. They had dropped in the autumn, and had been soddened into the earth by many rains. Think of a sick man who for weeks had been debarred the blessings of sun and sweet air-primroses could not have gladdened his sight more than these ugly sticks gladdened the sight of Jane Plummer; fresh violets could not have been more welcome and

refreshing to him than these black bits of wood were to her. They held out the hope of light and warmth. They were temptingly within reach. She stooped and picked them up, and put them into her apron, the humble badge of the Order of the Poor. Unfortunate Jane Plummer! Behind her was a policeman with a true policeman's spirit. He was off duty, but the ruling passion for taking people into custody was strong within him, and he never missed a chance. Besides, he yearned for promotion; he looked forward to being a sergeant. Animated by this blessed hope, he was as zealous a subordinate as could be found in the ranks. He knew Jane Plummer; knew that she was the poorest of the poor; knew that she had no fire, and no money to buy fuel; knew the meaning of her hesitating gait and wistful looks as the fatal branches came into view. What, now, if at this point he had turned and fled? Pooh, not to be thought of. He waited cunningly until the sticks were in her apron, and she was shuffling along with them; then he pounced upon her, and bade her come along with him. She trembled, and dropped the rotten sticks. He made her pick them up again. She sobbed and implored-unavailingly. The heart of the zealous policeman was not to be touched. Side by side they marched; he with his dreadful hand upon her arm, she holding with reluctant fingers the corners of the apron which contained the proofs of her crime. Jane Plummer passed that night in the police-station, and the next morning was brought face to face with Justice. The policeman, with modest triumph, gave his evidence.

"Taken red-handed," observed the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell to the dummy by his side, who nodded with the wisdom of an owl, and asked the prisoner what she had to say for herself.

Tremblingly and with sobs, Jane Plummer said,

"If you please, your worship, it was bitter cold, and I had no fire at home, and no money to buy coal; and as I was passing by Mr. Icicle's wood, I gathered a few sticks to boil my kettle. There is a path through the wood, and I picked up the sticks by the side of the path. I didn't think there was any harm in it; the sticks ain't worth a ha'penny!"

"Had prisoner any money upon her, policeman?"

"A penny and a farthing, your worship."

Thereupon the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell remarked that the rights of property must be respected; and the sapient Justice of the Peace, having property, read Jane Plummer a lecture upon her offence, and, looking at some writing on a paper handed to him by his reverend counsellor, passed sentence-two shillings and sixpence fine, and three shillings and sixpence costs, or seven days' imprisonment.

"And I hope," added the law's administrator, with more owl's wisdom, "that this will be a caution to you never to touch sticks in gentlemen's woods again."

Jane Plummer sobbed that she would never, never, never do so again and went to prison to brood upon her sin.

These are but two cases out of many which the Reverend

Emanuel Creamwell was instrumental in deciding. No doubt that, being actuated by a love for justice presumably more merciful (in these enlightened times) than the old Mosaic law of eye for eye and tooth for tooth, he often had to wrestle with his tender feelings; but he overcame them, as Jacob did the angel. And this mention of Jacob suggests the vision of his ladder. Say that the steps of the ladder by which the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell was to ascend to heaven were to be formed by good and just actions, surely such sentences as those he was instrumental in passing upon the baker's boy and hapless Jane Plummer would not be forgotten. If this thought ever occurred to him, it must have afforded him much consolation.

CHAPTER IX
THE REVEREND EMANUEL CREAMWELL AND HIS SON TAKE DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THINGS

This that we see before us might be, to a fanciful mind, the commencement of the ladder to heaven referred to in the last chapter. It is but a sunbeam, slanting from window to floor. Strangely out of place it seems in the gloomy study which it illumines, but the myriad motes within it sparkle and flash merrily, without reference to surrounding things. It is but a sunbeam, slanting from window to floor, but there are contained within it that you and I might be the better for knowing. At the simple suggestion of the thought, a darker cloud casts a shadow upon the window through which the sunbeam has stolen, and it vanishes, leaving the study utterly dreary and gloomy. The furniture in the study is heavy and ponderous, the curtains to the windows are heavy and dark, and the bookcase is oppressive and burdened with lore. Can the house, of which this funereal study forms part, be a home? The cloud passes, and the sunbeam is alive again. Truant flashes of light dart in, and shifting restlessly in the corners of the room, strive vainly to hide themselves, as if they are conscious that they have no business in a place so serious

and solemn, and wonder how they could have been so unwise as to enter. In the midst of their tribulation the door opens, and the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell enters. A deeper frown than usual is on his face. He holds a letter in his hand, which he has evidently been reading more and more.

"A Wesleyan Methodist!" he mutters. "Never been baptized in the Church of England! And the man's name is Verity, too. How could it have escaped me before? The very man, perhaps, to whom this paper refers."

He takes a small packet of papers from his desk, and selects one.

"A strange story," he muses, after reading it; "no person has any legal claim to what is due upon the debt. The statute of limitations has wiped off the obligation years ago. But the moral claim remains. I will see the man if he comes. I have some slight remembrance of him, as a man of strong opinions."

He refers to other papers, the perusal of which is evidently displeasing to him, if one can judge from the expression of his face. He pushes them aside, and leans back in his chair to think. Of what? Of his wife, who has been dead for twenty years. Not with affection does he think of her. But for a living remembrance she left behind her, she might have been to him as one who had never existed. This living remembrance is a child-a son-who, having completed his studies abroad (a phrase peculiarly adapted to fiction), has come home after many years of absence, with no prospects, no profession, and no settled aims or views for

the future. Not that this gives the young gentleman the slightest concern. He is as careless a soul as is to be met with here and there, and he can spend a sovereign or a sixpence with equal pleasure. An uncle, who had paid all the expenses of his training and education (upon the express understanding that his nephew was to live away from home), had lately died, and this afternoon had been appointed for the father and son to confer together upon business matters. And upon mention of the subject, here he is. A young gentleman with no trace of seriousness in his manner, with almost laughing face, and with an easy self-possession that it would evidently take a great deal to disconcert; altogether (asking pardon first for the irreverence of the comparison) no more like his father than was Hyperion to a satyr. A bright flower is in his coat.

"Good-day, father." Although it is afternoon, it is the first time they have met to-day.

"Good-day, Shad – "

But before he can get the name out, his son laughingly interrupts him.

"Felix, father; Felix, if you love me!"

The Rev. Emanuel Creamwell waives the latter proposition, and says in a displeased tone,

"I cannot understand your reason for changing your name."

"I don't like it, father. It sounds mean. Shadrach!"

"It is a Scriptural name," says the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell solemnly.

"So is the one I have chosen in its place-Felix. I never could respect a man with the name of Shadrach. Besides," adds Felix, with twinkling eyes, "it is unfair to the firm."

"To what firm do you refer?"

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They should never be parted. You know well enough, father, that you never think of the one but the other two partners pop up, as much as to say, 'Don't forget us, please! We belong to the firm.'"

Hard lines come about the thin-lipped mouth of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, and he says, with deepening frowns,

"The light manner in which you speak of these things is especially displeasing to me, and is entirely out of place in my presence and in this house."

"I almost seem to be out of place myself here," says Felix, with the slightest trace of vexation in his manner.

"Perhaps so; we will discuss that presently. Whoever lives here must conform to my rules. You were smoking in your bedroom last night."

"True, sir."

"I do not allow smoking."

"I will not smoke here again. I'll smoke my cigar in the open air for the future."

"I should prefer your not smoking at all; *I* don't smoke."

"Why, sir, you wouldn't keep everybody from smoking because you don't smoke? If it were not for tobacco, the revenue of nations would go to – "

"Blazes," he is about to say, but he checks himself in time. There is so little in unison between these two natures, that when they meet it seems to be almost a necessity that they should clash. One is harsh and sour; the other is tolerant and sweet. Felix was more the son of his mother than the son of his father; the sweetness of her nature had come to him with the milk he had drawn from her breast. Father and son had not been brought together for very many years until now, and the experience they have gained of each other is not agreeable to either of them.

"You scarcely need me to tell you," says the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, as his son stopped at the dangerous word, "that your remarks do continual violence to my feelings."

"We certainly don't seem to pull nicely together, father. You have some business matters to speak to me about. Perhaps it will be as well to proceed to them."

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell looks among the papers on the table, and says,

"Your uncle, as you know, died six weeks ago."

"So your letter informed me. Did you see him before he died?"

"I have not seen him for years. I did not approve of him; and but for its being understood that he intended to leave you as his heir, I should have declined to be upon friendly terms with him."

"He was my mother's brother, and he has been kind to me."

"So far as defraying the expenses of your education – "

"*All* my expenses, father," interrupts Felix. "Please to remember that he made me a regular allowance."

"By which you intend me to remember also," says the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell with a frown, "that you have been no expense to me."

"If you please to put it that way, you can. But I should prefer your thinking that I reminded you of the circumstance in order that you might do justice to the memory of my uncle."

"I do not need you to remind me of my duty; I need *no* reminding of that. It is always before me. The tone of your remarks, and your general bearing towards me, proceed from the stipulation made by your uncle that you should be educated away from me and from this house."

"I mean no disrespect to you, father, believe me," exclaims Felix eagerly; "but everything about me here is so-so different from what I have been accustomed to, that I feel myself almost in a strange land." He might have said more, but he restrains himself. He might have said, "Coming home as I have done, ready and wishful to be upon affectionate terms with a father who never showed any love for me-coming home with a studied resolution to try and conform to my father's wishes, and to gain for myself a place in his affections-I find myself baffled at every turn. When my father met me, after years of absence, he met me with no smile upon his face. He might have been a man of stone for all the warmth he showed to me; a stranger could not have exhibited less tenderness in his greeting. And so it has gone on from the moment I set foot in this house, which is cold enough and gloomy enough to chill one's blood." Felix does not say this,

but he thinks it, and much more to the same effect, and at the same time wonders a little whether he is in any way to blame for things being so different from what he hoped and expected.

"The stipulation made by your uncle," proceeds the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, "has thrown you into scenes and into a way of living that would certainly not meet with my approval; and if you wish to remain here, you must positively conform to my views. It is for you to change, not for me."

"Before we speak of this," says Felix, in as calm a tone as he can command, for the uncompromising bearing of his father grates strongly upon him, "will you be kind enough to tell me something more of my uncle? I have my future to look to now, and although it does not give me any anxiety, for I am sure to be all right" – with a careless wave of his hand to show that all the world was at his feet-"I would like to know what I have to depend on. My uncle must have died very suddenly."

"Sudden death is what we should all prepare ourselves for. I hope you have reflected seriously upon this and other matters not appertaining to this life."

"I don't know that I have, father," says Felix laughingly; "it's bad enough when it comes."

"I feared it!" exclaims the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell. "Not prepared! not prepared!"

The tone in which his father utters this lamentation is so exactly similar to the other lamentations which he has heard in other places, and which he has been in the habit of looking upon

as unworthy of regard, that Felix with difficulty suppresses his disdain; but he is of too frank and open a nature not to make upon the instant a confession of faith-a confession so dreadful that the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell listened in undisguised wrath.

"I don't suppose I am prepared, father, in the way you mean, and I must confess that I don't see what necessity there is for it. I am not sent into the world to mourn; there are things in it that I like to enjoy, and that I think I was sent to enjoy; otherwise, they would not be provided. I sha'n't be the worse for enjoying them, if I live till I am seventy, and I shouldn't be the better for avoiding them, or for looking upon them as sinful."

Felix is aware of the bad impression he is producing upon his father, but he deems it a point of honour not to falter, and he goes on to the end with a certain manliness that would be refreshing in any other place than the cheerless study in which he is sitting.

"May I inquire what you call yourself in the matter of religion?" asks the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell gloomily.

"Well, father," replies Felix, with a certain puzzled hesitation, "I suppose I should call myself a Church-of-England man; but I would much prefer to call myself a Christian."

"It is useless, I expect," observes the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, after a pause, "to enter into a discussion upon these subjects with you?"

"Quite useless, I should say, father."

"Then we will continue about your uncle's affairs," said the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, with the air of one who,

encountering a difficulty, finds it insurmountable; and, curiously enough, with the air of one who feels relieved in consequence. "As I was your uncle's nearest relative, and it was understood that you were his heir, I thought it my duty, immediately I heard of his death, to hasten to his house. I then, to my astonishment, discovered that he had expended the whole of his property in the purchase of a life annuity, which, of course, dies with him. After payment of certain claims, which could not be resisted, the estate leaves you, as your uncle's heir, the exact sum of one hundred and ten pounds."

A sour smile plays about the lips of the Rev. Emanuel Creamwell; thankful as he would have been for a more fortunate issue of his brother-in-law's death as relieving him of a responsibility which he is afraid may fall upon him, and which he is wishful to be rid of, he is not displeased at this triumph over his son. But Felix is more surprised than hurt; there is no such feeling in his breast as animosity towards his uncle because a fortune is not left to him. He says in a gentle voice,

"I am not the less grateful to him for what he has done for me; and I cannot say exactly whether I am sorry that he did not leave me a fortune. I can understand now the reason of his urging me to choose a profession. He knew that he had nothing to leave me, and that I should have to depend upon myself. But he did not think that he would have died so soon; he was a healthy strong man, and the probability was that he had many years of life before him."

"I told you," interposes the Rev. Emanuel Creamwell grimly, "that we should all be prepared for sudden death; he was not prepared for it."

"We have spoken of that already," replies Felix, in a dry tone, "and it will not profit us to pursue the subject. I know that many a bad word was said about him, but after all perhaps he was not much worse than many of his neighbours. I, at all events, have cause to be grateful to him. I have no doubt that, had he lived, he would have helped me to make a career for myself. But that is still before me; I haven't the slightest fear. The circumstance of his leaving so small an estate speaks for him. It proves that in the allowance he made me he went to the full extent of his means, and that between us we managed to swallow up his annuity pretty well to the last shilling." In his anxiety to do justice to the memory of his uncle, his generous mind seizes every point that reflects credit upon the dead man. "Be a lawyer, he wrote to me over and over again, be an architect, be an engineer, be something, whatever it is, and come home and let us set about it. That showed he was in earnest, and meant to stand by me."

"We are not likely to agree upon this or any other subject. I have but few words to say in conclusion, relating to your uncle's affairs. He left a request behind him, in a document written some years ago, that when he died all his papers and letters should be burnt. This was done; they were all burnt with the exception of one, which contains the recital of a singular story; I thought it desirable to keep it, as it may be worth money, and as I think

it concerns a man who once dwelt in this locality. And that, I believe, is all I have to say respecting your uncle."

A long and embarrassing silence follows, each knowing that the most momentous part of the interview is to come. Felix is unusually grave, for he cannot but feel that the relations existing between himself and his father are to some extent unnatural. Anxious as he is to find the road to his father's good wishes-affection seems to be out of the question-the consciousness is forced upon him that the only road open to him is one the treading of which will compel him to be false to himself. And that he cannot be. Come what may, he is determined not to play the hypocrite. He is the first to break the silence.

"You have something else to speak of, father."

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell clears his throat, in precisely the same way as he was in the habit of doing when he was about to deliver a more than usually disagreeable discourse to his congregation. This clearing of the throat did not have the effect usually produced; it did not clear his voice. On the contrary, his tones on these occasions invariably became more harsh and discordant-like rusty iron. It is in these rusty-iron tones he speaks now, and every word he utters grates upon Felix, and sets his soul on edge.

"I have something else to speak of, but the subject is the same-yourself. I am disappointed in you."

"I am sorry for it, father."

"The opinions you entertain of religious matters are sinful in

my eyes. I should so regard them if they were entertained by a stranger, and it is not because you are my son that I should exercise an unwise leniency towards you in matters which I deem of the utmost importance. You have contracted habits which I do not approve of. Your views I do not approve of. Your dress, your manner, your general conduct, are not in accordance with my ideas. That gay flower in your coat is unnecessary. Outward observances show the inward spirit."

"Not always, father," said Felix, with somewhat of recklessness; "I have known men who wore masks."

"Is that meant as an imputation upon me?" asks the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, the gulf between father and son widening at every word that is spoken.

"I was thinking at the moment," replies Felix, urged on by a feeling he cannot resist, "of what a French writer said upon the subject of outward observances and inward spirit. He said that the true man is that which exists under what is called man, and that, strictly speaking, the human visage is a mask."

"Such vague generalities are after the common manner of French romancists, whose writings lead the soul astray."

Here Felix thinks scornfully, "Why drag the soul in?" but he does not speak his thought.

"They take us," continues the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, joining the tips of his fingers and thumbs, and making an arch of them, "from the point we are speaking upon. I must desire that you do not break in again with such unseemly interruptions."

"I wish you would remember, father, that I am a man, and not a child. I have opinions of my own, and it is no fault of mine if they do not agree with yours."

"You are my son, and, as such, owe me implicit obedience. You have not decided yet as to a profession?"

"No."

"Your uncle dying leaves me in an unpleasant position. I am not rich; I have but little money to spare. Something the world will expect me to do for you – "

"O, pray, sir," interrupted Felix, "don't study the world. I shall get along well enough without assistance, I haven't the slightest doubt."

"Something, I say, the world will expect me to do for you; but if I do it, out of my small means, I shall require from you deference, respect, obedience. I have expressed my opinion of your views. You say in reply that you are a man, and have opinions of your own. Those opinions you will perhaps find it advisable to change. Until a profession is determined upon, you can stay here; but only upon the express understanding that you conform to my rules. You are the best judge whether this arrangement will suit you."

Felix, with a wry face, is about to reject this ungracefully-offered hospitality, and to say that perhaps it will be better for him to find a lodgment elsewhere, when an interruption occurs. Voices are heard in the passage, and the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell's housekeeper makes her appearance at the study-

door. Strictly speaking, she might be described as a colourless woman, her dress being black, and her face being white.

"Some persons to see you, sir," she says.

"I cannot be interrupted," replies the Reverend Mr. Creamwell.

"But they insist, sir."

"Name?"

"Verity."

"Let them come in."

The next moment old Wheels with Lily and Alfred enter the room.

CHAPTER X
FELIX GOES OVER TO THE ENEMY

Humbly they stood before the minister and his son, and there was silence for a moment or two in the gloomy study. From the window of the study the parish churchyard could be plainly seen, and Felix, looking through the window while the conversation between his father and the housekeeper was taking place, saw a coffin lying by the side of a newly-made grave, and a little group of persons standing about it in the sun's light. This group was composed of Gribble junior and his wife, and Mrs. Podmore and her little Polly. Gribble junior's heir was also there, under shade. The youngster was asleep on the turf at the foot of a tall and weary tombstone, on which was an inscription to the effect that the soul that had once animated the clay beneath it had assuredly gone to the place where the wicked ceased from troubling and the weary are at rest. The letters which recorded this desirable consummation of a life's labour were nearly worn away by time, and the woeful tombstone, as it leaned towards the earth, exhibited in its attitude a yearning to fall upon its face, and to go also to the place where the weary are at rest. Over the head of Gribble junior's heir a large umbrella was spread to protect him from the sun. The umbrella served two purposes-it

kept the child in shade, and advertised the business. For glaring upon the Cambridge blue silk was an advertisement, in yellow paint, of Gribble junior's Royal Umbrella and Parasol Hospital; and the proprietor of that establishment, complacently surveying the announcement, did not seem to think that it was at all out of place in the old churchyard. Little Polly, to whom everything that she had never seen before possessed surpassing interest, was looking about her with that solemn wonder which is often seen on children's faces. The gravedigger, a young man who should have known better, stood with his foot resting upon his spade; and the group was completed by two very old men who took an interest in funerals, and three dirty children with the usual dirty pinafores and the usual staring eyes.

The occasion was made quite a holiday by Mrs. Podmore and Mrs. Gribble junior. When Lily's Mather died, there was much sympathy expressed for her and her grandfather in the crowded house in Soho; and the women, notwithstanding they had ordinarily not a minute to spare from their pressing duties, busied themselves unostentatiously in assisting Lily and the old man through their trouble. Thus, Mrs. Podmore took upon herself Lily's household work, and cleaned and tidied the rooms, and cooked the meals for them until after the funeral; and Mrs. Gribble junior, being a perfect marvel with her needle, set to work at once making a black dress and bonnet for Lily. This quick practical sympathy is very common and very beautiful among the poor. Then Mrs. Podmore and Mrs. Gribble junior

had settled that they ought to go to the funeral, which was to take place somewhere near Gravesend, in accordance with the wish of the dying woman. They spoke of it to their respective husbands. Gribble junior said, "We'll all go; and we'll take the young 'un. He's never been to a funeral; it'll open up his ideas, as a body might say." As if such an opportunity should, for the baby's sake, on no account be allowed to slip. Mrs. Podmore told *her* husband when they were in bed. He had come home, worn and tired out as usual, and while his wife expressed her views, he held his little treasure-his darling Pollypod-close to his breast. He had a very perfect love for his child.

"All right-old woman," he said, in his weary manner, when his wife had finished. "Go. It will be-a holiday for you."

"And Polly?" said Mrs. Podmore "What shall I do with Polly?"

"What shall you do-with Pollypod?" he repeated drowsily, hugging the child. "Take her with you. It will be a treat-for her. My Pollypod! She'll smell-the country-and see-the sun." He was falling off to sleep, when he pulled himself up suddenly, and said, "And look here-old woman! Don't bother about-my dinner. I'll make shift-somehow."

"Lord bless you, Jim!" exclaimed Mrs. Podmore: "I shall have a nice meat-pudden for you. My man ain't going without his dinner."

So it was settled, and when Mrs. Podmore, the next morning, spoke of it to old Wheels, he was grateful for the attention, and said there would be plenty of room in the coach for them all.

Mrs. Podmore's great difficulty was a black dress to go in; she could not go in a coloured dress, and could not afford to buy a new one. But on the day of the funeral she made her appearance in black, having borrowed her plumes of a neighbour who was in mourning; Pollypod went in colours.

As they had nearly twenty miles to go, the coach was at the door early in the morning. All the neighbours round about came into the street to gaze at it and the mourners. They stood and talked in whispers. Their sympathy was chiefly reserved for Lily and the coffin. "Hush-sh-sh! There's the coffin. Hush-sh-sh!" as if their very whispers might disturb the dead. Then, when Lily came out, the women shook their heads, and said, "Poor dear! Poor dear! How pale she is! Ah, she didn't look like that the other night at the White Rose." Presently they expressed surprise because the children were going, but said, a moment afterwards, "Ah, well, it will be a nice ride for them."

Gribble junior's father, master of the chandler-shop, and foe to co-operation, having been assured by his son that his late lodger was not to be buried by co-operation, also patronised the starting of the funeral with his presence. He had a corrugated face, not unlike the outside of an old walnut-shell, and it would have been difficult to have persuaded him that there was hope of salvation for the deceased if the coffin had been a co-operative production.

The party being large a one, a coach of an extra size had been provided. Gribble junior rode outside the coach, with the driver;

the others, each mother with her child on her lap, and the coffin, were inside. He liked his position on the box, and thoroughly enjoyed the ceremony. As he sat there, he looked round with a sad gentle smile upon his neighbours. The day was fine, and the coach moved slowly through the narrow streets, as was befitting and proper. Common as the sight is, everybody turns his head or pauses for a moment to look at a coach with a coffin in it. Women come to the windows and gaze at it with a kind of quiet fascination; dirty children suspend their games and stand in admiration at the corners of the streets; idle shopkeepers come to their doors in their aprons; and mothers bring their babies to see the coach go by-truly suggestive of the cradle and the grave. Gribble junior relished this attention on the part of the public. He took it in some measure as a tribute to himself, and even derived satisfaction from the thought that many of the persons who stopped and gazed must believe him to be a near relative of the deceased. He was as little of a hypocrite as it is in the nature of human beings to be, but he deemed it necessary to his position to assume a mournful demeanour; and he did so accordingly, and sighed occasionally. When the coach got away from the narrow streets, it moved faster. Gribble junior had brought a Cambridge blue-silk umbrella with him, which, however, he did not open on the journey. He and his wife and Mrs. Podmore enjoyed the ride amazingly. To escape for a few hours from the narrow labyrinths of Soho was good; to get into a little open country where grass and flowers were growing and blooming was better;

and to see bright colour come to the children's cheeks and bright sparkles to their eyes was best of all. It was as Mr. Podmore said, a treat for them. The wives had brought sandwiches and bread-and-butter with them, and water in ginger-beer bottles. (Gribble junior, outside the coach, had two bottles filled with beer-four-penny ale-which he and the driver drank and enjoyed.) The women offered part of their refreshments to the relatives of the dead woman, but not one of the mourners could eat. In the early part of the journey, little Pollypod was inclined to show her enjoyment of the ride somewhat demonstratively, but Mrs. Podmore whispered to the child, "Hush, Polly dear! Lily's mother's in there!" pointing to the coffin. Pollypod had blue eyes, very bright, though not very large; but the brightness went out of them and they grew larger as she learned this fact and looked at the coffin. A little while afterwards, having watched and waited and debated the point with herself, without being able to come to a satisfactory conclusion, Pollypod asked why Lily's mother did not get out of the box.

"*I* would!" said Pollypod. "If I was shut up there, I'd cry, and you'd let me out; wouldn't you? Wicked box! Father couldn't play with me if I was shut up in you!" And listened and wondered why the clay in the coffin did not cry to escape.

Once during the ride, Lily nursed Polly for comfort, and the child, with her lips to Lily's ear, said,

"Lily, I want to know!"

It was one of Pollypod's peculiarities that she was always

wanting to know.

"Well, Polly?"

"Was Lily's mother naughty?"

"O, no, Polly! O, no!"

"What is she shut up in the box for, then?"

"She is gone from us, Polly dear."

"Was *you* naughty, Lily?" continued the inquisitive little Pollypod; "and is *that* the reason why she's gone?"

"No, Polly, dear."

"What is the reason, then, Lily?" inquired the pertinacious little maid. "I want to know."

"God has taken her, Polly," said Lily, in a tearful voice.

"Where has God taken her to, Lily?"

"There!" pointing upwards.

What did the matter-of-fact little maid do, there and then, but go to the window, and look into the bright sky for Lily's mother? Mrs. Podmore kept her there, and whispered to her that poor Lily was not well and must not be teased. But the child, at intervals, turned her perplexed eyes to the coffin and then to the beautiful clouds, not at all satisfied in her mind, and with all her heart "wanting to know."

At length the ride, weary to some and pleasant to some, was over, and they were in the churchyard and by the grave. There a man, taking old Wheels aside, spoke a few words to him. An expression of amazement, almost of horror, came into the old man's face.

"It is impossible!" he exclaimed, in a tone of uncontrollable agitation. "Here-beneath God's sky! – Surely you are mistaken."

The man replied that there was no mistake.

"Where is the minister?" inquired the old man. "Is that his house? I will go and see him. Come, children, come with me."

And leaving his friends by the grave, the old man, followed by his grandchildren, walked swiftly to the house of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell.

When the relatives of the dead woman entered the gloomy study, Felix, seeing a tender girl among them, offered Lily a chair. She bowed without looking into his face, and although she did not sit down, she rested her hand upon the chair, as if she needed support. If the thoughts which animated the minds of the five persons in that sombre study had been laid bare, the strangest of contrasts would have been seen. There sat the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell; behind him was his son. They were at variance with one another, and each felt himself so much in the other's way, that if it had not been for the tie of kinship that bound them, their opposing natures would have led to the plain expression of scorn and contempt on the one side, and of harsh and bitter condemnation on the other.

There stood the delicate girl, whose nerves during the last few days had been strung to the highest point of which her nature was capable. A pure and tender lily indeed, as graceful as the flower from which she derived her name, and whose white bells, as they arch among the vivid leaves of green, tremble in the lightest

breath from zephyr's mouth. It was so with Lily at this time. A harsh word would have caused her to quiver with pain. The effect which the suddenness of her mother's death, and the terrifying dreams that followed, had produced upon her had not passed away. Like the lily she stood there, dependent upon surrounding things almost for very life itself; kind looks and sweet words gladdened her and helped to make her strong, as kind sunshine and sweet breezes gladden and make strong the flower. And like the flower, the light in which she stood seemed to come from inward brightness and purity.

Her brother Alfred stood by her side. What was stirring in his mind? Well, it was the day on which the Northumberland Plate was run for at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne races. The race was over by this time. Had Christopher Sly won? He trembled to think that it might have been beaten-had come in second, perhaps; had lost "by a head." If it had, there was woe in store for him. If he were in London, he would know; this uncertainty was torturing. Now he was in the depth of misery: Christopher Sly had lost, and he had to pay money, and to make money good, out of an empty purse. Now he was in the height of gladness: the horse *could* not lose-every one of the prophets had said so; Christopher Sly had won, and everything was right. It was like a reprieve from death.

Lastly, the grandfather. What his thoughts were will be shown in words. A strange and unexpected trouble had been added to his grief, and his handsome thoughtful face showed traces of perplexed anxiety.

When Felix had offered Lily a chair, the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell had killed the proffered courtesy with an irritable wave of his hand, which expressed, "You will not presume to sit in my presence." In everything that Felix did he found cause for anger, and he believed that his son was animated by a distinct wish to thwart and oppose him; this very proffered courtesy to one of these persons was another argument in his mind against Felix. Marble in the hands of a sympathetic worker was more capable of tenderness and gentleness than was the face of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell as he sat in his arm-chair and waited for the intruders to speak.

"My name, sir, is Verity," commenced the old man, in a humble and respectful voice.

"So I understand," said the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, in a hard and cold voice.

Lily shivered as the harshly-spoken words fell upon her ears.

"These are my grandchildren," indicating Lily and Alfred.

"A gentleman," thought Felix, as he followed the courteous action of the old man.

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell received the intimation with a scarcely perceptible nod, and a colder chill came upon Lily's sensitive spirit as she raised her eyes to the dark face of the minister.

"They are the children of my dead daughter," continued the old man, "who before she died expressed a wish to be buried in the place which had been familiar to her in her younger and

happier days."

"These details are scarcely necessary, I should say. What are you here for?"

The old man's agitation was so great that he was compelled to pause before he answered; but strength seemed to come to him as he looked at the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell's stony face.

"The mother of these children is waiting in the churchyard to be buried."

"You received my message, I have no doubt."

"Some words were spoken to me as coming from you."

"Were not they sufficient?"

"I could not believe, sir, that the words which were delivered to me came from the lips of a minister of God."

A flash of something very like anger lighted up the small eyes of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell.

"And so you come here to revile His minister?"

"I come here in all humility, sir," replied the old man.

"Do you wish me to repeat the message?"

"I wish to know, sir, that I have been mistaken. I cannot believe that what I have been told is true."

"It is the evil of the ungodly that they cannot answer straight. Do you wish me to repeat the message?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is very simple. My intimation was to the effect that I cannot perform any service over the deceased woman."

"The prayers for the dead – " exclaimed the old man

imploringly.

"Are not for her!" said the minister, finishing the sentence sternly.

At these dreadful words Felix started forward to Lily's side; the young girl was trembling, and he feared she was about to fall. Indeed she would have fallen, but for his helping hand. Inward fire possessed the soul of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell at the action of his son and his wrath was expressed in his face. Felix saw it, but did not heed it; his lips were firmly set as he yielded Lily to her grandfather's arms, who, as he bent over her, murmured,

"I would have spared you the pain, my darling! But I thought that your helplessness and your innocent face would have pleaded for us."

Then he turned to the minister. "Why do you refuse to perform the last rites over the body of my daughter?"

"I am mistaken if you have not been informed. Her parents were members of the Wesleyan Methodist body, and the woman was not baptized in the Church of England. Therefore I cannot say prayers over her."

"Is that God's law?"

"It is mine!" replied the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, with inconsiderate haste. If, when he heard the rejoinder, he could have caused the old man to fall into dust at his feet, he would have done so.

"You say truly, sir," said the old man, in a tone of bitter

calmness. "It is not God's law; it is yours."

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell shaded his face with his hand; he did not choose that the feeling there expressed should be seen. He knew, by his son's sympathetic movement towards Lily, that Felix had gone over to the enemy, and a consciousness possessed him that Felix was not displeased at his discomfiture. Still it was his duty to assert himself, and he did so accordingly in severe measured terms, and in tones utterly devoid of feeling.

"I have already told you that you came here to revile-to revile God through His minister. It is such as you who set men's minds afire, and drive them into the pit."

But the old man interrupted him with,

"Nay, sir, do not let us argue; I at least have no time. A dead woman is waiting for me. I must go and seek a minister who will say prayers over the poor clay. Come, my children."

"To seek a minister!" echoed the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell. "What minister?"

"A Methodist minister, as that is your will."

"Presumptuous!" exclaimed the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, in wrath so pious that a colour came to his usually pale face. "No Methodist minister can be allowed to pray in *my* churchyard!" – with a protecting look and motion of his fingers towards the ground where the dead lay-a look which said, "Fear not! My lips have blessed you; my prayers have sanctified you. Ye shall not be defiled!"

"How, then, is my daughter to be buried?" asked the old man,

with his hand to his heart.

"The woman must be buried in silence," replied the minister.

As if in sympathy with the words, a dark cloud passed across the face of the sun, and the sunbeam, with its myriad wonders, vanished on the instant, while the truant flashes of light that were playing in the corners of the room darted gladly away to places where light was.

The old man bowed his head, and the words came slowly from his trembling lips.

"Cruel! Unjust! Wicked!" he said. "Bitterly, bitterly wicked! Do we not all worship the same God? What has this innocent clay done, that holy words may not fall upon the earth that covers her? What have we done, that the last consolation of prayer shall be denied to us?" Then looking the minister steadily in the face, he said in a firm voice, "According to your deserts may you be judged! According to your deserts may you, who set your law above God's, and call yourself His priest, be dealt with when your time comes!"

Turning, he was about to go, when the voice of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell stopped him.

"Now that you have done your reviling, attend to me for a few moments. You lived in this parish once?"

"Twenty years ago," replied the old man. "All my life up to that time-I and my poor daughter. There will be some here who will remember me."

"I remember you myself. You had a son?"

"No; I had but one child, she who lies yonder."

"Psha! it is the same-you had a son-in-law – "

The old man looked up with apprehensive eagerness, and Alfred, who had hitherto been perfectly passive-having indeed for most of the time been engrossed in torturing himself about Christopher Sly and the Northumberland Plate-made a sudden movement forward. The old man laid his hand upon his grandson's arm, cautioning him to silence.

"The father of these young persons," continued the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell. "Where is he?"

"Alfred," exclaimed the old man, "take Lily away. It is too close for her here. I will join you presently outside."

Indeed, Lily was almost fainting. The long weary ride, the abstention from food for so many hours, and the sufferings she had experienced during the dialogue between her grandfather and the minister, had been too much for her strength. Seeing her weak state, Felix stepped forward to assist Alfred, and presently they were in the porch.

"Stay one moment, I pray," exclaimed Felix hurriedly; "only a moment."

He darted into the house, and brought out a chair.

"There!" he said. "Let her sit here for a minute or two. It will do her good. The sun is the other side of us."

It is a fact that Felix, with quick instinct, had selected this place as being likely to revive the girl. They were out of the glare of the sun.

"Now, if you will oblige me and not let her move," he said in the same hurried eager tone, "you will lay me under an obligation that I shall never be able to pay."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before he was upstairs, in his own room, tearing open his valise; he scattered the things wildly about, and came flying down again, with a fine white handkerchief and a bottle of Cologne water in his hand. He poured the liquid upon the handkerchief, and, with a delicate consideration, handed it to Alfred.

"Bathe her forehead with it; place it on her forehead, so. Now blow gently-gently. Let me!"

He blew upon the handkerchief, and the deliciously cool breeze revived the fainting girl. She looked gratefully into his face, which turned crimson beneath her gaze. But his task was not yet completed, it seemed. He took from his pocket a flask, which he had also found in his valise. There was a little silver cup attached to the flask, and he poured a golden liquid into it.

"Taste this; it will do you good. Nay, put your lips to it; there's no harm in it. Your brother will drink first to show you how reviving it is."

His voice was like a fountain; there was something so hearty, and frank, and good in it, that it refreshed her. Alfred emptied the silver cup, and her eyes brightened.

"Take a little, Lily," he said; "it *will* do you good."

She drank a little, and felt stronger at once.

"Where's grandfather?" she asked then.

"He will be with you presently," replied Felix. "I am going into him. I will tell him to come to you. But before I go," and here his voice faltered, and became more earnest, "I want you to say that you forgive me for any pain that you may have felt in-in there," pointing in the direction of the room they had left.

"Forgive you!" said Lily, in surprise. "Why, you have been kind to us It was not you who said those dreadful words to grandfather. There is nothing to forgive in you."

"There is much to forgive," said Felix impetuously; "much, very much, if it be true that the sins of the father shall be visited on the children. I am in that state of remorse that I feel as if I had been the cause of your suffering and your pain."

"Nay, you must not think that," she said, in a very gentle voice; "I am not well, and we have come a long, long way."

"Well, but humour my whim," he persisted; "it will please me. Say, 'I forgive you.'"

"I forgive you," she said, with a sad sweet smile.

"Thank you," he said gravely, and touched her hand: and as he walked into the house again, and into the study where his father and old Wheels were, Lily's sad smile lingered with him, and made him, it may be presumed, more unreasonably remorseful.

While this scene was being enacted outside the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell's house, the conversation between the minister and old Wheels was proceeding. When Lily was out of the room, the old man said,

"Will you please detain me here as short a time as possible,

sir, as we have much to do and far to go?"

"I will not detain you long," said the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, in the tone of a man who is about to smite his enemy on the hip; "possibly you would not have remained, had you not been curious to know what I have to say respecting your son-in-law."

"Possibly not, sir; you may guess the reason why I wished the tender girl who was here just now not to be present while you spoke."

"Because I might say something unpleasant. Well, it is not a creditable story. Searching among the papers of a deceased man, having warranty to do so, his effects being the property of my son, I came upon this paper. It recites a singular story of an embezzlement, which took place-let me see; ah, yes-which took place nearly eighteen years ago. You know the story, probably?"

"There are so many stories of embezzlement. Is my name mentioned?"

"Otherwise I should not have spoken of the matter to you. After reciting the manner of the embezzlement and the name of the criminal, it speaks of intercession by you on his behalf, and how, somewhat out of compassion and somewhat out of policy, criminal proceedings were withheld. You undertook to repay the money, and after the payment of one large sum, dates are set down on which smaller sums were paid on account from time to time."

"Anything to deny?" asked the minister.

At this point Felix entered the room.

"Nothing to deny. The story is true."

"And you," exclaimed the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell loftily, "the father of a criminal who should be expiating his crime in prison, presume to lift your voice against me! Truly, I should but be doing my duty to society if I were to make the matter public."

"Do I understand that the man from whom the money was embezzled is dead?"

"He is dead."

"There is a balance still due," said old Wheels; "one hundred pounds. Has he left the claim to any one?"

"My son is heir to the property," said the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell.

"Your son!" There were traces of disappointment in the old man's voice as he looked at Felix. "Is this he?"

"This is he."

"You shall be repaid, sir," said the old man humbly to Felix, "to the last farthing." Felix, who had stood before the old man with head inclined, turned away abruptly at these words, and looked out of window. "It is but just," continued the old man in firm and gentle tones, "that you and he should know, that no one was to blame but the unfortunate man who committed the crime-for crime it was undoubtedly, although the law judged it not. The children who were here awhile ago were babes at the time, and it was to save all of us from shame and misery that I

undertook to repay the money. I have been all my life paying it, as you may see by the statement in your hand. I did not know that such a document was in existence. I have a signed quittance for the money at home, and have had from the time I paid the first instalment, which, as you see, was large enough to wipe off at once three-fourths of the debt. But the moral claim remained and remains. It is my pride to think that some part of my dear granddaughter's earnings have gone towards the clearing of her father's shame, of which, up to the present moment, she has never heard. Depend upon it, sir, the balancer that remains shall be faithfully paid. Have you anything farther to say to me?"

"Nothing farther. You can go."

The old man lingered as though he were wishful to say a word to Felix; but that young gentleman, standing with his back to him, gave him no opportunity, and he left the study in silence. Then the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell rose and, paced the room, indulging in bitter meditations. It had been an unfortunate afternoon for him; everything but this last small triumph had gone wrong with him; he had been crossed, almost defied, at every turn. First, his son; then, this presumptuous old man, whose words were still burning in his mind. And his son's silence now irritated him. Every moment added to his irritation. Felix, standing with his face to the window, looking out upon the churchyard, and upon the figures of the old man and his grandchildren walking towards the grave, showed no disposition to move or to speak. In the eyes of his father this implied

disrespect. He was not destitute of a certain decision of character, and in harsh tones he called upon Felix, to speak.

"I have been considering, sir," said Felix. "I ask your pardon for keeping you waiting."

"Considering what?" demanded the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell.

"The proposition you made to me before these persons intruded upon us. You offered me a shelter here, until I determined upon a profession.

"On the express understanding that you conform to my rules."

"I do not forget, sir. Those were your very words. Will you permit me?" He took from the table the document which had been referred to in the conversation that had lately taken place. "And this old man has been all his life paying a debt for which he was not liable! There is hope yet for human nature, sir." A queer smile came upon his lips as he uttered these words in a half-gentle, half-bantering tone.

"Speak plainly," was the stern rejoinder of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell.

"I will try to do so. My uncle left a request that all his papers should be burnt, and I am my uncle's heir. Why was this preserved?"

"You have heard: for your good. It is worth money to you. The man admits the claim."

"Money!" exclaimed Felix, with a light laugh, in which there was bitterness: "But the dead must be obeyed."

He went to the fireplace, struck a match, and applied the light to the paper. The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, with face white with anger, watched the burning of the paper. Felix let the ashes fall into the fender, and tapped his fingers lightly together, with the air of one wiping away a soil.

"So!" he said. "I wash my hands of that."

"You know what you have done?" said the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, placing his hand upon the table to steady himself.

"Yes, sir," answered, Felix gravely; "I shall never trouble you again."

Then he left the room quietly and sadly.

CHAPTER XI
FELIX, DISSATISFIED WITH THE REALITY, SETS UP AN IDOL, AND WORSHIPS IT

In the passage Felix was confronted by the colourless housekeeper. He had a kindly feeling for her. She had been his father's housekeeper ever since he could remember. She was a young woman and well-looking when he was a little child. When he came home, a man, she had addressed him in the old familiar way, and he was surprised at the change in her; but he soon recognised that living all her life within the influence of his father's house had made her what she was. Now, as, she confronted him, he gave her a kind nod, and would have passed her: but she laid her hand upon his arm to detain him.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Into the churchyard," he answered.

"Where, after that?"

"A subtle question, Martha. Who knows where he goes to after he gets into the churchyard?"

"Where, after that?" she repeated.

"Ask the worms," he replied; and added, somewhat bitterly, "or the preachers."

"Answer me, Felix," she said.

"I can't;" and again he attempted to pass her.

"Nay," she said, almost entreatingly; "let me speak to you for a minute or two."

"Come outside, then; I cannot speak to you here."

She followed him into the porch. The chair which he had brought for Lily was there, but Lily was gone. The fragrance of the scented water he had sprinkled upon his handkerchief lingered in the air. He placed his hand upon the chair, and in his fancy the sweet air became associated with the tender girl who had rested there awhile ago. He smiled, half gladly, half sadly, as the fancy came upon him. The housekeeper watched him earnestly, as if striving to read his thoughts.

"Now, Felix, where are you going afterwards?"

"I can't tell you, Martha," he replied-softly, for he was thinking of Lily. "My plans are unformed."

"When do you return?"

"Never; unless something dearer than life brings me back."

"You have had a quarrel with your father?"

"You are a witch," he said lightly, "and ought to be burnt."

"You have had a quarrel with your father," she repeated, showing no temper at his light manner, but even seeming to take pleasure in it.

"Something like that. We don't agree. There are not two rights, are there, Martha?"

"I am not sure; there may be."

"I *am* sure. My father's right and mine are as the north and the south pole. If I am right, I must not stay here and vex him: it would be unfilial. If he is right, I must sit in sackcloth and ashes, and pray for fresh blood and bone and brain before we can meet again. Any way I must go; that is settled."

"Who settled it?"

"He, or I, or both of us. Are you not witch enough to guess for yourself? It came, somehow. That is enough. If you entertain the idea that the difficulty is to be smoothed over – "

"I do not," she interrupted. "I know your father."

"And me-do you think you know me?"

"I think I do."

"Therefore you must see how impossible it is that he and I, having disagreed upon a vital point-it *is* vital, to my thinking-can live together. I have a fancy in my head, Martha; I'll tell it to you. To have a father and not have a father-as is the case with me-is dreadful. For father and son to disagree is dreadful also. So I shall imagine a father, and as he is sure to agree with me, we shall be the best of friends. I shall picture him tender, and good, and kind; tolerant, yet conscientious; merciful, yet just. I can see him, and I love him already!"

Light as his words were, there was a vein of seriousness in his tones that showed how deeply his feelings had been stirred.

"When I left the Continent," he continued, "I had a friend with me who also had been absent from home for years. At intervals during our journey, he spoke with enthusiasm of home delights

and of the happiness in store for him when he and his family came together. He showed me letters from them which made me think. We crossed from Paris to Dover, and there he met his father, who had travelled a hundred miles to welcome his son the moment he set foot on English soil. They threw their arms round each other, like boys, and laughed to keep away the tears. When I came to the railway station here-just half a mile from where we stand-I looked about me with a dim hope that *my* father had come that distance to welcome his son home. But there are fathers and fathers, Martha. Now, if I had been wise, and had set up my imaginary father before the train stopped, I should have seen him waiting for me on the platform; I should have been able to throw my arms round his neck, to press him to my heart, and to see in his eyes a kindly welcome; I should have been able to grip his hand, and to say, 'Bravo, dear old fellow! I love you!' But I was not wise, and to be forewarned by my fears was not with me to be forearmed. It is not too late, though-it is never too late. Away, you shadows!"

He flicked his handkerchief in the air, as if the reality oppressed him with a phantom presence, and said in a mock-serious tone, in which earnestness struggled not vainly for a place:

"Here I raise a father whom I love. I kiss his hand, and vow to pay him all respect. He shall go with me, and we shall live together."

There was nothing in the housekeeper's appearance to denote that freaks of the imagination would find favour in her eyes, and

yet gleams of pleasure-all the more strange because she sought to suppress them-brought light to her dull white face as Felix with fantastic grace stooped to kiss the hand of the shadow he had raised. But these signs faded away as soon as Felix had finished speaking, and her face resumed its usual dulness of expression.

"Those persons who have just gone, Felix-had they anything to do with your quarrel with your father?"

"I never saw them before," he replied.

"Had they anything to do with the quarrel with your father?" she persisted.

"There's something of the bull-dog in your nature, Martha," he said, laughing. "You never leave a subject until it is settled."

"I would not hurt you, Felix," she said, softly.

"I don't believe you would. Well, yes, they *had* something to do with the immediate cause of my leaving-though it would have come to the same thing without them. We were on the verge of the precipice as they entered. I must go and see how they are getting along, and if I can be of any use to them; but I shouldn't wonder if they shrunk from me and looked upon me as an unclean thing. Are you surprised at all this, Martha?"

"No," she replied tranquilly. "This is no house for sunshine. I knew when you came that you would not be here long."

"You can do me a service. I shall soon look my last on this place; will you pack up such things as are mine, and give them to a messenger I shall send?"

"Yes; they shall be ready this evening."

"Then that is all, and the world is before me for me to open. Where is my oyster-knife?" He felt in his pockets with a comical air. "Ah, it is here," and he touched his forehead confidently. "So now good-bye, Martha."

She did not relinquish the hand he held out to her, but clasped it firmly in hers.

"You will let me know where you live, Felix?"

"O, yes; I will let you know."

"I have but little money of my own, unfortunately – "

"Stop, stop, stop!" he cried, with his fingers on her "Enough has been said, and I must go. Good-bye."

"Good-bye; I think you do right to leave, Felix."

"I should be compelled to leave, sooner or later," he replied; "I could not live without love or sympathy. The cold austerity of this house is enough to turn heart and face to stone. I pity you, Martha. I have sometimes wondered how you could have stood it so long."

"I earn money here, Felix. Your father pays me liberally-for him-because I suit him; and I am not entirely without love. I have something to work for, thank God. Good-bye. May every good fortune be yours!"

CHAPTER XII
POLLYPOD WANTS TO KNOW

When Felix reached the churchyard, the grave was still empty. The coffin lay upon the earth by its side, and the women of the party were sitting on convenient tombstones. Of the men, only Alfred remained; Gribble junior and the old man were absent.

Gribble junior's baby was sleeping peacefully beneath the umbrella tent, the gay outside of which had caused the two old men to go for two other old men, and the girls in dirty pinafores to go for other girls in dirty pinafores. These new-comers were as interested in the unusual sight as their friends, and expressed their admiration by staring persistently in the dullest possible manner.

Pollypod, wandering about, was in a state of delight and wonderment. Truly the old churchyard was a world of wonders to the child. To her young mind there was nothing suggestive of corruption in it. The "Here lies" and "Here lieths" brought no melancholy thoughts to her, although she was curious about them. But, when she asked, wanting to know, her mother bade her "Hush!" as she had done in the coach, and Pollypod was fain to hold her peace. It was not difficult for her to let the matter rest for a time, as there were plenty of other things to occupy her mind. Now and then a butterfly flew by, and she watched it with delighted eyes till it was out of sight. She found ladybirds on

leaves, and wished that she had a little bottle to take them home for father. But she could take him some buttercups and daisies, and she was plucking the prettiest and the most golden when her eyes lighted on Felix.

Pollypod was not by any means a bashful child. She had her likes and dislikes, as all children have, but she had more of the former than of the latter. And she was fond of society. She had tried to make friends with the dirty girls who stood staring at the umbrella and the coffin, and the strange folk, but had not been successful. All her advances had been received with stupid stares, and not a word could the little maid extract from the juvenile bumpkins. Then she had tried the old men; but when she plucked their trousers, they moved away without a word. She had therefore given up the attempt as hopeless. Now, all at once, here was a handsome young man, handsomely dressed, and he immediately became an object of interest to Pollypod. Felix, seeing the child gaze at him, smiled at her, and Pollypod smiled in return; and to show that she was prepared to give good interest for amiability, came and stood by his side, and looked into his face with frank interest and curiosity. The healthy exercise had brought bright sparkles into Pollypod's eyes, and a bright colour to her cheeks. Felix was fond of children, and invariably found favour in their eyes. At parties where grown-up people and children were, the youngsters always claimed him as one of themselves, and played and romped with him without restraint. Children have an instinct for the discovery of amiable

matures in their elders, which is very seldom wrong.

"Well, little girl," said Felix, by way of commencement. The sight of the child's artless face did him good, and tended to dispel the vapours which clouded his mind.

Pollypod nodded a reply, and arranged the buttercups and daisies in her hand, without looking at them. Her attention was fixed upon his smart clothes and bright face, and the flowers in his coat. These latter had an especial attraction for her. She thought how pleased father would be if she could take them home to him in the middle of a bunch of buttercups and daisies. But suddenly, as she looked, her face became clouded, and she retreated a step or two.

"What's the matter, little one?" he asked, seating himself upon a tombstone. "You are not frightened of me, are you?"

"I don't know," replied Pollypod; and then, with her finger to her lips, and her head inclined forward, she said solemnly, "Are you the naughty man?"

"What naughty man?" he inquired, amused at the child's attitude and manner.

"The naughty man who won't bury Lily's mother."

The cloud on the child's face was reflected on his as he replied, "No, I am not."

Pollypod came close to him immediately.

"I am glad of that; I'm very, very glad of that!"

"Why, little one?"

"Because I like you."

The artlessness of the child pleased and soothed him. It was nature speaking.

"If the naughty man was here," continued Pollypod, clenching her little fist, and stamping her little foot, "I'd beat him for making Lily cry."

"Is that Lily?" pointing to the girl.

"Yes, that's Lily, and that's Lily's brother Alfred, and that's Mrs. Gribble, and that's my mother, and that's the baby. And that's Lily's mother in the coffin. Who are you?"

"My name is Felix."

Pollypod pondered upon the name, and presently nodded her head two or three times, to express approval, In proof that she was disposed to treat him fairly in the matter of information, she said,

"My name's Pollypod."

"Polly – "

"Pod. Father's name is Jim Podmore, and I'm his little Pollypod."

Thereupon-confidential and affectionate relations being completely established-she sat down on the tombstone beside him. She put him at once upon on equality with her by asking, in the most serious manner,

"Do you like butter?"

And gravely held a buttercup beneath his chin, he laughingly submitting to the test. The golden reflection of the flower being seen on his chin, she declared that he *did* like butter, and the

triumphant tone in which she announced the discovery evidently enhanced his value in her eyes. Then she asked, Did she? and held up her face for the test, which Felix applied with becoming seriousness. The answer being satisfactory, they became more confidentially familiar.

"This is a churchyard," said the little maid.

"Yes."

"Where people are buried."

"Yes."

"Lily's mother is going to be buried here."

"Yes."

"I want to know if Lily's mother is shut up in a box, how can she be up there?"

Felix, seeing that he was in danger of being entangled in a theological disputation with an opponent who thirsted for facts, answered simply,

"God lives there, and when we die we go to Him."

"Mother has told me so often and often, but I want to understand."

"Inquisitive little maid!" exclaimed Felix. "Is not that a beautiful place?" pointing upwards.

"It *is* pretty-and bright; that cloud looks like blue-and-white feathers. Mother says we'll go to heaven if we're good. And that's heaven. I'm going to be very good. But I want to know! How can we be here and there at the same time?"

Felix felt that it was a hard question to answer, and he

despaired of making it clear to so young an understanding.

"See now," he said, with an attempt at simplicity; "you are a little girl. By-and-by you will become a woman; then you will grow older and older, and your hair will turn white, and you will be an old woman. When we are old, we die."

"*Must* we die-all of us?"

"All of us, little one. But God gives us a soul which is always young; it never grows old, and when our bodies are worn out, our souls go back to God and heaven."

"I give my soul to God to keep," murmured Pollypod, repeating a line which she said in her prayers every night. She did not understand, but she had faith in Felix. She murmured the words so softly that Felix did not hear them.

"So that our body is here, and our soul is there, little maid. Earth takes care of one, and heaven takes care of the other."

"I suppose it is right," said Pollypod, with her hands clasped in her lap, where the flowers had fallen loose. She looked into his face as she spoke.

"Yes, little one, it is right."

"And Lily's mother *is* there, although I can't see her."

She gazed earnestly, at the clouds for a few moments before she spoke again. "I want to know!" she then said. "Everybody who dies is not old."

"Some die young. God wants them."

"I hope God won't want me till I'm old, for I want to grow up to be a woman – "

"And then, little maid?"

"And then you shall marry me," said Pollypod, coming down to earth, and placing her hand in that of her companion. "I'll be your little wife."

"That's a bargain," said Felix merrily; "we're sweethearts from now."

"You ought to kiss me," said the forward little maid; and after being kissed, she fell to bunching her buttercups and daisies together.

"And now tell me, Pollypod," said Felix, anxious to learn something of Lily and the old man. "Where do you all come from?"

"O, along, long, long way! It was such a nice ride!"

"Then you live a long way from here?"

"O, yes, we live in London, in Soho."

"That is a long-way indeed, Pollypod. Are you Lily's cousin?"

"O, no; we're none of us relations, not even the baby! But we all live together. Lily lives on the first floor; baby and Mr. and Mrs. Gribble live on the second floor-they're umbrella makers; father and mother and me live on the third floor."

"That's very high up, Pollypod!"

"I like it because of that; there's such a lot of light! It's nearer the sky, father says. Father's a railway man, and comes home so late! But we play in bed every morning. And we've got a dog; Snap's his name. He goes out to work every morning with father, and comes back at night. We have such fun together! We've got

such a nice room."

"Only one, Pollypod?"

"Yes; we don't want more, do we?" inquired the little maid. "There's such pretty paper on the walls. Roses-*such* red ones! Father's fond of flowers, that's why. I like to look at them before I go to sleep; sometimes I see pretty faces in them, like Lily's. I dream of everything. I shall dream of you to-night, and shall look for your face among the roses. I'm making a bunch of buttercups and daisies for father, but they're all one colour" – with a wistful look at the flowers in her companion's coat.

Felix saw the wish in the look, and taking the flowers from his coat, gave them to Pollypod.

"If you put these in the bunch," he said, "there will be more than one colour."

Pollypod held up her face to be kissed again, and nestled closer to him.

"I knew you were good," she said.

When she had arranged the flowers, Felix found a piece of string in his pocket, and tied them together for her. The party near the coffin were in the same position as they had been when he came into the churchyard; the old man and Gribble junior had not returned. Having nothing better to do, and burning with a desire to know more of the fair girl whose acquaintance he had made in so strange a manner, Felix resumed his conversation with little Pollypod. He had no difficulty in doing so; Pollypod was brimful of talk.

"So you dream of everything," he said.

Pollypod nodded, repeated "E-ve-ry-thing" under her breath, and held up her bunch of flowers admiringly, turning them this way and that, and thinking how pleased father would be with them.

"What did you dream of last night?"

"I don't remember," replied Pollypod, after a little consideration. "I know what I dreamt of the night before."

"Of what?"

"Of my Doll," said the little maid, showing by her manner that the subject was of very serious importance. "And, O, it looked so beautiful! It had large blue eyes-and moved them! – and a pink face, and red lips, and it was dressed in blue silk, with such a lovely bonnet!"

"Was it as pretty as your own doll?" inquired Felix.

Pollypod shook her head a dozen times, and pursed her lips. "I haven't got one," she said wistfully, "I never saw it; I only dream of it."

Felix did not say anything in the pause that followed, knowing that he was about to be enlightened.

"It's in father's ship. Father told me, O, such a long time ago! that when his ship came home, he would give me the Doll; and the naughty ship won't come home. Father is so angry sometimes because it's so long away. There's a toy-shop not far from where we live, with such funny things in the window-and there's a Doll in the middle of them, just like mine that's in father's ship. Father

says mine is handsomer, and that mine has a smaller nose and pinker lips. I go to look at it whenever I can, and wish, and wish, and wish that father's ship would come home! I often dream that it has, and when I wake up I say, 'Father, has your ship come home?' and he says, 'No, Pollypod;' and I know by his voice that he's sorry."

"Now, Pollypod," said Felix, holding up his finger to denote that she was to give him all her attention, "I'm going to tell you something. I'm a wizard."

"A wiz-ard," repeated Pollypod thoughtfully; and then said, with a sharp look at Felix, "I want to know!"

"What a wizard is! So you shall, little one. A wizard can see things, and tell things before they occur."

"Can he!" exclaimed Pollypod, her blue eyes dilating. "Can you see and tell anything now?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I can see a little girl lying in bed, looking at the roses on the wall."

"That's me," said Pollypod, in a tone of infinite content. "Who's in the room with the little girl? Not father!"

"No; not father, because father comes home so late."

"And the little girl is asleep before he comes home."

"Fast asleep, Pollypod. But there's some one else in the room-mother is there, working."

"That's right! that's right!" cried Pollypod, twining her fingers

together in her excitement. "You *are* a wizard!"

"The little girl is lying with her eyes open, looking at the roses. She fixes her eyes upon one, and it changes. Lips come-like Lily's; eyes come, bright-like Lily's. Presently Lily's face is in the rose, smiling at the little girl. But the face fades – "

"Does it?" whispered Pollypod anxiously.

"And in its place a Doll appears – "

"Yes! yes!"

"And the little girl falls asleep and dreams of it, and holds it in her arms. And while she dreams, I see a ship coming over the seas – "

"Father's ship!" cried Pollypod in ecstacy.

"No; another ship."

"O!" sighed Pollypod, drooping.

"Here it comes sailing-sailing-sailing; and the waves are curling-curling-curling; and the captain is bowing-bowing-bowing; and the stars are shining-shining-shining into the waters, lighting them up with smiles! But what is this I see on the ship? A Doll!"

"Doll!" cried Pollypod, reviving. "For the little girl?"

"Yes, for the little girl. The little girl's Doll! Pollypod's Doll! And as sure as we sit here talking, the captain, if he's alive, will bring it home before the week's out."

In a very flutter of delight Pollypod jumped to her feet, and clasped her hands.

"You mustn't be frightened of me, Pollypod," said Felix,

sharing in Pollypod's delight; "I'm a good wizard."

"I know that! I know that!" said the little maid, almost in a whisper. "But I want to know! Is She beautiful?"

"Yes, she is beautiful," replied Felix, dwelling long on each syllable.

"And has she got blue eyes?"

"The bluest in the world."

"And a pink face?"

"As pink as this rose, Pollypod."

"And red lips?"

"Red as cherries."

"And what is She dressed in?"

"Blue silk, with a large sash behind, and mauve boots, and the loveliest bonnet that ever was made."

So filled with joy that she could not speak, Pollypod sat down on the tombstone, shut her eyes, and saw Her in all Her silken glory. The little maid was in a state of beatific bliss; and she saw the ship sailing, and the waves curling, and the captain bowing, and the stars shining, and the beautiful Doll eclipsing them all.

Presently she opened her eyes, and said reflectively,

"I hope Snap will like her. You're sure he'll come?"

"The captain? As sure as can be. Mother's calling you."

Away raced Pollypod, the happiest little girl in all England, towards her mother; and Felix strolled out of the churchyard with the idea of ascertaining why the old man and Gribble junior were so long absent.

He was arrested in his purpose by an incident that claimed his attention.

Near to the entrance to the churchyard was the mourning-coach which had conveyed the party from Soho, and near to the mourning-coach was the driver, in a condition bordering closely on intoxication. Whether it is that sorrow requires inward moistening, or that there is some other equally strong cause to account for it, every churchyard has in its immediate neighbourhood a handy public-house, or two, or three-according to whether the churchyard does a flourishing business or otherwise. There is nothing strange in the circumstance; for public-houses are everywhere, and churchyards should no more be deprived of the consolation their presence affords than other places. No sooner had our driver got rid of his load of flesh and clay than he sought the handy ale-house, to bait his cattle and moisten his sorrow. The former task was quickly accomplished, but the latter occupied a much longer time-a proof that his sorrow was very keen, and needed a great deal of moistening. When Felix approached him, he had paid at least half a dozen visits to the ale-house, and his sorrow had turned into anger at the time he had been kept waiting. His face, which had grown puffy in the exercise of his profession, was inflamed, and he was muttering to himself that he would see the whole party in a very warm place before he would wait for them a minute longer. The assertion was not only irreverent, with a churchyard in view, but (as he would have to be there to see) it was injudicious as regarded his own

fate after he had shuffled off his mortal coil.

Felix saw the state at once, and saw also that the driver was not in a fit condition to drive the party home. A very few words with the man convinced him of this. He was quick at expedients, and eagerly took advantage of the opportunity that presented itself.

"My guv'ner," said the driver, in a thick voice, and with occasional hiccoughs, "didn't bargain that I was to stop here till I got blue in the face."

Which (supposing that the contract had been entered into between him and his "guv'ner") was so manifestly impossible of accomplishment in sight of his inflamed countenance, that Felix could not help smiling.

"And *in* consequence," continued the driver, with sarcastic emphasis, "as it wasn't in the bargain, and as the job's paid for beforehand, and as I've got my family to look arter, you can tell the party inside, as you're a friend of their'n, that I'm off."

With that he gathered up the reins, and prepared to mount. His foot was in the air when Felix invited him to "Come and have a pint."

The invitation was not to be resisted, and they adjourned to the ale-house, where, over the pint, Felix learnt the name of the street and the number of the house in which Lily lived. His purpose being served, he allowed the man to depart, and, with some satisfaction, saw the mourning-coach on its way to London.

"There would have been an accident for certain," said Felix to himself, as if in apology for allowing the man to depart, "and it

will be better for them to have a sober driver than a drunken one. Besides, I myself must sleep in London to-night."

Then he went to an hotel of a better kind, where he was known, and made arrangements for the hire of a waggonette and a pair of good horses, and ascertained where he could stable them for the night in London.

"Harness the horses," he said, "at once, and let them stand at the entrance of the churchyard: I shall return in the morning. I wonder," he mused, as he walked towards the churchyard again, "Whether they will refuse to accept a courtesy from my father's son."

CHAPTER XIII
THE WINNER OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND PLATE

"Though the prayers of a priest are denied to you, not less sanctified is the ground in which you lie. Tender thoughts and tender remembrance accompany you, and these are the best of prayers. It is better as it is, perhaps; better that your dust should be buried thus in silence; than that the cold words of a harsh sorrowless minister should fall upon your grave. Peace be with you!"

These words were spoken inly by Lily's grandfather, as he stood, with head uncovered, by the side of the grave into which the coffin was being lowered. He and Gribble junior had been in search of a Methodist minister, in the vague hope that something might be suggested to afford consolation to the dead woman's children; but their search had been unsuccessful, and as the day was waning and they had far to go, they had no alternative but to comply with the Reverend Mr. Creamwell's decree. As they stood about the grave, the men were silent and sad; tears were streaming down the faces of the women; and Pollypod for a few moments forgot her Doll and the ship that was bringing it home over the seas. The heir of the house of Gribble junior was awake and in his father's arms, and the enthusiastic umbrella-doctor

tilted the baby over the grave, so that the child might have a good view of the coffin, in the belief probably that it would "open up his ideas, as a body might say." Notwithstanding the minister's decree, Lily's mother was not buried: in complete silence; for the twittering of birds and the soft hum of insect-life were heard, and the breeze was as peaceful, and the clouds as bright, as if a thousand human voices had been raised in her glorification. The old man picked up a handful of dust, and scattered it lightly upon the coffin, and then the earth was shovelled in and the grave was filled. Slowly they walked out of the churchyard, Pollypod in a state of restlessness about Felix, and wondering what had become of him. When she caught sight of him, standing by the waggonette he had hired, she ran eagerly to him, and plucked his coat. He inclined his head to hers.

"The Captain's sure to bring my Doll this week?" she whispered.

"Quite sure, little maid," he answered.

"Do you see the ship now?"

"Yes," he said, "and the wind is fair."

But when he raised his eyes, and saw a shadow on the old man's face, he was not so certain that the wind was fair. He had a task to perform, however, and he addressed himself to Gribble junior, and telling him that the mourning-coach was gone, delivered the driver's message, in milder terms than he had received it. The old man, listening, glanced sharply at Felix.

"I think it is as well," pursued Felix, addressing the company

generally, though he looked only at Gribble junior, "that the man *has* gone, for he was drunk, and in no fit condition to drive you home."

"Then how are we to get back?" inquired Gribble junior in perplexity, more of himself than of Felix.

"I feel that I am in some measure responsible for the difficulty," rejoined Felix, "for I might have detained the man, though, as I have said, the wisest course was to let him go. Will you allow me to place this waggonette at your disposal? It will be pleasanter driving than in the close coach, and you will reach home more quickly." All but the old man looked up gratefully at the proposal. "The evening will be fine, and I will ensure a safe and speedy journey. Nay," he continued hurriedly, in answer to a motion of the old man's hand indicating refusal, "before you decide, grant me the favour of one minute's private conversation."

There was much in the voice and manner of Felix to recommend him, and the old man saw that he had found favour in the eyes of the rest of the company. He himself also, against his own judgment as it seemed, felt inclined to the young man. This feeling, no less than his perplexity, induced him to comply with the request, and they stepped aside, out of hearing of the others.

"Sir," then said Felix, "the offer is made out of pure disinterestedness, believe me."

He blushed slightly as he said this, for he thought of Lily, and of the share she unconsciously bore in the transaction.

"It is somewhat incomprehensible," said the old man, gazing attentively at the earnest face of Felix; "I cannot be mistaken. You are the young gentleman who was present during my interview with the minister."

"I am he, sir," replied Felix, "but – "

"And you are his son," interrupted the old man.

"There is no doubt of that. I am my father's son-in the flesh. For the share I took in that interview by my presence, I humbly ask your pardon. Do me the justice to believe that I am in earnest."

"It would be hard to believe otherwise."

"Thank you, sir."

"Yet it is difficult to reconcile." As he spoke he thought of the young man's kindness to Lily, and it seemed to be not so difficult. But if the kind offer sprang from sincere and unselfish impulse, father and son must be at variance. "Your father – " he said.

But Felix broke in abruptly with, "Nay, sir, pardon me. Do not let us speak of fathers and sons. The subject is a painful one. My father and I differ upon certain points. I am under suspicion, I know; I should be surprised were it otherwise. But come, sir, your own sense of justice will grant me this. Let me be judged, not by you alone, but by those who accompany you. If they decide against me, I will drive to London alone, with only my thoughts for company. If they decide for me, I will resign my whip, or drive you home, as you determine."

By this speech Felix proved himself to be a master of generous

cunning. He knew that he had a true friend in little Pollypod, who necessarily carried her mother's vote, and he hoped also that Lily and her brother were on his side. But he did not know that when he said, "Do not let us speak of fathers and sons; the subject is a painful one," he had unconsciously uttered words which served him in good turn with the old man also. Thought of Alfred's father, who had brought shame on all of them, came to the old man's mind as he heard the words. He walked to where the others were standing, and found Pollypod in a state of feverish delight at the prospect of being driven home in such a beautiful carriage. Mrs. Podmore, of course, was equally pleased, because of the treat in store for her child, and because she fell in love immediately with any one who was kind to Polly. Gribble junior spoke in enthusiastic terms of the handsome offer; and Alfred, quivering with eager anxiety to know whether Christopher Sly had won the Northumberland Plate, fretted at every moment's delay that kept him from the London streets, where the evening's newspapers would tell him the news. Lily was silent, but the old Man saw in her eyes that she wished him to accept the offer. This at once decided him, and he waived all personal feeling in the matter. He returned to Felix, and said,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.