Fenn George Manville

A Little World

George Fenn
A Little World

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23157315
A Little World:

Содержание

Fenn George Manville
A Little World

Volume One – Chapter One.
Duplex Street

"Some people are such fools!" said Richard Pellet; and, if public judgment was right, he knew what a fool was as well as any man in the great city of London. He was a big man was Richard Pellet, Esq., C.C., shipper, of Austin Friars, and known among city men as "the six-hundred-pounder;" and he knew a fool when he saw one. But whether at his office in the city, or down at his place at Norwood, – "his little place at Norwood," where he had "a morsel of garden" and "a bit of glass," and grew pine and melon, peach and grape, and had a fat butler in black, and a staff of servants in drab, trimmed with yellow coach-lace, – no matter where Richard Pellet might be, he could always see in his mind's eye the greatest fool that ever breathed – the man whom he was always mentally abusing – to wit, his brother Jared.

But Jared Pellet always was a fool – so his brother said; and he was continually filling the foolish cup of his iniquitous folly fuller and more full. He was a fool to be tyrannised over by his brother when a boy, and to take all the punishment that should have fallen

to Richard's share; he was a fool to marry Lizzie Willis, who had not a penny, when Richard would have given his ears to stand in his shoes; he was a fool for being happy – loved and loving; he was a fool to have such a large family; he was a fool for being a poor struggling man, while his brother was so rich; in short, taking Richard Pellet's opinion – which must have been correct, seeing how wealthy, and stout, and clean shaven, and respected he was – there was not a bigger fool upon the face of the earth!

Just as if it was likely that a man could get a living in Clerkenwell by mending musical instruments in so unmusical a place; doctoring consumptive harmoniums; strengthening short-winded concertinas; re-buffing a set of hammers, or tuning pianos and putting in new strings at one shilling each.

However, living or no living, Jared Pellet rented a house in Duplex Street, Clerkenwell; and there was a brass plate on the door, one which Patty Pellet brightened to such an extent that when the sun did shine in Duplex Street – which was not often – it would kiss the bright metal and then shoot off at various angles to dart into darksome spots where, directly, he seldom or never shone.

It was a bright plate that, and a couple more years of such service would have oiled and rotten-stoned and rubbed and polished out the legend, "J. Pellet, Pianoforte Tuner;" for at this time there was but little of the original black composition left in the letters, and as for the corner flourishes, they were quite gone. But there was a board up over the front parlour window, bearing,

in gold letters, much decayed, the self-same legend, with the addition of "Musical Instruments Carefully Repaired;" while, so that there might be no mistake about the indweller's occupation, a couple of doleful-looking, cracked, and wax-ended clarionets sloped from the centre hasp to either side of the said front parlour window; and where by rights there should have been one of those folding-door green Venetian barred blinds so popular in the district, there graced the bottom panes – "The Whole Art of Singing," "Beaustickski's Violin Tutor," and "Instructions for the Concertina" – fly-stained and dust-tarnished books, that had been put in on Monday mornings and taken out again on Saturday nights, in company with the cracked clarionets, ever since Jared Pellet had hired the place, and determined upon keeping it private on Sundays.

There was nothing else very particular about the house save that it had once entered into the heart of its owner to have the front stuccoed, ever since which time it had suffered severely from a kind of leprosy which made it shell and peel off abundantly; and that the top pane of the parlour window had once been cracked by a tip-cat, forming a star whose rays extended to the putty all round, starting now from a round dab of the same material. Jared did not have that pane mended, saying that it would soon give way, and then they would have a fresh one put in; but that starred and puttied pane bore a charmed life, having outlived every one of its eleven brethren, who had all gone to the limbo of broken glass, while it still remained. It may perhaps

be mentioned, though, that there were some rusty iron railings laid horizontally beneath the window, forming the kitchen into a cage, and just sufficiently far apart to allow of playthings of every description being dropped into the area; when would come the ringing of the door-bell to ask for restitution of the treasure. At intervals, too, there would be the trouble of some child or other getting its foot firmly fixed between the bars, to remain the centre of a commiserating crowd until the arrival of its incensed parent, and the extrication of the imprisoned member, minus shoe or boot, which of course followed the example of Newton's apple, illustrating the force of gravity for the benefit of Jared's children.

There was a watchmaker's next door to Jared's on the right, and a watchmaker's next door on the left, and watchmakers in front, all along the street. In fact, it was altogether a very mechanical place, although Richard Pellet said that no one but a fool would ever have thought of living there.

But Jared's house had an inside as well as an out: the rooms were neither light, airy, nor large, and it was probably from sanitary ideas that Jared refrained from filling his apartments with furniture, and from covering his floors with hot, thick carpets. But, well or ill-furnished, the place was scrupulously clean, and possessed an ornament that a prince might have coveted in the shape of Patty Pellet, the eldest daughter of the household. Talk of classic types, noble features, chiselled nostrils, or heads set upon swan-like necks, until you are tired,

and then you will not produce a word-painting worthy to vie with blushing, down-bloomed, soft-cheeked Patty, with her brown wavy hair half hiding her little pinky ears, which seemed to be continually playing in and out from behind two of the brightest curls ever seen. As for her forehead – well, it was a white forehead, and looked nice and pure and candid, while beneath it her eyes were laughing and bright; and her lips – well, it was a fact that many a quiet old-fashioned man wanted to kiss them, innocently and pleasantly too, without feeling a blush of shame for the wish, for Patty's lips seemed as if they had been made on purpose to kiss, and more than one thought that it would be a sin to neglect the opportunity.

What further description need be given more than to say that she was like the best parts of her father and mother combined, that she was just eighteen, and washed all the children every morning before breakfast.

Volume One – Chapter Two.
Jared at Home

Jared Pellet sat in the front parlour —*pro tem*, his workshop – while, to keep the sun from troubling him, Patty had been pinning up the broad sheet of a newspaper over the window, and now descended by means of a chair. For jared was busy working a curious-looking pair of bellows with his foot, and making a little tongue of metal to vibrate with a most ear-piercing but doleful note in the process of being tuned, before being returned to the German concertina, where its duty was to occupy the part of leading note in the major scale of C.

"Hum-um," sang Jared, checking the current of air, and striking a tuning-fork upon his little bench. "Hum-um; a bit flat, eh, Patty?"

"Just a little," said Patty, looking up from her work.

"But there, only think!" cried Jared, dropping his tuning-fork, leaving his task, and crossing over to an old harmonium, over whose keys he ran his bony fingers; "only think if I could – only think if I could get it! Fifty pounds a year for two practices a week, and duty three times on Sundays. Black, of course, for your mother; but what coloured silk shall it be for you, eh, Patty?"

"Silk?" said Patty wonderingly, and her eyes grew more round.

"Yes, silk – dress, you know," said Jared, jumping up again

from the harmonium, and walking excitedly about the room. "Only think if I could get it – Jared Pellet – no, Mr Jared Pellet; or ought it to be esquire, eh, Patty? Organist of St Runwald's. But there," he continued, with a grim smile, "this is counting the chickens before they are hatched, and when there has not been one solitary peck at the shell. Heigho, Patty, if the wind has not been and blown down my card house."

"Is any one at home?" said a high-pitched, harsh voice, as the door was quietly opened, and a little yellow-looking Frenchman entered, a tasselled cane in one hand, a cigarette being held between the fingers of the other, but only to be changed to the hand which held the cane, that its owner might raise the pinched hat worn on one side of his head, and salute gravely the two occupants of the room.

"Aha! the good-day to you bose. The good Monsieur Pellet is well? and you, my dear child, you do bloom again like the flowers."

Patty smiled as she held out her hand; the little Frenchman gravely raising it to his lips, and then crossing to where Jared had stood, looking ten years older, till, reseating himself at his bench, he began to make the metal tongue vibrate furiously, sending a very storm of wind through it, so rapidly he worked his foot; now making the note too sharp, now too flat, and taking twice as long as usual to complete his task.

"No, no, mon ami; he is too sharps – now too flats again. Aha, it is bad!" exclaimed the visitor, dropping cane and cigarette to

thrust both fingers into his ears as Jared brought forth a most atrocious shriek from the tortured tongue.

"My ear's gone completely, I believe," exclaimed Jared, looking in a bewildered way at his visitor.

"Ah, no, no; try him again – yais, try him again;" and the visitor leaned over the performer. "*Ta-ta*" he hummed, nodding his head, and beating time with a finger. "Better – yes, better – better still – one leetle touch, and – aha, it is done – so!" he exclaimed triumphantly, as the little note now sounded clear and pure.

"And now I must have two string for my violin. They do wear out so fast." Which was a fact, and nothing could have more fully displayed Monsieur Canau's friendship than his constant usage of Jared Pellet's strings, best Roman by name, worst English by nature. "Why do you not come to-day?" he continued, as Patty opened a tin canister, and emptied a dozen of the transparent rings of catgut upon the table.

"I could not leave," said Patty, hastily. "We are anxious about the organ."

"Yes, oui, of course; and the good papa will get it?"

"He has not written yet," said Patty, dolefully.

"But he is méchant! Why do you not write? Eh! what – you are going to? It is good; then I will not stay. But write – write – for you must have it. What! you shake your head. Fie; you must have it. And you, ma fille – I will take these two – and you will come to us soon, for the poor Janette is triste, and longs for you,

and the birds pine; but he goes to write. Adieu."

The little Frenchman kissed his hand to both in turn, and, with his yellow face in puckers, stole out of the door on tip-toe, turning back for an instant to make a commanding gesture at Jared, who rose from his bench and went slowly towards the table.

For, be it known, that the post of organist to St Runwald's was vacant – the church that everybody knows, situated as it is in a corner, with houses all round, turning their backs as if ashamed, and hiding it, lest people should see what a patch Sir Christopher Wren made of the fine old Gothic building when he restored it, squaring the windows, putting up a vinegar-cruet steeple, padding, curtaining, brass-rodding, and cushioning the interior to make calm the slumbers of miserable sinners; and, one way and another, so changing it that, could the monks of old once more have gazed upon the place, they would have groaned in their cowls, and called Sir Christopher a barbarian.

But the only groans proceeding from cowls were those which were heard upon windy nights, when showers of blacks were whirled round and round and then deposited in the corners of the window sills, or against the lead framing, whence they could filter through in a dust of the blackest, which would gather upon the pew edges in despite of the pew-opener's duster, ready to be transferred to faces by fingers, or to rise of itself and make church-goers sneeze and accuse the old place of being damp, the churchwarden of being stingy with the coals, the pew-opener of not lighting the fires at proper time to air the church, and the vicar

of spinning out his sermons, finishing off by accounting for the smallness of the attendance by declaring that it was impossible for a parish to be religious where there was such a damp church. And all this through the sootiness of the neighbouring houses, for St Runwald's was as dry as a bone – as the bones of the old fathers who lay below in the vaults, placed there hundreds of years ago, when Borgle's yard was occupied by a monastery, and matins and vespers were rung out from the tower of the church.

Jared Pellet in after times could have told you it was not damp, in spite of the words of Sampson Purkis, the beadle, who said that there were "sympsons" of it, else why did the steel fastenings of the poor-boxes grow rusty? unless – but thereby hangs a tale. Jared could have told you the place was not damp by the organ, for would not the stops have stuck, and the notes refused to speak, had there been moisture? But at this period he was in ignorance, for, incited thereto by his wife, his daughter Patty, Mr Timson, the churchwarden, and Monsieur Canau, professor of the violin, Jared Pellet was about to offer himself as a candidate for the vacant post of organist, to perform which task he had now settled himself at a table – some four or five small faces that had come peeping in at the door having been warned off by divers very alarming looking frowns and shakes of the head.

But it was no easy task to write a letter at Jared Pellet's. True, there had been a pennyworth of the best "cream laid," and envelopes to match, obtained for the occasion; but the ink in the penny bottle was thick, and when thinned with vinegar to prevent

it from coming off the nibs upon the paper in beads, it looked brown and bitty. Then the pen spluttered, partly from rust, partly from having been turned into a tool for raising the tongues of silent harmonium notes.

So fresh pens and ink had to be procured, when Jared wrote one application, and smeared his name, and then said, "Tut-tut-tut!" He wrote a second, but that did not look well, for there was a hair in the pen, and he put two n's in candidate. He then wrote a third, but only to find that he had done so with the paper upside down, when he exclaimed —

"There never was a letter yet that didn't get more and more out of tune – I mean didn't get worse – the more you tried."

Patty did not speak, only looked sympathetic, and as if she would gladly have written the letter herself. But Jared tried once more, and this time a proper missive was written, passed round, and approved by both Mrs Pellet and her daughter. Then the postage stamp was affixed to the envelope with paste, for Jared had managed to lick off all the gum; and at last, when the important document had been safely posted, its writer recollected half a score things he ought to have said, and after fidgeting all the evening, went off despairingly to bed, feeling certain that the post of organist could never be his.

Volume One – Chapter Three. Organic

A busy day at St Runwald's. Mrs Nimmer, the pew-opener, in a clean cap, like a white satin raised pie. Mr Purkis, the beadle – of "Purkis's Shoe Emporium," in private life – in full uniform and dignity. He had cuffed Ichabod Gunnis, the organ-blower, for spinning his top in the porch, and sent that young gentleman howling up the stair leading to the loft, where he thrust off his big charity-boy shoes, and stole down again in his soft, speckled-grey worsted stockings, to where from a darkened corner he could catch sight of his portly enemy, and relieve his mind by turning his back, doubling down, and grinning between his legs, distorting his face after the fashion of the corbels of the old church, the tongue being a prominent figure as to effect. For quite five minutes Ichabod showed his utter contempt for the church dignitary in question, who was all the time in a brown study, calculating the amount he would probably receive by way of what he called "donus," upon the appointment of a new organist – a train of thought interrupted by the consideration of the verses he should distribute at the coming Christmas, the last set having been unsatisfactory, from having been used by the beadle of the neighbouring parish, "a common man and low."

But there was soon an interruption to this second train of

thought, for people began to congregate, and he had to lend his aid to Mrs Nimmer, and assist the worthy old lady in imprisoning the new-comers in the big old pews, where if they could not see they would at all events be able to hear, this being the day for the organ competition.

People assembled under the impression that they were about to hear something unusual, eight competitors having been selected from a very host of applicants; for the post, without taking into consideration the fifty pounds per annum, was one of honour, St Runwald's being an organ with a name.

Through the influence of the churchwarden and his medical friend – only a slight return on that gentleman's part, for Jared had been a good friend to him – the Clerkenwell music cobbler, as he called himself, was one of the select, and now sat in nervous guise where the vicar and churchwardens were assembled to elect the new performer.

Eight competitors, with testimonials to prove that though there might have been Mozarts, Beethovens, and a long roll of worthy names in harmony, yet there never had lived such able, such enthusiastic musicians as Edward Barrest, Mus. Doc., Oxon.; Philip Keyes, Mus. Doc., Cantab.; Herr Schtopffz; Handel Smith, R.A.; and Corelli Sweller. There were two other names read, but Mr Timson, the vicar's churchwarden, bungled so that Jared Pellet could not catch them; but his ear-drum vibrated when his own was given out, and he shivered horribly. There were stout and important men there, and men thin and insignificant,

but conspicuous for his shabby aspect was Jared Pellet.

The testimonials did not have their due weight, for the vicar's churchwarden, Mr Timson, tea-dealer, a short, stout, peg-top style of man, threw himself into a violent perspiration by trying to keep each man's papers separate, as he turned them over and over with a peck here, and a peck there, and laid them in heaps, just as if he were sorting tea-papers for pounds, halves, and quarters; and at last, what with confusion and his formidable double eye-glass, which was rather weak in the back and given to shutting up when it should have kept open, he worked himself into such a knot that he did what was best for him under the circumstances, handed the paper chaos over to his brother official, who hurriedly put on his gold-rimmed spectacles, and did not read a word.

The vicar, the Rev. John Grey, a ruddy, genial old man, then in his turn read aloud, for the benefit of those in the vestry, the list of the candidates.

"And now, then, gentlemen," he said, "preliminaries being adjusted, and matters in train, we will proceed to the organ."

"We" meant the candidates; for the vicar took possession of a pew, where he looked very much out of place, seeing that reading-desk and pulpit were both empty; and then there was a little bustle and confusion in the old church, as Jared slowly, and with sinking heart, followed the great musicians to the organ loft, from whence he could see Monsieur Canau taking snuff furiously, and Mrs Pellet, Patty, and a pew full of little Pellets anxiously waiting "to hear father play."

"Ten minutes each, gentlemen," said the vicar loudly from below, when, the Oxford doctor's name being first upon the list, he took his seat.

Ichabod Gunnis loudly moistened his hands, and bent to his task, pulling up the bellows beam, and then sprawling across it to bear it down again with his own weight. While unrolling a piece of music, the doctor informed those around that it was his own composition, and played it through in a most admirable manner.

But the effect of the doctor's composition was spoiled, for just in the midst of the finest *forte* Ichabod Gunnis had fished a "boxer" top from the pocket of his yellow leather tights, and, lost in admiration of its peg, forgotten his task and slackened his efforts, so that the wind failed in the chest, and in place of a series of grand chords there came from the old organ such doleful howls, as of a dying tune, that the organist thrust the fingers that should have been upon the keys into his hair, and grinned at himself in the reflector like a musical fiend.

"Try again," whispered a competitor, loftily, and the Oxford man re-played his piece; but though he got through it this time without mishap, the doctor felt that unless his testimonials told strongly in his favour, his had been but a fruitless journey that day.

Next came the Cambridge doctor, with a noble march, which brought forth murmured applause from those who listened. Then followed Handel Smith, who confined himself to the works of his great namesake, and now won plaudits, softly given, for his

masterly performance of the great "Hallelujah Chorus."

As this last performer left his seat, Jared glanced down into the church, where, amidst the fast increasing audience, and occupying the most prominent place he could secure, stood Richard Pellet, with his thumbs in the arm-holes of his white vest, as he leaned back in portly guise against the pew front, and frowned acceptance of the last man's musical incense, which he seemed to consider entirely in his own honour. But now he caught sight of brother Jared, and as eye met eye, Richard's frown deepened, and his bottom lip protruded, as he appeared contemptuously to say, "Some people are such fools."

At all events, Jared Pellet seemed to feel the words, and to think them true. He glanced round the church, as if seeking an opportunity to escape from the moral custody in which he found himself; but there was refreshment for him in the bright eyes of Patty, and an encouraging smile from Mrs Pellet at her side.

The competition progressed. Mr Timson gave vent to his opinion that Herr Schtopffz – a gentleman who appeared to be all fair hair, cheeks, and spectacles – almost made the organ speak; while in their turns the other competitors played admirably. A buzz of conversation ensued, as people warmly discussed the merits of the various performers; the churchwardens looked at one another, as if to say, "What next?" and Mrs Pellet and her daughter began to fidget in their seats, both impatient for Jared to begin, since it had been their decided opinion that he should have been the first to play.

But the buzz of conversation suddenly ceased, for the vicar rose in his pew and exclaimed loudly —

"Another candidate yet, gentlemen – Mr Jared Pellet."

Volume One – Chapter Four.
Jared's Piece

For the last half hour Jared had been wishing himself in Duplex Street, and for the last five minutes he had indulged in a hope that he would be passed over and forgotten. But as his name was uttered, he started and mechanically left his seat, while Patty turned pale, and Mrs Pellet had what she afterwards described as a rising sensation in her throat.

Anything but a formidable competitor seemed Jared Pellet as he rose from his seat, gazing with a lost and wandering look round the old church, and wiping the perspiration from his brow, till what with abject air, want of confidence, and his anything but bright costume, poor Jared's aspect was pitiable to an extent that made one of his brother's feet work as if it wanted something to kick.

After the first glance, the audience resumed their conversation, and the rival candidates, making common cause against their opponent, raised their brows, tightened their lips, and shrugged their shoulders, especially Herr Schtopffz, who quite covered his ears as he took a pinch of snuff.

Jared gave one more glance round the church, as if he expected a miracle to be performed in his favour, and that one of the stone angels by a neighbouring tablet would suddenly whisk

him off. He then stepped slowly towards the vacant seat, rubbing his long bony fingers together so that they crackled again.

The appearance of the organ was enough to make Jared approach it reverently; and he shuffled on to the long stool, pressing down the lowest pedal key as he passed, so that it gave forth a deep shuddering rumble. This mishap seemed to add to his confusion, which, however, culminated as he felt in his pocket for the roll of music from which he was to have played. He felt in the next pocket, then in his breast, and lastly looked in his hat, as if expecting to see it there. Then he gazed in the faces of his fellow-candidates, as if to say, "What's become of it?" But the roll was not forthcoming; and in despair, he now glanced at himself in the glass reflector above the key-board. But nothing was to be seen there but a doleful, hopeless-looking face, seeming to tell him that every chance of success was gone.

But as Jared sat there, in full view of the whole church, he felt a slight vibration in his seat, and heard the air rushing into the wind-chest as the boy toiled on at his task to keep it filled and make no more mistakes, for already, in anticipation, he was suffering from a cut or two of Beadle Purkis's cane.

Jared gazed up at the towering pipes above his head, down at the keys and stops on either side; and then seemed to come over him the recollection of many a pleasant practice in a dim old church, where he had forgotten the troubles of the present in the concord of sweet sounds he had drawn from the instrument. He grew more agitated, his hands trembled, his cheeks flushed,

and his eyes brightened – his whole form seemed to dilate, and he thrust his long fingers through his hair, as if seeking to add to the oddity of his appearance, while the audience ceased their murmuring hum of conversation as they witnessed his strange gestures.

He pulled out a stop here and a stop there, tenderly, as if caressing something he loved. Then pushing off his boots, he thrust in every stop, seized them sharply to draw nearly all out, and struck so wild and thrilling a chord, that his hearers started and craned forward to catch the next notes.

Now there was silence, save the dying vibrations of the chord heard in the distant corners and groinings of the roof, for not a whisper was audible amongst the many listeners assembled.

Still silence, as Jared Pellet sat motionless before the great instrument while you might have counted thirty, for the player was lost in the crowd of recollections the sounds had evoked from the past Competition, the audience, all had faded from his mental vision as once more he leaned forward; and fingers were held up to command silence.

"He's a lunatic, sir," said one of the listeners to Mr Timson, as Jared Pellet again bent over the keys.

"Then I should like to be at a concert of such lunatics, sir," answered Mr Timson, who then gave forth an audible "Hush!" as, in a rapid rolling passage, the huge pedal pipes thundered forth a majestic introduction; when again for a few moments there was a pause, and the organist's fingers were held crooked in mid-air,

till with a spasmodic effort he brought them down upon the keys, to pour forth crashing volley after volley of wondrous chords, from end to end of the key-board, and with the full power of the mighty pipes.

Again a rest, and again crashing forth with wondrous rapidity came the spirit-thrilling passages, till, with suppressed breath, the listeners leaned forward as though overpowered; while, after another slight pause, came wailing and sobbing forth so sweetly mournful, so heavenly a strain, that there were some present who were moved to tears, and two, seated in a pew surrounded by children, joined hands and listened with bended head. So sweet an air had never before pealed through the old aisles of St Runwald's, and made to tremble the woodwork of the great pews with which it was disfigured; for now the melody was wild and piercing – now subdued and plaintive, to rise soon to the jubilant and hopeful: it was the soul of the true musician pouring forth through the medium of the divine art its every thought and feeling.

Again a pause, and the seven rivals, with parted lips, eagerly clustered round the man who saw them not, who ignored church, audience, self, everything but the majestic instrument before which he was seated; and again and again, although the ten minutes had long expired, the audience listened to the bursts of harmony which swayed them as one man, floating around until the air seemed quivering and vibrating with the songs of a multitude of heaven's own choristers. Louder and louder, chords

grander and more majestic, then softly sweet and dying away, while, after one sweeping crescendo passage, Jared ended with a mighty chord which no other man could have grasped, and the audience seemed to be released from the spell which had bound them, as, stop by stop and interval by interval, the chord was diminished, until the pedal key-note alone vibrated shudderingly through the church.

"Rather warm work that, sir," said the little churchwarden, leaning over into the vicar's pew.

"Hush, Timson," said the vicar; "he has not done."

But he had, though for a few minutes there was a silence that no one cared to break, till, forgetful of place – everything but the strains they had heard – from the vicar downwards, all joined in one loud burst of applause; while, dull, lustreless, spiritless, Jared Pellet responded to the congratulations of his rivals – one and all too true lovers of their art to withhold the palm where they felt it to be well deserved.

Down in the nave, too, there was a pompous, bustling man, talking loudly to those around, giving people to understand that the performer was his brother – the man who, without hesitation, was elected to the post – and for once in a way, Richard Pellet went and shook hands with Jared, and, as he warmly asked him to dinner, forgot to tell him that he was a fool.

Volume One – Chapter Five.
Saint Runwald's

There were grand rejoicings in Duplex Street when Jared obtained official announcement, under the hand and seal of Mr Timson the tea-dealer, of his appointment to the post of organist of St Runwald's, with a salary of fifty pounds a year. To be sure, it was settled before; but Mrs Jared said they might run back, and, after the many disappointments they had had during their married life, it was dangerous to reckon on too much. But now that there was an official appointment in Mr Timson's round, neat calligraphy, she had no words to say, save those of thankfulness.

Proud! Ay, he was proud, was Jared, for that was an organ to be proud of. It was none of your grand new instruments, full of stops bearing a score of unaccountable names, miserably naked, skeleton-looking affairs, like a conglomeration of Pandean pipes grown out of knowledge, and too big for the society of their old friend the big drum – beggarly painted things, with pipes in blue and red and white, after the fashion of peppermint sticks of the good old times. Why, I hardly believe that Jared, unless prompted thereto by the wolf Poverty, would have struck one of his mighty chords upon them.

But there would have been nothing surprising in Jared's refusal, since the instrument now placed under his charge was a

noble organ in a dark wood case, one which grew richer of tone year by year, while the carved fruit and flowers that clustered around pipes, reflector, music-stand – in fact, wherever a scrap of carving could be placed – were worthy of inspection, without taking into account the shiny Ethiopie cherubs that perched upon their chins, and spread their wings at every available corner.

No; Jared's was no common organ, as would be declared by any one who had seen the great pipes towering up into the gloom of the roof, and their gilding shedding a rich sunset hue into the farthest corners of the old church. People came miles to hear that organ as soon as Jared became its ruling spirit, and Mrs Nimmer grew hot on Sunday mornings in her endeavours to find sittings for the strangers who flocked in. But the old vicar, the Rev. John Grey, used to chuckle, and think that all was due to his sermons, and wonder whether there could ever be a second St Chrysostom, the golden-mouthed.

Purkis, the beadle, used to wink – that is to say, he would draw a heavy lid over one of his lobster eyes – and say, "I know!" For Jared, in spite of his poverty and large family, had commenced his musical reign by a "donus" of three half-crowns to the beadle, who would boast that he (the beadle) could give people a better service than they could get in any other church in London; and "as to the orgin, why they'd better come and see, that's all."

And truly it seemed that Jared could make that instrument thrill beneath his touch, till every passion of the human heart had its representative amongst those notes. You might hear it sob, and

wail, and moan in the most piteous manner, whisper and die away in sweet sighing melodies amongst the old pillars, or far up in the carven corners of the chancel, where the notes made the glass to tremble in the lead as they seemed striving to pass through the painted windows. Hear it thunder too, like a young earthquake, and rage, and roar, and growl, till the very pew doors rattled and chattered; and however thick and soft your cushion, you could feel the deep-toned diapasons shuddering up and down your spine. There were love sighs, joy, rage, contending armies, the warring elements, with the rolling billow and crashing thunder, all to be heard from those organ-pipes when Jared Pellet touched the keys; and matters grew to such a pitch, that, partly out of pity for Ichabod Gunnis, and partly because people would not be played out, Mr Timson limited Jared's voluntaries to a duration of ten minutes.

Mr Purkis's dinner grew cold; but he did not mind it, for he loved music, and would sit with mouth open and eyes upturned, swallowing the sweet sounds which floated in the air; but Mrs Nimmer, who was not musical, and who, alternately with Mr Purkis, locked up the church, did mind. Hints were of no use; the people would stop, while Ichabod Gunnis heartily wished that he might do the same, for it was a close and confined space where he laboured at the handle of his wind pump, until Jared's afflatus had been dispersed.

Mr Timson stopped all this with his ten minutes' law – ample time as he said; and as Jared Pellet never thought of opposing

anybody, the voluntaries were reluctantly brought to an end. For Jared's behaviour at the competition was but a sample of his future proceedings, and when once he began to play, and the organ was in full burst, there was no Jared there, only his body see-sawing from side to side, with shoeless feet working at the pedals, and fingers, bony almost as the keys themselves, nimbly running from flat to natural and sharp, and back again. Jared was not there, he was in the spirit soaring far away upon musical pinions, and in another state of existence, wherein he was freed from the cares and troubles of this life, and felt them only indirectly, as they affected others with whom he seemed to weep or smile, as the character of the music was grave or gay.

Jared Pellet had just finished a morning practice, for he had had to work hard to reduce his wild, semi-extemporised style to the requirements of a regular choir. He had pushed in the last stop, and left his long stool, closing the organ with a sigh, before opening the locker in his seat and depositing therein his book and manuscript. He had drawn the red curtains along the rod when he had entered, and on leaving drew them back again, so that he stood confessed before Ichabod Gunnis; and for a stranger to see Jared Pellet stand confessed after one of his ethereal musical flights, was like taking him from the seventh heaven and putting him under the pump. It was worse than going right into fairyland at the back of the stage on pantomime night, and staring dismayed at the dauby paint, canvas, and confusion.

Ichabod and the organist stood face to face, and whatever

the failings of the latter, the former was no pattern of personal beauty; for as to his appearance, he had been rightly named, had there ever been any glory to depart; but the sole reason for the boy bearing his quaint cognomen was, that at the workhouse where he received his early gruel, the authorities had worn out the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, while the number of Abels, Davids, Solomons, and Jonathans who had left their walls was something startling, so they had tried Ichabod for a change, the Gunnis being an after addition.

Ichabod's leather garments have already been delicately hinted at, but it has not been said that they badly fitted his fourteen year old limbs, neither have his blue bob-tail coat and his vest, ornamented with pewter buttons, been mentioned – buttons bearing a large capital "G." There was no star of merit upon the left breast of Ichabod, but a pewter plate was stitched on, close to his heart, to keep him from being smitten by the pity of those who saw his absurd garments, and also to act as a label, and to show that he was number fifty-five in the list of scholars belonging to that most excellent gift of charity – Gunnis's, which, every one who knows London will tell you, is a school where so many boys are educated, and made moral scarecrows; and Ichabod being a "fondling" – as he was called by the workhouse nurse – was entered at last, to the freedom of his parish, already overburdened, and became one of Gunnis's boys.

"Six o'clock, Ichabod," said Jared, "and don't be late."

"No, sir," said 'Bod, as he was familiarly termed; and then he

began to spin his muffin cap by the tuft of coloured wool on the top.

"Don't do that, my boy, or you'll pull off the tassel," said Jared, as he prepared to descend the stairs, while the young gentleman addressed, evidently perceiving how disfigured his worsted cap would be without its red tuft, tossed it high in the air, to nimbly catch it again upon his head, though rather too far over his eyes for comfort in wearing. Then listening to the descending footsteps, he threw off his coat, and went down upon the boards in a sitting posture, but not of the common kind; for, though one leg was down in a normal position, the other was stretched out far behind, so that it appeared as if the joint had been reversed.

Up again; and now one leg was thrust over his head, to the great danger of his leather pants; then the other leg was tucked over, and the boy down prostrate upon his chest, so that he wore the appearance of a dislocated frog, though his countenance beamed with satisfaction.

"Ichabod!" cried Jared from below.

"Comin', sir," shouted the boy, trying hard to untie himself, but in vain, although, after a couple more calls, he could hear the reascending steps of his employer. He twisted, he turned, he struggled, but he was like a mouse in a wire-trap; it was easy to get into his present state, but extrication seemed impossible.

Higher came the steps, and the boy struggled more violently than ever to free himself, till, just as Jared reached the door of the organ loft, the unpractised tumbler rolled over upon his back

and stared with upturned eyes over his forehead at the organist.

"Why, bless my soul!" exclaimed Jared, "what a dreadful contortion. The boy must be in a fit."

"No, I ain't," blubbered 'Bod. "I'm only stuck."

"Stuck!" exclaimed Jared.

"Yes, stuck," whimpered the boy. "Can't get my legs back 'cause I've got shoes on."

"Stuck – shoes on," repeated Jared, in a puzzled way.

"Yes, sir," wept 'Bod, "and if you'll pull down one, I can do t'other myself."

Jared stared at the imp for a few moments as if he took him for a sort of human treble clef, then seizing the uppermost leg, he set it at liberty, and the boy reduced himself to ordinary proportions, standing erect, with one arm raised ready to ward off the expected blow.

"How dare you play such tricks as that in the church, sir?" cried Jared. "Suppose that you had become fixed – what then?"

Ichabod evidently did not know "what then," so he did not say; but snivelled and rubbed one eye with the cuff of the coat he was about to put on.

"There, go on down first," said Jared, smiling grimly to himself, "and mind and be punctual; there's a good boy."

The good boy, now that the danger was past, went down grinning, and darted out of the porch, forgetting in less than five minutes all that had been said to him about the practice.

Jared's must have been a more than usually patient disposition;

for the same evening he arrived at the church at the appointed hour to find that Ichabod had not come, nor did he make his appearance when his master had opened the organ, and seated himself to wait while gazing dreamily in the old reflector before him.

Not the first time this, that Ichabod had failed; but Jared Pellet had spent the whole of his life accommodating himself to circumstances; and now, as had often before been his wont, he gave unbounded freedom to his thoughts. The mirror before him was dim, for the night was closing in, and besides, the old church was always in a state of twilight from the stained glass windows; but as he looked he could just distinguish the pulpit, dimly shadowed forth, and the screen before the chancel. Soon these seemed to fade from the reflector, and Jared was gazing upon the scenes of his early life – scenes now bright, now shadowed – which passed rapidly before him as if actually mirrored in the glass; – the day that his brother and he were left orphans; their school days, when he was always fag and slave; scene after scene, scene after scene. That mirror had grown to be Jared's opium – his one indulgence, and, seated alone in the dark church, he had gone on dreaming of the past, and building up fancies of the future, until a habit was formed that it was not easy to shake off.

There was a strange life history to be read in that reflector, as Jared dreamed on, recalling his first severe illness, and its following weakness, for many months solaced by the attentions of the usher's little girl, whose father had taken charge of him

when he was removed from school. Here it was that he had laid the foundation of his dreamy future, as he read aloud to his fair little companion. This had been a pleasant oasis in his life journey, in spite of long weary months of suffering, during which he never left his reclining position, succeeded by a long sojourn in a London hospital, and all from an unlucky blow given by his tyrant brother.

Many dreams had Jared in that old church: of early manhood, and years passed as usher in his old school, while his brother was prospering in town; his love for his old playmate, Lizzie, and the bar of prudence which stayed their marriage; the failure of the school, and his efforts to gain a living by teaching music, eking out his income by the trifling salary he obtained as organist of the little town church – an accomplishment taught by love, for Lizzie Willis had been his instructress, and now gave up the duty in his favour.

At such an hour as this, back too would float the times when he had leaned against one of the old pews listening while she played some grand old tune.

Floating before him always, scene after scene: his application to his brother for help when he first reached London in search of a more lucrative post; the refusal; and the subsequent rage of Richard when he found that Jared, the despised, had married the woman who had but a short time before rejected him, Richard, the prosperous. Then his coming up to London with his wife, and their happiness together, even though, on the second day after

their arrival, the bankruptcy of a firm threw Jared out of the employment he had gained.

He recalled, too, his despondency over the disappointment, and then his determination to fight it out; how, struggling on, he had obtained a tuning job here, and some repairing there; now taught a little, and now obtained a commission to purchase some instrument; and one way and another obtained a living, in spite of the way in which Mrs Jared seemed to look upon him as a sort of human camel, adding to his burden year after year with the greatest of punctuality; and still his back was not broken, though twins, as he often told his wife, must have been fatal.

Volume One – Chapter Six.
Patty's Mistake

Matters wore a rather serious aspect at Duplex Street; for a whole month Jared had been enjoying all the sensations known only to the wealthy. He had been congratulated by his family, who looked upon him as a sort of musical god, or as, at least, a musician worthy of ranking with those fiddling and trumpet-blowing angels they had seen once upon a holiday, smiling benignantly in a cloudy heaven upon the ceilings at Hampton Court Palace.

He had been congratulated too by Monsieur Canau, who had been in the habit of occasionally bringing his violin for an evening duet; and, as has been already stated, he had been congratulated by his brother, who invited him to dinner, and then put him off twice, ending though by announcing his marriage with the wealthy Mrs Clayton, widow of a merchant captain, and, desiring that bygones might be bygones, requesting that Jared, with his wife and daughter, would spend the afternoon and dine with them at Norwood on Christmas Day.

Jared had said "No;" but Mrs Jared "Yes;" for even if it spoiled their own homely day, no opportunity ought to be passed over which promised reconciliation between brothers, for whose estrangement her woman's tact told her she was partly to blame.

So arrangements were made for the flock in Duplex Street, Janet, *protégé* of Monsieur Canau, readily undertaking to be shepherdess for the occasion. Clothes were compared, and, what Mrs Jared called, made the best of; Jared himself devoting quite an hour to the brushing and nap-reviving of his old black coat and trousers. Many an old scrap of half-forgotten finery was routed out by Mrs Jared for her embellishment, after long discussions; while as for Patty, when did a fair open-countenanced young girl look otherwise than well in virgin white, even though it was but a cheap book muslin, made up at home, with very little regard to fashion?

At the appointed hour, a cab deposited the party from Duplex Street at the door of Richard's "little place," at which door they arrived after a drive along a gritty gravel sweep. The stout and gentlemanly butler was there, and received them with frigid courtesy, two doors being flung open by as many gentlemen in drab and coach-lace, which tall parties indulged in a laugh and a wink behind their hands at the expense of Jared, though number one – the under-butler – afterwards told number two – the footman – that "the gal wasn't so very bad."

And now the brothers had met, and Jared the poor been introduced by Richard the wealthy to his wife, late the widow of Captain Clayton, of the merchant service.

There was another introduction though, performed by Mr Richard Pellet in a condescending fashion, namely, of his stepson Harry Clayton; who, however, seemed to forget all the next

moment, as he made his step-father frown upon seeing the attentions paid by the frank, earnest young undergraduate to his blushing niece. Jared too felt troubled, he did not know why, for he dwelt with pleasure upon the young man's face as it shone in opposition to the darkened countenance of the elder.

The conversation rose and flagged; but it was evident to Jared that there was a cloud overshadowing the meeting, though the young man heeded not the glances of father and mother, as he chatted on to the fresh happy girl at his side.

Doubtless to a grandee of the London season Patty would have seemed slow and backward in conversation; but to the young collegian there was something fascinating in the naïve, ingenuous girl; and in spite of looks, hints, and even broad remarks, which turned Jared's morocco-covered chair into a seat of thorns, Harry laughed and chatted on through the dinner.

There was everything at Norwood requisite for the spending of a pleasant evening – everything, with one exception. There was what Jared afterwards called in confidence to his wife, "the fat of the land;" but though the said fat was well cooked and served, and there were luscious wines to wash it down, yet was there no geniality, and the visitors partook of portions of their meal in the midst of a chilly, though exceedingly well-bred silence.

Jared was not at his ease, and he could not help flinching from the ministrations of the men in coach-lace, while he felt quite hot when the gentlemanly butler asked him in stern tones if he would take champagne.

Not that conversation was entirely wanting on the part of the elders, for at intervals Jared listened to thrilling narratives of his brother's speculations, and of how much money he had made in different ways; he learned, too, something new – what a fine thing cash was, how powerful it made its owner, and how he enjoyed its possession. Then Richard pitied kindly Jared's want of business tact, hinted how much more might have been made had both been business men, and concluded by wishing him better days, and drinking his health in a glass of port – a port purchased at Mr Humphrey Phulcrust's sale, as he informed Jared, at one hundred and twenty shillings a dozen; Jared thinking the while that it was very strong and harsh, and flavoured of the sloes he had gathered as a boy, while a dozen of the ruddy fluid would have paid a quarter's rent in Duplex Street, so that altogether he quite trembled, and felt as if he were injuring his wife and family as he sipped and sipped, like a man who was engaged in swallowing sixpences.

When Richard Pellet was not frowning upon his stepson, he was very active in promoting the comfort of his guests, after the same fashion in which he had flavoured his brother's wine, telling them how much port was in the soup, how much he paid for the turbot in Billingsgate, and how he gave a crown for the lobster. As for the turkey, that was five-and-thirty shillings, and bought on purpose for their coming. Many other things were equally expensive, so that Jared and his family thoroughly enjoyed the epicurean feast, thinking all the while of their own humble board.

Home would keep rising to his mind, so that before the dinner had half dragged through its slow length, Jared was wishing himself back in Duplex Street, having a duet with Monsieur Canau, while Janet and Patty played at forfeits or blind man's buff with his tribe, watching the while that they did not meddle with any of his musical concerns.

Money and business, business and money, were Richard Pellet's themes, and on the golden string they formed when twisted he harped continually. But it was not only in speech that you felt the money, for it was peering out of everything, from the mistress of the house, with her massive gold chain and large diamond rings, down to the very carpet on which she trod. There were books in gilded bindings that had never been opened; a piano of the most costly kind that was rarely touched; there was every luxury that money could purchase; while, lastly, the very essence of his cash, grey-headed, bushy and prominently browed, very smooth and glossy, and always chinking a few sovereigns in either pocket, there was Richard Pellet, looking down with a pleasant patronising smile of contempt upon his guests.

"Some people are such fools," he seemed to mutter to himself as he pitied poor, comely Mrs Jared, who appeared to be neither surprised nor disappointed, but took all with a quiet, well-bred ease, and did not in the least allow stout Mrs Richard to sit upon her – metaphorically of course – in spite of her violent flame-coloured moiré; neither did she seem to be crushed by the conversation, which varied little between the weather and the

dinner.

But however full of constraint the repast might have been for the elders, to Patty it was a scene of enjoyment, for Harry Clayton, awake now to their meaning, laughed at his mother's remonstrant looks, and ignoring those of Richard, was more than ever attentive to the bright-eyed girl, who in her light-hearted innocence chatted merrily with him, listening eagerly to his account of college life, both thinking nothing of the wealth around them in the thorough enjoyment of the hour.

It was, of course, very provoking; but in spite of all hints to the contrary, when they were in the drawing-room, Harry would linger by Patty's chair.

"Would she play?" Yes, she would play. "And sing?" Yes, and sing too. The first skilfully; the latter in a sweet, little, silvery, gushing voice, that was bird-like in its purity and freedom from affectation. For Patty was Jared's own child, with her father's zest for music, the art which he had loved to teach her, at times too when often and often called away to perform some simple domestic duty.

Richard Pellet seemed surprised, and listened in silence. Mrs Richard forgot herself so for as to clap her hands and call Patty "a dear little darling." But, gazing upon the group at the piano with the eyes of her lord, she felt that this sort of thing would not do. Apparently, too, acting upon a hint from Richard, she kept framing blundering excuses for getting the young man to her side – excuses, though, so trivial, that Harry only laughed good-

humouredly, and then made his way back to their young visitor.

It was nearly time for tea, and Harry had coaxed the artless girl into the little drawing-room to show her some sketches, and the photographs of the elders. Jared and his brother had their backs to them, hard and fast in a discussion upon money, – Richard telling his brother what a deal a sovereign would make, – Jared the while in a state of doubt, from old experience how short a road it went, whether there really were as many as twenty shillings in a pound. As for Mrs Jared, she was seated in a low chair by the fire, and being beamed upon by Mrs Richard, who had exhausted the weather, finished the dinner, and was now at a loss for a fresh subject.

The sketches were very interesting, so much so that Harry was obliged to explain them in a low, subdued tone, when, taking advantage of their position, he with a heightened colour took from the wall a sprig of mistletoe, and held it before Patty's eyes.

"No, no," she whispered in a low tone – so low that he probably did not hear it. "No, no; that is only for children."

"The licence of the season," Harry whispered, as with one hand he held up the sprig, and then drew towards him the yielding girl.

Well, Patty was very young, very natural, and quite unused to worldly ways; and Harry was somewhat rough and wilful. Patty had listened that night to words new to her, and where her parents had seen but pride and ostentation, she had had her eyes blinded by a *couleur de rose* veil, drinking deeply the while of the honied

draught the young fellow in all earnestness pressed upon her.

All was so sweet, and new, and delightful. He must mean all he said; while being Christmas-time, with a scrap of the pearl-hung parasite to hallow the salute, how could she scream or struggle, as was, of course, needful under the circumstances? Patty did not resist, for being ignorant and natural, she thought that she would like it, and so allowed her soft cheek to rest for a moment where it was drawn, while the little red half-parted lips hardly shrank from the kiss they received.

"Harry!" roared Richard Pellet, leaping from his chair, for he had been seated opposite to a glass which betrayed every movement of the young people. "Harry!" he roared, and the young man with eyes cast down, but raised head, stood erect and defiant before him; "come here!" he exclaimed, striding towards the door, while as the delinquent followed him from the room, Jared and his wife distinctly heard the words, "That beggar's brat!"

Volume One – Chapter Seven.
The Lover's Petition

An hour later and the party were back in Duplex Street, having travelled home in silence, with Patty weeping her sin the whole way, while she now sat sobbing by the fireside almost heedless of her mother's consoling words. Jared had looked stern and troubled, but not cross; in fact, he had been talking the matter over to himself on the way back, and himself had had the best of the argument by declaring that it was only a custom of the season; that Harry Clayton was a fine handsome young fellow, and Patty as sweet a little girl as ever breathed; and that, though the matter had turned into an upset, the young folks were not so very much to blame.

Jared was beaten by himself, that is to say, by his own good nature, and what was more, he seemed so little put out in consequence, that he rode home the rest of the way with his arm round his wife's waist – but then, certainly it was dark.

"There, there!" exclaimed Jared at last; "go to bed, Patty, and let's have no more tears."

He spoke kindly; but Patty could not be consoled, for she told herself that she had been very, very wicked, and if dear father only knew that she had almost held out her lips to be kissed, he would never, never, forgive her. So she sobbed on.

"Why, what is the matter?" exclaimed Jared at last, for Patty had thrown herself on her knees at her mother's feet, and was crying almost hysterically in her lap. "What are you crying for?"

"Oh! oh! oh!" sobbed poor Patty, whose conscience would not let her rest until she had made a full confession of her sin, "I did-id-id-n't try to stop him."

"Humph!" grunted Jared, and the eyes of husband and wife met over their weeping girl, whose sobs after confession grew less laboured and hysterical.

The next day Harry Clayton called at Duplex Street, and the next day, and again after two days, and then once more after a week, but only to see Mrs Jared, who never admitted the visitor beyond the door-sill. She was civil and pleasant; but he must call when Mr Jared Pellet was at home, which he did at last and was ushered into the front parlour.

Jared was in his shirt sleeves, and had an apron on, for he was busy covering pianoforte hammers, and there was a very different scent in the place to that in Mrs Richard's drawing-room, for Jared's glue-pot was in full steam.

Had Mr Harry Clayton received permission from his parents to call? This from Jared very courteously, but quite *en prince*, though his fingers were gluey.

No, from the young man, very humbly, he had neither received nor asked permission; but if Mr Jared would not let him see Miss Pellet before he went, he should leave town bitter, sorrowful, and disappointed; for there had been a great quarrel at home, and

though he was of age, Mr Richard Pellet wished to treat him like a child.

Only a shake of the head from Jared at this.

Would Mr Jared be so cruel as to refuse to let him bid Miss Pellet good-bye?

Yes, Jared Pellet would, even though his wife had entered, and was looking at him with imploring eyes. For Jared had a certain pride of his own, and a respect for his brother's high position. And besides, he told himself bitterly that it was not meet that the stepson of a Croesus should marry with "a beggar's brat."

So Jared would keep to his word, and Mrs Jared could only sympathise with the young man, holding the while, though by a strange contradiction, to her husband.

Harry gave vent to a good deal of romantic saccharine stuff of twenty-one vintage, interspersed with the sea saltism of "true as the needle to the pole," and various other high-flown sentiments, which mode of expressing himself, tending as it did to show his admiration for her daughter, and coming from a fine, handsome, and manly young suitor, Mrs Jared thought very nice indeed; but she diluted its strength with a few tears of her own.

Jared was obstinate though, and would not look; he only screwed up his lips and covered pianoforte hammers at express speed, making his fingers sticky and wasting felt; for every hammer had to be re-covered when Harry had taken his departure.

Harry was gone, with one hand a little sticky from the touch

of Jared's gluey fingers, as he said, "Good-bye," and one cheek wet with Mrs Jared's tears, as he saluted her reverently, as if she had been his mother.

"But a nice lad, dear," said Mrs Jared, wiping her eyes.

"Yes; I dare say," said Jared, stirring his glue round and round; "but mighty fond of kissing."

Then husband and wife thought of the strange tie growing out of the new estrangement, and also of the fact that they must be growing old, since their child was following in their own steps – in the footprints of those who had gone before since Adam first gazed upon the fair face of the woman given to be his companion and solace in the solitude that oppressed him.

And where was Patty?

Down upon her knees in her little bedroom, whither she had fled on hearing that voice, sobbing tremendously, as if her fluttering heart would break – her handkerchief being vainly used to silence the emotion.

Poor Mrs Jared was quite disconcerted by her child's reproachful looks when she told her that it might be but a passing fancy, that their position was so different, that years and distance generally wrought changes, and she must learn to govern her heart.

Just as if it were possible that such a man as Harry Clayton – so bold, so frank, so handsome, so – so – so – so – everything – could ever alter in the least. So Patty cried and then laughed, and said she was foolish, and then cried again, and behaved in a very

extravagant way, hoping that Harry would write and tell her, if only just once more, that he loved her.

But Harry did not write, for he was a man of honour, and he had promised that he would not until he had permission; while Jared, thinking all this over again and again in his musing moods when sitting before his reflector, felt convinced that he had acted justly, and time alone must show what the young people's future was to be.

The breach remained wider than ever between the brothers; for Richard Pellet said grandly to his wife – standing the while with his back to the fire, and chinking sovereigns in his pockets – that it was quite impossible to do anything for people who were such fools, and so blind to their own interests; and Mrs Richard, who was on the whole a good-natured woman, but had not room in her brain for more than one idea at a time, thought her new relatives very dreadful people, for they had driven her poor boy away a month or two sooner than he would have gone, though in that respect Richard did not show much sympathy, since he was rather glad to be rid of his stepson.

Volume One – Chapter Eight.
Little Pine and her Teacher

Carnaby Street, Golden Square, where the private doors have their jambs ornamented with series of bell-pulls like the stops of an organ, and the knockers seem intended to form handles that shall lift up and display rows of keys; but generally speaking, the doors stand open, and the sills bear a row of as many children as can squeeze themselves in. The population is dense and the odours are many, but the prevailing smell is that described by a celebrated character as of warm flat-irons, the ear corroborating nose and palate, for an occasional chink hints that the iron – not a flat one – has been placed upon its stand, while the heavy dull thump, thump, tells that some garment is being pressed. For this is one of the strongholds of the London tailors, and the chances are that the cloth cut upon the counter of Poole has been built into shape in Carnaby Street.

It was in the first floor back, and in two small rooms, that Tim Ruggles – always Tim, though christened Timothy – a steady-going, hard – working, Dutch clock kind of man, carried on the trade popular in the district, with his family of a wife and a little girl. He considered the two rooms ample – the larger serving for parlour, kitchen, workshop, and bedroom for little Pine, the other being devoted exclusively to sleeping purposes.

But you might have entered Tim's room a score of times without detecting little Pine's bed, which was an ingeniously contrived affair like a cupboard, that doubled up and doubled down, and creaked and groaned and sprawled about when in use, and had a bad habit of bursting open its doors when closed, and coming down when least expected in the shape of a bedding avalanche. But these accidents only occurred when Mrs Ruggles had ventured upon the doubling up of that piece of furniture, for Tim was the only person who thoroughly understood its idiosyncrasies, and possessed the skill and ingenuity to master its obtrusiveness. In effect, the first thing to be done was to make the bed, which Tim did regularly; then when all was well tucked in, to double back clothes and mattress, and with one rapid acrobatic evolution, performed in all its intricacies without a moment's hesitation, to kick its legs from beneath it as you seized it at the foot, force your knee vigorously into its stomach, and then, as it folded, to drive all before you back into a state of collapse, banging to and bolting the doors in its face before it had time to recover; for if you were not rapid in your motions, down you went with the recoil, to be pinned to the floor by an incubus of wood and sacking. But, manage the matter as did Tim Ruggles, taking care that no corners of sheet, blanket, or quilt stood out between cracks, and to all appearance that bed might have been a secretary.

Tim was not a large man, either in person or ways; in fact, cross-legged upon his board, he often seemed half lost in the

garment he was making. Dry he was, and shrunken, as if overbaked – a waster, in fact, from Nature's pottery. The effect of the shrinking was most visible in his face, whose skin seemed not to fit, but fell into pucker, crease, and fold, above which shone, clear, white, and firm, his bald forehead and crown, fringing which, and standing out on either side, was a quantity of grizzled, frizzly, tufty hair, imparting a fierce look that was perfectly unreal.

Tim had just fetched his hot iron from the fire, and gone back to press off the garment he was completing; he had run his finger along the bars of a canary cage, and had it pecked by the bird within; gazed at the eternal prospect of back windows, cisterns, and drying clothes; sighed, wiped his nose upon a piece of cloth kept for the purpose, and then sat, sleeve-board in one hand, sponge in the other, the image of despair, as smothered cries, the pattering of blows, and half-heard appeals, as of one who dared not cry out, fell upon his ear.

As Tim Ruggles sat over his work with a shudder running through his frame, there rang out, at last, in thrilling tones —

"Oh! oh! oh! please not this time – not this time. Oh! don't beat me." Now louder, now half smothered, till Tim twisted, and shuffled, and writhed as if the blows so plainly to be heard were falling upon his own shoulders; each stroke making him wince more sharply, while his face grew so puckered and lined as to be hardly recognisable.

"I can't stand it," he groaned at last; and then he gave a start,

for he had inadvertently placed his hand upon his hot iron.

Then came again the anguished appeal for pardon, accompanied by cry after cry that seemed to have burst forth in spite of the utterer's efforts to crush them down, till Tim, as he listened to the wailing voice, the whistling of stick or cane, and the dull thud of falling blows, seemed to shrink into himself as he turned his back to the sounds, stopped his ears with his finger and a wet sponge, and then sat crouched together regardless of trickling water making its way within his shirt-collar.

At last the cries ceased, and the silence was only broken by an occasional suppressed sob; but Tim moved not, though the door opened, and from the inner room came a tall, hard, angular woman, rigid as the old whalebone umbrella rib she held in one hand, leading, or rather dragging in a child with the other. She was a woman of about forty, such as in a higher class of life would have been gifted with a mission, and let people know of the fact. As it was, she was but a tailor's wife with a stiff neck: not the stiff neck of a cold which calls for hartshorn, friction, and flannel, but a natural rigidity which caused her to come round as upon a pivot when turning to address a speaker, at a time when with other people a movement of the head would have sufficed.

"Tim!" she cried, as she stepped into the room, opening and closing her cruel-looking mouth with a snap.

Tim heard the meaning cry, and, starting quickly, the next moment he was busily at work as if nothing had happened.

Mrs Ruggles said no more, but proceeded to place her

whalebone rod upon a perch over the fire-place. Her back was turned while doing this, a fact of which Tim took advantage to kiss his hand to the cowering child, when, save at distant intervals, she ceased to sob.

"I don't think you need beat poor Pine so," said Tim at last, in a hesitating way, "What was it for?"

"Come here," shouted Mrs Ruggles to the child; "what did I whip you for?"

With the cowering aspect of a beaten dog, the child came slowly forward into the light: sharp-featured, tangled of hair, red-eyed, cheek-soiled with weeping. Tim Ruggles winced again as he looked upon her thin bare arms and shoulders, lined by the livid weals made by the sharp elastic rod of correction, ink-like in its effects, the dark marks seeming to run along the flesh as the vicious blows had fallen. The poor child crept slowly forward, as if drawn by some strange influence towards Mrs Ruggles, her eyes resting the while upon Tim, whose face was working, and whose fingers opened and closed as if he were anxious to snatch the child to his heart.

"Now, ask her what she was whipped for," shouted Mrs Ruggles. "Tell him. What was it for?"

"For – for – taking – "

"Ah! what's that? For what?" shouted Mrs Ruggles.

"For – for – for stealing – for – for – oh! – oh! – oh!" cried the child, bursting into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing, "I didn't do it – I didn't do it!"

And there she stopped short: the words, the sobs, the wailing tone, all ceased as if by magic, as Mrs Ruggles snatched the whalebone from its supporting nails.

"Yes, yes," the child shrieked in haste, as the rigid figure and the instrument of torture approached – "for stealing the cake from the cupboard." And then teeth were set fast, lips nipped together, hands clenched, and eyes closed, and the whole of the child's nine years' old determination seemed to be summoned up to bear the blow she could hear about to descend. The whalebone whistled through the air, and, in spite of every effort, the cut which fell upon the bare shoulders elicited a low wail of suffering.

A deep sigh burst from Tim Ruggles' breast, and he bent lower over his work, moving his iron, but over the wrong places, as he closed his eyes not to see the child fall upon her knees and press both hands tightly over her lips to keep back the cry she could not otherwise conquer; her every act displaying how long must have been the course of ill-treatment that had drawn forth such unchildlike resolution and endurance.

"Now," cried Mrs Ruggles, "no noise!" though her own sharp unfeminine tones must have penetrated to the very attics as she spoke. "There, that will do. Now get up this minute."

"But," said the little tailor, humbly, "you should always ask before you punish, Mary. I – I took the piece of cake out of the cupboard, because I hardly ate any breakfast."

"Tim – Tim – Tim!" cried Mrs Ruggles; and as she spoke, she looked at him sideways, her eyes gleaming sharply out of the

corners. “You false man, you! but the more you try to screen her that way, the more I’ll punish. How many times does this make that I’ve found you out?”

“Times – found out?” stammered Tim.

“Yes – times found out,” retorted Mrs Ruggles. “But I’ll have no more of it, and so long as she’s here, she shall behave herself, or I’ll cut her thievish ways out of her.”

“But, indeed,” said Tim, pitifully, “it was me, upon my word. It was me, Mary. Just look – here’s some of the crumbs left now;” and he pointed to a few splintery scales of paste lying upon the board.

Mrs Ruggles gave a nod that might have meant anything.

“I am sure you should not beat her so,” whimpered Tim. “Beating does no good, and may hurt – ”

“Didn’t I say I wouldn’t have her talked about?” exclaimed Mrs Ruggles, in threatening tones. “And how do you know? If she didn’t want whipping this time, it will do for next. Children are always doing something, and a good beating sometimes loosens their skins and makes ’em grow. You never had children to teach.”

“’Tain’t my dooty to have children,” muttered Tim.

“What’s that?” shouted Mrs Ruggles. “Now don’t aggravate, you know I can’t abear nagging.”

“I only said, my dear, that it wasn’t my dooty to have children, but yours.”

Mrs Ruggles gave her husband a look composed of half scorn,

half contempt – a side look, which, coming out of the corners of her eyes, was so sharpened in its exit that though Tim would not look up and meet it, he could feel it coming, and shivered accordingly.

Meanwhile Mrs Ruggles took a bonnet from a peg, and putting it on, tied the strings tightly as if in suicidal intent, snatched herself into a shawl, and rummaged out a basket, preparatory to starting upon a marketing expedition.

"Now then, don't grovel there, but go to your work," she shouted to the kneeling child, who bent before her as if she were the evil deity presiding over her fate.

Then the child's hands dropped from before her mouth, as she flinchingly rose, and taking a copper lid from a side table, began with a piece of dirty rag to rub and polish the already bright metal, giving at the same time stealthy, furtive glances, first at Tim and then at Mrs Ruggles; while, in spite of every effort, a sob would swell her little breast, beat down her puny efforts, and burst forth, to make her shiver in dread of further blows.

Volume One – Chapter Nine.
The Ninth Part of a Man

The room door closed upon Mrs Ruggles' rigid figure, her loud step, indicative of the woman's firmness, was heard upon the stairs, and then Tim and little Pine ceased from their tasks, and listened till an echoing bang announced the shutting of the front door, when, half rising and leaning forward, Tim dashed down the garment he was making, opened his arms – the child gave a series of bounds, and the next moment had buried her face in Tim's breast, winding her little bare arms about his neck, wringing her thin fingers as she clasped and unclasped them, moaning piteously the while.

"Just what I expected," exclaimed Mrs Ruggles, in hard, sharp tones; and starting up, the guilty couple found that she had stolen back and softly opened the door. But the next instant the child had seized lid and rag, and Tim was busily stitching away at a piece of lining which belonged nowhere, as he looked confusedly in his wife's face.

"Call yourself a man!" exclaimed Mrs Ruggles, with that peculiar bitterness so much used by women of her class. "Ah! I've a great mind to!" she exclaimed again, looking sideways at little Pine, and making a dash at the whalebone; "but I don't know which deserves it most."

The child set her teeth hard, and shrank towards the wall, while Tim drew a long breath, and clutched the big iron by his side, though without the slightest intention of using it for offence or defence.

Mrs Ruggles again spoke —

"Don't let me come back again, that's all," she exclaimed; and if his looks were a faithful index of Timothy Ruggles' mind, his heart evidently just then whispered, "I wish to goodness I could take you at your word."

Then the door was once more closed, the step heard again, the bang down-stairs, and then there was silence in the room, broken only by the half-suppressed sobs of little Pine, and the impatient, restless pecking of the bird in the cage.

Five minutes passed, and still there was silence, when Tim softly took up a yard-measure from the board, stole nimbly off on to his shoeless feet, opened the door, and peered through the crack, and then, reaching out one hand, he touched a bell with the yard-measure, making it ring loudly twice over. Then he softly closed the door, replaced himself and his measure upon the board, before leaping boldly and noisily off to cross the room, open the door loudly, and trot down-stairs to answer the bell, the child earnestly watching his motions the while.

Down the stairs trotted Tim, and along the passage to the front door, to open it, look out, and peer up and down the street, when, apparently satisfied, he closed the door once more, his face wearing an aspect of full belief as he muttered, "A runaway ring."

Had Tim Ruggles made his descent a minute sooner, he would have seen the graceful form of his lady some half-a-dozen doors lower down, as she stood in conversation with a neighbour; but now, no one being in sight, he hurried up-stairs again, climbed upon his board, placed his work ready to hand, and then, and then only, he held out his arms to the child, who was sobbing the next instant upon his breast.

"Don't – don't cry, my pet," he whispered, puzzling the while a couple of real tears which had escaped from his eyes, and finding no friendly handkerchief at hand, were dodging in and out amongst the main lines and sidings and crossings and switches of the course of life as mapped out in Tim's face, till one tear was shunted into his left ear, and the other paused by the corner of his mouth.

"Don't cry, my pet," said Tim again, caressing the child with all a woman's tenderness. "But come, I say, you must cheer up, for see what I've been making for you. But there, don't cry, my darling;" and he pressed his cool, soft, womanly hand upon weal and burning sore. "Now look," he continued, and from under a heap of cloth patches he produced a quaint-looking rag doll, evidently the work of many a stolen five minutes. "Now, then!" he cried, in the tone people adopt towards children, "what do you think of that?"

Then there was silence, while Tim eagerly watched the child, whose little mind seemed to be struggling hard between the ideas natural to its age, and those of a forced and premature character.

First she looked at the doll, then at its donor, and then, half laughing, half crying, she looked pitifully in Tim's face, before once more throwing herself, sobbing loudly, in his arms, where she clung tightly, as the little man patted her head, and smoothed and caressed her.

"I thought she'd have liked it," muttered Tim, looking down upon the little head in a disconcerted way, his face growing more and more puckered as he rocked himself to and fro, humming the snatch of some old ditty, treating the suffering little one as though she were a baby. By slow degrees the sobs ceased, and Tim seemed more puzzled than ever, when the child raised her head, and gazed in his face, her little wan aspect seeming to make her years older as she kissed him, saying —

"Please put it away now."

Tim stared hard at the little thin face, as with one hand he reluctantly placed the doll beneath the cloth shreds, holding her tightly with the other, till, in a strange old-fashioned way, she kissed him again, saying —

"It was very kind of you." And then she slipped out of his arms, crossed the room to the glass, and smoothed her hair, wetted Tim's sponge, and removed the tear marks from her face, placing too the cool grateful water against the smarting weals upon her arms. Afterwards she returned to her task and went on polishing the metal lid, a sob rising at intervals to make Tim Ruggles flinch.

Tim's work was again in hand, but progressing very, very

slowly as he then sat musing, and wondering whose child the little one was; also whether she would be fetched away, a proceeding which he dreaded, in spite of the pain it gave him to see her suffer. “I’ve no spirit to stop it,” he muttered, “though it nips me horribly. I suppose it’s from stitching so much that I ain’t like most men. It’s all right though, I s’pose; she knows best. – Here, I say, though, my wig and pickles, we shall have the missus home directly,” he cried, fiercely, “and no work done. Now then, bustle; polish away;” and he set the example of industry by snatching up the trousers in course of making, and sewing more fiercely than ever.

Volume One – Chapter Ten.
My Duty towards my Neighbour

"Now then," said Tim Ruggles, "we mustn't have no more sobbing and sighing, you know, but get on with working, and eddication, and what not, before some one comes home, and goes off. Now what were we doing last, my pretty?"

"Reading," said little Pine, absently.

"Mistake," said Tim. "It was cate – cate – well, what was it?"

"Chism," said the child; "catechism."

"Right," said Tim. "Now, let's see; it was duty towards my neighbour, and if we don't look sharp as a seven – between we shall never get through that beautiful little bit. Eddication, my pretty, is the concrete, atop of which they build society; and if I'd been an eddicated man and known a few things – "

"But you know everything, don't you?" queried Pine.

"Well, no, my dear, not quite," said Tim, rubbing one side of his nose, and gazing in a a comical way at the child.

"But you are very clever, ain't you."

"Oh, dear me, no; not at all," said Tim; "leastwise, without it's in trousis, and there I ain't so much amiss. But come, I say, this won't do; this is catechism wrong side out, so go on."

Then slowly on to the accompaniment of the metal polishing – the lid being by this time succeeded by a brass candlestick –

and the sharp click of Tim's needle, the portion of catechism under consideration progressed till it was brought to a full stop over the words, "Succour my father and mother," when Tim was, to use his own words, quite knocked off his perch by the child's question —

"Who is my mother?"

"Why – er – er – why, mother, you know," replied Tim.

The child shook her head thoughtfully, and now speaking, now stopping to rub at the bright metal, said —

"No, no! not her – not her! My own – my own dear mother could not, would not beat me so. I think it must be some one who comes when I'm half asleep, and I can see her blue eyes, and feel her long curls round my face when she kisses me, and then it is that I wake up; and," she continued dreamily, "I'm not sure whether she does come, for she is not there then, and when I whisper, no one answers; and do you know whether she comes, or whether I dream she does, that must be my mother, for no one else would come and kiss me like that."

"Why, I do," remonstrated Tim, "lots o' times."

"Yes, yes! you do!" said the child, smiling, "but I know when it's you, and I can't help thinking – "

"Here, I say," exclaimed Tim, "this isn't catechism. This won't do, my pretty, you mustn't talk like that. Now, then, go on, – 'Succour my father' – "

"Succour – succour," continued the child, "my father and mother. Is she gone to heaven, and does she come to look at me

in the night, and kiss me? I don't think that she would whip me so, and – and – oh! pray don't beat me for it. I can't help it. Oh! I can't help it," and then once again, the little thin hands were pressed upon the quivering lips to thrust back the bitter heart-wrung wail that would make itself heard. No child's cry; but the moaning of a bruised heart, forced and rendered premature in its feelings by the long course of cruelty to which it had been subjected. A stranger might have listened, and then have gone away believing that his feelings had been moved to pity by the anguished utterances of a woman in distress.

Tim hopped from his board, half bewildered, and quite in trouble, to kiss and caress the child, smoothing her hair, patting her cheeks, and holding her tightly to his breast.

"Come, my pretty," he whispered, "you mustn't, you know. It does hurt me so, and ain't I as good as a father? And didn't you promise me as you'd love me very, very much? And now you're raining down tears, and melting all the sugar out of a fellow's nature till you'll make him cross as – Polish away, my pretty."

With two bounds Tim was back in his place, and little Pine again bent over her task; for there was a heavy step upon the staircase, and as it stopped at the door, Tim grunted, and slowly shuffled off his board to replace his iron in the fire after giving it a loud clink upon the stand.

"Now, my dear," said Tim, loudly, "we ain't getting on so fast as we oughter. 'Bear no malice.'"

"'Bear no malice,'" repeated the child, looking up at him, with

a quaint smile upon her little pinched lips.

"'Nor hatred in my heart,'" said Tim; and then dolefully, "why don't you look at your work?"

"'Nor hatred in my heart,'" said the child, whose little face, then again upturned, showed that, if there were truth in looks, malice or hatred had never entered her breast.

"Louder, ever so much," whispered Tim, "and don't yer get whipped whilst I'm at Pellet's, there's a pet. 'Keep my hands from picking and stealing,'" he continued, aloud.

"'From picking and stealing,'" said the child, softly.

"She'd better, that's all I can say," came from the doorway; and Mrs Ruggles closed the portal, and then swung round again, right about face, and confronted her husband, "perhaps some one else will keep his tongue from evil-speaking, lying, and so on."

"I'm blessed," muttered Tim, "that's rather hot."

"Of course it is," exclaimed Mrs Ruggles, who only caught the latter part of the sentence, and applied it to the fire. "Such waste of coals. I suppose that girl's been shovelling them on as if they cost nothing."

"No, my dear – me – it was me," said Tim, who well enough knew that the fire had been made up by Mrs Ruggles herself: but he was a terrible liar.

"Then you ought to have known better."

"Yes, my dear," said Tim, humbly, glad to have averted the current of his lady's wrath.

"Are those trousers nearly done?" said Mrs Ruggles.

"Very nearly, my dear," replied Tim, throwing his iron duster, and some more scraps over the spot where lay the doll.

"Because you have to go to Pellet's, mind, this afternoon."

"Thinking about 'em when you was on the stairs, my dear," said Tim, and this time he spoke the truth.

Volume One – Chapter Eleven. Homely

This was a busy day in Duplex Street: in fact, most days were busy there, and Mrs Jared and Patty were in a state of bustle from morning till night. For, being a poor man's wife, Mrs Jared had grown of late years to think that doing nothing stood next door to a sin, and consequently she worked hard, early and late.

But this was a Saturday – a day upon which all the juveniles rose with sorrow in their hearts, since it was washing day. Not the washing day when the copper was lit in the back kitchen, and Mrs Winks from the Seven Dials came to work with crimpy hands by the day, making the house full of steam and the cold mutton to taste of soap, but a day when there was a family wash of the little Pellets. Mrs Jared's task had of late years grown to be rather heavy, the consequence being that she had become on her part more vigorous of arm, more bustling of habit. Certainly during these weekly lamb-washings there used to be a good deal of outcry – Mrs Jared being the washer, and Patty undertaking the head-dressing and finger and toe-nails of the smaller members, bringing to an end her part of the performance by carrying them up pig-a-back to bed like so many little sacks. But in consequence of numbers, the first washed had of necessity to go very early to rest – a fact productive of much crowding and getting behind one

another, the strongest in this case going to the wall, and thrusting the weaker before them.

Mrs Jared had been very busy all day – at least what should have been all day – though in consequence of a heavy fog, and the neutralising lamp-light, it seemed to have been all night. She had made a mistake that morning, and risen two hours before her customary time, the consequence being that cleaning matters were the same period of time in advance; and in place of the lavations taking place after tea, they were all over before, and the shining faces, that had lately been screwed up, were once more beginning to look happy and contented, though, by some strange fatality, their owners seemed to be always in Mrs Jared's way.

Everything about the place shone clean and bright: the comfortable front kitchen was in order, and tea time was near at hand, when Jared Pellet would descend with Tim Ruggles, grown by long working quite a friend of the family – coming for so much a day and his meals, and ready to do anything, from curtailing the goodly proportions of Jared's old trousers, and making them up for smaller members of the family, and contriving caps out of waistcoats, to acting in various ways as a regular tailor-chemist in the new and useful combinations he could contrive for the little Pellets, of whom one never knew for certain how many Jared had, for if you tried to count them there were always two or three fresh little heads peeping out at you from among Mrs Jared's skirts, like chicks from the wings of a hen.

Tea time at last, and things in a satisfactory state of

preparation, though, as a matter of course, work was never ended in Duplex Street. Mother and daughter had taken it in turns to change gowns, and to smooth hair; and then Patty had made that pleasant home-like clinking noise so familiar to every Englishman, formed by the setting out of the cups and saucers, and the placing of the spoons in their normal positions.

"Ah-h-h! who is touching the sugar?" cried Mrs Jared, in what was meant for the tone of an ogress; but from so pleasant-faced a little body anything like an ogreish sound was out of the question.

But the voice had its effect; for a little, plump, sticky fist was snatched from the sugar-basin, though not without drawing with it the depository of sweets, when a large proportion of the sandy-looking necessary was thrown down upon the newly-swept piece of drugget, amidst a violent clattering of teacups, and a buzz of small voices, as though a score of wasps had been attracted to the cloying banquet.

"Oh, Totty, Totty!" exclaimed Mrs Jared, popping the baby down upon the old chintz-covered sofa – there always was a baby at Jared's – and then charging the culprit, and a couple more, who had gathered round the spoil. "Oh dear, dear! and Mr Ruggles will be down directly to tea. O Patty, why didn't you mind Totty? See what mischief she has been in; and here's Dicky with quite a handful now."

"She was here just this minute," cried Patty from the back kitchen, "and I did not miss her."

In fact, it was rather hard to mind Jared's progeny, who, from

being confined in a small house, were exceedingly restless – climbing, falling, upsetting candles, cutting fingers, or rolling from the top to the bottom of the kitchen stairs, so that the rag-bag was always in requisition, and tied-up fingers, sticking-plaistered or bruised heads, and abrasions in general were matters of course.

"Totty yikes oogar," said the sticky cause of the mischief, in treacly tones.

"Totty yikes oogar," exclaimed Mrs Jared, angrily imitating her juvenile's limping speech, and forgetful that she herself had crippled the words while teaching the little one its first steps in language; "Totty's a very, very naughty girl, and ought to be well whipped." And then the troubled dame busied herself in gathering up the spilled saccharine treasures with a spoon, while Totty, elevating her chin to make the passage straight, gave vent to a doleful howl, rubbing the while her sticky hands all over her clean face. Patty tried to look cross because she had been scolded – an utter impossibility on account of the dimples in her cheeks, which seemed as though a couple of kisses had been planted there by loving lips, and the downy, peachy skin had flinched with the contact, and never since risen – nursing up the sweet impressions, and holding them as treasures of the past. Then numbers odd wept for sympathy, as Mrs Jared scraped and scolded, heedless of the facts that the Dutch clock had given warning for five, and that the tea was not yet made, the toast not cut, and the bloaters not down to cook. For, as it had been a

Saturday's dinner —*i. e.*, scrappy – "snacks," in honour of Tim Ruggles, were in vogue for tea.

But troubles never come singly; for now the baby having made up its mind to see what was the matter, contrived to wriggle about until its nine-months'-old bundle of soft bones, gristle, and flesh rolled off the sofa, bump on to the floor, where, as soon as it could get its breath, it burst forth into a wail of astonishment and pain at the hard usage it had received.

Patty rushed to seize the suffering innocent; Mrs Jared, with her skirts, knocked down the origin of the mischief; the kettle boiled violently, and spat and sputtered all over the newly-blackleaded grate and bright steel fender, adding as well a diabolical hydrogenous smell; and in the midst of the trouble down came Jared Pellet and Tim Ruggles, punctual to five o'clock, on purpose to refresh themselves with the social meal.

"There – if I didn't expect as much!" cried Mrs Jared, snatching the kettle off the fire with one hand, and hushing Totty with the other; rushing the children into their ready-set chairs, and Tim Ruggles into his place, Jared quietly taking his own by the fireside, where he could set his tea-cup on the oven top. Then Patty set to work toasting; the little Dutch oven, containing four "real Yarmouths at two for three halfpence," was placed before the fire, and sent forth a savoury odour; the tea was made with two spoonfuls extra, and Jared was set to caress the sticky Totty, now planted upon his knee.

By the end of five minutes that tyrant of the household – the

baby – had subsided into an occasional sob, and was given over into the care of one of Patty's juniors – both being well bread-and-buttered, the baby having a wedge in each hand – and sent up into the front room, the nurse *pro tem* being strictly ordered not to touch anything. The paraffine lamp was lit instead of a candle, the fire poked; and now, after so many preliminaries, the meal was commenced, the tea being fragrant, the toast just brown enough, the butter better than usual, and the bloaters prime; Totty declining to abdicate the throne she had ascended, one where she reigned supreme – her father's knee, to wit; and at last there was peace in the front kitchen in Duplex Street.

"Did you ever hear such a noise, Mr Ruggles?" said Mrs Jared at length, her face now all smiles.

"Not my way often, ma'am," said Tim, "at least – that is – we do have noises."

Mrs Jared looked significantly at her husband, and then sighed, when, after fidgeting in his chair, Tim said, "A little more sugar, if you please, ma'am."

"Totty yikes oogar," exclaimed the chubby delinquent, displaying her sorrow for her late act of piracy by making a grab at the hard roe upon her father's plate – a delicacy but just set free from overlaying bones, but the plate was hot, and the little fingers suffered a sharp pang, when there was another outcry; but with that exception, the meal progressed in peace to the end, when Jared threw himself back in his chair, and set himself to amuse Totty, by turning his inflated cheeks into drums for that

young lady to belabour with sticky fists.

But it was at supper time, when the little ones were in bed and Jared and Tim had concluded their tasks, that there was the real peace. For now, up-stairs by the fireside, a pipe was produced for Tim, and two weak glasses of gin and water were mixed – Mrs Jared indulging in occasional sips from her husband's portion, while, under the influence of his own, Tim grew communicative respecting his own home, and the present Mrs Ruggles, and on Patty making some enquiry respecting little Pine, he laid down his pipe, rubbed his hands softly together, and looked very serious as he replied to her question.

"For my part," said Mrs Jared, "I don't hold with such sharp correction of children as you say Mrs Ruggles administers."

Tim did not speak, but his eye fell upon a small cane above the chimney-piece. His glance was detected by Mrs Jared, who exclaimed:

"You need not look at that, Mr Ruggles, for it is never used, only talked about; at least," she said, correcting herself, "very seldom. I don't think it right to be harsh to children, only firm; and if you begin with firmness, they will seldom require further correction."

"Spare the rod, spoil the child," said Tim, softly exhaling a column of smoke.

"Stuff!" said Mrs Jared, sharply; "do you mean to say that my children are spoiled, Mr Ruggles?"

"No, ma'am," said the little tailor, earnestly; "I never saw a

better behaved family. – Nor a bigger," he said to himself.

"But Solomon said so, my dear," said Jared, drily.

"Then Solomon ought to have been ashamed of himself," said Mrs Jared, tartly; "and it must have been when he was nearly driven mad by some of his own children. He said plenty of good things, but I don't consider that one of them; and besides, with all his wisdom, he was not perfect. Between ourselves, I wonder, Mr Ruggles, that you allow it. When the little thing came after you the other day, even her little neck was marked, and as to her arms – why Patty went up – stairs and cried about them. I'm only a plain-spoken woman, and really, sometimes, I wonder that you ever married again, and you must excuse me for saying so."

"I often wonder at it myself," thought Tim Ruggles, as he sat poking at his frizzy hair with the stem of his pipe, and looking very intently into his gin and water: all at once, though, he exclaimed:

"I'll tell you how it was!"

But before telling them how it was, he refilled and lit his pipe, sat thoughtfully for a few minutes, and then refreshed himself with a sip of his gin and water.

Volume One – Chapter Twelve.
Tim's Ditty

"You see, ma'am," said Tim Ruggles, looking very mysterious, "that little one's name was Prosperine or Propserpine, I'm not sure which, unless I look at where we've got it written down. I'm not sure it ain't Proserpine; but at all events it's a long awkward name, and we took to calling her Pine. I married the present Mrs Ruggles to take her in charge and mind her. And she does take care of her, and brings her up in the way she should go. You should hear her say her Catechism," said Tim, looking proudly at Mrs Jared.

"I'd rather hear her say she loved your wife, Mr Ruggles," said Mrs Jared, quietly.

Tim was disconcerted, but not beaten.

"But she does, ma'am, and me too, wonderful, for Mrs Ruggles is only just a little too strict, and I don't like to interfere; for you know, ma'am, that's a child of mystery – that is, like Fatherless Fanny, as maybe you've read of; and no doubt she'll come to be in a big spear of life. She – that's Mrs Ruggles, you know, ma'am – says that we'll do what's right by the child, ma'am, and what can I say against that, when Mrs Ruggles is such a clever woman?"

"I don't quite like such cleverness," said Mrs Jared.

"You see I want to do what is right, ma'am," said Tim, "and somehow that's rather hard sometimes. But I was going to tell you, ma'am, we used to live in South Molton Street, and though I've no children of my own now, ma'am, when my poor first wife was alive there used to be one regularly every year, and the wife that proud of it, she didn't know what to do for a few months; and then a time would come when we'd stand side by side looking at the little weeny, waxy features, lying in the bit of a coffin, and the wife fit to break her heart because they were all taken away again so soon. Not one lived, ma'am; and though we were poor, and at times very much pushed for a job and a little money, that used to be our greatest trouble, and I've seen my poor wife look that hungry and envious of a lodger on the first floor – quite a lady she was – who lived alone there with her baby, that nothing could be like it.

"But she was a good woman, God bless her!" said Tim, in a low voice, and as he spoke he put his hand to his bald head, as if raising his hat; "and sometimes I think, ma'am, that there aren't such a wonderful number of good women in this world. I never knew what money we had, and what money we hadn't, but used to put it in her hands as I brought it home from the shop, and I always knew that she'd make it go as far as money would go, and I didn't want no more. Nothing like letting your wife keep the purse, sir," he said, turning to Jared – "always makes her feel proud of the confidence.

"But it came to pass at one time, ma'am, that we were so

put to it, that I couldn't put a bit of confidence in Mrs Ruggles, ma'am – my first – for times were that hard with strikes that there was not a stroke of work to be got for anybody. We tried all we knew, and I scraped and pledged and sold, till it seemed that the next thing to do would be to go into the workhouse, when one day came a knock at our back-room door, and we both started, feeling sure that it was the landlord to tell us we must go, for we were behindhand with the rent. But no; who should come in but the first floor lodger, with her little one; and to make a long story short, what she wanted was for my lass to take care of her, because she was going abroad with her husband, and my wife was to be paid for doing it.

"And do you think she would? Why, she snatched hungrily at the little thing; and poor as we were, would have been glad to do it for nothing. Perhaps I had my objections, and perhaps I hadn't, ma'am; but we were almost starving, and when five pounds were put on the table for the present, and an address written down where we were to go when that money was done, why, one could only look upon it as a Godsend, and promise all the poor lady wished.

"Then came the cruel time, ma'am, when the poor woman had to leave it, and I was glad to go out of the room, so as not to see her sobbing and breaking her heart, and snatching the poor little baby to her breast, and running to the door with it, and then coming back and giving it up to my wife, kissing her, and kneeling down to her, and begging of her to love it, when my

poor lass was worshipping it as hard as ever she could.

"I stopped out of the room till she was gone, poor lady, and then I came back, pretending to look jolly; but I only made a fool of myself, ma'am, when I saw the wife crying softly over the little thing in her lap, for I knew what it all meant. Oh, so much, ma'am, for they were the tender motherly tears of a woman who had never been able to pour out all the love of her heart upon one of her own little ones. And as I stood there, I seemed not to like to speak, as I saw her lips quivering and face working. But, in spite of all her sad looks, there was one of pleasure in her face; for there was the little thing looking up and crowing and laughing as if it knew that it was in good hands; and while my poor wife stayed on this earth, ma'am, no little one could have been more tenderly treated.

"But there came a time when I was anxious and worried, same as I had been often before; and then I couldn't believe it at all, and wouldn't have it that it was true; for it all seemed like a dream, till I found myself sitting with little Pine in my arms, keeping her with me because she was something poor Lucy loved; and then it seemed to come home to me that it was my poor wife's cold, smooth forehead that I had kissed, as she lay still and sleeping with another little waxen image upon her breast; but it was all true, ma'am, and I was alone – all alone."

Poor Tim Ruggles made no secret of the fact that he was crying, as he laid down his pipe, and pulled out his thin red cotton handkerchief to wipe his eyes; and, for some reason or other,

Patty's face was very close to her work, and Mrs Jared had altered her position.

"Time went on," said Tim, continuing his narrative, "till one day I was sitting, nursing the little thing, as took to me wonderful, when there came a sharp knock at the door, and in came the child's mother to snatch it out of my arms, and kiss and fondle it as only mothers can. She seemed as if she couldn't speak, but held out one hand to me, and pressed mine and tried to smile; but only gave me such a pitiful woe-begone look that it was quite sad to see.

"Then there were steps on the stairs once more, and the next moment there was a tall hard-looking woman, and a stout man in black like a doctor, both in the room.

"'Ellen,' said the tall woman, in a sharp, cross way; but the stout man was all fidgety, and nervous like, and did not seem to know what to do; but he says, 'Hush! hush! don't let us have any scene here.'

"'Let her come quietly with us, then,' says the woman; but the poor thing only held little crying Pine to her breast, seeming in sore trouble that the child should not know her, but struggle and try to get away. Then she gave me the child, and the man says, 'Take her away. Stop that crying child.'

"But I had no occasion to do anything, for she stopped crying directly I took her, and besides I wanted to see the end of this strange scene, and it seemed as if the little one's mother gave herself up like a prisoner to the tall woman, who took tightly hold

of her arm, and then they hurried out of the room, the stout man all in a perspiration and looking scared, and as if afraid I was going to interfere, and I would, too, only Pine's mother went so quietly, just smiling, and kissing her hand to me and the little one as she left the room, and then I heard their steps on the stairs.

"I did not see any more, but one of the lodgers told me afterwards how they all went off together in a cab that was waiting at the door. And I never knew any more, only what I told you was the child's name, and that the money's paid regular by a lawyer for her keep; and nobody never asks any questions, nor wants to know anything about her; and though I once tried, I couldn't find anything out, and excepting that I've ten shillings a week with her, she might be my own little girl.

"And what could I do without some one to help me, ma'am?" continued Tim to Mrs Jared. "I went four years with women to do for me, and housekeepers, and the last one I had was the present Mrs Ruggles, ma'am, who took so kindly to the child, that I thought it would be all for the best; and we moved to Carnaby Street, ma'am, and it took a deal of doing, but I married her. My sister's husband says she married me: perhaps she did, ma'am. I don't know; but it all seems to come to the same thing."

"And did you never see anything more of the little thing's relations?" asked Mrs Jared.

"No, ma'am," said Tim, "never – never. Of course I felt a bit curious after that strange visit; but I was too full of my own troubles to do anything then; and when, some time afterwards,

I said something to one of the lawyer's clerks, he asked me if I was tired of my job, because plenty more would be glad of it.

"That sent me out of the office like a shot, ma'am. It didn't matter to me that I heard the clerk laughing, for I'd sooner have given them ten shillings a week to let me keep her than have given her up. And I don't love her any the less now, ma'am; but I do sometimes wish she was away."

"The old story," said Jared; "they evidently don't want the little thing, and pay to keep it out of sight."

"Something more than the old story, sir, I think," said Tim, humbly, as he tapped his forehead. "There's something wrong about the poor mother, depend upon it, as well as the child."

"So I think, Mr Ruggles," said Mrs Jared, "and though perhaps I have no business to interfere, I cannot help saying again, that I don't at all like the way in which it is treated, poor child, – I don't think you ought to stand by and let it be beaten."

"Well, I don't know, ma'am, I don't know," said Tim, humbly. "I'm afraid to interfere, to tell you the truth; for I'm out a deal, and if I were to say much, I should only make Mrs Ruggles the little thing's enemy. Really, ma'am, I try to do what's for the best; and I don't think if I tried ever so, I should make any better of it. As I said, I almost wish sometimes that she was gone, but it always nips me afterwards; for somehow, ma'am, that child seems to be all I have to love now, and you know how children will wind themselves round you, and make a home in your heart. I hope none of yours, ma'am, may know what it is to have a step – that

is," said Tim, stammering, "ever be – er – ever – ever – suffer, you know, ma'am."

Tim Ruggles hid his confusion in his red handkerchief, as soon as he could prevail upon it to quit the depths of his pocket; after which he found out that it was quite time for him to take his departure, and hurried away.

"I can't help taking an interest in the poor little thing," said Mrs Jared, when they were alone; "but it seems a strange story."

"Very," said Jared Pellet.

Volume One – Chapter Thirteen. Patty among Friends

Brownjohn Street, Decadia, on a bright summer's morning, when improvements had not made the neighbourhood a little less dingy than of old; when the pleasant district named after, but, all the same, a perfect disgrace to, a certain patron saint, had not recovered from the vast and clean sweep to which it had been subjected.

So early in the day, there was peace. There was no fight in progress before either of the palaces famed for the dispensing of gin; the police were not binding some fierce, dishevelled, and blaspheming virago to a stretcher, and then patting their hair or whiskers in tender spots from whence locks had been ravished by the handful, previous to bearing the drunken scold to the X station, attended by a train of howling creatures, in human form, but debased by "the vitriol madness" – the poison mental and bodily sold to them by the name of "Cream of the Valley" – "of the Shadow of Death," might well have been added. The courts of the palaces were quiet as yet, and brawny-muscled bar and potmen were brightening counters, polishing plate-glass and mirrors, or burnishing brass, ready for the night, when the gas should be in full blaze. Men and women slink in and out now – coming in a dark secretive way, to partake of "pen'orths," or,

as they were here facetiously termed, "coffin nails," to rouse the spirits, flagging from the effects of the previous night's debauch. Burglars and pickpockets – night-birds both – slept in their lairs, hiding from the light, and waiting in drunken sleep for the darkness that was to them their day.

But Brownjohn Street was full of life: young men and women of the Decadian type – not children, though their years varied from five to ten – span the celebrated Decadian top, or sent pointed instruments, known as "cats," darting through the air; halfpenny kites were flown with farthing balls of cotton; and one select party waltzed, fancy free, around a street organ, what time a young gentleman of about twelve, who had already attained to the dignity of greased sidelocks, performed a castanet accompaniment upon two pairs of bones, and another of the same age, whose costume consisted of one rag, one pair of trousers, secured beneath the arm-pits with string, and a great deal of dirt, stood upon his head, swayed his legs about as if in cadence with the air played by the organist, and occasionally beat together the soles of his bony feet. Altogether it was a happy party, and the Italian ground away and showed his white teeth; the children danced; and the whole scene might have been Watteau-like, but for the streets and the dirt.

Vehicles seldom passed down Brownjohn Street; the warning "Hi!" was rarely uttered by the driver, and the children ran in and out of the burrows of the human warren, wild and free, until old enough to be trained to prey upon their fellows. But they

partook more of the rat than of the rabbit in their nature, for they were small-sized, careworn street Arabs, whose names would yet become famous in the "Hue and Cry," or, under the head of "Police Intelligence" in the morning papers.

Dense, dismal, close, swarming, dirty, with the flags broken, and the gutters heaped up with refuse – such was Brownjohn Street; for dandies no longer escorted beauty homeward to such and such a number, in a sedan-chair, with running footmen and link-bearers to clear the way. But, teeming with population as was Brownjohn Street, those swarms were not all of the *genus homo*– the place upon this bright summer morning, when the sun was struggling with the mists and foul exhalations, was a perfect *rus in urbe*. The sound of the Italian's organ was drowned by the notes of birds, as lark, canary, and finch sang one against the other in glorious trills, telling of verdant mead and woodland grove, as they hung in cages by the hundred outside dingy windows high and low.

The shops were full of birds from floor to ceiling. One place had its scores of wooden cages, some eight inches square, each containing its German canary-immigrant, another window was aviary and menagerie combined; but no shop displayed so great a variety as the one bearing the name of "D. Wragg, Naturalist, Dealer in British and Foreign Birds."

Grey parrots shrieked, bantams crowed, ferrets writhed and twisted like furry snakes, rabbits thrust their noses between the bars of a parrot's cage, a pair of hedgehogs lay like prickly balls

in the home lately vacated by a lark, and quite a dozen dogs were ranged outside over the area grating, in rabbit-hutches, to the great hindrance of the light and the washing of Mrs Winks, then being carried on in the cellar-kitchen.

There was a door to D. Wragg's shop, if you could get through it without hanging yourself in the chains, with collars attached, swinging from one post, and avoid knocking down the dragons which watched from the other side.

Not that these last were inimical monsters, for they were but dragon-pigeons, watching with an anxiety in their soft eyes which told of expected food or water.

It was different though with the dogs, since they snapped openly at trousers' legs, out of which garments, they had been known to take pieces, in spite of a general reputation for harmlessness.

The pinky cockatoos also possessed a firmness of beak that was by no means pleasant if they could manage a snip. But once past the door, and you were pretty safe amidst the wonders which met your eye: a couple of knowing-looking magpies gazing at you sideways; a jay, the business of whose life seemed to be to make two hops with the regularity of a pendulum; squirrels and white mice, which spun round their cages and fidgeted and scratched; a doleful owl blinking in a corner; a large hawk, which glared with wicked eyes from cage to cage, as if asking who would die next to make him a meal, as he stood on one leg, and smelt nasty, in another corner; squealing parroquets and twittering avadavats;

bullfinches which professed to pipe, but did not; and a white hare, fast changing its hue, which did tattoo once on the side of its hutch.

And even when you had seen these, you had not seen all, for in every available or unavailable place there was something stowed, living or dead.

Love-birds cuddled up together, budgerigars whistled and scratched, while in one large wire cage, apparently quite content, about fifty rats scurried about or sat in heaps, with their long, worm-like tails hanging out in all directions from between the wires, as if they were fishing for food, and snatched at the chance of getting a bite. One sage grey fellow sat up in a corner, in an attitude evidently copied from a feline enemy, whom he imitated still further as he busied himself over his toilet, pawing and smoothing his whiskers, like an old buck of a rat as he undoubtedly was, and happily ignorant that before many hours were past he would be sold with his fellows by the dozen, and called upon to utter his last squeak while helping to display the gameness of one of the steel-trap-jawed terriers, trying so hard to strangle themselves, and making their eyeballs protrude as they hung by their collars, tugging in the most insensate way at chains that would not break.

And here, amidst trill, whistle, screech, squeak, coo, snarl, and bark – amongst birdseed, German paste, rat and mouse traps, cages, new and secondhand, besides the other wonders which helped to form D. Wragg's stock-in-trade, was Patty Pellet,

whose bright, bird-like voice vied with those of the warblers around, and whose soft, plump form looked as tender, as lovable, and as innocent as that of one of the creamy doves that came to her call, perched upon her shoulder, and – oh, happy dove! – fed from the two ruddy, bee-stung, honeyed lips, that pouted and offered a pea or a crumb of bread to the softly cooing bird, which seemed to gaze lovingly at the bright face, the brighter for the dark framing of misery, vice, and wretchedness by which it was here surrounded.

Patty was enjoying herself that morning, seeing, as she called it, to Janet's pets; for in spite of the vileness of the neighbourhood, she was often here, in consequence of her strange friendship for the adopted daughter of Monsieur Canau, who lodged on D. Wragg's first floor. The acquaintanceship had originated in the visits of the Frenchman and his ward to the house in Duplex Street in quest of violin-strings, and through similarity of tastes, had ripened into affection between the girls, in spite of something like dislike evinced at first by Jared Pellet, and something more than dislike displayed by his wife, who, however, ended by yielding, and treating in the most motherly fashion the object of Patty's regard, and of late many pleasant evenings had been spent by Canau and Janet in Jared Pellet's modest parlour, on which occasions the little house resounded with wondrous strains, until the children were so wakeful that they rose in revolt, and the instruments had to be silenced.

Patty's friend had just left her visitor and gone up-stairs in

answer to a summons from Monsieur Canau, while the proprietor of all this wealth sat in his back room, a pleasant museum of stuffed departed stock-in-trade. He was smoking his pipe, and spelling over the morning's paper, taking great interest in the last garrotting case – merely called, in those days, a violent assault – so that Patty, left alone, was enjoying herself, as was her custom, in dispensing seed, red sand, chickweed, and groundsel, and other food – with water unlimited – to the hungry many.

"Have you brought me anythink to do for you, my dovey?" said a voice, and a round red fat face appeared from somewhere, being thrust into the shop between a parrot's cage, and a bunch of woolly and mossy balls, such as are supplied to young birds about to set up housekeeping.

"Nothing this morning, Mrs Winks," trilled Patty.

"Not nothink, my dovey? no collars, nor hankychys, nor cuffs? The water's bilin', and the soap and soda waitin', so don't say as you've brought nothink as I can wash."

"Nothing – nothing – nothing," laughed Patty; "but be a dear old soul, and fetch me a pail of clean water, so that I can fill the globe for Janet before she comes back."

"Of course I will, my pet; only fetch me the pail, or I shall be knocking of something down if I come any further."

Patty handed the pail as requested to Mrs Winks, correcting very mildly a spaniel that leaped up at her as she did so. She then disappeared for a few minutes, to return bearing in her little hands a large globe, in which were sailing round and round half-

a-dozen goldfish, staring through the glass in a stupid contented way, as their bright scales glistened and their fat mouths opened and shut in speechless fashion. Then, as she set the globe down upon the counter, there came a loud panting from the passage – a heavy rustling – and the next moment it was evident that Mrs Winks had made her way to the front, for she now puffed her way in at the shop-door, bearing the well-filled pail.

"Oh, how kind!" cried Patty; "I could have taken it in at the side."

"You look fit to carry pails, now, don't you, you kitten; it's bad enough to let you come here at all," said the stout dame, smiling; and she stood, very tubby in shape, and rested her pinky, washing-crinkled hands for a moment upon her hips; then she wiped her nose upon her washed-out print apron; and lastly, as Patty stooped to pour the water from the globe, and replenish it with fresh, Mrs Winks softly took a step nearer, and just once gently stroked the young girl's fair glossy hair, drawing back her hand the next instant as Patty looked up and smiled.

"Ah, my dovey! why, here's Mounseer just going out for his walk!" exclaimed Mrs Winks, as the little, shabby yellow-faced Frenchman squeezed into the shop through the side-door, his shoulders hoisted nearly to his ears, and his hands occupied the one with a cigarette, the other with a tasselled cane.

"Ah! tenez then, dogs," he cried, thumping his cane upon the floor, for he had been saluted with a barking chorus. "Janet will soon be down, – and how is my little one?"

Patty held out her hand, when, laying his cigarette upon the counter, the old man took off his hat, placed it in the same grasp that held his cane, and then, with the grace of an old courtier, kissed the little round fingers that were extended to him. Directly after, he replaced his hat, but only to raise it again in salute to Mrs Winks, who acknowledged the act of courtesy by shortening herself two inches, and then rising to her normal height and breadth.

"I was just going to say, Mounseer, that if all people were as polite as you, how easy we could get along; and that if I was like Miss Patty here, people wouldn't be so rude and queer when one goes round with the basket."

"Aha! they are rude, then, those people in the galleree?"

"Rude ain't nothing to it, Mr Canau; they makes way fast enough for the man with the porter, but when I'm coming with my basket of apples, oranges, biscuits, ginger-beer, and bills of the play, they goes on dreadful, a-sticking out their knees and grumbling, and a-hindering one to that degree, that you've no idee what a heat I'm in when I've gone down a row; and never gets half round before the curting rises again, let alone their remarks about being fat – just as if I made myself fat, which I don't; and, as I says to one hungry-looking fellow, I says, 'If I was as thin as you, I'd be a super still, and you admiring of me, instead of my having to supply people's nasty animal wants, and being abused for it.' For – I put it to you now, Mr Canau – can people do without their apples, and oranges, and things, when a play's

long and heavy? and I'm sure I've helped many a noo piece to a success, when it would – Oh, if there isn't the water a-bilin' over!"

With an agility and lightness almost corklike, Mrs Winks, warned by a strong and pungent odour steaming up between the boards, hurried down below; the little Frenchman lit his cigarette, kissed his hand to Patty, and then shuffled in his well-worn and cracked Wellington boots from the shop.

Patty, quite at home, refilled her bright bowl with water, and bore it through the side-door, and then returned to continue supplying the many wants around; but only to be interrupted by a fresh comer – a barefooted, round-faced, ragged man, smoking a short black pipe, but bent almost double beneath the heavy basket he bore, one which required a great deal of manoeuvring to get it past the cages, in addition to a great many low adjurations, in a husky voice, to "come on then!" or to "get out!" But at last it was safely deposited beside the counter, when the bearer made quite an Indian salaam, bending low in salutation to the smiling girl.

"That's the werry last noo bow, Miss. I larnt that of my friend Jammesie Jeejeewo, what plays the little tom-tom drum with his fingers outside the public-houses of a night, and sings 'Fa-la-ma-sa-fa-la-ta;' and sells scent-packets, and smiles like a nigger all day long in Oxford Street. He's own brother to the opium-eating cove as has allers got the cold shiver and freeze, and sweeps the crossin' at the Cirkis. That's it, Miss," he said, bowing again with outstretched hands. "Blame the thing! what are you up to?" he shouted, shaking and snapping his soft fingers, one of which

had come in contact with the cage of a hungry parrot, and been smartly nipped.

"Well, Dick!" said Patty, kindly.

"Well, Miss, but where's Miss Janet? But, there! love and bless your pretty face, Miss, it's a treat to see you here. Why, you makes the shop full of sunshine, and the birds to sing happier than if they was far away amongst their own woods and fields. But now to business, Miss," he exclaimed, as, stooping to the basket on the floor, he brought out, piled one upon the other, a dozen freshly-cut, green, round, cheese-plate-like clover turves. "Tuff's is getting werry skeerce, Miss; and will you tell Miss Janet as they've riz another penny a dozen? Penny a mile miss, accorden' to Act of Parlyment. Every mile I goes farther away, I puts on a penny a dozen. They won't let you cut 'em anywheres; and I got these four mile t'other side Pa'an'ton. I'm blest if there'll be a bit of country soon, or a blessed scrap of chickweed or grunsel, or a tuff to cut anywheres. There wouldn't be no water-creases if people didn't grow 'em a purpose; and that's what I shall have to do with grunsel – have a farm and grow it by the acre. You know, Miss, the bricks and mortar frightens the green stuff; and it goes farder and farder away, till it costs me a pound a year more for shoe-leather than it did a time ago."

"Come, Dick, business," said Patty, smiling at his earnestness; "I'm mistress just now."

"To be sure, Miss – business," said Dick. "Grunsel, Miss; there you are. Chickweed, green as green, and fresh as a daisy; plantain

– there's a picter – there's fine long stalks, as full of seeds as Injin corn, and 'most as big; but blow my rags, if I don't think this here's the werry last to be got."

As he spoke, the man placed the various bunches he had enumerated upon the counter, and then looked up smiling in Patty's face as she spoke.

"Why, Janet says you tell her that story, Dick, every time you come," laughed Patty, as she paid him the money, obtained from the inner room, while every coin the man took he rubbed upon his eyelids for luck, as he said, before wrapping them all in the piece of dirty rag which served him for a purse.

"Well, Miss, I know I've often said so; but really things is now growing to a pretty pass, and you've no idea the miles I have to tramp. Now, look ye there! What do you say to that, Miss Patty? That's for you and Miss Janet, poor lass. She love flowers, she do. Them sorter things don't grow amongst scaffle-poles and mortar-boards and contractors' brick-rubbidge. Why, I had to go – "

"O Dick! O Dick! you good fellow! Oh, how sweet!" exclaimed Patty, with sparkling eyes, as the rough fellow brought from out of his basket, with the dew yet heavy upon their petals, a bunch of wild-flowers – late violets, blue-bells, primroses, and the peachy wood-anemone.

She took them from him with almost childish joy, smelt them, kissed them, and then for a moment held them to her breast, but only to dart into the back room for a little common vase, to fill it with water, and then carefully place the flowers within it.

"I thought as you'd like 'em," said the man, as he watched her with glittering eye; "but they're getting werry skeerce, Miss; and what with the building and 'closing commons, and shutting up of Epping Foresses, there soon won't be no more flowers for poor people, only in shop winders and grand ladies' bonnets, and of course they won't smell. You mark my words, Miss; afore long, London'll get to be so big that it'll fill up all England, and swaller up all the country, so that they'll have to build right out all round into the sea, and get their grunsel and chickweed for singin' birds from furrin parts."

"It was very kind of you, though, Dick, to think of us," said Patty; and she held out her hand with a coin or two half-hidden therein; but the rough gipsy fellow shook his head, as he struggled against the temptation, for it was hard work to refuse money; then stooping, he occupied his hands with the straps of his basket.

"I don't want no payin' for 'em, Miss. I ain't forgot the many a good turn she done my poor missus. I aint half outer debt yet. Besides, I'm flush just now; got a good two bobs' worth o' stuff, if I'm lucky, and here goes to sell it. Miss Janet all right?"

As the answer came in the affirmative, the man guided his basket out, and commenced singing in a sonorous minor key —

"Chickweed and grunsel for your singin' birds!" as he turned to go down the street, rubbing his eyes with the knuckles of one hand. "Might ha' been like her, if she'd on'y ha' lived," he muttered; and then, giving his eyes another rub, the dirty knuckles of his hand glistened as if with moisture, as he gave his

strap and basket another hitch before going any farther.

Chickweed Dick was gone; but he only gave place to one Chucky, who drew a donkey-cart to the door, and brought in a basket of red sand. Then came boys to ask the price of guinea-pigs and white mice; boys to offer squirrels or hedgehogs for sale – miry and dusty boys, with the marks of the shires upon their shabby garb, to indicate long tramps, as bits of hay and straw whispered of nights passed beneath some friendly stack; but the proprietor of this Noah's ark was already overstocked, and, in spite of references made by Patty, there was no dealing.

Patty meanwhile sang on as she fed the rest of the stock; and as if in emulation, the birds whistled loudly, darting eagerly at their cage bars, as she distributed the green food brought by Dick; but her song suddenly ceased, as did that of the birds, when a heavy-looking gaol-typical young fellow, in a sleeved vest, entered the shop, breathed hard, and then, staring offensively at Patty the while, asked to look at some finches.

Patty, glancing at the room door to see if any one was coming, lifted down a cage containing perhaps a score; but the gentleman seemed hard to please, pointing out failings here and there in the various birds, till he seemed to fix the poor girl with his stare, though she kept striving to master her trepidation, and to hide from her unpleasant visitor the fact that his presence caused her dread.

"I say," he whispered, suddenly; "I say," and he leaned across the counter.

The movement seemed to break the spell, for Patty now made an effort to retreat to the back room; but, in a moment, the fellow had stretched out one long, gorilla-like arm, effectually barring her way, when hawk and dove seemed to stand in the naturalist's shop, eye to eye, the weak quailing before the strong.

A loud rustle of a newspaper within ended the scene, for, starting at the sound, the rough visitor turned his attention to the birds once more, and re-commenced his fault-finding, giving Patty time to recover herself, and to redden with anger at what she was ready to call her cowardice when there was some one in the next room.

"You see it ain't for myself," said the fellow, once more fixing his gaze on Patty, but turning the cage round the while; "it wouldn't matter if I wanted it; but he'll have to come and pick one for hisself. I don't think I'll take one to-day."

Patty was about to take back the cage, but with a grin and a repetition of the hard breathing, the fellow drew it farther away.

There was again the rustling of the newspaper. A moment after, the proprietor was heard to rise, and then he jerked himself into the shop, to attend to the customer.

Patty, glad to get away, hurried into the back room, when a sharp piece of bargaining ensued between customer and dealer, ending, as might have been foreseen, in the former finding all possible fault, and then declining to purchase, as he went outside to stand staring heavily through the window, ostensibly at its contents, but really to see if Patty returned.

Volume One – Chapter Fourteen.
Janet

Mr D. Wragg rented the whole of the house in Brownjohn Street, and his lodgers were confined to Mrs Winks and the little Frenchman, the attics being used for store purposes – old cages, birdseed, bundles of herbs, bags of feathers, cobwebs, and dust.

These attics formed a part of the house rigidly tabooed by the dealer, who only gave a comical twitch to his countenance, and jerked his body from head to heel when Mrs Winks complained that she had not had a bit of sleep for the howlings of some dreadful dog there confined.

Patty did not return into the shop, but began slowly to ascend the stairs, pausing at the first landing to fall into an attitude of attention, holding the balustrade and listening eagerly, as from below came the twittering of birds, and from above – in long-drawn, nerve-thrilling tones – sounds that seemed to have a strange effect upon the girl, as she stood in the full light of the landing-window, her eyes half-closed, her face upturned, and her lips parted, as though to give passage to a sigh.

But there was no sigh, no utterance, no motion; only the same strained aspect of attention, as still, from above stairs, came the sounds – now low, almost to fading away, now powerful and loud – but always with the same effect, that of chaining Patty to where

she stood.

She might well listen as if entranced, for from above, with every note given with a feeling that seemed to find its echo in the listener's ears, came floating softly down, the melody of "Ah, non giunge!" evidently played upon a violin of fine and sonorous tone, every bar sweet, pure, and clear, and softened by the distance into a strain which seemed to have floated into the dingy house from some brighter region.

Then, after a pause of a few moments, there was a change, the player turning off into a wild and eccentric variation upon the theme, now loud and sparkling in the major key – now plaintive and thrilling in the minor.

But this lasted only a short time, for as Patty once more began to ascend the stairs, the violinist dashed off into a French mazurka, with such spirit and brilliancy, that the notes seemed to be trilling out in joyous laughter, setting Patty's head nodding to the gay refrain.

The next minute she had opened a door and stood in the presence of the player, who put down her instrument upon the table, and moved slowly across the room to catch the young girl's extended hands, and apologise for not coming down again.

Canau's room was bare and cheerless; a table, a few chairs, a couple of roughly-made music-stands, and a pile of torn, stained, yellow-leaved, printed, and manuscript music, were the principal objects that met the gaze; but Patty – whose presence lent a brightness to the blank place – seemed to have no eye for aught

but the swarthy, deformed girl, whom she kissed affectionately.

Perhaps no greater contrast could have been seen than the sweet happy face of Patty, with her bright brown hair and peachy complexion – peachy with its soft down, and contrasts of creamy white and delicate pink; and that of Janet – she was known by no other name – the dark, deformed girl, who had been brought up by Monsieur Canau, the little French musician, now taking his morning promenade and indulging in his only extravagance – his second cigarette – a pinch of the commonest tobacco, rolled in one of the gummed squares of tissue-paper prepared for him by the girl who shared his poverty and had been taught his art.

The vital spark of life was bright and vivid, shooting keenly now from two dark eyes; but as for the fleshly case that held this vital spark, the wonder was that it should possess any shape at all, so fearful a moulding must it have received in its early plastic days, and not that the poor girl's head should be close down between her shoulders, and that in form she should be diminutive and shrunken.

"I was tired of waiting, and had been listening ever so long," said Patty, drawing a little white finger across the violin-strings. "I wish I were clever, too, and could play."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the other, harshly. "I'm ashamed of it sometimes. It isn't a woman's instrument; but it pleases him for me to play, and I get to like it now; one seems almost able to make it speak and tell one's feelings – sending them floating away into the air," she continued, dreamily gazing before her. "It

makes one think and think, and seem to be living another kind of life; and I am far away from here, Patty, sometimes when I am playing, – perhaps along with you and the little innocent children, and your father and mother, – perhaps far away in the country, amongst the flowers, where there's no noise in the streets, no shouting, shrieks, oaths, nor misery, nor dirt. There!" she said, suddenly, as if she had been brought back to the present, "I know what you are thinking."

"Indeed!" laughed Patty.

"Yes; you think I'm odd and strange in my way. Ah! I wish I were like you."

"And sometimes," rejoined Patty softly, turning very serious, and stooping to pass one arm round the deformed girl, and bending so that her cheek touched the other's dark sallow face, – "sometimes, Jenny, I wish that I were like you – oh! yes – so much – so much; for I'm not happy, Jenny – not happy!"

She repeated these words in a quiet thoughtful way, sinking at last upon her knees by the other's side, when, laying her hand, long and bony of finger, upon the bonny little head, Janet pressed it closely to her misshapen breast, from which burst sigh after sigh, till, waking as it were from her dreamy thoughts, Patty forced a smile, and springing up, kissed Janet again and again.

"There! what nonsense!" she cried, lightly. "I'm crying too, and pray what about? Let's see how these goldfish are. Why, quite lively," she exclaimed, drawing her friend to the window, where, half-screened by a faded curtain, the gorgeous little pets

sailed round and round in their crystal prison.

"Do you ever think it childish of me, liking to keep them?" said Janet, after a pause, during which, as they clung together, the two girls had been watching the fish, one of which rose to the surface, and, with its little gasping lips touched lightly the pinky finger-tip Patty placed beneath the water.

"Sometimes," continued Janet, "it is so dull, so lonesome, in spite of the busy noises coming from the street. Wragg is kind, and so is poor old Mrs Winks; but – but," hesitated the girl, "there are times when I don't wish to be with them. He is often away for hours together, and one cannot always be at music; and then it is that I like to go down-stairs, and be with the little prisoned birds and things. And somehow they seem to know me, and flutter and leap to welcome me when I come. But you don't think it childish?"

"Childish? No!" was the reply, as Patty again dipped a finger to have it saluted by the fish. "I love to come and feed the birds myself; but I would take them, if I could, all far away into the bright happy country, and then open the cage-doors and set them free one by one – one by one. How they would leap, and dart, and flutter as they felt the soft air waiting for them! I think it would be real happiness to see the little things leave off beating their breasts as they tried to get out; and then to listen to them singing from some tree!"

"Or else see some cruel hawk come and seize one," said Janet, bitterly.

"Heigho! perhaps yes," sighed Patty; "there's always something to make life unhappy."

"I like the goldfish," said Janet, without seeming to heed the sigh. "They always put me in mind of lying there – just there!" and she pointed to a corner by the window, "when I was little and could not walk, but only lay there all day with my back aching, as I stretched out my hands to touch one of the little bright things as they sailed so easily round and round. I must have been very very little when he bought the first to please me. But Patty, Patty!" she exclaimed, as she peered in the other's eyes, "what made you sigh, and say that there was always something to make you unhappy?"

Patty was silent, and gazed thoughtfully at the fish, as another, seeking the food so often given, rose and touched her finger.

"What did you mean?" said Janet again, bending forward to gaze in the soft grey eyes. "It was not because I spoke of the hawk?"

Patty shook her head.

"Well, perhaps not altogether – I mean, I don't know," she said, in a slow hesitating way. "But really I must go home now; I promised not to be very long."

Janet watched her eagerly, then, as if to change the subject, kissed her affectionately, and thanked her for what she had done below, ending, at Patty's wish, by putting on her bonnet and accompanying her friend back to Duplex Street, D. Wragg being charged with a message for Monsieur Canau, who, according to custom on such occasions, came for his adopted daughter in the

evening.

Volume One – Chapter Fifteen. Husband and Wife

Nimrod may have been a mighty hunter in his day, but he was never anything to compare with Jared Pellet, who for twenty long years – that is to say, years of the ordinary length – had engaged in the chase of one savage, long-fanged, dire, snarling brute of a wolf, a hungry grinning wretch, grey and grim, and ever licking his thin gums. Old and lank he was, but a very giant in endurance; and very often circumstances were reversed, the hunter becoming the hunted, when it took all Jared's strength and courage to keep the wolf at bay.

That wolf had lain down his long, lean, hungry form at Jared's door when he married, and, on and off, he had been there ever since. What were Nimrod's feats to hunting or keeping at bay a wolf for twenty long years? Jared Pellet had done all this, and was ready to keep up the struggle with the wolf Poverty so long as he had breath left in his body.

They were busy in Duplex Street as usual. Jared was wax-ending a cracked clarionet, pausing every now and then to apply the reed to his lips and breathe out such a wail as would have produced goose-skin upon a stranger. Here, though it had no effect upon Mrs Jared, who was stitching hard, nor upon Patty, bending over her work, there was another present who winced

slightly, namely, Janet, who was paying one of her many visits to her friend; and as each wail arose, she drew in her breath between her set teeth and slightly knitted her brow. Then catching Patty's eye, the latter smiled and rose, and the two girls left the room to husband and wife.

"Ah!" said Mrs Jared, as soon as they were alone, "I do wish poor Canau would leave that horrid place."

"Used to it, and won't," said Jared, supplementing his speech with a dismal "too-hoo" from the clarionet.

"I don't like to be unkind to poor Janet," said Mrs Jared; "but I'm always in dread of something happening when Patty goes there."

"Too-hoo, too-roo, roo-roo," blew Jared from the half-cobbled instrument. "Hen's anxiety about her chicks!"

"Chicks! yes;" said Mrs Jared with a sigh, her thought's current turned. "It is such a drawback having so many children, as well as the anxiety; what with the doctor and the nurse, and dear, dear, the extravagance of the old things, it is really dreadful; and when I'm up-stairs and can't help myself, I do so fidget about the expense. The tea that goes when Patty is not there is really infamous. I'm sure it's never used. And when you buy black at three shillings, and green at four, Mr Timson's best, it worries you terribly. If ever – you know what I mean – and I wanted one again poor Mrs Nimmer had promised to come, if I'd set her free on Saturdays for dusting, and, of course, on Sundays, and now she's ill."

From the wail which now arose from the clarionet it might have been supposed that Mrs Nimmer had been dead, but Jared did not speak.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mrs Jared, "if we did not have so many children!"

"What's the good of grumbling?" grunted Jared; and then there was silence, only broken by the clicking of needle against thimble.

"When was she taken ill?" said Mrs Jared then.

"What? Mrs Nimmer? – last week. Break up, I think. She's past seventy."

Mrs Jared sighed again, and then Jared took up the ball as he went on busily cleaning the keys of the instrument.

"Children are expensive luxuries. Costly; they do eat so furiously; and I don't believe there ever were such children as ours to eat – bless 'em. Poor folks' children ought to be born without appetites, instead of coming into the world with a double share. Some people do, I think, reckon the poor to be a different race to their noble selves; and if they are to be so looked on, it does seem a pity that Nature don't take the matter up and cover them with feathers or wool. What a saving it would be if they'd only moult every year and come out in a new suit!"

"Jared, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said his wife.

"So I am, my dear," said Jared, screwing up his face; "but it was you who grumbled. 'Like as the arrows in the hand of a giant;' and 'Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them.'

That's it, isn't it? But they didn't pay rent and rates and taxes in those days, and every man had his own freehold in the land of Israel. Ah! there was no Duplex Street in the land in those days."

"Nor no Decadia," said Mrs Jared, tartly.

"No," said Jared, "nor no St Runwald's. By the way, I wonder who used to mend their musical instruments at that time."

Here Jared gave a loud nasal "whang-whung" upon the clarionet.

"There were the trumpets they blew before Jericho, you know," he continued. "They must have got cracked some time or other. They couldn't have had organs though, and Ichabods wern't invented to blow. 'To repairing clarionet, ninepence,'" he muttered, writing a little entry in a pocket-book. "Never mind the expense, my dear. Look at the breed: not such children anywhere. Talk about arrows: sharp as needles. I wish, though, you'd ask that little one of Tim's here to play with them a little oftener. I like the child, and – and well there, I believe it's really an act of kindness."

"Poor little thing, yes," said Mrs Jared; "but she's not like a child; she's so old and strange, and don't seem to mix with them. Mr Ruggles came this afternoon just as Janet came up to the door."

"Tim Ruggles – what did he want? I don't owe him a penny."

"Don't talk in that way, dear, just as if all the people who came to the house wanted money."

"Well, don't they?" said Jared.

"No, dear, of course not, not all; and I don't think you ought to speak like that."

"Consequences of long habit, my dear," said Jared.

"And besides, Mr Ruggles never troubled you for money, though it has been owing to him sometimes till I've been ashamed to see him."

"That beautiful wife of his has though," said Jared, nursing one leg by the fire as he stirred the glue now melting in the little pot, preparing for some fresh piece of music cobbling.

Mrs Jared winced and looked uncomfortable.

"Bullied me terribly one day for two and ninepence. Bother the Jezebel! I hate her, if it's only for the way in which she ill-uses that child. 'Pon my soul," exclaimed Jared excitedly, "I feel sometimes as if I could take the little thing away."

Here Jared stirred the glue so viciously, that a portion fell over into the fire, and a vile savour arose in his nostrils.

"But it was about her he came to-day," said Mrs Jared, nervously.

"What! little Pine?"

"No; about Mrs Ruggles," said Mrs Jared, speaking very hurriedly. "He says there is no doubt about poor Mrs Nimmer never being able again to perform her duties; and he wants you to use any little influence you may have with Mr Gray and Mr Timson."

"What for – mending?" said Jared.

"No, no; to back Mrs Ruggles in trying to get the appointment

of pew-opener."

"What! Mrs Ruggles?"

"Yes, dear," exclaimed Mrs Jared, laying down her work.

"I'll see her – "

"And if you will," continued Mrs Jared, hastily interrupting her husband, whose glue was again in the fire, "he says that she will not mind the distance."

"I shouldn't think she would," exclaimed Jared. "Why, she'd scourge us all. Why, I hate her and she hates me, and has done ever since I spoke about her ill-using the little one. Why, before I'd stir a step to get the nasty old cat the post, I'd – "

"And Mr Ruggles says, if you would speak for her, he thinks her having occupation away would make it pleasanter for those at home, and little Pine would be more left to him; and it would be conferring an obligation upon him that he would never forget."

"Bother the fellow! why did he put it like that, so as to make a man eat his words? Why, I hate to see the nasty one-sided looks of the woman; and I know if I help her into the church, she'll do me an ill turn for it some time or other."

"Nonsense," cried Mrs Jared. "Depend upon it the woman has some good qualities."

"Ah! it's all very fine!" said Jared. "You'd take the very devil's part, if you saw him in trouble."

"Hush!" exclaimed Mrs Jared; "and now you'll do your best now, won't you, and do Mr Ruggles a good turn?" – the Mr was slightly emphasised. "I promised him you would."

"Men are lords of the creation," muttered Jared; "man is a free agent. Ah, well! are we going out to-night?"

"Yes, and to see Janet home," was the reply; and soon after, Mrs Jared stood, big basket in hand, and ready, for it was marketing night, and there were the wants of the household to supply.

Volume One – Chapter Sixteen. Purkis's Emporium

"I'm always glad to get out of this place," said Mrs Jared; and she hurried her steps as they turned out of Brownjohn Street, where they had left Janet in safety, Monsieur Canau being absent at his theatrical duties; but they had seen D. Wragg, who had insisted upon Jared taking back a couple of unfortunate sparrows in a paper-bag. "Just to please the children," the dealer had said. They had also seen Mrs Winks, and made an appointment with that lady concerning soap and soda: and now the providing had to be attended to in the busy street to which they made their way.

It was sharp work that providing, now at the butcher's, now at the greengrocer's, and now at the grocer's that was not green; then they went to get a piece of the very fine prime old Cheshire from the next shop, with five eggs for sixpence, and butter and lard. Then the big basket began to grow heavy, and there was no more room in Jared's pockets, nor yet under Mrs Jared's shawl; and their steps were directed, as Jared supposed, homewards, as he groaned beneath his load.

For Jared Pellet always was loaded. No sooner did he take a weight off his shoulders than one asserted itself upon his mind. But it did not matter, he said, so long as he did not get so much more than his share. Upon the present occasion he felt like a

man carrying a sheet of plate-glass down Fleet Street; for he had apples in the same pocket with the eggs, and that pocket being disposed to bulge, people would keep coming in contact, even though he used a market bunch of greens as the "ease-her-stop-her" boys do the fenders on the "Citizen" steamers to soften collision or contact with pier.

Then, too, there was Mrs Jared to protect in the crowd, for she was a very little woman; and though she would not own to it, that big basket bothered her sadly, being a regular tyrant, and, in spite of the coolness of the night, keeping her in a profuse perspiration.

It really was a brute of a basket – one of those wicker enormities with a cross handle, two flaps, and a large interior. Plenty of room when you could get anything inside; but an abomination of obstinacy, which seemed to like to have goods carried half in and half out, top-heavy fashion, with the flap lids cocked up and in the way of the handle.

And so it was upon the night in question; nothing would pack in as it should. The potatoes certainly did dive in properly when the scale was turned up; but the beef would not enter in spite of all the coaxing and contriving bestowed. No; it would not go in, but broke the wedge of fine old Cheshire all to crumbs; and there it was being carried home with the rough, red, freshly-sawed bone sticking out, and anointing with wet marrow Mrs Jared's second-best shawl. Even the tea-paper was broken, and "Timson's fine old family mixture" escaping in secret amongst

the potatoes. However the moist sugar was safe, for it was being carried is a brown paper cone, balanced inside Jared's hat, to the serious alarm of the two sparrows, till Jared stopped for a moment at a street corner and let them fly.

Any one with sympathetic feelings will easily understand that homely shopping under such circumstances was rather trying to the temper. Mrs Jared's temper was tried, but it only displayed itself in slight compressions of her lips; and even this outward and visible sign of something wrong soon passed off, giving place to an air of anxiety as they passed through a by-street, where she suddenly arrested her husband.

The stopping-place was at a liberally painted shoemaker's shop, over which, in large letters, shone the golden words, "Purkis's Boot and Shoe Emporium," while the gilt flourishes and bands upon the board seemed to remind the beholder strangely of the beadle's uniform and wand of office.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jared, waking up from a dream of Farmer's *Gloria in Excelsis*, "What do you want here?"

"Only to tell Mr Purkis to send for Totty's little boots," said Mrs Jared.

Jared was satisfied, and they entered, sending a small bell hung upon the half door into a very rage of ringing, to summon attendance, although the owner of the establishment was ponderously taking the measure of a customer's foot, by means of a long slip of paper and a sliding rule, slowly the while making entries upon the said white slip, and afterwards smearing

them out and re-writing them. The next minute, though, he had fallen into a state of doubt, and measured again, till, in his confusion, he not only made himself extremely inky, but blotted his customer's white stockings.

But at last Mr Purkis had finished, sighed relief, dismissed the measured lady, with a promise very doubtful of fulfilment, taken off his glasses, and then turned to welcome his visitors, Mr Jared Pellet, organist of his (Mr Purkis's) church, being a customer held by him in some reverence.

A very warm, moist man was Mr Purkis in all weathers, and during conversation he was always busy dabbing his forehead, or wiping his neck or hands, even continuing the desiccating process sometimes within his shirt-collar; but his broad face was wreathed with smiles, and a Chesterfield could not have been more polite to his visitors as he responded to Jared's inquiries about his health.

"Not very well, sir," said Mr Purkis, taking up a huge clump-soled boot. "I've been a deal worried to-day, sir, over this boot. Mr D. Wragg's, sir, as you recommended to come to me, and that leg of his as is shorter than the other never seems to keep the same length two days together, and I can't get the sole thick enough, even now. But he's a good customer all the same, and I thank you ever so much for recommending me to him. Make that dark gi – young lady's boots too, I do, sir; her as comes with the little Frenchman; but where he picks up *his* boots, I don't know."

Here Mrs Jared cut a long story short by speaking about

Totty's shoes.

He would send for those little shoes first thing in the morning, without fail; but would not Mr and Mrs Pellet step in.

Jared thought not, but Mrs Jared took the opposite, for she had other thoughts than shoes upon her mind; so declaring herself to be tired, she followed Mr Purkis into the back room, where Mrs Purkis left off ironing to dust a couple of chairs, and drew a small black saucepan, simmering upon the hob, a little farther from the cheery blaze.

"Poor Mrs Nimmer's dead and gone, sir," said Mr Purkis.

"Indeed!" said Jared and his wife together.

"Yes, sir – went very suddenly – only this very afternoon, sir. Forty year had she been pew-opener at St Runnles – twenty year before I took the beadleship."

The conversation had taken the very turn Mrs Jared desired; in fact, she had dragged Jared round in order to enlist Mr Purkis upon their side – at all events, to prevent him from trying to run a friend of his own. She was somewhat shocked at the suddenness of the beadle's announcement, yet she felt that, for the sake of a family friend, so good an opportunity must not be lost.

"Who is to be the new pew-opener, Mr Purkis?" she said, after a while.

"Who, mum?" said Purkis, after a good wipe; "I don't know, mum, I'm sure. I should like the Missus there to try, but she says she won't."

"Not if I know it, Joseph," exclaimed his lady, as if in doubt

whether she might commence the undertaking in ignorance. "Not if I know it, Joseph," she exclaimed, polishing an iron with a duster, after giving it a vicious rub in the ashes. "If a married woman hasn't enough to do to mind her own house and bits of things, it's a pity. The church has got you, and has you a deal away from the business with weddings and such; and besides, I never opened pews, and I'm too old to learn now."

"Perhaps Mrs Purkis will think better of it," said Mrs Jared.

"Better of it! No, ma'am; nor worse, neither. I shall never commit myself by doing of it, as I've told Joseph a score of times."

"Then, under those circumstances, perhaps Mr Purkis would not mind helping a friend of ours to obtain that post?"

"Friend of yours, mum?" said Purkis, eagerly; "I'd do all I could in my way, mum, though that wouldn't be much. But," he exclaimed, as a bright thought seemed to strike him, "I could keep other people away."

"But that would hardly be fair," observed Mrs Jared.

"Perhaps we had better not go into that part of the business, mum," said Mr Purkis, with dignity. "Elections is things as ladies don't understand; and those in elections have to serve their own friends, and serve out their enemies. What we want to do is to remember Mr Pellet's kindness."

"Which we shall never forget," chimed in Mrs Purkis, looking up from her ironing in support of her husband's allusion to Jared's "donus," and a timely loan supplied at a time when Mr Purkis had

got himself into what he termed “a mess” by obliging a friend in a bill transaction.

“’Taint every one as will put himself to inconvenience and help them as is pushed,” said Mr Purkis.

“Which it’s well enough we know that, Joseph,” chimed in Mrs Purkis, halting in her task, and burning the mark of the flat-iron into the garment being smoothed.

“There! I must go, if you are going to keep this on,” exclaimed Jared, rising from the chair in which he had been fidgeting about until it scraped upon the floor. “I can’t stand this, you know,” and he glanced from Purkis to his wife, who was wiping her eye upon the corner of her apron.

“Don’t go, sir, please,” exclaimed Purkis; “for I was going to say – to ask, you know – that is, if you wouldn’t mind – ”

Here he made a telegraphic signal with one arm to his wife, and in one sweep indicated “Clear away and lay the cloth.” The signal having the effect upon Mrs Purkis of making her dab down an iron and raise the saucepan lid.

“We’re very homely, Mr Pellet, sir,” she said, as she diffused a savoury odour through the little room; “but if you wouldn’t mind?”

Jared did not wish to stay, but Mrs Jared did, and she had her way, when, over a snug little supper, the pew-opening business was discussed in all its bearings, though frequently during his stay Jared was ready to get up and leave the place in consequence of the beadle’s allusions to his kindness.

It was very plain, though, that Purkis and his wife looked up to their visitors as people far above the ordinary run; and after their departure, Mr Purkis dabbed himself for five minutes, and then, bringing his hand down upon his counter with a loud spang, he exclaimed, like a monarch bestowing dignities —

"She shall have it, that she shall."

"But, Joseph," exclaimed his wife, deprecatingly, "whatever you do, don't commit yourself."

"Don't talk stuff," exclaimed Purkis, fiercely.

"But it wouldn't be stuff, Joseph, if you was to commit yourself," whimpered Mrs Purkis.

"Mrs Purkis, ma'am," said the beadle, donning imaginary robes, "Mr Pellet has asked for the post for a humble friend of his. Mr Pellet's humble friend shall have it, ma'am, or I'll know the reason why. Mr Pellet, ma'am, is our friend; and what's more, or what isn't more – I won't say as to that – Mr Pellet, ma'am, is an ornament to my church, for he's the finest organist in London."

Volume One – Chapter Seventeen. Mrs Nimmer's Successor

There was no very great difficulty in the matter. Jared Pellet, under protest, wrote a note to the Rev. John Gray, the vicar, telling him that a friend – he haggled a great deal over that word "friend" – would be glad to undertake the duties of pew-opener in the place of the defunct Mrs Nimmer; and the vicar mentioned the matter to his friend Mr Timson, churchwarden and tea-dealer, and both agreed that they would be most happy to oblige Mr Jared Pellet in the matter.

Then Mr Timson had an interview with Jared, and told him personally he would be glad to give his weight to the matter, if Jared's friend was a worthy suitable woman.

Now there came a hitch in the smoothness, for Jared went home and told his wife that that red-faced old humbug Purkis had played double; and, in fact, he had gone head-dabbing into the presence of the vicar and churchwarden to tell them he should be glad if the post lately occupied by Mrs Nimmer could be conferred upon a friend of his.

But explanations followed: the two principal candidates were found to be one and the same; and Mrs Tim Ruggles was duly appointed to a post, for whose proper filling she seemed to have been specially manufactured by Dame Nature.

She, that is to say Mrs Tim Ruggles, glided, as it were, into the correct rut upon the very first Sunday – coming to St Runwald's in a mournful-hued dress – a shot putty and soot, while a tightly-fitting cap crowned her head – a cap like a white sarcenet raised pie, all tiny bows and tuckers – none of your fly-away servant-girl style of headdress, but firmly tied beneath her chin with silken strings. Then, too, a prim-white muslin handkerchief encircled her neck, with ends pinned across, and descending to be hidden away and protected by exceedingly stiff, dark-coloured jean stays, whose presence was manifested to the ear of the world at large by divers creaking cracklings, when, by rare chance, Mrs Ruggles slightly bent her fierce body – to the eye, by a little peephole, afforded where one hook in the back of the dress had an antipathy to its kindred loop.

She might have been pew-opener for twenty years from the way in which she performed her duties, even trenching upon Mr Purkis's dominion by frowning at small boys. It was a sight to see the way in which she performed her task, pouncing upon dubious-looking strangers who stood tasting their hats just inside the doors, and, as she could tell in a moment whether or not they were disposed to be generous, placing them in comfortably cushioned seats, where such miserable sinners could not fail to be eased in their consciences. Sometimes she morally took the poor things into custody, and then, like some savage warder, shut them up in cold wooden cells – in corners where it was dark, in black places just below the galleries, in spots beneath the organ,

where they sat with a sensation as of liquid thunder being poured upon their heads, or behind pillars where they could not catch a glimpse of the reading-desk, and had to look round the corner at the pulpit. A select few she treated worse than all the rest, shutting them up in the great churchwarden's pew, where they were completely out of sight, Mr Timson monopolising all the hassocks so as to peep over the edge.

A very moral hedgehog was Mrs Ruggles, treating the congregation as if they were so many little Pines intrusted to her charge, and evidently annoyed that she was not allowed, like Mr Purkis, a cane to use *ad libitum*. Had she been in office at a ritualistic church, brawlers would have paused ere they attempted to desecrate the structure. If you went into the church, she looked at you sidewise, and calculated your value in an instant; when, if you obeyed the glance of her eye, well; if not, she held up a finger at you, as if to say, "Come here, sir!" and then – stay away if you dared.

Why! the pew doors never screaked and scrawked when she opened them. She never shut in your coat-tails, or the voluminous folds of a lady's dress; but she punished you severely if ever you attended St Runwald's without books; for she would glide along the aisle like a religious ghost, and thrust a dreadful liver-coloured, dog's-eared, S.P.C.K. prayer-book under your nose, so that you were obliged to take it, and then pay her sixpence as you went out for what you would rather not have had. For, if you had been accustomed all your life to a delicately bound diamond

edition, it was not pleasant to stand up in good society holding the sore-edged, workhouse-looking book, while you dared not thrust it out of sight, for she was sure, in that case, to bring you another, to your lasting shame and confusion. It was almost a wonder that people so served ever entered the church again; and the probabilities are that they never would have done so, had not Jared Pellet drawn them thither with his music.

The best way to meet Mrs Ruggles was to be prepared with a pocket edition of the liturgy, when, if it were your custom to stand with hands joined and resting upon the pew-edge, under the impression that you were quite at home in the service, down she would come, for a certainty, her crackling stays heralding her approach. Then the plan was to be ready for her, and, as she rigidly made a thrust at you with the most disreputable book in her collection, ward off her attack with one of Jarkins & Potto's little bijous.

The assertion cannot be authenticated, but it was said that Mrs Ruggles, soon after her appointment, went round to the bookstalls in Holywell Street, and bought up the old prayer-books out of the tea-chests, labelled, "All these at twopence;" and these brutal, loose-leaved, mildewed affairs she used to keep in a box in a corner pew ready to hand, making pounds out of them in the course of the year – a sort of private church-rate of her own.

It was almost startling to hear her, when it had grown too late for fresh comers, when the church was completely filled, and a portion of the congregation was sitting in aisle and nave upon

camp-stools and chairs fetched out of the vestry. She would join then in litany and communion, startling the clerk, and getting right before him, so that the congregation would turn and look at her, in admiration or otherwise, but without ruffling in the least the perfect calm of her demeanour.

If a douceur was given to old Purkis, he bent a little, or touched his cocked-hat, or in some way gave you to understand that he was grateful; but not so Mrs Ruggles: she seemed to demand the money of you as a right, and you paid it under protest, feeling somehow obliged to do so, although, when she took it, she seemed to ignore you and your coin at one and the same time. Some people said that she must have paid fees to physicians in her day, and so have learned something of their ways; but how she ever continued to get the sixpences and shillings into her pocket, remains one of the great unsolved mysteries, for she never bent in the slightest degree.

Mr Purkis never took to her, for he declared her to be a woman without a soul for music, since she seemed to make a point of leaving all the dust and cobwebs she could about the organ loft, neglecting it shamefully; which the beadle said was not the thing, seeing who had been the means of getting her the post.

Volume One – Chapter Eighteen. Official

"A most valuable woman, Timson," the vicar said to the churchwarden; "most suitable person. You never see her flurried when a great many people are waiting for seats."

"Never," said Mr Timson, gruffly.

The conversation took place in the vicar's snuggery, where he and his friend indulged in these unclerical comforts, pipes, gin-and-water, and cribbage.

"Very stiff and formal she is certainly," said the vicar; "but, somehow, she never seems to give offence."

"Yes, she does," said Mr Timson, gruffly; "she offends me; I don't like her. Wish Mother Nimmer was alive again."

"Pooh! nonsense! stuff! prejudice!"

"Shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo!" ejaculated Mr Timson. "I haven't a bit of prejudice in my whole body."

"I mean," said the vicar, taking not the slightest notice of the interruption, "she never seems to give offence about people's sittings; for her's is a delicate task, and one not easy to manage. I can assure you that I have not had a single complaint as yet, and they used to be constant in Mrs Nimmer's time."

"'Fraid of her," suggested Mr Timson.

"I do wish that you would talk rationally, Timson," said the

vicar.

"Well, that is rationally," said Mr Timson.

"The church fills uncommonly well now," observed the vicar, after a pause, so as to start a fresh subject; for Mr Timson was looking red and choleric, and his short hair was standing up all over his head. "The people seem to like those historical sermons. I think I shall continue them."

"I think I should," said Timson, drily; "perhaps it might be as well, at the same time, to stop some of the music, or give Mr Pellet a holiday."

"Why?" said the vicar, sharply.

"Make more room in the church," said Timson.

"There, there! I won't quarrel with you Timson," said the vicar, with some asperity; "but I can understand your allusion, though I won't notice it. But, to return to the subject, don't you think that Mrs Ruggles' salary might be a little raised?"

"No," said Mr Timson, stoutly; "I don't think anything of the kind. Why, what for, pray? when the woman has the same as poor old Mrs Nimmer, who was worth a dozen of her."

"Well, Timson," said the vicar, quietly, "if you are not disposed to discuss the matter in a liberal spirit, why it had better drop; at least, I think so."

"So do I," said the illiberal Timson; and consequently the matter did drop, with the advantage to Mrs Ruggles of making her appear an ill-used woman, much persecuted, in the vicar's eyes.

For the old gentleman most thoroughly believed in her, from her conduct being so exemplary. Always the same quiet, prim woman, ready at proper times to do her duty; to arrange hassocks at a christening, or to point out the positions for the actors at a hymeneal sacrifice. The vicar was loud in her praise, so loud, indeed, that when with his crony Timson, Mrs Ruggles grew to be quite a bone – or rather bundle of bones – of contention, over which at times they almost quarrelled, for Mr Timson, either from a spirit of opposition, or from genuine dislike, invariably took part against the woman. So near were they to quarrelling at times, that had they been people of a more secular turn, it might have been said that they quite fell out.

The vicar told Timson so more than once, though he would not believe it; for in spite of his friendly feeling and genuine respect for his nominator, the churchwarden could at times be as obstinate as the proverbial pig.

In short, there was a division in the church, for and against Mrs Ruggles, and Purkis told his wife in confidence, that he "couldn't see it at all; and if it hadn't been for Pellet – he knowed" – What, he did not say; but he shook and nodded his head a great many times, as he concluded by telling Mrs Purkis that if she had been ruled by him, Mrs Ruggles would never have had the post.

"And you'd never have had a decent bit of hot dinner o' Sundays," retorted his lady.

"She's a deceitful one, that's what she is," said Mr Purkis; "and she ain't going to meddle and interfere with my dooties; so come

now!"

"I shouldn't bemean myself to speak to her, if I was you, Joseph," said his wife.

"You might just as well have took the place, and gone comfortable to church with me, and come back with me comfortable," said Mr Purkis, ignoring his wife's last remark.

"And, as I said before, you never knowing what it was to have hot dinners on Sundays," retorted Mrs Purkis. "No, not if I know it, Joseph. We've been man and wife now turned of thirty year, and never once yet did I give you a cold Sunday-dinner. If I don't know my duty as a wife by this time it's a pity."

Mrs Purkis turned very red in the face as she spoke, and, after the fashion of her husband, shook her head and nodded it, till Mr Purkis, who, if he did not make a god of his gastric region, certainly yielded it the deference due to a monarch, owned that there was something in what she said, when her face resumed its natural hue, which was only a warm pink.

"But it would have been a deal nicer for some things," said Mr Purkis, who still hung about the subject.

"And a deal nastier for other things, Joseph," retorted his wife; "and that makes six of one and half-a-dozen of the other."

"Just so, my dear," said Mr Purkis, making his first and last attempt at a joke – "six of one in pounds, and half-a-dozen of the other in shillings – six guineas a year, and what you could have made besides, and a very nice thing too."

"And you growling and grumbling because your Sunday-

dinner was always cold," said Mrs Purkis, resorting once more to her carnal fortification.

"But I don't know, now, but what that would have been better," said the beadle, indulging in a habit which he had learned of a stout alderman and magistrate, who believed in its awe-inspiring qualities, and often tried it on small pickpockets, while Mr Purkis was so pleased with it that he always wore it with his beadle's uniform, and practised it frequently upon Ichabod Gunnis, though with so little effect that the said young gentleman only imitated him as soon as his back was turned, frowning, blowing out his cheeks, and then letting them collapse again. "I don't know, my dear," said Mr Purkis, "but what it would have been better than to have had that woman always pottering about in my church."

"And never even had the decency to call in and thank us for the pains we took," said Mrs Purkis, "or to drop in occasional for a friendly cup o' tea, and a mossle of toast, as anybody else would; or come in and sit down sociably as poor Mrs Nimmer would, and ready at any time to take up a bit o' needlework, or a stocking, and have a quiet chat."

"Well," said Mr Purkis, whose thoughts were evidently running quite as much upon Sunday-dinners as upon pew-openers, "it's of no use to grumble, for what's done can't be undone. But when Christmas comes, if she pushes herself forward so much, I'll let her know – see if I don't I'm not going to put up with so much of her interference, I can tell her."

"The more you give way, the more give you may," said Mrs Purkis, rhythmically.

"Why, she'll want to be beadle next, and clerk too," said Mr Purkis, indignantly, and growing so warm that he had to wipe inside his shirt-collar as well as dab his head; "says all the Amens now, she does, louder than the poor old gentleman – reg'lar drowns him in the litany, and makes herself that conspickyus that it's a wonder Mr Gray can't see through her, instead of taking her into favour. Not that I mind a bit – not I. Mr Timson don't like her, though; and you see if he gives her a Christmas-box, same as he used Mrs Nimmer – pound o' best black, and a quarter o' green – he always give her reg'lar."

"Ah! same as he gives us," sighed Mrs Purkis, "and as good tea as ever stood on a hob to draw."

Volume One – Chapter Nineteen. Richard's Secret

Time glided on, and the brothers Pellet did not meet. There was estrangement too between Richard Pellet and his stepson, who came up during his vacations, but only to leave home again in disgust. For the fact was, Richard Pellet looked upon him as being in the way, – a manner he had of considering all those who were not of present use to him in his designs. So Harry Clayton saw but little of Norwood.

He made calls in Duplex Street at intervals, but always in vain, for Jared remained inflexible, and received the young man in a way which chilled him, and sent him away declaiming against people's hard-heartedness. Never once was Patty visible, for she followed out the rôle she had been taught, and had in consequence many a bitter cry in secret.

Would she have liked to see Henry Clayton? That, too, she kept secret; and fate seemed to fight on Richard Pellet's side, for somehow the young people never encountered, in spite of the long hours which Harry loitered about Clerkenwell, till he knew every brass plate by heart in the neighbourhood, without counting the signboards that he read till he was weary.

The effect of all these crosses upon Harry Clayton was to quite change the young man's disposition; from being light-hearted and

cheerful, he grew stern and quiet, almost morose. He determined at last, in a fit of anger, after a call at Duplex Street and a vain application to Richard Pellet for money, that he would turn dissipated, and began at once.

His first plunge was into billiards, but he gave the game up at the end of a week. Rowing followed, and he almost lived upon the river in gaudy-coloured flannels. But that soon palled upon him, and at the end of a month a cold business-like letter from Richard Pellet, advising him curtly to take to business, for his late father's settlements would not permit of the expenses of a college life, settled the affair. The consequence was, that. Harry knit his brows, went down to Norwood, and announced his intention of staying up at Cambridge and reading for honours.

The result was a quarrel, and Richard Pellet slammed the door as he went out, bound for the city. Mrs Richard kissed her son, and said she hoped he would be a good boy and obey Mr Pellet, who was all that was wise and clever, and then Harry said good-bye, and went off with an aching heart to make a last call at Duplex Street.

It was the old story; Jared received him kindly, and shook hands when they parted, but there were no ladies visible.

Harry looked sterner, and felt sterner of purpose as he came away, and these troubles were the turning-point in the young man's career, for henceforward he seemed to cast youth and its frivolities behind, so as to be untrammelled in the firmer purposes of life.

He was wandering slowly and thoughtfully along, wondering as to what the future would bring forth. He told himself that he was certainly very fond of Patty, and though she had perhaps never since given to him a thought, yet he would be true to his intentions, and in spite of her humble position, if she proved to be as he believed she would, no difference of station should interfere.

"No," he said, half aloud; "not even if I get to be senior wrangler," – of which, by the way, there did not seem to be much probability. Then his thoughts turned to Richard Pellet, and it seemed to him that his father's affairs had somehow got into a state of strange confusion. He could get no satisfactory explanation. One thing was evident, and that was that Richard Pellet had full influence over his wife, and that nothing save recourse to law would enforce a full declaration of how matters stood.

"And I can't do that," muttered Harry. Then he began going over once more his mother's marriage, and wondered how she could have been so weak as to marry one so hard, and close, and cold.

Just then he saw a Hansom cab stop a short distance from him, out of which stepped Richard Pellet, who paid his driver, and, without seeing his stepson, strode off hastily, making his way through the gloomy streets of Pentonville.

Harry hesitated for a while, feeling half tempted to follow, but he turned off the next moment to seek his hotel.

Meanwhile Richard Pellet hurried on, his way lying through streets that seemed to be the favourite playgrounds of the roaming children of the neighbourhood. And here he walked as if he felt a peculiar spite against every child he passed. He kicked this one's top half across the road; he purposely obliterated the chalked-out hopscotch marks with his feet; nearly knocked down a boy carrying a shawl-swathed infant, – not that there was much force needed, for the weight of the shawl-swathed nearly overbalanced its porter; and he ended by treading upon a thin girl's toes.

Another turn or two, and he was in a pleasant street rejoicing in the name of Borton, at whose end there was a pleasing glimpse to be obtained of the great jail with its blank walls, and the low hum of Tullochgorum Road murmured on the ear.

Richard stopped at a dingy sleepy-looking house, with its blinds down, and knocked a slinking kind of double knock, as if afraid of its being heard by any one outside the house. It was a double knock certainly, but it had a mean degraded sound about it, beside which a poor man's single thump would have sounded massive and grand.

After waiting for a reasonable space he knocked a second time, when, after fidgeting about upon the door-step, glancing up and down the street, and acting after the fashion of a man troubled with the impression that every one is watching him, he was relieved by the door being opened a very little way, and a sour-looking woman confronting him.

Upon seeing who was her visitor, the woman admitted him to stand for a minute or two upon the shabby worn oil-cloth of the badly-lighted passage before ushering him into a damp earthy-smelling parlour, over whose windows were drawn Venetian blinds of a faded sickly green, the bar-like laths giving a prison aspect to the place.

"Send her down?" said the woman, shortly, as she removed a handkerchief from her face and looked toothache.

"Yes," was the curt gruff reply; but the woman held her handkerchief to the aching tooth and remained waiting, when Richard Pellet drew out his pocket-book and passed a piece of crisp paper to the woman.

The paper was taken, carefully examined, and then seemed to have an anodyne effect upon the toothache of its recipient, who folded it carefully small and then tied it in a knot in one corner of the dingy pocket-handkerchief, after the fashion of elderly ladies from the country who ride in omnibuses, and then seek in such corners for the small coin wherewith to pay the fare. In this case, though, the tying-up was followed by the deposit of the handkerchief in its owner's bosom, the act been accompanied by a grim nod which said plainly enough, "that's safe."

The woman left the room; there was the sound of the key being drawn from the front door, pattering of steps on the oil-cloth, and then she re-appeared.

"'Taint my fault, you know," she said, in a hoarse voice; "it's him – he made me write. I'd keep her to the end, but he says

that we won't have it any more. It's a fool's trick, for she never leaves her room."

"It's plain enough," said Richard, contemptuously, "you want more money."

The woman smiled grimly. "He says he won't have it any more," was all she said.

"What reason does he give?" said Richard, sharply.

"Oh!" said the woman, "he says that it has got about that we keep a mad woman in the house without having a license; and the neighbours talk, and there will be a summons about it some time or another. He hates to go out, he says – just as if that matters. Don't you think it might be managed after all? I don't want to part with her."

"Yes – no," said Richard Pellet, correcting himself. "You've thrown up a good thing, and now I shall make another arrangement."

"Well," said the woman, in surly tones, "I was obliged to write – he made me. But you've no call to complain; she's been here now best part of nine years, and always well taken care of, and at a lower rate than you would have paid at a private asylum. You ought to have let me have the child as well. No one could have kept her closer."

"What?" said Richard, harshly.

"Well, that was only once; and I took precious good care that she did not play me such a trick a second time. She wasn't away long, though," said the woman, laughing.

"There! send her down," said Richard Pellet, impatiently.

"I don't mind telling you, now," said the woman, not heeding the remark, "she's very little trouble; sits and works all day long without speaking."

"Humph!" ejaculated Richard Pellet; "now that there's no more money to be made by contrary statements, you can be honest."

"Well," said the woman, "other people may find out things for themselves. Nobody taught me."

Then she left the room.

A few minutes elapsed, and then a pale, dark-haired woman, with a pitiful, almost imploring aspect, entered the room, clasped her hands tightly together, and stood gazing in Richard's Pellet's face.

"I'm going to take you away from here, Ellen," he said.

For a few moments the pale face lit up as with some show of animation; the woman exclaimed – "To see my child, Richard?"

"I'm going to take you away from here," he replied, coldly; "so be ready to-morrow."

The light faded from the countenance of the woman in an instant, to leave it dull and inanimate. She pressed her hand for an instant upon her side, and winced as if a pain had shot through her. Then slowly drawing a scrap of needlework from her pocket, she began to sew hastily.

"I have made arrangements for you to stay at an institution where you will be well cared for," he continued; "that is, provided

that you behave well."

The faint shadow of a sad smile crossed the pale face as the woman glanced at him for a moment, and then sighed and looked down.

"Do you hear what I say?" said Richard, roughly.

"Yes, Richard," she said, quietly, and as if quite resigned to her fate; "I never do anything that you would not wish, only when – when – when my head gets hot and strange. I am quite ready, but – "

"Well?" said the great city man.

"You will let me see my little one before I go, Richard? I won't let my head get hot. You will not mind that. I will do all that you wish. But why not let us be together? She is not mad; but that would not matter. Let me have her, and go away from here. She is so little, I could carry her; and we would never trouble you again. Indeed, indeed – never, never again!"

If he could only have placed faith in those words, what a burden Richard Pellet would have felt to be off his shoulders! But no; he dared not trust her; and in the few moments while she stood with her wild strange eyes gazing appealingly in his face, he saw her coming to his office for help, then down to Norwood, declaring that she was his wedded wife, and trouble, exposure, perhaps punishment, to follow, because, he told himself, he had declined to let this poor helpless maniac stand in the way of his advancement.

Richard Pellet's face grew darker as he turned to leave the

room.

"But you will let me see her once, Richard – only once before I go? Think how obedient I have been, how I have attended always to your words – always. I know what you mean to do – to shut me up in a dreadful madhouse, and all because – because my poor head grows so hot. It was not so once, Richard."

She dropped her work upon the floor, and elapsed her hands as she stood before him.

"Only once, Richard," she exclaimed again; "only once, for ever so short a time," and the voice grew more and more plaintive and appealing – the tones seeming to ring prophetically in Richard Pellet's ears, so that he found himself thinking – "Suppose those words haunt me at my deathbed!"

He started the next moment.

"Be quiet," he exclaimed, harshly, as he might have said "Down!" to a dog; when, rightly interpreting his words, the woman uttered a low wail, letting herself sink upon the floor, as she covered her face with her hands, and convulsively sobbed. But the trembling hands fell again as she shook her head with the action of one throwing back thick masses of curling hair, and looking sharply up, she listened, for the sound of a bell fell upon her ear. The cause was plain enough, for Richard Pellet stood before her with the rope in his hand.

Then she slowly rose, sighing as she closed her eyes, and stood motionless until the woman of the house came into the room and laid her talon-like hand upon her shoulder. But though the

prisoner shivered, she did not move from her place; she only opened her eyes and gazed once more imploringly at Richard, who avoided her look, and, walking to the window, peered through the bar-like blinds.

"Ellen!" said the woman, in a harsh voice, which seemed to grate through the room, and then unresistingly a prisoner, for the sake of Richard Pellet's prosperity, she followed her gaoler from the room, Richard Pellet waiting with knitted brows till the woman came back.

A long and somewhat angry conversation ensued, in which Richard Pellet tried very hard to make out whether the woman he had employed for so many years as his wife's attendant was in earnest concerning the written desire to give up the charge, or whether it was merely a bit of business-fencing to obtain a higher rate of payment. He left at last, boasting of the ease with which he could make fresh arrangements for "Ellen Herrisey's" reception. "But I will not take any further steps till I hear from you again," he said, while the woman watched him as he left the room with a strange meaning smile.

"Another twenty pounds a year will do it," said Richard, as he walked away. "He won't let her give up the money."

"You're like the ostrich we read about," muttered the woman, as she watched her visitor down the street. "Do you think I don't know you're married again, you brute? Ellen Herrisey, indeed! It shall be fifty pounds a year more, or I'll know the reason why!"

Volume One – Chapter Twenty. Startling

Mr Richard Pellet was back at Norwood Station at about the same time as his stepson reached the terminus at Shoreditch, where he caught the express, and ran back to Cambridge, to find a letter which made considerable alterations in his arrangements, of which more after a while. As for Richard Pellet, he had all the cares upon him that night of a great dinner-party, for Mrs Richard, in happy ignorance of all that might work to her mortification, had, in obedience to Richard's commands, issued her cards to a select circle of city magnates, of course including their wives and daughters – men who matched well with Richard Pellet, some of them worth a plum – golden drop, no doubt.

The stout butler and the men in coach-lace were hard-worked that evening, for the best dinner-service was in use, the choice plate, too, had been taken out of green baize bags, from green baize-lined boxes; the three extra dark-hued leaves had been fitted into the dining-table; the large epergne was filled with flowers and waxlights. Bokes the butler had turned eighteen damask dinner-napkins into as many cocked-hats, all crimp, crease, and pucker; prepared his salad – a point which he never yielded – and decanted his wines. Two men in white had been down all day from Gunter's, driving cook and kitchenmaid out

of their senses, as they declared again and again that there was nothing in the kitchen fit for use, and that it was quite impossible for a decent dinner to be prepared. They vowed that the great prize kitchener was a sham; the patent hot-plate good for nothing; the charcoal stove and warm cupboard, abominations both; stew-pans, saucepans, and kitchen fittings generally, a set of rubbish; and ended by asking how they were to be expected to work without stock. There would have been no dinner if Mrs Richard, upon hearing the twentieth complaint, had not taken the butler into her counsel, and urged him to allay the disorder. The consequence was that Mr Bokes went into his pantry, and from thence into his kitchen, which was hotter, morally, than ever. Then he mysteriously signalled with his thumb to the two men in white, and shortly after installed them in a couple of chairs in the cool shades of the pantry.

As if performing some mysterious ceremony, Mr Bokes made the cork of a port-wine bottle "skreel" as he tortured it by forcing in a screw, and then brought it forth with a loud "fop," holding it out, wet and blood-stained – grape – for the senior Gunterian to sniff at, and afterwards to the lieutenant, when the following solemn dialogue took place: —

"Twenty!" whispered Mr Bokes, solemnly.

"Twenty!" exclaimed the Gunterians, in duet.

"Twenty!" repeated Mr Bokes, with additional solemnity; and then he added, "Five bin."

Speech ceased for a few moments, while Mr Bokes armed his

guests with large claret-glasses, afterwards tenderly pouring forth the deep-hued generous mixture.

"Seeing as you're both gentlemen," said Mr Bokes, confidentially, "as goes into the best of society, I thought I should like to hear your opinions."

"But you'll join us?" said Gunter One to the speaker.

"Well, raylly, gentlemen," hesitated Mr Bokes.

Gunter One set down his glass and pursed up his mouth, looking at Gunter Two, who also set down his untasted glass, folded his arms, and looked fiercely at the butler.

"Well, raylly, gentlemen," said Mr Bokes, "if that's it, I suppose I must;" and helping himself to a glass, the three took wine together, after the most approved fashion, but perhaps with an additional dignity.

Gunter One thought it a tolerably fruity wine.

Gunter Two considered that it wanted more age.

"Well, I don't know," said Gunter One; "for a light-bodied tawny wine, it's fairish."

"I think I'll take another glass," Mr Bokes, said Gunter Two, Gunter One following his example; and the butler filled their glasses, not forgetting his own; after which there was a discussion upon crust, and bees-wing, and vine-disease, when Mr Bokes dropt a hint about the finest glass of Madeira to be had in or out of London being likely to be on the way when the dinner was over.

The conversation was stopped by the ringing of a bell, and as

James, footman, and Thomas, under-butler, were busy over other matters, Mr Bokes went to respond to the summons.

Five minutes had elapsed before the butler returned, in time to find the bottle perfectly empty, and the Gunters smacking their lips over the last drops in their glasses; when, no more being forthcoming, the gentlemen in white returned to the kitchen, sufficiently good-humoured for Number One to smile affably upon the cook, and Number Two to address the kitchenmaid as "My dear," in asking for a wooden spoon.

The full resources of the Norwood establishment were brought out that night, and Jared Pellet of Duplex Street would have looked less dreamy, and rubbed his eyes, as he turned from the duet he was having with Monsieur Canau, with Janet, little Pine, and Patty for audience, could he have seen the dinner served in a dining-room that sparkled with candles, plate, and glass. Even the most ill-disposed of the guests acknowledged the repast to be a success, that is, as far as appearances went. There was only one failure – the smash made by one of the men of a dish of meringues, leaving a blank place upon the table. Wines, ices, attendance, all were good. There could not be a doubt of Mr Richard Pellet's wealth, nor of the high position he occupied, not only in the city, but in the pleasant suburban district of Norwood.

The ladies had risen, and, amidst a pleasant rustling of silks, swept up-stairs; the gentlemen had drawn their chairs nearer together for the convenient passage of port-decanter and claret-jug, when Mr Bokes, the Norwood Pharaoh's chief butler,

whispered to his master that he was wanted.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, купив полную легальную версию на ЛитРес.

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