A DAY'S PLEASURE

WILLIAM D. HOWELLS

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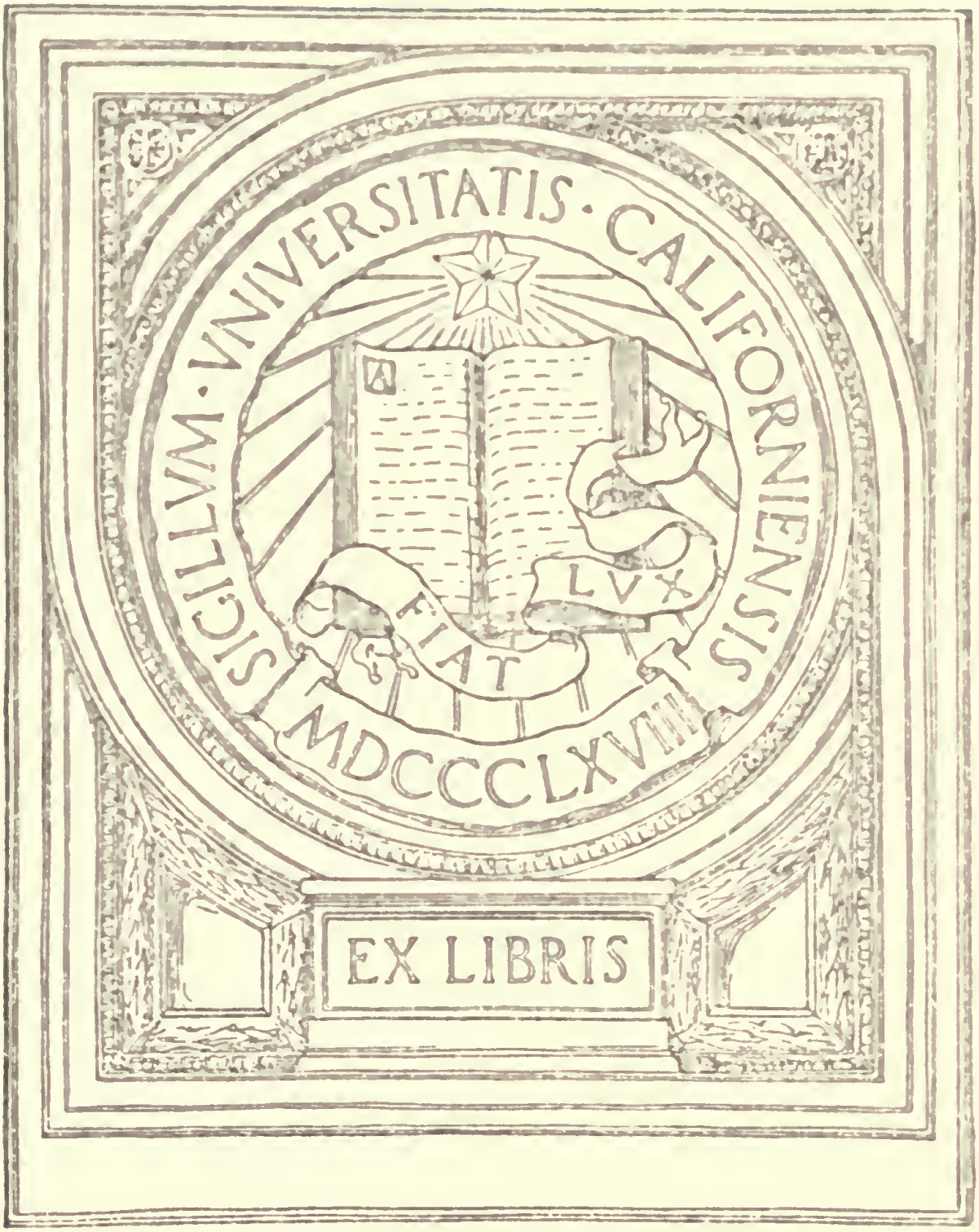
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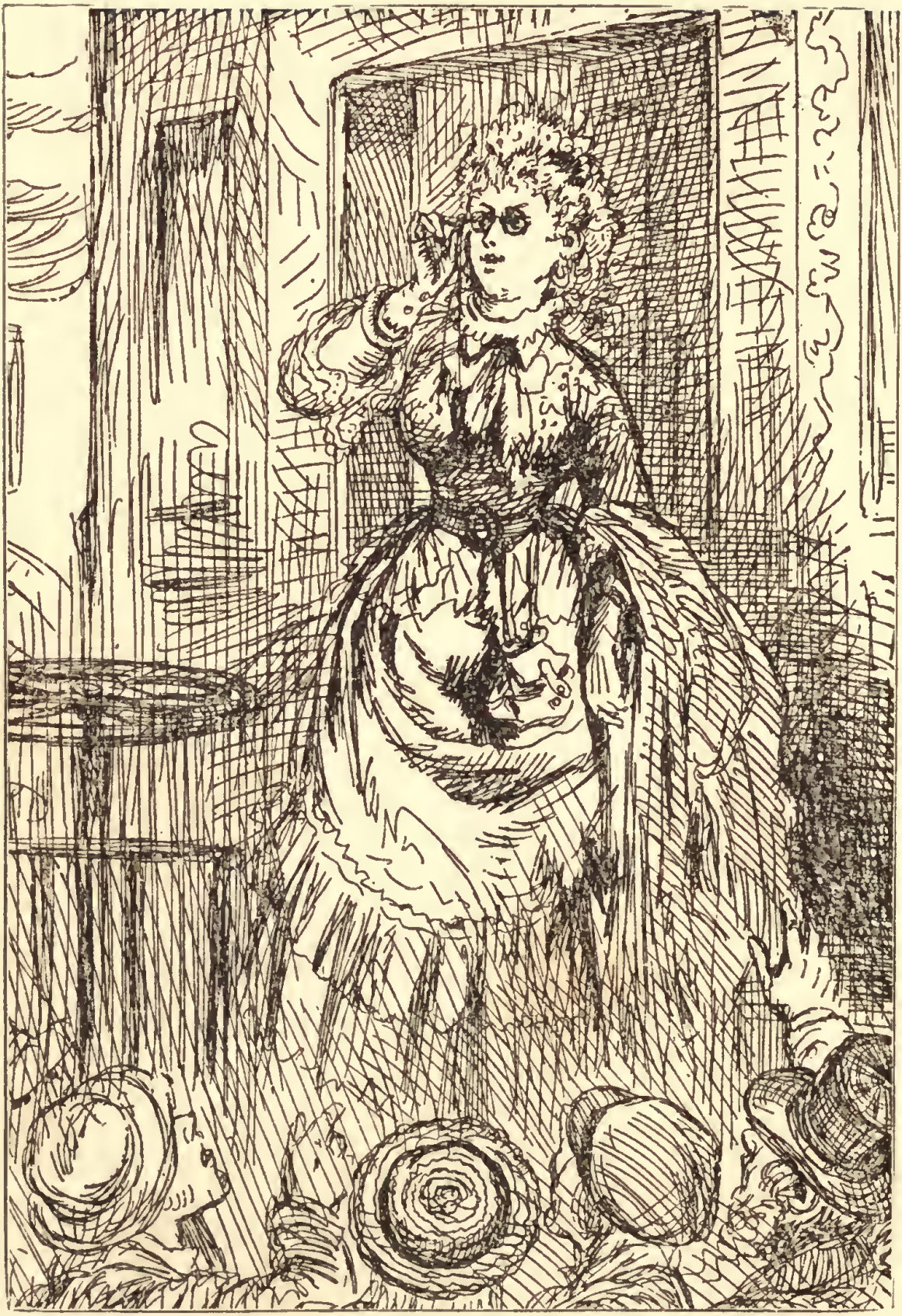


"That sweet young blonde, who arrives by most trains."

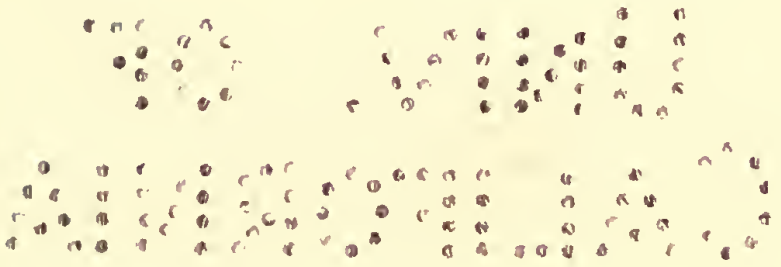
A Day's Pleasure.

BY

WILLIAM D. HOWELLS.

Illustrated.

BOSTON:
JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY,
Late Ticknor & Fields, and Fields, Osgood, & Co.
1876.



University Press: Welch, Bigelow, & Co.,
Cambridge.

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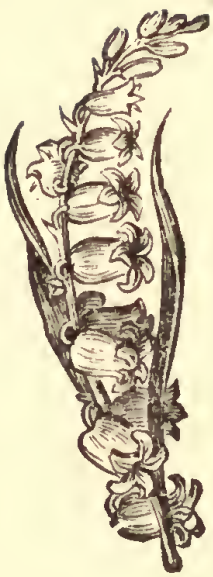
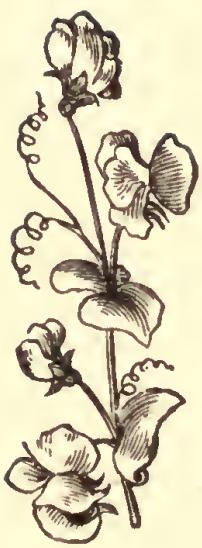
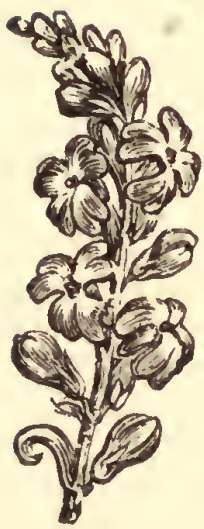


ILLUSTRATIONS.



I.

THE MORNING.



I.

THE MORNING.

THEY were not a large family, and their pursuits and habits were very simple; yet the summer was lapsing toward the first pathos of autumn before they found themselves all in such case as to be able to take the day's pleasure they had planned so long. They had agreed often and often that nothing could be more charming than an excursion down the Harbor, either to Gloucester, or to Nahant, or to Nantasket Beach, or to Hull and Hingham, or to any point within the fatal bound beyond which is seasickness. They had studied the steamboat advertisements, day after day, for a long time, without making up their minds which of these charming excursions would be the most delightful; and when they had at last

fixed upon one and chosen some day for it, that day was sure to be heralded by a long train of obstacles, or it dawned upon weather that was simply impossible. Besides, in the suburbs, you are apt to sleep late, unless the solitary ice-wagon of the neighborhood makes a very uncommon rumbling in going by; and I believe that the excursion was several times postponed by the tardy return of the pleasurers from dreamland, which, after all, is not the worst resort, or the least interesting — or profitable, for the matter of that. But at last the great day came, — a blameless Thursday alike removed from the cares of washing and ironing days, and from the fatigues with which every week closes. One of the family chose deliberately to stay at home; but the severest scrutiny could not detect a hindrance in the health or circumstances of any of the rest, and the weather was delicious. Everything, in fact, was so fair and so full of promise, that they could almost fancy a calamity of some sort hanging over its perfection, and possibly bred of it; for I suppose that we never have anything made perfectly easy for us without a certain reluctance and foreboding. That morning they all got up so early that they had time to waste

over breakfast before taking the 7.30 train for Boston; and they naturally wasted so much of it that they reached the station only in season for the 8.00. But there is a difference between reaching the station and quietly taking the cars, especially if one of your company has been left at home, hoping to cut across and take the cars at a station which they reach some minutes later, and you, the head of the party, are obliged, at a loss of breath and personal comfort and dignity, to run down to that station and see that the belated member has arrived there, and then hurry back to your own and embody the rest, with their accompanying hand-bags and wraps and sun-umbrellas, into some compact shape for removal into the cars, during the very scant minute that the train stops at Charlesbridge. Then when you are all aboard, and the tardy member has been duly taken up at the next station, and you would be glad to spend the time in looking about on the familiar variety of life which every car presents in every train on every road in this vast American world, you are oppressed and distracted by the cares which must attend the pleasure-seeker, and which the more thickly beset him the more deeply he plunges into enjoyment.

I can learn very little from the note-book of the friend whose adventures I am relating in regard to the scenery of Somerville, and the region generally through which the railroad passes between Charlesbridge and Boston; but so much knowledge of it may be safely assumed on the part of the reader as to relieve me of the grave responsibility of describing it. Still, I may say that it is not unpicturesque, and that I have a pleasure, which I hope the reader shares, in anything like salt meadows and all spaces subject to the tide, whether flooded by it or left bare with their saturated grasses by its going down. I think, also, there is something fine in the many-roofed, many-chimneyed highlands of Chelsea (if it is Chelsea), as you draw near the railroad bridge, and there is a pretty stone church on a hillside there which has the good fortune, so rare with modern architecture and so common with the old, of seeming a natural outgrowth of the spot where it stands, and which is as purely an object of æsthetic interest to me, who know nothing of its sect or doctrine, as any church in a picture could be; and there is, also, the Marine Hospital on the heights (if it is the Marine Hospital), from which I hope the inmates can

behold the ocean, and exult in whatever misery keeps them ashore.

But let me not so hasten over this part of my friend's journey as to omit all mention of the amphibious Irish houses which stand about on the low lands along the railroad-sides, and which you half expect to see plunge into the tidal mud of the neighborhood, with a series of hoarse croaks, as the train approaches. Perhaps twenty-four trains pass those houses every twenty-four hours, and it is a wonder that the inhabitants keep their interest in them, or have leisure to bestow upon any of them. Yet, as you dash along so bravely, you can see that you arrest the occupations of all these villagers as by a kind of enchantment; the children pause and turn their heads toward you from their mud-pies (to the production of which there is literally no limit in that region); the matron rests one parboiled hand on her hip, letting the other still linger listlessly upon the washboard, while she lifts her eyes from the suds to look at you; the boys, who all summer long are forever just going into the water or just coming out of it, cease their buttoning or unbuttoning; the baby, which has been run after and caught and suitably posed, turns its an-

guished eyes upon you, where also falls the mother's gaze, while her descending palm is arrested in mid-air. I forbear to comment upon the surprising populousness of these villages, where, in obedience to all the laws of health, the inhabitants ought to be wasting miserably away, but where they flourish in spite of them. Even Accident here seems to be robbed of half her malevolence; and that baby (who will presently be chastised with terrific uproar) passes an infancy of intrepid enjoyment amidst the local perils, and is no more affected by the engines and the cars than by so many fretful hens with their attendant broods of chickens.

When sometimes I long for the excitement and variety of travel, which, for no merit of mine, I knew in other days, I reproach myself, and silence all my repinings with some such question as, Where could you find more variety or greater excitement than abounds in and near the Fitchburg Depot when a train arrives? And to tell the truth, there is something very inspiring in the fine eagerness with which all the passengers rise as soon as the locomotive begins to slow, and huddle forward to the door, in their impatience to get out; while the sup-

pressed vehemence of the hackmen is also thrilling in its way, not to mention the instant clamor of the baggage-men as they read and repeat the numbers of the checks in strident tones. It would be ever so interesting to depict all these people, but it would require volumes for the work, and I reluctantly let them all pass out without a word,— all but that sweet young blonde who arrives by most trains, and who, putting up her eye-glass with a ravishing air, bewitchingly peers round among the bearded faces, with little tender looks of hope and trepidation, for the face which she wants, and which presently bursts through the circle of strange visages. The owner of the face then hurries forward to meet that sweet blonde, who gives him a little drooping hand as if it were a delicate flower she laid in his; there is a brief mutual hesitation long enough merely for an electrical thrill to run from heart to heart through the clasping hands, and then he stoops toward her, and distractingly kisses her. And I say that there is no law of conscience or propriety worthy the name of law — barbarity, absurdity, call it rather — to prevent any one from availing himself of that providential near-sightedness, and beatifying

himself upon those lips, — nothing to prevent it but that young fellow, whom one might not, of course, care to provoke.

Among the people who now rush forward and heap themselves into the two horse-cars and one omnibus, placed before the depot by a wise forethought for the public comfort to accommodate the train-load of two hundred passengers, I always note a type that is both pleasing and interesting to me. It is a lady just passing middle life; from her kindly eyes the envious crow, whose footprints are just traceable at their corners, has not yet drunk the brightness, but she looks just a thought sadly, if very serenely, from them. I know nothing in the world of her; I may have seen her twice or a hundred times, but I must always be making bits of romances about her. That is she in faultless gray, with the neat leather bag in her lap, and a bouquet of the first autumnal blooms perched in her shapely hands, which are prettily yet substantially gloved in some sort of gauntlets. She can be easy and dignified, my dear middle-aged heroine, even in one of our horse-cars, where people are for the most part packed like cattle in a pen. She shows no trace of dust or fatigue

from the thirty or forty miles which I choose to fancy she has ridden from the handsome elm-shaded New England town of five or ten thousand people, where I choose to think she lives. From a vague horticultural association with those gauntlets, as well as from the autumnal blooms, I take it she loves flowers, and gardens a good deal with her own hands, and keeps house-plants in the winter, and of course a canary. Her dress, neither rich nor vulgar, makes me believe her fortunes modest and not recent; her gentle face has just so much intellectual character as it is good to see in a woman's face; I suspect that she reads pretty regularly the new poems and histories, and I know that she is the life and soul of the local book-club. Is she married, or widowed, or one of the superfluous forty thousand? That is what I never can tell. But I think that most probably she is married, and that her husband is very much in business, and does not share so much as he respects her tastes. I have no particular reason for thinking that she has no children now, and that the sorrow for the one she lost so long ago has become only a pensive silence, which, however, a long summer twilight can yet deepen to tears. . . . .

Upon my word! Am I then one to give way to this sort of thing? Madam, I ask pardon. I have no right to be sentimentalizing you. Yet your face is one to make people dream kind things of you, and I cannot keep my reveries away from it.

But in the mean time I neglect the momentous history which I have proposed to write, and leave my day's pleasurers to fade into the background of a fantastic portrait. The truth is, I cannot look without pain upon the discomforts which they suffer at this stage of their joyous enterprise. At the best, the portables of such a party are apt to be grievous embarrassments: a package of shawls and parasols and umbrellas and india-rubbers, however neatly made up at first, quickly degenerates into a shapeless mass, which has finally to be carried with as great tenderness as an ailing child; and the lunch is pretty sure to overflow the hand-bags and to eddy about you in paper parcels; while the bottle of claret, that bulges the side of one of the bags, and

"That will show itself without,"

defying your attempts to look as if it were cold tea, gives a crushing touch of disreputability

to the whole affair. Add to this the fact that but half the party have seats, and that the others have to sway and totter about the car in that sudden contact with all varieties of fellow-men, to which we are accustomed in the cars, and you must allow that these poor merry-makers have reasons enough to rejoice when this part of their day's pleasure is over. They are so plainly bent upon a sail down the Harbor, that before they leave the car they become objects of public interest, and are at last made to give some account of themselves.

"Going for a sail, I presume?" says a person hitherto in conversation with the conductor. "Well, I would n't mind a sail myself to-day."

"Yes," answers the head of the party, "going to Gloucester."

"Guess not," says, very coldly and decidedly, one of the passengers, who is reading that morning's "Advertiser"; and when the subject of this surmise looks at him for explanations, he adds, "The City Council has chartered the boat for to-day."

Upon this the excursionists fall into great dismay and bitterness, and upbraid the City Council, and wonder why last night's "Tran-

script" said nothing about its oppressive action, and generally bewail their fate. But at last they resolve to go somewhere, and, being set down, they make up their warring minds upon Nahant, for the Nahant boat leaves the wharf nearest them; and so they hurry away to India Wharf, amidst barrels and bales and boxes and hacks and trucks, with interminable string-teams passing before them at every crossing.

"At any rate," says the leader of the expedition, "we shall see the Gardens of Maolis, — those enchanted gardens which have fairly been advertised into my dreams, and where I 've been told," he continues, with an effort to make the prospect an attractive one, yet not without a sense of the meagreness of the materials, "they have a grotto and a wooden bull."

Of course, there is no reason in nature why a wooden bull should be more pleasing than a flesh-and-blood bull, but it seems to encourage the company, and they set off again with renewed speed, and at last reach India Wharf in time to see the Nahant steamer packed full of excursionists, with a crowd of people still waiting to go aboard. It does not look in-

viting, and they hesitate. In a minute or two their spirits sink so low that if they should see the wooden bull step out of a grotto on the deck of the steamer, the spectacle could not revive them. At that instant they think, with a surprising singleness, of Nantasket Beach, and the bright colors in which the Gardens of Maolis but now appeared fade away, and they seem to see themselves sauntering along the beautiful shore, while the white-crested breakers crash upon the sand, and run up

"In tender-curving lines of creamy spray,"

quite to the feet of that lotus-eating party.

"Nahant is all rocks," says the leader to Aunt Melissa, who hears him with a sweet and tranquil patience, and who would enjoy or suffer anything with the same expression; "and as you 've never yet seen the open sea, it 's fortunate that we go to Nantasket, for, of course, a beach is more characteristic. But now the object is to get there. The boat will be starting in a few moments, and I doubt whether we can walk it. How far is it," he asks, turning toward a respectable-looking man, "to Liverpool Wharf?"

"Well, it 's consid'able ways," says the man, smiling.

"Then we must take a hack," says the pleasurer to his party. "Come on."

"I 've got a hack," observes the man, in a casual way, as if the fact might possibly interest.

"O, you have, have you? Well, then, put us into it, and drive to Liverpool Wharf; and hurry."

Either the distance was less than the hackman fancied, or else he drove thither with unheard-of speed, for two minutes later he set them down on Liverpool Wharf. But swiftly as they had come the steamer had been even more prompt, and she now turned toward them a beautiful wake, as she pushed farther and farther out into the harbor.

The hackman took his two dollars for his four passengers, and was rapidly mounting his box, — probably to avoid idle reproaches. "Wait!" said the chief pleasurer. Then, "When does the next boat leave?" he asked of the agent, who had emerged with a compassionate face from the waiting-rooms on the wharf.

"At half past two."

"And it 's now five minutes past nine," moaned the merrymakers.

"Why, I'll tell you what you can do," said the agent; "you can go to Hingham by the Old Colony cars, and so come back by the Hull and Hingham boat."

"That's it! chorused his listeners, "we'll go"; and "Now," said their spokesman to the driver, "I dare say you didn't know that Liverpool Wharf was so near; but I don't think you've earned your money, and you ought to take us on to the Old Colony Depot for half-fares at the most."

The driver looked pained, as if some small tatters and shreds of conscience were flapping uncomfortably about his otherwise dismantled spirit. Then he seemed to think of his wife and family, for he put on the air of a man who had already made great sacrifices, and "I couldn't, really, I couldn't afford it," said he; and as the victims turned from him in disgust, he chirruped to his horses and drove off.

"Well," said the pleasurers, "we won't give it up. We will have our day's pleasure after all. But what *can* we do to kill five hours and a half? It's miles away from everything, and, besides, there's nothing even if we were there." At this image of their remoteness and the inherent desolation of Bos-

ton they could not suppress some sighs, and in the mean time Aunt Melissa stepped into the waiting-room, which opened on the farther side upon the water, and sat contentedly down on one of the benches; the rest, from sheer vacuity and irresolution, followed, and thus, without debate, it was settled that they should wait there till the boat left. The agent, who was a kind man, did what he could to alleviate the situation: he gave them each the advertisement of his line of boats, neatly printed upon a card, and then he went away.

All this prospect of waiting would do well enough for the ladies of the party, but there is an impatience in the masculine fibre which does not brook the notion of such prolonged repose; and the leader of the excursion presently pretended an important errand up town, — nothing less, in fact, than to buy a tumbler out of which to drink their claret on the beach. A holiday is never like any other day to the man who takes it, and a festive halo seemed to enwrap the excursionist as he pushed on through the busy streets in the cool shadow of the vast granite palaces wherein the genius of business loves to house itself in this money-making land, and inhaled the odors of great

heaps of leather and spices and dry goods as he passed the open doorways, — odors that mixed pleasantly with the smell of the freshly watered streets. When he stepped into a crockery store to make his purchase a sense of pleasure-taking did not fail him, and he fell naturally into talk with the clerk about the weather and such pastoral topics. Even when he reached the establishment where his own business days were passed some glamour seemed to be cast upon familiar objects. To the disenchanted eye all things were as they were on all other dullish days of summer, even to the accustomed bore leaning up against his favorite desk and transfixing his habitual victim with his usual theme. Yet to the gaze of this pleasure-taker all was subtly changed, and he shook hands right and left as he entered, to the marked surprise of the objects of his effusion. He had merely come to get some newspapers to help pass away the long moments on the wharf, and when he had found these, he hurried back thither to hear what had happened during his absence.

It seemed that there had hardly ever been such an eventful period in the lives of the family before, and he listened to a minute account

of it from Cousin Lucy. "You know, Frank," says she, "that Sallie's one idea in life is to keep the baby from getting the whooping-cough, and I declare that these premises have done nothing but re-echo with the most dolorous whoops ever since you've been gone, so that at times, in my fear that Sallie would think I'd been careless about the boy, I've been ready to throw myself into the water, and nothing's prevented me but the doubt whether it would n't be better to throw in the whoopers instead."

At this moment a pale little girl, with a face wan and sad through all its dirt, came and stood in the doorway nearest the baby, and in another instant she had burst into a whoop so terrific that, if she had meant to have his scalp next it could not have been more dreadful. Then she subsided into a deep and pathetic quiet, with that air peculiar to the victims of her disorder of having done nothing noticeable. But her outburst had set at work the mysterious machinery of half a dozen other whooping-coughers lurking about the building, and all unseen they wound themselves up with appalling rapidity, and in the utter silence which followed left one to think they had died at the climax.

"Why, it's a perfect whooping-cough factory, this place," cries Cousin Lucy in a desperation. "Go away, do, please, from the baby, you poor little dreadful object you," she continues, turning upon the only visible operative in the establishment. "Here, take this"; and she bribes her with a bit of sponge-cake, on which the child runs lightly off along the edge of the wharf. "That's been another of their projects for driving me wild," says Cousin Lucy, — "trying to take their own lives in a hundred ways before my face and eyes. Why *will* their mothers let them come here to play?"

Really, they were very melancholy little figures, and might have gone near to make one sad, even if they had not been constantly imperilling their lives. Thanks to its being summer-time, it did not much matter about the scantiness of their clothing, but their squalor was depressing, it seemed, even to themselves, for they were a mournful-looking set of children, and in their dangerous sports trifled silently and almost gloomily with death. There were none of them above eight or nine years of age, and most of them had the care of smaller brothers, or even babes in arms, whom they were thus early inuring to the perils of

the situation. The boys were dressed in pantaloons and shirts which no excess of rolling up in the legs and arms could make small enough, and the incorrigible too-bigness of which rendered the favorite amusements still more hazardous from their liability to trip and entangle the wearers. The little girls had on each a solitary garment, which hung about her gaunt person with antique severity of outline; while the babies were multitudinously swathed in whatever fragments of dress could be tied or pinned or plastered on. Their faces were strikingly and almost ingeniously dirty, and their distractions among the coal-heaps and cord-wood constantly added to the variety and advantage of these effects.

"Why do their mothers let them come here?" muses Frank aloud. "Why, because it 's so safe, Cousin Lucy. At home, you know, they 'd have to be playing upon the sills of fourth-floor windows, and here they 're out of the way and can't hurt themselves. Why, Cousin Lucy, this is their park, — their Public Garden, their Bois de Boulogne, their Cascine. And look at their gloomy little faces! Are n't they taking their pleasure in the spirit of the very highest fashion? I was

at Newport last summer, and saw the famous driving on the Avenue in those pony phaetons, dog-carts, and tubs, and three-story carriages with a pair of footmen perching like storks upon each gable, and I assure you that all those ornate and costly phantasms (it seems to me now like a sad, sweet vision) had just the expression of these poor children. We 're taking a day's pleasure ourselves, cousin, but nobody would know it from our looks. And has nothing but whooping-cough happened since I 've been gone?"

"Yes, we seem to be so cut off from every-day associations that I 've imagined myself a sort of tourist, and I 've been to that Catholic church over yonder, in hopes of seeing the Murillos and Raphaels; but I found it locked up, and so I trudged back without a sight of the masterpieces. But what 's the reason that all the shops hereabouts have nothing but luxuries for sale? The windows are perfect tropics of oranges, and lemons, and belated bananas, and tobacco, and peanuts."

"Well, the poor really seem to use more of those luxuries than anybody else. I don't blame them. I should n't care for the neces-saries of life myself, if I found them so hard to get."

"When I came back here," says Cousin Lucy, without heeding these flippant and heartless words, "I found an old gentleman who has something to do with the boats, and he sat down, as if it were a part of his business, and told me nearly the whole history of his life. Is n't it nice of them, keeping an Autobiographer? It makes the time pass so swiftly when you 're waiting. This old gentleman was born — who 'd ever think it? — up there in Pearl Street, where those pitiless big granite stores are now; and, I don't know why, but the idea of any human baby being born in Pearl Street seemed to me one of the saddest things I 'd ever heard of."

Here Cousin Lucy went to the rescue of the nurse and the baby, who had got into one of their periodical difficulties, and her interlocutor turned to Aunt Melissa.

"I think, Franklin," says Aunt Melissa, "that it was wrong to let that nurse come and bring the baby."

"Yes, I know, Aunty, you have those old-established ideas, and they 're very right," answers her nephew; "but just consider how much she enjoys it, and how vastly the baby adds to the pleasure of this charming excursion!"

Aunt Melissa made no reply, but sat looking thoughtfully out upon the bay. "I presume you think the excursion is a failure," she said, after a while; "but I've been enjoying every minute of the time here. Of course, I've never seen the open sea, and I don't know about it, but I feel here just as if I were spending a day at the seaside."

"Well," said her nephew, "I should n't call this exactly a watering-place. It lacks the splendor and gayety of Newport, in a certain degree, and it has n't the illustrious seclusion of Nahant. The surf is n't very fine, nor the beach particularly adapted to bathing; and yet, I must confess, the outlook from here is as lovely as anything one need have."

And, to tell the truth, it was very pretty and interesting. The landward environment was as commonplace and mean as it could be: a yardful of dismal sheds for coal and lumber, and shanties for offices, with each office its safe and its desk, its whittled arm-chair and its spittoon, its fly that shooed not, but buzzed desperately against the grimy pane, which, if it had really had that boasted microscopic eye, it never would have mistaken for the unblemished daylight. Outside of this yard was the

usual wharfish neighborhood, with its turmoil of trucks and carts and fleet express-wagons, its building up and pulling down, its discomfort and clamor of every sort, and its shops for the sale, not only of those luxuries which Lucy had mentioned, but of such domestic refreshments as lemon-pie and hulled-corn.

When, however, you turned your thoughts and eyes away from this aspect of it, and looked out upon the water, the neighborhood gloriously retrieved itself. There its poverty and vulgarity ceased; there its beauty and grace abounded. A light breeze ruffled the face of the bay, and the innumerable little sail-boats that dotted it took the sun and wind upon their wings, which they dipped almost into the sparkle of the water, and flew lightly hither and thither like gulls that loved the brine too well to rise wholly from it; larger ships, farther or nearer, puffed or shrank their sails as they came and went on the errands of commerce, but always moved as if bent upon some dreamy affair of pleasure; the steam-boats that shot vehemently across their tranquil courses seemed only gayer and vivider visions, but not more substantial; yonder, a black, sea-going steamer passed out between

the far-off islands, and at last left in the sky above those reveries of fortification, a whiff of sombre smoke, dark and unreal as a memory of battle; to the right, on some line of railroad, long-plumed trains arrived and departed like pictures passed through the slide of a magic-lantern; even a pile-driver, at work in the same direction, seemed to have no malice in the blows which, after a loud clucking, it dealt the pile, and one understood that it was mere conventional violence like that of a Punch to his baby.

"Why, what a lotus-eating life this is!" said Frank, at last. "Aunt Melissa, I don't wonder you think it 's like the seaside. It 's a great deal better than the seaside. And now, just as we 've entered into the spirit of it, the time 's up for the 'Rose Standish' to come and bear us from its delights. When will the boat be in?" he asked of the Autobiographer, whom Lucy had pointed out to him.

"Well, she 's *ben* in half an hour, now. There she lays, just outside the 'John Romer.'"

There, to be sure, she lay, and those pleasure-takers had been so lost in the rapture of waiting and the beauty of the scene as never to have noticed her arrival.

II.

THE AFTERNOON.

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IT is noticeable how many people there are in the world that seem bent always upon the same purpose of amusement or business as one's self. If you keep quietly about your accustomed affairs, there are all your neighbors and acquaintance hard at it too; if you go on a journey, choose what train you will, the cars are filled with travellers in your direction. You take a day's pleasure, and everybody abandons his usual occupation to crowd upon your boat, whether it is to Gloucester, or Nahant, or to Nantasket Beach you go. It is very hard to believe that, from whatever channel of life you abstract yourself, still the great sum of it presses forward as before: that business is carried on though you

are idle, that men amuse themselves though you toil, that every train is as crowded as that you travel on, that the theatre or the church fills its boxes or pews without you perfectly well. I suppose it would not be quite agreeable to believe all this; the opposite illusion is far more flattering; for if each one of us did not take the world with him now at every turn, should he not have to leave it behind him when he died? And that, it must be owned, would not be agreeable, nor is the fact quite conceivable, though ever so many myriads in so many million years have proved it.

When our friends first went aboard the "Rose Standish" that day they were almost the sole passengers, and they had a feeling of ownership and privacy which was pleasant enough in its way, but which they lost afterwards; though to lose it was also pleasant, for enjoyment no more likes to be solitary than sin does, which is notoriously gregarious, and I dare say would hardly exist if it could not be committed in company. The preacher, indeed, little knows the comfortable sensation we have in being called fellow-sinners, and what an effective shield for his guilt each makes of his neighbor's hard-heartedness.

Cousin Frank never felt how strange was a lonely transgression till that day, when in the silence of the little cabin he took the bottle of claret from the hand-bag, and prepared to moisten the family lunch with it. "I think, Aunt Melissa," he said, "we had better lunch now, for it's a quarter past two, and we shall not get to the beach before four. Let's improvise a beach of these chairs, and that water-urn yonder can stand for the breakers. Now, this is truly like Newport and Nahant," he added, after the little arrangement was complete; and he was about to strip away the bottle's jacket of brown paper, when a lady much wrapped up came in, and, reclining upon one of the opposite seats, began to take them all in with a severe serenity of gaze that made them feel for a moment like a party of low foreigners, — like a set of German atheists, say. Frank kept on the bottle's paper jacket, and as the single tumbler of the party circled from mouth to mouth, each of them tried to give the honest drink the false air of a medicinal potion of some sort; and to see Aunt Melissa sipping it, no one could have put his hand on his heart and sworn it was not elderberry wine, at the worst. In spite of these efforts, they all knew

that they had suffered a hopeless loss of repute; yet, after the loss was confessed, I am not sure that they were not the gayer and happier through this "freedom of a broken law." At any rate, the lunch passed off very merrily, and when they had put back the fragments of the feast into the bags, they went forward to the bow of the boat, to get good places for seeing the various people as they came aboard, and for an outlook upon the bay when the boat should start.

I suppose that these were not very remarkable people, and that nothing but the indomitable interest our friends took in the human race could have enabled them to feel any concern in their companions. It was, no doubt, just such a company as goes down to Nantasket Beach every pleasant day in summer. Certain ones among them were distinguishable as sojourners at the beach, by an air of familiarity with the business of getting there, an indifference to the prospect, and an indefinable touch of superiority. These read their newspapers in quiet corners, or, if they were not of the newspaper sex, made themselves comfortable in the cabins, and looked about them at the other passengers with looks of lazy surprise,

and just a hint of scorn for their interest in the boat's departure. Our day's pleasurers took it that the lady whose steady gaze had reduced them, when at lunch, to such a low ebb of shabbiness, was a regular boarder, at the least, in one of the beach hotels. A few other passengers were, like themselves, mere idlers for a day, and were eager to see all that the boat or the voyage offered of novelty. There were clerks and men who had book-keeping written in a neat mercantile hand upon their faces, and who had evidently been given that afternoon for a breathing-time; and there were strangers who were going down to the beach for the sake of the charming view of the harbor which the trip afforded. Here and there were people who were not to be classed with any certainty, — as a pale young man, handsome in his undesirable way, who looked like a steamboat pantry-boy not yet risen to be bar-tender, but rapidly rising, and who sat carefully balanced upon the railing of the boat, chatting with two young girls, who heard his broad sallies with continual snickers, and interchanged saucy comments with that prompt up-and-coming manner which is so large a part of non-humorous humor, as Mr. Lowell calls it, and now and then pulled

and pushed each other. It was a scene worth study, for in no other country could anything so bad have been without being vastly worse; but here it was evident that there was nothing worse than you saw; and, indeed, these persons formed a sort of relief to the other passengers, who were nearly all monotonously well-behaved. Amongst a few there seemed to be acquaintance, but the far greater part were unknown to one another, and there were no words wasted by any one. I believe the English traveller who has taxed our nation with inquisitiveness for half a century is at last beginning to find out that we do not ask questions because we have the still more vicious custom of not opening our mouths at all when with strangers.

It was a good hour after our friends got aboard before the boat left her moorings, and then it was not without some secret dreads of sea-sickness that Aunt Melissa saw the seething brine widen between her and the familiar wharf-house, where she now seemed to have spent so large a part of her life. But the multitude of really charming and interesting objects that presently fell under her eye soon distracted her from those gloomy thoughts.

There is always a shabbiness about the wharves of seaports; but I must own that as soon as you get a reasonable distance from them in Boston, they turn wholly beautiful. They no longer present that imposing array of mighty ships which they could show in the days of Consul Plancus, when the commerce of the world sought chiefly our port, yet the docks are still filled with the modester kinds of shipping, and if there is not that wilderness of spars and rigging which you see at New York, let us believe that there is an aspect of selection and refinement in the scene, so that one should describe it, not as a forest, but, less conventionally, as a gentleman's park of masts. The steamships of many coastwise freight lines gloom, with their black, capacious hulks, among the lighter sailing-craft, and among the white, green-shuttered passenger-boats; and behind them those desperate and grimy sheds assume a picturesqueness, their sagging roofs and crooked gables harmonizing agreeably with the shipping; and then growing up from all rises the mellow-tinted brick-built city, roof, and spire, and dome, — a fair and noble sight, indeed, and one not surpassed for a certain quiet and cleanly beauty by any that I know.

Our friends lingered long upon this pretty prospect, and, as inland people of light heart and easy fancy will, the ladies made imagined voyages in each of the more notable vessels they passed,— all cheap and safe trips, occupying half a second apiece. Then they came forward to the bow, that they might not lose any part of the harbor's beauty and variety, and informed themselves of the names of each of the fortressed islands as they passed, and forgot them, being passed, so that to this day Aunt Melissa has the Fort Warren rebel prisoners languishing in Fort Independence. But they made sure of the air of soft repose that hung about each, of that exquisite military neatness which distinguishes them, and which went to Aunt Melissa's housekeeping heart, of the green, thick turf covering the escarpments, of the great guns loafing on the crests of the ramparts and looking out over the water sleepily, of the sentries pacing slowly up and down with their gleaming muskets.

"I never see one of those fellows," says Cousin Frank, "without setting him to the music of that saddest and subtlest of Heine's poems. *You* know it, Lucy"; and he repeats: —

"Mein Herz, mein Herz ist traurig,
Doch lustig leuchtet der Mai;
Ich stehe gelehnt an der Linde
Hoch auf der alten Bastei.

. . . . .

"Am alten grauen Thurme
Ein Schilderhäuschen steht;
Ein rothgeröckter Bursche
Dort auf und nieder geht.

"Er spielt mit seiner Flinte,
Sie funkelt im Sonnenroth,
Er präsentirt, und schultert,—
Ich wollt', er schösse mich todt."

"Oh!" says Cousin Lucy, either because the poignant melancholy of the sentiment has suddenly pierced her, or because she does not quite understand the German,— you never can tell about women. While Frank smiles down upon her in this amiable doubt, their party is approached by the tipsy man who has been making the excursion so merry for the other passengers, in spite of the fact that there is very much to make one sad in him. He is an old man, sweltering in rusty black, a two days' gray beard, and a narrow-brimmed, livid silk hat, set well back upon the nape of his neck.

He explains to our friends, as he does to every one whose acquaintance he makes, that he was in former days a seafaring man, and that he has brought his two little grandsons here to show them something about a ship; and the poor old soul helplessly saturates his phrase with the rankest profanity. The boys are somewhat amused by their grandsire's state, being no doubt familiar with it; but a very grim-looking old lady who sits against the pilot-house and keeps a sharp eye upon all three, and who is also doubtless familiar with the unhappy spectacle, seems not to find it a joke. Her stout matronly umbrella trembles in her hand when her husband draws near, and her eye flashes; but he gives her as wide a berth as he can, returning her glare with a propitiatory drunken smile and a wink to the passengers to let them into the fun. In fact, he is full of humor in his tipsy way, and one after another falls the prey of his free sarcasm, which does not spare the boat or any feature of the excursion. He holds for a long time, by swiftly successive stories of his seafaring days, a very quiet gentleman, who dares neither laugh too loudly nor show indifference for fear of rousing that terrible wit at his ex-

pense, and finds his account in looking down at his boots.

"Well, sir," says the deplorable old sinner, "we was forty days out from Liverpool, with a cargo of salt and iron, and we got caught on the Banks in a calm. 'Cap'n,' says I, — I 'us sec'n' mate, — ' 's they any man aboard this ship knows how to pray?' 'No,' says the cap'n; 'blast yer prayers!' 'Well,' says I, 'cap'n, I 'm no hand at all to pray, but I 'm goin' to see if prayin' won't git us out 'n this.' And I down on my knees, and I made a first-class prayer; and a breeze sprung up in a minute and carried us smack into Boston.

At this bit of truculent burlesque the quiet man made a bold push, and walked away with a somewhat sickened face, and as no one now intervened between them, the inebriate laid a familiar hand upon Cousin Frank's collar, and said with a wink at his late listener: "Looks like a lerigious man, don't he? I guess I give him a good dose, if he *does* think himself the head-deacon of this boat." And he went on to state his ideas of religion, from which it seemed that he was a person of the most advanced thinking, and believed in nothing worth mentioning.

It is perhaps no worse for an Infidel to be drunk than a Christian, but my friend found this tipsy blasphemer's case so revolting, that he went to the hand-bag, took out the empty claret-bottle, and seeking a solitary corner of the boat, cast the bottle into the water, and felt a thrill of uncommon self-approval as this scapecoat of all the wine at his grocer's bobbed off upon the little waves. "Besides, it saves carrying the bottle home," he thought, not without a half-conscious reserve, that if his penitence were ever too much for him, he could easily abandon it. And without the reflection that the gate is always open behind him, who could consent to enter upon any course of perfect behavior? If good resolutions could not be broken, who would ever have the courage to form them? Would it not be intolerable to be made as good as we ought to be? Then, admirable reader, thank Heaven even for your lapses, since it is so wholesome and saving to be well ashamed of yourself, from time to time.

"What an outrage," said Cousin Frank, in the glow of virtue, as he rejoined the ladies, "that that tipsy rascal should be allowed to go on with his ribaldry. He seems to pervade

the whole boat, and to subject everybody to his sway. He 's a perfect despot to us helpless sober people, — I would n 't openly disagree with him on any account. We ought to send a Round Robin to the captain, and ask him to put that religious liberal in irons during the rest of the voyage."

In the mean time, however, the object of his indignation had used up all the conversable material in that part of the boat, and had deviously started for the other end. The elderly woman with the umbrella rose and followed him, somewhat wearily, and with a sadness that appeared more in her movement than in her face; and as the two went down the cabin, did the comical affair look, after all, something like tragedy? My reader, who expects a little novelty in tragedy, and not these stale and common effects, will never think so.

"You 'll not pretend, Frank," says Lucy, "that in such an intellectual place as Boston a crowd as large as this can be got together, and no distinguished literary people in it. I know there are some notables aboard: do point them out to me. Pretty near everybody has a literary look."

"Why, that 's what we call our Boston look,

Cousin Lucy. You need n't have written anything to have it, — it 's as general as tubercular consumption, and is the effect of our universal culture and habits of reading. I heard a New-Yorker say once that if you went into a corner grocery in Boston to buy a codfish, the man would ask you how you liked 'Lucile,' whilst he was tying it up. No, no; you must n't be taken in by that literary look; I 'm afraid the real literary men don't always have it. But I *do* see a literary man aboard yonder," he added, craning his neck to one side, and then furtively pointing, — "the most literary man I ever knew, one of the most literary men that ever lived. His whole existence is really bound up in books; he never talks of anything else, and never thinks of anything else, I believe. Look at him, — what kind and pleasant eyes he 's got! There, he sees me!" cries Cousin Frank, with a pleasurable excitement. "How d' ye do?" he calls out.

"O Cousin Frank, introduce us," sighs Lucy.

"Not I! He would n't thank me. He does n't care for pretty girls outside of books; he 'd be afraid of 'em; he 's the bashfullest man alive, and all his heroines are fifty years old, at

the least. But before I go any further, tell me solemnly, Lucy, you 're not interviewing me? You 're not going to write it to a New York newspaper? No? Well, I think it 's best to ask, always. Our friend there — he 's everybody's friend, if you mean nobody's enemy, by that, not even his own — is really what I say, — the most literary man I ever knew. He loves all epochs and phases of literature, but his passion is the Charles Lamb period and all Lamb's friends. He loves them as if they were living men; and Lamb would have loved him if he could have known him. He speaks rapidly, and rather indistinctly, and when you meet him and say Good day and you suppose he answers with something about the weather, ten to one he 's asking you what you think of Hazlitt's essays on Shakespeare, or Leigh Hunt's Italian Poets, or Lamb's roast pig, or Barry Cornwall's songs. He could n't get by a bookstall without stopping — for half an hour, at any rate. He knows just when all the new books in town are to be published, and when each bookseller is to get his invoice of old English books. He has no particular address, but if you leave your card for him at any bookstore in Boston, he 's sure to get

it within two days; and in the summer-time you're apt to meet him on these excursions. Of course, he writes about books, and very tastefully and modestly; there's hardly any of the brand-new immortal English poets, who die off so rapidly, but has had a good word from him; but his heart is with the older fellows, from Chaucer down; and, after the Charles Lamb epoch, I don't know whether he loves better the Elizabethan age or that of Queen Anne. Think of him making me stop the other day at a bookstall, and read through an essay out of the "Spectator"! I did it all for love of him, though money could n't have persuaded me that I had time; and I 'm always telling him lies, and pretending to be as well acquainted as he is with authors I hardly know by name, — he seems so fondly to expect it. He 's really almost a disembodied spirit as concerns most mundane interests; his soul is in literature, as a lover's in his mistress's beauty; and in the next world, where, as the Swedenborgians believe, spirits seen at a distance appear like the things they most resemble in disposition, as doves, hawks, goats, lambs, swine, and so on, I 'm sure that I shall see his true and kindly soul in the guise of a

noble old Folio, quaintly lettered across his back in old English text, *Tom. I.*"

While our friends talked and looked about them, a sudden change had come over the brightness and warmth of the day; the blue heaven had turned a chilly gray, and the water looked harsh and cold. Now, too, they noted that they were drawing near a wooden pier built into the water, and that they had been winding about in a crooked channel between muddy shallows, and that their course was overrun with long, dishevelled sea-weed. The shawls had been unstrapped, and the ladies made comfortable in them.

"Ho for the beach!" cried Cousin Frank, with a vehement show of enthusiasm. "Now, then, Aunt Melissa, prepare for the great enjoyment of the day. In a few moments we shall be of the elves

> 'That on the sand with printless foot
> Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
> When he comes back.'

Come! we shall have three hours on the beach, and that will bring us well into the cool of the evening, and we can return by the last boat."

"As to the cool of the evening," said Aunt

Melissa, "I don't know. It 's quite cool enough for comfort at present, and I 'm sure that anything more would n't be wholesome. What 's become of our beautiful weather?" she asked, deeply plotting to gain time.

"It 's one of our Boston peculiarities, not to say merits," answered Frank, "which you must have noticed already, that we can get rid of a fine day sooner than any other region. While you 're saying how lovely it is, a subtle change is wrought, and under skies still blue and a sun still warm the keen spirit of the east-wind pierces every nerve, and all the fine weather within you is chilled and extinguished. The gray atmosphere follows, but the day first languishes in yourself. But for this, life in Boston would be insupportably perfect, if this is indeed a drawback. You 'd find Bostonians to defend it, I dare say. But this is n't a regular east-wind to-day; it 's merely our nearness to the sea."

"I think, Franklin," said Aunt Melissa, "that we won't go down to the beach this afternoon," as if she had been there yesterday, and would go to-morrow. "It 's too late in the day; and it would n't be good for the child, I 'm sure."

"Well, aunty, it was you determined us to wait for the boat, and it 's your right to say whether we shall leave it or not. I 'm very willing not to go ashore. I always find that, after working up to an object with great effort, it 's surpassingly sweet to leave it unaccomplished at last. Then it remains forever in the region of the ideal, amongst the songs that never were sung, the pictures that never were painted. Why, in fact, should we force this pleasure? We 've eaten our lunch, we 've lost the warm heart of the day; why should we poorly drag over to that damp and sullen beach, where we should find three hours very long, when by going back now we can keep intact that glorious image of a day by the sea which we 've been cherishing all summer? You 're right, Aunt Melissa; we won't go ashore; we will stay here, and respect our illusions."

At heart, perhaps, Lucy did not quite like this retreat; it was not in harmony with the youthful spirit of her sex, but she reflected that she could come again, — O beneficent cheat of Another Time, how much thou sparest us in our over-worked, over-enjoyed world! — she was very comfortable where she was, in a seat

commanding a perfect view for the return trip; and she submitted without a murmur. Besides, now that the boat had drawn up to the pier, and discharged part of her passengers, and was waiting to take on others, Lucy was interested in a mass of fluttering dresses and wide-rimmed straw hats that drew down toward the "Rose Standish," and gracefully thronged the pier, and prettily hesitated about, and finally came aboard with laughter and little false cries of terror, attended through all by the New England disproportion of that sex which is so foolish when it is silly. It was a large picnic party which had been spending the day upon the beach, as each of the ladies showed in her face, where, if the roses upon her cheeks were somewhat obscured by the imbrowning seaside sun, a bright pink had been compensatingly bestowed upon the point of her nose. A mysterious quiet fell upon them all when they were got aboard and had taken conspicuous places, which was accounted for presently when a loud shout was heard from the shore, and a man beside an ambulant photographic machine was seen wildly waving his hat. It is impossible to resist a temptation of this kind, and our party all yielded, and posed them-

selves in striking and characteristic attitudes, even Aunt Melissa sharing the ambition to appear in a picture which she should never see, and the nurse coming out strong from the abeyance in which she had been held, and lifting the baby high into the air for a good likeness. The frantic gesticulator on the shore gave an impressive wave with both hands, took the cap from the instrument, turned his back, as photographers always do, with that air of hiding their tears, for the brief space that seems so long, and then clapped on the cap again, while a great sigh of relief went up from the whole boat-load of passengers. They were taken.

But the interval had been a luckless one for the "Rose Standish," and when she stirred her wheels, clouds of mud rose to the top of the water, and there was no responsive movement of the boat. She was aground in the falling tide.

"There seems a pretty fair prospect of our spending some time here, after all," said Frank, while the ladies, who had reluctantly given up the idea of staying, were now in a quiver of impatience to be off. The picnic was shifted from side to side; the engine groaned

and tugged, Captain Miles Standish and his crew bestirred themselves vigorously, and at last the boat swung loose, and strode down the sea-weedy channels; while our friends, who had already done the great sights of the harbor, now settled themselves to the enjoyment of its minor traits and beauties. Here and there they passed small parties on the shore, which, with their yachts anchored near, or their boats drawn up from the water, were cooking an out-door meal by a fire that burned bright red upon the sands in the late afternoon air. In such cases, people willingly indulge themselves in saluting whatever craft goes by, and the ladies of these small picnics, as they sat round the fires, kept up a great waving of handkerchiefs, and sometimes cheered the "Rose Standish," though I believe the Bostonians are ordinarily not a demonstrative race. Of course, the large picnic on board fluttered multitudinous handkerchiefs in response, both to these people ashore and to those who hailed them from vessels which they met. They did not refuse the politeness even to the passengers on a rival boat when she passed them, though at heart they must have felt some natural pangs at being passed. The

water was peopled everywhere by all sorts of sail lagging slowly homeward in the light evening breeze; and on some of the larger vessels there were family groups to be seen, and a graceful smoke, suggestive of supper, curled from the cook's galley. I suppose these ships were chiefly coasting craft, of one kind or another, come from the Provinces at farthest; but to the ignorance and the fancy of our friends, they arrived from all remote and romantic parts of the world, — from India, from China, and from the South Seas, with cargoes of spices and gums and tropical fruits; and I see no reason why one should ever deny himself the easy pleasure they felt in painting the unknown in such lively hues. The truth is, a strange ship, if you will let her, always brings you precious freight, always arrives from Wonderland under the command of Captain Sindbad. How like a beautiful sprite she looks afar off, as if she came from some finer and fairer world than ours! Nay, we will not go out to meet her; we will not go on board; Captain Sindbad shall bring us the invoice of gold-dust, slaves, and rocs' eggs to-night, and we will have some of the eggs for breakfast; or if he never comes, are we not just as rich? But I

think these friends of ours got a yet keener pleasure out of the spectacle of a large and stately ship, that with all sails spread moved silently and steadily out toward the open sea. It is yet grander and sweeter to sail toward the unknown than to come from it; and every vessel that leaves port has this destination, and will bear you thither if you will.

"It may be that the gulf shall wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew,"

absently murmured Lucy, looking on this beautiful apparition.

"But I can't help thinking of Ulysses' cabin-boy, yonder," said Cousin Frank, after a pause; "can you, Aunt Melissa?"

"I don't understand what you're talking about, Franklin," answered Aunt Melissa, somewhat severely.

"Why, I mean that there is a poor wretch of a boy on board there, who's run away, and whose heart must be aching just now at the thought of the home he has left. I hope Ulysses will be good to him, and not swear at him for a day or two, or knock him about with a belaying-pin. Just about this time his mother,

up in the country, is getting ready his supper, and wondering what 's become of him, and torturing herself with hopes that break one by one; and to-night when she goes up to his empty room, having tried to persuade herself that the truant 's come back and climbed in at the window—"

"Why, Franklin, this is n't true, is it?" asks Aunt Melissa.

"Well, no, let 's pray Heaven it is n't, in this case. It 's been true often enough to be false for once."

"What a great, ugly, black object a ship is!" said Cousin Lucy.

Slowly the city rose up against the distance, sharpening all its outlines, and filling in all its familiar details, — like a fact which one dreams is a dream, and which, as the mists of sleep break away, shows itself for reality.

The air grows closer and warmer, — it is the breath of the hot and toil-worn land.

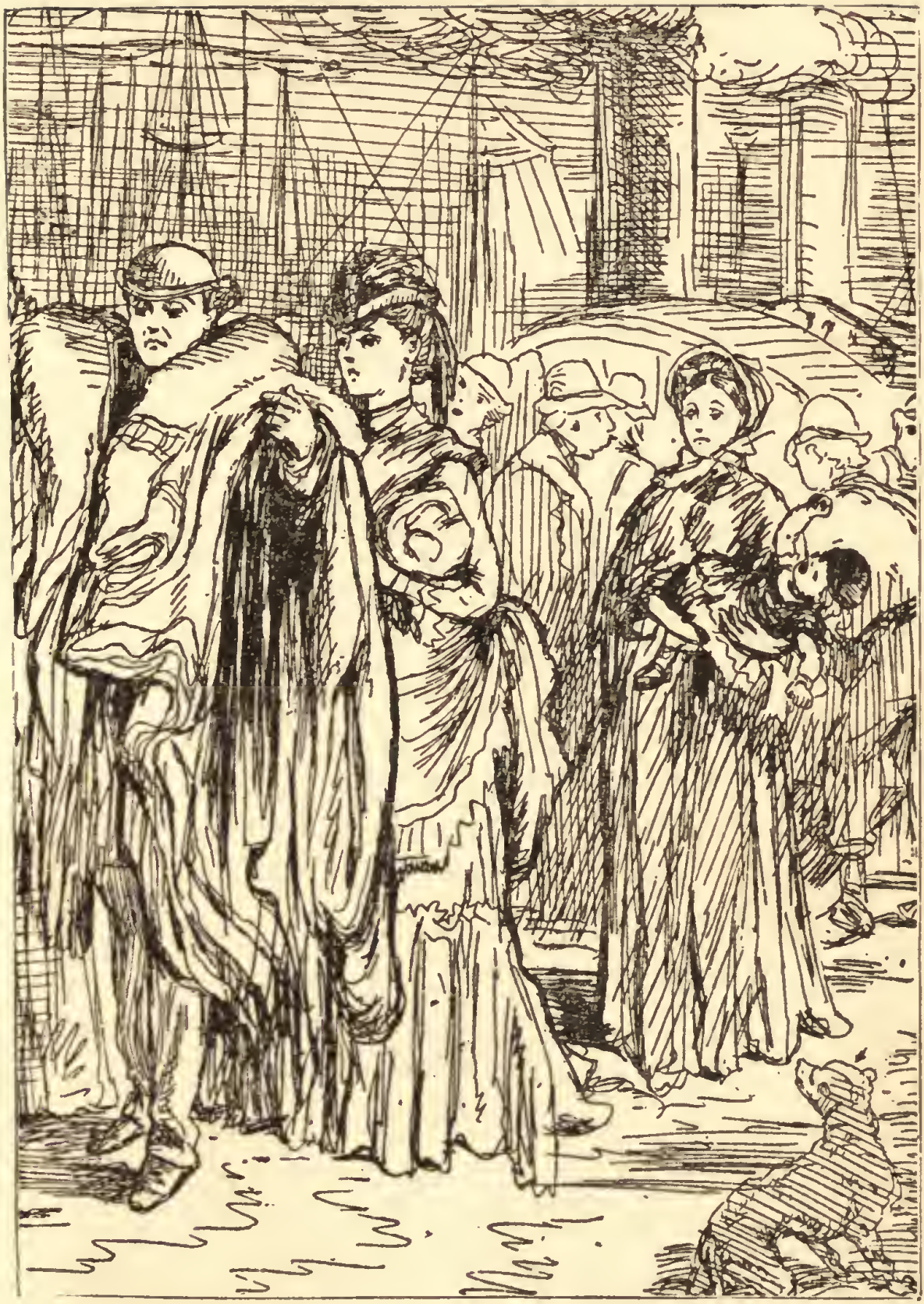
The boat makes her way up through the shipping, seeks her landing, and presently rubs herself affectionately against the wharf. The passengers quickly disperse themselves upon shore, dismissed each with an appropriate sarcasm by the tipsy man, who has had the means

of keeping himself drunk throughout, and who now looks to the discharge of the boat's cargo.

As our friends leave the wharf-house behind them, and straggle uneasily, and very conscious of sunburn, up the now silent length of Pearl Street to seek the nearest horse-cars, they are aware of a curious fidgeting of the nurse, who flies from one side of the pavement to the other and violently shifts the baby from one arm to the other.

"What's the matter?" asks Frank; but before the nurse can answer, "Thim little divils," he perceives that the whooping-coughers of the morning have taken the occasion to renew a pleasant acquaintance, and are surrounding the baby and nurse with an atmosphere of whooping-cough.

"I say, friends! we can't stand this, you know," says the anxious father. "We must part some time, and this is a favorable moment. Now I'll give you all this, if you don't come another step!" and he empties out to them, from the hand-bags he carries, the fragments of lunch which the frugal mind of Aunt Melissa had caused her to store there. Upon these the whooping-coughers hurl themselves



"Frank and Lucy stalked ahead, with shawls dragging from their arms."

in a body, and are soon left round the corner. Yet they would have been no disgrace to our party, whose appearance was now most disreputable: Frank and Lucy stalked ahead, with shawls dragging from their arms, the former loaded down with hand-bags and the latter with india-rubbers; Aunt Melissa came next under a burden of bloated umbrellas; the nurse last, with her hat awry, and the baby a caricature of its morning trimness, in her embrace. A day's pleasure is so demoralizing, that no party can stand it, and come out neat and orderly.

"Cousin Frank," asked Lucy, awfully, "what if we should meet the Mayflowers now?" — the Mayflowers being a very ancient and noble Boston family whose acquaintance was the great pride and terror of our friends' lives.

"I should cut them dead," said Frank, and scarcely spoke again till his party dragged slowly up the steps of their minute suburban villa.

At the door his wife met them with a troubled and anxious face.

"Calamities?" asked Frank, desperately.

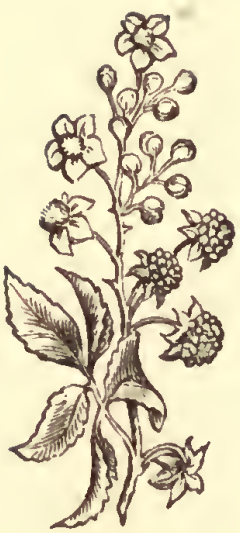
"O, calamities upon calamities! We've

got a lost child in the kitchen," answered Mrs. Sallie.

"O good heavens!" cried her husband. "Adieu, my dreams of repose, so desirable after the quantity of active enjoyment I've had! Well, where is the lost child?"

III.

THE EVENING.



III.

THE EVENING.

"WHERE is the lost child?" repeats Frank, desperately. "Where have you got him?"

"In the kitchen."

"Why in the kitchen?"

"How's baby?" demands Mrs. Sallie, with the incoherent suddenness of her sex, and running half-way down the steps to meet the nurse. "Um, um, um-m-m-m," sounds, which may stand for smothered kisses of rapture and thanksgiving that baby is not a lost child. "Has he been good, Lucy? Take him off and give him some cocoa, Mrs. O'Gonegal," she adds in her business-like way, and with a little push to the combined nurse and baby, while Lucy answers, "O beautiful!" and from that

moment, being warned through all her being by something in the other's tone, casts aside the matronly manner which she has worn during the day, and lapses into the comfortable irresponsibility of young-ladyhood.

"What kind of a time did you have?"

"Splendid!" answers Lucy. "Delightful, *I* think," she adds, as if she thought others might not think so.

"I suppose you found Gloucester a quaint old place."

"O," says Frank, "we did n't go to Gloucester; we found that the City Fathers had chartered the boat for the day, so we thought we 'd go to Nahant."

"Then you 've seen your favorite Gardens of Maolis! What in the world *are* they like?"

"Well; we did n't see the Gardens of Maolis; the Nahant boat was so crowded that we could n't think of going on her, and so we decided we 'd drive over to the Liverpool Wharf and go down to Nantasket Beach."

"That was nice. I 'm so glad on Aunt Melissa's account. It 's much better to see the ocean from a long beach than from those Nahant rocks."

"That 's what *I* said. But, you know, when we got to the wharf the boat had just left."

"You *don't* mean it! Well, then, what under the canopy *did* you do?"

"Why, we sat down in the wharf-house, and waited from nine o'clock till half past two for the next boat."

"Well, I 'm glad you did n't back out, at any rate. You did show pluck, you poor things! I hope you enjoyed the beach after you *did* get there."

"Why," says Frank, looking down, "we never got there."

"Never got there!" gasps Mrs. Sallie. "Did n't you go down on the afternoon boat?"

"Yes."

"Why did n't you get to the beach, then?"

"We did n't go ashore."

"Well, that 's *like* you, Frank."

"It 's a great deal more like Aunt Melissa," answers Frank. "The air felt so raw and chilly by the time we reached the pier, that she declared the baby would perish if it was taken to the beach. Besides, nothing would persuade her that Nantasket Beach was at all different from Liverpool Wharf."

"Never mind, never mind!" says Mrs.

Sallie. "I don't wish to hear anything more. That 's your idea of a day's pleasure, is it? I call it a day's disgrace, a day's miserable giving-up. There, go in, go in; I 'm ashamed of you all. Don't let the neighbors see you, for pity's sake. — We keep him in the kitchen," she continues, recurring to Frank's long unanswered question concerning the lost child, "because he prefers it as being the room nearest to the closet where the cookies are. He 's taken advantage of our sympathies to refuse everything but cookies."

"I suppose that 's one of the rights of lost childhood," comments Frank, languidly; "there 's no law that can compel him to touch even cracker."

"Well, you 'd better go down and see what *you* can make of him. He 's driven *us* all wild."

So Frank descends to the region now redolent of the preparing tea, and finds upon a chair, in the middle of the kitchen floor, a very forlorn little figure of a boy, mutely munching a sweet-cake, while now and then a tear steals down his cheeks and moistens the grimy traces of former tears. He and baby are, in the mean time, regarding each other with a steadfast

glare, the cook and the nurse supporting baby in this rite of hospitality.

"Well, my little man," says his host, "how did you get here?"

The little man, perhaps because he is heartily sick of the question, is somewhat slow to answer that there was a fire; and that he ran after the steamer; and a girl found him and brought him up here.

"And that 's all the blessed thing you can get out of him," says cook; and the lost boy looks as if he felt cook to be perfectly right.

In spite of the well-meant endeavors of the household to wash him and brush him, he is still a dreadfully travel-stained little boy, and he is powdered in every secret crease and wrinkle by that dust of old Charlesbridge, of which we always speak with an air of affected disgust, and a feeling of ill-concealed pride in an abomination so strikingly and peculiarly our own. He looks very much as if he had been following fire-engines about the streets of our learned and pulverous suburb ever since he could walk, and he certainly seems to feel himself in trouble to a certain degree; but there is easily imaginable in his bearing a conviction that after all the chief care is with

others, and that, though unhappy, he is not responsible. The principal victim of his sorrows is also penetrated by this opinion, and after gazing forlornly upon him for a while, asks mechanically, "What 's your name?"

"Freddy," is the laconic answer.

"Freddy — ?" trying with an artful inflection to lead him on to his surname.

"Freddy," decidedly and conclusively.

"O, bless me! What 's the name of the street your papa lives on?"

This problem is far too deep for Freddy, and he takes a bite of sweet-cake in sign that he does not think of solving it. Frank looks at him gloomily for a moment, and then determines that he can grapple with the difficulty more successfully after he has had tea. "Send up the supper, Bridget. I think, my dear," he says, after they have sat down, "we 'd better all question our lost child when we 've finished."

So, when they have finished, they have him up in the sitting-room, and the inquisition begins.

"Now, Freddy," his host says, with a cheerful air of lifelong friendship and confidence, "you know that everybody has got two names. Of course your first name is Freddy, and it 's

a very pretty name. Well, I want you to think real hard, and then tell me what your other name is, so I can take you back to your mamma."

At this allusion the child looks round on the circle of eager and compassionate faces, and begins to shed tears and to wring all hearts.

"What 's your name?" asks Frank, cheerfully, — "your *other* name, you know?"

"Freddy," sobbed the forlorn creature.

"O good heaven! this 'll never do," groaned the chief inquisitor. "Now, Freddy, try not to cry. What is your papa's name,— Mr. — ?" with the leading inflection as before.

"Papa," says Freddy.

"O, that 'll never do! Not Mr. Papa?"

"Yes," persists Freddy.

"But, Freddy," interposes Mrs. Sallie, as her husband falls back baffled, "when ladies come to see your mamma, what do they call her? Mrs. —" adopting Frank's alluring inflection.

"Mrs. Mamma," answers Freddy, confirmed in his error by this course; and a secret dismay possesses his questioners. They skirmish about him with every sort of query; they try to entrap him into some kind of revelation by

apparently irrelevant remarks; they plan ambuscades and surprises; but Freddy looks vigilantly round upon them, and guards his personal history from every approach, and seems in every way so to have the best of it that it is almost exasperating.

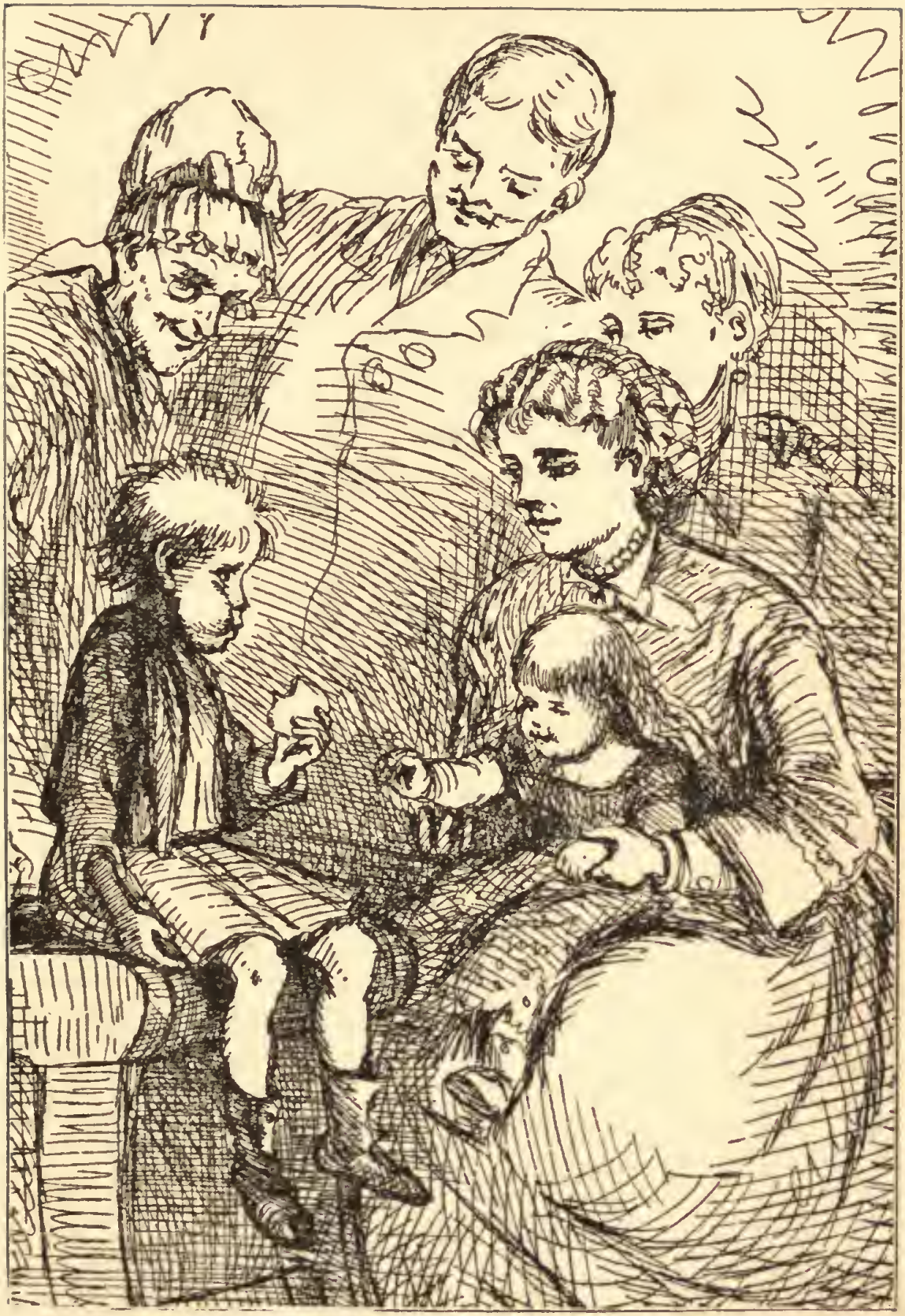
"Kindness has proved futile," observes Frank, "and I think we ought as a last resort, before yielding ourselves to despair, to use intimidation. Now, Fred," he says, with sudden and terrible severity, "what's your father's name?"

The hapless little soul is really moved to an effort of memory by this, and blubbers out something that proves in the end to resemble the family name, though for the present it is merely a puzzle of unintelligible sounds."

"Blackman?" cries Aunt Melissa, catching desperately at these sounds.

On this, all the man and brother is roused in Freddy's bosom, and he roars fiercely, "No! he ain't a black man! He's white!"

"I give it up," says Frank, who has been looking for his hat. "I'm afraid we can't make anything out of him; and I'll have to go and report the case to the police. But, put him to bed, do, Sallie; he's dropping with sleep."



"They skirmish about him with every sort of query."

So he went out, of course supported morally by a sense of duty, but I am afraid also by a sense of adventure in some degree. It is not every day that, in so quiet a place as Charlesbridge, you can have a lost child cast upon your sympathies; and I believe that when an appeal is not really agonizing, we like so well to have our sympathies touched, we favorites of the prosperous commonplace, that most of us would enter eagerly into a pathetic case of this kind even after a day's pleasure. Such was certainly the mood of my friend, and he unconsciously prepared himself for an equal interest on the part of the police; but this was an error. The police heard his statement with all proper attention, and wrote it in full upon the station-slate, but they showed no feeling whatever, and behaved as if they valued a lost child no more than a child snug at home in his own crib. They said that no doubt his parents would be asking at the police-stations for him during the night, and, as if my friend would otherwise have thought of putting him into the street, they suggested that he should just keep the lost child till he was sent for. Modestly enough Frank proposed that they should make some inquiry for his parents, and was answered

by the question whether they could take a man off his beat for that purpose; and remembering that beats in Charlesbridge were of such vastness that during his whole residence there he had never yet seen a policeman on his street, he was obliged to own to himself that his proposal was absurd. He felt the need of reinstating himself by something more sensible, and so he said he thought he would go down to the Port and leave word at the station there; and the police tacitly assenting to this he went.

I who have sometimes hinted that the Square is not a centre of gayety, or a scene of the greatest activity by day, feel it right to say that it has some modest charms of its own on a summer's night, about the hour when Frank passed through it, when the post-office has just been shut, and when the different groups that haunt the place in front of the closing shops have dwindled to the loungers fit though few who will keep it well into the night, and may there be found, by the passenger on the last horse-car out from Boston, wrapt in a kind of social silence, and honorably attended by the policeman whose favored beat is in that neighborhood. They seem a feature of the bygone village life of Charlesbridge, and accord pleas-

antly with the town-pump and the public horse-trough, and the noble elm that by night droops its boughs so pensively, and probably dreams of its happy younger days when there were no canker-worms in the world. Sometimes this choice company sits on the curbing that goes round the terrace at the elm-tree's foot, and then I envy every soul in it, — so tranquil it seems, so cool, so careless, so morrowless. I cannot see the faces of that luxurious society, but there I imagine is the local albino, and a certain blind man, who resorts thither much by day, and makes a strange kind of jest of his own, with a flicker of humor upon his sightless face, and a faith that others less unkindly treated by nature will be able to see the point apparently not always discernible to himself. Late at night I have a fancy that the darkness puts him on an equality with other wits, and that he enjoys his own brilliancy as well as any one.

At the Port station Frank was pleased and soothed by the tranquil air of the policeman, who sat in his shirt-sleeves outside the door, and seemed to announce, by his attitude of final disoccupation, that crimes and misdemeanors were no more. This officer at once

showed a desirable interest in the case. He put on his blue coat that he might listen to the whole story in a proper figure, and then he took down the main points on the slate, and said that they would send word round to the other stations in the city, and the boy's parents could hardly help hearing of him that night.

Returned home, Frank gave his news, and then he and Mrs. Sallie went up to look at the lost child as he slept. The sumptuous diet to which he had confined himself from the first seemed to agree with him perfectly, for he slept unbrokenly, and apparently without a consciousness of his woes. On a chair lay his clothes, in a dusty little pathetic heap; they were well-kept clothes, except for the wrong his wanderings had done them, and they showed a motherly care here and there, which it was not easy to look at with composure. The spectators of his sleep both thought of the curious chance that had thrown this little one into their charge, and considered that he was almost as completely a gift of the Unknown as if he had been following a steamer in another planet, and had thence dropped into their yard. His helplessness in accounting for himself was as affecting as that of the sublimest metaphysician;

and no learned man, no superior intellect, no subtle inquirer among us lost children of the divine, forgotten home, could have been less able to say how or whence he came to be just where he found himself. We wander away and away; the dust of the roadside gathers upon us; and when some strange shelter receives us, we lie down to our sleep, inarticulate, and haunted with dreams of memory, or the memory of dreams, knowing scarcely more of the past than of the future.

"What a strange world!" sighed Mrs. Sallie; and then, as this was a mood far too speculative for her, she recalled herself to practical life suddenly. "If we should have to adopt this child, Frank —"

"Why, bless my soul, we're not obliged to adopt him! Even a lost child can't demand that."

"We shall adopt him, if they don't come for him. And now, I want to know" (Mrs. Sallie spoke as if the adoption had been effected) "whether we shall give him our name, or some other?"

"Well, I don't know. It 's the first child I 've ever adopted," said Frank; "and upon my word, I can't say whether you have to give

him a new name or not. In fact, if I 'd thought of this affair of a name, I 'd never have adopted him. It 's the greatest part of the burden, and if his father will only come for him, I 'll give him up without a murmur."

In the interval that followed the proposal of this alarming difficulty, and while he sat and waited vaguely for whatever should be going to happen next, Frank was not able to repress a sense of personal resentment towards the little vagrant sleeping so carelessly there, though at the bottom of his heart there was all imaginable tenderness for him. In the fantastic character which, to his weariness, the day's pleasure took on, it seemed an extraordinary unkindness of fate that this lost child should have been kept in reserve for him after all the rest; and he had so small consciousness of bestowing shelter and charity, and so profound a feeling of having himself been turned out of house and home by some surprising and potent agency, that if the lost child had been a regiment of Fenians billeted upon him, it could not have oppressed him more. While he remained perplexed in this perverse sentiment of invasion and dispossession, "Hark!" said Mrs. Sallie, "what 's that?"

It was a noise of dragging and shuffling on the walk in front of the house, and a low, hoarse whispering.

"I don't know," said Frank, "but from the kind of pleasure I 've got out of it so far, I should say that this holiday was capable of an earthquake before midnight."

"Listen!"

They listened, as they must, and heard the outer darkness rehearse a raucous dialogue between an unseen Bill and Jim, who were the more terrible to the imagination from being so realistically named, and who seemed to have in charge some nameless third person, a mute actor in the invisible scene. There was doubt, which he uttered, in the mind of Jim, whether they could get this silent comrade along much farther without carrying him; and there was a growling assent from Bill that he *was* pretty far gone, that was a fact, and that maybe Jim *had* better go for the wagon; then there were quick, retreating steps; and then there was a profound silence, in which the audience of this strange drama sat thrilled and speechless. The effect was not less dreadful when there rose a dull sound, as of a helpless body rubbing against the fence, and at last lowered heavily to the ground.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Sallie. "Do go out and help. He 's dying!"

But even as she spoke the noise of wheels was heard. A wagon stopped before the door; there came a tugging and lifting, with a sound as of crunching gravel, and then a "There!" of great relief.

"Frank!" said Mrs. Sallie very solemnly, "if you don't go out and help those men, I 'll never forgive you."

Really, the drama had grown very impressive; it was a mystery, to say the least; and so it must remain forever, for when Frank, infected at last by Mrs. Sallie's faith in tragedy, opened the door and offered his tardy services, the wagon was driven rapidly away without reply. They never learned what it had all been; and I think that if one actually honors mysteries, it is best not to look into them. How much finer, after all, if you have such a thing as this happen before your door at midnight, not to throw any light upon it! Then your probable tipsy man cannot be proved other than a tragical presence, which you can match with any inscrutable creation of fiction; and if you should ever come to write a romance, as one is very liable to do in this age, there is

your unknown, a figure of strange and fearful interest, made to your hand, and capable of being used, in or out of the body, with a very gloomy effect.

While our friends yet trembled with this sensation, quick steps ascended to their door, and then followed a sharp, anxious tug at the bell.

"Ah!" cried Frank, prophetically, "here 's the father of our adopted son"; and he opened the door.

The gentleman who appeared there could scarcely frame the question to which Frank replied so cheerfully: "O yes; he 's here, and snug in bed, and fast asleep. Come up stairs and look at him. Better let him be till morning, and then come after him," he added, as they looked down a moment on the little sleeper.

"O no, I could n't," said the father, *con expressione;* and then he told how he had heard of the child's whereabouts at the Port station, and had hurried to get him, and how his mother did not know he was found yet, and was almost wild about him. They had no idea how he had got lost, and his own blind story was the only tale of his adventure that ever became known.

By this time his father had got the child partly awake, and the two men were dressing him in men's clumsy fashion; and finally they gave it up, and rolled him in a shawl. The father lifted the slight burden, and two small arms fell about his neck. The weary child slept again.

"How has he behaved?" asked the father.

"Like a little hero," said Frank, "but he 's been a cormorant for cookies. I think it right to tell you, in case he should n't be very brilliant to-morrow, that he would n't eat a bit of anything else."

The father said he was the life of their house; and Frank said he knew how that was, — that he had a life of the house of his own; and then the father thanked him very simply and touchingly, and with the decent New England self-restraint, which is doubtless so much better than any sort of effusion. "Say good night to the gentleman, Freddy," he said at the door; and Freddy with closed eyes murmured a good-night from far within the land of dreams, and then was borne away to the house out of which the life had wandered with his little feet.

"I don't know, Sallie," said Frank, when he had given all the eagerly demanded particu-

lars about the child's father, — "I don't know whether I should want many such holidays as this, in the course of the summer. On the whole, I think I 'd better overwork myself and not take any relaxation, if I mean to live long. And yet I 'm not sure that the day 's been altogether a failure, though all our purposes of enjoyment have miscarried. I did n't plan to find a lost child here, when I got home, and I 'm afraid I have n't had always the most Christian feeling towards him; but he 's really the saving grace of the affair; and if this were a little comedy I had been playing, I should turn him to account with the jaded audience, and advancing to the foot-lights, should say, with my hand on my waistcoat, and a neat bow, that although every hope of the day had been disappointed, and nothing I had meant to do had been done, yet the man who had ended at midnight by restoring a lost child to the arms of its father, must own that, in spite of adverse fortune, he had enjoyed A Day's Pleasure."

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