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LOVE THE DEBT

I.

LOVE THE DEBT

BY BASIL

Richard Ash King

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

in Debt

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1882

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CONTENTS
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CHAP.	PAGE
I. IN A TEMPER	1
II. REVENGE	21
III. REV. GEORGE KNEESHAW	41
IV. MABEL—CHILDHOOD	66
V. MABEL—GIRLHOOD	87
VI. SQUIRE	105
VII. BARNEY McGRATH	125
VIII. MISS MASTERS	150
IX. MABEL TO THE RESCUE	171
X. 'IN THE NET'	193
XI. REPARATION	214
XII. DRIFTING	235
XIII. A PROPOSAL	258
XIV. GUARDIANS	280



LOVE THE DEBT.



CHAPTER I.

IN A TEMPER.

‘You were never asked to the Pickleses before, Mabel?’ in the assured tone of a question with but one answer.

‘No, Aunt.’

Miss Masters nodded, ‘I thought so,’ as plainly as if she had said it, and then read out the invitation she held in her hand. Having read it, folded it up, and put it carefully away, she accounted for it. ‘I sat beside Mr. Pickles at the Sugdens’ the other evening.’

‘Yes; he’s your conquest, Aunt,’ answered Mabel, nodding and smiling. ‘At least, he’s not mine. He was downright rude to me that evening.’ Miss Masters was still more gratified.

The invitation to her niece was, therefore, the higher compliment to herself. She appropriated it at once without doubt or disguise.

‘My dear, he didn’t know who you were. You see he’s included you in the invitation.’

‘Because he doesn’t know who I am?’

Miss Masters would no more take a joke than a counterfeit coin. She nailed this to the counter at once. ‘Because you are my niece, my dear. I meant that he didn’t know you were my niece.’

‘If I go with you, he’ll know it, Aunt. Hadn’t I better stay at home and not discredit you?’

‘I can’t go by myself, Mabel.’

‘No, Aunt, certainly not. I couldn’t permit you. It wouldn’t be proper. And if you’re bent on going, I suppose I must chaperon you; though I like Mr. Pickles as little as he likes me.’

‘We must make allowances for him, my dear. He’s self-made, you know.’

‘Then he doesn’t do himself credit, Aunt. He’s like Margaret’s home-made wine—no one but herself can endure it.’

‘My dear, he’s your member!’ in the

shocked tone in which an old lady, who gave religion the place Miss Masters gave society, would say, 'My dear, he's your clergyman!'

'That's just why he should be civil, Aunt. You expect your member, like your grocer, to be civil for the sake of your patronage.'

'Not in the South, Mabel. Never in the South.'

'Are they never civil in the South, Aunt?'

'Never grocers, my dear, or people of that kind; never. I didn't know Mr. Pickles was a grocer,' with a shudder in her voice; 'I thought he was a dyer.' Miss Masters' stupid mistakes were made, not from mere stupidity, but from inattention also. She never gave more than half of her not very large mind to a subject in which she had no personal concern.

'It's his brother who's the dyer, Aunt. Mr. Pickles is a brewer.'

'Oh, a brewer,' much relieved. 'I thought Mrs. Roxby said a dyer. But brewers are always members, my dear. No one objects to a brewer sitting for anywhere.'

'And I don't, Aunt. I only object to his sitting on me. He's welcome to any other seat in England as far as I am concerned. And

I should'nt mind his snubbing so much if he would be snubbed. But he won't,' in a lamentable voice. 'You might as well prick a rhinoceros with a pin. I wasted the most stinging sarcasms on him the other night when he put his great clumsy foot down on me.'

'It's those long skirts, my dear; no one can help treading on them. I think I shall wear my black silk.'

'Do, Aunt,' persuasively; for her aunt was given to outraging propriety by light, bright and juvenile costumes.

'Yes; I think I shall. I wonder who will be there.'

'The Deardens and Matchlocks are sure to be there; and, of course, Mr. Augustus Minnit. He's like that book no gentleman's library should be without, dull and indispensable. And the Milligans, I think; and I hope Miss Menzies.'

'What! that plain girl with red hair?'

'Plain, but wholesome, Aunt. Doesn't agree with you like Miss Sugden, the heiress, who does nothing else. There's no doubt about *her* being there, for Mr. Clarence Pickle's sweet sake.'

‘My dear, he hardly spoke to her in her own house the other night. I thought it was *you* he was paying attention to.’

‘My dear Aunt, you don’t talk of people paying attention to a moth or a beetle. Mr. Clarence Pickles looked at me so through his eyeglass, as through a microscope, and asked such superior questions about my haunts and habits, that I think he would have stuck a pin through me and put me in a glass case, if his father hadn’t set his foot upon me and crushed me.’ Miss Masters gathered dimly and not without complacency that both father and son had been uncivil to Mabel—‘dans l’adversité de nos meilleurs amis nous trouvons souvent quelque chose qui ne nous déplaît pas’—especially when their ill-luck is a foil to our better fortune. Miss Masters’ vanity, absorbed and busy as a bee, ‘gathered honey from the weed.’

‘He made himself very agreeable to me, my dear.’

‘Then it was to *you* he was paying attention, Aunt.’

‘Nonsense, Mabel. I might be his mother, speaking with perfect seriousness.’

‘So you might, Aunt. Mr. Pickles is a widower.’

‘Mabel, I shall never marry,’ slowly and solemnly, as if all her life lay before her instead of behind her.

‘Well, Aunt, I shan’t press it. I should be the last person to urge you to marry them if you think they wouldn’t make you happy. And, after all, rank isn’t everything. “Josiah Pickles and Son” sounds very well, but it’s only a title. What’s in a name?’

Miss Masters was little likely to understand irony, especially coming from Mabel, with whom bitterness of any kind was uncommon. What was her horror, then, to hear a scion of the noble stock of Masters talk in this way of people who had sprung out of the mud, and the mud of Wefton! Pah!

‘My dear Mabel! Do you know what you are talking about, child? Rank! Who was Mr. Pickles’ father?’

‘I give it up, Aunt,’ shaking her head as at a desperate riddle.

‘I believe his father was a draper—a *linen-draper*,’ emphatically, as if this was the lowest of a large assortment of kinds of drapers. ‘So

Mrs. Roxby told me. A linendraper in a very small way in Shrimp Lane. I think it's a pity Mrs. Roxby should rake up this old scandal, but there it is. Mrs. Roxby has got a piece of his signboard, she tells me, with Peter Pickles on it. "Peter Pickles, Linendraper!" in a low voice of horror.

'But is it safe, Aunt?'

'What, dear?'

'Is it safe to keep evidence like that in the house? Mightn't Mrs. Roxby be taken up at any moment as an accessory after the fact, I think they call it, if the signboard was found in her possession? If I were she I should burn it, unless she keeps it as a relic to cure rheumatism.'

'What nonsense, Mabel! You know as well as I that Mrs. Roxby can't bear the Pickleses because they won't know her.'

'It's charitable of Mrs. Roxby, then, to be at such pains to know them. It is enough for most people to know Josiah Pickles and Son without going farther back.'

'But she doesn't know them, my dear. That's it. It's spite, don't you see?'

'Well, Aunt, it's very bad; but, after all,

it was Mr. Pickles' father who so disgraced himself. Mr. Pickles himself has broken with this bad past and become a brewer, and may sit for anywhere, and so we find the noble clay of the linendraper stopping a bunghole. Don't you think, Aunt, Mrs. Roxby had better let bygones be bygones?'

'I quite agree with you, my dear. It's not a thing to talk about. We should be only too thankful that there's nothing of the sort in *our* family,' as though it was epilepsy or insanity of which she was speaking.

'I don't know, Aunt. If we cut Mrs. Roxby I fear she'd find some horrible ancestor for us, "who disappeared about the time of the assizes." We all have so many ancestors, you know, if you go a bit back; and do what you can you can't keep them all select. There might be even a linendraper amongst them. I mean,' correcting herself at a shocked look from her aunt, 'I mean in the old days, when the business wasn't so dreadful. Izaak Walton for instance, was a linendraper.'

'A linendraper! Certainly not. Not among the Masterses, at least. This Mr. Walton must have been on your mother's side,

Mabel. I know nothing about her family. I believe they were in trade, but I never inquired,' with an air of immense magnanimity.

'Aunt, I can conceal it from you no longer. My grandfather was a coal-merchant!'

'My dear,' said Miss Masters, after a pause, speaking slowly, and as one who weighed well weighty words. 'My dear, I don't think coal is such a disgrace. It's better than soap—a good deal better than soap—and nearly as good as sugar.'

'But not as good as beer, Aunt?'

'Beer! My dear, beer comes very near land!'

'Oh!'

'Yes, very near land, and marries into the peerage.' Miss Masters, after the fashion of her sex, was generalising from a single instance—that of one of the members for her own county.

'That's unfortunate for Miss Sugden. With Mr. Clarence Pickles she has no chance against the peerage.'

'Oh, Mr. Pickles! I was speaking of very big brewers, Mabel.'

'Not of very small beer, Aunt? There is

hope still, then, for the heiress. I have set my heart upon her marrying Mr. Clarence Pickles.'

'Why, dear?'

'To kill two birds with one stone, Aunt.' Leaving her aunt to digest this bloodthirsty sentiment, the young lady—who all this time had been standing, dressed for going out—took up a bulky satchel from the table and quitted the room.

Our heroine is unfortunate in the moment of her introduction—one of the rare moments in which she could even appear to be flippant and ill-natured. No doubt her banter of her aunt appears unbecoming, and her bitterness against Messrs. Pickles and Son unamiable; but it really was not possible to be serious with Miss Masters; while the Pickleses—father and son—had been exasperating. The father had been insolently uncivil, because the son had been insolently civil, to Mabel, and because he thought, and let her see he thought, that she had encouraged the young gentleman's intolerable attentions. And this was not the sole or chief cause of her disgust with them. The satchel she has just carried out with her was bulky with supplies for the sick child of Mr.

Pickles' niece. This poor woman had been left destitute by the death of her husband of 'wool-sorter's disease'—a common and sudden form of death in Wefton—and, after a vain appeal for help to her uncle, had been forced to go to the mill, to the neglect of her child, who thus became one of Mabel's little patients. Mabel, therefore, was wroth with Mr. Pickles—most unreasonably, as that gentleman's reply to the appeal for help showed. He refused simply on principle. His niece's father had drunk himself to death, and he had not the least doubt that her husband had hastened his death by drinking; and therefore he Mr. Pickles—the brewer who owned all the lowest public-houses in Wefton—could not encourage intemperance by relieving the widow and daughter of drunkards. He refused, in fact, on high moral grounds. But women, it is well known, have no conception of justice or principle, but are creatures of feeling alone; and Mabel, therefore, was rather disgusted than delighted with the admirable morality of the letter. She forgot, too, that Mr. Pickles, since his candidature, was a philanthropist; and that, as cosmopolitans are lovers of every

country but their own, so philanthropists, since the days of Rousseau, have been lovers of every family but their own. Indeed, at this very time Mr. Pickles was building a Working Men's Institute, at a cost of 3,000*l.*; and was, therefore, little likely to be heartless—unless on principle.

Mabel, then, was not in charity with the Pickleses, and was put as much out of temper as she could be by the prospect of having to accept their invitation. She knew her aunt too well to have a hope of escaping it. Go she must; and, as the leek was to be eaten, it was only human nature to swear. We should be sorry, however, if our readers started with the impression, which her caustic wit and keen sense of the ridiculous gave many of her friends, that there was nothing serious in her or to her. Beneath the rippling surface lay unsuspected feelings, secret from their sacredness and silent from their depth. The girl, for instance, was religious in her own peculiar way. She did not, indeed, attend daily services, or embroider stoles, or distribute tracts; but, from a religious motive, she often bridled a restive tongue, and always felt

remorse if it ran away with her ; and she visited the sick children of the poor in her neighbourhood in a manner so furtive and felonious that her nearest friends had no suspicion of her eccentricity. In extenuation of a taste which may be thought morbid in a girl of nineteen, we must explain, in the first place, that she had no brothers or sisters, no mother, and, to all intents and purposes, no father—for the gentleman who stood to her in that relation took less interest in her than in any of the many pamphlets of which also he was the author ; and, in the second place, she did not allow these visits to interfere with her proper work in the world ; for she played, sang, and went to balls, pic-nics, and parties, as assiduously as the most exemplary young lady in Wefton.

There was one other singularity of hers, due also to her isolated life, of which her Wefton friends had as little suspicion. She was portentously learned. The number and kind of books she read to please her father would have satisfied a Civil Service Commissioner ; yet she so concealed her learning as to seem, to all of one sex, and some even of the other, the most

agreeable and accomplished young lady in Wefton. How far this estimate of her mind was affected by her face we shall not undertake to say. It was a singularly interesting face; in repose restful, thoughtful, truthful, like the ideal quaker face. Her clear grey eyes seemed to look straight through you, and you seemed to look straight through them to the pure soul behind. It was a face in which sweetness and light shone together, and her little patients seemed to read in it, as in a commentary, the meaning of the Gospel stories she told them :

A sweet attractive kind of grace,
A full assurance given by looks :
Continual comfort in a face,
The lineaments of gospel books.

As she left the house, Mabel, after her manner, was moved with remorse for her bitterness of speech—a remorse which was somewhat quickened on her reaching Mrs. Mathers' and learning that Mr. Pickles had sent her a load of coals, which she had never got. It had been shot into the cellar of a Mrs. Flaherty, an Irish widow and washerwoman, who lived in the next house but one above. Mrs. Flaherty ascribed the miscarriage to

Providence; saying with much unction, that ‘if Mr. Pickles didn’t know where to send a load of coals, God did.’ Her offensively defensive manner, however, suggested that it was one of those cases to which Joan of Arc’s proverb applies—‘Ayde-toi, Dieu te aydera.’ Indeed, there was little doubt that Mrs. Flaherty had misled the carter by taking the name, for the nonce, of Mrs. Mathers. But the thing was done, and couldn’t be undone, at least, according to the disinterested Mrs. Flaherty. For, in the first place, the coals were all gone; in the second place, they were all dust and would blow away if they were stirred; in the third place, they were all slates, and went off up the chimney like the crack of a gun—and small blame to them, since, as slates, they were more at home on the roof than in the grate. These reasons seemed to cover the case pretty completely; but, nevertheless, Mrs. Flaherty thought it necessary to reinforce them by adding significantly, and with arms akimbo, that if there was no coal in her cellar, there was a coal-hammer there, and any one was welcome to it who came prying and prowling about her premises. Mrs.

Mathers, being a meek person, and preferring to have rather her coals than her brains scattered about Mrs. Flaherty's cellar, made no more ado about the matter except to Mabel. Mabel, however, who was not a meek person, was so moved by the double motive of anger and pity, that she set out at once to see Mr. Pickles' agent, by whom, it seemed, the coals had been sent—one among many hundreds of loads which were distributed among the poor, because of the approach of winter, according to Mr. Pickles—of the elections, according to every one else. Only the outrageous Mrs. Flaherty could have roused Mabel to this enterprise, from which she shrank more and more as she drew nearer the agent's office. At the door she hesitated for full a minute, but at last mustered courage to ring. In another minute she found herself in the office and face to face with Mr. Clarence Pickles!

Mr. Clarence Pickles seemed somehow all eyeglass. It gave his face all the expression it had, and, indeed, all it had any title to have, for it expressed the dominant idea of his mind—contemptuous wonder at the existence of

any one else in the world besides himself. He used it, as Mabel suggested, as an entomologist uses a microscope—to examine creatures infinitely below himself in the scale of creation; and he looked through it now at Mabel as she entered as at a more than usually interesting specimen. He had no doubt at all—not the least—that, whatever her ostensible errand to his agent's, the real motive of her visit was the hope of seeing himself. He had fascinated her the other evening, and filled her with the fond hope of fascinating him. And so she had, too; the finest girl in the West Riding, by Jove, bar none. And here she was, fluttering after him, like a moth about a candle! She had watched him into the office—not a doubt of it—and had followed for a little flirtation. And she should have it too, egad!

A single look in Mabel's face would have satisfied any one in the world but Mr. Clarence Pickles that such a motive or action was as infinitely beneath her as—Mr. Clarence Pickles himself. But there are people who, like Narcissus, can look into the purest fountain and see—not all heaven reflected—but only the image of themselves.

‘Miss Masters! Come in. How do? Gad, I was in luck to turn in here this morning. Come in. Take a seat.’

‘Isn’t Mr. Long in?’ faltered Mabel.

‘Long? No, he isn’t. Won’t I do?’ with a self-complacent grin that was nauseous to Mabel.

‘No, thank you. Good morning.’

‘No, but I say, you’re not going? It’s all right; Long will be here presently’—standing between her and the door.

‘Thank you, I can’t wait.’

‘Oh, yes, you can, for a minute—eh?’ Mr. Clarence Pickles’ manner was insufferably familiar, but Mabel thought it ridiculous to put on tragedy airs with such a creature.

‘May I trouble you to open the door, Mr. Pickles?’

‘Come, I say, Miss Masters, you can’t be so cruel. To come in only to go out, you know. Such a disappointment, you know. You forget me.’

‘I think you forget yourself, Mr. Pickles. Allow me to pass.’

‘Here’s Long,’ said Clarence, sulkily, as the outer door was heard to open. In another

moment Mr. Pickles senior entered. He took in the situation at a glance. It was an assignation, that was plain enough, and Long had been got rid of as *de trop*. He looked from one to the other—savagely at Clarence, insolently at Mabel. She felt her cheeks burn with a blush of indignation, which made Mr. Pickles' assurance doubly sure.

‘Oh, Miss Masters! You've come on business?’

‘I came to see Mr. Long.’

‘It's very unfortunate he should happen to be out,’ with an undisguised sneer. ‘On business, of course?’

‘Yes, on business,’ looking Josiah straight in the face with a fearless defiance that exasperated him. Any kind of contradiction, or opposition, or exhibition of spirit was intolerable to him.

‘No doubt my son did as well; better perhaps. As a principal in the firm, it would be more his business than Mr. Long's, I dare say.’

‘Certainly, it was more his business than Mr. Long's. It was about the relief of his cousin, Mrs. Mathers.’ Mabel, though at white

heat at Josiah's transparent insinuations, spoke with a cutting calmness. But Josiah, so far from seeming disconcerted, turned savage.

'It may be his business, but it's hardly yours, Miss Masters. Perhaps you will permit us to look after our relatives ourselves.'

'It's just what I came to ask you to do, Mr. Pickles. Your agent sent Mrs. Mathers a load of coals, which was delivered at the wrong house. I came to ask Mr. Long to see the mistake set right. It was hardly my business, as you say; but Mrs. Mathers had no idea you were looking after her yourselves. Good morning, Mr. Pickles.'

CHAPTER II.

REVENGE.

WHEN Mabel had swept out of the office, the torrent of Josiah's wrath was turned upon Clarence.

'Look here, Clarence, this is no place for assignations.'

'No, it's too public,' in the languid drawl he found most effective with his father, who thought its insolence the essence of gentlemanliness.

'Public or private, it's not the place for them, and they musn't be made again; do you hear?'

'Better tell Long, eh?'

'What's Long to do with it?'

'More than I have, I should say.'

'Do you mean that you made no assignation with that girl?'

'Gad, she's a likely girl to make an assign-

nation with,' exclaimed Clarence with unusual vivacity. He was beginning to get a dim idea of Mabel.

'What brought her here, then?' asked Josiah, whose suspicions were shaken, not by Clarence's words, but by his manner.

'She's told you, hasn't she? She came about that Mrs. What-you-call-her. Here's Long; you'd better send him to see if she hasn't come straight from there;' for Clarence was curious upon this point himself.

Long was accordingly despatched to make inquiry into this matter and redress Mrs. Mathers' grievance, if there was one. Mr. Pickles had now no doubt that the meeting of Mabel and Clarence was an accident.

'Clarence, I'll treble your allowance if you marry with my approval. Blood or money, you can have the pick of the market. Whom has your aunt asked for the sixteenth?' Josiah regarded parties as markets where his son was to pick up a bargain if he could.

'Oh, the Deardens, Matchlocks, Milligans, and that lot, I believe.'

'Dearden is too high-stepping. He'll be down some day, mark my words. That girl

will be in the gutter again. Is Miss Sugden coming?’

‘She’s sure to come. She’s everywhere,’ in an aggrieved tone.

‘Fifty thousand pounds safe isn’t everywhere, I can tell you. A good figure, too,’ speaking of her fortune.

‘I don’t know what you call a good figure,’ exclaimed Clarence, roused to animation by this outrageous statement. ‘She’s as broad as she’s long.’

‘What’s her length or breadth got to do with it?’ cried Josiah, exasperated by the introduction of this irrelevant consideration. ‘She’s the safest fortune in Wefton.’

‘I don’t think her fortune’s as safe as you imagine. Mattock says there’s not half of it in safe bottoms.’

‘Mattock’s an ass. I know where every penny of it is; and I can tell you, you might do a deal worse than Miss Sugden—a great deal worse. Is that Miss Masters coming?’

‘She’s likely to come now!’ growled Clarence sulkily.

‘There’s an end to that business, then,’ rejoined Josiah with much complacency.

‘I don’t think there’s an end to the business at all. Her father is one of those writing fellows, and he’ll have us in all the papers.’

‘I thought he was a half-pay colonel.’

‘Yes, he’s a half-pay colonel, but he writes for all that. He’s always writing some rot or other in the “Wefton Witness.” He’ll be glad to get hold of this, you may be sure,’

This was a palpable hit of Clarence’s, for Josiah was not safe in his seat, and a little thing this way or that would upset him at the next election. He had lost ground with the Liberal party (which had returned him) because he was too large-minded a man to represent a single party, or even a single constituency. What he set himself to represent was the country at large. When the country at large wavered between the Liberals and Conservatives, Josiah wavered; but when the country at large inclined decidedly to the Conservatives Josiah took up a decided Conservative stand. The local Liberals, who sent Josiah to Parliament, are too narrow to see things from this imperial standpoint, and threaten to unseat him at the next election. Let us hope that in the meantime those in high

places who look on things 'with larger, other eyes than ours,' and can appreciate Josiah's sacrifice of party to patriotism, will honour his disinterestedness with the baronetcy it has earned.

Josiah, therefore, through not being the man

To narrow his mind,
And to party give up what was meant for mankind,

lost favour with the Liberals, who were the majority in Wefton, and had a very precarious hold on his seat. A slight access of unpopularity, such as would be caused by the publication of this scandal of the neglect of his niece, would ensure his defeat at the next election.

'I don't know what business it is of hers or his,' snarled Josiah, with much asperity. Clarence maintained a discreet silence. He was very anxious that this pretty quarrel should be made up, but he knew that to betray his anxiety would be to ensure what it feared.

'That fellow King has been going right round, lately,' resumed Josiah. King, the editor and proprietor of the 'Wefton Witness,' had stuck staunchly to his colours; but Josiah was under a like delusion to that which makes

the sun seem to us to be going right round—he was going right round himself. ‘Tell Long to make the woman an allowance of ten shillings a week,’ he growled at last, going towards the door.

‘And these Masterses? Hadn’t we better let her hear of it from them, to stop their tongues?’

‘No, confound them, let them do their worst now,’ slamming the door behind him.

Nevertheless Clarence sat down forthwith and penned an ample and all but abject apology in his father’s name to Miss Masters; thanking her for bringing the case under their notice, and begging her to be ‘good enough to inform Mrs. Mathers of the allowance she was to have weekly from Mr. Long.’

Clarence was proud of his diplomacy, and with some reason; for there was not the least foundation for the fear with which he influenced his father. It is true that Colonel Masters ‘misused King’s press damnably,’ but only for dreary discussions on scientific subjects. He cared no more for politics than a Laputan. Besides, even Clarence felt that Mabel was above the meanness of the revenge

he had suggested. So Clarence was proud of his diplomacy, and of his letter too—not a brilliant production—which he forwarded forthwith by special messenger. Thus it came about that a little more than an hour after her return home Clarence's apology came into Mabel's hands. She had returned mortified and humiliated, not least for her own part in a scene which seemed to her simply degrading. And there was still further humiliation in store for her when she attempted to induce her aunt to decline the invitation. Her aunt had no notion of declining an invitation from an M.P., even though his father had been a linendraper. It was little use for Mabel to say generally that both father and son had again been grossly rude to her; she had to come down to particulars and go over a scene, which, to go over even in thought, was like holding a burn to the fire. The only point in the story, however, which fascinated Miss Masters' attention was that with which Mabel started, that Mr. Pickles' niece was a factory hand. At this point she made a dead set and followed Mabel no farther.

‘He has asked her?’—aghast.

‘Whom, Aunt?’

‘This niece. My dear, you are quite right, it is most insulting. I shall certainly not go to meet such people.’

Mabel sat silent. What hold could she get on a mind like this?

‘Really it is not safe to go anywhere in these towns, not anywhere—not even to the house of the member,’ Miss Masters resumed in a fume.

‘He has not asked his niece, Aunt. You will meet no one there lower than Mr. Pickles himself.’

‘My dear Mabel, you said this moment that Mr. Pickles had sent her and some low Irish-woman an invitation.’

‘Not exactly an invitation, Aunt—a load of coals.’

‘Oh! But why should we cut him for that? He has to do something for these people to keep them quiet and hush the scandal up. You are too particular, my dear. It doesn’t do to be too particular in the North.’

‘I was trying to explain, Aunt,’ said Mabel after a pause of despair, ‘that Mr. Pickles and

his son were very rude to me when I went to their office.'

'To their office! But what took you to their office, my dear?'

'I went to set right this mistake about the load of coals.'

'I must say, then, Mabel, that you deserved it. Why shouldn't Mr. Pickles send her a load of coals, even if she was his niece?'

'Oh, dear,' groaned Mabel, yet laughing in spite of herself. 'The mistake was not in sending the coals, but in delivering them. They were delivered at the wrong house, and I went to see Mr. Long to have the mistake set right, and found only Mr. Clarence Pickles in the office, and his manner wasn't pleasant; and then Mr. Pickles himself came in—But I can't go over it all again;' flushing at the recollection of the scene.

It was as well that Mabel didn't put herself to the pain of going over it all again, for Miss Masters' mind, being slow working and given to hanging fire, was still stuck dead at the load of coals. It was busy and perplexed about Mabel's fervent interest in it, and in low things and persons generally. She had a kind

of dim idea that Mabel, through her grandfather, must have coal in the blood.

‘I still think, Mabel’—with the air of having given the most patient and dispassionate attention to Mabel’s statement of her side of the question—‘I still think, Mabel, that Mr. Pickles wasn’t to blame for sending a load of coals to his niece, whatever she was.’

‘Well, perhaps not, Aunt. He may have meant it kindly,’ giving up the hopeless battle for the present. ‘Mit der Dummheit kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens.’

Before she could renew it on a more favourable field, Clarence’s letter came, and she hurried off at once to tell the good news to Mrs. Mathers; while Miss Masters had the presence of mind to take the opportunity of her absence to write and send to post her acceptance of the invitation.

‘Well, my dear, I have written to accept the invitation,’ she said, with perfect complacency, on Mabel’s return.

‘Has it gone?’

‘Yes; Jane took it to the post. I was very glad, dear, that I got you to agree with me about it.’

Mabel took this thing characteristically. She had brought it on herself, and richly deserved it. Mr. Pickles had done his penance, and she had to do hers. Besides, not to have accepted the invitation would have been construed into not accepting what was certainly a most ample apology. So Mabel tried to reason herself into resignation—not successfully. She looked forward to this dread party with a mixed feeling of disgust and dismay. And yet, as so often happens, it turned out to be one of the pleasantest parties she ever enjoyed, though from no fault of her hosts. They were not pleasant hosts. They were too conscious, and made their guests too conscious, of their being superior beings. Josiah, for instance, is, we will not say overbearing, but overpowering, in conversation. He divides human knowledge exhaustively into two categories—things he knows, and things not worth knowing. If you talk to him upon things he knows, he cannot help showing you that your opinion is worthless; if you talk to him upon things he does not know, he cannot help showing you that your knowledge is worthless; so that he is not a social success. Nor is Clarence.

He is as like his father as a photograph of a portrait in oils is like the original—that is, a mechanically correct, but vacant copy, all the colour, expression, life and soul wanting. Clarence's idea of gentlemanliness was contempt. It had been shown to him by the acknowledged leaders of fashion in Oxford (where he stayed to be plucked for his Smalls), and he showed it in Wefton, bettering the instruction. This made him an even more unsatisfactory host than his father. As for Miss Pickles, the aunt, an entertainment meant to her just what it means on a signboard—provision for man and beast. Her work began and ended with the kitchen, and when she was not in the kitchen, or its purlieus, in person, she was there in thought, which made her absent-minded and given to answer in monosyllables, and at random in the drawing-room. It was through no fault of her hosts, therefore, that Mabel enjoyed this party; for Mr. and Miss Pickles paid her no attention at all, and Clarence too much. Nevertheless, she did enjoy it greatly, owing not a little to the presence at it of a young divine—Rev. George Kneeshaw. He was one of the curates of the

parish church, but not in the least like other curates of Mabel's acquaintance. He was neither prig, priest, nor coxcomb—the three varieties she had hitherto known (for Wefton was not fortunate in its curates)—but just a gentleman who happened to be a clergyman.

Mabel thought him clever and amusing, perhaps, in some degree, because he plainly thought her so; for even the least vain prefer the friends, as they prefer the mirrors, that give back the most flattering reflections of themselves. And the sweet and subtle flattery of the deference of Mr. Kneeshaw's manner was the more attractive by contrast with Mr. Clarence Pickles' patronage. Mr. Kneeshaw, on his part, encountered Mabel with a surprise not flattering to the daughters of the land.

‘Have you been long in Wefton, Miss Masters?’

‘That's a disingenuous way of asking my age, Mr. Kneeshaw. I shall not fall into the trap.’

‘Lived all your life here?’ with unfeigned surprise.

‘All that I remember of it. It's very

dreadful, I know,' with a shocked shake of the head.

'Very—for Wefton.' Mr. Kneeshaw's eloquent dark eyes interpreted the irony of this ungallant speech into the highest compliment. It was a happy form of inoffensive flattery.

'There's a great deal of pity wasted on Wefton, Mr. Kneeshaw. We shouldn't have known we were so wretched if it wasn't for the missionaries who are good enough to come to enlighten us,' with a bow to Mr. Kneeshaw's cloth.

'Ah, it's use; you are so used to its wretchedness you don't feel it, Miss Masters. "Our torments in length of time become our elements," you know.'

'Or is it "The mind is its own place," etc.? You might at least give us credit for being jolly under difficulties.'

A young lady capping quotations from 'Paradise Lost' sounds formidable, but it is more the manner than the matter of a quotation which gives it an appearance of pedantry; and in Mabel's easy manner there was not the least consciousness of learning or cleverness.

Mr. Clarence Pickles, who haunted Mabel persistently, though he felt himself for the most part 'out of' the conversation, gathered generally that Wefton was being abused by Mr. Kneeshaw, and was wroth. It is true no one abused the place so liberally as himself. Like most Weftonians, in conversation with a stranger he turned queen's evidence against his native town to escape being confounded in a common condemnation with it. Just as Jimmy Button, the Fuegian, abused his countrymen to Mr. Darwin: 'All bad men—know nothing—d——, fools.'

But if Mr. Clarence Pickles' abuse of Wefton was indirect exculpation of himself, anyone else's abuse of it was indirect condemnation of him, and was resented accordingly. Besides, his wrath had been gathering blackly all the afternoon against this prig of a curate, who had made himself most offensive by his monopoly of Mabel.

'If Wefton is such a hole, a fellow can keep out of it, I suppose. He's not forced to come here; or stay here, eh?'

Here was a startling explosion from one's host.

‘We come as “missionaries,” you know, Miss Masters,’ said Mr. Kneeshaw pleasantly, turning towards Mabel after an amazed look at Clarence. Clarence’s temper was not improved by his being ignored.

‘To parties?’ he sneered; for the curates of Wefton were gay.

‘Well, one may meet savages who need civilising even at parties;’ this time addressing himself directly to Clarence, but still keeping to the tone of good-tempered banter.

‘They’re not likely to be asked more than once,’ retorted Clarence with a readiness which surprised himself.

‘And don’t deserve to be if they insult their host intentionally, Mr. Pickles,’ said Mr. Kneeshaw, who was ashamed for himself and distressed for Mabel at this supremely silly encounter. ‘I’m sorry you took seriously a little chaffing abuse of Wefton; but, you know, everyone abuses the town he’s quartered in as a matter of course; though, as you say, he wouldn’t stay here if he didn’t like it.’ Mr. Kneeshaw’s apology, which to Mabel seemed magnanimous, seemed mean to Clarence, who could imagine no other motive for stooping

than the hope of avoiding a blow. Having, however, no sharper missile ready, he turned on his heel, muttering, perfectly audibly, 'Confounded cad!'

'I think it's time for me to go,' said Mr. Kneeshaw, turning to Mabel with a look of mixed amusement and amazement.

'And for me, too,' said Mabel, who did not look either amused or amazed, but disgusted merely. Mr. Kneeshaw saw her and her aunt off, and then went home, thinking a good deal about the quarrel, but this above all, that it seemed to bring him nearer the most charming girl he had ever met. He could afford, therefore, to forgive Mr. Clarence Pickles. Besides, he had his revenge the very next day.

Next day, as he was going through one of the narrow lanes of Wefton, he stopped to make a ragged child he knew happy with one of those gaily coloured balloons which are hawked through low neighbourhoods. It was an unlucky present. For, as the little wretch ran flaunting it in triumph up the middle of the street, he frightened with it Mr. Clarence Pickles' horse. It stopped, backed, turned half

round, till a savage lash of the whip sent it bounding in mad panic down the street. In a moment it had knocked down and run over the child, reached the corner of the street, and, instead of turning with the road to the left, ran straight on along a short cut for foot passengers to the Lancashire and Yorkshire station. The path was broad enough till it crossed the railway cutting by a wooden bridge of three planks forty feet above the line; so that, whether the horse took the bridge, or the brow of the cutting at either side, destruction was certain. The groom had the presence of mind to leap off, and escaped with a couple of broken ribs, but Clarence seemed too bewildered to do more than cling to the broken reins. Kneeshaw, who was on the bridge, looked round when he heard the shout, and saw the trap just as it was dashing from the street into the footway. He ran back to leave between him and the bridge a margin for the struggle, and had a moment's pause for breath before he sprang at the reins. He missed them, was knocked down, but brought the horse down too. It was not a romantic mode

of stopping a runaway horse, as by a stumbling block, but it was effective.

Clarence was at first too unnerved to swear at the officious crowd which gathered round them in a moment, though he had the presence of mind to intercept some brandy meant for Kneeshaw. Indeed, he needed it the most of the two. Kneeshaw, who had no bones broken, and did not yet feel his bruises, was giving collected orders to the men who were busy about the fallen horse, while Clarence was shivering as in an ague. The brandy, however, so restored him to himself that he was soon able to abuse the men who were cutting the traces as a set of bunglers, his groom as a confounded coward, and the child he had run over as an infernal little beggar's brat.

A man has naturally a very kindly feeling towards anyone whose life he has just saved, but this Clarence soon dissipated.

'Look here, Mr. Pickles,' said Kneeshaw, quitting the horse's head to come up to the side of the trap, 'if you can't thank God for your life except by swearing, you'd better hold your tongue.' And, without waiting to catch

Clarence's muttered reply, he walked back to look after the child that was run over.

On the other hand, a man must be very generous to feel duly grateful for so big a debt as his life ; and as Clarence's failing was not generosity, it would surprise no one who knew human nature to hear that he was not brought to feel more kindly towards Kneeshaw through the mortifying consciousness of owing him what he never could pay.

CHAPTER III.

REV. GEORGE KNEESHAW.

‘ISN’T Mr. Kneeshaw down yet?’ asked Mr. Gant, in an aggrieved voice.

‘No, sir,’ replied the little maid; ‘but I think he is getting up, and will be down in a few minutes. Will you step in, sir?’

‘Thank you, I shall go up to his room,’ said Mr. Gant curtly.

Mr. Gant, the senior curate of the parish church of Wefton, was righteously enraged with his colleague, whose weddings he had had to take that morning. It was Mr. Kneeshaw’s week of surplice duty, but as he lived a mile from the church, and did not turn up that morning for the weddings, the clerk had natural recourse to Mr. Gant, whose lodgings were at hand. Now nothing tried Mr. Gant’s easily turned temper more than weddings as they were conducted at the parish church. A

marriage, which was a piece of business to the clerk and an entertainment to the bridal party, was a sacrament to him, and seldom was one celebrated by him without the clashing of these conflicting views. This morning, especially, the profanity of the clerk in treating the weddings as a piece of business, and of the bridal party in treating them as occasions of unseemly rejoicing, had been flagrant and exasperating. Therefore Mr. Gant spoke sharply to the little maid, and strode sternly upstairs.

‘Kneeshaw!’ he cried aloud, as he stumbled over the boots at that gentleman’s door. ‘Kneeshaw, I say!’

A profound snore was the response.

Having knocked twice impatiently at the door, with no better result, Mr. Gant turned the handle and entered the room. His first step landed him in the bath, his next on a pile of books. Resting here for a moment till his eye grew used enough to the dimness to steer him clear through the confusion of books, boots, bath, clubs, and dumb bells which littered the floor, Mr. Gant picked his way to the bedside. Here a chair, with a candle

burnt to the socket and a volume of natural history upon it, showed for what Mr. Kneeshaw had borrowed from sleep the hours he was now paying back with interest. The truth is, that, partly from the excitement and partly from the pain of last night's adventure, Mr. Kneeshaw couldn't get asleep till the small hours of the morning.

‘Kneeshaw!’ cried Mr. Gant, shaking the sleeper sharply by the shoulder. ‘I say, Kneeshaw!’

‘Is that you, Gant?’ muttered Mr. Kneeshaw sleepily. ‘What's the matter?’

‘Matter! Do you know what o'clock it is?’

‘I suppose a man must be wide awake to know what o'clock it is,’ growled Mr. Kneeshaw, with mild but ill-timed facetiousness. ‘Do you want me to take your matins for you?’

Now Mr. Gant's six-o'clock matins, as he termed that mechanical monologue, which he pattered over in an empty school-house at the rate and with the expression appropriate to ‘This is the house that Jack built,’ was a sore subject between these uncongenial colleagues.

‘No,’ said the exasperated Gant; ‘but I don’t want to take your weddings for you; and you must allow me to say that it is a scandal and a disgrace to a priest to set such an example of sloth.’

‘Well, I don’t know,’ yawned the imperturbable Kneeshaw, as he sat up and stretched himself. ‘What saith the Psalmist, “Let the saints rejoice in their beds”? I don’t call it rejoicing in your bed to get up at five o’clock. All the same, Gant, I am sorry I overslept myself, and let you in for the weddings. Pay you in funerals next week. Stay and have some breakfast, will you?’

‘Thank you, I have breakfasted,’ replied Mr. Gant sourly, retreating before his colleague’s coolness with an irritating sense of impotence. ‘I have my sick to see after. Good morning.’

‘Good morning. I say, would you mind telling Fritters I shall be down in half an hour?’

‘Fritters’ was Mr. Kneeshaw’s name for the little maid, in allusion to her person and toilet generally, which were scant and snippety, but especially to her mode of dressing her hair.

Fritters, by the way, a maid-of-all-work of twelve years, took the name from him, as she would have taken anything from him, very kindly, but resented its use by another.

Mr. Gant being gone, Mr. Kneeshaw lay in bed a little with his thoughts turned naturally upon his colleague. 'What a prig that fellow is! He has cultivated his natural dulness by reading dull books till he has become so stultified as to think himself clever. Yet the fellow never really thinks or studies. He cannot maintain or even understand an argument, and cannot construe correctly a chapter in the Greek Testament. He crept through a theological college, was ploughed for deacon's orders, and passed a year afterwards only by cribbing and copying. Yet the bishop's hands were no sooner off his head than he claimed a reverence for himself that he would be the last to yield the bishop. It is good to hear him show up the ignorance of the chaplain who plucked him, and the profanity of the bishop who ordained him on the strength of an apostolic succession that has changed nothing in him but his dress. He may well hold on by apostolical succession,' said Mr. Kneeshaw;

‘it’s all he has to boast of. If a man has no natural claims on our respect, he must fall back on supernatural claims. If the O’Mulligan had been less out at elbows, he would have bragged less of his descent from Brian Boroo. That forged draft was all the cash he had.’

Having thus established to his satisfaction a natural connection between silliness and ritualism, Mr. Kneeshaw addressed himself to his toilet.

Meantime Mr. Gant, on his way to his work, had his thoughts equally busy about Mr. Kneeshaw. ‘What made that fellow become a priest? He laughs at our Holy Church, her orders, her sacraments, even her creeds. He said to Mawson the other day that the Athanasian Creed was like Temple Bar with the skulls on it—out of date, either as a landmark, a barrier, or a scarecrow, and the sooner it was swept away the better! Good Heavens This man eats the bread of the Church, and thus bites the hand that feeds him!’

The question that Mr. Gant asked himself, ‘What brought this Jonah into the ship of the Church?’—‘*Que diable allait-il faire dans cette*

galère ?'—will perhaps perplex our readers as much as it did Mr. Gant. The truth is, George Kneeshaw drifted into the Church. His father, himself a clergyman, always intended him for the ministry; his mother set her heart upon his entering it, and he himself did not feel himself at first unfit for it. But he soon began to find out his mistake.

To begin with, he had a most uncomfortable curacy. Dr. Clancy, his rector, the Vicar of Weston, who originally was a missionary, then an usher, then head master of the Hertford Grammar School, and then Vicar of Weston, treated his curates as fourth-form schoolboys. As a rule, therefore, no one who had any self-respect could endure to serve under him. Nor did he seek such to serve under him. He preferred to justify the wide interval he maintained between himself and his curates by choosing such as were far his inferiors in learning and intellect; and as he was neither an able man nor a profound scholar he had to go low down for his recruits. These recruits were promoted to all the livings in and about Weston of which the vicar had or obtained the patronage; and so it came about that the

clergy of the town and neighbourhood were, as a rule, of a very inferior class. George Kneeshaw, however, though a gentleman and scholar, and the last man the Doctor would have chosen for curate, or who would have chosen the Doctor for rector, had accepted a nomination to the parish church of Wefton on the recommendation of his uncle, a college friend of the vicar. Rector and curate were not long in finding out their mistake, which could not now, however, be rectified for two years, the term of a first curacy. Kneeshaw was the three things Dr. Clancy 'most highly held in hate' in a curate—able, independent, and Broad Church; while Dr. Clancy seemed to Kneeshaw, not perhaps altogether justly, the incarnation of cant—a man whose idea of religion was unctuous talk, who believed, so to speak, in 'soft money'—in an unlimited and irredeemable issue of paper.

Thus, to begin with, Kneeshaw had a very uncomfortable curacy. But this was not all, or nearly all, or anything indeed, compared with another great and growing trouble of his life. Less than a year after his ordination he began to find that he had entered a haunted

house, or, rather, a house with a haunted room in it. We cannot better express his position in the Church. In most respects it was a very pleasant position. It made him master of his own time ; allowed him some leisure to read ; gave him a choice of friends wide as the parish, and brought him into a kindly relationship to the poor that he thought more of and made more of than most clergymen. But this position he held on the terms of his acceptance of creeds, articles, and doctrines that seemed to him to conflict with each other and with reason. At first he stilled his conscience with the thought that, as beyond dispute the Articles looked towards Geneva and the Liturgy towards Rome, no clergyman could accept the two together without reservation. But a slight acquaintance with the clergy of Wefton—who, as we have said, were, as a rule, of a very inferior class—convinced him that they accepted absolute contradictions in perfect good faith, their consciences in this matter being much clearer than their brains. In fact, his intercourse with the Wefton clergy rather deepened than lightened his sense of responsibility, for no reasonable man could listen to their arguments without his

faith being shaken. Naturally, though illogically, Kneeshaw's contempt for the advocates extended to contempt for their cause, and his scepticism under their treatment became more confirmed and profound. At first he faced and fought his doubts fiercely.

He would not make his judgment blind ;
He faced the spectres of the mind
To lay them.

But they were not laid. When he seemed to have exorcised them they returned sevenfold and irresistible till he fled before them, and lived now, as we have said, in a house with a haunted room in it, whose door he shunned to open and shuddered even to pass. He declined controversy, put aside apologies and aids to faith, where he found 'no light, but rather darkness visible'—which but manifested the difficulties they were designed to clear—and returned to his study of natural history, in which he delighted most and found most distraction. Lock the haunted chamber as he would, however, he could not lock out the horror of it from his mind. It was always there, latent or evident, and affected his whole life, in some respects, curiously enough, for

good. Practically, scepticism wrought in him the zeal of a religion. It made him sometimes sour and cynical in speech, especially in his intercourse with his brother clergy, but in act it seemed to double his natural kindness. Naturally he was very generous—to the weak and dependent generosity itself—with women gentle as a woman, with children childlike as a child, humble with the poor, homely with the simple, kindly to every creature with the claim of helplessness. Now this natural kindness was raised by his scepticism into a religion, in part through his eagerness to atone for the heterodoxy of his thoughts by the orthodoxy of his life, and in part through the hope that his life might re-act upon his thoughts to their reconversion—a hope founded on a text in the New Testament and encouraged by the advice of his friend Archer Lawley, Vicar of Fenton, a Broad Churchman, with whom George spent every spare hour. Those who think that he should not have allowed his conscience to be sophisticated by this hope may have the satisfaction of knowing that the sin brought its own punishment with it. George was haunted and

unhappy, flying before a spectre he had not the courage to face again,

Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turn'd round, walks on,
And turns no more his head ;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

When he had dressed himself with some difficulty—for he was badly bruised and could not stir his right arm without pain—and had got downstairs, he found Fritters in tribulation. A meerschaum pipe had fallen upon a glass case containing a loathsome array of specimens of the British spider which George had collected and arranged ; and Fritters, stooping over the wreck, was divided between her horror of the spiders and her desire to pick the pipe and the shattered glass out from among them.

‘ Oh, please, sir, I done it,’ she cried, with a fresh outburst of tears. ‘ I was standing on a chair a-polishing of the bookcase, when I shook down the pipe from the top on to the glass case. Eh, whatever maun I do ? ’

‘ Pooh ! ’ said George, taking up the pipe to find a hairy and hideous specimen crushed out of all recognition under its bowl. ‘ Don’t

be a child, Fritters'—Fritters was of the mature age of twelve—'there isn't much harm done, and crying won't mend it, anyhow.' He was under the fond delusion that Fritters was bemoaning his loss and deprecating his anger, though nothing could be farther from her thoughts.

'Eh! but shoo will go on though,' said Fritters, not in the least consoled. 'Ye mind how shoo called me for a week for blackleading of your boots, sir, and that was nowt to this,' looking disconsolately at the shattered case.

George couldn't help a smile at his egotistical delusion that Fritters' concern was about him, while at the same time he was pleased by her faith in his forgiveness. 'She'll think it was I, Fritters,' said he, putting his hand kindly on the girl's shoulder.

'But, please, sir, if shoo ax you if I done it?' asked Fritters anxiously, knowing George was a soft one and fearing he might not have the strength of mind to tell a direct lie.

'She can't ask me if I say, "Miss Skinner, I have had a misfortune; would you kindly send Fritters for the glazier?"'

Fritters was as much tickled as relieved by

the idea of doing Miss Skinner in this ingenious way; and her crushing terror of that virago having been removed, there was room in her heart for lighter anxieties to stir. 'Please, sir, was it a particular un?' she asked, looking at the scrunched spider with an expression in which natural abhorrence and an affectation of interest struggled together ludicrously.

'It was a specimen of the *Argyroneta aquatica*, Fritters,' said George solemnly.

'Was it though?' exclaimed Fritters, looking now with awe on the brute. 'And the glass will be tenpence mayhap?' Here she felt on surer ground, for tenpence was deducted from her scanty last quarter's wages for a pane she put her elbow through. Suddenly, to George's surprise, she began to cry more silently, but more profusely than ever. 'I'm now't but trouble to you, sir,' she sobbed, 'but I *will* learn them tables.'

This heroic resolution referred to tasks Mr. Kneeshaw set her. He gave Fritters the only thing he ever grudged to give—his time—borrowing her from Miss Skinner for half an hour of an evening to teach her to read, write, and cipher. The girl was a foundling from the

workhouse, recommended to George by her friendlessness, and as she took the opportunity of her evening lesson to tell him her griefs and grievances, she soon learned to look on him as her *Deus ex machinâ* to get her out of scrapes. She felt besides that there was a bond between them in their common awe of Miss Skinner, who ruled George nearly as despotically as she did Fritters.

‘Of course you’ll learn the tables,’ said George soothingly, touched by the feeling she showed; ‘but I’ll tell you what, Fritters, if Miss Skinner sees you’ve been crying, she’ll know you’ve been in mischief.’ This was effective, especially as it was reinforced by a shrill cry from the kitchen.

‘Georgina!’—the workhouse mistress, who was childless, had christened the foundling after her husband—‘Georgina! What-are-you-a-doing-of-upstairs-and-not-a-hand-put-to-the-boots-and-knives-when-it-is-a’most-time-to-be-getting-dinner-ready-you-lazy-idle-gaumless-good-for-nowt!’ This discharge of shrapnell, shot out as one word, was very effective, and brought down Fritters instantaneously. George also felt, as it was meant he should, the

reproach of lateness and laziness, and sat down to devour his breakfast and the *Wefton Witness* simultaneously, after the manner of bachelors. He soon came across a paragraph of some interest, which he read with a grim smile.

‘ Our readers will be concerned to hear of an accident, which was like to have had a fatal termination, and which happened last evening to Mr. Clarence Pickles, son of our respected member. As Mr. Pickles was driving down Sugg Lane—which it will be remembered is the short way from Driffield Street to the Lancashire and Yorkshire Station—a little urchin ran out of one of the houses in that swarming neighbourhood, waving a red flag in the face of the horse. The high-spirited animal took fright, became uncontrollable, and bolted, and, having knocked down and run over the child which was the cause of all the mischief, dashed from Sugg Lane into Slater’s Alley—the footway which crosses the railway cutting by the plank bridge. Here the groom lost his nerve and leaped off, but Mr. Pickles fortunately stuck manfully to his post, though he could not guide the panic-stricken animal so as to prevent

its knocking down the Rev. Mr. Kneeshaw, one of the curates of the parish church, who, however, we are happy to say, escaped without serious injury. As the shaft struck the reverend gentleman, the horse stumbled and came down within a few yards of the cutting, into which, in all human probability, it must have plunged but for this timely and most providential accident. The horse, which was a very valuable animal, was seriously injured, and the harness, either maliciously, or, as we prefer to think, officiously, was cut to pieces by the crowd that collected about the scene of the accident. The groom had two ribs broken in his fall, and the child, which was run over and had both its legs fractured, lies in a precarious state, its mother obstinately opposing its removal to the Infirmary.'

In this piece of penny-a-lining, George read the frank hand of Mr. Pickles; and indeed the reporter, hearing of the accident, had judiciously gone to head-quarters to ensure the correctness of his account. Mr. Pickles would probably have given a truer, or at least a more plausible, narrative of the affair if the reporter had not come upon him while still in a state of

irritation against Mr. Kneeshaw and not cool enough to calculate the evidence against such a version of the accident. George was not the man to talk or think much of his part in the affair, and was more amused than aggrieved by the paragraph, so far as it concerned himself; that part of it, however, in which the reporter, echoing Mr. Pickles, showed less concern for the injured child than for the injured horse and harness, was not amusing. George had seen the little fellow immediately after the accident, and could not get the white face, patient from excess of pain, out of his thoughts as he lay awake in the night; and now he hurried over his breakfast that he might go to see what could be done for the child.

Sugg Lane, with its two gorgeous gin palaces, many foul and foetid beershops, and its sordid, squalid, crowded homes, was like one of those women who might be seen of a morning standing about its pavement—frowsy, slatternly, down-at-heel, and unwholesome-looking, a tawdry ribbon or two making her rags look more wretched. In a sunken cellar in this unlovely lane lay the little child that was run over—Squire Lumb. ‘Squire,’ ‘Colo-

nel,' 'Captain,' and even 'Lord,' are not uncommon Christian names in the levelling West Riding. The little Squire lay lost in a corner of a great bed which took up a third of the cellar, and which he shared at night with his father and mother. His mother had left the wash-tub to coax him into lying quiet, for he was very restless and feverish.

'Lig thee daan, doy, doee nah.'¹

'May I come in, Mrs. Lumb?'

'Come forards, Mr. Kneeshaw, and sit thee daan. Aw'm fain to see yo.'

'How is he to-day?'

'None so weel,' said the poor woman, as she rocked herself back and forward in deep trouble. 'He had some mak' of a sick gird²—a fit like—after yo'd been last neet, and doctor coomed and 'xamined him and said we must tak' him to t' Infirmary. Eh, my puir bairn, my puir bairn, they'll niver tak' thee to t' Infirmary to be a-cuttin' and a-slashin' and tryin' their experience wi' thee; for tha knaws, Mr. Kneeshaw, when Joe Webster, our Nancy's husband's brother, fell off the stee³ and was

¹ Lie down, dear, do now.

² 'Gird,' attack.

³ 'Stee,' ladder.

took to t' Infirmary, the doctors tell'd him there was nowt for it but he maun have his leg ta'en off, and he nobbut a lad, as it might be our James, and as fine a lad as ever stepped, but they killed him amang 'em did t' doctors, and cut his leg off, and he niver looked up at after,¹ but was browt hoam to dee. And then to be telled that aw'm a-murderin' our Squire because aw'm agen his gwin' into t' Infirmary! An' murdered he is, too,' cried the poor mother, starting up and bending over the bed, 'trampled and trodden down like t' stones in t' street, and thowt no more on than t' muck under t' horses' hoofs. Eh, that ever I should live to see this day!'

George said what he could to soothe her, which wasn't much, and then, knowing that hard work is the anodyne of the poor, tried to divert her thoughts. 'I see you have a big wash to-day, Mrs. Lumb, and I am sure you won't mind me if I sit and watch Squire a bit, while you go on with your washing. I have a bit of time to myself this morning.'

'Its varry gooid on yo', Mr. Kneeshaw, aw'm sewer it is, and aw'll niver be out on

¹ 'Looked up at after,' i.e. got over it.

your debt,' said Mrs. Lumb, drying her tears in her apron. When he was a-ramblin' and a-ravin' last neet, and that restless that we were fair bet wi' him, 'twas "Mr. Kneeshaw" an' "Mr. Kneeshaw" ovver an' ovver agin.'

Squire was still and lucid enough now, watching with a dreamy interest the grapes and the flaring picture-book which George added to the treasures ranged by his bed. These treasures, which he had asked at different times to have brought to him, were only a less pitiful sight than the child himself—a white marble, a string with a round piece of leather at the end, a whipping top, twopence in halfpence, and the burst balloon, which was found clutched in his hand when he was picked up. He nodded towards it now, as George sat by the bedside and took the little feverish hand in his: 'Broken!' he said, looking up anxiously in George's face to see how he would take this terrible disaster. He seemed quite relieved when George only smiled and said—

'Never mind, Squire, we can get another.'

He lay quiet a little to take in this offer in all its bearings, looking the while at the burst balloon, his mind wandering from it to the

accident, of which it was the occasion, with the result of a refusal which was not meant to be as ungracious as it sounded—‘Don’t want another;’ and then, after a pause, ‘Please, Mr. Kneeshaw, I shall miss my marks.’

‘Eh, mun! he does greeat ovver thim marks,’ said his mother, whose broad Yorkshire contrasted with the child’s school-taught English. Marks for attendance were given in the Sunday-school, and a prize at the close of the year for the full number. It was curious to find the treasures of a top and marble and the troubles of the loss of a mark and a six-penny prize of such importance as to be remembered by the child in the midst of his pain; and George in his present depressed mood drew the morbid moral that the treasures and troubles of the lad’s elders would not look larger if taken from under the microscope of their imagination. From this morbid moralising he was roused by the appearance of a special treasure and trouble of his own. He was startled into dropping a grape he was peeling with his penknife for the child by a voice at the door.

‘Does Mrs. Lumb live here?’

Mrs. Lumb herself was startled into the astonishing civility of a curtsy.

‘Nay, for sewer, Miss Masters! Ould Betty sent for yo’ after all? I telled her aw couldn’t for shame ax yo’ to come into t’ lane, let alone such a hoil as this.’

‘I wasn’t sent for, Mrs. Lumb, but I read of the accident in the paper and thought I might help you to nurse a bit. How do you do, Mr. Kneeshaw? You’re not hurt, I hope?’

‘Thank you, I’m all right,’ said George, who couldn’t help a look of amazement at Miss Masters’ appearance in the last character in which he would have expected to see her. Her ministrations had been confined to her own neighbourhood, which was in another parish at the far side of the town. ‘I didn’t know you knew Squire, Miss Masters.’

‘I don’t know him. Do I, Squire?’ she said, as she rearranged his tumbled pillows with one hand and with the other raised his head with the deftness of a nurse and the tenderness of a mother. Squire’s wide wondering eyes were a sufficient answer.

‘I thought Mrs. Lumb wished to send for you.’

‘Nooan soa, Mr. Kneeshaw, aw niver thowt on axin’ her into sich an a haase as this. But ould Betty—tha knaws ould Betty, Miss, shoo that hawks brandysnap an’ sich mak’ o’ stuff—shoo telled me that tha visited the sick childer araand where shoo come thro’, up aboon the Green Market, and that tha did ’em a deal more gooid nor t’ doctors.’

The Prince could not have been more amazed at the sight of Cinderella at home than George at this revelation of Miss Masters as hospital nurse.

‘Yes ; I do sometimes visit sick children,’ said the young lady defiantly, in answer to the astonished look which had not yet died out of George’s face. ‘There’s room in Wefton, I hope, for another Miss Batt.’

Miss Batt was an odious old maid, attached to St. Gabriel’s church as tract and scandal distributor, the horror of its curates, the terror of its poor, and George’s special detestation, as Miss Masters well knew.

‘I thought you were close behind me, Jane,’ to her maid, who now appeared at the door wrestling with a big bundle.

‘Please, Miss, I lost you at the turn.’

‘It’s a water-bed for Squire, Mrs. Lumb. He will find it much easier to lie on.’

‘I’m afraid I can be of no use,’ said George wistfully.

‘Unless you can make beds, Mr. Kneeshaw. But even Miss Batt wouldn’t turn you out of a house in your own parish.’

‘You don’t know Miss Batt then. I shall call again in the evening to hear what the doctor thinks, Mrs. Lumb, and to bring Squire the Sunday-school prize he is fretting over. Good-bye, Miss Masters; I shall report you to Miss Batt for poaching.’

As George walked away he thought that the less he saw of that young lady the better it would be for his peace of mind, and for his peace of conscience, too. He must not give another hostage to the Church that held already so many securities for his fealty.

CHAPTER IV.

MABEL—CHILDHOOD.

‘AN unknown cause of the known effects which we call phenomena, likenesses and differences among these known effects, and a segregation of the effects into subject and object—these are the postulates without which we cannot think. Within each of the segregated masses of manifestations there are likenesses and differences involving secondary segregations, which have also become indispensable postulates. The vivid manifestations constituting the non-ego do not simply cohere, but their cohesions have certain invariable modes ; and among the faint manifestations constituting the ego, which are products of the vivid, there exist corresponding modes of cohesion——’

‘I wish, Mabel, you’d put some expression into what you read,’ said Colonel Masters petulantly.

‘But I can’t understand it, father; you might as well expect expression from a barrel-organ.’

‘Oh, if you take it in that way, and speak of reading for your father as organ-grinding, you had better close the book.’

‘I meant to compare myself to the organ, not the grinder, father, repeating mechanically the tunes put into me. I read the whole chapter over last night, to try to understand it, that I might read it intelligently to you this morning; but it was no use,’ said Mabel wearily, ‘I couldn’t make it out.’

Her father’s sole reply was a shrug, expressive at once of his contempt for woman’s intellect, and his martyr-like resignation to the fate that gave him such a daughter.

‘May I finish the chapter, father? There are only two or three more sentences.’

‘Yes, you may as well finish it now,’ said Colonel Masters, in an injured tone. ‘Read that last paragraph over again.’

Colonel Masters had quite as good sight as his daughter, but some years before a doctor had told him that nothing tried the sight so much as reading; and from that day he resolved

to save his own eyes at the expense of his daughter's. He had never thought of anyone but himself since he began to think at all, and a soldier's life does not tend by any means to make a man unselfish. If he had married young or for love, he might have been drawn out of himself more; but he was a confirmed misogynist, and married at thirty-five, in despair of the dreariness of an Indian life, and in the hope of having a son, whom he might train up in certain principles he had thought out for himself, and was anxious to see tested. His marriage, however, disappointed all his expectations, and rather deepened than lightened the gloom of his disposition and of his life. His wife had not much spirit to begin with, or she would not have married him at the bidding of her parents, and when the little she had was broken a year after her marriage, her meekness, which was meant to conciliate, exasperated him by its insipidity more than any display of spirit would have done.

To him

She was all fault who had no fault at all;

For who loved him must have a touch of earth;

The low sun makes the colour.

And when, after much expectation, she was

confined at last only of a daughter, he lost all hope of her ever being reasonable, and treated her henceforth with less consideration than he showed his syce. The poor woman would have died of the horrible loneliness of his companionship but for the arrival of Mabel. Her she hid away from her father, as some animals of her sex hide their young from their mates lest they should devour them, and lavished upon her in secret all the pent-up love of her heart. Pet and seclude her as she would, however, it was impossible to keep the child from screaming occasionally, or always to keep these excruciating screams out of the hearing of her father. Now he had a horror that was absolutely morbid of noises of all kinds. Their effect on his exquisitely strung nerves was such as the whole household, and indeed the whole community, had reason to dread. A good healthy scream of Mabel's in the morning so upset him that he was sure to beat his syce, abuse his subordinates, make himself intolerable to his equals, and to sting and stab his wretched wife with savage sarcasms. In fact, a scream of Mabel's in those days created a sensation

like that caused by the appalling scream in *Parisina*.

Through the open lattice driven,
That horrid voice ascends to heaven ;
And those who heard it as it past,
In mercy wished it were the last.

IT was no sooner heard than the men-servants scuttled out of the house, and the women-servants made for the nursery, with all kinds of charms for the soothing of the child. While one danced it up and down, another dangled her bracelet in its eyes, a third put a spoonful of some seductive syrup into its too, too wide-open mouth, while a fourth made as fast and air-tight as she could all the doors and windows—its bewildered mother looking on the while in helpless trouble. Nor, if Mabel appeared in all her beauty at that station now, could she have been more talked of than she was in those days. Masters was not popular, and his paroxysm of rage upon the birth of his daughter, and its recurrence at every scream that recalled her existence to him, was at first a joke and at last a grievance to Messrs. Barclay, Pearce, and Sagar, who had often to depend upon him to make up their whist party of an evening ;

and thus it happened that Mabel owed to an idle jest of one of these gentlemen the shaping of her character and of her early years. They came to think the child's tempers, which were neither frequent nor violent, the final cause of all Masters' tempers, which were both frequent and violent, so that the facetious Sagar had furbished up an old joke, and christened Mabel 'the cherub,' because she 'continually did cry.'

'I say,' said Barclay to that gentleman one night, 'I can't stand that fellow Masters any longer.'

'You mean you can't stand losing, old boy,' said Sagar, who, having won considerably, was much more patient of human infirmity. 'But Masters *is* a beast, and no mistake.'

Barclay, after pulling at his pipe gloomily for some moments, recurred to his grievance: 'What's that they give 'em to keep 'em in good temper in baby farms?'

'The bottle, my boy; try it, it's very soothing,' said his facetious chum, pushing the brandy bottle towards him. 'Soothing syrup, that's it; why the deuce doesn't Pearce'—

Pearce was the doctor—‘give it soothing syrup?’

‘What! murder a patient?—kill the goose with the golden eggs?’

‘Needn’t kill it,’ growled the morose Barclay, ‘stun it a bit; or, by Jove, order it home; they do order them home, you know.’

‘Yes, before they’re weaned; put ’em in a hamper labelled “To be kept dry,” in charge of the captain,’ said Sagar, with provoking flippancy, jingling his winnings cheerfully; and then, after a pause, with a sudden change to seriousness, ‘By George, though, it will do!’

‘Of course it will do; send it home with an ayah,’ said Barclay, triumphantly.

‘Send it home with its mother,’ said Sagar; ‘that brute is killing her.’

‘What! are you going to get sick leave?’ sneered his chum.

Barclay was too swinish not to misinterpret Sagar’s feeling towards Mrs. Masters, which was made up of a chivalrous mixture of admiration of her beauty, reverence for her meek goodness, and pity for her fate.

‘She could go home with the Sedgwicks,’ said Sagar, too much engrossed with his scheme for rescuing her from Bluebeard to heed Barclay’s sneer. ‘I wonder has Pearce turned in yet. I’ll cross over and see;’ and before Barclay could muster up any more clumsy chaff, the kind-hearted and impulsive lad was across to the Doctor’s. The Doctor, who hadn’t turned in, naturally expected an important patient when Sagar burst in upon him impetuously.

‘Don’t be uneasy, Doctor; nobody’s ill,’ said Sagar jocosely.

The Doctor tried to look relieved, but listened rather sourly to Sagar’s scheme. He didn’t like the loss of so good a patient as Mrs. Masters, and he didn’t like the light use which Sagar proposed to make of his professional advice; but, on the other hand, as he also admired and pitied Mrs. Masters, he suffered for his devotion to her an hourly martyrdom from the tongue of his jealous shrew of a wife. While affecting to listen to all Sagar’s sentimental and irrelevant pleas, he was weighing the practical *pros* and *cons* in his own mind, and at last decided that he had all along

intended to order Mrs. Masters herself to England, that he had spoken about the change to her several times, and even hinted its advisability to her husband, and that he would put the matter to-morrow, once for all, plainly before them. At the same time he made it quite clear that the idea was wholly his own, and that it was suggested by the delicacy of the lady's health, and not of her relations with her husband. This Mr. Sagar was not concerned to dispute, but was rather glad to confirm, knowing enough of human nature to be sure that the Doctor would be more zealous in the advocacy of a scheme of his own than of one suggested by another. It did not need zealous advocacy, however. Captain Masters was only too glad to be rid of his wife and daughter. Mrs. Masters felt, and was shocked to feel, a timid and secret joy at the prospect of escaping from such a husband, and of carrying her little one to a safer nest; and the only one distressed by the scheme was its originator.

Poor Sagar had come to regard this sweet, gracious, and unhappy woman with something of the chivalrous devotion which an enthusiastic

loyalist would feel towards his imprisoned and oppressed queen ; and her departure was as great a grief to him as it was a relief to her husband. It had, however, the effect of clearing Mabel's character, for Masters' tempers were soon found to be spontaneously generated, and not merely born of the tempers of his daughter ; and the morose Barclay was fain to admit that only the devil could be the father of such outbursts as he once put down to the credit of the baby.

In this way it came about that Mabel's early and impressionable years passed from under the blighting shadow of her father's tyranny. Her first impressions, which, like a palimpsest, were written over without being erased, were all of her mother ; that is, of gentleness, guilelessness, unselfishness, simple piety, and profound love. When she was six years old, indeed, her father spent with her mother and her a fortnight of his two years' leave—the rest being given to foreign travel ; but her only impressions of him were, that he was childish yet hated children, and noisy and yet hated noise ; to which paradoxical conclusions she was brought in this wise : while he

was in the house she was taught to sit still as a stone, and yet when he talked to her, he spoke in a great and terrible voice. In truth, he shouted to her as some people shout to foreigners, through confounding dulness of intelligence with dulness of hearing. When he would roar nearly at the top of his voice, 'Well, Mabel, how do you like your doll?' the little girl, perplexed by a kind question put so terrifically, could only look up half amazed and half frightened, and would thus confirm his impression that she was, like her mother, an idiot.

By the way, it was curious to see how, after this tremendous question, she hid her doll away from him, as by a derived instinct, just as her mother had hidden her in her infancy away from him.

Nor was Mabel's opinion of her father's intellect in those days more flattering than that he had formed of hers. As, in order to make himself intelligible to her, he spoke not only in a loud voice, but as nearly as he could in monosyllables, or in dissyllables distinctly divided (as in a primer), she had an idea that he, like her ayah, and very probably all other Indian

persons, was only at the stage of education which she had left behind two years ago. So that she in turn—when she ventured to speak at all—tried to speak down to the level of his understanding. Living alone with her mother, she had come to think in old-fashioned words and ways; but these she tried so to translate that they should be intelligible to the undeveloped intellect of her father. This mutual misunderstanding made a conversation between them rather amusing. Of course, if either had heard the other speak to a third person, each might have formed a worthier impression of the other's understanding. As, however, they met only at lunch-time—Mabel's dinner-hour—and as Major Masters made a point of devoting himself exclusively to her for the few minutes they were together—in order to draw out the little intellect she had—there was no such opportunity of correcting their estimates of each other. Major Masters would shout 'Mabel, do you know any stories?'

Mabel, though by this time she had got used to the loudness of his voice, would hesitate about her answer. She imagined that her father, like her ayah, wished to have retailed to

him the stories she read or heard from her mother, and she could not at once make her mind up as to what story would suit him best.

‘Tales you, know,’ said her father in a still louder tone, thinking that ‘tales,’ being monosyllabic, would be more intelligible than the dissyllabic ‘stories.’ ‘Tales, you know, like “Who killed Cock Robin?” or “Babes in the Wood.”’

‘Oh, dear!’ thought Mabel, ‘is he so far back as that?’ and then she went back to the earliest stratum of stories in her memory. ‘I know the story of “Joseph” and of “Jack the Giant Killer,” and “Sindbad the Sailor,” and the “Three Bears,” and Elisha’s bears; he was bald and hated children,’ she explained, thinking that story might interest him most, as in both respects he resembled the prophet. ‘And “Little Red Riding Hood,” and “Moses in the bulrushes,” and the “Babes in the Wood;” but you know that?’ she corrected herself, looking up into his face interrogatively.

‘She’s certainly silly,’ thought Major Masters, who was not perhaps singular in considering no one wise who did not think him wise.

‘Or,’ continued Mabel, after a pause which her father didn’t fill—she was a terrible chatter-box once her tongue was loosed—‘or I could tell you “The Eleven Wild Swans,” but you mightn’t underst—care for that,’ she substituted, thinking ‘understand’ both too long and too uncomplimentary a word for her father. He, meanwhile, had forgotten her existence, as he often did that of anyone who was speaking to him, and had gone off in a reverie about the son that should have been born to him, and the education he would have given him.

The Major was sitting back in his chair, after his lunch, pulling his long grizzled moustache and staring steadfastly at her without seeing her. ‘How old are you?’ he said abruptly, when he had brought his scattered thoughts back to a focus. Mabel flattered herself that both the question and the long stare that preceded it meant amazement at her acquirements.

‘Oh, I know ever so much more than that,’ she exclaimed, forgetting to answer the question in her eagerness to increase the admiration from which she thought it sprang. ‘I know——’

‘How much are 8 times 6?’ interrupted her father.

This was a terrible blow. Mabel was as much below her years in arithmetic as she was above them in most things. She flushed all over with the shame and mortification of the reaction from pride to abasement, and began to climb slowly in her mind the steep steps from 8 times 2 are 16 upwards. She had just reached 8 times 6 are 48 when her father impatiently changed the problem.

‘How much are 6 times 8?’

She would have said at once 48, if in her confusion it did not seem that as 6 times a thing *must* be less than 8 times a thing, 48 could not be right for both. She puzzled over this till she got so bewildered that the only distinct idea in her mind was a crushing sense of disgrace, which brought the tears into her eyes. Her father no sooner saw this alarming sign, which seemed the storm signal of such screams as used to follow it in her infancy, than he turned to say sharply to her mother, ‘Take her away.’ And so poor Mabel was led away, sobbing bitterly, to be petted and purred over and consoled by her idolising mother.

In this way Major Masters came to form a mean idea of Mabel's intellect from the first, and his prejudiced impression of it was rather confirmed than weakened by the little intercourse he allowed between them in after years. For, as he cared only for—to use De Quincey's distinction—the literature of knowledge, and she only for the literature of power, he knew little and thought less of her acquirements. No doubt he sometimes made her read to him such books as she delighted in and he despised; for whatever his favourite Review recommended, he thought it right to read, to keep abreast with the age; but her admirable rendering of them was lost upon his listlessness, and never suggested that she could be interested in anything uninteresting to him. On the other hand, Mabel had an extravagant veneration for her father's learning and intelligence. If he despised what interested her in literature, it was, she thought, because he had left such things long since behind, and they looked little from the height he had reached. 'She darkly felt him great and wise,' and shared his opinion not only of himself, but of her. She was told daily for years of her

stupidity, and was forced to realise it in reading the dreary and maddening metaphysics in which he rejoiced, so that the conceit of her childhood had given place to despairing diffidence of her own powers, so long as, like Miranda, she knew no one but her father. When, however, like Miranda, she came to know a 'brave new world,' she learned to think more truly of herself, though not of her father. Compared with him, she felt herself still what he thought her—dull and ignorant; but she found she could hold her own very fairly in the society of Wefton. She had, in fact, an advantage over the young ladies of that society—she had not had a first-class education. She had not given the most profitable years of her life to acquiring stucco accomplishments that were meant, like female ants' wings, to bear their possessors to a settlement, and then to be nipped off and discarded. Till she was ten years old, her only teacher was her mother, who, though she felt painfully her incompetence to develop the child's precocious powers, could not bear to resign her labour of love to a governess. At ten she lost her mother, who, in nursing her night and day through an attack

of scarlatina, herself caught the fever, and was too worn out with watching to resist it. Her mother's death nearly coincided with the return of her father from abroad to find himself a widower in charge of a child so stupefied with her bereavement as to seem to him more silly even than he expected. Her mother had been father, mother, sister, brother, teacher, everything to Mabel, and she was so much older than her years as to realise her loss intensely and at every turn. She flitted about the house like a shadow, spoke only when spoken to, and then only in monosyllables, and pored over the Bible constantly as over a book of travels that would give her an idea of the kind of place to which her mother had gone. All these signs, and the last not least of all, confirmed her father's first impression that she was sillier even than the average of her sex. What was to be done with her? To send girls to school seemed to him like 'sending men ruffles when wanting a shirt.' Women had no minds, and the fringe and frippery of ornamental knowledge they picked up, parrotwise, at school, was a mere sham to conceal their mental nakedness. Still, if she stayed at home, there

must be somebody to take care of her, and keep her out of his way. While meditating these things, he received a letter from an aged aunt, the terror of his boyhood and the parasite of his later years, who periodically extorted contributions from him under the threat of disgracing the noble name of Masters by going out as a governess. This demand and threat were renewed in this letter, and decided him to silence a dun and secure a cheap governess by inviting the old lady to take charge of Mabel's education. There was but one objection to the arrangement—the old lady was distressingly deaf; and though he certainly wasn't going to take the trouble to talk to her himself, still Mabel's shrieking her lessons to her would be insupportable. Why not establish a gynecium—set apart one wing of the house to the exclusive use of Mabel and Miss Murdoch, with double doors, densely padded, dividing it from the body of the building? Miss Murdoch having accepted the charge subject to this admirable arrangement, Mabel passed from the care of her mother to the rule of this spinster. Age had a good deal softened the sternness which had kept Colonel Masters' boyhood in

awe, but still Miss Murdoch was a formidable personage, bony both in body and in mind, with, however, this singular qualification for the post of governess—there was one subject she professed to teach which she really and thoroughly knew herself. Having had in her youth an excellent English education, of which she had the taste and talent to make the most, she knew and appreciated the best books of the best ages of our literature, and these she put Mabel steadily through, finding her an apter pupil even than she had been herself. But having, unfortunately, in her old age, and in view of becoming a governess, taken a fancy to master the French tongue, she was under the impression that this acquisition was worth most because it cost most. She was especially proud of her Parisian accent, picked up not in Stratford-atte-Bowe, but from a flattering French friend. She considered no lady educated whose French pronunciation was not pure, and the shibboleth of purity she held to be the pronunciation of the vowel U. If any one will shout some subtle sound into an ear-trumpet at the top of his voice, he will find a slight difficulty in preserving the niceties of a

pure pronunciation. It is not to be wondered at, then, if Mabel, 'the martyr,' not 'of a diphthong,' but of a vowel, underwent a good deal of persecution from failing to satisfy Miss Murdoch's nice ear on this point. There was hardly a day in which she had not to shriek many times over a sound not unlike the cry of the pewit; yet when Miss Murdoch lay on her deathbed five years after Mabel came under her charge, she felt it a weight on her conscience that the child had not yet achieved a Parisian pronunciation. Lying on her deathbed, indeed, does not rightly describe the close of this grim, indomitable woman's life. She sat and taught in her chair almost to the last, seeming to hold with Vespasian that 'a ruler should die standing;' and the Rev. Joseph Meekins was amazed to hear Mabel shouting 'Eheu!' through the ear-trumpet the very day before Miss Murdoch's death. He could interpret it only as a heathen and heartless form of lamentation, and was not more edified by Miss Murdoch's response to it. 'Child, child, it's too late now,' she cried, with a hopeless shake of the head. 'All these years have been wasted!'

CHAPTER V.

MABEL—GIRLHOOD.

MABEL, while in Miss Murdoch's charge, saw little of her father. At first he allowed them to take their meals with him; but as Mabel, from living so much with Miss Murdoch, shouted to everyone as she was used to shout to her, Colonel Masters soon found her society insupportable. Upon her shrieking in a piercing treble, 'If you please,' to him one day at dinner, he turned to the waitress with this laconic sentence of exile, 'Miss Murdoch and Miss Mabel will have their meals in their own apartments in future.' Mabel henceforth saw her father only

In visits

Like those of angels, short and far between.

Once, indeed, it occurred to him that she might be of some use to science and himself. He might mentally vivisect her, find out by

cross-examination when and how the ideas of personal identity, self-consciousness, God, etc., first arose in her mind. She was so young she could not have had them long, and could not have forgotten how she came by them.

Mabel was sent for. Her father sat at his desk in his study with a carefully prepared list of questions in one hand, and in the other a pen for jotting down the answers. Mabel stood before him trembling. He asked her the most amazing questions, of which one only was intelligible to the child, and it gave her the idea that he was anxious about her progress in religious knowledge. This unlucky prepossession of hers did not make her answers to the other questions more apt or acceptable. Her father despaired of and despised her intellect more than ever. He had reduced the questions to the lowest terms of simplicity at the cost of much thought, and these idiotic answers were the result!

On another occasion he tried again to put her to scientific use. He was reading Darwin's 'Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals,' and wished to verify the expressions of suffering illustrated by the photographs of

weeping children which adorn that philosophic work. Accordingly—having given up reluctantly the idea of making Mabel cry, which Miss Murdoch, with some warmth, revolted against—he instructed her and the servants to give him instantaneous notice of any outbursts of tears of the child's. He seemed to think her still of an age to cry in the hearty wide-mouthed way he saw in the photographs, and remembered in India. Mabel, it is true, cried a good deal at this time, but always quietly and in secret; and it was so long before she was surprised in the act that her father grew petulant and impatient, and took Miss Murdoch more than once to task for her remissness. When at last, however, the housemaid came flying to him with the welcome news that 'Miss Mabel was a-crying of her eyes out, sitting on a box in the hattic,' and he had hurried up the steep steps to the attic with Darwin's book in his hand, open at the illustrations, he found to his disgust the wretched child weeping in silence with unconvulsed features over a few relics of her mother. He was gone again in wrath before Mabel had recovered from her astonishment at seeing him

in a place which had hitherto been a safe refuge for her and the rats. She accounted to herself for his sudden appearance and disappearance by supposing that he came to seek something and fled before the sight of her in the fear of her shouting to him. She felt she must have been trespassing, that the attic was in his quarter of the house, and that it was forbidden ground to her henceforth. Now there was not a day hitherto on which the lonely child did not climb up into the attic and brood over the treasures and the memories of her mother they called up. The ghost stories her old nurse used to tell, a terror to her then, were a solace to her now. She would creep up in the evening to the dark attic in the hope that she might see her mother, and in the faith that, visible or not, she was near her ; and Mr. Meekins would have been horrified to hear her in her prayers address her mother as a devout Catholic addresses his patron saint. In this way the attic became sacred to her as an oratory and retreat ; and to quit it for ever, as she felt forced to do now, was rather a wrench to her. She had no need to quit it, however, for her father never sought her again, either in

the attic or elsewhere, till after Miss Murdoch's death, when the doctor, called in for a bilious attack, incidentally advised him that nothing tried the sight more than reading. Hereupon it occurred to him for the third time that Mabel might be of use in the world. He sent for her and set her to read a chapter of Buckle's 'Civilisation.' She read admirably—reading for the deaf is a good school at least for distinct articulation—and her father was so satisfied that he bade her be in the study every morning at half-past six; for an Indian habit of early rising still clung to him.

Thus Mabel at fifteen was introduced to books that were not the most suitable or edifying to her age and sex. But she read as most of us read—assimilating what attracted her, rejecting what repelled her, distilling 'some soul of goodness from things evil,' and 'gathering honey from the weed.' It was Una among the Satyrs subduing them to innocent service. She read daily to her father for an hour and a half before breakfast and an hour and a half after, and was allowed to do what she would with the rest of the day. Some of it she gave to music, in which she was but moderately

skilled, but of which she was passionately fond; and much of it to her own favourite books. In this way she might have grown silent, eccentric, and unsociable, if it was not for the Rev. Joseph Meekins. Mabel went regularly to church; for, though her father was an atheist, and would have thought it worth while to bring up a son in his principles, he held that women had not soul enough to receive them, and that they took to church in their womanhood as naturally and despicably as they took to dolls in their childhood. So Mabel went without interference to church regularly and gladly. It was the one day in the week in which she could get near her mother's grave—for the churchyard gates were locked on weekdays; and her mother still was the only friend and companion she had known. It was the one day in the week, too, in which she saw the world—admirably represented in all its elements in church. And, lastly, and notwithstanding the ineffable dreariness of Mr. Meekins' discourses, she liked church for its own sake. In her early years she had gone with her mother to the Baptist Chapel; but when, among other street improvements, it was

swept away and replaced by a gin-palace, and there was not enough money or members to establish another, her mother had taken her to church, and eventually allowed her even to be baptized. In this way Mabel came by her creed as creditably as most of us, and was as reasonably proud of her Church as the hero of 'H.M.S. Pinafore' was of his country:—

For he himself has said it,
And it's greatly to his credit,
That he's an Englishman.

But she was no more proud, and had no more reason to be proud, of her Church principles than was the Rev. Joseph Meekins. This worthy man took to himself the credit of having snatched her as a brand from the burning. He had grave and great doubts of her father's orthodoxy, not merely because he didn't attend church—a neglect he considered Indian—but because he didn't seem to have sound views on the subject of infant baptism. Colonel Masters' views on that question were not, perhaps, altogether sound; but he was not even conscious of having given Mr. Meekins any reason to think so. He would no more stoop to argue with a clergyman than he

would stoop to blow down a child's house of cards; and, indeed, in the company of a clergyman he usually gave way altogether to the habit he had contracted from living so much alone of answering at random, without listening to a word that was said. When, then, Mr. Meekins, speaking to him of the virtual heathenism of the Baptist children, and of Mabel's providential escape from that heresy, and of her baptism by his predecessor, Mr. Bray, said that, 'terrible as it was to him to think of the number of children who were unbaptized in this Christian country from mere neglect, it was still more terrible to think of the number who were left purposely and on principle unbaptized'—Colonel Masters, pulling his moustache slowly, gazing steadily into the fire, and composing a sentence of his forthcoming pamphlet upon 'The Cæcum in Man,' had yet room enough in his mind for a hazy idea that Mr. Meekins was complaining of the numbers left to him to baptize by the neglect of his predecessor.

'Bray didn't like their squalling, I suppose,' he said absently. 'Why don't you wait to christen them till they are grown up, eh?'

‘My dear sir!’ cried Mr Meekins in horror.

He knew that Colonel Masters held strange and strong opinions upon such unimportant matters as spontaneous generation and the ascidian origin of man ; but he never dreamed that he had advanced so far as to question the necessity of infant baptism. Yet, damnable as the heresy seemed, he was, perhaps, as much pleased as shocked at finding Colonel Masters inclined to it. He had read up this very subject lately for the confutation of the Baptists, who swarmed in his parish ; and here was a providential opportunity of proving his armour. Accordingly, he entered into a long argument to prove the apostolic origin of infant baptism, laying special stress on the fact that whole families, and therefore little babies, were then baptised together. Meanwhile, Colonel Masters, deep in his demonstration of man’s being as the beasts that perish in having a cæcum and not having a soul, did not look as convinced by Mr. Meekins’ arguments as that gentleman had a right to expect. In fact, the Colonel had taken in only a word here and there of the whole discourse ; though, when roused by the

silence at its close, he said in a tone of the deepest conviction—

‘Quite so, Mr. Meekins, quite so. I should baptize them in batches—whole families together, as you say—except, of course, the infants. The noise is terrible.’

Henceforth Mr. Meekins’ opinion of Colonel Masters was not only that of a man who did not believe in infant baptism, which was bad, but that of a man whose disbelief was not shaken by Mr. Meekins’ arguments for infant baptism, which was a great deal worse. But, if the father was hopeless, at least the child was reclaimable. Mabel, brought up under such influences, might become a Baptist or an Anabaptist! Something must be done. Why not get her to the Sunday-school and into Miss Roxby’s class? But her father, with such views of baptism, would certainly object to her learning the Catechism. Nevertheless, it was Mr. Meekins’ clear duty to press upon him calmly, but firmly, the propriety of Mabel’s instruction in the principles of the Church of her adoption. Accordingly, having braced himself for a desperate struggle, he broached the subject to Colonel Masters, who amazed

him by an immediate consent, given as if there was no need to ask it in a matter of such infinitesimal importance. Thus Mabel, through the Sunday-school, was introduced into the world; for through the Roxbys, with whom she soon became intimate, she got to know the Milligans, Deardens, Hawkshaws, etc., and was almost as much in one or other of their houses as in her own. In this way her spirit recovered its spring and elasticity, her shy and shrinking diffidence disappeared, and her natural humour and keen wit came into play. But an acquaintance, however intimate, with the Roxbys, etc., was not satisfying to a nature like Mabel's, and the accident of the illness of one of her scholars (after she had become a teacher herself), which set her upon devoting her spare hours to the sick children of the poor, gave a new turn and zest to her lonely life. It was certainly a singular taste for a girl of nineteen; but some allowance must be made for the singularity of her bringing up.

Mabel being now nineteen, it was quite time, according to Miss Roxby, that she should 'come out.' Mabel was not particularly anxious for this epiphany, but she was accus-

tomed to bow to Miss Roxby's experience in all social matters.

‘But how is it to be done, Miss Roxby?’

‘My dear, you must get your father to chaperon you.’

At this happy suggestion, the picture of her father's face on being asked to perform this duty, and of his bearing in a ball-room, rising vividly before Mabel, was too much for her gravity.

‘I don't see the joke,’ said Miss Roxby severely; for, though she was intensely matter-of-fact, she feared ridicule as keenly as if she had been of a satirical turn herself.

‘I'm afraid my father wouldn't see it either,’ said Mabel, sobered by this severity.

‘I don't see the use of all your education if you are not to “come out”,’ Miss Roxby resumed, after a pause, which Mabel was to construe as a lady-like rebuke. ‘Have you no aunt who could come to stay with you?’

‘Yes; there's Aunt Rebecca, but—— Perhaps, though, when father's abroad I might have her.’

‘He goes abroad always in autumn, doesn't he?’

‘ Yes, about the middle of August, and stays three months away generally.’

‘ The first of the Assemblies is in the beginning of October ; that will do,’ said Miss Roxby, with judicial decision. ‘ Everybody will be there. A public *début* is much the best.’

‘ Oh, dear! “ coming out ” seems a formidable piece of business,’ said Mabel, a little dismayed ; though the portentous solemnity of Miss Roxby’s face impelled her to add, ‘ It couldn’t be done by advertisement, I suppose ? ’

‘ What ? ’ asked Miss Roxby in perplexity.

Light jests, like soap-bubbles, are not made to be handled, opened, and examined in the way in which Miss Roxby insisted on dissecting them ; and besides, Mabel regretted her flippancy in the moment of giving way to it. She owed Miss Roxby a great deal of kindness, and felt ungrateful when she yielded to the temptation to shock her prim sense of propriety. ‘ Only a silly joke, Miss Roxby. I shall do as you decide. It’s rather trying to begin with a public ball, but I dare say it’s better to plunge in than to wade in.’

‘ The next thing to decide,’ said Miss Roxby, in the manner of a chairman who had

got through a deal of business, and had a deal still to get through—‘the next thing to decide upon is—your dress.’

‘Dress! Why, the fashion may change three times before then.’

‘Fashions change, but not colours, Mabel,’ an aphorism which sounded so like a text that it quite imposed on Miss Roxby herself the impression that she was on the borders of a solemn subject. ‘We must not forget that, my dear. Fashions change, but not colours.’

‘Always excepting Mr. Pickles’ dyes,’ said Mabel, with a mischievous allusion to a piece of stuff dyed by Mr. Zaccheus Pickles, a brother of the member, whose colours Miss Roxby had not found fast. Mabel felt here on safe ground, as Miss Roxby, by frequent references to this unfortunate purchase, avenged social slights inflicted on her by the member’s family.

‘And his family in Parliament, too!’ snorted Miss Roxby, delighted by the diversion into her favourite grievance.

‘It was since they got into Parliament that their colours changed, I am told,’ said Mabel, emboldened by the reception of her last mild

joke. But a political allusion was lost on Miss Roxby.

‘Indeed, dear, it was not. It was three years ago last June, and you know his brother has not been member more than a year and a half.’ And then Miss Roxby recounted the scandalous transaction for the twentieth time, returning at the close of her tale to the serious subject from which she had been diverted—the most becoming style and colour for Mabel’s forthcoming costume—a subject in which candour compels us to say our heroine took an unheroic interest.

But arranging about a dress was a small matter compared with arranging about a chaperon. Morning after morning Mabel made her mind up to broach the matter to her father at the close of her reading, but her heart always failed her when it came to the point. At last it occurred to her that it would be easier to confide in an aunt whom she had never seen than to break the business to her father, to whom it would be as unintelligible as his metaphysics were to her. Accordingly she put the whole case before Miss Masters in a letter, which wound up with the request that

her aunt would herself propose a visit to her father. Miss Masters was charmed with the *naïveté* of the letter, and still more with the prospect of chaperonage. There was nothing the old lady liked better than seeing and being seen, visiting and being visited. She did not lose a post, therefore, in announcing to her brother an intended visit to him in September, taking her welcome—as she always did everywhere—for granted. Colonel Masters received and read the letter at breakfast with less disgust than Mabel anticipated. In truth he was unconcerned, because he would be from home in September.

‘Your aunt Rebecca writes to say she will come here in September. Will you mind her being in the house?’

He spoke as if Miss Masters was a small-pox patient.

Mabel, who was truthfulness itself, replied with some trepidation, ‘I wrote to suggest the visit to her, father.’

‘I thought you meant, when I was away, to copy those passages I marked,’ said her father petulantly.

‘So I do, father. I shall have plenty of time in the mornings.’

‘Well, her coming doesn’t matter to me, as I shall be away till the latter end of October.’

‘But I think she means to stay after your return,’ said Mabel, with growing nervousness.

‘Why should you think so? She doesn’t say so,’ said Colonel Masters, looking again and with more interest at the letter. ‘No, she merely says she hopes “to pay me a visit in September, to make your acquaintance and to take you about.” What does she mean by “taking you about”?’

‘To take me to parties, father. It was for that I wanted her to come,’ said Mabel desperately.

‘Why couldn’t Margaret take you to parties as usual?’

Margaret was Mabel’s old nurse, who had attended her to and from the few children’s parties she had been asked to. It never for a moment occurred to her father that Mabel might consider herself grown up. To him, of course, she was a mere child.

‘ I am rather too old for children’s parties now,’ said Mabel with a smile.

‘ Then why should you want anyone to take you about if you don’t care to go to parties?’ asked the Colonel, in perplexity.

It was only another instance of the utter unreasonableness of women, and he felt ashamed of the foolish attempt to find a clue in a chance tangle of a thousand and one odds and ends of thread—his conception of a woman’s mind.

‘ We had better resume our reading,’ he continued in a tone of impatient disgust.

He wrote the same day to his sister a letter that would have put off anyone but Miss Masters, and received from her in reply a line to say that it didn’t need his note to assure her of a warm welcome. Thus it came to pass that Miss Masters took Miss Murdoch’s place as Mabel’s duenna. For this self-complacent old lady was not easily to be dislodged from quarters she fancied. Not that she *would* not, but that she *could* not imagine herself unwelcome.

CHAPTER VI.

SQUIRE.

Poor little Squire was well visited. Not only George and Mabel, but the Doctor came daily to see him. That gentleman, in fact, was no sooner informed by the child's father that Mr. Pickles senior had ordered the Doctor's bill to be sent in to him, than he redoubled his attentions to his patient. This redoubled zeal, it must be said, not being according to knowledge, was of little service to Squire. Dr. Dredge, being old-fashioned, and practising exclusively among the poor—who value only heroic remedies—bled, blistered, drenched, and drugged as if Death were his paymaster. No one who has not mixed much among the poor can conceive the extravagance of their faith in draughts, drugs, leeches and blisters, or the pride with which they parade the grim array of medicine-bottles they have emptied; and a doctor,

whose practice lies among the poor, would be more than human if he did not pander to this ghoulish passion. Dr. Dredge, who was not above the weaknesses of our common nature, prescribed to suit rather the tastes than the ailments of his patients. He bled, or blistered, or dosed with the most drastic drugs almost every disease on this side of consumption; but in a case like Squire's, where such treatment could not immediately be prescribed, he was at a stand. In such cases he had little experience and less skill. They were taken, almost invariably, to the Infirmary, and Dr. Dredge was not of such standing as to be upon its staff. Fortunately for himself, though unfortunately for his patient, his feelings were as blunt as his surgical skill. Doctors who practise among the very poor exclusively, often grow callous to the sight and to the infliction of pain. And as Dr. Dredge was no exception to the rule, he had not the least compunction in putting the wretched child to intolerable and unnecessary torture, first, in groping after the nature and extent of his injuries, and next in his bungling attempts at their cure. He so set the broken bones that they had to be unset and reset

within a week, and so badly, even then, that the child, if he lived, would be crippled for life.

However, there was little likelihood of his living. Mrs. Lumb's sympathising neighbours were unanimous in their judgment that he was 'baan hooam,'¹ which they expressed with a frankness that sounded a little brutal as they stood beside Squire's bed. The feelings, like the hands of the poor, grow horny through hardship; and the matter-of-fact way in which the neighbours spoke to Mrs. Lumb, in Squire's hearing, of the certainty of his death and of the expenses of his funeral was revolting to Mabel. Still more revolting to her was the sordid way in which Mrs. Lumb herself often spoke of her probable loss as in great part a pecuniary one. It is hardly too much to say that, in the West Riding, love of money seems as deep and natural an instinct as a mother's love of her child; and mothers there, of the working class, who are weeping for their dead children, recur again and again to the loss of their services or of their wages as a main element of their sorrow. Mabel was too young to make allowance for the sordid lives of which these sordid feelings

¹ 'Baan hooam,' i.e. going home.

were the natural outcome, and felt at once repelled from Mrs. Lumb and drawn towards the child, whom she alone seemed disinterestedly concerned for.

‘T’ Doctor says we mun get all the strong support we can intil him, Miss Masters—sherry wine, or port wine, and some mak’ o’ stuff he called “distract o’ beef;” but aw’m sewer aw doant knaw where it’s all to come thro, aw doant. Aw’ve weared more brass¹ on that bairn than on all the others put together. He war allus gettin’ one thing or another—messles, or scarlatina, or t’ chincough, or t’ browntitus, or whatever war goin’. He *wad* tak’ it,’ she said querulously—as if it was something Squire should have been whipped for stealing; ‘and aw’d no sooner paid one bill off, a shillin’ a week, nor another cam’ in, an’ Sam war niver off awr doorstanes’—Sam was Dr. Dredge’s collector of fees. ‘But aw allus thowt he’d addle summat² some day, an’ mak’ it up to us. But there’s little chonce of his addlin’ owt na; an’ him a cripple if he mends up—if iver he does mend up, which aw’m afeard he niver

¹ ‘Weared more brass,’ *i.e.* laid out more money.

² ‘Addle summat,’ *i.e.* earn something.

will. Dredge gives sma' hopes on him, unless there's a great alteration. He's a bit rough, is Dredge. They mun be hard, mun t' doctors, wi' sich jobs in hand. But he allus did well for me and mine, allus; an aw said to Mrs. Slater last neet—nay, aw'm storying—it war in t' afternoon when shoo cam' in for t' clothes' prop—aw said, “Mrs. Slater,” aw said, “if there's owt wrang in t' inside, there's nobbody beats Dredge.” ’

‘Eh, mun, he *is* gooid at insides!’ said Mrs. Greenough, a sympathising neighbour, who had followed Mabel in, out of pure curiosity. ‘Aw'm sewer when aw had the spavins,¹ an' thowt it war all ovver wi' me, he set me reet wi' an odd² bottle; eh, an' it war nasty stuff yo' mind! He mayn't be gooid at bones an' that, for he isn't as mich amang it as them Infirmary doctors, but he's a jockey at insides; an' if he could nobbut wark it raand to your Squire's inside he'd mend him up, aw'm sewer he wad.’

This indirect and ingenious receipt for curing a compound fracture of the leg by driving it into the stomach, and there securing

¹ ‘Spavins,’ *i.e.* spasms.

² ‘Odd,’ *i.e.* single.

it—like a rat driven from an inaccessible to an accessible hole—made Mabel smile, in spite of the spectacle of Squire's wan face.

‘What do yo’ think by him to-day, Miss?’ continued Mrs. Greenough, turning to Mabel.

‘I am afraid he’s no better,’ said Mabel, putting fresh flowers in the tumbler by the bedside.

‘He’ll niver mak’ mich aat, aw’m thinking,’ said Mrs. Greenough, looking at him and speaking of him with as little delicacy as if he were a sick animal. ‘Think on tha send’st t’ club brass regular to t’ schooil, Mary Ann, there’s na knawing how sooin yo’ may need it.’

‘Nay, Squire hisself allus thinks on to send it aat of his own brass, by our Sally, first thing on Sunday morning,’ answered Mrs. Lumb, to whom this admonition was addressed.

‘T’ club brass’ was a subscription of a penny or two weekly to a Sunday-school sick and burial society, which, on the death of a member, entitled his parents to a few pounds towards his funeral expenses. Poor Squire, made old-fashioned by both illness and poverty, and taught ‘to look on all his sicknesses as selfish luxuries he had no right to indulge in,

and on his approaching death as the last and worst of these inconsiderate extravagances, made the amends of paying his subscription to the sick society out of his own money-box. This put in a new light the greedy way in which the child took the few pence he was occasionally given; and Mabel, who had hitherto set this eagerness down to West Riding greed, was struck with a remorse that doubled her tenderness towards him.

‘How much money have you now, Squire?’ she asked, as she sat by his bedside and took his worn hand in hers.

‘Fourpence hawpny. But Mr. Kneeshaw said he’d give me a shilling if I didn’t cry when doctor ’xamined me. And I didn’t, did I, mother?’

‘Eh, Miss, but he was as gooid as gooid! Warn’t he, Martha?’ to Mrs. Greenough.

‘Gooid!’ exclaimed Mrs. Greenough. ‘*Aw* niver seed nowt like it in all my life—niver. T’ doctor paanded and pooiled and twisted his legs as if he war kneeding dough—he did. My heart warked for the bairn, as the sweat reet paared daan his face; but he never cried aat, not once. Bless him! Dredge

hisself wor capped¹ wi' him, and said he bet all he iver had to do wi'.'

Mabel smoothed back the child's hair and stooped and kissed his forehead with a tenderness she could not trust herself just then to put into words. Tenderness of this kind and expressed in this way was such a surprise to Squire as to suggest to him that he must be dying. His probable death had been discussed and discounted before him so often, and in so matter-of-fact a way, that the idea of it was neither new nor terrifying to him. It was made up in his mind of an idea of heaven—which he pictured as like a Whitsuntide school treat, when the Sunday-school children marched with a band and banners to a field, and played and had buns, and an idea of such a scolding as he got invariably when he came back from the field with his new Whitsuntide suit soiled or torn. Indeed, he had heard enough to know that his death would cost his parents a good deal more than a suit of clothes, and would therefore be a proportionately greater grievance. And, as he wasn't by any means a bad-hearted little chap, there was mixed up with these two

¹ 'Capped,' *i.e.* surprised.

ideas a third, which troubled him not a little—that there would be no mother, nor Miss Masters, nor Sally in heaven. After meditating these things a minute, he said, ‘Mother, where’s our Sally?’

‘Shoo’s gone to t’ coöp, doy; shoo’ll be back sooin.’

‘She may have the grapes, mayn’t she, mother?’

Sally, it seemed, had cried for some grapes Mr. Kneeshaw the day before had left for Squire, and which Squire would then have shared with her but for his mother’s indignant intervention.

‘Nay, doy, tha munnot gie away them grapes. What ’ud Mr. Kneeshaw say?’

Mr. Kneeshaw’s name turned his mind, which wandered easily now, back to the balloon and the accident.

‘I couldn’t help it, mother.’

‘What, doy?’

‘Being runned over. Mr. Kneeshaw said it wasn’t me that did it.’

‘It wor to be,’ replied his mother, with a fatalism universal among the poor. ‘Tha’ wor

allus an unlucky bairn iver sin' tha wor born.'

Mabel, who, with the sympathy of love and of long experience of children, had got the clue to the child's thoughts, tried to counteract this ungracious speech.

'You! of course it wasn't your fault, Squire. Do you think Mr. Pickles would send the doctor to see you if it was your fault?'

Squire, who certainly had little reason to be thankful for Dr. Dredge's attentions, was anything but reassured by this evidence of Mr. Pickles' feeling towards him. So, disregarding this comfort, he turned to another.

'Mr. Kneeshaw was runned over too,' he said, in an accent and with a look at Mabel that plainly expressed, 'It couldn't have been a scrape if Mr. Kneeshaw was in it; could it?'

It was a very effective *argumentum ad hominem*, and Mabel didn't like the lad the less for his faith in Mr. Kneeshaw.

'Who has been putting it into the child's head that he is to blame for the accident?' asked Mabel, with some of the irritation she felt towards Mrs. Lumb in her voice. 'I can't

think how anyone could be so cruel and heartless as to say such a thing. You know very well, Mrs. Lumb, that he was no more to blame for it than you were.'

This unlucky speech was at once and of course interpreted by Mrs. Lumb to mean that she alone was to blame for it. We can hardly say whether West Riding people are readier to give or to take offence. Not in the least sensitive as to your feelings, they are extremely sensitive in their own. Mrs. Lumb's feelings of gratitude and respect towards Mabel were strong, but, strong as they were, they nearly went down before the shock of this sudden attack.

'Me, Miss!' she cried, in breathless amazement; 'me to blame! What war aw to do wi' him? War aw to tee him to t' bed fooit to keep him aat o' street? How many hunerd times have aw telled him to coome hooam straight thro' schooil, and not to lake¹ wi' t' lads up and daan and in and aat in all mak's of mischief? Nay, nobbody can say aw've not been a gooid mother till him, and warmed² him times and times when he has been laking and loitering and coomed hooam lat' thro'

¹ 'Lake,' *i.e.* play.

² 'Warmed,' *i.e.* whipped.

day-school or Sunday-school wi' his bits o' things all ovver muck. And if he'd been at hooam when t' accident happened,' she asked triumphantly, 'wad he have been runned ovver? What are ta cryin' for?' she interrupted herself to say, in a voice still sharp, but softened somewhat at sight of Squire's tears. Squire, like most Yorkshire lads, was as stoical as an Indian when well, but weakness had so unstrung him as to set him crying at the thought that he had got Miss Masters into a scrape. When his mother was half through her harangue, his hand stole from under the coverlid instinctively to console Mabel, as he would have consoled Sally, by putting his arm round her neck. But as, of course, this was not to be thought of, his hand, stopping half way, nestled itself timidly in hers, and he expressed the rest of his sympathy in tears, of which he was thoroughly ashamed. He felt he had lost the character he had earned by not crying when the doctor was torturing him. He hid his head in the bedclothes, wiped his tears away with them, and, looking out again with a defiant face, said, in a voice that 'protested too much,' 'I am not crying;' and then, with great

presence of mind, changed the subject by asking Mabel a question which had been much in his thoughts since her last visit—‘Please, Miss Masters, why couldn’t they take the press away?’ This mysterious question referred to the miracle Mabel had read for him, in which the sufferer had been let down through the roof when he could not be brought through the door ‘for the press.’ Squire thought it harder to take the roof away than ‘the press,’ of which his idea was the press-bed on which he lay; and that there must therefore be some mysterious and malign influence in a ‘press’ which made against such a miracle being worked in his own case. While this difficulty was being explained by him and to him, Mrs. Greenough, who associated anything religious with church, and church with her best clothes, became conscious of the profanity of her toilet, and made hastily but softly for the door. Here her reverential impressions were confirmed by her meeting no less than two parsons, Revs. Archer Lawley and George Kneeshaw—two spiritual doctors, who she imagined, were met together in consultation over the difficult case of the dying child.

Mr. Archer Lawley's appearance on the scene was an apt illustration of the lesson Mabel was giving the child—that such cures as the Gospel records were not wrought to-day directly, but intermediately. For Mr. Lawley came to make Mrs. Lumb the extraordinary offer to give Squire the one chance of life that remained, of better air, food, and advice, by taking him to his own vicarage in the country. We must explain that Mr. Lawley justified all that his friends said of his eccentricity by turning his house into a convalescent hospital for the sick children of the very poor. Wretched little creatures that were fading fast in the foul and festering back slums of Wefton, revived miraculously when transplanted to Fenton Vicarage, where there were provided for them not only pure air, good food, the care of a professional nurse, and the skill of the first doctor in Wefton, but games, toys, treats, and amusements of the most miscellaneous kind. Mr. Lawley, who was a bachelor, spent upon this craze something more than the income he had from the Church, and lived himself on his private means, which were not large, and by his pen. He no sooner heard from Kneeshaw

of Squire's case than he offered to take it under his care, and the two had come together to make this offer to Mrs. Lumb. Fortunately for Squire, exaggerated accounts of Parson Lawley's good deeds and miraculous cures had reached Mrs. Lumb, so that she no sooner heard his name than she divined and rejoiced over his errand. Such accounts had reached Mabel also, who naturally so appreciated a kindred craze to her own that she looked up at Mr. Lawley with a beautiful expression of hero-worship when George introduced him to her. Mr. Lawley, a very tall man, foreign-looking, with a cynical mouth, but not unkindly eyes of a soft deep brown, blushed under her gaze. His self-possession, which would have been proof against the presence of an archbishop, often left him in the presence of ladies, and he was disconcerted by the sight of the loveliest face he had ever seen, looking up at him with a childlike admiration. He muttered something about intruding, and would then and there have beaten a hasty retreat, leaving to Kneeshaw the arrangement of the affair, if Mrs. Lumb had allowed him. That good lady, however, intercepted his retreat, and saved him and

Mr. Kneeshaw any delicacy or difficulty they might have felt about broaching the subject, by taking upon herself the modest duty.

‘Sit thee daan, Sir,’ she said, wiping a chair with her apron; ‘aw’m fain to see yo’. Yo’ve coomed, aw reckon, to ax awr Squire to your haase. Well, aw’m nowt agin it. Yo’ can tak’ him if yo’ve a mind.’

Neither Mr. Lawley nor Mr. Kneeshaw was in the least surprised by Mrs. Lumb’s modesty and magnanimity, for both had experience enough of the West Riding poor to know that, however grateful they feel at heart—and no one can accuse them of ingratitude—they accept a favour as if they were conferring it.

‘I think the change would do him good, Mrs. Lumb,’ said Mr. Lawley, as courteously as if Mrs. Lumb really was doing him a kindness.

‘It is so good of you, Mr. Lawley,’ burst in Mabel, eager to cover and make up for Mrs. Lumb’s ungraciousness, yet blushing at the same time with the consciousness that praise from her might sound patronising or presumptuous. The imperturbable Mr. Lawley seemed, to Kneeshaw’s amazement, absolutely to return the blush as he muttered something like ‘Not

at all,' and turned to ask Squire if he would like to come to Fenton. Squire had heard of Fenton Vicarage from the same source as his mother—from a schoolfellow who lived in an alley off Sugg Lane, who had spent a month in that paradise, of which he had never ceased to talk since.

'Please, may mother and Sally come to see me?'

'Of course they may.'

'And Miss Masters?'

This was a very awkward request. Mrs. MacGucken, Mr. Lawley's housekeeper and hospital nurse, who ruled him with a rod of iron, would as soon see a bailiff as a spinster in the house, since neither could have any other business there than 'to take' the master. Accordingly, she was simply brutal in her manner to any eligible spinster who entered the vicarage under any pretence or pretext whatsoever. For Mr. Lawley, therefore, to invite Miss Masters and her chaperon (who, he supposed, would be her mother) to meet such a reception as Mrs. MacGucken would give them, would be more inhospitable than to discourage them. Yet he would have been more

brutal even than Mrs. MacGucken herself, if he made no response to Squire's suggestion.

'I am sure,' he said hesitatingly, 'I shall be very glad if Miss Masters will honour my house with a visit; but I'm afraid——'

'Thank you very much,' interrupted Mabel, hastening to the relief of his evident embarrassment; 'but I really couldn't think of coming, except on crutches or in consumption. You don't take in anything short of that, Mr. Lawley?' she rattled on with a flippancy which seemed, under the circumstances, the truest politeness, as Mr. Lawley was slow to recover from his embarrassment. 'Besides, I expect Squire will be so much better as to be able to come to see me before I could get my aunt to make her mind up for an expedition to Fenton. She thinks any place you get by train to must be an immense distance off. It's a good way for Squire to be moved to, I am afraid.'

'It's something over five miles,' replied Mr. Lawley; 'but once you get clear of the town, the road is good.—When may I send for him, Mrs. Lumb?'

The question helped Mrs. Lumb to realise her separation from Squire, which she felt all

the more keenly because she had had so much to do for him ; and her tears, which began now to flow freely, affected Squire. It was a bitter mortification to be unable to choke back his tears. Could Mr. Kneeshaw now believe that he hadn't cried yesterday, when Dr. Dredge had given him good reason? Yet, somehow, the sight of his mother's tears, and the thought of leaving her and Sally and Mabel, melted him, while Dr. Dredge's bungling brutality had only hardened him.

'Doan't freeat, doy. Me and Sally will coome see thee,' cried Mrs. Lumb, as she dried her own tears in her apron.

'She won't,' sobbed the child, nodding his head towards Mabel. 'Mother!'

'What, doy?'

But Squire wouldn't tell her what, till she had stooped down to hear it in a whisper.

'Nay, aw couldn't for shame ax her. Eh, Miss, but he thinks the warld o' thee!'

'Is it anything I can do for him, Mrs. Lumb?'

'Deed, Miss, aw can hardly fashion to tell thee. He wants thee to kiss him as tha did a bit sin.'

As Mabel was about to stoop to kiss the child, George and Mr. Lawley held their hands out to bid her good-bye, and telling Mrs. Lumb what hour the cab would come to-morrow for Squire, they left the house together. When Mabel did stoop to kiss him, the poor little chap put both arms round her neck, and cried, and clung convulsively to her till Mabel's cheek was wet with other tears beside his.

CHAPTER VII.

BARNEY MCGRATH.

WHEN Mabel left Mrs. Lumb's some time later, she was so absorbed in sad doubts about seeing Squire again alive that she did not notice, till she was close upon him, a drunken navvy, who, leaning against a lamp-post, took up most of the narrow footway along which she was passing. As she was stepping hastily out of his reach into the roadway, he put out his hand, caught her by the shoulder, and, cursing and swearing the most frightful endearments, drew her towards him. Before, however, she could realise the horror of the position, the brute lay sprawling in the road, quite still and perfectly satisfied seemingly, bestridden by a dapper little Irishman, who poured out a mixture of abuse of him, praise of Mabel, and interjectural asides to the donkey he drove, shaken up together with incoherent volubility. At first, indeed, he was

so inarticulate with rage that the mixture flowed, as out of a bottle, in gushes; but soon it swept along in a continuous and impetuous torrent.

‘Oh, ye—ye—ye thief of the worruld! ye—ye black-hearted blaguard! Lie there, will ye? Lie there till the divil himself flies away wid ye: ye—ye—— An angei, bad luck to ye! Whose shadow is the sunshine of the sthreet. Dhrinkin’ the bed from undher yere wife and childher, and thin waylayin’ and maraudin’ thim that the saints send to put a bite in their bellies. Is it a man ye are at all at all, or a haythen brute baste? and she, I’ll go bail, just comin’ away from the little crathur she’s been a’most a mother to, God bless her! ye murtherin’ villain, ye! Woa, Neddy! woa, me lad! Get up wid ye, ye baste, and go home, and don’t be dirtyin’ the road wid yer carcass’—this with a vigorous kick, which horrified Mabel with the fear that it must rouse the giant to battle, but which was so ineffective that Barney continued in a disgusted voice, ‘Begorra, there’s no raisonin’ wid him, the onsinsible omidhawn! Don’t be a morsel in dhread, Miss. Shure, I’ll see ye safe home,

meself, if ye'll shtop a minute. Bad cess to ye! didn't ye hear me tell ye to shtand shtill, ye bothered¹ baste? Woa, I tell ye! Just half a minute to go home to put up the baste, and I'll see ye safe out of this divil's den, if I may make so bould, Miss. Faix, it's a sin to see him lyin' like that,' he soliloquised—in an accent of pity, Mabel thought, but really of regret; 'if he had a quart less in him now he'd have been mad for a fight. He would so. But there's thim that niver knows how much is good for 'em. 'Tis sorry I am to disappint you, Miss, but ye might shtand here all night before he'd be in a fit state for a baitin', the misfortunate gaumuck!² I'll just go and put the baste up, and be back in a jiffy to take care of ye, if you'll let the likes of me walk behind ye.'

'Thank you very much,' said Mabel, terrified at the thought of being left a moment by herself beside the prostrate navvy, eager to make all the haste she could out of the street, and yet more anxious not to offend her protector by a refusal of his escort. 'Perhaps you will kindly allow me to go with you now?'

'Deed thin, Miss, I'm proud to walk the

¹ 'Bothered,' *i.e.* deaf.

² 'Gaumuck,' *i.e.* idiot.

same shtreet wid ye; and if ye wouldn't be afther mindin'—— But shure it's like the blessed sunlight ye are that isn't in dhread of bein' shtained by shining into a poor man's house. This way, Miss, I must go before ye, axin' your pardon. Up, Neddy, home, me lad. It's down this alley, Miss. Faith, and shure I'm ashamed to bring ye into such a place.'

It certainly was a filthy alley—a parasite, so to speak, of Sugg Lane. For even Sugg Lane had its parasitic offshoots.

So, naturalists observe, a flea
Has smaller fleas that on him prey;
And these have smaller still to bite 'em,
And so proceed *ad infinitum*.

It was the most nauseating street Mabel ever was in. She had to stoop her head each moment to avoid the patched, mildewed, half-washed clothes that were hung across the street to dry, by lines stretched from window to window; she had to pick her steps amongst the sickly children that crawled, languid as snails, about her feet; she had to step out now and then into the road to avoid some virago who stood, with arms akimbo and defiant stare, blocking the narrow footway. When about

half way down this noisome alley, Barney stopped to speak to a sullen-looking savage who was leaning lazily against a house front, with his hands in his trousers' pockets, and a short clay pipe in his mouth.

'Bob's at the ould address,' said Barney, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

'Where?'

'In the guther.'

'Ay,' said the savage unconcernedly, replacing his pipe and relapsing into apathy.

'He'll be runned over.'

'Like enough.'

'Or he'll be runned in by the bobbies, and thin it'll all come out,' said Barney significantly. The savage swore a frightful oath, then cleared his throat, and spat down the grating at his feet. Whereupon *de profundis* shrilled a sharp voice up through the grating—

'Bad luck to ye, whoever ye are, that's the third time ye've done that thrick!'

'Nancy!'

'What?' sharp and shrill as a steam whistle.

'Your Bob's fresh.'¹

¹ Fresh, *i.e.* drunk.

‘Yes?’ interrogatively, as knowing that no one would tell her only *that* as a piece of news.

‘He’s lying in the street and will be tuk to the station if ye don’t have him fetched home.’

‘The divil fetch him and ye too for a pair of d——,’ etc. etc. etc.—fortunately unintelligible to Mabel.

The savage, swearing horribly once more, growled to Barney, ‘Lend us the cart and I’m d——d if I don’t fetch him and shove him down the grating to her.’

Nothing but consideration for Mabel would have induced Barney to lend his cart to the savage for any purpose; but he knew that if he refused it, Mabel would hear still more awful language than she had heard already, and that if he lent it he might at once hurry her out of this infernal region. Besides, he wasn’t sorry to stop short of his home, which he was ashamed that Mabel should see.

‘Ye’ll not kick the baste?’

‘No,’ with an imprecation.

‘And ye’ll put him him up when ye’re done wid him?’

‘Aren’t ye comin’ wid me yourself?’

‘I’m not. Tell Molly I’ll be home in an hour. He’s lyin’ outside the “Yorkshire Chicken.”—This is the shortest way into Clifford Street, Miss,’ he said hurriedly, pointing up a narrow but short passage. The savage, noticing Mabel for the first time, scowled curiously at her before he turned the donkey back into Sugg Lane. Barney felt quite guilty and crestfallen as he walked after Mabel, silent for a wonder, up the passage. He felt almost as responsible for the language Mabel had heard as if he had uttered it himself. As for Mabel, it was the first time in all her visits amongst the poor that she had met with insult, and seen and heard the utmost degradation of poverty. She felt quite faint and sick, and stopping at the top of the passage, she asked—

‘What is your name?’

‘Barney McGrath, Miss,’ answered Barney in a subdued voice.

‘Is there a cabstand near, Barney?’

‘Yes, Miss, I’ll fetch you a cab,’ he replied, thinking ‘She’s ashamed of me, small blame to her.’

Mabel, divining his thought, ‘I’d rather you’d take me to it, if you will. I don’t feel

quite well, Barney ; I don't think I could walk home.'

Barney, as he looked into her white face, felt ashamed of his suspicions. 'It's only round the corner, Miss.'

'Barney, I don't know how to thank you,' said Mabel, as they walked together towards the cabstand.

'For bringing ye into that inf—— into that alley, Miss?' said Barney bitterly.

'For defending and protecting me like—like an Irishman,' said Mabel, looking at him with eyes moistened and brightened with a grateful sense of his chivalry.

The compliment to his country cheered Barney like champagne instantaneously.

'Och, thin, it's little I done for you, Miss, compared wid what you done for me many and many's the time.'

'I?'

'You've been sarmon and priesht and mass to me,' said Barney impetuously, stopping suddenly to emphasise the statement. 'Shure, ye seen where I live. Shure, ye heard thim divils. Shure, ye know that's what I hear and see every day and all day. What good's Father

Quin's praiching on Sunday, wid thim about your cart on Monday? But when I see ye, a born lady, and a mere shlip of a gurl—axin' yer pardon, Miss—when I seen ye followin' throuble from doore to doore, and from bed to bed, and brightenin' it up—God bless ye!—as the shpring flowers brighten the black winter earth, I knew there war a heaven, and saints, and angels, and the Blessed Vargin, wid pity in their hearts for us, glory be to God!

Barney was impressionable and felt all he said, but it must in candour be admitted that he was less used to the ministrations of Father Quin than to those of the landlord of the 'Yorkshire Chicken.' In fact, his very impressionability was due in part to the state to which a long and regular attendance at that hostelry had reduced his nerves. For all that there was a deal of good in Barney that hadn't been worked out, as may be inferred from his genuine worship of Mabel, of whom he had seen much and heard more in hawking his wares among the poor of her neighbourhood. Mabel was at once amazed at Barney's outburst and ashamed of the little she had done to deserve it. Before, however, she could reply to it, Barney

had sighted a cab, which he ran after, hailed, and returned with.

‘ You’ll come home with me, Barney? My aunt will want to thank you, and I haven’t half thanked you myself yet.’

‘ Thank you kindly, Miss, but I’m onaisy about the baste. Black George is the divil’s own fist wid his clogs.’

‘ Well, when can you come to see me?’ asked Mabel eagerly. ‘ “The Grange,” you know, Bradford Road. Can you come to-morrow?’

Barney felt very sheepish about coming to be thanked in form for so light, little, and agreeable a service as that of knocking a man down, yet he knew that politeness called for his acceptance of so gracious an invitation.

‘ Well, thank you, Miss,’ he said, taking his cap off, looking stedfastly at it, and turning it round and round nervously in both his hands, ‘ I might call to-morrow evening, if it would be convanient to ye, Miss.’

‘ Yes, do. I shall be at home all the evening. Good-bye, Barney.’

Barney looked at the little gloved hand held out to him through the window of the

cab, then at his own vast, horny paw ; but again an instinctive politeness taught him to take it as unhesitatingly as it was offered, though he held it as reverentially as if it was the relic of a saint.

‘ Good-bye, Miss ; God bless ye ! ’

Barney stood for a moment looking after the cab, and thinking with some misgivings over to-morrow evening’s appointment. Next moment he bethought him of ‘ his baste,’ which he was loth to leave to the tender mercies of Black George a minute longer than he could help. He made his way back into Knacker’s Alley with all speed to find that Black George’s kindly design had not gone well altogether. As the savage led the cart into Sugg Lane he saw Bob, who had been revived by a benevolent bucket of water flung in his face, staggering towards him menacingly. The sight of the cart seemed to remind him that he had been knocked down by its owner, so he made for Black George like lightning, in a zigzag. Black George, having turned the donkey round, and sent it with a curse and a kick in the belly to find its way home, awaited the onslaught with contemptuous

equanimity. Bob, tacking wildly, took about a minute to bring up alongside Black George, and had, therefore, time to forget his intention of vengeance, of which, indeed, he lost sight with the disappearance of the donkey, and to become friendly and even affectionate. Black George was too anxious to get him clear of the police and coax him home to repel his affectionate advances, and so the two roamed together down the sweet arcadia of Knacker's Alley, an idyllic spectacle, Bob's arm being wound fondly round Black George's neck. Half way down they came up with Barney's 'baste,' which, being unpiloted, had got into difficulty (the cart-wheel being locked against a lamp-post), and waited patiently for Hercules to extricate it. Hercules shook Bob off roughly, since he was now, as it seemed, safe at the mouth of his den, and led the donkey to its stable near the bottom of the alley, where he proceeded to unharness it. Meantime Bob, roused by the rough shake, by the sight and sound of the cart, and, above all, by the inopportune appearance of Barney upon the scene at this moment, reverted to the revengeful mood, and made a drunken dash at

Barney. Barney, seeing that Bob wasn't even yet 'in a fit state for a baitin', stood on the defensive, warding off the wild blows, and giving a chaffing lesson in boxing.

'Hould in yere left! Hould in yere left, man! Now, out wid the right! Och! Pugh! Is it playin' skittles ye are?'

The scuffle, Bob's imprecations, and Barney's chaff, hurried Nancy up from the cellar, armed with a skillet she happened fortunately to have been scouring. With a wild warwhoop she made at Barney from behind with the skillet, and would have felled him if he had not ducked and allowed the blow to take effect upon Bob's midriff, bringing him to the ground with a crash. The row roused the whole foul rookery, which cawed and clamoured from every door and window in the alley, but could not drown Nancy's shrill blasphemies, which were loud enough to be heard in Clifford Street, and to bring a passing policeman to the spot. Just before his arrival, Barney, having assured himself that Bob was not seriously hurt, had gone off to look after 'his baste,' and the policeman found no one to contradict Nancy's account of the affair,

which was, of course, that that drunken black-guard Barney McGrath had made a most savage and unprovoked assault upon her inoffensive husband.

‘Knocked the sivin senses out of him, the crathur.’

As there was no doubt his senses were gone, and some doubt as to whether they had been driven out as much by drink as by violence, the policeman thought it safer to impound Barney than Bob. Following the afflicted Nancy’s directions, he went down the alley, and met near the bottom Barney and Black George, who had just come together from the stable.

‘Do you know where a man of the name of Barney McGrath lives?’ asked the policeman, with official peremptoriness.

Barney knit his brows and puckered his lips together into an expression of perplexed consideration, and muttered musingly, ‘Barney—Barney McGrath;’ then his face lightened with a sudden inspiration, as he said to George, ‘I’ll be bound it’s Baste Barney he manes—him that dh rives the donkey.’ Then, turning to the policeman, he asked, ‘Is he in throuble now?’

‘That’s no business of yours.’

‘Deed, thin, that’s throe; and where he lives is no business of mine, neither. Shtill, *I’ll* answer a civil question when I’m axed. He lives down that cellar just foreninst ye, and here’s his missus comin’ up the shteps.—Mrs. McGrath, is Barney at home?’

Molly was quick enough to take in the situation, even without the aid of Barney’s wink.

‘What’s that to you?’ she said sharply, with a vicious look at the policeman.

‘Oh, nothin’s nothin’ to me,’ said Barney, in an aggrieved tone; and then, with a sly wink at the policeman, ‘Ye may take yere oath he isn’t far off.’

‘Come, come, my good woman,’ said the policeman, thrusting her aside, ‘I must see him.’

As the policeman descended the steps, Black George slouched off at a speed unusual with him, stopping only once to slap his thigh and exclaim, ‘Well, I’m blowed!’

Barney stood his ground, as he thought it safest that the policeman should look to no one but himself for information.

‘Go down and keep the childre from seein’ me,’ he whispered to Molly, who, hurrying down the steps, met the policeman returning disappointed.

‘Are ye aisy now?’ she sneered, as he passed her.

‘Isn’t he in?’ asked Barney,

‘No,’ replied 43 curtly.

‘Divil go wid him; it’s in the shtable he is, thin.’

‘You’re a friend of his?’ said 43, turning sharply on Barney.

‘A frind! He hasn’t a worse inimy in the worruld,’ replied Barney, with genuine bitterness.

‘Where’s the stable?’ asked 43 reassured.

‘It’s up the borieen here. Anyhow, we can see if he’s come home if the baste’s in.’

‘There’s no doubt about that. It’s not five minutes since he knocked a man down in the alley.’

Barney expressed his horror by repeating three or four times that sucking noise made by striking the tongue against the roof of the mouth.

‘Think of that, now! He wasn’t a policeman, I hope?’

‘A policeman!’ exclaimed 43, with a disdainful smile, ‘no; a common man.’

‘I wouldn’t put it pasht him to tackle even a policeman.’

‘Ah!’ said 43, with ineffable meaning.

‘And as for dodging, he’d dodge the divil.’

‘He’s not in the force,’ said 43, chuckling inordinately at his own wit. ‘McGrath will not find it so easy to take the police in, my man, I can tell you.’

‘Ah, shure there’s no desaivin’ ye at all at all,’ said Barney, with wide-eyed admiration.

43 replied by closing one eye altogether for two seconds.

‘Begor, it’s locked!’ said Barney, as they reached the stable door. ‘If we knew where he was, now, we could get the kay.’

‘If we knew where he was, we shouldn’t want the key, softhead.’

‘Barrin’ he locked himself in.’

‘How could he lock himself in and it padlocked?’

‘Thru for ye. Ye think of everything, faith. There’s the “Brown Jug,” now,’ he con-

tinued, scratching his head reflectively. 'He's always in the "Brown Jug," when he's at home; but I daren't go wid ye there. The boys would bate me like a carpet if they seen me wid ye.'

'The "Brown Jug"?' That's in Limerick Street. What kind of looking man is this McGrath?' asked 43, as they walked together back to Knacker's Alley.

'What sort of a lookin' man is he? Faix he's as fine a looking chap as iver ye seen,' said Barney enthusiastically. 'As shtraight as a rush, and as shtrong as a bull, wid a fine open countenance like a peony. He's a bit like meself when he's clane and daycent. Ye'd be ike to take me for him if ye knew him.'

Poor Barney's pun was ominous, for, as they emerged into the alley, there stood Nancy confronting them. She had become uneasy at the delay in the arrest, which she accounted for by supposing that Barney was convincing the policeman of the truth of his own version of the fray; and she had no sooner got Bob into the house than she hurried down the alley to reiterate her own account with tenfold fury. It would probably have turned out as she

feared if Barney could have resisted the temptation of 'gammoning a bobby;' for his account would have been corroborated by the fact of his sobriety and Bob's drunkenness, by the skillet in Nancy's hand, and perhaps by the testimony of some bystander. Now, however, Barney, like many a better man, had to pay for being too clever, as nothing short of his arrest could satisfy the outraged dignity of 43.

'Oh, ye've took him, have ye, the murderin' mishcreant?'

'Who?'

'Baste Barney, to be shure!'

'No, we haven't found him yet.'

'Haven't *what*? And who's that shtanding fut to fut wid ye?'

'It's—it's not——'

'Yes, it's me,' said Barney, with the most perfect composure, not to say complacency. 'Has she been tellin' ye lies about me?' in an accent of astonishment.

'Lies!' screamed Nancy; and then followed a tirade of accusation, exclamation, abuse, and scurrility, during which 43 had time to realise the audacity and disgrace of the imposture practised upon him.

‘ You come along with me,’ he said savagely, turning suddenly and collaring Barney.

‘ Where am I to go to?’

‘ To the devil,’ cried 43, beyond himself with rage.

‘ I thought he wasn’t in the force.’

‘ What is it now, Barney?’ asked Molly, whom Nancy’s shrill tirade had brought up from her cellar, and who heard enough to know that Barney was identified.

‘ Faix, it’s meself that doesn’t know rightly, Molly.’

‘ There’s nothin’ but throuble,’ said Molly; ‘ nothin’.’

‘ Don’t cry, mavourneen; it’ll all come right.’

‘ Will it?’ said 43; ‘ we’ll see.—Look here, my good woman’—to Nancy—‘ you and your husband must be in the court-house to-morrow at eleven to give evidence. Do you hear?—Come, my man.’

‘ Hould up, Molly. Find out thim in the alley that seen the row, and ax ’em to come spake the truth in coort.’

‘ Molly’s reply was lost in the torrent of filthy abuse which Nancy turned to pour out

upon her, and Barney was led off in charge of 43.

Molly was not successful in her attempt to procure evidence. Under the twofold fear of a police court and of Bob, Black George & Co., every one denied either seeing the affair, or seeing it distinctly enough to swear to. Bob himself, as was to be expected, kept clear of the court, Nancy accounting for his absence by informing the Bench that 'they couldn't put a sixpenny piece on any part of his body that wasn't black and blue.' Her story, which she told with such volubility and vehemence that it had to be repeated three times over before the Bench could make out all its bearings, was strongly corroborated by 43, who felt that Barney deserved the utmost punishment he was likely to get, if only for the profane deception he practised on a police officer.

Barney, to Nancy's amazement, admitted having knocked Bob down, but explained that he had done it in Sugg Lane, and not in Knacker's Alley, and that he had done it in defence of a lady whom Bob had assaulted; that he had accompanied the lady to Clifford

Street and put her into a cab, and that on his return he was attacked by Bob, ‘who was that dhrunk he couldn’t hit a hayshtack. I kep’ him up as well as I could till Nancy came at me wid a shkillet, your worships, and she’d have tuk me a crack that would have knocked daylight through me—for there isn’t a woman in the alley can come up to her wid a shtone in the fut of her shtockin’—and, as I was sayin’, your worships, she shtruck at me from behind wid a shkillet, and I ducked, and it tuk Bob in the wind and floored him as flat as a tomb-shtone.—Ye did, ye know ye did, ye shtrap,’ turning suddenly towards Nancy.—‘And thin,’ reverting as suddenly towards the Bench, ‘and thin I went to look afther the baste, your worships, and whin I was comin’ out of the shtable I met the policeman, and he axed me, says he, “Do you know where Barney McGrath lives?” says he. “I do,” says I, “and well too ;” and I showed him where I lived, your worships, I did,’ concluded Barney, with a triumphant expression of conscious honesty.

The presiding magistrate, no other than our old friend Josiah Pickles, who was as domineer-

ing and dogmatic on the Bench as he was in society, took the case wholly into his own hands. He had hardly patience to hear it to its close, for his natural prejudice against the Irish had been quickened into abhorrence by their political desertion of him at the last election.

‘Where are your witnesses?’ he asked sharply.

Barney looked vainly round the court.

‘The lady you rescued is here, no doubt,’ with a facetious look at his brothers on the Bench.

Barney had once thought of sending to Mabel, but all his associations with a court made him imagine it a degradation to be summoned there in any capacity, so he put the thought chivalrously aside.

‘Ah, I thought not. Is there anyone here who knows you and can speak to your character?’

Barney again looked from face to face till his eye lighted on Captain Markham, the chief constable, with whom he, as a witness, had once been brought into relation.

‘There’s Captain Markham, the chief constable, your worship, he knows me.’

‘I know nothing whatever about you, my man.’

Barney, with wonderful quickness, turned even this to his credit.

‘There, do you hear that!’ he cried triumphantly.

‘He says he knows nothing about you.’

‘And what could he say more nor that, yere worships? Shure, doesn’t he know every thief and dhrunkard and bla-guard and bad charácther in Wefton as well as he knows his own childhre? Do ye think he wouldn’t know me if I was the likes of thim?’

Again poor Barney had to pay for being too clever. His quickness served only to convince the other magistrates of what Mr. Pickles was convinced already, that his circumstantial story was only an invention from end to end. After a minute’s consultation together, or rather a minute granted graciously by Mr. Pickles to his fellow-magistrates to consider and endorse his sentence, that gentleman summarily despatched the business: ‘10s., or seven days. Call the next case.’

The fine was paid out of a pound which poor Molly had scraped together by pawn and

loan, and Barney left the court with his faith in the guardianship of the saints, etc., somewhat shaken, and his hatred of the law as impersonated by Josiah Pickles, M.P., intensified.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS MASTERS.

WHEN Messrs. Lawley and Kneeshaw called to remove Squire, they heard from his mother a muddled account of the assault, from which it appeared that Barney and Bob had a terrific combat in Sugg Lane, with the result that Bob was worsted in the field, but Barney in the police court.

‘But Miss Masters?’ interjected George anxiously.

‘Eh! but shoo war flayed,¹ they tell me.’

‘Shoo mud well be flayed; aw’d ’ave been flayed mysen,’ burst in the inevitable and irrepressible Mrs. Greenough, who proceeded then to recount, as a parallel case, an adventure she herself had with ‘a druffen man’ when she was in an interesting condition, from which she branched off to her different confine-

¹ ‘Flayed,’ *i.e.* frightened.

ments, the sex and name of each resulting child, with its death under its proper date, or its age, if living, the tyranny of the School Board, her Sarah Jane's extraordinary turn for 'twining' a washing machine, and Mrs. Slater's slatternliness in washing on a Thursday, or even Friday, winding up with that hearty burst of self-praise which closes a West Riding speech as naturally as the Doxology a psalm. George, despairing of hearing anything to the purpose in Mrs. Greenough's presence, found out from Mrs. Lumb where Barney lived, and leaving Squire in charge of Mr. Lawley, hurried off to Knacker's Alley.

Meanwhile Barney sat gazing into the fire, with his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands, listening, or affecting to listen, to Molly's scolding, but waking up to unfeigned interest when she came to an inventory of what she had pawned.

'Ye didn't pop any of the childhre's bits of things, did ye?'

'Of coorse I didn't.'

'Or any of yere own?'

'Deed, thin, I did not, Barney,' said Molly, softened a little by the knowledge that Barney's

questions were inspired by his affection for herself and 'the childhre.'

'Sorra a fardin' beyand five shillin' would he give on my Sunday gownd, the thief of the worruld! an' it's high mass next Sunday.'

'What did ye pop, thin?' asked Barney, relieved.

'A pair of breeches——'

'Shure, I thought ye said ye didn't pop yere own things.'

'Yerra, whisht wid yere nonsense! It's jokin' ye'd be if they sould the bed from undher us. A pair of breeches, the laygends of the saints—more be token, he called thim the forty thieves, the haythen!'

'He tuk thim for Proteshtant saints,' said Barney inopportunely, for just then George appeared at the door.

Now Barney had come from a part of Ireland where what was called 'souperism' was rampant, *i.e.* the interested conversion of destitute Romanists through soup kitchens, etc. He therefore regarded, and had fair reason for regarding, every Protestant clergyman with a mingled feeling of suspicion, aversion, and contempt. It was only after a

struggle that his effusive Irish hospitality so far conquered these feelings as to give George a not over cordial invitation to enter and take a seat. Barney was resolved, however, to possess his soul as a Turk keeps his wife—well shut in—as the only certain security against its corruption. He answered each question as laconically as he could, lest he should give any coign of vantage for controversy to take hold of. ‘Yes, he was in throuble.’—‘There wasn’t any fight. He knocked him down, that was all.’—‘She was a bit frightened and sick-like, and he put her into a cab.’—‘No, thank ye,’ very ungraciously; for this was in answer to a delicately worded request from George—in which Barney at once scented souperism—that he might be permitted to repay Barney the amount of his fine. George, making all allowance for Barney’s soreness under a sense of injustice, was disgusted, nevertheless, with his surliness, and at once took leave, with a curt apology for the offence he had given. Molly was more than disgusted.

‘What’s come to ye now? Is it takin’ lave of yere sinses ye are?’ “No, thank ye,”

indeed! an' not a bite or sup in the house for the childhre——'

'Would ye have me turn "souper"?' broke in Barney impatiently. 'Ye may pop me breeches, but I'm —— if ye'll pop me sowl!'

Barney could not help being spiritually puffed up after this pious outburst; but, fearing the demoralising effect of Molly's eloquence, he beat an immediate retreat, under the pretext of looking after 'the baste.' He took the road, however, not to the stable, but to the 'Yorkshire Chicken,' in the hope that his religious fortitude would be rewarded by Providence putting it into some one's heart to treat him to a pint of beer. Barney was little likely to be disappointed. He was first favourite among the frequenters of that hostelry, in part from his generosity when he was in funds, and in part from his being the only reveller of that choice circle who could raise a laugh without being disgusting.

While Barney was making for the 'Yorkshire Chicken,' George was well on his way to visit Mabel. He had vowed to avoid that young lady, as he felt that to fall in love with her would double the difficulty of a position

which was becoming intolerable; but he easily persuaded himself that the merest politeness required him to call and ask after her. He rehearsed the interview many times over, reducing it to the lowest terms of conventional courtesy; though, do what he would, daydreams, like sunset clouds, obtruded themselves, and crossed and occulted this grey groundwork. George was too young not to indulge in what the Greeks aptly called the *κενή μακαρία*—the hollow happiness—of a daydream. He envied even Barney's inglorious rescue of Mabel, and made it the theme of infinite variations of dangers and deliverances, in which he played the Redcross Knight to Mabel's Una. These soap bubbles of men are not as harmless as those blown by children, with all deference to Macaulay, who attributed to castle building a great part of his success. It is a kind of mental opium-eating, which enervates the mind that habitually indulges in it; and George, who took to it as men take to opium—to escape harassing or harrowing realities—felt, when the fit was over, more helpless and unhappy than before.

He was roused from his reverie and recalled

to his resolution by finding himself in the drawing-room of the gynecium ; for the gynecium which had been established in the days of deaf Miss Murdoch as a necessity, had since her death been maintained by Colonel Masters as a luxury. Its drawing-room was a curious and incongruous room, where the severe Doric style of furniture and ornament introduced by Miss Murdoch was overlaid, and yet rather emphasised than concealed, by the florid Corinthian taste of her successor. It was like the stern stone statue in the Prologue to the 'Princess,' which Lilia had bedizened :—

Lilia had wound
A scarf of orange round the stony helm,
And robed the shoulders in a rosy silk,
That made the old warrior from his ivied nook
Glow like a sunbeam.

The stiff straight-backed chairs and the hobble-dehoy tables—all legs and elbows—were adorned with gay, not to say garish, draperies worked or chosen by Miss Masters ; while the drab walls were hung with her paintings—glowing fruit and flower pieces and a few startling landscapes, which perhaps represented Nature as she looked in Miss Masters' girlhood, before the fashions had changed. There were also

two portraits of Miss Masters herself, one representing her as a child, holding a shell to her ear and evidently listening intently—for the admiring remarks of spectators; the other depicting her as a pensive maiden looking out from a balcony into the night, not quite as unconscious of observation as Juliet. With the help of her paintings, these portraits, and two pier-glasses, Miss Masters felt quite at home in this room, in which she lived, and in which George found her at work upon another gorgeous group of flowers. She received him with exceeding graciousness, as she set his visit down to the impression she had made upon him at Mr. Pickles' party. Of course we do not mean that she imagined George to be in a fair way of falling in love with her mature charms (though more unlikely things had happened); but she did him the justice to think that he could not be insensible to the contrast between her bearing, culture, and conversation, and those of the ladies of Wefton. It never entered her head for a moment that his visit might be meant for Mabel or Colonel Masters.

‘How do you do, Mr. Kneeshaw? It is

really very good of you to come to see me. I know I'm not in your parish,' she said, speaking, as she always spoke, in gushes, as water flows out of a bottle.

Politeness prevented George undeceiving her by asking at once after Mabel. Not until he had hoped Miss Masters liked Wefton, had complained of the weather, and had admired the painting in progress, did he venture to ask if Miss Mabel Masters had recovered from the shock of yesterday.

'Oh, she's quite well, thank you, to-day. When she came home last night, white and trembling, and told me how she had been frightened by a drunken man, I was quite upset. I felt that I could never again go out alone in Wefton. I have had such a horror of drunken men ever since we drove over one in Clifton, some years ago. It was terrible, having to give evidence at the inquest, and being in all the papers. Perhaps you remember it? No? It was in the *Times*—nearly half a column. Every one was talking of it. You may fancy how my nerves were shaken! I have not been myself since. The mere mention of a drunken man upsets me. I don't

blame Mabel. Poor thing, she was so unnerved that she forgot how I felt about it, or I'm sure she wouldn't have mentioned it. One cannot expect young people to be very considerate, you know, Mr. Kneeshaw,' she said, with an indulgent smile.

'I'm afraid I must apologise also for my want of consideration,' replied George with becoming gravity. 'It was you I should have asked after, and not Miss Mabel Masters. I hope you have recovered from your agitation.'

'Oh, thank you; it's only upset me for the moment; though I'm afraid it will keep me more at home than I like. I quite meant to mix with the Wefton people; but now, really, I dare not venture out alone in such a place. I daren't, indeed. Do you take an interest in the Temperance Question, Mr. Kneeshaw? I understand that the clergy are taking it up. And quite time too. It's a shame that one can hardly walk or drive out in safety. Don't you think something might be done to clear the streets of these people?'

This view of the Temperance Question, as a

minor branch of the great Sewage Question, was new and interesting to George.

‘Certainly, Miss Masters; there might be a system of moral drainage established to carry them off to inebriate asylums, or they might be carted out of the way by the scavengers. I don’t quite see, though, why you should blame us clergy in the matter. It is the Town Council, or the Police, I think, who are in fault:—

Untaught knaves, unmannerly,
To leave a slovenly unhandsome corpse
Betwixt the wind and your nobility.’

George was unnecessarily nervous after venturing upon this flagrant banter, for Miss Masters took it in perfect seriousness, and hurried away from the subject only because she feared she was being drawn out of her depth. George was infinitely relieved. He was provoked into the rudeness of raillery by Miss Masters’ atrocious insensibility to the wrongs of her adorable niece; but as this adorable being *was* her niece, it would have been the worst policy in the world to have offended her.

Fortunately nothing was further from her thoughts than offence. She had no sense of humour, and a deep sense of her dignity, and

could not conceive that anything she said or did might be held up to ridicule. She thought George had expressed himself a little pedantically, perhaps, but with perfect propriety, and was rather pleased to see her idea put into such fine clothes by him. Her only misgiving was lest she should lose the credit she had evidently gained with him for sound sense by attempting to follow the philosophic turn he had given the subject. So she changed it.

‘I am glad you agree with me, Mr. Kneeshaw, about these people. Mabel has such queer notions. I’m sure I don’t know where she picked them up, but I do hope the fright she got yesterday will shake them out of her. You can’t think what ideas she has about these common people; she says “they are the best society in Wefton!”’

This was an epigrammatic version of Mabel’s answer to her aunt’s reflection on her ‘low’ tastes in visiting among the poor: ‘Really, Aunt, they’re not half as vulgar as Mr. Pickles, or half as rude as Miss Sugden.’

‘The best society in Wefton!’ repeated Miss Masters, lookin horror through her double eyeglass, which she never used in

public, but had forgotten to take off upon the announcement of a visitor. 'I'm sure, from what I have seen of it, the society of Wefton is quite as good as that of any of these manufacturing towns. I have stayed in Rochdale. Do you know anything of Rochdale, Mr. Kneeshaw?'

'Rochdale? I'm afraid I know it only as being celebrated for John Bright and the first co-operative society.'

'Well, I should hardly call it the *first*, Mr. Kneeshaw; certainly not the first. You must go South for the first society. Indeed, I was going to say that the society in Rochdale was not so select as that of Wefton.'

'I've never mixed with the co-operative society of Wefton,' said George, who now felt it safe to say anything, and was embittered by despair of seeing Mabel. Miss Masters' attention being thus recalled to the word 'co-operative,' which she thought was a pedantic expression of George's, and might mean either a society of operatives or of manufacturers, escaped committing herself farther by a second change of subject.

'Ah, you'll not have much time for visiting

any but the sick, Mr. Kneeshaw. Mr. Gant told me all about his work, and the immense size of the parish—30,000 people! He calls it a diocese. A most devoted and self-sacrificing clergyman. He sat beside me for nearly two hours the other day at Mr. Pickles', and gave me an account of all the funerals and weddings and services he had to take. I forget how many he said he had buried in one day; or was it married? It must have been married, I think, for he said they took it so lightly. He spoke so highly about marriage. I was quite pleased. No ritualism, you know, or nonsense about the clergy not marrying. Is he engaged, Mr. Kneeshaw?'

This was the net result remaining in Miss Masters' mind of a long discourse of Mr. Gant's, in which he proved conclusively not only that marriage was a sacrament, but that it was a sacrament of which the laity alone might lawfully partake—for Mr. Gant, after infinite flirtations and entanglements, and one 'hair-breadth escape' from an 'imminent and deadly breach' of promise, now preached the celibacy of the clergy with all the vehemence of apostasy.

‘He has no engagement at present—at least, none that I know of,’ said George, whose attempt to express in this way the variety and frivolity of Mr. Gant’s flirtations was wasted on Miss Masters.

‘Really! I thought he must be engaged; his mind seemed so full of marriage. I am quite in favour of clergymen marrying, Mr. Kneeshaw,’ she continued graciously, with an air that would have become an archbishop, ‘especially in the country. Gives them something to think of, you know. In our own parish the clergyman, Mr. Martin, is unmarried—I may say an old bachelor. He has got into such curious ways—candlesticks and confession; services every day and at all hours; communion Sundays and saints’ days: all idleness, Mr. Kneeshaw,’ she decided, with a peremptory nod of the head.

“Ye are idle, ye are idle, therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice,” said George. ‘You’d have us marry on nothing, and make bricks without straw, Miss Masters; a little sharp connubial suffering and oppression would whip the nonsense out of us. That accounts for your present pastor’s—Mr. Meekins’—Low

Churchism. He's in the house of bondage, I think ?'

Miss Masters was too much shocked to hear a clergyman make a profane use of Scripture to attend particularly to the use he made of it ; and, being nonplussed now for the third time by George's enigmatical answers, she began to form a poor opinion of his understanding. Young men sometimes seem to imagine that the way to be thought clever is to show off yourself, and not to help others to show off. With Miss Masters the mistake was deadly, as she would much rather see her own face in the glass than the finest picture ever painted. She was coming, therefore, to regard George as stupid and pedantic, and, worse than all, ritualistic. Her abhorrence of ritualism, by the way, had a more substantial basis than the ordinary prejudice against religious coxcombry. Once, under Mr. Martin's ministrations, she had taken very kindly to ritualism, and even (Mrs. Grundy said) to him ; but she was providentially brought back to the Protestant faith by his refusal to wear a stole she had worked for him, in which the green was not the precise shade enjoined on believers, and by his

advocacy of doctrines so extreme as those of auricular confession and of the celibacy of the clergy. It was not without good reason, therefore, that Miss Masters was disgusted with ritualism, and with George for his obvious bias that way. Disgusted with him as she was, however, she could not bring herself to be disagreeable. Her one aim in life was to be universally voted charming, and she could not endure to lose even a single vote. Besides, George, whatever were his faults, had *the* great redeeming merit of being very much taken with her, as his visit proved. Accordingly it occurred to Miss Masters that good manners required her to be complaisant, let her visitor's views be what they would. Taking George to mean by 'the house of bondage' not marriage, but Low Churchism, she said, with a conciliatory smile, 'I rather incline that way myself, Mr. Kneeshaw, but I don't try to persuade any one into it. You need have no fear of my attempting to lead you into "the house of bondage," as you call it.'

George was hardly more amused by her mistaking the application of his metaphor than by her confidence in her controversial powers,

and her merciful resolve not to exercise them on him. He was malicious enough to set her right as to his meaning. 'I am sorry you should think me such a bigot, Miss Masters, as to speak of Low Churchism as "the house of bondage"—I meant marriage.'

Miss Masters was not in the least disconcerted. On the contrary, she was pleased, as she was always pleased, by an opportunity to speak her mind on marriage, and so give her friends some faint idea of the obstinacy and obduracy of her objection to that state which had resisted such a multitude of brilliant proposals. These triumphs, to which she occasionally referred, were not pure and conscious invention. She took very ordinary for marked attentions, which would, she considered, have ripened into proposals under the sunshine of encouragement, and she had merely to imagine that she had not encouraged them sufficiently.

'Oh marriage! I beg your pardon. I quite agree with you there; quite,' she said, with a most emphatic nod; but, remembering that she had just spoken approvingly of Mr. Gant's appreciation of marriage, she added, 'I mean, of course, as far as our sex is concerned.'

It's perfect slavery. I could never understand how a woman with any self-respect could submit to it. I am sure I was staying with my married sister last year, near Louth, in Lincolnshire, you know; and no one would believe what a time I had. Three children in the measles together, and Mr. Hancott, my brother-in-law, laid up with bronchitis, and my poor sister nursing them all, night and day. I was left to myself altogether. Not a soul to speak to. No one came near us, and we went nowhere. If it wasn't that I was very fond of painting, I really don't know what I should have done, as my sister grudged every moment she gave me; in fact, I hardly saw anything of her. That came of having a husband and children to look after, Mr. Kneeshaw.'

George was not in a mood to regard the loss of Miss Masters' society as the crushing penalty she considered it. Indeed, he had so reconciled himself to it that he rose at this moment to take leave, but was prevented by the entrance of Mabel.

'How do you do, Mr. Kneeshaw? Have you been long here? You've come to tell me about Squire, I know.'

‘Well, no; I came to inquire after you, Miss Masters. I was very glad to hear that you had recovered from the shock of yesterday.’

‘Oh yes, thank you, quite. But how did you hear about it?’

George then proceeded to explain how he had heard from Mrs. Lumb of Barney’s knight-errantry, and from Barney himself the true particulars of the affair. ‘He seems rather a surly fellow,’ he continued; ‘but, to do him justice, he made very little either of what he did or what he suffered on your behalf. And, after all, it was enough to put any man in a bad temper to be taken up and fined for doing the work of the police.’

‘Taken up and fined!’

Mabel’s exaggerated views both of the debt she owed Barney and of the disgrace of a conviction in a police court made this news little less than shocking to her. She horrified her aunt by consulting George upon the propriety of appearing to-morrow in court, and getting the conviction quashed. Meantime, and without a moment’s delay, she must go and see and console the hero and martyr,

Just, however, as she rang to send for a cab, the maid appeared to say that a man named McGrath was below, and wouldn't go away till he had seen Miss Mabel. Please was she to send for the police? This was too much. Mabel hurried downstairs with an apology to George, only to return immediately in much distress. The hero and martyr was in a rather noisy stage of intoxication. Poor Barney had been treated by a fellow-countryman not to beer, but to whisky, which, as he had eaten little, took immediate effect on him, and made him more heroic than ever. He couldn't rest till he had expressed to Mabel his intention to knock down for her sake, the Borough Bench of Magistrates.

CHAPTER IX.

MABEL TO THE RESCUE.

BARNEY'S condition, which amused George and horrified and disgusted Miss Masters, made Mabel more miserable than ever. For this also she was responsible, since it must have been the disgrace of an unjust conviction which drove Barney to drown thought. His state, therefore, if it was not a credit, was hardly a reproach to a man of such a nice sense of honour as Barney had shown himself yesterday. This, indeed, seemed so self-evident to Mabel that she not only did not doubt it herself, but did not think that anyone with right feeling could doubt it. Accordingly George's cynical comments were so ill received that he suddenly became sympathetic and sentimental. He, too, at once began to see that Barney's intoxication was of itself a part of his martyrdom, and to take a deep and active interest in his case. 'I think I had

better see the poor fellow,' he said, with much feeling; 'I shall be better able to manage him than you.' While he and Mabel went down to look after the sufferer, Miss Masters, who had for some time been speechless with indignation, in part because of being ignored during the consultation, and in part because of the maudlin and monstrous sympathy expressed in it towards the abominable Barney, at last so far recovered her presence of mind as to ring for the maid and send her in haste for a policeman. But Barney by this time was outside the jurisdiction of the police—if he had ever been fairly within it. At the sight of Mabel he had ceased to be noisy, and the shocked expression in her face woke him up to a consciousness of not being altogether presentable. She and George found him leaning despondently against the back door, and remonstrating sadly with himself. Upon their appearance he broke off this conversation with himself to explain the cause of his condition at some length, and with many apologies and parentheses. It appeared that he had partaken of some cold potatoes, and it was these that so upset him. Barney was certainly not happy in his choice of an intoxicating

food ; but it must be said for his account it was so far true as that, on his return from the court in the morning he had indulged in those delicacies as the most palatable food he could find in the house. He now made merely the common mistake of confounding *post hoc* with *propter hoc*.

‘What does he say?’ asked Mabel, to whom Barney’s explanation, disguised by brogue, drink, and parenthesis, was unintelligible.

‘He says,’ replied George, with creditable gravity, ‘that he has

eaten of the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner.’

‘What!’

‘Cold potatoes,’ said George sententiously. ‘He says it was some cold potatoes he ate this morning that took this effect upon him.’ It was impossible for Mabel not to laugh a little at the effect attributed to this fiery stimulant. ‘You see,’ continued George, encouraged by her amusement into a relapse of cynicism—‘you see, it was just as you suggested, Miss Masters, the disgrace of his conviction in the court has driven him into the wildest dissipation.’

‘But what’s to be done?’ asked Mabel, recalled to seriousness and sympathy by the mention of the court.

‘I should say brandy was the best thing to counteract the effect of cold potatoes, if they disagreed with one: unless he’s a total abstainer. In that case, the best thing would be to put him into a cab and send him home.’ But when Mabel, approving of this last suggestion, turned to send the discreet Jane for a cab, she heard, to her consternation, that Jane had been sent already by Miss Masters for a policeman. George, however, volunteered both to intercept Jane and the policeman, and to fetch a cab; and while he was gone on these errands, Mabel ran upstairs to find her purse, thinking to take advantage of Barney’s state to have the amount of his fine, etc., smuggled into his pocket. When she had found it, and had with some difficulty explained her design to her old nurse—who, being Yorkshire, was not easily made to understand how anyone in his sober senses could refuse ‘brass’—she at last induced that tetchy old body to come down with her and, if possible, slip the money into Barney’s pocket. But Barney was nowhere to be found.

George, Jane, the policeman, and the cab, were all there together, but no Barney. Jane, being an expert, had at once found her own policeman, for whom she was so anxious to be sent, but made the return journey 'linked sweetness long drawn out,' by a wide detour, so that George found the two only on his return with the cab. Meanwhile, Barney having become sufficiently sober to be conscious of tipsiness, had ducked his head in the waterbutt, and so far completed his cure as to feel shocked and ashamed of himself, and as to be able to slink homewards with fair speed and directness. George, having dismissed the cabman with a fare, and the policeman with a solatium, returned for orders to Mabel. 'What next?' he asked, with an amused smile. Mabel would have liked to have had the derelict pursued and towed out of danger, as she feared that Barney would fall again into the hands of the police; but this, of course, she could not ask George to do. Indeed, it was not without much compunction that she asked him to do the next best thing.

'I am really quite ashamed of putting you to so much trouble, Mr. Kneeshaw, but I should

be so much obliged if you could kindly call some time and see if he got safely home. It would be too bad if he was again taken up and fined, or put in prison.'

'Of course I shall call to see him,' said George. 'He's on my sick list, you know, now, since his singular seizure this morning. By the way, though, seriously, I ought to have kept the cab, oughtn't I? I should soon have caught him up. It's not too late now, perhaps,' he continued; and seeing Mabel look infinitely relieved at the suggestion, he bid her a hurried goodbye, promising to let her know the result early the next day.

In this way Barney's lapse became an unromantic link in the chain of fate which bound George. For Mabel, who had Barney's rehabilitation at heart, and could not of course consult her father or aunt upon the business, was driven to make use of George's counsel and help; and her childlike dependence upon them completed his conquest.

May we hint here to those of the sex who thirst for emancipation, that there is nothing so winning to men who are worth winning—the strong and self-reliant—as this childlike de-

pendence? Their own instincts—at least a mother's instincts—would tell them how love is drawn out by dependence. A mother always loves most the child that is most dependent upon her—the baby at the breast more than the upgrown son; and of the upgrown sons, him who is weakest in mind and body rather than him of whom she has most reason to be proud. And if we go down to mother's love, pure, simple, and unsophisticated, as we find it in the lower animals, we see that it wanes, waxes, or ceases in precise proportion to the dependence upon them of their young. It is strongest when they are weakest, and weakest when they are strongest, and ceases the moment they become independent of it. And how much dependence has to do with love of other kinds may be seen from this—that, as in biography so in life, we love most the most dependent characters—the Steeles and Goldsmiths of our acquaintance; and also from this that our expressions of affection are generally (as, for instance, diminutives) expressive of dependence. All this being considered, we conclude that when the relations between the sexes are wholly reversed, and men are as

dependent on women as women are to-day upon men, romantic love will again be possible; but that in the intervening and intermediate state of things now dawning upon us, when women come only abreast with men and have not yet distanced them, there will be little place left in life for love as distinguished from passion. As for Mabel, truth constrains us to say that she had not even left Egypt, so that the intervening desert, not to say the promised land beyond it, was not in all her thoughts. On the contrary, her extravagant veneration for her father's judgment made her share, in some degree, his extravagant contempt for her sex's mental capacity, and gave her especially an inordinately modest opinion of her own. And this brings us back to the point from which we started on our dry digression—Mabel's childlike deference to George's judgment. Here was a girl at once clever and beautiful looking up to him with an unaffected and implicit trust in his wisdom. To be sure it was in a matter of no moment, but it was the manner which intoxicated George, and might well have intoxicated a less susceptible subject. When he called the next morning—early, as

she had asked him—he found her alone, as Miss Masters rarely put in an appearance before noon.

‘I am so glad to see you, Mr. Kneeshaw ; you don’t know how impatiently I have been expecting you,’ she said, with a frankness which showed her unconsciousness of George’s having any other interests than those of Barney to serve by his visit. ‘Did he get home safely?’

‘Oh, he’s all right,’ said George, who, to tell the truth, had not Barney at this moment much in his thoughts. ‘I overtook him in five minutes, but nothing would induce him to get into the cab ; so I dismissed it and dogged him home to be ready to intercede in case the police interfered. But he wasn’t tipsy enough to be meddled with. I’m not sorry I followed him, though, for I found out I had done him an injustice. I told you how surly he was when I called yesterday morning. I thought it was natural brutality, but it turns out he took me for what his wife called a “souper”—that is, as well as I could make out, a missionary who wins souls with soup in Ireland, where they seem cheap. She said he thought I meant

to convert him because I offered to pay his fine!’

‘I wish he had taken it—at least—I mean,’ stammered Mabel, colouring at her vicarious generosity, ‘I wish he had let you pay it to him from me.’

‘To invest it in cold potatoes,’ muttered George, who, however, didn’t think fit to mention that Molly had taken the money from him last night without the least religious scruple.

‘You must let me thank you for the offer, Mr. Kneeshaw, if he didn’t. It was my debt, or part of my debt. I really don’t know how I’m to repay the poor fellow for all he has gone through for me—unless,’ she added brightly, ‘I borrow from you to pay him, like a desperate debtor. For I still want your advice and help, Mr. Kneeshaw, if I haven’t put you to too much trouble about him already,’ looking appealingly at George.

‘I fetched a cab for him, and walked home his way. You could hardly ask me to do more than that,’ he replied, with a pleasant irony more reassuring than an effusive offer of help.

‘I’m afraid I must, though,’ she said,

smiling. 'You see, Mr. Kneeshaw, my father is so taken up with his studies; and as for my aunt, she was quite disappointed that Barney escaped the policeman yesterday; and I have no idea myself what I ought to do to get his sentence reversed. Must I appear in court?' she asked anxiously. To appear in court would be not only terrible in itself, but in its consequences, for it would certainly bring down upon her from her father a peremptory prohibition of her work amongst the poor.

'It's too late for that now,' said George. 'By the way, I saw the police-sergeant this morning, and he told me something that gave me a better opinion of our hero than, to tell the truth, I had before. He said that he himself told McGrath his only chance of escaping a fine or imprisonment was to call you as a witness; and when he refused, because, as he said, the court wasn't a fit place for such as you, the sergeant was certain his whole story was an invention.'

Mabel started up and walked twice hastily up and down the room with an emotion that seemed out of all proportion to its cause. It must be remembered that she could not look at

a conviction in a police-court from Barney's, or even from George's, philosophic standpoint.

'It was noble of him!' she said, stopping suddenly in front of George with her large eyes as bright with admiration as if Barney had led a forlorn hope. George also looked all admiration, only its object was different. 'What *can* I do, Mr. Kneeshaw?' she said, reseating herself, and looking up wistfully at George.

'Well,' said George, 'I consulted three experts—a magistrate, a dog-stealer, and a solicitor, all friends of mine—and all seemed to think McGrath's character was less damaged than his purse by the sentence. But,' he hurried on to say, seeing gathering wrath in Mabel's face, 'they thought the thing might be set right either by the prosecution of the policeman for perjury—which would hardly hold water—or by a few words from the Bench next Thursday. In the last case you need not, they thought, appear at all, as a letter from you to one of the magistrates—who would not, of course, publish your name—would probably be enough. My friend, the dog-stealer, by-the-by, saw the whole business from first to last,

though a wholesome horror of the police, and a modest appreciation of the weight which would attach to his evidence, kept him from coming forward yesterday. However, I induced him, for 'old acquaintance' sake—for I had attended him in smallpox—to go with me this morning to the chief constable. I can't say that his evidence had an overwhelming effect upon that functionary—rather the contrary; so I went so far as to say,' continued George, hesitatingly, 'that perhaps you would be kind enough to see the great man.'

George seemed to have worked hard in the few hours since Mabel had chartered him for this service, and yet that young lady, in her breathless interest in Barney's case, did not pause, for the moment, to thank him, from which it may be inferred that she at least was heart whole.

'I shall go at once to see him,' said Mabel, half rising; but, recollecting and reseating herself, apologised to George for her rudeness.

'I feel so helpless—putting you to so much trouble on my account, and not being able to do anything myself. I hope you don't think me ungrateful, Mr. Kneeshaw?'

‘You haven’t much to thank me for, Miss Masters; and as to Mr. McGrath, he certainly can’t complain of your ingratitude,’ said George—*not* satirically. If Miss Roxby had been as demonstratively and disproportionately moved by Barney’s chivalry as Mabel had been, the cynical Mr. Kneeshaw would have pronounced her either hysterical or affected; but Miss Roxby was not lovely—was, to say the truth, rather unlovely; and Mabel’s childlike or, if you like, childish impulsiveness made her look lovelier than ever. An eighth of an inch of eyelash more or less makes a great difference in our moral judgments of a young lady; so that even if Mabel had affected the feeling she showed, George would have forgiven her; whereas, it had obviously taken her out of herself altogether, making her forget herself and George also, unfortunately, for the moment.

‘And as for feeling yourself helpless,’ continued George, ‘you can do more for McGrath by seeing the chief constable than could be done for him by anyone else or in any other way. For I’m told that the whole Bench of Magistrates together is not of equal authority with Captain Markham in a case of this kind.’

‘When could I see him?’ she asked eagerly.

‘He said he would be at home from eleven to half-past twelve.’

‘It’s nearly twelve now,’ she said, with a glance at the clock and then at the door; for her aunt—who would certainly do all she could to frustrate the plan—was almost due.

‘It’s not more than five minutes’ drive from here,’ said George, rising resignedly, for the short interview had been very sweet to him. ‘May I fetch you a cab?’

‘Thank you very much, Mr. Kneeshaw. To tell you the truth, I’m afraid of my aunt’s coming down and upsetting our plan altogether. I shall run up and put my things on and be at the door before the cab comes.’

She was at the door as she promised, when the cab drove up. George got out, handed her in, and was about to shut the door when she cried out in a surprised and dismayed voice, ‘Aren’t *you* coming, Mr. Kneeshaw?’

Obviously nothing was farther from Mabel’s thoughts than his being in love with her; nevertheless, the invitation, despite of its frank unconsciousness, was delightful to him.

‘I shall be only too glad, if you think I can be of any use.’

‘Any use!’ she exclaimed, as George got in. ‘Why, you didn’t really suppose I could face by myself that terrible Captain, who is equal to a whole Bench of Magistrates? He’ll probably take me for another of your dog-stealing friends. Will he cross-examine me?’ she asked anxiously, not without a real fear of some such brutal and browbeating cross-examinations as she had read in the papers.

‘It is only in public they cross-examine; in private they merely put you to the torture. He may use the thumbscrews for form’s sake,’ said George, looking at the little gloved hand which held the window-strap, with a lover’s longing to have it in his own.

‘He will allow me to be chloroformed first, of course;’ and then, with sudden seriousness, as if the thought struck her in full force for the first time, she said, looking at him with clear, earnest, honest eyes, as un-self-conscious as the eyes of a fawn, ‘What trouble you have taken, Mr. Kneeshaw! You must have done nothing else since I saw you.’

‘I’ve done nothing since but eat and sleep.

I met my dog-stealer as I left McGrath's, and the magistrate and solicitor I dined with at Mr. Marsden's. I only went a few yards out of my way to arrange an interview for you with Captain Markham, for which you have every reason to be grateful.'

'And so I am,' said Mabel heartily. 'It's the only thing you've left me to do for my hero. I hope he'll believe me,' she added doubtfully. 'Shall I have to take an oath?'

It was impossible for George not to laugh at the idea of anyone distrusting that face, or suspecting her of collusion with a drunken Irishman.

'But, you know, he didn't believe your other friend,' she said, in answer to his laugh.

'No; he said I should procure better assurance than Bardolph,' said George, still laughing.

'I like not the security,' said Mabel, shaking her head—'only a woman. He'll think that I exaggerate, or that I took one man for the other, or made some such other slight mistake, as women, you know, always do.'

'We shall see soon,' said George, 'for here we are.'

Mabel got out and walked with no little trepidation into the awful audience chamber, but was relieved to find a quiet and gentlemanly-looking man, who in turn found her as different as possible from what he expected. Captain Markham, according to his custom, had prepared himself for the interview by questioning those of the force who were likely to know anything about Miss Masters. It turned out that she was nearly as well known to the police as her fellow-witness, the dog-stealer, but fortunately more favourably. She was always going about doing good amongst the poor of her own neighbourhood, and occasionally of other neighbourhoods, was the substance of their report. Captain Markham accordingly pictured to himself either a second Miss Batt—a sour-visaged Protestant old maid, who served tracts like writs among the poor, summoning them, under awful penalties, to appear in church; or a second sister Agnes—a meek and insipid Anglican old maid who symbolised her being dead to the world by going about in a costume like a coffin lined with a shroud. What was his amazement to see certainly the loveliest face he had ever seen

—and Captain Markham had all a soldier's susceptibility to beauty—and to find this new sister of mercy as charming in bearing as in person. Mabel, on the other hand, was hardly less agreeably surprised to find Bluebeard courteous, deferential, even apologetic. He was so sorry that press of business prevented him from waiting on Miss Masters. He hoped she would forgive him for putting her to the trouble to come to his office, and so on. This was the first effect of Mabel's beauty upon the gallant Captain, and the second was to secure a most favourable hearing for her story. Indeed, even if Mabel had been ill-favoured and ill-mannered, her story, told with simple directness, would have convinced Captain Markham that there had been a gross miscarriage of justice in Barney's case, though he would certainly not have been so zealous to redress it as he showed himself now. He rang and asked if Barker had returned. Barker was the sergeant whom George had seen that morning, and who had been sent at George's suggestion to make inquiry into the matter in Knacker's Alley. He had now returned with overwhelming confirmation of Barney's version of the

affray in Knacker's Alley, to which Mabel couldn't speak. In fact, every one in the alley was eager to give unofficial evidence against Bob and Nancy, who were hated as much as they were feared, though all had a wholesome horror of venturing into court.

'It's been a very unfortunate mistake for McGrath,' said George.

'Unfortunate! My dear sir, it's the best thing ever happened to him. I should say it will be ten pounds in his pocket if it's a penny. There's the Mayor two guineas; Roxburgh, Reed, and Palmer a guinea each; Pickles probably three guineas, or perhaps five, as it's near an election,' calculated the Captain, counting on his fingers the sums by which the Bench of Magistrates were likely to indemnify Barney for their mistake, and to reward him for his chivalry. 'Ten pounds! if it gets into the papers it will be nearer twenty. He could drink himself to death upon it!' cried the Captain, with an emphatic nod at Mabel, to confirm this assurance that her hero would be well provided for.

George, seeing that the happy consummation suggested by the Captain had not a cheer-

ing effect upon Mabel, changed the subject by asking if Miss Masters need take any other step in the matter, such as that of writing to one of the magistrates. This question touched the Captain on two strong points—his gallantry and his self-importance.

‘I have put Miss Masters to a great deal too much trouble already,’ he said, with a deferential bow to Mabel; ‘the least I can do is to take the case altogether into my own hands. I shall lay the matter *myself* before the magistrates.’ The words were not weighty, but the tone and manner in which they were uttered were imperial—expressing at once infinite condescension and confidence. After this there was nothing more to be said but thanks and adieus. Mabel took leave without backing out of the presence, since the great man himself politely ushered her out, and George meekly followed. While the Captain, on his return to his office, was congratulating himself upon another and most brilliant conquest, Mabel was thinking that if the wisdom of Wefton was represented by the Bench, and that of the Bench by the Captain—as Mr. Kneeshaw had suggested—perhaps men were not, really, after

all, so immeasurably superior in mental power to women as her father maintained.

‘Will the magistrates really do as *he* bids them?’ she asked George, not at all reassured as to Barney’s rehabilitation.

‘So Mr. Roxburgh told me last night. The Captain is really a very clever fellow, Miss Masters, though he doesn’t show to advantage in ladies’ society. Great soldiers, you know, never do. I think McGrath’s case safe in his hands.’

Mabel had another trouble in reserve. ‘Mr. Kneeshaw,’ she said after a pause, ‘do you think I could get him to sign the pledge with me?’

‘To sign it, certainly.’

‘But not keep it?’

‘Well, no; I’m afraid not.’ Another pause.

‘I haven’t courage to go again into that alley. Mr. Kneeshaw, would you mind going there once more for me, and asking him to come to see me? I’m really ashamed of putting you to all this trouble.’

George was grateful even for this little commission.

CHAPTER X.

'IN THE NET.'

CAPTAIN MARKHAM had not miscalculated upon the justice and generosity of the Wefton Bench, as a whole, in the matter of the apology and indemnity to Barney; though Mr. Pickles did not subscribe to either. He never had been wrong in his judgment of men and things, and it was little likely that he should be wrong now in the case of a drunken Irishman. Captain Markham, however, for a wonder, so carried the Council with him that they overruled the Pope, and Mr. Pickles had to content himself with an intemperate protest against the public apology and an angry refusal to have anything to do with the subscription. The sum collected amounted in all to thirty pounds, as the report of the case in the papers attracted some subscriptions from the public at large. It was an immense sum to Barney, and held out to him a

fair prospect of spending the rest of his days in delirium tremens. But the very day after he received it from the hands of Captain Markham, Barney took the pledge! No one would believe it, but it was true. Mabel had seized hold of the moment when he was utterly and abjectly ashamed of the state in which he had presented himself to her, and had so beset and bewildered him that he lost all control over himself, and signed the pledge. The thing did not seem so terrible to him in the doing of it, but he had not gone many steps from the house when what he had done broke upon him in all its horror. He stopped to lean against a lamp-post, the picture of remorse. Never more must he go to the 'Yorkshire Chicken' or the 'Flute and Fiddle,' and crack the best joke and sing the best song. And the frequenters of those favourite hostelries—what would they now think of him? He had for ever forfeited the esteem of every friend he had. The respect of his fellows—that single consideration, which ballasts us more than all other motives to morality put together—was gone. And yet he had not done this thing deliberately. He was suddenly surprised, and, as it were, betrayed into it, and

betrayed into it just at the moment when he seemed most proof against temptation, not last week, when he had not a penny, but to-day, when he had heaps of money to spare and spend in his favourite haunts. Certainly the ways of Providence were inscrutable—as inscrutable to Barney as to Henry IV. :—

She either gives a stomach and no food,
Such are the poor, in health ; or else a feast,
And takes away the stomach, such are the rich,
That have abundance and enjoy it not.

At this miserable period of his meditations Barney turned back towards the house, not to rail the seal from off his bond, but to ask the fair Mephistopheles, to whom he had sold himself, to help him to keep the compact.

'What is it, Barney?' Mabel asked anxiously, upon his re-appearance. She feared he had come back already to repudiate his pledge.

'It's this, Miss,' said Barney, in the tone of a man who was making upon the scaffold a last disposition of his effects. 'It's no use to me now,' handing her the purse of sovereigns. 'If you wouldn't mind keeping it, Miss, for Molly and the childhre, and giving thim a shillin' or two a week out of it.'

Mabel would have been amused at the testamentary tone of the request if it hadn't expressed so plainly and plaintively the sacrifice she had just induced him to make. 'Couldn't you put it into the bank, Barney?'

'Is it the likes of Molly to set her fut in a bank?'

'Well; would you ask Mr. Kneeshaw to take charge of it? He would know best how to invest it?'

'The parson?' asked Barney, in a very doubtful tone.

'Or there's your own clergyman,' suggested Mabel, answering rather the tone than the question.

'Father Quin!' exclaimed Barney, in a tone not now doubtful at all, but decidedly adverse; 'shure, he's building a mission chapel.'

Since this objection was urged as obviously fatal, Mabel fell back upon Mr. Kneeshaw.

'I think you might trust Mr. Kneeshaw, Barney.'

'Why wouldn't I thrust him, why? 'Tisn't that at all, Miss; but what am I to say to Father Quin when he calls—and faith, he's as

shure as the gas-rate to call, if he reads of my bit of luck in the papers? "Well, McGrath," he'll say, "what are you going to do wid that bit of money," he'll say, "are you going to make your sowl up wid it?" he'll say. Shure, I couldn't have the face to tell his rivrence I gev' it to a souper.'

'Well, then, I'll take charge of it, Barney, if you'll allow me to ask Mr. Kneeshaw what's best to be done with it.'

'In course you may, Miss, and thank ye kindly for all the throuble ye're takin' about it. There's a mather of twenty-three pounds, Miss, left; as I gev' Molly five pounds and kep' one pound for Father Quin's chapel, and thrated the boys wid another.'

'Barney,' said Mabel, putting her soft white hand entreatingly on his sleeve, 'you *will* keep teetotal, won't you?' and her eyes and voice, imploring as her hand, would have converted Bacchus.

'I will, Miss, I will,' said Barney, gathering himself together as for a supreme effort, and going forth from the house as on a forlorn hope.

Barney was not far wrong about Father

Quin, whom he found waiting for him on reaching home.

‘Glad to see you, McGrath,’ said the worthy Father; ‘what about those plants you were to bring me?’

‘Shure, your rivirence, ye didn’t order thim; ye only talked about ordering thim.’

‘Of course I ordered them. You may bring half-a-dozen—let’s see; how much are they each?’

‘They’re sixpence aich to *ye*, yere rivirence.’

‘Sixpence each. I’ll say a dozen, then. You can bring a dozen of them to my house to-morrow.’

‘Thank yere rivirence.’

‘Let them be hardy ones that will stand the smoke, you know. Father Hanlon says that he couldn’t get those you sold him to grow in his garden.’

‘His garden! Hear that now! Begor, it’s for all the worruld like the back of an elephant in a menagerie—hard, dry, and cracked, wid an odd bristle of grass here and there! To think of any dacently brought up plant livin’ in it! But any plant would be at

home in yere place, yere rivirence,' said Barney, not unconscious of the rivalry between Fathers Quin and Hanlon as to what they were pleased to call their gardens.

'Well, we shall see. Bring them and plant them yourself, so that they may have every chance.' And then the good Father began to talk about the children, whom he patted on the head in turn, being especially taken with the baby. Hearing, however, that it was not yet baptized, nor its mother churched, he gave the parents a genial scolding, and exacted from them a promise to have both these neglects repaired upon the following Sunday. On rising to leave, he suddenly be-thought him, before he reached the door, of Barney's good fortune. 'Oh, by the way, McGrath, I nearly forgot to congratulate you. You have been distinguishing yourself, I hear. In fact, it's in all the papers. I'm sure I was proud to see a good Catholic so spoken of, and, better than spoken of, most handsomely rewarded. How much was it, eh?'

'Thirty pounds, your rivirence,' said Barney, who wished heartily now that he hadn't, on his way home, given to a needy

friend half of the sovereign he had intended for the mission chapel.

‘Thirty pounds!’ exclaimed the astonished Father, with raised eyebrows—‘a most magnificent present! What are you going to do with all that money? I know what you are going to do with some of it, my son; yes, yes, I’ve not been mistaken in you. I’ll be bound the first thing you thought of was the mission chapel. Wasn’t it now? I thought so; I thought so,’ said the delighted Father, as Barney fumbled desperately in his pockets, and produced at last—half-a-sovereign!

‘Oh, ten shillings!’ cried the Father, with a sudden change from the most genial to the most scathing manner. ‘You haven’t made a mistake, have you? It wasn’t sixpence you meant to give me? No? Oh, thank you—thank you very much—good evening!’

It must be remembered that, after all, Father Quin was not begging for himself, but for a mission chapel, that would give him a deal more work without more pay. At least the motive, if not the mode, of his begging was commendable.

Next day, when Barney had brought and

put in the plants and presented himself for payment, Father Quin was freezing in his reception of him. 'Ah; you've put them in, have you?'

'I have, yere rivirence.'

'You're sure they'll live?'

'I'm shure they will, yere rivirence.'

'Then you're sure of getting paid. I shall pay you if they live; not otherwise. Good morning, McGrath.'

Barney didn't mind much the Father's refusal to pay, but the rasping manner of his refusal was exasperating. However, on the following day—Sunday—when he, Molly, and the baby presented themselves, according to promise, Barney was still civility itself, until the ceremony was over and the fees demanded.

'Do ye think, now, he'll live, yere rivirence?' asked the anxious father, looking down on his newly christened babe.

'There isn't much doubt of that,' said Father Quin, touching with two fingers the chubby cheek of the child.

'Thin there isn't much doubt but ye'll be paid, yere rivirence. If he lives, I'll pay ye. Good morning to yere rivirence.' And before

the amazed Father had recovered himself so far as to be able to articulate, Barney had hurried Molly out of the chapel.

Father Quin took Barney's revenge, when he had realised it, in an unlooked for way. It was evident that he wasn't angry, or merely amused, for he chuckled and rubbed his hands together with an unaccountable self-complacency. In truth, the thought that came to the top in his mind was this: 'That will make a good story.' Story-telling was the good Father's forte. Among the first of the few innocent pleasures permitted to his cloth are eating a good dinner and telling well a good story—two things that, of course, go together, as a good story-teller is sure of a good dinner. Now Father Quin was a capital story-teller, and owed to his eminence in the art his welcome at some of the best tables in Wefton. No sooner, therefore, had he realised Barney's facetious revenge than he set to, like a skilled *chef*, to prepare the story for presentation at table; and was so pleased with his successful transformation of it, in his own mind, into something which would certainly tell, that he began to feel quite kindly towards the man to

whom he owed it. 'I must cultivate that fellow,' he thought; and when, at a dinner-party on the day following, the story, owing to his telling, turned out as great a hit as he expected, he was in the best possible mood for reconciliation with Barney at their next encounter. Meanwhile, Barney had repented of his irreverent audacity. Molly, who anticipated nothing less than excommunication as its penalty, led him a harassed life of reproach, and Barney himself was not at all comfortable as to the spiritual punishment appropriate to his sacrilege. He was infinitely relieved, therefore, as he was slouching shamefaced at the off side of his 'baste' past the good Father, two or three days after, to hear himself cheerfully and even cordially accosted by 'his rivirence.'

'Is that you, McGrath? We're quits now, aren't we?'

'Indeed, thin, we're not, your rivirence,' answered Barney, with much presence of mind. 'I'm ten shillings to the bad wid ye yet.'

'How's that?' asked his reverence, in a surprised tone.

Barney then told the whole story of his

entrusting the money to Miss Masters, with the reservation of a sovereign for the mission chapel, half of which Mat Kenny had coaxed out of him on his way home.

‘But here it is, yere rivirence,’ said Barney, handing it over with a cheerful confidence of forgiveness. But to his surprise, the good Father seemed more aggrieved by the peace offering than by the offence it was meant to gild over. In fact, Father Quin was affronted by Barney’s banking his money with anyone but his parish priest, though of course he was too proud to complain of the slight.

‘Oh, Miss Masters; that’s the young lady you rescued,’ said he, after he had coldly accepted the half-sovereign. ‘She gives you tracts, I suppose?’

‘Sorra a thract, yere rivirence. It’s her life that’s a thract,’ said Barney enthusiastically, and proceeded to tell the priest all the good she did, and the last and most wonderful work of all—his own conversion to teetotalism.

‘She’s made a teetotaller of you, has she? She’ll be making a heretic of you next.’

‘Is that the next best thing, yere rivirence?’

asked Barney, irritated by such an imputation on his goddess. ‘If she can make anything at all of me, she’ll not make me worse than I am.’

‘Not much room on that side,’ said Father Quin drily.

‘Deed, thin, that’s throe,’ throwing back his head despondently.

‘Well, McGrath,’ said the worthy Father, appeased by Barney’s humility. ‘I’ve been doing you a good turn; good for evil, you know. I met Mr. Mullen at dinner the other night, and recommended him to order all his bedding-out plants from you.’ This was not strictly true. Mr. Mullen was so tickled by Father Quin’s improved version of Barney’s revenge that he spontaneously vowed he would buy all his plants in future from the hero of the tale. ‘I hope you’ll do credit to my recommendation. No use trying to do *him*, I can tell you. He’s a deal harder man to deal with than I.’

‘Not much room on that side,’ muttered Barney, under cover of stooping to pick up his whip. Nevertheless he had not the least compunction in saying aloud, ‘He might aisy

be that, yere rivirence. If all my customers were like ye, yere rivirence, faix, it's in a bether worruld I'd be to-day,' looking up at Father Quin with an expression of such absolute innocence that the priest felt quite ashamed of his suspicion of the *double-entente*. Still, as the only transaction Barney had with Father Quin was the one we have recorded, and as a succession of such transactions would have sent him to a better world, by starvation, it was not safe to accept the compliment seriously.

'Yes, it's a wicked world, McGrath; but the wickedness is not all on one side. There's a little left for the market-gardeners. What about Father Hanlon's plants?'

'Do ye think, yere rivirence, Father Hanlon is responsible for all the childhre he christens out of Haggis Alley? They're good enough when he christens 'em, God bless 'em, but nothin' could grow up good in that hole. And, shure, it's the same wid thim other flowers. Don't ye know yereself, yere rivirence, that Father Hanlon can't get a dacent blade of grass to grow, barrin' he grows it undher a tumbler? But there's thim that thinks flowers 'll grow in a chimbley!'

'You'll be calling my garden a chimney next.'

'Not if thim plants grow, yere rivirence,' with a humorous twinkle.

Father Quin was rather tickled by Barney's so turning the tables as to put the garden and not the plants upon trial.

'Well, you'll have no fault to find with Mr. Mullen's garden, anyway, McGrath. You'd better call to-day, and say I sent you.'

'I will, yere rivirence, and thank ye kindly for spakein' a good wurrd for me.'

It will be seen that Barney was not only a greengrocer in a small way, but also in a small way a middle man between the nurseryman and the public. The last was not a paying trade, but Barney's passionate love of flowers made him stick to it at a loss which to him was sometimes considerable. And now the probability of getting Mr. Mullen's custom encouraged a wild dream which had been in his head since he became a teetotaller. His one chance of keeping the pledge, he felt, lay in his escape from Knacker's Alley and its associations, and in his finding employment for his evenings. If

only he could get a bit of a garden, such as he had once in the old country, it would be the saving and the making of him, he thought. He must see Miss Masters and ask her about investing his money in this way. No sooner, then, had Father Quin left him than, with Irish impulsiveness, he turned the 'baste' round and made for the Grange.

Barney's recourse to his guardian angel involved the guardian angel's recourse to George; and in this way Barney's fortunes became entangled with those of our hero and heroine, and his plans came to clash with George's. For George, now realising fully the danger of seeing much more of Mabel, had resolved to keep as clear of her as he could. Of what force were his virtuous resolutions, however, in the face of this business-like despatch?

'DEAR MR. KNEESHAW,—Could you kindly call any morning, between eleven and one, when you have a minute or two to spare? I am really ashamed to have to trouble you again, but Bayard'—George's satirical name for Barney—'Bayard has put the money subscribed for him into my hands, and I have

no idea what to do with it. I advised him to take it to you, but he didn't seem to like troubling either you or his own clergyman with it, though he consented to my asking your advice about investing it. I'm afraid you'll think the kindness you have shown in taking so much trouble already in the matter a poor excuse for putting you to more ; but it's the only one I have to offer.

' Believe me, truly yours,
MABEL MASTERS.'

Now there are two things about this letter that every young lady will disapprove of. First, that it was written at all, and secondly the style in which it is written. It was certainly not young-ladylike either to write it at all or to write in that style. It is such a letter as the late lamented Miss Murdoch might appropriately have written ; and this, which is the worst thing, is also the best thing, that can be said for it, since the motherless Mabel had been educated by that grim spinster, to whom the proper pronunciation of the French vowel U and the formation of a literary style anything but feminine, had

seemed of much more importance than the cultivation of conventional proprieties.

George was not only enough in love to think the letter all that it should be, but he was so fond (the reader may take the word in either its old or new sense, according to his own age) as to put it among his treasures, and to hurry off towards the Grange, long before the earliest hour mentioned in it. In fact, he had what seemed an age to hover about the house, like a bird about its nest, before his watch told him it was time to ring the bell. Where now was his stoic resolution? It was not in all his thoughts. The very mood of mind in which it was formed was dim as a dream to him. The feeling he thought he had securely dammed had burst the barrier, and now with accumulated force swept all before it. The reader was not prepared for such an outburst? George himself was not prepared for it. Like the fisherman in the 'Arabian Nights,' he is amazed to see the power which one moment seemed sealed securely in its phial, tower the next moment to the sky, and fill the earth with its shadow.

The change in George was so marked that even the self-absorbed Miss Masters might have noticed it, if she had been present. As for Mabel, who was the quickest observer in Wefton, she remarked it in a moment. She was not now absorbed with anxiety about Barney, and she took in, therefore, indications that escaped her before, and which besides were now so much more pronounced. It is astonishing how instinctively girls, even children, and even those who, like Mabel, have not a particle of vanity in their nature, recognise the most suppressed admiration. About George's admiration, however, there was no mistake. He had lost all his cynicism and self-possession, and become timid, deferential, even reverential. He was—if the ladies will forgive a most unromantic metaphor—like a crab which has shed its shell, and which, from being the most self-reliant and aggressive of creatures, suddenly becomes meek, self-distrustful, and retiring. And what was the effect of his evident infatuation on Mabel? It may be taken as certain that a young lady rather despises a man for adoration, which she does not in some degree reciprocate—a remark,

by the way, which is stolen from Bacon. Mabel did not despise George. His admiration had the effect of precipitating a feeling which had before floated in vague solution in her mind, indefinite and unrecognised, but which now took the solid shape of liking. It is not worth while giving what passed between them at this interview. It had as much to do with what was passing in their minds as the sougning of the wind through the telegraph wires has to do with the electric messages flying along them. As for Barney's business, it was a matter of such moment that George would have to think over it, and consult experts, and come again to-morrow to tell Mabel the result. Next day it was found that there were two or three other things to be inquired about and reported on, and even when those were decided, it was necessary for Mabel to see Bayard and get his consent, and transmit it at a fourth interview to George. Barney, however, saved Mabel the trouble of sending for him by turning up with his own scheme for the investment of his fortune. This, again, must be communicated to George. But how? Certainly not by

letter now; from which it will be seen that Mabel was in a fair way of falling in love. She succeeded in inducing Barney to call himself upon George, and lay the matter before him.

CHAPTER XI.

REPARATION.

MEANWHILE, Mr. Pickles was forging another link in the chain by which George was being bound. The chairman of one of his local committees, Mr. Jonas Barraclough, brought him an important report one evening. Mr. Barraclough was a pompous and ponderous man, who would give importance to any report. He had no doubt that Mr. Pickles owed his seat to Mr. Jonas Barraclough's influence, and that Mr. Jonas Barraclough owed his influence to his oratory. His idea of oratory was shortly this—never to use one word, or a word of one syllable, where three words or a tri-syllabic word would serve the same purpose. He would, so to speak, change a sovereign into two hundred and forty pence, and imagine that its value increased with its bulk. Mr. Barraclough was shown into a room set specially

apart by Mr. Pickles for the reception of his constituents. Its walls were adorned with plans or pictures of the schools, hospitals, churches, or chapels he had helped to build, and with photographs of his local committees in groups, and portraits of their respective chairmen. There were also two emblazoned and, indeed, blazing addresses hung at either side of a magnificent portrait in oils of the gentleman to whom they were presented—Josiah Pickles, Esq., M.P.—while on each side of the fireplace were bookcases stored with blue-books, reports, etc., relieved by the light literature of the quarterlies.

In this reception-room Mr. Barraclough was left some time alone, admiring the counterfeit presentment of himself; for it was a rule with Mr. Pickles to allow his constituents time to digest the significance of these ornaments, that their imagination might thereby be helped to a conception of the greatness and goodness of their representative. The *genius loci*, however, did not affect Mr. Barraclough, in part because he was fascinated by his own portrait, and in part because there was no room in his mind to take in any other greatness and goodness than

his own. He was still admiring his portrait, with his head a good deal on one side, when Mr. Pickles at last appeared.

‘How do you do, Mr. Barraclough? Take a seat, sir; take a seat,’ said Mr. Pickles, in his sharp and decisive manner.

‘Thank you, Mr. Pickles, sir,’ replied Mr. Barraclough, slowly seating himself, and proceeding in a very measured and impressive manner to answer the question ‘How do you do?’ as a question of the utmost importance.

‘I am tolerably well, sir. I had a bad cold last week, and my chest seemed, I may say, choked with phlegm. But I expectorated a good deal; I always expectorate when I have a bad cold, sir,’ pausing and looking at Mr. Pickles with the evident expectation of some expression of surprise, or at least of interest, which extracted from Mr. Pickles, ‘Oh, indeed?’

‘Yes, sir; I always expectorate a good deal when I have a bad cold. I think, Mr. Pickles,’ he continued, with the manner of a man who was venturing on a daring hypothesis, ‘it to some extent relieves the lungs of the accumulated phlegm. But, sir, I am better now, a

good deal better. In fact, I may say quite well, thank you.'

'I am glad you are, Mr. Barraclough.'

'So am I, sir; so am I,' heartily, as if his assent must be a gratifying surprise to Mr. Pickles. 'If I had not been quite well I should hardly have ventured out so late to-night, Mr. Pickles, though I have come on important business; I may say on business of considerable importance.'

'Political business, Mr. Barraclough?'

'Well, sir, looking at it from the point of view of politics, you might call it political business. It is so far political business, sir, as it concerns the character of public men—of personages of some political importance and prominence.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Pickles vaguely. Mr. Barraclough's style was more intolerable to him than to most men, as being the very opposite of his own short, sharp, and decisive manner; but he had to pay Mr. Barraclough's claims upon him as graciously as any other extortionate election charges.

'You will not be unaware, Mr. Pickles,' Mr. Barraclough resumed, 'that an accident

not unattended with serious consequences, happened to your son, sir, Mr. Clarence Pickles, a short time ago.' Here Mr. Barraclough paused to make quite sure that the father had heard of his son's hairbreadth escape from death.

'Yes?' said Mr. Pickles, with some impatience.

'An account of that accident, as I understand, sir—I may have been misinformed, and I am subject to correction, if I am wrong—but, as I was given to understand, an account of that accident was furnished by Mr. Clarence Pickles himself to the representative of the reporting department of our principal local journal, the *Wefton Witness*.'

'Yes,' assented Mr. Pickles, with a little more interest.

'In that account it is stated— Stay, I have the copy of the journal in my pocket,' said Mr. Barraclough, clearing his throat, and drawing from his pocket an uncleanly copy of the *Wefton Witness*, in which it took him some time to find, first the paragraph and then that part of the paragraph he wanted: '“ The high-spirited animal Here the groom

but Mr. Pickles"—ah, this is the part of the paragraph to which I would invite your most particular attention, Mr. Pickles; "But Mr. Pickles fortunately stuck to his post, though he could not guide the panic-stricken animal so as to prevent its knocking down the Rev. Mr. Kneeshaw, one of the curates of the parish church, who, however, we are happy to say, escaped without serious injury. As the shaft struck the reverend gentleman, the horse stumbled and came down within a few yards of the cutting, into which, in all human probability, it must have plunged, but for this timely and most providential accident." "Most providential accident," repeated Mr. Barraclough, folding up and returning the paper to his pocket. 'This paragraph, Mr. Pickles, as I understand it, attributes Mr. Kneeshaw's being in the way and being knocked down to chance, sir—to accident pure and simple?'

'Certainly, Mr. Barraclough.'

'Would you believe it, then, sir,' said Mr. Barraclough, stooping forward with a hand on each knee, and speaking in a low, slow, and awed voice—'Would you believe it, then, sir, that this very day I was contradicted flatly, to

my face, in our club-room, when I repeated the statement of that paragraph word for word, and, I may say, *verbätim* ;' and Mr. Barraclough drew himself back in his chair and looked to see the horror in his own face reflected in that of Mr. Pickles. Mr. Pickles, however, being as Yorkshire as Mr. Barraclough in looking at things exclusively from his own point of view, could not see wherein the atrocity lay.

'Contradicted! On what point, Mr. Barraclough?'

'On what point, sir?' asked Mr. Barraclough, with some vexation in his tone at Mr. Pickles' insensibility to the main insult of the contradiction, beside which the details were nothing. 'On the point, sir, of Mr. Kneeshaw's being accidentally, I may say fortuitously, in the way. They said, sir—and it was not one or two, but the greater number of the members asserted it, and maintained it in the teeth of my deliberate statement to the contrary—they said that Mr. Kneeshaw was safe on the plank bridge, but hearing the tumult, and looking round, and seeing the imminent peril and—and danger of your son, he hurried back and was

knocked down in trying to catch the reins and arrest the horse. And they said, sir, that at least thirty or forty people saw him running back from the bridge and catching at the reins ; and they said, sir, that Mr. Clarence Pickles must have seen it himself, and known that his statement to the representative of our local journal was, I may say, misleading and inaccurate, and indeed inexact.'

'Is this a general impression?' asked Mr. Pickles, beginning now to see the justice of Mr. Barraclough's indignation.

'It is the general impression, sir, of our club, which is supposed to represent—whether justly or unjustly I will not presume to say—to represent the Liberal opinion of the West Ward.'

While Mr. Pickles, without concerning himself in the least with the truth or falsehood of the report, was casting about in his mind for the best means of neutralising its probable effect upon the approaching elections, Mr. Barraclough, who had, to say the truth, been not only contradicted, but browbeaten rather brutally, by those members of the club who were impatient of both him and Mr. Pickles,

was of course thinking chiefly of his own credit.

‘I must see to this, Mr. Barraclough; thank you for bringing it to my notice,’ said Mr. Pickles, who equally, of course, was thinking, and imagined that Mr. Barraclough was thinking, only of *his* (Mr. Pickles’) credit. ‘What would you suggest as best to be done?’

‘I should suggest, sir, that a letter under the hand of Mr. Clarence Pickles and countersigned by yourself should be written and addressed to me, maintaining the substantial and literal and, I may say, general accuracy of my statement, which letter should be posted up in the club-room and communicated to the local journals.’

‘H’m,’ said Mr. Pickles dubiously. ‘I shall see my son about it, Mr. Barraclough, and let you know the result.’

‘As you please, sir, as you please,’ replied Mr. Barraclough, somewhat huffed. ‘You will keep in mind, Mr. Pickles, sir, that I have endorsed that statement, and that my credit in the club and in the town is at stake, sir; is, I may say, bound up and involved and implicated in the truth of that statement, and in its

bonâ-fideness. That is a consideration, sir, that you will not overlook in your decision upon the matter. I wish you good evening, Mr. Pickles; good evening, sir,' rising with much majesty, and taking a rather stiff leave of the member.

'Good evening, Mr. Barraclough; I shall write you the result,' said Mr. Pickles, as he rang to have his guest shown out.

Upon Mr. Barraclough's departure Mr. Pickles rejoined Clarence, who was enjoying his wine after dinner. 'Clarence, was Kneeshaw trying to stop your horse when he was knocked down?'

'Can't say, I'm sure,' drawled Clarence, flushing slightly.

'But you did say to that reporting fellow.'

'I said what I thought I saw; but I wasn't looking at the thing with my hands in my pockets, you know. I wasn't on the look-out for Mr. Kneeshaw's safety, I can assure you.'

'It will be a confounded awkward business to settle, I can tell you,' said Josiah, in a tone of irritation.

'Has the fellow been making a claim on you?'

‘Who? Kneeshaw? No; but they’re making a story out of it for the elections.’

‘They can’t make much out of it, I should say.’

‘They can make this out of it, that you told a lie to shirk a debt. *I* don’t say so, but they’ll say it.’

‘It’s very good of you not to say it,’ sneered Clarence, stung into what for him was an unusually sharp answer. But steel had no chance against Josiah’s bludgeon.

‘*I* don’t say it, because I didn’t see the accident. But those who saw it say it,’ said the father, pushing his chair away impatiently as he rose to stand with his back to the fire. Opposition of any kind and from anyone was intolerable to Josiah, even when he was in good humour. He was very much out of humour to-night for many reasons, and was not sorry that his son should have the benefit of his mood. He saw in a moment, from Clarence’s manner, that for some reason he had given to the reporter a version of the accident which he knew to be untrue, and which, moreover, was not only a crime, but a blunder that would tell in the elections. Clarence, being dependent upon

his father, had not such silly ideas of honour as to resent a hasty word at the cost of a quarter's allowance.

'They may say what they like. I can only say what I saw,' he said sulkily.

'Well, you have said it now, and we can only make the best of it,' said the father, taking the falsehood as much for granted as if his son had admitted it. It was very irritating, but Clarence didn't care to dispute the matter knowing that nothing but further irritation would come of further controversy.

'Who is this Kneeshaw? He's a curate, isn't he?' asked Josiah, with a dim remembrance of the paragraph in the *Witness*.

'Yes, he's a curate. One of Dr. Clancy's curates.'

'It wouldn't do to send him a cheque,' mused Josiah, more to himself than to his son. 'He'd take it fast enough, I daresay, but he wouldn't care to have it known that he took it. We must set ourselves right with the public. One of Clancy's curates? I'll tell you what, I'll give him St. George's. It will kill two birds with one stone, for Clancy will take it as a compliment to himself.'

‘St. George’s isn’t yours to give, is it?’ growled Clarence sulkily, pleased to pick this hole in the plan.

‘If I pay the piper I shall call the tune. I’ve given 2,000*l.* towards it already, and they were at me yesterday for 1,500*l.* more to finish it. I shall give it if they put my man in; not otherwise. I should have had to give another 1,000*l.* whether or no, so it will cost me only 500*l.*

‘Who are the trustees?’

‘There’s Gledhill, Dearden, Mills, Matchlock, and myself; but, except Matchlock, not one of them has given 1,000*l.* towards it.’

‘Matchlock’s daughter is married to a parson.’

‘Let him give the other 1,500*l.* then. He’ll be glad to have his 1,000*l.* back in his pocket again, and more besides he would be glad to know it was there. Matchlock is at the far end, I can tell you.’

‘If you are only one of five, you will not get the credit of giving it, either with Kneeshaw or anyone else.’

‘I shall take credit for it if I give it. You may be sure of that.’ As this was certain as the sunlight, Clarence was silenced. He was naturally not in favour of an arrangement

which meant a frank public confession of the falsehood of his version of the accident.

‘What are *you* going to do about it?’ asked Josiah sharply, after a pause.

‘About what?’

‘About this—ah—mistaken account you gave of the thing.’

‘I don’t know that it was mistaken, and I don’t believe it was either.’

‘Barraclough says there are thirty or forty who saw it. Shall I have them up before you?’ sneered Josiah.

‘It’s this confounded election,’ retorted Clarence. ‘They’d say anything for sixpence.’

‘Look here, Clarence; “this confounded election,” as you call it, has cost me so much that I don’t care to throw away 1,000*l.*, or 500*l.* for nothing. If the thing happened as you say, you can get four or five witnesses—they’re cheap at sixpence a head, you know—to support your statement, and I shall be glad to keep my money in my pocket. But if not, you’ll either write to the *Witness* to say that you were mistaken, or you’ll have 50*l.* a quarter docked from your allowance till the 500*l.* is paid off.’

Josiah, having delivered his ultimatum, advanced to the table, filled and drank a glass of sherry, looking defiantly at Clarence the while. Clarence muttered something he took care should be inaudible, leisurely chose a cigar from its case, sauntered to the window, and thence to the lawn. Josiah looked after him with an unexpected expression of satisfaction. In the first place, Clarence's supercilious airs were his father's highest ideal of a gentlemanly manner, and made up to him in great measure for his son's lack of brains and energy; and in the second place, Josiah felt as certain of the appearance of the required letter in the *Witness* as if he had seen it there. And, indeed, as a quarter's allowance was now nearly due, the following letter appeared in that print before the close of the week:—

‘SIR,—In your issue of the 3rd inst. there is an account of an accident which happened to me through the running away of my horse, which is in one particular inaccurate. It states that the Rev. Mr. Kneeshaw was *accidentally* knocked down; but I find upon inquiry that he was knocked down in attempting to stop my horse. I am glad to make through your

columns this public acknowledgment of the service the Rev. Mr. Kneeshaw rendered me on that occasion.

‘I am, sir, yours, etc.,

‘CLARENCE PICKLES.

‘To the Editor of the *Wefton Witness*.’

This letter, which might have been written by the Prince of Wales in acknowledgment of a bouquet presented by the daughter of a loyal mayor, was inserted in the *Witness*, with the addition of this curt editorial note:—

‘The account whose accuracy Mr. Clarence Pickles now questions was given to our reporter by Mr. Clarence Pickles himself.’

This editorial comment, which was interpreted in *Wefton* to express the disgust of the Liberals with the political tergiversation of their member, really expressed the disgust of Mr. King, the editor of the *Witness*, at being uninvited to the luncheon with which the Pickles’ Working Man’s Institute was about to be opened. It was, in fact, the invidious invitations to this lunch which put Josiah into the bad temper we found him in at the opening of this chapter. As it was to be a very grand affair, everyone

who was anyone expected an invitation ; but since not more than one tenth of such expectants could by any possibility be accommodated in the building, Josiah, like the French Prince, was compelled to make ten malcontents and one ingrate at each card issued. Many of these malcontents had bites or stings of their own, which they used with as little scruple as the editor of the *Witness*, and Josiah, therefore, had a rather harassed time of it just now, especially at the hands of disaffected and affronted Liberals. But the apostacy of the *Wefton Witness*, which once stood staunchly by him though good and evil report, was a heavy blow and great discouragement. The day before Clarence's letter appeared, it had spoken of their member as 'a political Procrustes who changed, like the chameleon, his colour with his position, and mangled and mutilated the principles he professed to fit the length of his own foot.' This mysterious sentence, in which the writer seemed to have rolled into one Proteus, Procrustes, and Paddy the Piper, was not the less terrible from being unintelligible, and in the very next issue appeared the curt and cutting comment on

Clarence's note. The defection of the *Witness* brought to a head a resolution which had been some time maturing in Josiah's mind. He had been long enough uncomfortably astride, like a circus rider, on two horses; henceforth he would stick to one and stand to win on the Tory steed. He would take the first public opportunity of frankly, formally, and finally avowing his adhesion to 'those good old Conservative principles which reconciled progress with stability and order with freedom, making our constitution the envy of those military despotisms which transformed countries into camps and nations into armies, and making her also the model and the mother, or, if not the mother, at least the foster-mother of all constitutional governments throughout the world.' We give by anticipation the concluding words, as reported by the *Witness*, of Josiah's speech at the luncheon, by which he broke down his bridges and burned his boats, and finally and for ever severed himself from the Liberal party.

Josiah, having made his mind up to the formal desertion of the party which returned him, had to consider how best to make to himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness

and ensure his welcome into the enemy's camp. And his first thought was, of course, the Church. Josiah had been a chapelman in the days of his obscurity, but on achieving greatness he took to churchgoing, as he took to late dinners, as being respectable. He had hitherto also subscribed to Church objects, rather grudgingly and of necessity, perhaps, than as a cheerful giver, but still he did subscribe, and sometimes handsomely; now, however, he would serve Baal much. And, as his first service, he would complete St. George's Church—of course on the condition that he was allowed to make the first appointment.

Josiah, having made his mind up on any matter, was not the man to lose a moment in moving in it. He was present at the next meeting of the trustees, laid his offer and the condition of his offer before them in his usual ungracious take-it-or-leave-it manner, and mentioned incidentally Mr. Kneeshaw's name as that of his nominee. Now Mr. Gledhill, who, as taking the most active interest in the building of the church, was listened to with most deference by his co-trustees, happened to know a

good deal about George and about his kindness to the poor, and his recommendation smoothed down the opposition—urged upon the ground of Mr. Kneeshaw's youth—which Josiah's rasping manner aroused. Even Mr. Matchlock, whose interested opposition Clarence had anticipated, made no serious objection, as his son-in-law had already a living of more value than St. George's. Josiah, when his terms were accepted, condescended to explain the reason of his choice of so young a man as Mr. Kneeshaw, since he wished it to be as widely known as possible that he acknowledged this great debt of his son's life to him; and the explanation reconciled even Mr. Dearden to an appointment to which he had given at first a rather sullen adhesion. As for Mr. Mills, no one seemed to think his consent necessary.

‘DEAR SIR,—I have only just learned the obligation I am under to you for saving my son's life. I have great pleasure in offering you the living of St. George's of the probable value of 700*l.* per annum, as I have succeeded in obtaining the first presentation of it. I have undertaken to complete the church at an

estimated cost of 1,500*l.*, and hope to have it finished in a month.

‘I am, dear sir, faithfully yours,

‘JOSIAH PICKLES.’

The letter read rather like a balance-sheet, but Josiah could do nothing graciously. George, however, was in no mood to be critical when he received it. He opened it after an almost sleepless night of struggle with himself, in which his conscience at last conquered, and the firstfruits of its victory was to be the refusal of this living. So he sat down at once to his desk and wrote the following reply :—

‘DEAR SIR,—I very much regret to have to decline your kind offer of St. George’s, though the promotion is far beyond my expectations or deserts, and a very disproportionate reward for the service I did your son. I only did what anyone else would have done in my place, and what I should have done for anyone else. I hope you will not think me ungrateful because I am compelled to decline your generous offer.

‘Believe me, dear sir, faithfully yours,

‘GEORGE B. KNEESHAW.’

CHAPTER XII.

DRIFTING.

George, having written and addressed his letter, hurried off to post it at once. He wasn't sure of himself. He had fought the night through against the thought of Mabel, to keep her image as much as he could in the background, for to give up the ministry meant giving up all hope of her. And he must give up the ministry. What had at last decided him? Yesterday was a great Christian festival commemorating an event which he did not quite absolutely disbelieve, but in which his faith was certainly not firm enough to preach it to others. Yet he must preach it, and preach it as a thing certain as the sunrise. He did so preach it, and the preparation of the sermon and the preaching of it, and the sense of self-degradation which overcame him as he descended the steps of the pulpit, forced him

to feel the falsehood of his position as he had never felt it before. The fact was, though he was unconscious of it, he was in a much falser position than when last he looked his faith fairly in the face. Our minds are never at a standstill on subjects in which we are interested, try as we will to shelve them. They are always more or less at work upon such subjects through conscious or unconscious cerebration, and when we come after an interval to take our bearings with respect to them, we are certain to have drifted to a new standpoint. Since George had taken his bearings, his mind had in this way drifted out to sea much farther than he had any notion of, and now he was horrified to find himself so far from shore. Hence his sleepless night and the struggle with his conscience, made more desperate by Mabel's being ranged on the enemy's side. He had conquered, however, or thought that he had conquered, and this offer of a living seemed to come in the nick of time rather to strengthen than shake his resolution. Everyone knows how a new resolution, like a young soldier, longs for action, and is impatient to translate its ardour into some definite form ; and George

welcomed Mr. Pickles' offer for the opportunity it gave of realising his resolution. Accordingly, the writing of the refusal of the living was a relief to his mind as giving shape and substance to his determination, and being a definite and decided step in the right direction. But, beside and behind this reason for his eagerness to write and post his refusal at once, lurked distrust of himself and of his power to give up all chance of Mabel. In fact, this brave dash was little more than masked cowardice, and this prompt decision was but indecision in disguise. He must commit himself at once and once for all, or the sight of Mabel, or the mere thought of her, if he allowed

Th' idea of her life to sweetly creep
Into his study of imagination,

might overpower his conscience. Hence his hurry to post the decisive letter.

As he opened the gate of the little garden between his lodgings and the road, a wagonette drove up and stopped at it. In it were Squire, four other convalescent little ones, and Archer Lawley.

‘Halloa!’ cried Lawley, ‘just in time.’

‘In time for what?’

‘To come with us.’

‘Where?’

‘Didn’t you get my letter?’

‘Letter? No.’

‘By Jove! that accounts for it. She couldn’t have got it either.’

‘Who?’ asked George, bewildered.

‘Mary Ann,’ said Lawley, disregarding George’s question, and turning back to address the eldest of the children, ‘didn’t you post those letters?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Where?’

‘At the station, sir.’

‘It’s very odd,’ mused Lawley, pulling his moustache with a perplexed air.

‘Very,’ answered George drily.

‘I wrote to you on Thursday,’ Lawley explained, ‘asking you to join us to-day, but telling you not to trouble to answer if you could come; and by the same post I invited Miss Masters and her niece, as Squire was so anxious to see her, but got no reply. Are you sure you posted the letters, Mary Ann?’

‘Yes, sir,’ answered the child, on the brink of tears.

Lawley, after a moment's meditation, exclaimed in a tone of mortification, 'Of course! Where did you post them, Mary Ann?'

'I put them into the big wooden money-box,' said the child, now whimpering.

'I thought so! She posted them in the box for newspapers for the workhouse. What an ass I was not to tell her where to put them, for it's the second time I've been played that trick. It can't be helped now. Don't cry, little woman, it was my fault,' he said soothingly, patting the penitent Mary Ann on the cheek. 'We must go without them, I suppose.'

At this doleful news Squire also lifted up his voice and wept.

'This is a nice beginning of a treat, isn't it?' to George.—'Never mind, Squire, you shall see her if she's in. We shall call there, at any rate. In with you, Kneeshaw.'

'I don't think I can go;' in no very decided tone, however.

'Why, what have you got to do?'

George couldn't say he had anything particular to do, and Lawley simply took him impatiently by the arm and shoved him up the steps, while Squire, to whom this second disap-

pointment would have been crushing, looked so wistfully into his face that George's faint resistance gave way at once.

'The Grange, Bradford Road,' cried Lawley to the driver, as he jumped in after George. 'If you hadn't come I couldn't have faced them, Kneeshaw. I'm not a ladies' man, you know.'

When George read the offer of the living that morning, the second person he thought of was Archer Lawley. He felt it to be a kind of treason to their friendship not to take him into counsel, or at least into confidence, before writing his refusal, but he feared at once the delay and himself and his friend's adverse advice. Now, however, he had no choice but to hand Lawley Mr. Pickles' letter. Lawley, when he had read it, put his hand on George's shoulder, with a demonstrativeness unusual with him.

'My dear fellow, I congratulate you with all my heart!'

'But I have refused it.'

'What!' and then, after a moment's pause, he referred to the letter. 'Why, you only got the offer this morning! You can't have refused it yet.'

George held up the answer. Lawley took it, looked at the address, and coolly put it into his pocket.

‘You can’t have considered the matter for five minutes,’ he said. ‘It’s not a thing to be refused or accepted like an invitation to dinner. A day is little enough to think over it, especially if you are inclined to refuse it. Anyhow, your letter won’t reach Mr. Pickles sooner by being posted twelve hours before the box closes.’

George submitted meekly, with a sense that his childish haste deserved a child’s treatment.

‘I must give the whole thing up, Lawley,’ he said despondently.

‘Well, we shall have plenty of time to talk it over to-day when we get to ourselves. It’s not likely the ladies will come on so short an invitation.’

‘Where are we going?’

‘To the moors. Doctor says a day there will do the children more good than a week at home. Besides, it’s the only place that won’t swarm to-day.’

‘What on earth made you choose to-day of all days in the year?’

‘The MacGucken’s off,’ whispered Lawley, that the children might not hear. ‘Gone to her sister’s. Couldn’t have gone without her if she’d been at home, you know ; and I wanted Squire to see Miss Masters. Here we are. Shall we take Squire in with us?’

George looked at his watch before he answered to see if Miss Masters was due downstairs yet, and finding that she was, thought it best to be cautious. ‘Let us see if they’ll join us first. Don’t say anything about the children to the aunt,’ he added, as they walked up the steps together. ‘In fact, don’t say anything to her at all. Leave her to me, while you explain the matter to Miss Mabel.’

Lawley nodded submissively. Where ladies were concerned he at once resigned the command he assumed on all other occasions. All the same, he didn’t like the task of explaining the business to that young woman whose great eyes seemed to look straight through him. Fortunately they found only Mabel in the drawing-room, and George therefore was free to help him out in his explanations.

‘It’s very good of you, Mr. Lawley,’ said Mabel in a subdued tone, as if she was address-

ing a bishop. She had quite made up her mind that he was at once a sage and saint. ‘And I should so much like to go, but—— I shall go and ask my aunt about it, if you’ll excuse me.’

Her aunt, however, saved her the trouble by appearing at this moment. Lawley, upon being introduced to her, was blundering out the explanations which George forewarned him against giving, when that diplomatist intervened and expatiated upon the exquisite beauty of the moors, which he was amazed Miss Masters had not yet seen and painted. If she could spare an hour or two to-day to accompany them he could assure her she could find no better guide than Mr. Lawley, who knew all the lovely bits. It was unnecessary to say another word to convince Miss Masters that the expedition was got up exclusively for her. She was profuse in her acknowledgments to the embarrassed Mr. Lawley, and hurried off to get herself and her sketching materials ready.

‘Mabel, my dear,’ she turned to say as she reached the door, ‘you needn’t wait lunch for me. I shall take a biscuit and a glass of sherry before I start.’

‘But who’s to chaperon you, Aunt? Mr. Lawley has been good enough to ask me too.’

‘It really is too good of you, Mr. Lawley,’ said Miss Masters, highly flattered by this additional mark of his consideration. ‘I should like to have Mabel with me very much: she has never had any drawing-lessons worth speaking of. Come, my dear, we mustn’t keep the carriage waiting.’

‘What are we to do about the children?’ asked George, when they had left the room.

‘How?’

‘You see she hates poor people and she hates children, so poor children will be doubly abominable. Would you mind adopting them just for to-day?’ urged George persuasively. Lawley acknowledged this ghastly joke with a grin, little thinking that George contemplated carrying it out. ‘It was well your invitation miscarried,’ continued George; ‘she’d never have accepted it if put in your way.’

‘It would have been the best way after all,’ retorted Lawley. ‘We shall have nothing but bother trying to keep up your humbug. You’re a nice fellow to set up a conscience!’

Hereupon Mabel re-entered for a moment to say that she was going down to speak to Squire. The truth was she thought it as well to spare her aunt the shock of seeing her meeting with the child. When Miss Masters at length appeared, George took charge of her camp-stool, portfolio, etc., gave her his arm, and, as they were going together down the stairs, mentioned casually that there were five little children of the party. 'Mr. Lawley's children, we call them,' he explained, mumbling the last three words rather indistinctly. Certainly George had little right to set up a conscience.

Miss Masters, seated in the waggonette, took an amazed survey of the five weazened creatures ranged in a row on the opposite side. One had crutches, another had an arm in a sling, a third had one side of her face and neck badly burned, the fourth was deformed, and the fifth worn to a shadow. From them her eyes glanced with a deeper pity to their unfortunate father. Of their mother, whether she was dead or alive (she saw no crape on Mr. Lawley's sleeve), she could not help having hard thoughts. Only through gross carelessness

could it be possible that so many horrible accidents should happen in a single family. It was evident their father was not in fault, for his taking such spectacles out to ride with him testified to his kindness of heart, of which, indeed, his invitation to herself spoke still more eloquently. He must be watching anxiously the impression they made upon her—the refined and artistic Miss Masters. She mustn't let him see how unfavourable it was. Indeed, common politeness, to say nothing of gratitude, demanded that she should find some redeeming feature somewhere. But where? She looked in despair from face to face and figure to figure. At last she fixed on Squire as the least horrible of the five. 'Don't you think, my dear,' she said, turning to Mabel, who was seated beside Squire, with his hand in hers, 'there's a strong likeness about the eyes?' looking, with her head on one side, first at Squire and then at Lawley.

Mabel in a moment saw her aunt's mistake and coloured up to the very roots of her hair. 'They are not brother and sister,' she said with great presence of mind, affecting to think that her aunt saw some likeness between Squire

and his next neighbour, Mary Ann. ‘Mercy!’ thought Miss Masters. ‘Two families! Was ever a man so unlucky as to marry two such women!’

Meantime George, seeing Mabel’s misery, repented bitterly of his foolish joke. ‘We call them Mr. Lawley’s children, Miss Masters, for he turns his vicarage into a convalescent hospital for the children of the poor when they are recovering from illness.’

This announcement acted like an electric shock upon Miss Masters. She lost all control over herself, started up, poked the driver in the back with her umbrella, while she screamed to him to stop. She had the most morbid horror of infection.

‘What is it, Aunt?’ asked Mabel, thoroughly alarmed.

‘I don’t know what it is—scarlatina, perhaps, or small-pox. Mr. Lawley, I hope you’ll excuse us; it’s very kind of you, but——. Mabel, let go that child’s hand!’

‘She can’t catch compound fracture of the leg,’ growled Lawley, who forgot his shyness in his horror of a scene. ‘There’s no infection to fear, Miss Masters.—A broken arm, a broken

leg, a burn, curvature of the spine, and general debility,' ticking off his patients' complaints in a very business-like manner. 'I'm sorry you should think I'd trap you into a fever hospital.'

George was amazed at Lawley's self-assertion; Mabel was utterly and miserably ashamed; while Miss Masters herself, being reassured and rebuked by Lawley's words and manner, was shocked at her hysterical outburst—which, indeed, only an insane terror of infection could have provoked from her—and became meekly apologetic. In explanation of her panic she told rather a rambling story of her childhood about a little girl who came to their house to sell mushrooms, and her brother Henry kicked over her basket, and their mother made him gather up the mushrooms and put them back, and both the little girl and her brother caught scarlatina at the same time, and the little girl died. Hence she might well dread infection ever since.

““The dog it was that died,”” muttered Lawley, thinking the allusion would be intelligible only to George.

‘Mr. Lawley thinks, Aunt, that the little girl caught the fever from my father,’ said

Mabel, looking over archly at Mr. Lawley. It didn't need much reading or readiness so to translate Lawley's quotation, but it needed more of both than that gentleman expected from a young lady, and he was, therefore, rather taken aback. As for Miss Masters, it was some seconds before she could take in this preposterous view of the case. She considered infection to be, like the poor-rate, a tax which the lower orders imposed on the upper.

'We never had such a thing in our family before,' she said with some stiffness.

On the whole, however, Miss Masters was as amiable as could be expected under the circumstances. She was really ashamed of her outbreak, and expressed her penitence by trying to make herself even more agreeable than usual. In this way George and Mabel were again thrown together by fate. If Lawley's invitation had been properly posted, or if Miss Masters had known that morning the real nature of the pleasure party she was asked to join, she would certainly have declined. As it was, she was not only there, but gracious, thanks to this little storm. Yet at the bottom of her heart—as was only to be expected in so

vain a person—she was irritated less with herself than with Mr. Lawley, as the cause, however indirect or innocent, of her mortification.

Mabel during the drive devoted herself to Mr. Lawley exclusively, in part to try to do away the impression of her aunt's ungracious outburst, and in part for another reason. We do not say she was in love with George, or that she considered George in love with her; we say only that she could neither look at him nor speak to him with the frank unconsciousness and freedom from self-consciousness with which she would look at or speak to anyone else in the world. As for George, while affecting to listen to Miss Masters, he had eyes and ears only for Mabel. She never looked so lovely or talked so brightly, a sweet and secret excitement speaking through her eyes and thoughts. Even that gnarled old cynic Lawley was fain to confess her power. In speaking afterwards to George on one of his favourite topics—the general muddle of things in the world, in which no one could find either clue or coherence—he burst out with ‘There's that Miss Masters! She might have been anything,

and she's a girl!' It was not an effective *argumentum ad hominem*, as George was quite satisfied with Nature's ordering in this individual instance; but it expressed pithily Lawley's opinion at once of the sex in general, and of Mabel in particular. The fact was, that when Lawley could be got to converse with a woman at all, he conversed with her as if she was a very young man; and a conversation of this kind revealed incidentally that Mabel had read and thought about what—for a girl—was an immense and amazing range of subjects. And this range of thought and reading seemed to Lawley all the more prodigious in a girl, not merely because in every case it came out incidentally and in answer to his lead, but also because in every case it was submitted to his superior judgment with a deference that was unfeigned, and therefore flattering to masculine vanity. Without this deference, twice her accomplishments would not have had half the effect on any man, not even Lawley. Mabel herself, we may say, was much more inclined to be ashamed than proud of her acquisitions, since they were held by the Roxby School to be as unfeminine as whistling or smoking.

‘What! have you read that, too?’ asked Lawley, in reference to some metaphysical work.

‘I have repeated it, like a phonograph. It’s one of the books I have read aloud to my father, Mr. Lawley; but I hope you won’t suspect me of understanding it. I couldn’t pronounce half the words properly.’

‘It’s waste of time reading such stuff,’ said Lawley, now perfectly at his ease and speaking precisely as he would speak to George, but seeming to look rather through Mabel than at her. ‘Metaphysics are just like eddies in a river, they whirl you round and round till you are dizzy, and don’t advance you a yard.’

‘I’ll answer for the dizziness; but at least they do me the good of making me feel how stupid I am.’

‘Stupid! It’s the book that’s stupid. You’re not stupid, and you don’t think yourself stupid either,’ he added, in the sudden fear that he was being trapped into paying a compliment. Certainly Mr. Lawley, in his intercourse with ladies, seemed like the teapot in the ‘Biglow Papers’—

A teapot made o' pewter
Our Prudence had, thet wouldn't pour (all she could du) to
suit her ;
Fust place the leaves 'ould choke the spout, so's not a drop
'ould dreem out,
Then Prude 'ould tip an' tip an' tip, till the holl kit bust
clean out ;
The kiver hinge-pin bein' lost, tea leaves an' tea an' kiver
'Ould all come out *kerswosh* ! ez though the dam broke in a
river.

It was not an easy matter for Mabel to get him to speak, but when he did speak he came out with the shock of a shower-bath. Mabel was a very womanly young woman, and therefore liked being bullied by a man she respected. 'I don't think myself stupid in some things, but I do in others.'

'You're not stupid in anything,' said Lawley decisively, being now reassured as to her sincerity. 'Understanding such stuff is no more a proof of cleverness than seeing in the dusk is a proof of good sight. You don't think a bat has better eyes than you, do you? If you have to read such books out to your father, like Milton's daughters, it's a good thing that, like them, you don't understand what you read. At least, *I* think so,' said Lawley, sinking his hands deep into his

trousers' pockets, and leaning back in the wagonette with a coolness and complacency that confounded George. Was this Petruchio the man that couldn't look a girl in the face? As for Mabel, this uncompromising disparagement of her father's favourite studies by the only man in Wefton of whom she ever heard her father speak respectfully perplexed her considerably. Her faith in her father's profound wisdom was unshakable, but she had heard her father himself say more than once of Mr. Lawley, to Mr. Meekins, that it was a disgrace to the Church that such a man should be buried in a wretched little country living. Colonel Masters, indeed, knew Lawley only through articles of his which appeared in a leading Review; but he had an inordinate idea of a literary success which he had vainly sought himself. But if her father had a high opinion of Mr. Lawley, Mr. Lawley did not seem to return the compliment—at least, he spoke very slightly of those profound studies of which her father was a profound student. This, we say, perplexed Mabel considerably and held her silent. Meantime, Lawley was regarding her somewhat in the way in which he would regard an author

whose first book he was reviewing. He ought not only to point out its defects and beauties, but to give the *débutante* what encouragement he could.

‘Do you read new books, too?’ he asked suddenly.

‘I very seldom get the chance of reading any except what *you* would “cast to the moles and bats,”’ said Mabel, smiling.

‘I wish you’d let me send you one now and then. I get batches of them every fortnight nearly, and there’s sometimes one worth reading.’

Mabel flushed with pleasure. ‘I should be so much obliged to you, Mr. Lawley, not only for the books, but for your choosing those you think best for me. Since my aunt died I have had no one——’ Here she checked herself, in the fear that she seemed implicitly reproaching her father. ‘I mean, I’ve read at random since I escaped from the schoolroom.’

‘I’m afraid you’ll think you’ve got back to the schoolroom, or to the schoolmaster, anyhow,’ said Lawley, suddenly brought to himself. Hitherto he had been looking rather beyond Mabel than at her, in a dreamy way

that had grown upon him from living so much alone. But when Mabel checked herself for a moment, he naturally looked interrogatively into the flushed and lovely face turned up to his, and his shyness returned upon him in a moment, and 'covered him all over, thoughts and all, like a cloak.' For the short remainder of the journey he relapsed into his reserve, and Mabel felt as she used to feel when Miss Murdoch took from her and locked away some interesting story, when its interest had just culminated.

Her conversation, however, with Mr. Lawley had the effect of rousing her aunt's suspicions. It was quite evident to that old lady's keen penetration that Mr. Lawley was paying Mabel marked attention, which Mabel was receiving with marked favour. Now Miss Masters, as we have already said, was irritated most unreasonably with Mr. Lawley, and her prejudice against him made her very particular to find out his means, prospects, etc., before she allowed this matter to go any further. Therefore she did what she could to keep the two apart for the rest of the day, and manœuvred the matter so skilfully that George and

Mabel were thrown together for a great part of the afternoon, while the unhappy Mr. Lawley was chained to the camp-stool of the exacting artist.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PROPOSAL.

ON reaching the moors a council was held to decide upon the best site for lunch. Mabel proposed a hill at a little distance, and was of course seconded by George and supported by Lawley, on the ground that it would give Miss Masters a fine view all round. Miss Masters, however, being inclined for lunch and disinclined to walk a foot further than she could help, thought it would be too far for the gentlemen to carry the hampers, and that the view of the hill was probably more picturesque than the view from it. Accordingly they pitched their tents where they were and proceeded to unpack the hampers, which Lawley, after his manner, had crammed with enough provisions for forty people.

‘Do you think there will be enough?’ he

asked George doubtfully, as he handed him out a fourth fowl.

‘There will hardly be one apiece, but we may eke it out with the lamb and tongue. Good heavens! What an array of bottles!’

‘They do look rather a lot,’ said Lawley, himself somewhat dismayed, ‘but except the beer all are single bottles. I didn’t know what wine Miss Masters drank. There’s just one bottle of each,’ he said, in a survey of the corks, ‘of port, sherry, champagne, claret, hock, brandy, mint sauce, and custard.’

‘I drink custard, Mr. Lawley, thank you,’ said Mabel (who, by the way, had become a teetotaller with Barney). ‘As for Aunt, she hardly ever touches anything but port, sherry, champagne, claret, and hock.’

‘My dear!’

‘I didn’t know you cared for brandy or mint sauce, Aunt.’

‘The brandy was for Squire and another of the children,’ said Lawley apologetically.

‘I am quite sorry, Mr. Lawley, you took the trouble to provide so many kinds of wine for me. I hardly ever take any wine but sherry,’ said Miss Masters, less to acknowledge

Mr. Lawley's special consideration for her than to disabuse him of the impression of her drinking habits she felt Mabel's wild words must have given. She sat upon her camp-stool surveying through her eyeglass, critically at first, but at last complacently, the various dishes Mabel and George were arranging as Lawley handed them out of the hamper. Her view of the lunch was so satisfactory that she was positively charmed with the scenery. 'I wouldn't have missed this for anything. I really must take that bit.'

'Which, Aunt? The wing?' for George was busy upon a fowl.

Mabel, from intercourse with the wooden Miss Roxby, had got into that way of 'uttering her jests with a sad brow,' which, as we know from both Cicero and Shakspeare, makes even a thin joke effective.

'My dear,' replied her aunt with some scorn in her voice for Mabel's prosaic absorption in the luncheon, 'I was speaking of sketching that beautiful bit of hillside. Where are your eyes, Mabel? You'll never be a painter if you think only of lunch with such a view before you.'

‘Have you eyes?

Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed
And batten on this moor?’

quoted George, pointing to the hill and the moor, and looking into Mabel’s face with a mixed expression of amusement and admiration.

‘It was Miss Mabel Masters who wished to feed on the mountain, I thought,’ said Lawley, ‘while Miss Masters was “the gentle lady wedded to the Moor.” You preferred to lunch here, didn’t you, Miss Masters?’

From this bewildering pedantry Miss Masters could at least gather confirmation of her suspicion of Lawley’s designs upon Mabel. It was plain that, while Mr. Kneeshaw sided with herself, Mr. Lawley sided with Mabel, as she might have expected.

‘Yes; I don’t think I could get a better point of view to sketch from. I hope you will help me after lunch with your advice, Mr. Lawley,’ said that wily chaperon, mindful of the danger of allowing Mr. Lawley from her side for a moment. No doubt it would have been better still to have tied Mabel to her apron-strings; but that young person,

not having the least idea of the danger to be guarded against, was little likely to be as amenable as Mr. Lawley to discipline.

Lunch, then, being over, to which Miss Masters did the most ample justice, the distraction of the scenery notwithstanding, the unhappy Mr. Lawley, who meditated having a pipe in retirement, was summoned to her side, shown her drawings, asked his opinion of each, and his advice as to the standpoint for the one in hand, and as to every point in its progress. Lawley loved tobacco, and did not love the society of silly old ladies; and only a perfect host and gentleman could have stood as he stood the severe and continuous strain upon his manners for two mortal hours. Meantime Mabel was amusing the children with such mild games as the invalids could manage, until they were tired (as they soon were) of movement, and set to to make daisy chains. Daisies were to be had only on the skirts of the moor, and on the hill at its edge, and here Mabel, Mary Ann, and George gathered them for the others. Lawley was somewhat comforted to see Kneeshaw reduced to a sillier slavery than his own, little thinking that the daisies were

flowers of paradise to George. When the three had reached the hill and wandered round its base to the other side, George suggested that Mary Ann had better carry back in her apron what they had gathered.

‘They’ll have nothing to go on with by this,’ he said considerately. ‘You can come back when you want more, Mary Ann, and we shall have another lot for you.’

Mary Ann, however, preferred to make a daisy chain of her own out of the superabundance of daisies already gathered, and did not return for more. George was madly in love. He forgot everything and everyone but Mabel. The mere touch of her hand in one of the childish games doubled the beating of his heart, and sent his blood in so mad a whirl to his brain as to dizzy it. He walked after her as in a dream, gathering the daisies she trod on and treasuring one she dropped. ‘Amare et sapere vix Deo conceditur.’ He was only a little madder than most with that delicious delirium we all have, or ought to have, endured and enjoyed; and only those who have lost their memory or have little in their lives worth remembering can be so pitiable as

to pity him, or so despicable as to despise him.

‘Let us sit down a moment, the view is lovely from here,’ said George, pointing to a little hollow in the hill from which they could see nothing, but would there be unseen themselves.

Mabel obeyed him with her heart fluttering like a newly caught bird. She knew now what George felt for her as well as if he had expressed it in words—better than words could express it. How? We cannot tell. What we call instinct is made up of a thousand accumulated experiences and impressions and associations, so atomic as to baffle analysis. And a girl’s instinct is quicker and truer than a man’s, because she is more observant; but she can no more account for her unerring instinct than a marksman for his unerring aim, which comes not only of a keen eye, but of numberless minute observations and inferences, that have been made unconsciously. We cannot tell the grounds, then, of Mabel’s instinctive inference of George’s feeling for her, nor shall we say how much she was helped by analogy to such an inference by the response

she found to that feeling in her own heart. We are not going to pry into that sacred chamber which she now blushed to look into herself; for in a heart like Mabel's the purest love when first detected 'trembles like a guilty thing surprised.'

George seated himself beside her, but a little backward, that he might gaze inoffensively on her face. There was an awkward silence, for while George was wrapped in his worship, Mabel could think of nothing to say that would not sound forced or foolish. She reviewed and rejected one topic after another till the tension became intolerable.

'I mustn't forget my painting lesson, or Aunt will think me more hopeless than ever.'

'Don't go!' cried George, as she essayed to rise, seizing her hand, and looking and speaking as if life and death were in the balance.

Shall we print in cold blood his headlong, incoherent, passionate appeal?

Be wise: not easily forgiven

Are those who, setting wide the doors that bar

The secret bridal chambers of the heart,

Let in the day.

'I couldn't help it,' said George des-

perately, with a sudden drop to bathos. He had put it to the touch and thought he had lost it all, because Mabel sat silent with averted face. Yet she had not withdrawn her hand, though George once, at the height of his vehement pleading, had so pressed it that her mother's ring bit into the next finger. But intense longing is sometimes the father not of belief, but of doubt, and George thought he had thrown and lost. 'You are angry with me?' in a voice of despair. Mabel turned her ferocious gaze upon him, and even George was satisfied with all it expressed.

'Don't; please, don't!' she said, in answer to what next proceeded from his lips uttered close to her ear, but not addressed to that organ; for the reaction from despair carried George over considerably to the other side. In fact, Mabel had to disengage her hand to defend her face.

'It is bleeding!' he cried.

'It's a bad omen,' Mabel replied lightly. 'I have given you my hand, and see how you have crushed it!'

George cried out upon his brutality, and bent over the little wounded hand lying lost

in his own great palm as a mother over her sick child, and kissed and soothed it and was altogether lovelorn and silly. It would be hard to find two persons with a keener sense of the ridiculous than these two ridiculous creatures, yet neither was in the least disposed to laugh at the other! We old folk of course can laugh at and—envy them, longing in vain to exchange our cynical sense for their happy insanity. For the laugh is not on our side after all. Our wisdom may be so ripe

*Possent ut juvenes visere fervidi,
Multo non sine risu,
Dilapsam in cineres facem.*

So these two prattled silly things with a sublime meaning—bubbles rising from profound depths. Shall we print their prattle? As well gather the drops of which the rainbow was composed after they had fallen from heaven—their glory was not their own, but of the sun which transfigured them. Let us leave them to themselves for the single, sweet, swift hour that seems to glide from them in a moment,

*Like the snowfall in the river,
A moment white, then melts for ever.*

‘ Please, Mr. Kneeshaw ; ’ George started aside like a broken bow. He had been sitting very close to Mabel, probably to take advantage of the shadow of her sunshade, for his head was under it. They were hidden in a cup-like hollow of the hill, only visible to anyone who stood, as Mary Ann stood now, directly in front.

‘ You’ve come for more daisies, Mary Ann, ’ said George in the confused way a man speaks when first roused from a vivid dream.

‘ Please, sir, we are agoing home. ’

‘ Home ! ’ cried George, looking at his watch. ‘ By Jove ! it’s five o’clock ! ’

Mary Ann, like most poor people’s children—especially if they are delicate children—was a very precocious young person, and drew her own shrewd conclusions from George’s attitude and Mabel’s scarlet face. These conclusions and their grounds she afterwards imparted to Mrs. MacGucken, much to that matron’s relief, for she had great searchings of heart about this picnic in general, and the invitation of Miss Mabel Masters to it in particular. ‘ The master, ’ she was often heard to say, ‘ was that soft that any one who had the mind might whip him up

as easy as a handkercher off a hedge'—an unflattering comparison suggested by her losses of linen left to bleach near the highway.

On this occasion, however, Mr. Lawley was kept quite clear of temptation—unless Miss Masters is to be considered in that incredible light. That sagacious and cautious chaperon never let him stray farther from her side than to the children, and was so absorbed by her suspicions of him that it never occurred to her to think anything of Mabel's stroll with George. She saw the two go off together with Mary Ann in their company, and, not having noticed the child's return in the interval she was in no wise disquieted on seeing the three return, still together, after over an hour's absence. Lawley, though his thoughts were little given to running on such subjects, could not help putting the right construction on this otherwise unaccountable desertion of him and his invalids by Mabel and George. When it came near the time to return, therefore, he thought it more considerate to send Mary Ann in search of them than to surprise them himself; and he felt rather proud of his discretion when he saw the expressions on the faces of the three as they hurried back—

Mabel looking still conscious, George confused, and Mary Ann disgustingly knowing.

‘My dear Aunt; how quickly you have done it! It’s so like, too!’

‘Like what, dear? That’s a sketch of Derwentwater. I didn’t know you had been to the Lakes.’

‘We shall just have time for a pipe, Kneeshaw.’

‘I hope Miss Masters doesn’t object to the smell of tobacco,’ said George, speaking to the aunt but looking at the niece.

‘“Which king, Bezonian?”’ grunted Lawley.

‘I don’t in the least object to the scent of tobacco in the open air,’ said Miss Masters graciously, admiring, with her head drawn back and on one side, the last consummate touch she had given her sketch. George, having looked in vain for Mabel to interchange one last glance with him (for that young woman, conscious of Mr. Lawley’s cynical scrutiny, would not lift her eyes from her aunt’s sketch), was hauled off a dejected prisoner in Lawley’s custody.

As they walked away together George

roused himself from his delicious reveries by a prodigious effort. 'Well, what have you been doing?' he asked coolly.

'You may well ask. I've been admiring the works of the old Masters,' growled Lawley, giving vent through this ungallant pleasantry to his long-gathering irritation. 'You've been going in for the modern, I should say.'

George was silent for a moment, wondering whether Mabel would object to his confiding their secret to Lawley. Having determined this point in his own mind, he said, when they had seated themselves, and Lawley had taken out and filled his pipe, 'Lawley, she has accepted me!'

'Phew!' whistled Lawley, who, being just in the act of lighting his pipe, dropped the fusee in amazement. 'Got to that! Why, how long has it been going on?'

'Oh, some time,' said George dreamily.

'What! before to-day?'

'Before to-day!'

'Then you meant to propose when you refused St. George's?' asked Lawley, rather bewildered.

George thus forced back to face his night-

long struggle and his heroic resolution of a few hours since, which seemed now so dim and far away, was confounded at this presentation of his folly and feebleness.

‘No, I didn’t,’ he said desperately; ‘I meant this morning to give up both her and the living.’

‘But what about her? If she accepted you to-day she must have cared for you before this morning.’

Here was a consideration for a misogynist to urge! But Lawley had been extraordinarily struck with Mabel.

‘I didn’t know she cared for me, and I didn’t know I cared so madly for her. I was carried off my feet, Lawley.’ And then he raved frantically about Mabel like a boy, as he was.

Lawley listened to his wild rhapsody with more sympathy than he showed. ‘By the way,’ he said, when George paused for breath, ‘we mustn’t forget to post this letter of yours,’ taking the refusal of St. George’s from his pocket.

‘Lawley, it’s cruel of you! God! what must I do?’

‘I’ll tell you what you must not do. You mustn’t drag a girl like that into hopeless poverty, or a hopeless engagement either. If you must give up the Church and struggle for a living God knows how, you must give her up. It won’t do to fling yourself out of the boat and drag her to drown with you.’

‘I *can’t* give her up,’ groaned George.

‘You could give her up this morning, and may be in the same mind to-morrow morning,’ said Lawley, in a tone of irritation that seemed to George uncalled-for and unaccountable. The fact was not merely that Lawley, being himself ‘a still strong man,’ was impatient of feeble vacillation, but that he felt indignant that the happiness of a girl like Miss Masters should be at the mercy of such vacillation. Perhaps, at the bottom of his heart, this cynic and misogynist grudged George the brilliant conquest he seemed to make and hold so heedlessly.

‘We had better get back, hadn’t we?’ said George, with sudden sullenness, repenting bitterly of having confided his sacred secret to such sacrilegious hands.

‘Look here, old fellow,’ said Lawley, with

a frank friendliness which was irresistible, putting his hand on George's knee. 'It's no use being angry with me for looking at this thing from the girl's side. She's not like other girls. She'll not accept a man as she'd accept a partner for a waltz, and change partners as lightly;' speaking with a bitterness which was the irritation of an old wound that still throbbed at times. 'When you do come across a girl like that, it's not fair to make it a toss-up whether you propose to her or not. It *was* a toss-up you know,' nodding at George.

Lawley praise any girl so! And that girl Mabel! He was the prince of confidants!

'I tell you, Lawley, I didn't know how I worshipped her. It seems a whole year since this morning. And as for her caring for me, I couldn't have believed it. I can hardly believe it yet;' looking back to where she stood, as if for reassurance that it wasn't a dream. 'But give her up now! Can't you understand that a man might give up a lottery ticket of one in ten thousand who wouldn't give up the prize for the world?'

'Well, then, if you are going to stick to her you must stick to the Church, and to this

living, too,' said Lawley, coolly lighting a match and holding George's letter over it till it was consumed.

George watched the *auto-da-fé* in silence, but with a troubled face.

'You'll thank me for this before you're a year older,' continued Lawley.

'I don't know,' said George doubtfully.

'Are you glad I made you come with us to-day?'

'Glad!'

'You see what a difference a few hours have made in your mind.'

'It's not the time that has made the difference.'

'Of course it's not the time that has made the difference. It's change of circumstances. And a change of circumstances will make all the difference in the world in your views. You take what I must call a morbid view of your position in the Church now—I don't see how you could help taking it. You got let in for one of the worst curacies in England—one of the worst curacies in England, I should say,' repeated Lawley deliberately. 'Dr. Clancy may have been a very good man for converting

the heathen to Christianity—I don't know about that—but a better man for converting Christians to heathenism you could hardly find in England. It's not easy for any thinking man to listen to him in or out of the pulpit for a year without his faith being shaken. Besides, he made you as uncomfortable as he could; put you into the most galling harness, and took care that it should gall; and when you were disheartened and disgusted and in the worst frame of mind for forming a fair judgment of anything, you had this burlesque of religion put before you at every turn as the thing you had sworn to hold and teach. Every parson you met was appointed by Clancy, and echoed his ideas of a clergyman's obligations, till you came to

Think the rustic cackle of your bourg
The murmur of the world.

It will be a different thing altogether when you have a church of your own, and are no longer worried, bullied, and muzzled. You can then say out what you believe and what you don't believe, and can leave the things you doubt alone. You'll get a safety-valve to blow off steam and ease the boiler, and you'll come

back to a healthy state of mind. You'll find then that you believe more than you thought, and that others believe less than you thought, and that you have at least as good a right in the Church as a Methodist like Clancy or a Romanist like Gant.'

There was some truth and much plausibility in Lawley's way of putting the thing, but it would hardly have convinced and converted George that morning. Now, however, he could no longer look at things by that 'dry light' of which Bacon speaks—*ψυχὴ ξηρὴ σοφωτάτη*—but by a light 'which was infused and drenched in his affections.'

'I shall accept it,' said George, rising suddenly.

'Of course you'll accept it,' Lawley replied, also rising and putting back his pipe into its case. 'You're the luckiest fellow I ever heard of. Here you are, a young fellow of twenty-five, without interest and with no great good looks or brains, and you get in one day the best living in Wefton and a girl too good for a duke!'

Here, of course, George took up the wondrous tale, and as they walked back went

wild with praise of Mabel, till Lawley had to quote, from Bon Gaultier,—

‘Tis the most infernal bore
Of all the bores I know,
To have a friend who’s lost his heart
A short time ago.’

On their return they found the horses to, Miss Masters seated in the waggonette, and Mabel lifting in the last of the children. George was just in time, under the pretext of helping her in, to press her hand, and to convey through that dumb alphabet of love all the unutterable things he felt in the long interval since he had last seen her. During the drive home Mabel was shy and embarrassed ; George, since he could not bring himself to speak to her as a mere acquaintance, was silent but happy in the mere touch of her dress ; while Lawley amazed them both by an extraordinary flow of talk and spirits. Mabel’s shyness and embarrassment not only gave him courage, but suggested that the greatest kindness he could do her would be to take all the talk to himself. Now Lawley, when he was in the vein and chose to exert himself, was a most brilliant talker. He had a keen and caustic wit, dry

humour, and a memory, like an old curiosity shop, stored with all manner of out-of-the-way and interesting things. Mabel heard him with the most flattering interest and admiration, while George was more than once drawn out of his delicious reveries to listen. All three were so absorbed, that the sudden pulling-up of the carriage at The Grange was their first warning of the close of the journey.

‘Here we are!’ said Lawley, with something like a sigh. Mabel turned suddenly towards George to look her farewell. George, however, had no idea of being put off with a look, however loving.

‘Would you kindly allow me to write a note in your house, to post on my way home?’ asked he of Miss Masters, whom the sudden pull-up had waked out of an uneasy sleep.

‘Certainly, Mr. Kneeshaw. Perhaps Mr. Lawley, too, would come in and have a cup of tea?’ with, however, a doubtful look at the children. Mr. Lawley politely declined, on the plea of having to see his charges home; and so the party broke up.

CHAPTER XIV.

GUARDIANS.

GEORGE whispered to Mabel as he handed her out, 'I must see you for a moment;' and Mabel, speaking upon this hint, said to her aunt as they entered the house—

'Mr. Kneeshaw might write his note in the nursery, Aunt, while tea is getting ready.'

'The nursery' was the study of the gynecium: first a nursery, then a schoolroom, now Mabel's sanctum, it had kept its original name.

'Very well, my dear; you can show Mr. Kneeshaw into it,' said this incomparable chaperon.

'Is this the nursery? What a pretty room!' It was not a pretty room in itself, but books, pictures, flowers, nicknacks, arranged neither primly nor confusedly, but with a

‘sweet disorder, a wild civility,’ redeemed its natural plainness.

‘Yes, this is the nursery. You’re looking for the broken toys? There have been plenty of them, but they’re hidden away,’ said Mabel, with an undercurrent of deep and sad meaning in her voice and in her eyes. ‘It has always been my own room ever since I can remember. *My very own*, you know.’

‘My very own!’ echoed George, with another meaning expressed through his eyes, and through his hands holding both of hers, and through his lips pressed passionately to hers.

‘Is this what you wanted me for?’ making her escape to a table where, with her back turned to him to hide her burning blushes, she opened a desk for him to write at. George followed, and put his arm round her, and told her for the first time of the offer of the living, and showed her Mr. Pickles’ letter.

‘What does he mean by saying, “I have only just learned the obligation I am under to you for saving my son’s life”?’

‘He thought I was knocked down by accident.’

‘Weren’t you?’

Then George had to explain how the thing had been, and Mabel learned for the first time her hero’s heroism, not merely in risking his life to save that of the worthless Clarence Pickles, but in leaving that gentleman’s account of the affair uncontradicted. Indeed, this contemptuous magnanimity of silence struck Mabel as more noble than the rescue itself, which it was a mere matter of course that her hero should attempt.

‘Bayard!’ she said jestingly, but showing her earnest admiration through her shining eyes.

‘*Vice* Barney dismissed,’ laughed George. ‘But shall we accept it, dearest?’ asking the question for the opportunity it gave of this delightful identification of their interests. It also gave him an opening to speak of their marriage as contingent on his induction into the living; but Mabel put this startling subject aside to speak on another that was uppermost in her mind. To her secrecy seemed deceit, and she could not feel happy in her engagement until her father knew and approved of it. And yet she had a miserable misgiving that her

father would disapprove of it, and that it would be another of the broken toys of her life to be hidden away. George, when she expressed her scruples to him, fell in at once with her wish, as he himself, from a feeling he would not face, was eager to rivet irrevocably their engagement.

Accordingly it was arranged that he should have the fateful interview with Colonel Masters that evening, if possible. Then the pair relapsed, after this lucid interval, into delirium, from which they were roused by Miss Masters calling for Mabel.

‘There! Tea is ready!’ cried Mabel, in dismay; ‘and you haven’t written your note, and I haven’t taken my things off. What will Aunt think?’

‘She’ll think the tea cold’—which was precisely what she did think. She was simply disgusted at being kept waiting. Even when all went well with her, and she was in the best temper possible, she hadn’t much thought to spare to anyone else; but upon the least discomfort she shrank into her shell altogether.

‘What a time you’ve taken to get ready, Mabel,’ she said peevishly. ‘And Mr.

Kneeshaw hasn't written his note yet, I suppose. I'm sure he'd not wish us to wait tea for him. Shall I send him a cup into the nursery?'

This happy thought was welcomed by Mabel, who did not care to take her aunt into confidence as to the reason or result of George's interview with her father. George could go to him direct from the nursery, where she would await his return and report.

'Jane could take it in to him,' urged Miss Masters.

'I think I shall take it myself,' said Mabel, looking as unconscious as she could, with such little success that even a man would have taken in the situation at a glance. Miss Masters' only thought, however, was that it was undignified in Mabel to attend upon Mr. Kneeshaw,

'My dear, I think it would look better if Jane took it in.'

But Mabel, without arguing the point, proceeded to prepare a tray, and as the matter was of slight importance to Miss Masters compared with her having her own tea at once and in comfort, Mabel was allowed to take it to George without further remonstrance.

‘I was just coming,’ said George.

‘I thought it better you should go from here to see my father,’ said Mabel, with a tremor in her voice. She felt that the happiness of her life would be decided in a few minutes.

‘He’ll give his consent, dearest,’ said George, speaking assuredly, but looking up interrogatively into her wistful eyes.

‘I don’t know,’ she answered tremulously.

‘But if not?’ he asked, clasping both her hands in his, and appealing to her as for life.

‘If not,’ she faltered, with a childlike expression of piteous helplessness in her face—‘If not, you must help me to do my duty, George.’

‘My darling, I can’t give you up,’ he cried, rising and straining her to his breast.

She lay passive in his arms a moment, thinking it might be a farewell embrace; and then, disengaging herself with a smile that shone through tears, said, ‘It mayn’t be good-bye after all, you know;’ and then, after a pause, ‘I shall ask him to see you now,’ she said, and was gone.

‘Father, Mr. Kneeshaw wishes to see you.’

Colonel Masters was sitting solitary over his wine.

‘Mr. Kneeshaw? Who’s he?’

‘One of the curates of the parish church.’

‘What does he want? At this hour, too.’

‘Shall I ask him to call to-morrow morning?’

‘What does he want?’ he asked again petulantly; and then, after a pause, which Mabel didn’t fill, ‘No; I’d better get it done with at once, whatever it is. Tell Jane to show him in.’

‘Here, Father?’

‘Yes, here. It’s a subscription, I suppose.’

This was not encouraging. Mabel returned to George pale and dejected, but trying to look cheerful. ‘Come,’ she said, with rather a wan smile. ‘You’ll be patient and forbearing,’ she turned to say entreatingly, before they entered the dining-room together. George nodded with a smile, though his heart rather failed him. This lion that guarded his Una must be rather a savage beast. Yet Mabel’s warning was uncalled for. Colonel Masters was brutal only at home, but exquisitely polite to strangers. He prided himself on being a

gentleman, and he knew that gentlemanliness obliged him to be courteous to everyone but those of his own household, and to be specially gentle with women, children, and clergymen. No doubt he lost his self-command when he lost his temper, but under ordinary circumstances he was punctiliously and even painfully polite.

‘Mr. Kneeshaw, Father.’

‘How do you do, Mr. Kneeshaw? Pray take a seat. Mabel, tell Jane to bring another glass.’ Colonel Masters was favourably impressed with George’s appearance. In the first place, he didn’t look a clergyman, for, like his friend Lawley, he was ritualistic enough to express his disbelief in sacerdotalism through his dress, which was little distinguishable from that of a layman; and, in the second place, he was a perfect gentleman in appearance and bearing.

After a glass had been brought for George, and nervously filled and sipped, and after a few common-place remarks on common-place matters, there fell an awkward silence, which grew more difficult to break the longer it lasted. ‘Colonel Masters,’ George at last

blurted out, 'you will be surprised at my calling upon you, at such an hour, but the fact is I—I—proposed to-day to Miss Masters, and she has accepted me, subject to your approval.' George had arranged and repeated aloud to himself in the nursery a gradual and most diplomatic approach to this delicate subject, and this headlong plunge was the result! Colonel Masters set down untasted the glass he had half raised to his lips. 'With Miss Masters!' he exclaimed. He had for a moment an idea that George meant his sister. But no; this was not possible. He must mean Mabel.

'Mr. Kneeshaw, do you know her age?'

It was now George's turn to think the aunt was in question. He could not help being more amused than enraged at this revolting misunderstanding, and exclaimed in turn, with an irresistible smile, 'Her age! Your *daughter's* age?'

'Yes,' replied the Colonel, to George's amazement, not disconcerted in the least; 'my daughter's age. You must have known, Mr. Kneeshaw, that she was little more than a child; yet you put this thing into her head!'

Was it possible, thought the bewildered George, that Mabel, with a mind and body so superbly developed, was only fourteen or fifteen years of age? He had heard of the precocious mental and bodily development of Indian-born children; could Mabel be a singular instance of this singular precocity?

‘I hope you’ll excuse the question, Colonel Masters; but how old is your daughter?’

Colonel Masters was puzzled in his turn. How old was Mabel? By an intricate calculation, made upon a comparison of the dates of his going to India, of his first furlough, etc., he found, to his utter amazement, that Mabel must be nineteen, and might be twenty-one. Upon this confounding discovery, his first thought was, as usual, of himself, and of what to him was the sorest of subjects—*his* age, which seemed to hurry on by a kind of geometric progression—each year so much shorter than the last—*crescit eundo*. His next thought was how to extricate himself from the rather absurd position he had taken up without compromising his dignity.

‘You must allow us elders to have different ideas from yours of youth, Mr. Kneeshaw,’ he

said, evading, of course, a direct answer to George's question. 'I daresay we are behind the age, but we think our daughters should not marry earlier than their mothers before them.' (Mabel's poor mother, by the way, had been married at eighteen.) 'But, even putting that point aside, Mr. Kneeshaw,' continued Colonel Masters, with an air of much magnanimity, 'you are yourself very young—only just entered the Church, I should say,' looking interrogatively at George, who nodded acquiescence. 'Now the Church is a very honourable profession—a most honourable profession—but a very precarious profession. Promotion in the Church, I need not tell you, always depends on some one beside a man's self, and on something beside his merits. Indeed, it seems to me that in the Church the best men are always the last promoted, and the silliest, like froth, get to the top at once. Not a promising look-out for *you*, Mr. Kneeshaw,' with a complimentary bow.

'I have strong confirmation of your view of Church preferment in my pocket,' laughed George, with new hope; 'it's a letter from

Mr. Pickles offering me the living of St. George's.'

'Indeed! A good living, Mr. Kneeshaw?'

'He says it will probably be seven hundred pounds a year.'

Colonel Masters would have given way at once if he hadn't made such a foolish fuss about Mabel's youth. He knew as little of his daughter's character as he knew of her age, and he had no doubt at all that she would marry Mr. Kneeshaw, whether he gave his consent or not. Besides, she was as likely as not to fancy some parson or other, and Mr. Kneeshaw was much above the average parson of Colonel Masters' acquaintance in bearing, appearance, and prospects. He didn't seem like a man either who would dun him for money if he needed it, while he was unlikely to need it with a good living to start with. This was a great point with the Colonel. But, on the other hand, who was to read for him? That was the main thing to be thought of, after all. He had got used to Mabel, and was not likely to find one who would suit him so well. Besides, he would have now to pay for such help. It was disgusting how selfish people

were. After all the expense and trouble he had been at to bring this girl up, just when she was beginning to be of some little use to him, she was ready to leave him for the first man that asks her. Still, as she was sure to leave him some time for some one, it was as well she didn't fall into the hands of an adventurer, who would have been always trying to extort money from him. On these grounds the Colonel would have given his ungracious approval of their engagement, if he had not committed himself against it on the absurd plea of Mabel's extreme youth. At this point of his meditations, which passed in a moment through his brain, a way out of the difficulty suggested itself, by which he would be rid at once, and once for all, of the business.

'I think this is rather a woman's matter, Mr. Kneeshaw,' he said, in a tone of some contempt. 'My sister will be fitter to deal with it than I. If you will permit me, I shall refer you to her.'

'If I can get her approval, I may hope for yours?' asked George, relieved, and indeed overjoyed, but contemptuous of Colonel Masters' contempt.

‘Certainly,’ said the Colonel, decisively, dismissing the subject as having not much in it to begin with, and being now thoroughly threshed out. He passed at once to topics of some importance, in which, however, George showed but a languid interest. He rose, as soon as he could, without ungraciousness, and, making an apology for intruding at such an unseasonable hour, hurried away to report to Mabel.

Meantime Mabel, after going through the form of taking tea with her aunt, had returned to the nursery, where she paced up and down in a suspense that would have shocked Miss Roxby. Indeed, that correct person would have disapproved of the facility, not less than of the intensity, of Mabel’s affections, and in this, perhaps, some of our readers may agree with her. We must again remind them that Mabel, since her mother’s death, had been famishing for love, as her father simply tolerated her, and Miss Murdoch was as stern as steel. It was their indifference which made George’s conquest of her seemingly so easy. When he, seeming ‘scarce other than her own ideal knight,’ fell down and worshipped her, the

gratitude she felt at first slipped easily and soon into a warmer feeling. And this feeling had lain so long fallow that it yielded now all the richer harvest. Thus George got more than the reversion, which was the most the Duke looked for from Olivia:—

She that hath a heart of that fine frame
To pay this debt of love but to a father,
How will she love, when the rich golden shaft
Hath killed the flock of all affections else
That live in her !

The affection which had been chilled by her father and aunt now broke into blossom all the more luxuriant from the long winter that had kept it back. Her heart was like a tree that struggles up in the gloom of a dense forest, which cannot put forth a single shoot till it gains the sun at last ; but then its whole pent-up life bursts out together, and it is crowned like a palm, all its glory at the top.

‘ Well ? ’ she asked, as she met George at the nursery door. George at first reassured her only by his look, for he was eager to set at rest an anxiety of his own. Putting his hand under her chin and lifting up her face towards him, as if she were a child, he asked in turn, ‘ How old are you ? ’

‘How old? Oh, I’m ever so old. I shall be twenty in October,’ she said, with the regretful air of a septuagenarian.

‘Twenty! Thank God!’ said George, affecting to laugh off as a joke a relief that was real. ‘I thought you were an infant phenomenon. Your father seems to think you about twelve.’

‘He said I was too young?’

‘He said you were little more than a child; but in the end he referred me to your aunt.’

Mabel knew her father’s utter contempt for her aunt, to whom he would certainly not refer anything he thought of the least importance, and she was provoked into saying, with a bitterness unusual in her, ‘He refers all little housekeeping matters to aunt.’

George hastened to heal the hurt.

‘I’m not sure that he didn’t think it was your aunt’s hand I was asking for. He seemed rather hazy about it, and thought it safest to refer me to her,’ he said, laughing.

This irresistible joke cleared the cloud off Mabel’s face.

‘Aunt will make the same mistake, if you don’t mind. I don’t think I shall trust you in a *tête-à-tête* with her.’

‘Let’s go together, then, and ask her blessing on our knees. Is she still in the drawing-room?’

‘Yes; she expects you there when you have finished your letter. I needn’t announce you this time.’

‘You’ll not come?’

‘Come? No. I should be *de trop*. Besides, I have heard your proposal speech already at the rehearsal this afternoon.’ George’s answer was not in words, and Miss Masters had to wait some time longer in the drawing-room before he appeared.

‘It must have been a foreign letter, Mr. Kneeshaw. When my brother was in India it took me hours to send him all the news.’

‘No, indeed, Miss Masters, it was a letter to Wefton—to Mr. Pickles, accepting a living he was good enough to offer me.’ George was determined to begin at the right end this time.

‘I hope it’s a good living, Mr. Kneeshaw.’

‘It will be about seven hundred pounds a

year and a house. It is the new church of St. George's.'

Miss Masters' opinion of George went up at a bound. 'I'm sure I congratulate you heartily, Mr. Kneeshaw. It's very quick promotion.'

'And yet I'm not satisfied, Miss Masters. I came to ask you for something more.'

'Me!' If George had given the old lady time to get her thoughts together, she would certainly have made the mistake Mabel predicted.

'Yes,' he hurried on to say; 'I came to ask you for the hand of your niece.'

'Mabel! Why I thought—but you'd better see her father.'

'I have seen him, Miss Masters, and he referred me for an answer to you.'

Miss Masters was very much flattered by this proof of her brother's confidence, and pleased at the consequence it gave her; but her first thought, like her brother's, was, of course, of her own convenience and comfort. If Mabel married, her chaperon's occupation would be gone.

'You are both very young,' she said, in the

hope of at least postponing the wedding. This was too bad. She also, like her brother, seemed to expect that George's

Vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow ;
While she should, if she please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.

'Mabel is twenty, and I twenty-five. 'Besides,' George adroitly added, 'she would always have you to advise her, Miss Masters.'

Miss Masters, thinking with her brother that the marriage would come off with or without her consent, decided that it would be wisest to make to herself new friends and a new home. But she must first make the most of her new importance.

'You've taken me so much by surprise, Mr. Kneeshaw, that I hardly know what to say. You must give me a little time to think the matter over, and talk it over with my brother, before I can give you an answer. A woman's happiness is a very serious thing,' she added sententiously and solemnly, as if matrimony and misery went together invariably.

'You don't think I shall make her happy?'

asked George, rather taken aback by this dismal way of looking at the thing.

‘I think she will be as happy with you as with any one, Mr. Kneeshaw—quite; but a woman is much happier unmarried,’ nodding very decidedly.

‘But you should consider our sex,’ urged George, much relieved; ‘a man is so much happier married. Isn’t it a little selfish of you to look only at your own side of the question?’

‘Perhaps I *was* a little selfish,’ confessed Miss Masters musingly, as if recalling all the hearts she had broken.

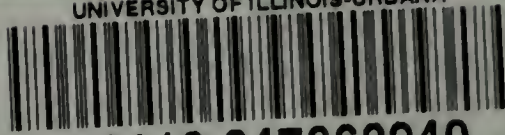
‘You’ve done mischief enough already, Miss Masters. You owe our sex some reparation. Make it to me by giving me Mabel.’ It was an audacious venture, but perfectly successful.

‘Well, we shall see,’ she said, with a smile that made George happy.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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