THE

TALES OF OLD LIVERPOOL.

BY

JOHN P. EIFFE.

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[FROM THE LIVERPOOL WEEKLY "ALBION."]

CALEB CROSSLEY'S BUTLER.

BY JOHN P. EIFFE.

CHAPTER I.

Mr. Caleb Crossley was a wealthy man. He lived in a style of great magnificence at his mansion, a short distance from town; gave frequent routs and parties to his contemporary magnates and their families; kept his coach and pair and a large retinue of servants; and, in a manner, richly merited the pseudonym which old Liverpudlians christened him—namely, Caleb Crœsus.

Melville House was the name by which his mansion was known, and the most important person in that establishment, after himself and family, was a Mr. George Brown, his major domo, butler, and right hand man. Brown, who hailed from somewhere in Cumberland, had wormed himself cleverly into his master's confidence, until he became as indispensable to him as his head cashier or managing clerk at the office. He had the entire control of everything that took place in Melville House; the arrangement of balls and festivities of all kinds; the engaging and supervision of the servants; and the personal regulation of the outlay and requirements inimical to the wants of such an establishment. Mr. Crossley being a widower with two grown up daughters, who took little interest in household matters, the duty devolved on Brown to fill the hiatus, and this he succeeded in doing to the fullest satisfaction.

It was one evening in midsummer, while the family were away spending their holidays, that our friend, Brown, took the opportunity to visit the lower parts of the establishment, where a friend and admirer of his, Mrs. Huggins, the cook, was the presiding genius. She was a fresh-faced, well-proportioned lady of forty—very plump and good-looking, and, what is more, a widow; so that he could not have selected a more agreeable companion to while away an idle hour with. The good lady may have encouraged, in her own breast, feelings deeper than ordinary admiration for the butler, although he was ten years her junior, but, if such were the case, they were so well controlled by a discreet and deferential manner that there was no room left for him to suspect anything of the kind. He entered the kitchen with a somewhat conscious air of condescension, such as a prince might assume on visiting some wretched hovel, and in the blandest and most genial manner addressed the cook.

"Well, and how are you this evening, Mrs. Huggins? I daresay well pleased for your short rest while the folk upstairs are away? Ah! I am sorry to say they will soon be back again—to-morrow or the next day at lat st; so Crossley, at least, informs me" He always referred to his master in this familiar way when speaking before the servants.

Mrs. Huggins was all of a flutter as he came in upon her unexpectedly. However, she soon pulled herself together, and assumed her best smile and most winning manner to give him a pleasant reception.

"As for rest and such like, sir," said she, "I'm sure it's yourself that has more need of it. I often wonder how you can stand the worrit and upset that one in your position has to contend with. From morning till night you have not a moment to call your own while the family is at home, and, for the matter of that, it's about the same when they are away."

This considerate language of the cook evidently pleased him. He smiled with conscious dignity, and acknowledged—

"That it was no child's play to keep the place in order; that Crossley had his weather eye open when he gave him the post; that, by his systematic economy and vigilance, he saved his master thousands a year; and that there was not another man in England who would plague and worrit himself as he did about another's interests."

"All you say, sir, is perfectly true," remarked she, sympathetically. "I have often said the same to my friends when we happened to talk on the subject. But won't you take a little drop of something, now that you are here, sir? —a little gin or whiskey toddy or——"

"If you'll allow me," said he, with a gracious bow and drawing forth his bunch of keys, "I'll take the liberty of asking you this time. Give it a name, Mrs. Huggins, and you shall have the best that Crossley's cellar contains."

The cook was overwhelmed by this generous offer, and profusely poured forth her acknowledgments of the great honour intended her.

"You are too kind, indeed, sir," protested she; "but I suppose you gentlemen are bound to have your way. If it must be so, I have no particular choice of my own; I leave that in your hands, Mr. Brown, as who should be a better judge than yourself in these things?"

While the butler proceeded to the cellar to carry out his proposal, Mrs. Huggins took the precaution to give the maid servants some work in another part of the house, so that she and her companion could have their *tête-à-tête* in the kitchen without fear of interruption. It was evident to the cook that Mr. Brown was unusually generous and good tempered this evening, and it was not at all unlikely that there might be something in the wind: that is to say, he might be going to talk very seriously to her.

When the bottle was produced—one of the best, in fact, in Crossley's bin—they took their seats *vis à vis*, and indulged in a little complimentary talk on common-place subjects, until at length the butler suddenly changed the topic, and seemed desirous of turning the conversation into another channel. It was clearly evident to

his companion that he had something on his mind, and did not know how to broach it. After beating about the bush for some time, he seemed at last to screw his courage to the sticking point, and the confidence which he reposed in the good lady had the effect, as if by magic, of dissipating any castles in the air which she was imprudent or silly enough to have erected.

"You have always been a friend of mine, Mrs. Huggins," he said, in a serious tone of voice; "a person I can talk to as confidentially and familiarly as to my own mother. I am, therefore, going to tell you a great secret—one known only to myself and another party—and I want you to assist me by your advice and experience in a very delicate and interesting matter."

The cook acknowledged as graciously as she could the great honour conferred upon her by what his words implied, but she was, nevertheless, a little troubled and uneasy at the disappointment of her first conjectures.

"Women can always manage these things better than men," continued he; "especially women of a certain age—a motherly age, I mean." This was gall and wormwood to the cook, but she had too much sense to reveal her feelings.

"I am in love, Mrs. Huggins!" He blurted this out as though greatly relieved to have thus far broken the ice; "and now who do you suppose is the particular young lady I am in love with?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say, Mr. Brown," replied she, with a forced and chilly laugh of indifference.

"Can't you guess, Mrs. Huggins; you a person of experience and years; you surely must have suspected something of the kind by this time. She has spoken to you daily; she is, I believe, a great friend of yours—a confidante, in fact?"

"You don't mean Miss Edith Crossley, do you?" said she, with killing sarcasm.

He simply shook his head, and puckered his mouth with sovereign contempt in reply.

"Well then, Miss Amy Rogers, that calls here so often, and plays the piano so beautifully?"

"I thought you had a better opinion of my taste," said he, apparently hurt at this conjecture.

"But, if all accounts be true, she is very rich, and no bad match for—for"—she was going to say a butler, but supplemented the word gentleman instead.

"Mrs. Huggins, you don't quite understand my character. I'm not one of them gents that looks for money and money only. I can appreciate as well as anyone else beauty, talents, grace, and manners—something to adorn a home, and make the hours of life pass away like a beautiful dream. Oh! you are very dull to-night; cannot you think of the sweetest and prettiest girl in all Liverpool?"

"You surely don't mean Miss Lillie Jackson, the governess?" ventured the cook, opening her eyes, and staring fixedly at him.

"You've hit it at last!" exclaimed he, giving his leg a terrific slap, and exhibiting unusual agitation and delight at the mere chance guess of her name. "Now, don't you admire and appreciate my taste; is she not beautiful and good, and—and all that could be desired?"

The cook did not reply just then, but was turning over in her mind something concerning another person, whose name had been mentioned to her by Lillie Jackson herself.

"Let me have your honest opinion, ma'am?' he repeated; "I place great value on everything you say."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what to say," replied she; "you're the best judge of your own affairs, I should think; but Miss Jackson I hear is very poor—poor as a church mouse, as they say."

This was intended to be cruel and cutting, but the other did not take it so.

"Don't you believe a word of that," said he; "I have been over to Chester making inquiries, and I find that her mother has a good shop there, and is worth some money—all of which will be left to Lillie when the old lady dies.

Make no mistake, ma'am, I am not altogether asleep. I shouldn't marry for money alone, you know, but I would like to have a comfortable little sum with the girl I made my wife."

"Then I suppose everything is arranged between you," observed she; "and matters have gone so far that whatever I might say would be of little consequence."

"Not so fast, please, ma'am; not so fast. If you give me your attention for a moment, I will put our present position clearly before you."

And, helping himself to another glass of wine, and clearing his throat, he proceeded as follows:—

"Well, before the family went away for their holidays, I tried every means I could to catch Miss Jackson by herself, and explain to her the state of my feelings regarding her. Somehow or other she was never alone, or suspecting by my look and manner—for there is no knowing how sharp you women are (this with a waggish shake of the head)—she always managed to have some one with her. At last I saw her entering the library one day, and seizing the opportunity I popped in unawares, and, closing the door behind me, said 'Miss Jackson, may I speak a few words with you now that we are alone.' She looked startled at seeing me then, but without any hesitation she answered 'Well, if you don't detain me long, Mr. Brown, I will hear you, but I am very busy just now.'

"She had a book in her hand, and looked oh! so beautiful and innocent, standing there before me, that I would have given all the wealth of the world to have called her mine. I don't know what came over me, but her beauty seemed to instil a sort of courage and inspiration into me. I dropped on my knees before her, and without an effort began to pour forth all the most loving things I could think of. I declare to you, ma'am, if you were to offer me the wealth of the country I could not repeat what I then said; it seemed to flow naturally from me, and without an effort to find the proper words. To show my delicacy for her feelings I closed my eyes all the time I was

speaking. How long I was on my knees I could not say, but I was quickly recalled to my senses by hearing the room door closed. I opened my eyes at once, and gazed around me. Alas! the beautiful vision had flown; her maiden modesty could not support the ordeal. I blame myself for having approached the matter with such enthusiasm and warmth; in vulgar words, ma'am, I put it on too thick. Well, while I was still on my knees thinking, and somewhat disappointed, the room door was suddenly thrown open, and in walked Crossley in his fussy way: 'What! at your prayers, Brown? Pray don't disturb yourself for me. I'll be off in a jiffy.' 'I was only picking a pin off the carpet, sir,' said I, not to be taken aback; 'it's not pleasant to have them strewn about the floor while you're wearing thin slippers.' 'True, Brown, very true. I remember experiencing a most uncomfortable sensation with those same pins once. One of the girls left a fancy pin-cushion in my arm-chair, and I sat on it.' 'Ah, sir, those young ladies are very thoughtless.' But, Mrs. Huggins, to return to the subject of my story. I laid in wait for my beautiful charmer during the next few days, but do what I would there was no getting even a look from her. She purposely turned her face aside when passing me, and I could notice that she blushed deeply whenever I chanced to meet her in the hall. She did not look as though she was offended, or put on any of those airs which young women are in the habit of assuming towards those they despise and dislike. I also know that she did not say anything about what had happened to the Miss Crossleys, for they would have been sure to open their big mouths and grin at me, whenever they saw me. No; I guessed how things were at a glance; she was taken aback by my sudden declaration of love, and only wanted a little time and gentle handling to swallow the bait. Now, Mrs. H., you have been a married woman, and know all the peculiarities of your own sex. I want you to give me your assistance in this affair, and use your influence to bring two loving hearts

together. Elderly ladies are always the best matchmakers, and young maidens will confess to them what they would not for worlds acknowledge to a male friend. May I console myself by knowing that you are my friend, Mrs. H., that—that you will pop in a good word for me now and then, and use your tact to arrange little matters between us, when I can express my love and admiration without fear of interruption. She will be back with the family to-morrow at the furthest, so we must strike the iron while it is hot. You are a great favourite with her, and can do more than anyone else to forward my cause. Give me your hand, and say that you will stand by me in this little matter."

Here the amorous butler stood up, and seized his companion's reluctant hand, but, as if the fates were against them, just at this moment one of the maid-servants entered the kitchen, and then with a little scream of alarm withdrew precipitately.

The good lady was very much annoyed at this interruption, chiefly because it would be wrongly interpreted by the servants, and being a great stickler for propriety herself, it would place her in a very unenviable position as regards those who were under her. Besides, the affair would be certain to furnish matter for scandal, and very probably would reach the ears of the master and the Misses Crossley.

The butler saw that she was greatly put out by what had occurred, and, to quiet her agitation, he whispered confidentially that the intruding hussy should be discharged next day, or his name wasn't Brown.

At this juncture she was desirous of bringing the *tête-à-tête* to a close, but the love-stricken butler would not hear of it until she had given him her full promise to enlist her services in his behalf.

"I will not be satisfied until I have the promise of your assistance, ma'am; without your help I feel as though I can make no headway myself. Come now, take up the cudgels in my

behalf, and you'll never want a friend while George Brown lives."

"Well, but, Mr. Brown, I'm afraid you are misled as regards the young lady's own feelings. If she has another lover and doesn't care a jot for you, all that I can say will be of little avail."

"Another lover, and doesn't care a jot for me!" repeated he, starting back in his seat, as though the supposition were indeed a reality. "Oh, Mrs. H., don't use those words except you wish to kill me right out. The bare idea of the thing has knocked me all of a heap, and I feel as though I had no backbone. There's a good lady, say you only meant it in fun."

"But I must be plain with you, sir; she has another lover—in fact, she has promised to marry him, and that I know for certain."

If the butler in his own graphic language had been denuded of his vertebral column, he could not have looked more chapfallen. His face turned deadly pale, his lower jaw dropped, and he remained silent for some moments, as if deprived of the power of speech. At length he seemed to recover himself, and in an altered tone of voice, said—

"Are you telling me the truth about another lover? Don't drive me to despair by saying what you only suspect. You women often imagine a thing when there is no real cause to do so. Who is the other party that you say she is going to marry?"

"I am sorry to pain you by telling you this, but I think it was Miss Jackson's place to have given you to understand that she was engaged."

"Who is the other man, Mrs. H.? Have you any objection to let me know his name?"

"Oh no, there is no secrecy about the matter; he is your own cousin, Alfred Grice."

"What! the fellow I got Crossley to take into his service for God's sake—the fellow I actually brought down from Cockermouth, and supported and paid for in Liverpool, so that he might be at hand when an opening occurred in the office. Believe me, I have done more for that young man than if he was my own brother,

and this is how one is repaid for doing a good act. But he is in Buenos Ayres at present, and the chances are he may never come back."

"I heard Miss Jackson say that he is coming home in the master's ship, Prince Rupert, and that he will sail in about a month's time."

"Oh, indeed; then they write to each other, do they? That accounts for the bulky letters which she receives so often. Aha, that's how matters stand, is it?"

Here Mr. Brown became suddenly absorbed in thought, in which condition he remained for some time, while the cook fidgeted about, and conducted herself as though she had something very important to do, and was desirous to bring the interview to a close. At length, standing up from his seat and preparing to go, he observed with calm indifference,

"Well, from what you say, it's very evident that I'm too late in the field. I can therefore depend on you saying nothing of what has occurred between us. Where no good can be done, it is just as well to let the matter drop. I must bear my disappointment as best I can, and we must all expect to meet with disappointments coming through life."

Mrs. Huggins expressed her deep sympathy with him, and gave the necessary promise to keep silence on what had transpired. However, when he took his departure, she had very grave doubts about his apparent resignation, and determined to keep her eye upon him, notwithstanding all he had said.

CHAPTER II.

Two days succeeding the interview described, Caleb Crossley and his family returned to Melville House. They had enjoyed themselves immensely during their absence, and every member, not excepting the governess, Miss Jackson, was in the best of health and spirits after their fortnight's holiday. Mr. Crossley, in addition

to the pleasures of relaxation, had the satisfaction to know that everything had gone on swimmingly during his absence. The attentive major domo presented him with a great number of letters on his arrival; all of which bore tidings of successful speculation, while the accounts he had received from his counting-house were equally satisfactory.

"Egad, Brown," said he, tapping the butler familiarly on the shoulder, "this is the happiest day of my life. I have netted a good round sum in these last ventures of mine, and every one in my employ shall have an increase of salary. I will attend to the clerks down at the office myself, and you can look after the people here. Remind me this evening, and we will talk over the share which you must have in my good fortune."

"You are very kind, sir," said Brown, bowing in acknowledgment, "and I am heartily glad that things have gone on so well with you, but the people here are all getting good salaries at present, and—and they sometimes get too hot and unmanageable when you treat them over kindly; however, sir, you are the best judge."

"Well, Brown, I don't like to interfere with your management, for you are a good and faithful servant to me, but still I should like every one about me to be a partaker in my success; however, this can be talked over at another time. Just help me on with this coat. I want to go down to the office, and see how things are there."

When the butler had done as he was bidden, and Mr. Crossley was about to depart, he turned suddenly around, as though something had occurred to him.

"By-the-bye," said Mr. Crossley, "that cousin of yours is a most invaluable servant; he has been looking after my interests abroad better than I could have done myself. I am very grateful to you for recommending him to me. When he returns to Liverpool I shall give him a position deserving his ability and trustworthiness."

Brown accompanied his master to the hall door with a smile of bitterness and chagrin on his face. The eulogium he had just heard

regarding his cousin had an opposite effect on him to that which his master intended. He experienced to the fullest extent all the envy, rage, and despair that a jealous and vindictive man can feel through the probable triumph of a successful rival. However, he was a man of resource and action, and was not going to throw up the sponge thus early in the game. Returning to his office in the back part of the house, he locked the door securely after him, and then produced two bulky letters, which bore the address—"Miss Jackson, Melville House, Liverpool, England." After carefully opening them, so as to remove any traces of detection, he set about deciphering them, as well as his faulty education would permit. After considerable pains and delay, he at length succeeded in mastering the contents; there was one particular passage which seemed to strike him with a new and happy thought, and this he read over to himself several times. To one who did not fathom his thoughts, this passage contained nothing very special. It was, as some would think, a bit of eccentricity on the part of the writer, Alfred Grice. It ran as follows:—"And now, dearest, you will be surprised at what I am going to write. I have engaged to fill an inferior position in my homeward voyage. You remember what a liking I always had for a sailor's life: I mean the duties of a sailor before the mast; some of which I know theoretically and a little practically. Well, I am going to set to on my homeward voyage and make myself proficient in all its duties. This may appear odd to you, but there is no accounting for people's tastes. The captain has consented to my wishes, and agrees to engage me as an able-bodied seaman at nominal wages. I need scarcely say that whatever I earn shall be transmuted into a little present for the girl I love best. Now, I don't wish Mr. Crossley to know anything about this, as he might be displeased, thinking that I demeaned myself to take this post; but in my estimation it is the proudest and most manly calling a man could follow. Of course I have finished the busi-

ness I was sent out here to transact, and I am at liberty to spend my idle time as best I think fit. We expect to sail on the 3rd of next month; so that if all goes well I will be with you early in September. Tell my cousin Brown that I am doing first class, and will bring him home something curious from these parts."

After resealing the letters to his satisfaction, Brown returned them to the letter bag, and then proceeded with his ordinary duties, as though nothing had occurred. Notwithstanding this, he seemed considerably abstracted during the next few days, and did not give his instructions with the same precision and intelligence he was accustomed to do. He also showed a tacit desire to avoid Miss Jackson, and when forced by circumstances to speak to her, he always did so in the briefest and most collected manner possible. What had passed between them, as far as the young lady could judge, was satisfactorily set at rest, and would cause no further annoyance or unpleasantness. No doubt, Brown was a sensible man, she thought, though sometimes like all his sex afflicted with amorous feelings, but, perceiving that his suit was not accepted, he took the wisest course he could by letting the matter drop. Indeed, he had risen considerably in her estimation by the alteration she noticed in his manner, and she did not fail to show him by an occasional grateful glance how highly she appreciated it. This, however, had the opposite effect to that desired, and only encouraged him to suppose that his suit was not entirely displeasing to her, and that, if he only succeeded in removing his rival out of the way, all would be straight sailing afterwards.

In this manner some months passed away, and the time at length approached when the ship, Prince Rupert, was expected in the Mersey. It was the habit of Brown, about this time, to stroll out every other evening when nothing special detained him in the house. In these excursions he was usually dressed in his best clothes, and sauntered carelessly towards the old town, smoking a cigar. When he got as far as Pool-lane (now

South Castle-street) he generally increased his paces, and took a circuitous route towards a certain house, with a flag flying from one of the upper windows, in Old Strand-street. Here he stopped, and, after looking about him cautiously, approached the open door, and knocked quietly at it. After a time a tall, piratical looking fellow, known as Jack Law, made his appearance, dressed in a seedy semi-military coat and trousers, and wearing a seaman's hat. Recognizing Brown at once, he joined him, and then they both adjourned to an out-of-the-way public-house, where they remained some time in private consultation.

In these visits to Old Strand-street, the major-domo was careful to let no one see him but the individual aforesaid, and, when their interview was over, he generally returned to Melville House by proceeding for some distance in an opposite direction, and afterwards retracing his steps through several narrow and tortuous streets, until he got clear of the town. He also took the precaution to guard against being followed, stopping now and then in some dark alley or doorway on his route, and looking back suspiciously in the direction whence he came. Altogether, his conduct seemed very mysterious and peculiar, and would have somewhat astonished the confiding Caleb Crossley had he been acquainted with it. One morning a great number of letters were delivered at Melville House, and among them a letter for Miss Jackson, the superscription of which was not unknown to Brown. He quickly seized on this, carried it to his sanctum, and there opened and read it, as he had done several others before. This letter from Alfred Grice to his sweetheart informed her that it was despatched by a vessel sailing a fortnight before the Prince Rupert, and, barring accident and adverse weather, he was sure to be with her in ten or fourteen days after receiving it. The day following this, Brown drew a large instalment of salary from his master, and the same night went as usual to the rendezvous in Old Strand-street. He remained a considerable

time with his companion, Jack Law, and, when he returned to Melville House, he was lighter both in spirits and pocket. Scarcely a week elapsed after this when the Prince Rupert was spoken. On arriving at the dock side, she was found to be minus most of her crew, one of the missing hands being Alfred Grice.

This was terrible news for poor Lillie Jackson, and she was nearly beside herself with grief. Caleb Crossley was also greatly upset about the matter, losing such a good and efficient servant, without the opportunity of making him any reward for his invaluable services.

The captain of the vessel was summoned to the office, and interrogated by Mr. Crossley. That functionary stated that his vessel was boarded by the Press-gang just outside the Black Rock, and that they seized on all hands, except a few old blue jackets that were barely sufficient to work the ship into port.

"But," said Crossley, "Mr. Grice was an agent of mine, and not a sailor; what motive, then, could they have in impressing him?"

"Ay, ay, Sir," replied the captain; "but you see Mr. Grice has been working his way home before the mast, and a darned good seaman he made. I was opposed to his doing this at first, but he kept continually asking me as a favour to let him try his hand, so thinking that he would soon grow tired of it I gave my consent."

"He was certainly at liberty to do what he liked with his own time," remarked Mr. Crossley; "but why did you not tell those scoundrels that he was not a real blue jacket, and take proper means to prevent them seizing him?"

"Bless your heart, sir, they wouldn't care a fig for all that I said or threatened; they have the Minister of War on their side, and carry everything with a high hand. I did tell them that I had a couple of passengers and a Mr. Grice, an agent, on board, but they paid no heed to me, only remarking among themselves that Grice was the very chap they came for. 'We have an opening for a rear-admiral,' said they, laughing, 'and that will about suit your new sailor.'"

"Have you the names of all the men they impressed?" inquired Mr. Crossley.

"Well, I have a list of all that are missing Sir, but when the Press-gang's boat came alongside, it was dark at the time, and I did not see all that took place."

"Well, I shall take immediate steps to have Mr. Grice released," said Mr. Crossley, standing up and bringing the interview to a close; "though the time that has elapsed may defeat all my endeavours. I hear the ship that lay in the river to receive the impressed men has gone round to the outports to distribute her cargo amongst the men of war in want of blue jackets; if he is among them on board of her it may not be too late to trace him."

Two days following this, a boy called at Melville House with a letter for Brown. This letter was from Alfred Grice, informing the factotum that he was hiding in an untenanted house on the Cheshire side, and requesting him to send by the bearer a suit of civilian's clothes, and a little money to keep body and soul together, until he could manage to make his escape to Liverpool. He had succeeded in eluding the vigilance of the Press-gang, he said, but as they were known to be prowling about the neighbourhood, he was forced to keep within doors, as he was in sailor's uniform. Fortunately, the boy was thrown in his way, or he believed he should have died of starvation, not having eaten food for several days. He also implored his cousin to reassure Lillie of his safety, but to say nothing to Mr. Crossley until he returned himself, and fully explained all to him. After Brown had read the letter, he made the messenger describe the locality of the hiding-place with great minuteness; then he dismissed him with a shilling, telling him that he would attend himself to what was required, and that there was no occasion to trouble any more about the matter. Late in the afternoon he left the house, and made his way to the rendezvous in Old Strand-street, after which he called at a tailor's shop, and bought a suit of ready-made clothes, and, taking the parcel under his arm, he proceeded

down to the river to take a boat for the Cheshire side.

On landing at the other side, and following the description given by the boy, he had little difficulty in finding the hiding-place of his cousin. It was an old, dilapidated cottage standing close to the Chester-road, but partially hidden from view by several bushes and trees that surrounded it. He approached it cautiously, but with a look of triumph and satisfaction in his face. "All is fair in love and war," said he to himself. "What can a fine young fellow do better than fight for his king and country. He is fond of a sailor's life, then let him have it with all my heart." It was now quite dark, but there was no light visible from the outside. He, however, managed to find the front door, and knocked quietly with his fingers. After waiting for some time without any answer, he was suddenly startled by a figure emerging from some bushes at the side, and making instantly towards him.

"It is you, George! God bless you! I could just make out your face in the darkness. Oh, I shall never forget this kindness, but have you not always been good to me? Come round this way, old boy, and we shall find an entrance. I make a practice of never opening the front door."

When they got inside, he took a lighted candle from an old pantry where he had hidden it, and let its beams fall on the bare and comfortless apartment, and on his own face, which was pale, haggard, and pinched for want of sustenance. But his eyes were bright, nevertheless, and a grateful smile lighted up his anxious features.

"First of all, George, tell me how Lillie is?"

"Oh, she is quite well," replied Brown, uneasily. "Of course she was cut up when she heard you were impressed, but on the whole bore up very well."

"Poor girl! I can imagine all she must have suffered; but was she not delighted when you told her I was safe?"

"Oh, yes, yes—certainly," replied Brown.

"What have you got in that parcel, old fellow —clothes? Oh, thank you, ever thoughtful, George. Please open them, while I unship these proscribed togs." It was not long before he exchanged his blue jacket costume for that of the civilian's garb, and then, making a bundle of the cast-offs, he thrust them away in an old cupboard at the end of the room.

"Now, George, I am a new man," said he, looking as delighted as a schoolboy in a new suit; "and whom have I to thank for my liberty —my new life, I might say, but my dear, generous, kind-hearted cousin." He brushed away a tear from his eyes, and seized Brown's hand, which he pressed warmly. In the joy of the moment he had forgotten for the time the pangs of hunger, not having tasted anything in the shape of food for several days. Now, however, the great craving made itself keenly felt; and asking Brown for a little money, he said he knew where there was a shop some quarter of a mile distant, and would start off at once and get some bread and cheese. He would run all the way, and should not keep him waiting long.

Brown was for going himself, but Grice would not hear of such a thing. He had been too kind already; besides it was probable that he would not find the place. So saying, he took Brown's hat in his hurry, and, before the owner was aware of it, he dashed out of the house, and made off towards the shop mentioned.

While Brown sat waiting in the comfortless room, he half regretted the dastardly errand upon which he had come. But he was by no means a sensitive man, and any compunctious visitings of nature which he felt were summarily repressed by the consciousness of his own self-interest and love for Lillie Jackson. After all, the object he had in view could not be considered a great crime; it was only a clever movement on his part to get rid of a dangerous rival. It was far more humane than to pitch him into the river, or shoot a bullet through his heart, as many fellows in his position would have done. He, however, was only doing a service when he appeared to do an injury. Alf

Grice would be forced to follow a pursuit for which he showed a great predilection, and who knew but that he might rise to be a great man yet, and thank him afterwards for being the means of turning his career into its proper channel. He had resolved to be there that night, so that the affair might not miscarry; and also to leave the impression that he was aiding Grice to escape when the hawks pounced down upon their prey.

As these thoughts were passing through his mind, he heard the sound of a footstep outside the cottage door. "He hasn't been long on his journey," said he to himself; "I thought he could scarcely have reached the shop by this time."

He had scarcely uttered these words, before a tremendous crash burst upon his ears, and the front door tumbled in, burst off its hinges. At the same moment the back door was thrust suddenly open, and several villanous looking fellows rushed into the room.

"Ha! it is you then?" said he, jumping up suddenly, and running his eyes over their faces to discover Jack Law, whom he knew. "I expected you here to-night, but not so early."

"It's a pity you did not tell us the time to come," observed one of the men, with a sneer; "we should have tried to accommodate you. Better too early than too late, however, say I. Come, since you have been expecting us, half the battle's over."

"Hallo there, mate," shouted another to him, "any lotion about these here premises? Anything nourishing in your cupboard, eh?" And going to satisfy himself on that point, he pulled out the bundle of sailor's clothes which Grice had placed there. "Better keep these by you," said he; "they may be of use hereafter." Brown was considerably puzzled by their rough demeanour and suspicious looks. He knew they were a determined and daredevil lot, and notorious for their want of respect for persons; but he was uncomfortably surprised when two of them kept guard over him, while the remainder of the gang lit a lamp, and

went rummaging about the rooms of the cottage. He noticed also that they all were the worse for drink, and the fumes of whiskey and rum impregnated the atmosphere of the place. In his transactions with Jack Law he had never seen any of these desperadoes, and therefore they were all strangers to him.

"Do you—do you belong to the Press-gang?" inquired he, looking up timidly at one of those keeping guard on him.

"The Press-gang?—No; we belong to the Marines. Can't you see our uniforms?" This was followed by a hoarse laugh from the other, and Brown felt more and more uneasy.

By this time the searching party had returned, and passing a signal to the others, the leader of the gang seized Brown suddenly by the arms, and forcing them behind his back slipped a pair of handcuffs over his wrists. "What in the name of heaven do you mean?—What are you going to do with me?" he cried out, being now thoroughly frightened.

"We are going to give you a sail in our yacht, and then introduce you to the Lord High Admiral. Ha! ha! ha! Come, there will be time enough to thank us when we get you out on the river."

"But you have got hold of the wrong man. I begin to see it all now—you mistake me for Grice; my name is Brown."

"Yes, yes, that's all right," said the leader; "we have heard that yarn before."

"I came here to point the man out to you," said Brown; "where is Law—Jack Law; he knows all about it; he will prove what I say."

"—— you, and Law too, for the matter of that; we want no more of this talk, we have wasted too much time already. Come, lads, heave to, and help Mr. Brown on his way to distinction." After a short struggle, in which the unfortunate major domo writhed and shrieked with all his might, he was at length hoisted on the shoulders of four of the gang, and carried feet foremost out of the cottage.

"You will hang for this—all of you," he cried out helplessly. "My name is George Brown—

I am no sailor, and never have been one—I am head butler to Mr. Caleb Crossley, of Melville House, and have been in his employ the last twelve years. The man you want is Alfred Grice —he escaped from the Prince Rupert some days ago, and has been hiding here. I told Jack Law where to find him, and now you are carrying me off in mistake for him."

All this made no impression on his captors; they merely told him to shut up, and keep his breath to cool his porridge.

"If you wait for ten minutes the right man will be here," persisted he; "he has gone to a shop yonder to buy some food. Grant me ten minutes' grace, and seize the man Grice, and I will give each of you five guineas."

"Do you happen to have the coin on you, Mister Brown?" inquired one of them sarcastically.

"No, but I can get it—this very night if you wish."

"Oh, curse the fellow!" blurted out the leader; "we have wasted too much time already. Heave ahead, men, and don't heed him; there's another job for us before we reach our hammocks."

Therefore, despite all his appeals, promises, shrieks, and threats, the doomed major domo was hurried across the lone and deserted space that lay between the old cottage and that part of the river where the boat of the Press-gang was moored.

In the meantime Alf Grice had hurried back from the shop with all speed. Approaching the old cottage, he heard the voice of his cousin appealing to his captors, and also his own name mentioned as being the real party they came to impress. Understanding at once the character of the men inside, he was about to turn and fly from the spot, when the door was suddenly thrown open, and some of the gang came forth, followed by others carrying the shrieking Brown on their shoulders. Crouching quickly beneath an elder bush at hand, he remained concealed from view, whilst he heard all that was said between Brown and his captors. He could scarcely believe his

ears on hearing from the lips of his cousin the dastardly plot that had been laid to place him in the power of the dreaded Press-gang.

When the coast was at length clear, and the distant cries of Brown grew fainter and fainter, he sprang from his hiding-place, and hurried away across the country in the direction of Chester. From Chester he made his way round by Warrington, and after the lapse of a week or so he arrived in Liverpool.

The fate that had unexpectedly overtaken Brown, the conversation that Grice had overheard from his hiding-place, and the inconceivable reason why one cousin should have laid a trap for the impressment of the other, were clearly understood when it became known that the major domo was in love with Lillie Jackson.

Caleb Crossley was shocked at what he had heard of his favourite Brown, but at the same time he was unfeignedly grateful at the fortunate escape of Grice. He placed the latter in a responsible position in his office, with sufficient remuneration to afford him the means of wedding his betrothed at an early date.

Some weeks afterwards Brown was seen in Liverpool, but he never returned to Melville House. He was liberated from the Press-gang through the agency of Jack Law, and learning by accident that his plot against Grice had been discovered, he suddenly quitted the good old town, and his subsequent history is buried in oblivion.

THE END.

THE VEILED LADY.

PART I.

Madame Hortense Unsworth, a French Canadian lady, arrived in the port of Liverpool in the October of 1837, the year of the memorable frost. She was a widow, very young and beautiful, and was accompanied by an only child, a little boy of about five years old. Although well-dressed and a person of superior education and manners, she was evidently in straitened circumstances, as her scanty supply of luggage would indicate.

The evening was wet and stormy when she landed, and, being a stranger to the town, she inquired from one of the porters where she could get a comfortable lodging, as she did not wish to stop at a hotel. The man directed her to a place in Hunter-street, then a notable lodging-house for seafaring folk, and, calling to a man who was waiting for a job, she gave him charge of her trunk and a small parcel, and told him to lead the way to the place mentioned.

The house in Hunter-street was kept by one Mrs. Mills, a stout, healthy-looking woman of the usual lodging-house type; but, though she was always willing to accommodate a male boarder, she had a natural suspicion about letting any females into her house. However, in this instance, she was favourably impressed by the appearance of the young widow and her child, and willingly gave them the use of a back room on the second floor at a moderate weekly rental. The room was but scantily furnished—a small flock bed and mattress, two cane-bottomed chairs, a round deal table, and a little strip of carpet in the centre. Nevertheless, it was very acceptable to the sad and wearied lady after her long

and stormy sea voyage ; and, paying a week's rent in advance, she gladly took possession of her temporary home.

Lionel Unsworth, her lately deceased husband, had been an officer in the British army stationed at Montreal. He was the only son of a wealthy wine merchant in London, and had respectable prospects before him in the event of his father's death; but in direct opposition to his parent's wishes, and deaf to the expostulations of his friends, he left the counting-house where he was about to be made a partner and bought himself a commission in a regiment that was then about to proceed to Canada. This, however, was not the worst. As if to add insult to injury, shortly after his arrival there, he became affianced to a poor, but beautiful, French Canadian lady, a foreigner, and thereby provoked his parent's anger and contempt to such an extent that he vowed he would never again recognize him as his son, and would leave all that he possessed for the benefit of London charitable institutions.

Lionel Unsworth, the father, was a widower, and had no blood relations in the world but his son. He was a man who had worked himself, by perseverance and industry, from a humble sphere in life to the comfortable position he now occupied. He had little education, save that which his commercial pursuits imparted, but he was a man of iron will, and held the strictest views regarding the duties of children to their parents. About a year after the marriage of his son he sold up his business in London and retired to some out-of-the-way place in the country, there to pass the remainder of his days in peace and solitude. Not long after this a rumour went abroad that he had died, and that, in accordance with his threat, all his wealth was bequeathed to London hospitals, and other institutions. This rumour had never reached the ears of his son, and, as all correspondence between him and his father had ceased, there were no means at hand of learning the true position of affairs at home. He was too well acquainted with his father's character to attempt any immediate means of reconciliation, but determined waiting until time

might have softened his anger and the course of events afforded him a plausible opportunity of doing so. If he could succeed in performing some great military act that should reflect credit on his name and honour in his country, then would be the time to approach his parent and solicit forgiveness and reconciliation. In his great desire to accomplish this, Lionel was ever foremost in offering his services whenever any hazardous or dangerous duty was to be executed. About this time there was considerable trouble occasioned by some of the Indian tribes, and Lionel was commissioned to take the command of a company of his own regiment and assist in the dispersion of a large and warlike tribe that was committing murder and havoc among some of the early settlers. In this expedition he unfortunately lost his life; and, as he had no other means but that arising from his pay in the army, his wife, in consequence, was left almost destitute. Owing to his reticence about matters at home, she was wholly ignorant of the estrangement between him and his parent. When taking his departure, however, on the fatal expedition, he gave her the address of his father in London, and also that of the solicitors who acted for him. This was the only clue she had as to his relations in England, but, being very young and ignorant of the ways of the world, she thought it sufficient for the purpose she had in view.

When she had been about a month in the lodgings in Hunter-street, her slender means became almost exhausted, and she did not know where to turn for the support of herself and child. She had written repeatedly to the address in London, but to all her letters no answer was returned. She did not know anyone to whom to apply for advice, and, being of a shy and retiring disposition, was averse to let the circumstances of her poverty be known. No matter how she pinched and economized in her expenditure, she was always compelled to find the money to pay rent or face the alternative of being turned out on the shelterless streets. For days she had to content herself with one

meal, so as to find a sufficiency, however plain, for her darling boy, who was now the only one she had to love and cherish in the world.

At length she grew so pale and thin that the landlady, remarking it, brought her up a basin of hot soup to nourish her. This happened to be the first mouthful of good food she had tasted for several days, but even so she divided it with her little boy, though she had always managed to shield him from the cravings of hunger. On many occasions the little fellow caught her weeping bitterly, and in reply to his childish enquiries she always answered that she was thinking of his father.

One day, when all her means were exhausted, her trinkets and clothes all pledged, and no food of any kind in the house, she went forth into the busy streets, her brain almost bursting to madness and a sense of hopeless despair at her heart. What was she to do? Where was she to turn in her terrible extremity? She wandered up and down the streets in a dull, listless, manner, looking now and then at the bakers' and butchers' shops, the sleek and comfortable people entering and leaving them, the crowds of affluent and well-dressed folks passing to and fro, the wagons and carts laden with provisions and comforts of all kinds, and she, without a farthing in the world wherewith to purchase a morsel of bread. She could struggle against her own hunger and sufferings, but she could not bear to think that the young life of her child should experience the pangs of starvation—should cry in vain for food. Oh! the thought was maddening—horrible! If she were but back again in Canada the few friends she had there would at least save her poor darling from starvation. But things had come to the worst now, and something must be done. What was that something that gradually took form in her mind—that only outlook in her distraction and extremity. Alas! it was the cruellest blow that fate could inflict on a high and sensitive nature; she would have to stand on the highway and hold out her hand to the passers-by for alms!

However, as she was passing a certain

butcher's shop in Scotland-road, a stout, florid looking man, standing in the doorway, was suddenly struck by her strange look and pale face.

"Hi! missus! come here; I want to speak to you," said he, beckoning her towards him. She stopped, and approached him as requested. "I say, missus, you look very white—are you ill?" he interrogated.

She held her head down and blushed, and although she intended telling him the truth, the words seemed to stick in her throat.

"Come, come, let's know what's to do wi' you; don't be ashamed of me, I'm ould enough to be your faythe r."

But the only reply she could make was to burst into tears.

"God bless my soul, lass, you are hungry! I can see it in your face, and you're ashamed loike to own to it," said the good hearted butcher. "Here, take this," and he slipped a shilling into her hand. "Go and get theeself sumat to eat, and call round and see me later on."

With a deep blush of shame, though a heart overflowing with gratitude, she accepted the proffered coin, and then hurried off to her lodgings, after purchasing what bread and other nourishment she could on the way. "God never leaves the poor entirely destitute," she murmured to herself. "This good man has been the means of saving two lives by his charity—God bless him for it."

That night, after her further interview with the butcher, she was undisguisedly happy and hopeful. She had told him her circumstances, as far as it was necessary, and that she only wanted employment of some kind to support herself and her child. The good man promised to use his influence to get her some needlework, and in the meantime gave her some slops and shirts to make for himself.

For some time after this she continued to earn sufficient to keep the wolf from the door, though she had oftentimes to sit up all night working by candle light. It was late in the January of the new year when the severe frost which set in in January and continued until March was at

its height. She had a large number of shirts to make by a certain time for a house in Lord-street, and to manage this she had to deprive herself of several nights' sleep only snatching a few moments at meal times to rest her wearied eyes and fingers. At last she had completed her task, and, making the shirts into a parcel to carry to the shop, she kissed her little son affectionately, promising to be back soon, and bring him *bon bons* and something nice for tea.

When she left the house on her errand, there was a dense fog enveloping the good old town. She hurried along Byrom-street and Whitechapel, in the direction of a large drapery establishment in Lord-street. All the lamps and shop windows were alight, and the foot passengers and vehicles had to move cautiously on their way on account of the severe frost and thick fog. Notwithstanding this, she hurried along as fast as she could, for she was anxious to reach her destination in time and get some money, the larder being entirely empty; and, besides, there were a few articles of clothing which she wished to redeem that night. She was so occupied with her thoughts, besides being somewhat stupid and lightheaded from want of proper rest, that when she reached the junction of Whitechapel and Lord-street she did not hesitate before crossing the street, but, thoughtless of danger, hurried on her way. The next instant a cab driven at considerable speed rushed upon her, and, before the driver could succeed in pulling it up, both horse and vehicle passed over her body. This happened in less time than it takes to describe it, and owing to the density of the fog could only be indistinctly seen by those who were a few yards off. However, the sudden scream she gave utterance to soon apprised them of what had occurred, and a great shout of alarm from the people around quickly brought an immense crowd to the spot. The driver responsible for the accident managed to get clear away under cover of the fog, and the policeman arriving too late upon the scene, no clue was left to establish his identity.

The immense crowd that had gathered around

could only discover a dark object with a white girlish face lying huddled in a heap without any sign of life or movement. Mr. Hardman, a then well-known townsman, happened to be near the spot at the time, and, elbowing his way through the densely packed crowd, at length with the assistance of a policeman, lifted the unfortunate lady to a recumbent position. He was greatly shocked at what had happened, and looked down at the crushed piece of humanity with inexpressible sadness and concern. There was something in the pallid worn face so triste and saintlike—in the thick masses of raven hair that hung loosely about her—and in the threadbare clothes, which, nevertheless, were of costly fabric, that made a powerful impression upon him. Turning to the crowd of startled faces about him, he inquired anxiously if there was anyone who knew her, but not a person there gave an affirmative reply. She was a perfect stranger.

At length a cab was hailed, and the poor inert fragile form, was placed tenderly in it and taken away to the Royal Infirmary. Mr. Hardman accompanied the policeman to that institution for the purpose of hearing the result of the surgeon's examination, and also to see if there were any papers on her by which he could communicate with her friends. On their arrival at the infirmary, the poor victim was still unconscious, and to all appearance dead; and the doctors gave very little hope of any favourable result. Her pockets were searched for papers or anything that could throw light on her name or residence, but the only writing they found was the address of the solicitors in London, and an affectionate letter from a female friend in Canada, which had been written while she was yet living in that country. Mr. Hardman took a note of both these addresses, and left the building with a sad and heavy heart as to the probable fate of the unfortunate lady. Next day he was obliged to sail for America, otherwise he would have exerted himself to the utmost to find out her friends, but, as it was, on his return home that night he wrote a letter to

the solicitors mentioned, informing them of what had occurred and begging them to acquaint her friends at once.

That evening the parcel of shirts was picked up close to the place of the accident, and from the name on the paper wrapper enclosing them its finder was enabled to deliver them to the rightful owner.

A short time after this, a gentleman called at Mrs. Mills' house, and told her, that her late lady lodger was very ill, and had instructed him to call and take her little boy to where she was. He paid the landlady for any claims she had against her late lodger and then departed, taking little Lionel along with him.

Save a short paragraph in one of the papers, all the circumstances of the affair were forgotten in the course of the next few days, and the busy folk of the good old town proceeded on their customary ways without giving any further attention to the sad occurrence.

PART II.

Five years had passed away, and Liverpool continued to make prodigious strides in population, commercial progress, and architectural additions. The populous suburbs which now surround us were separated by pleasant fields and trim gardens, but the centre of the borough proper was as busy with traffic and crowds of eager people as it is at the present time.

About this period there was a mysterious lady dressed in deep black and closely veiled who used regularly to frequent the most crowded thoroughfares. She was always to be seen alone, and seemed a perfect stranger to all the inhabitants. If you watched her movements, you would see that she passed on to the end of one street, and then, crossing over, returned along the opposite side. She did not appear to pay any attention to the foot passengers or shop windows, the fine dresses of the ladies, or

the exquisite deportment of the swells. When she had paraded one street in this manner she passed on to another, and was seldom seen in one street twice in the same day. After a time, the people began to look upon her with indifference, but always with an uncanny feeling that there was something strange and mysterious surrounding her. The men and business folk, as a rule, took little notice of her, but the women, always observant of anything unusual in dress, would scrutinize her keenly, and turn round frequently to observe her movements. Some would shake their heads or smile, suggestive of eccentricity or old world notions; but others, with more feeling, would look sad and pitiful, as though satisfied in their minds that the poor thing was demented.

But this harmless habit of parading the streets began to develop in time into a practice that caused considerable uneasiness to the maternal instincts of the humbler classes. The "mysterious lady," as she was called, would station herself near the entrance to some school, and, when the children were dismissed at midday or afternoon, she would carefully scrutinize the face of each little urchin as he passed her, and only take her departure when the last child had left the school. Singular to say, however, she took no notice whatever of the girls, and even boys who were under a certain age appeared to have no interest for her. Of course the youngsters, when acquainting their mothers of the fact, did not fail to exaggerate the matter, so, as a natural consequence, all sorts of hobgoblin personalities were attributed to the mysterious lady. Some held that it augured ill for the child she looked upon; others that it was a sure sign of success in after life. By many a fireside, when the nights were dark and the wintry gale moaned down the chimney, improbable stories and wild speculations were indulged in at her expense. Little children were threatened with all sorts of penalties on her account if they did not mend their juvenile ways and be obedient to their parents.

After a time there was scarcely a school in

town which she had not visited, and, whenever the Blue Coat School boys were marching out, she was always to be seen amongst the crowd present, scanning with eager eyes their clean and healthy faces. Whenever there was any great gathering of children there she was sure to be, no matter what the state of the weather or time of day. No one, it was said, had ever seen her face, and it was therefore impossible to form a correct opinion as to her age, but from the gleam of her restless eyes, seen through the veil, and the graceful deportment of her figure, it was generally concluded that she was comparatively young. There were a few who had passed her unknowingly at night time, when they were suddenly startled by a heartrending sigh or involuntary cry of despair, but other than this there was nothing to show that the apparent cause of her eccentricity was due to some great sorrow or misfortune which embittered her life. Whatever the real cause was, she kept it to herself, hidden away impenetrably from all eyes.

One day a lady was passing up Mount Pleasant with her little boy. The child happened by accident to catch sight of this mysterious figure behind them, and immediately urged his mother to quicken her paces. The faster they walked, however, the faster she appeared to follow them. At length the lady, becoming seriously alarmed, turned round and confronted her, when she suddenly drew back confused and abashed, and apologized in a gentle voice for her rudeness. "She was under a wrong impression," she said, "and thought it was some one else."

On another occasion she happened to be at the College, in Shaw-street, when a distribution of prizes was taking place. One of the young scholars appeared particularly to arrest her attention, and she rudely elbowed her way through the intermediate spectators until she got close enough to read his features distinctly; then, finding her mistake, she was overwhelmed with shame and confusion and nearly fainted away for her temerity.

Her conduct was so strange and unusual, and apparently so harmless, that in time she became

a sort of privileged person, and actions that would have been fiercely resented in others were altogether overlooked or condoned in her case. If one of the new policemen were consulted by an indignant mother, he generally shook his head with a smile, and told her not to heed the poor creature, as she was not all there. On Sundays or holidays, when well dressed parents, surrounded by their happy offsprings, were wending their way towards the river for a trip to the Cheshire side, she would hurry from their pathway and pass down some lonely bye street, as if unable to bear the merry voices of the children or the look of happiness that sat upon every face. The cry of pain from children seemed to overwhelm her with inexpressible terror, and their gladsome shouts of joy to fill her with tears and trembling. In fact, the men and women whom she met were so many passing shadows in her eyes; the children alone the real and concrete existence in the world.

After a time she was missed from her accustomed haunts, and then the people who were formerly indifferent about her began to display considerable interest as to the cause of her disappearance. A notable figure was absent from their thoroughfares, and the opportunity lost for satisfactorily explaining the mystery that surrounded her. The Press genius of the period had not yet evolved the redoubtable interviewer, otherwise the public would have been better posted up in matters that excited their curiosity.

A whole year had passed away, and people had almost forgotten this familiar figure, when lo! to their agreeable surprise, she appeared amongst them again. Her step was not as elastic and firm as before, her figure not so erect and graceful, and her dress looked somewhat more shabby and worn. She did not gaze suddenly into the faces of the passing children, or pursue them to satisfy her curiosity as heretofore, but wandered aimlessly up and down the streets, as though she had forgotten the errand upon which she had come. A score of years would seem to have passed over her head in the interval, so that those who had voted her

young before were now inclined to confess they were wrong.

One afternoon, late in September, there were unmistakable signs of a severe thunderstorm overhanging the town. Frequent showers had cleared the streets of loiterers and pleasure-seekers, and only those engaged in business, or having imperative duties to perform, were to be seen moving about. During the continuance of an unusually heavy downfall, the veiled lady was observed to take shelter in the doorway of a bye street, close to a large hotel, where merchants and other business men were in the habit of dining. Standing at the window of this hotel, gazing meditatively at the pouring rain, was a tall, florid-looking gentleman, with grey whiskers, and a handsome, intelligent face. He had just left a friend with whom he had been conversing, and, singular to say, the subject of their remarks was no other than the mysterious person who was now confronting him from the doorway opposite. He gave a start on recognizing her, and, as though there was something that seemed to recall her to his memory, he remained gazing fixedly and thoughtfully for some moments. Although he had frequently heard his friends speak of her, this was, indeed, the first time he had seen her, and now a strange, intangible something seemed to impress him that this person and himself had met before under unpleasant circumstances.

James Hardman was one of those prosperous merchants whose mind was wholly engrossed in his business, and the outside incidents of life had little or no claim on his attention. Nevertheless, he was a kind, charitable man, and had quick sympathies and a generous hand for the unfortunate and needy. While he was standing there, and endeavouring to piece together the incidents of his past life, with the object of discovering how and when he had seen that person before, the rain seemed suddenly to abate, and the shrinking, bedraggled form opposite, thinking she was unobserved, quickly lifted her veil for the purpose of satisfying herself that the rain had passed away. This gave the merchant an oppor-

tunity to get a glimpse at her face. Then, like a flash of lightning, the whole recollection of the accident in Lord-street burst upon his mind.

He exclaimed suddenly to himself, "Why, it's that young creature that was run over some five or six years ago. I could not be mistaken in that face; it made a wonderful impression on me at the time, but oh! how changed and worn it looks."

Without pausing a moment, he seized his hat and hurried out precipitately to where she was standing.

"Pardon me, madam," said he, approaching her, "but if I mistake not, you are the lady who met with a serious accident in Lord-street some years ago? I was one of those who accompanied you to the infirmary, and from what I was led to believe by the physicians there was little or no hope of your recovery. I am heartily glad that you falsified their gravest fears. Will you allow me to congratulate you accordingly?"

The lady drew back apprehensively, but said nothing in reply.

"I got the address of your lady friend in Montreal," proceeded he, "and as I happened to be visiting the States at the time I made it my business to wait upon her before returning to England. She made me acquainted with your name and sad bereavement, and requested me on my return home to make further inquiries as to your condition and send her all particulars. As soon as I arrived here I carried out her wishes, and then left the matter in her hands."

At the mention of her friend's name the poor lady burst into convulsive tears, and any doubts which he may have entertained as to the correctness of his suspicions were immediately dispelled.

After waiting till the paroxysm of her grief had somewhat abated, he continued in a kindly vein—

"Believe me, I am deeply interested in you, and would like to do whatever I could to assist you. Let me prevail upon you to enter the hotel and give me some information of your circumstances. And what has become of your

little son, about whom your lady friend in Montreal spoke to me?"

As if the bare mention of her child transformed the whole nature of the woman, she instantly raised her veil, and, turning towards the merchant with tearful eyes, said—"God bless you, sir; God bless you for your sympathy and kindness. You, alone, speak to me as though I were a sane woman; all the other people in this great town imagine that I am mad: they will not believe that I ever lost my darling—my little Lionel."

After getting her to accompany him to the hotel, he gradually learned her past history and the events that took place subsequent to the accident in Lord-street. It seemed, after recovering from her injuries in the infirmary, she became temporarily insane, and had to be transferred to the asylum in Ashton-street, where she remained for three years. When ultimately released her first thoughts were to find her child, and with this intention she went to the lodging-house in Hunter-street. There she learned that her former landlady was dead, and the place had passed into the hands of a new tenant, a stranger to the town, and wholly ignorant of anything that had occurred during the occupancy of her predecessor. Distracted by this, and the little hope held out of recovering her child, she almost became unsettled again in her mind, but, as she expressed herself, "The good God had mercy on me, and did not deprive me of reason a second time." She hunted high and low, making inquiries from every person likely to know Mrs. Mills or her lodger, but all to no purpose. The only thing she could glean was that a gentleman called at Hunter-street shortly after the date of the accident and took her little child away with him. She applied to the magistrates and policemen for assistance, but they could do nothing for her; in fact, they considered she was labouring under a hallucination, and it was not to be wondered at, for she was nearly beside herself with distress of mind.

At length, when Mr. Hardman was made acquainted with the full history of the facts, he

turned kindly towards her, and said—"You will now leave the matter in my hands, madame, and if your child is living I promise to restore him to your arms."

This comforting promise seemed to overpower her with gratitude, and, falling on her knees before him, she seized his hand and kissed it in mute reverence.

"Forgive me if I have not words to thank you," said she. "My heart is full, but I do not know your language sufficiently to express myself." "I shall be abundantly thanked," replied he, "if I can be the means of making your life happier. And now, you must not be offended at a question I am going to ask you. What means have you of earning a livelihood, and where do you live at present?"

"I am doing some needlework for the Sisters of Mercy at Mount Vernon," replied she quietly; "they have been very kind to me, and seeing I was a foreigner they got me lodgings in the neighbourhood."

"You are not in want of any assistance then?" he inquired.

A pained expression came into her face, and she shook her head in the negative.

"I see you are a lady and have been gently reared," continued he, "and, therefore, I should be sorry to say anything that would hurt you; but do not allow any morbid delicacy to prevent you from accepting a little aid if you require it."

She thanked him gratefully, but firmly declined to accept of any assistance.

When the interview terminated, Mr. Hardman went to his office and informed his managing clerk that he was going to London on business, and very probably would not return for some days. On reaching the metropolis he called on the solicitors who managed the elder Mr. Unsworth's affairs, but after a prolonged interview could extract nothing from them to throw light on his errand. He did learn, however, that the rumour of his death was false, and that he was then living in some part of the provinces. Pursuing his inquiries still further, he at length

discovered that Mr. Unsworth was residing in the neighbourhood of Hereford, and, having an old schoolfellow, a clergyman, living there, he at once determined to set out for the place.

Mr. Unsworth lived in a villa some distance from the town, and was particularly exclusive in his company and solitary in his habits. He bore the character of being something of a misanthrope, but Mr. Hardman's clerical friend had *entrée* to the villa, and promised to use his endeavours to bring about an introduction. It was after evening service on Sunday that a favourable opportunity presented itself. Mr. Unsworth was returning home after church service, when the clergyman at once approached him with his friend, and the desired introduction was effected.

"I must now leave you together," said the reverend gentleman; "I have to pay a visit to some of my parishioners, but you will be rather pleased than otherwise at my absence; for I am but poor company when two business men like you wish to chat on commercial affairs."

When the clergyman took his departure, Mr. Unsworth rather abruptly inquired if his companion were a married man?

"I am happy to say I am," was the reply, "and the father of several children."

"Are they all alive and dutiful children?" interrogated the other.

"Well, I have six living—two boys and four girls; two of the latter have only recently been married. I have nothing to find fault with in the matter of filial affection."

"Then you are a fortunate man," said Mr. Unsworth impressively. "I am one of those who have been singularly unhappy in my married life. I lost my wife when I was only beginning to appreciate her love and sterling qualities, and my son when he had reached manhood and was about to take my place in the management of my business. I have made plenty of money, and am comparatively wealthy, but I have none of my kindred living to be the recipients of my riches when I am dead."

"That is certainly a sad reflection," remarked his companion; "it is bad enough to think that

all the wealth you laboured and toiled for will ultimately pass into the hands of strangers, but the reality is even worse when one finds oneself alone and friendless, without chick or child, in the decline of life."

"And believe me, Mr. Hardman, there never was a father so wrapped up in his child as I was in mine. Words cannot tell the suffering I experienced at his loss. My whole thoughts were centred in him; he was, indeed, the only companion I had. Oh! it was unparalleled cruelty to have separated us."

"I can deeply sympathise with you," observed the other, "but am I to understand that you have no blood relations living?"

"Well, yes, there is a child living who is somewhat related to me, but he has foreign blood in his veins. I must make him a thorough Englishman in sympathies, manners, and feelings before I have resolved to recognize him."

"And pray was your son married before he died, Mr. Unsworth?"

"Yes, he was, and, unfortunately, to a foreign adventuress; one of those simpering French women that bring more ruin to English homes than war and pestilence. I wish the whole race was swept off the face of the earth. I should have been a millionaire at thirty if it was not for the wars and aggressions of that cursed nation. But I occupy too much of your time talking of my own affairs; the intensity of my grief must be my only apology. I could feel for the meanest wretch in the world who was bereft of an only child."

"Yes, yes, I can thoroughly understand you; it is an affliction to draw pity from the most obdurate heart. But, still, it is not wise to brood too long over your loss. We all must learn to bear with visitations of the kind. Why not change the current of your thoughts and form new associations? For instance, this youth you have just mentioned, he is your relative, and likely to be your heir. Is there not enough to occupy your thoughts and interest in having him properly reared and educated to become a comfort and an honour to you in your declining years?"

"What you say is very true, and I have often thought of it myself. I have the youth at present stopping with me during the holidays, and he is daily growing more and more in my affections. But come, my villa is close at hand; you shall see the boy for yourself, and give me the benefit of your opinion."

"I shall be most happy to do so," replied Mr. Hardman, turning up the avenue that led to the villa.

After proceeding a short distance in silence the latter gentleman said,

"Although I am singularly blessed in my own family affairs, still I am not without knowing several instances of parental bereavement that bear a striking resemblance to yours. There is one in particular which was recently told me, and if you have no objection I will briefly relate it to you."

The other consented, and he proceeded as follows:—

"There is a widow lady, a foreigner, at present living in Liverpool, who met with a frightful street accident some six years ago. She was conveyed in a senseless condition to the infirmary, and, while an inmate of that institution, her only child, a little boy of five years of age, was taken from her, in fact, kidnapped. Bearing in mind that she was in a strange land, her little boy, the only one she had to live for in the world, and she herself the most affectionate and loving of mothers, it is one of the saddest and cruellest cases that has ever come within my knowledge."

"But if she happens to be poor," put in Mr. Unsworth, "those who have taken her child may have done her a great service."

"That is all very well," returned the other, "but what about her feelings of sorrow and desolation at the loss of her child? The feelings of the poor father or mother are often more intense and comprehensive than that of their wealthier neighbours. When deprived of their offspring the very light of their life is taken from them. They have no comforts and attractions to lessen the poignancy of their grief, no ceremonious condolements and sympathy from powerful and

affluent friends, no alternative to quit the scene of their bereavement and travel and distract their minds in foreign lands. No, indeed, the bare naked fact of their sorrow is ever staring them in the face, and every incident of their lives—narrow and circumscribed by circumstances—recalls again and again the bitter loss they have sustained."

During the latter part of this speech, Mr. Unsworth did not appear at all at his ease, and now that they had reached the villa he was glad of the opportunity to change the subject.

"I think, as you very wisely said, that we can brood too much on these matters. Let me now show you my house and grounds, and then I will introduce you to my little *protégé*."

After some time spent in going over the place with his visitor, he then led the way to the library, and gave instructions that his nephew was to be brought forward.

As soon as the boy entered the room, Mr. Hardman gave an imperceptible start. The features, bearing, and manners of the child at once recalled the veiled lady to his memory. The likeness was unmistakable. The dark brown eyes, the hair somewhat lighter, but the self-same pale, handsome, oval face, with an almost identical expression. It was with great presence of mind that he expressed his feelings and assumed the appearance of an interested stranger.

The boy was asked several questions as to his proficiency at school, his special likings and dislikings, and numerous other interrogations that the occasion called forth, all of which he answered in a plain, straightforward manner. Mr. Unsworth then turned to his friend and asked him what he thought of his young charge.

"I shall be glad to give you my opinion," remarked he, rather seriously, "if you direct the boy to leave the room."

Little Lionel, therefore, was instructed to leave their presence, and the master of the house, somewhat disturbed by the apparent change in his friend's manner, awaited with considerable anxiety what he had to say.

Mr. Hardman's courteous civility and pleasant bearing had given place to a stern, determined manner and a severe expression of countenance.

"Mr. Unsworth," said he, in a cold, magisterial tone of voice, "I mentioned to you just now the case of a lady in Liverpool whose child was stolen away while she was stretched between life and death in a public hospital. I am acquainted with this poor lady, and I have promised to find her child and restore him to her arms before many days have passed. Up to this I have been engaged in my search, and now I am happy to say that I have succeeded in finding the child."

If a thunderbolt had fallen at Mr. Unsworth's feet he could not have been more astounded. He started back several paces, and a ghastly pallor overspread his face.

"I took you for a gentleman, sir, not a detective in disguise," said he, as soon as he could recover his speech.

"Here is my card, sir," retorted Mr. Hardman rather warmly; "and my friend, the Rev. Mr. Joyce, can abundantly satisfy you as to my position. I undertook this duty solely out of pity and sympathy for the sorrows of a sorely afflicted lady. I can plainly see, from the conversation which we have had, that you are under a wrong impression with regard to your daughter in-law. I have a wide circle of educated friends, many acquaintances amongst the titled and fashionable classes in this country; and, what is more, two grown-up daughters, carefully reared and tutored, and I can confidently say that a sweeter, purer, and more amiable lady than Madame Unsworth I have never had the good fortune to meet with. What a blessing and comfort such a person would be to you in your latter years, to supply the place of a daughter in your vacant family circle! The crass stupidity and persistent folly of some people in thrusting aside the blessings that have been thrown in their way is one of the most remarkable proofs of the littleness of our nature and the limited area of our penetration."

Mr. Unsworth remained standing with his head bowed down listening silently to what

was said. He was well aware of the penalty he had incurred in abducting the child, and that a criminal prosecution could be entered against him. He also knew that he had to deal with a man of position and means, and one who would not be easily turned aside from doing his duty, however disagreeable. As to the identity of the child, he did not for a moment dream of disputing it; for he took no measures in securing himself from detection, being under the impression that the mother would never recover from her accident. "With the recovery of the child," proceeded Mr. Hardman, "my business comes to an end, but, for your sake, and for the sake of the lady herself, I should gladly like to be the means of bringing about an interview between you. I am confident, when you have seen the lady and know her, that your opinion in regard to her will be greatly altered."

It was evident from this that the speaker's undertaking was one of pure philanthropy, and that there was no reason to anticipate any unpleasant eventualities; besides, if he consented to a meeting with Madame Unsworth, it would be a means to free himself of the questionable position in which he was placed. Therefore, after some further conversation, he promised to give Mr. Hardman's proposal his consideration, and to give him his decision by the following morning.

"Heaven assist you in your reflections," said the good merchant, piously. "I will say nothing more now, but leave all to your better influences."

Scarcely a week had elapsed before a meeting was arranged between Madame Hortense Unsworth and her erewhile implacable father-in-law. The interview was productive of the most happy results, and went far to fulfil Mr. Hardman's most sanguine expectations. Not long after this she was invited to take up her residence at the villa, and soon became by her affectionate nature, gentle manners, and cultivated tastes, the ruling spirit of the household.

Some years passed away, and at length the old man died, and young Lionel, grown to be as fine

and noble a young fellow as any in the land, inherited all his wealth. The good Mr. Hardman's name was never omitted from the family prayers at the villa, and, when in time he too passed away, full of years and honours, there were none in the *cortége* that followed him to the grave whose sorrow was deeper, or loss greater, than Madame Unsworth and her son Lionel.

THE

FATE OF ABEL WALLWORTH.

At some distance from Liverpool there stood a substantial brick house, separated from the highway by a small park, through which an avenue of trees led up to the hall door. In the rear there was a considerable extent of ground, consisting of a large orchard, a tastefully laid-out garden, and two cultivated fields reaching down to the banks of the Mersey, almost opposite to the place where New Ferry now stands. The orchard and garden were surrounded by a high wall, surmounted by chevaux-de-frise, and a massive door acted as a means of communication between them and the outlying fields. When Abel Wallworth, a prosperous general merchant, retired from business he selected this house as a suitable place in which to spend the autumn of his days in well earned comfort and tranquillity.

At the time this story opens he had been residing at Elm-tree House, the name by which the place was known, for five years, and his family consisted of an only child—a daughter, then about eighteen years of age, and upon whom devolved the entire management of his household affairs. He had married late in life, and shortly after the birth of his daughter was left a widower. He did not, however, enter a second time the married state, but turned his mind with redoubled energy to business, and showed no disposition to keep up a style of living compatible with his income and social status. He was a man whose every thought and effort was devoted to money making, one who could never feel content but when engaged in the bustle and stir of trade. However, when he ultimately retired from business, it was some-

what singular that he should turn his back upon all his most trusted and intimate friends in trade, and resign himself wholly to a life of the strictest seclusion and privacy. Yet, so systematically did he carry this out, that, in the course of a few years he was almost entirely forgotten, and even the most familiar of his late companions did not dare to invade the quietude of his self-imposed solitude.

But the busy brain that had been occupied so long in the ways of commerce could not adapt itself all at once to a life of quiet contemplation and absolute inertness. He still found something to engage his attention, and give his natural habits a plausible opportunity of whiling away the inevitable hours. A passionate love for pets of all kinds, whether beasts, birds, or fishes, seemed to afford him the one great pleasure of his solitary life. He had parrots that would talk with incredible pertness, canaries that kept the house in a general uproar of song, dogs of wonderful sagacity and intelligence; and last, though not least, an immense orang-outang, which had been trained and tutored to such perfection that if the late Mr. Darwin had had the opportunity of seeing him, he would have unhesitatingly pronounced him the redoubtable missing link. Indeed, there were some who solemnly averred that the brute was nothing more nor less than an African nigger; and, as Abel Wallworth had made the greater part of his wealth in the slave trade, they slyly hinted that his affection and kindness for this lucky member was an act of compensation on his part for his former dealings with that unfortunate race. The greater portion of the building, to the disgust of his daughter, was allotted to the service of this medley company; and in the feeding, training, cleaning, and attending upon them the former hard-hearted business man found ample employment and attraction to fill up the recurring round of his daily life.

Abel Wallworth was understood to have retired from business immensely rich, and his daughter Clara was destined to inherit all that

he possessed. Yet, strange to say, he seemed to take no steps to get her a suitable partner for life, and, what was stranger still, she appeared to give herself no concern about the possibility of such a contingency. The father would often say that he had kept himself a widower for her sake, and the least she could do was to remain single until he had "shuffled off this mortal coil."

One pleasant summer afternoon Mr. Wallworth entered his sitting-room, looking unusually grave and thoughtful. He was followed by his inseparable companion the orang-outang, dressed somewhat in the garb of Mephistopheles, but affording an ungainly and awkward representation of that distinguished and ubiquitous personage. This denizen of the forest stood about five feet high in his scarlet slippers, and had the appearance of being very stupid and sleepy, although, like many other specimens of his more advanced brethren, his looks somewhat belied him. In the opinion of his master, it only required two or three generations forward, with proper development and training, to make his grandchildren the equal, if not the superior, of the most gifted and intellectual of the human branch. He had an unpleasant habit of continually scratching himself, even in the best society, notwithstanding that Mr. Wallworth subjected him to frequent ablutions in the Mersey, at the bottom of the fields. With this exception he was very docile and tractable, and, no doubt, this bad habit would be overcome in time. What specially commended him to attention was his remarkable placidity of temper; he was quite the antipodes in this respect to his master, and strange to say, was the only one of his pets that never exasperated or annoyed that naturally excitable gentleman.

The window of this apartment overlooked the garden with its trim flower beds and picturesquely laid-out walks, and beyond this again could be seen the large orchard, with its numerous fruit trees in full blossom. Inside the room were several fanciful cages, occupied by canaries and goldfinches, and immediately in front

of the window was a large Amazon green parrot, that appeared to contemplate with silent but intense curiosity the sudden entrance of Mr. Wallworth and his ungainly companion.

Abel Wallworth was a small-sized man, very stout and florid, with a bald head, and bright, intelligent face. In his normal state he always seemed to be in a great hurry about something; bustling and fidgeting about the most trifling things, as though the well-being of the State depended on his carrying them through with all possible despatch. On this occasion, however, he walked into the room with slow and steady footstep, his head bent forward, as if in deep and serious thought, and an expression of unmistakable concern on his otherwise pleasant and jolly face. He threw himself wearily into an armchair, without taking the customary notice of his pets in the cages, and signified to his companion, whose name was Rajah, that he wished the bellrope to be pulled.

On the servant answering the summons, he intimated that he wished to speak with his daughter, and a short time afterwards that young lady entered the room, looking somewhat flurried and anxious. She saw at a glance that something unusual had occurred, and at once gave expression to the concern she felt.

"You look pale and ill, father; has anything happened to you?"

"Well, I have had another of those fits, my dear, and do not feel quite the thing; but no doubt the effects will soon pass away. Sit down, Clara, I want to speak to you seriously."

The young lady looked with repugnance at Rajah, who was seated on a low stool at her father's feet, and expressed a wish that the ugly brute might be removed while she remained in the room.

"The ugly brute, faugh! Turn him out, turn himo ut," quoth the parrot, breaking silence for the first time. "What business has he in the parlour, dressed and fed like a Christian, too. Oh dear, oh dear! what are we coming to?"

The old merchant looked with a mixture of anger and astonishment at the bird, but that

worthy appeared to take no notice of him, but continued talking away, as it swung itself jauntily to and fro on the ring in the cage. "Bundle him out. Ugh! the nasty brute. Here, you get the sweeping brush and I'll take the poker. Don't go too near him, though, he might bite. Take that, and that, and that. Ha! would you? Out you go, out you go." And then followed a sound resembling a door being clapped to, and, proceeding in an altered and indignant voice, it said, "I'll give notice at once. I'll not stop another day here if that brute is allowed to ramble about the house as he likes. Dear, dear! the infatuation of that old fool to make a pet of such a thing!"

Then the parrot ceased speaking, while the old merchant, evidently annoyed, stood up and led Rajah out of the room. Just as the door closed after him the bird simulated a hearty fit of laughter, which had the effect of bringing a faint smile to the otherwise pale and anxious face of the young lady. Of all his pets Rajah was the most favoured one, and it annoyed him very much, when even his daughter displayed that natural fear and repulsion which all females appear to entertain for quadrumanes of the larger size.

When he returned to the room, however, he motioned his daughter to take a seat beside him, and then, without further preliminary, opened the subject about which he required her presence.

"As I said just now, Clara, I want to speak very seriously to you, and I am wishful that you should pay particular attention to what I am about to say."

After pausing for a short time he proceeded again.

"I begin to feel that I cannot be much longer with you; day by day I am growing feebler and less able to take that exercise so indispensable to my health; and these frequent fits which I have had lately fill me with the gravest fears. I therefore feel anxious to have you married and settled in life before the final moment arrives. I fear I have postponed the matter too long already."

"Dear father, you grieve me by talking thus, said she, sensibly moved by his serious tone and manner. "Let my future life cause you no anxiety; I feel quite happy as I am."

"But, my child, that would never do; I must have you properly settled in life; then I shall have fulfilled my duty as your parent. Now, listen to me. I have nothing, as you know, but your welfare and happiness at heart. I have given this matter serious consideration of late, and I have arrived at a conclusion that in my opinion will be eminently advantageous to you and in every sense agreeable to me. There is an old friend of mine, a West India planter, who has recently retired from business with a quarter of a million of money. He has an only son, who, by all accounts is a most worthy young gentleman, and it is his earnest wish, seeing the large fortune that he will inherit, and the dangers surrounding a young man with his prospects, that he should meet with a young lady of his own social standing, with the undisguised object of marrying her and speedily settling down in life. With this intention he has commended his son to my charge, and in plain words asked him to be introduced to you; for Mr. Langley—that is the name of my friend—saw you before he left England, now about ten years ago, and from what he remembers of you, is perfectly satisfied that you would make a most desirable wife for his son. In addition to this, I have received the highest character regarding the young man himself, and he is also described as being both handsome and accomplished; so there can be nothing on that head to give rise to objection.

Then the old merchant glanced inquiringly at his daughter, but she made no effort to say anything in reply, only keeping her eyes fixed steadfastly on the carpet at her feet.

"I have, therefore," he continued, "invited him to pay us a visit next week, when, I have no doubt, an affectionate understanding will be arranged between you, and the first step taken to ensure the happiness and welfare of both of you in the future."

"Oh! father," said Clara, at length bursting into tears, "I wish you did not take such pains to get rid of me. I do not want to marry; I am perfectly contented with the life I am leading, and have no desire to change it."

"That is all very well, my dear, but we must look a little ahead of us. You will not always have me with you, and from the knowledge which you have of the world and its ways, I dare not venture to think what would become of you and your fortune if left to your own resources. Things have come to this pass that something must be done, and before I am taken away from you, I wish to arrange everything for your advantage and happiness."

"But, sir, you seem to overlook one thing, and that the most important," replied his daughter. "I cannot possibly marry a man whom I do not love, and from what you have just said, you seem to think that I should fall in love with a person whom I have never seen."

"Have I not told you that he is rich, handsome, and of good character; what more can be wished for? A man with such a trinity of perfections is good enough for a princess, much less Abel Wallworth's daughter."

This was said testily, and with some bitterness, as he thought he discovered a disposition on his daughter's part to thwart his plans.

"One thing, however, I must insist on, sir," persisted she, "and that is that I will not receive this young gentleman in any other light than that of a new acquaintance."

There was something so decided in the tone in which this was uttered that it jarred unpleasantly on the old man's mind. He became suddenly grave, and then turned a searching look upon his daughter.

"I am surprised to hear you speak in that way, Clara; it looks as though you have already determined to oppose my wishes."

"No, sir, it is my earnest desire to meet you in all things; but, in a matter of this nature, it is better that we understood each other at first. I have no desire to marry, at least during your lifetime, and even if I had—deeply as I love and

respect you—I could not transfer my affections at your command."

"Transfer your affections! What do you insinuate by that, pray? Is your indiscreet folly with that fellow Harding still unforgotten?" Here he grew red in the face and fidgeted nervously in his seat. He was gradually lashing himself into a passion, which was no unusual thing with him when the slightest opposition was offered to any of his plans. The very memory of that fellow Harding, as he called him, had the same effect upon him as that of a red rag on an infuriated bull. He jumped to his feet angrily, and commenced walking up and down the room with hurried steps.

"You must not drive me to extremes, young lady," said he, taking for granted that his suspicions were well-founded, "I have already told you what I would do if you held any communication with that scoundrel, and by heavens! I will carry it out, if you give me the least cause for suspicion."

"Hush! hush! keep calm, keep calm, there's a good fellow," interrupted the parrot, at this juncture.

"D— that bird! Will some one take it away!" exclaimed he, now thoroughly aroused. "This is some of those infernal kitchen husseys' work." And he shook his fist threateningly at the bird.

"Oh, fie! oh, fie! Naughty words, naughty words," reiterated Poll, looking down complacently at him.

"You should not call Mr. Harding a scoundrel, sir," said Clara, drawing herself up and looking very pale.

"Oh, indeed," observed he, repressing his ire for the moment, and throwing all the sarcasm he could into his words; "I must be circumspect in the language I use towards him, eh? I lifted him out of the gutter and made a decent man of him, to be sure; I pitchforked him over the heads of his fellow clerks to a confidential position, sure enough; I did all I could to make an honourable and respectable man of him, more fool I; but no, he could not altogether forget his

origin, and sneaked into the bosom of my family to filch away my only child's affections. Oh ! I must be very careful what I say about this gentleman. But by heavens!" Here no longer able to contain himself, he struck the table fiercely with his hand, and poured forth a volley of the most uncomplimentary epithets on the devoted head of the unfortunate Mr. Harding. So loud was his voice, and so excited his gesticulations that the parrot, accustomed to cry out "Murder and help," when any unusual disturbance occurred,screamed out at the top of its voice "murder! murder! murder ! help! help ! help!" until the shrill cries of the bird absolutely drowned the angry tones of the infuriated master. Almost beside himself at this interruption, and white with suppressed rage, he rushed towards where the bird was with the intention of seizing the cage and dashing it on the floor, when the fortunate occupant suddenly ceased its cries for help, and in an altered and affectionate tone of voice—a good imitation of the young lady's—said, "You look pale and ill, father; has anything happened to you?"

So grotesque, and yet so apposite was this at the moment that it quite took the old man aback, and he looked at the bird, half doubting in his mind whether it did not bear a similar character to that attributed to the raven in poor Edgar Allen Poe's mystical ballad.

If this little incident had not the effect of wholly allaying his anger, it was the means, however, of considerably modifying it. He turned away from the bird without uttering a word, and continued his promenade up and down the room. In the meantime Clara sat with a pockethandkerchief to her face, weeping bitterly. The lull that ensued was taken advantage of by the canaries and finches, who commenced chirping and singing boisterously, in grateful recognition of a golden stream of sunlight that entered the room from the departing luminary. It had a most soothing and softening effect at the moment, and did not fail to influence to some extent the ruffled temper and excited manner of the old merchant.

After walking up and down the apartment for some time, he at length returned to his seat, and, in a voice still stern, but more collected, renewed the subject.

"I will not excite myself any more in my endeavours to teach you your duty to me and to yourself, but this much I will say, that if you do not conform to my wishes in the manner referred to, I am resolved that you shall not have a farthing of my money. You know my character pretty well, and that whatever I say I will do; and I was never more determined on anything in my life than I am in this matter. Keep up a clandestine correspondence with that —that fellow I have mentioned, and become a pauper all your life. Follow my advice, and become attached to my *protégé*, Alfred Langley, and you will be the richest and happiest lady in the land. I give you until next week, the day Mr. Langley arrives, to make up your mind, and, if you have the interest of your own welfare at heart, and a true sense of the duty you owe me, there ought to be no doubt about your decision. This is my ultimatum, and I will not alter or modify it in one iota."

Saying which, he stood up from his seat, and, without even glancing at his daughter, passed out o i the room.

As soon as he had closed the door, Clara, with sudden resolve, rushed after him, as though to call him back, but, changing her mind before she reached the door, she stood motionless for some seconds, uncertain what to do; then, in an outburst of grief and despair she exclaimed,

"Oh! what a miserable coward I am not to have told him all! but the excess of his passion and anger terrifies me, and I have not the courage to face the results. I must now let events take their course, and prepare for the worst."

Five days had passed away since the interview previously described, yet father and daughter, although they met at meal times each day, did not exchange a word save in monosyllables. The old merchant appeared gloomy and morose, and was continually finding fault with the

slightest mistake or oversight. In his manner he seemed to treat his daughter with a cold superciliousness, as though she were some poor relation or dependant. On the other hand, Clara seemed humbled and broken-spirited in his presence, but when alone in her own apartments a smile of triumph would light up her face, and she would oftentimes go about her duties humming snatches of song.

Clara Wallworth was a young lady of considerable personal attractions. She was tall and stately in figure, resembling her mother in this respect, with the grace and deportment of an empress. Her face represented in outline and feature the very highest type of Saxon beauty; she had an abundance of rich yellow hair, which she was careful to arrange and dress to the best advantage. Since the estrangement with her parent she displayed less attention than usual to her personal appearance, but on the morning of the sixth day she arrayed herself in her richest robes and bedecked her head and throat with the costliest gems that she possessed. When she entered the breakfast room on this morning her father was agreeably surprised to see the change in her dress, and although he made no remark at the time, still he thought it augured well for the triumph of his cause. But this was not all; she seemed animated with the best of spirits, laughing and joking repeatedly through the meal, and fulfilling the duties of the table with all the graceful attention as of old. Her pleasant manner and good humour were too much for the old man's gloomy reticence; so, after a time, they talked and joked together as though nothing had occurred, taking care, however, to avoid the dangerous subject that had so lately estranged them. When the meal was finished and she retired from the room, the old merchant nodded his head, and winked knowingly to himself, as much as to say, "She is coming to a sense of her duty at last; take my word for it, she will capitulate and sue for mercy before young Langley arrives."

On the afternoon of this day, as he and his "Achates"—Rajah—were proceeding down the

main walk of the garden, he noticed his daughter in her walking costume enter a side door that led from the small park in front to the back part of the premises. He was dressed in overalls, such as sailors wear, with a scrubbing-brush and a bundle of towels under one arm, while to the wrist of the other was fastened a strong steél chain, which was also attached to the arm of his companion. He was going down to the Mersey to give Rajah his customary dip, and, as that individual did not particularly relish the bath, he was obliged to have him secured by a chain while undergoing the operation. On perceiving his daughter, he paused for a moment, and beckoned her to approach him. When she came near enough to him he could see that her face was flushed, as if with over exertion, and she appeared to have just returned from a long and fatiguing walk. There was also a look of ill-disguised guilt in her eyes, but this evidently escaped his observation.

"What has become of the servants, Clara?" inquired he, with a face expressive of astonishment.

"Oh! how stupid of me not to have told you," replied she, with great presence of mind. "I was induced to give them a holiday. They asked my permission to go to a wedding, and I did not like refusing them, especially as they have not had a holiday for some time. I shall be happy to do whatever you may require in their absence."

"I do not think it was wise to have let them both go," he remarked.

"Well, I thought it best, as they would be company to each other; and Annie, who was invited to a wedding, did not know the way to Walton, while the other did. I told them to remain all night with their friends, and return here first thing in the morning."

"I expect a visitor to-morrow," said he, glancing for a moment at his daughter, "and it would be very inconvenient if they were not at their posts."

"There is no occasion to have any fear on that head, father," said she, casting down her eyes; "they are certain to be here early to-morrow. But what were you wanting, sir? Can I be of any service to you?"

"Oh, no; I have managed all that I wanted myself; I merely required a large fire lighted, and blankets prepared for Rajah. The day is somewhat chilly, and I wished to take precautions against his getting cold after his bath."

After saying this he turned away, and proceeded towards the large door at the bottom of the orchard. Clara, for a moment, stood looking after him with a strange sad expression of face, and then, suddenly recovering herself, returned hastily to the house.

If the old merchant's manner seemed unusually quiet and subdued, that of his daughter was strangely excited and nervous. Very likely she expected that he would have taken the absence of the servants in a different spirit, and, no doubt, felt somewhat upset until he was acquainted with the fact.

On entering the building she made the best of her way to her own apartments, and commenced packing up her dresses, jewellery, and nick nacks, as though making a hasty preparation for a long journey. She seemed much agitated during the process, and every now and then cast a glance at the small French clock on the chimneypiece. When everything she could think of was packed away, she carefully locked and fastened her trunks, and then proceeded to her father's sleeping chamber, which was situated at the other side of the house. Before passing along the corridor she paused for some time, listening attentively for any sound that might indicate his return. Satisfying herself that all was right on this head, she glided noiselessly along the passage, and, finding the door of his room unlocked, she pushed it quietly open and entered. On a small table near the head of his bed was a leathern case containing two loaded pistols. These he was in the habit of keeping for use against burglars and thieves, there oftentimes being a considerable amount of money in the strong box in the room. Clara cautiously removed the pistols, replacing the case again on the table, and then without further delay quitted the room.

After hiding the pistols away in one of her

own apartments, she then proceeded downstairs to attend to some household duties, and prepare tea for her father on his return to the house. The room in which he generally partook of tea was connected by folding doors with another apartment which was called the library. As you passed from the one room into the other, a large mahogany bookcase stood on the right, filled with a moderate supply of classical and popular literature of the time, and suspended from the wall that immediately faced you was a valuable life-size portrait of Clara's mother, dressed in the prevailing fashion of the period. Strange to say, this room, excepting of course the sleeping chambers, was the only apartment in the house without the inevitable bird cages; not even Rajah was permitted to intrude his presence within its precincts. The old merchant had a sort of religious reverence for this place, and, whenever he neglected going to church on Sundays, he would spend some hours in this room either reading his Bible or otherwise devoutly engaged.

As Clara was arranging the table for tea, she happened to raise her eyes and glance incidentally at the portrait of her mother, which was distinctly visible through the partially opened folding doors. Whether it was fancy or not, she thought there was a stern commanding look in the eyes and an expression of angry surprise on the face which she never remembered noticing before. The figure itself appeared as though it were about to step bodily from the canvas and sternly upbraid her for what she was going to do that night. All her secret plans and unfilial plots were suddenly unmasked to those penetrating, immovable eyes. For some moments she remained rooted to the spot, experiencing all the indefinable fear and terror that a supernatural visitation exerts. Her own conscience magnified the enormity of her intentions, making her appear in the eyes of her dead parent, whom she reverenced as a saint, to be an unnatural criminal of the darkest dye. At length, by a superhuman effort, she seemed to break through the trance-like influence that oppressed her. Pale as a sheet,

and trembling in every limb, she rushed headlong from the place. As she hurried along the hall to a distant part of the building, she chanced to pass the open door of the room where the parrot already mentioned was located. That worthy, catching a glimpse of her passing form, instantly called out in a deep, guttural voice, "Ha! I have you; I have you!" In the excitement of the moment she mistook the bird's voice for that of her offended mother, and clutching quickly at the bannisters, she glanced over her shoulder and uttered a loud scream of terror.

She almost fainted away; but presently discovering the cause of her new fear by the parrot continuing to chatter and scream in imitation of her, the courage and nerve that forsook her returned, and she smiled almost contemptuously at the silly fancies that had affrighted her. "It's all imagination and conscience," said she, in a low voice to herself. "I must not allow myself to be unnerved in this way, or all is lost. I will go at once to my room and send Alfred a note that everything is prepared. It is now growing dark, and what we have to do must be done quickly. If my father would return and have his tea the road would be then perfectly clear."

She went upstairs to her room, and getting her pen and paper wrote the following letter to Alfred Harding:—

My Dearest Alfred.—All is now completed as far as I can go. The servants have been sent away, and will not return before morning, the dogs are locked up in one of the cellars, so they cannot give any warning of your approach. I am now alone in the house, my father having gone out some time ago to give Rajah his bath. When he returns he will spend an hour or so with his pets, and then retire to the library. While he is there it will be perfectly safe for you to enter. I will give the signal from my window, and leave the back door open for you. Do not fail to be on the watch, as I am sadly in want of your support and sympathy. What I have suffered in reviewing the consequences of this act no one will ever know. I sometimes feel that my resolution will give way and my heart lose its courage; but no, I will struggle on to the end, when I shall receive abundant compensation in the arms of my beloved. CLARA.

After folding this letter up and sealing it, she went to her window and beckoned a little boy towards her, who was loitering outside, apparently waiting for the message. She then threw herself wearily into a chair, and with a deep sigh prepared to await the issue of events.

* * * * * *

It was ten o'clock next morning when the servants returned to Elm Tree House. The outer gate was unlocked—a very unusual thing—and there was no sign of anyone stirring as they proceeded up the drive. They passed through a side door leading to the back of the premises, and could hear the canaries singing and calling, and the parrot screaming and whistling in full concert. The dogs, however, were nowhere to be seen, but they could faintly detect them barking and whining in some distant part of the building.

On entering the house something strange and unusual seemed to have occurred, but they could not for the life of them assign any reason for this singular impression. Passing down to the kitchen they found the fire unkindled, the furniture and utensils as they had left them the day before, and no sign whatever of any preparations for breakfast. Naturally enough, they thought that their master and mistress had overslept themselves, and without taking any further notice they set about lighting the fire and putting the things in order. While thus engaged, however, the dogs kicked up an unearthly noise, crying and whining plaintively in some part of the house. They at once proceeded to discover the cause of this disturbance, when they found the poor brutes locked up in a damp, unused cellar in the basement. This struck them as very strange, their master being most particular that the dogs should be confined to their own kennels and supplied with comfortable bedding for the night.

After a time one of the servants went up stairs to Clara's bedroom for the purpose of awakening her, but, receiving no answer to her repeated knocks, she pushed the door open and entered. The room appeared in the greatest

disorder, the floor littered with torn paper and articles of clothing, the furniture upset or straggling about out of their proper places; and every indication that the bed had not been slept in that night. Startled at this, she quickly rejoined her companion and acquainted her with the discovery. After consulting together, they determined to call their master at once, as it was plainly evident that something extraordinary had taking place during their absence. They had no love for their mistress, whose bearing was proud and haughty in the extreme towards them, and her mysterious absence from home, without the knowledge of her father, gave them good grounds for strange suspicions and conjectures. Besides, what motive could she have in giving them a holiday yesterday unasked; why, none whatever, but to get them out of the way while she carried out some of her deep laid schemes. Yes, they would awake their master at once, tell him all they knew about Miss Clara, and place him on his guard against possible contingencies.

With this resolution, and whispering their suspicions in a low voice, they proceeded together to that part of the house where their master's bedroom was situated. Singular to say, this room was also untenanted; and the bed had not been used during the night. Now, thoroughly alarmed, and staggered to account for this new disappearance, they raised their voices aloud, and called repeatedly to their master and mistress by name; but no response of any kind was returned to their cries, save the singing of the various birds below, or the faint echo of their own voices by the mimicking parrot. Terrified beyond measure, they now hastened out of the house, and began searching the garden and orchard in the vain hope of finding their master there. They went from end to end of the grounds, visiting all the places that he was known to frequent; they searched the outhouses, dog kennels, every part of the premises, but no sign whatever of either master, mistress, or the Orang-outang.

By this time two solutions to the mystery seemed to occur to their minds: the one was that Miss Clara had eloped with her lover, and that the old merchant discovering it had set off in hot pursuit after them; the other that the place had been entered by burglars, and, with the object of removing any possibility of detection, both parent and child were brutally murdered. The absence of their remains did not throw any doubt on this latter theory; for what could be easier than to carry their dead bodies to the Mersey and throw them in.

No time was now to be lost in acquainting the authorities with the circumstances, and with this object a messenger was dispatched to the Exchange bridewell, then only recently opened, and the proper place to go to in case of emergency. There were very few constables, as they were then called, distributed throughout Liverpool, and they had no fixed beats or localities where there was a certainty of finding them. However, the messenger in this case was more fortunate, and soon returned to Elm Tree House with two gentlemen, similarly dressed to the present doorkeepers at the Town Hall, with the solitary exception that they wore knee breeches. Soon after their arrival a thorough search was made of the place, and one of the theories was quickly set at rest. No burglars or thieves had entered the house, as nothing of value was missing, and the safe or strong box had not been tampered with. On the other hand, in searching the daughter's rooms, a small reticule, apparently forgotten in her hurried flight, was found, and this contained several papers, amongst which was a letter that seemed to point to a possible encounter which might or might not have culminated in the commission of a great crime. The substance of this letter was as follows:—

My Dearest Clara,—Forgive me for what I am about to write, but you can readily understand, from what I have told you of my sufferings, that I cannot feel otherwise than deeply incensed at the conduct of your father. For heaven's sake take all precautions against a meeting between us; should

we meet face to face, with the present feelings that inspire our breasts, the result would be something terrible. It seems unnatural that she whom I love and worship to distraction should stand in the relationship she does to the man who has done me such incalculable injury. I will not now repeat all that I have suffered at his hands,—his unflagging malignity that pursued me from place to place, that invented and suggested certain charges against me, thereby preventing me from holding any situation suitable to my abilities in this town. And what have I done to incur all this hatred and bitterness? Ah! dearest, you know the answer as well as I. What business had I to love the dearest, sweetest, girl in the universe,—why was I born poor and humble, a simple clerk, dependent on his favour and liberality? But thank heaven all this is changed now. As you are aware, I had to leave England through his persecution and seek my fortune in the West Indies. Fortune has smiled upon me there, and I am now a rich man. Now, I can keep you in a manner suitable to your station, and take you from under his roof by a stronger authority than ever he possessed. He can pitch all his hoarded wealth into the Mersey, or bequeath it to his born companion, the Orang-outang, for all that we may care. But I will not write any more on this subject; it always upsets me. Be careful to carry out everything as suggested, and miss no opportunity to guard against a *rencontre* between us. I will call at the appointed hour to-morrow night, and until then farewell, my own dearest wife. ALFRED.

This letter clearly indicated the bad feeling than existed between Alfred Harding and the old merchant, and the constables were at once led to suspect that the dreaded meeting had really taken place between them. Plausible, however, as this might appear, there were no traces of anything in the house or grounds that went to support it. At length, after a fruitless search of seven days, the house and gardens were locked up, and a guard placed over them until such times as the mystery was solved.

In the meantime energetic steps were taken to find out the whereabouts of Alfred Harding and his wife. Our detective organization was only in a nascent condition at this period, and when criminals got a few hours' start, or made their escape from the town, the chances were a hundred to one that they would never be

captured. However, while the authorities were vigorously prosecuting their search for the delinquents, the unravelment of the whole mystery was suddenly brought about by the following simple incident. As one of Abel Wallworth's servants was passing along the streets, she happened to notice a number of juveniles playing at soldiers, the leader of the band being a sturdy little fellow, with Rajah's Mephistophelean hat and feather adorning his head. On the youth being questioned as to how he came by the hat, he first stated that he found it on the bank of the river at a spot near to which Mr. Wallworth usually went to give the Orang-outang his bath. Being further pressed, he also admitted that he saw a black man and a sailor struggling in the water, and that after some time they both sank, and he saw no more of them. He then possessed himself of the clothes, thinking he did no wrong as both of the owners were drowned. In addition to this story the servants gave evidence of their master's usual habits—his liability to fainting fits latterly and his customary practice of washing the Orang-outang in the river, so that to all reasonable minds the strange and sudden disappearance of Abel Wallworth was satisfactorily accounted for. This was further confirmed by the unexpected return of Alfred Harding and his wife, who, learning through the "Hue and Cry" the melancholy fate of their relative, speedily posted back to the town and put themselves at once in communication with the authorities.

There can be no doubt that the old merchant was seized with a fainting fit whilst bathing his pet quadrumane, and, being securely fastened to each other by a strong chain, the result can be easily imagined. For some months afterwards the talk of the "good old town" reverted to the occurrence, and then, like many extraordinary things, it was relegated to the category of the fast receding incidents of the past. The wealth he left behind him was inherited by his daughter, and she and her husband soon afterwards quitted Liverpool with the intention never to return to the "good old town" again.

SILVESTER'S TRUST.

CHAPTER I.

Silvester Gerrard, an accomplished young Liverpool clerk, was appointed to a position of great trust in the house of Browning, Browning & Co., Kingston, Jamaica. Ralph Browning, the head of the firm, had known his father when they were schoolfellows together, and on this account he took a great liking to the young man, let him have apartments in his own house at Kingston, and encouraged a warm friendship between him and his only son Roger, who was then about eighteen years of age. Silvester was elated at his good fortune in getting such an appointment, and the prospects it held out of speedy advancement. He exerted himself to justify the partiality of his master, and to deserve the confidence so generously reposed in him.

He was a tall, well made young man of considerable physical strength and activity, with a disposition at once open, frank, and generous. He possessed in a striking degree those qualities of heart and mind that endeared him to his associates, and were prolific in the establishment of warm and lasting friendships. His master had little occasion to promote an affectionate understanding between the two young men; for shortly after they had become acquainted, the irresistible influence of the young clerk's character began to assert itself, and their intimacy soon ripened into a constant and inseparable companionship.

Silvester had the misfortune to lose both his parents. His mother died while he was yet a child, and his father, who was a clergyman with a poor living, had little to give him but a good education.

Roger Browning, his master's only son, was the one solitary companion he had in the strange and foreign town which he was destined to consider, for the time being, his home. This young man was possessed of many estimable qualities, but he was constitutionally delicate and of a retiring disposition. He was also somewhat eccentric and strange in his manner, but this no doubt originated from his sedentary habits, and an absence of proper physical exercise and outdoor life. He was a spare, sallow young man about the medium height, with sharp, regular features, and black hair and eyes. He had been exclusively reared in Jamaica, and, up to the time we are referring to, he had never visited the native land of his parents. No expense, however, had been spared in giving him a good education, such as could be acquired from a master brought over specially from England for that purpose. He displayed great aptitude for learning; so much so, that he devoted more time and attention to books than was altogether pleasing to his father, who had destined him for commercial pursuits. Both his father and mother absolutely idolised him; they thought there was no one in the world to compare with him; and they accordingly congratulated themselves in having such a worthy young man in Silvester to take him under his special charge, and act the *rôle* of friend and protector. Before the latter's arrival at Kingston, they could not bear to let him out of their sight, but shortly afterwards, so great was their confidence in the good sense and discretion of the new clerk, he was allowed to take short trips over Jamaica and oftentimes a sail to the neighbouring islands, when the exigences of business permitted Silvester to accompany him.

Two years had passed away since the young clerk first entered upon his duties, and his strict attention to business in all its details—superintending the routine of the counting-house, keeping correct estimates of the stock and outputs in the sugar mills and distilleries—made him an almost indispensable servant in the flourishing concern of Browning, Browning

and Co. One afternoon, in the early part of April 1814, he was summoned to his master's sanctum in the counting-house, where he found that good gentleman in the very best of spirits, and highly elated at the profitable returns of a large shipment of sugar and rum, which he had lately exported to Liverpool. "Take a seat, Mr. Gerrard," said his master, blandly, "and let us have a short conversation together. I want your opinion on a matter which Roger and myself have been talking over this morning. My son proposes that we should open a branch house in Liverpool; and, as both he and his mother think that a residence in England would be beneficial to his health, he is prepared to take the management of a house of this description, and reside permanently in England for some time. He is now about twenty years of age, and should be taking steps to acquire a full knowledge of our business; but, as you are doubtless aware, he has seen very little of active life, and is sadly deficient in everything that constitutes a man of the world. The idea, therefore is, that he should travel for some months through England, visiting all the chief export towns and business centres, and making himself acquainted with the customs and usages of trade, before he finally settles down to the duties I have mentioned. Now, as your holidays commence forthwith, and as Mrs. Browning and myself are desirous that you should accompany him on the trip, I thought I would first talk the matter over with you, and get your consent to our plans before I ultimately decide to give adherence to the proposal. We are doing a large and profitable business as you know, and I see no reason to extend the limits of the concern, except so far as it will be suitable to my son and beneficial to his interests." "Well, to be candid with you, sir," said Silvester, "the proposal which you mention has been the subject of conversation between Mr. Roger and myself for some time. In fact, I think the idea was first suggested by me, so that as far as my opinion is concerned that is already determined. With regard

however, to my accompanying him in his travels that is an entirely new matter, and has never been mentioned between us, but of course, if Mrs. Browning and yourself should desire it, I shall be only too glad to take the place of his companion and friend during the journey."

"Then I may consider it as so far settled," said Ralph Browning. "Well, I am rather pleased than otherwise that it should be so; I was impressed with the idea of his visiting England when it was first mooted; and, as there is little society here, save a few of our own station and the planters scattered over the island, it is only right and proper that he should mix for sometime in European life, and acquire a knowledge of the ways and habits of the business community there, before assuming the position which he is destined to occupy in his large firm. Of course his mother and myself will feel very lonely and anxious during his absence, but we have great confidence and faith in you, and willingly commit him to your charge in this undertaking, perfectly satisfied that our trust shall not be misplaced."

"Indeed, sir, you overwhelm me with your good opinion," said Silvester with sensible emotion. "Since I first entered your service the generous hopes you invariably expressed in my behalf have been the sole aim and ambition of my life to fulfil, and whatever may be good or meritorious on my part is entirely due to the fatherly care you extended to me. I can only promise that the fixed principle of my life shall be to maintain your good opinion unaltered, and whoever or whatever you commit to my charge shall be guarded and protected at the sacrifice of my own life."

"I fully believe what you say, Mr. Gerrard, and both Mrs. Browning and my son are of the same opinion. But, still you are only a young man, and the temptations and pitfalls that beset the steps of the young are frequently disastrous to the best intentioned. Let me see, what is your age now, Mr. Gerrard?"

"I was twenty-six last February, sir."

"Well, judging from your good sense and

methodical habits I should have thought you much older, but there again, your appearance does not warrant such an assumption. However, what I was going to say is this, fore-warned is fore-armed, and if you follow my advice in this undertaking, the chances are a hundred to one that all our best wishes will be satisfactorily borne out. Now, in the first place, you and Roger must have a definite object in view during your travels, that is to acquire knowledge, experience, and insight into all the useful pursuits of your fellowmen. You must confine yourself as much as possible to the centres of industry and commercial life, and avoid with a wholesome dread all places where excessive living, debauchery, or other temptations are likely to be encountered. Make acquaintances only among those engaged in business, and give all idlers, spendthrifts, and pleasure seekers a wide berth. I don't want you to deprive yourself of all amusements, you can visit the theatres, opera houses and such like places of entertainment when you think fit, but horseracing, gambling, drinking, and all that sort of thing I strictly and emphatically forbid. The continent of Europe is now in such an unsettled state that I would much rather you did not go there, althought I have several correspondents in Paris and other cities who would have been of great service to you. I will give you letters of introduction to several of the houses I have done business with, and they, no doubt, will be able to render you some assistance towards carrying out the object of your visit."

Some weeks after this interview everything was got in readiness for the contemplated visit to England, and the two young men sailed from Kingston with the best wishes of all their friends, and quite a demonstration of farewell from the mercantile community there. Previous, however, to going on board, Silvester had a final interview with Mrs. Browning, in which that good lady charged him with all manner of precautions, warnings, and responsibilities regarding her darling son. She pictured in vivid colours the terrible consequences that would

result to Mr. Browning and herself if anything serious happened to him while under the care and guidance of Silvester. So onerous seemed the duties attached to his position that any pleasure he anticipated from the trip was in a great measure overcast by the anxious fears and apprehensions of the parents.

It is not the purpose of this story to describe the incidents of their voyage or travels through England. We must, therefore pass over an interval of twelve months, and come to the time of their arrival in Liverpool, which was the month of March, in the year 1815. The change that had taken place in the appearance of the two young men was strangely at variance with what we would be led to suppose from a knowledge of their previous characters. Sylvester had grown pale, emaciated, and sad, with a careworn and wistful look in his eyes that bespoke nights of anxious thought, and a heart ill at ease and troubled. On the other hand Roger had become stout and florid, with a free and easy manner, a bold and independent bearing, and a grim joke or hearty laugh for everything that afforded him the opportunity. Their dress also was not the least prominent feature in this difference; for, while the former plainly but respectably attired, the other had assumed all the prevailing fashion of the period, and was in the vulgar sense of the word a buck of the first water. Their friendship, however, had apparently undergone no diminution, but its effects relatively considered was entirely reversed, for Roger now was the leading and commanding spirit, and his companion nothing more than a docile and obedient follower.

Their chambers in Water-street, the recognised locale of the branch house of Browning, Browning and Co., was frequently visited by the fashionable young men of all grades, who would induce Roger to neglect his duties and accompany them to several places of resort, where gambling, drinking, and every description of fast living was indulged in. All this was carried on despite the protests and remonstrances of Silvester, who, anxious to make up for the absence of the other

was the more assiduous and unremitting in his efforts not to allow the business to suffer in consequence. But this was not the worst feature of Roger's conduct, he was continually stopping out late at night, frequenting houses of notorious gambling and card-playing repute, and habitually returning to his apartments considerably the worse for drink. No one could be more pained and dejected at these depraved and dangerous habits than the boon companion who had known him as a quiet, simple, and delicate young man in his native town of Kingston. The change seemed so rapid and unexpected that, before his companion could use influence or advice, the foundation of his tastes was established, and all his most vicious passions roused into action. His experience of life in English cities was something like a new revelation to him; and, like all young men of peculiar or isolated minds, there was a recklessness in his conduct that those of a better mental balance would have chastened into moderation and restraint.

One day, while Silvester was going to dine at the King's Arms, an hotel at the top of Water-street, he happened to meet Roger in an advanced state of inebriety, accompanied by two strange and flash-looking men, who were assisting him on his way towards the office. Without being recognised, he turned quickly round and followed them closely to the office, taking particular notice of the two men, and listening to their maudlin and fragmentary conversation. As far as he could glean from what passed between them, they appeared to have been spending the morning in some gambling house in town, and were endeavouring to arrange for another meeting on the evening of the following day. One of the men particularly struck him as belonging to a class seldom seen in the company of his young friend. He was a heavy, square-shouldered, rough-looking fellow, with coarse, unprepossessing features, and an expression of face that inspired fear and repulsion. He had a strange, grating voice, with an impediment in his speech, and when excited by anger or drink he seemed to be incapable of making himself intelligible.

He was also maimed in one of his arms, and, in his endeavours to support Roger on his way, the sleeve of the coat was accidentally drawn back, and a wooden substitute exposed, with a hook affixed to the end, and strongly clamped round with iron bands. The other stranger was one of those persons of doubtful position, whose airs and assumption might have deceived the most wary. He was dressed in the height of fashion, and made a great display of jewellery and ornaments.

Silvester was greatly shocked at seeing his master's son in such a condition, and at such an early hour of the day, and although he would have greatly wished to screen him from the clerks in the office, still he felt so excited and exasperated at the moment that he was afraid to interfere, lest it might lead to a rupture between them, and thereby peril the slight influence he still possessed over him. However, one thing he was determined on, and that was he would make one last urgent appeal to Roger's good sense, and, if he did not succeed in his efforts, he would then release himself from his unenviable position, by acquainting his parents at once with the whole truth regarding the conduct of their son.

Next morning, before going to the office, he had an interview with Roger in his bedroom, where that young gentleman lay prostrate from the excesses of the previous day, and in anything but a pleasant and agreeable frame of mind. When Silvester entered the room his appearance was at once noticed by the other; there was a death-like pallor in his face, and an expression of sad, yet serious, thought in his eyes. He had not slept during the night, and the resolution he had finally come to cost him many an hour of intense anxiety and bitter reflection.

"Holloa, Sil., What has happened? Are you on the sick list, too?" said Roger, looking at him somewhat concerned.

Silvester did not answer just then, but drawing a chair over to the bedside, he sat himself down wearily, and buried his face in his hands.

The other sat up in bed unfeignedly startled

and glanced with a look of alarm at the stooping form of his companion.

"For heaven's sake, Gerrard, don't keep me in suspense. If you are seriously ill tell me of it at once. You know the state of my nerves at this moment; any excitement or suspense would certainly drive me mad."

"I am going to write to your father by the next mail," said Silvester, sitting erect in the chair, and speaking in a very grave tone of voice, "and, before I do so, I should like to make a last appeal to you regarding the terrible mode of life you are now pursuing."

"Oh! that is the matter, is it. Ecod, I thought you were striken with a fever, or that Browning, Browning & Co. had stopped payment, or worse still, that the island of Jamaica had been swallowed up by another of those infernal earthquakes. Well, let us be thankful that nothing more serious is going to happen."

"I should much rather you did not talk in that light and glaring way, Roger. If you knew what I have endured for sometime you would at least treat me with some mark of respect."

"Well, well, I know what you are going to say. I certainly have been going it a little too fast lately, but why in the name of heaven select a morning like this for a lecture. My nerves are in that condition that the very idea of serious talk almost brings on a fit of the blues."

"But I must write to your father to-day to catch the mail, and reply to all the inquiries he has made concerning you."

"Then write by all means; tell him I am as well as can be expected, and convey a large measure of my love to himself and mother. I will drop them a line myself in a week or two."

"You are perfectly aware that I am forced to tell him the life you are now leading, or write a direct falsehood to all his queries. I am determined to practice no more deception, Roger. I will make a clean breast of it, and relieve myself of the whole responsibility. I have been weak and vacillating too long."

At this, Roger bridled up at once, and his

dark, mulatto-like face became convulsed with anger. Sitting bolt upright in bed, he inquired with haughty irritation. "What do you mean to imply by those words?"

"You know the instructions your father gave me when leaving Kingston," replied Silvester, undisturbed by his sudden anger.

"My father had no right to give you authority over me, and you, as an honourable man, had no right to undertake such a position without first acquainting me. I thought you accompanied me as a friend and associate, not as a spy and detective. Believe me the office of breeding contention between father and son is both thankless and unprofitable."

"I have not deserved this of you, Roger," said the other, palpably hurt, "but no matter, I must learn to bear it all. I have now only one duty to perform, and after that I will arrange my accounts at the office, and send in my resignation to your father. Still as a friend—an almost brother I might say—I will make a last and final appeal to you. Give me the slightest promise—the faintest hope, that you intend reforming your ways, and then I shall feel perfectly satisfied that what already has occurred will be repaired in good time. I have implicit faith in your word, and that is all I require. If you once promise to amend—I know your character too well—nothing shall deter you from redeeming your word."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Roger, still evidently annoyed. "I do not feel disposed to give any pledge of the kind Mr. Gerrard. I am master of my own actions, and will not be accountable to any one in the world for the same."

"Then I have nothing further to say," remarked the other, rising up from his seat and moving towards the door. "I have prayed and hoped that this hour would never come, but, let the result be what it may, I shall do my duty, even at the eleventh hour."

When the room door had closed after him, Roger Browning threw himself on his back in bed, and gave vent to a torrent of bitter and con-

temptuous invectives against the impertinent assumption of his old companion. After a time however, a calmer frame of mind returned to him, and he buoyed himself up with the reflection that Silvester would not dare to acquaint his parents of his late conduct. By doing so he would make himself an avowed and declared enemy of his. It would be most unfortunate at that time if he were fool enough to carry out his threats, but then again he had often hinted at writing to his father before, and nothing after all had come of it.

"I must win back the money I drew from Jackson and Horsefall on account of the sales of the last three cargoes," said he, aloud to himself. "Then it will be time enough to talk about reforming and turning over a new leaf. By the bye, and there's that five hundred I took from the office a few days back, egad, I must drop Silvester a line about it, and save another scene. I shall put all things right in time, if time is only given me. I musn't forget to pull myself together for to-night's work. Kirby has won a ten thousand prize in the state lottery, and I mean to have a shy at it. I must have a doctor here at once to get rid of this nausea and headache, and then I will put a new aspect on affairs."

Here he rang the bell violently for an attendant, and despatched a messenger at once for a medical man.

CHAPTER II.

Professor Gunstone, teacher of music, calisthenics, and dancing, departed this life two years previous to the opening of the story, leaving a small annuity to his only child, Marion, who was a young lady of remarkable beauty, but, unfortunately, afflicted with frail and delicate health. Although skilled in the accomplishments her father had taught, and capable, to some extent, of taking his place, her health was

too precarious and uncertain to carry on the duties continuously, so she contented herself by giving music lessons to a privileged few aristocratic patrons. Otherwise she lived a life of quiet seclusion and retirement.

She was a young lady about the medium height, with a spare, fragile, though shapely figure; a face singularly attractive and beautiful, and a profusion of jet black hair—which she wore in the simplest fashion—drawn low over the temples at each side, and secured by a comb at the back of the head. Her eyes were unusually large and dark, of great brilliancy, with a marvellous power of expressing every shade of thought and feeling. Her mental gifts were evidently of a high order; the refined society she was reared amongst, together with the careful moral and religious instruction she received from her parents made her one of the most amiable and accomplished young ladies who resided at the time in the populous and flourishing seaport of Liverpool.

While yet a girl of thirteen or fourteen, Silvester happened to attend her father's classes for music, and as the natural result of her beauty and his disposition, a sort of mutual respect and intimacy sprang up between them. This intimacy, however, as years proceeded, gradually ripened into the deeper feeling of love and attachment, which was fully recognised and approved of by her father. When the time arrived for the professor to quit the scenes of this mortal life, the two young people were summoned to his bedside, and, after exhorting and advising them about the duties of their future lives, he committed his darling child to the protection of Silvester, adjuring him to take the place which he was called to vacate—to guard, cherish, and love her as the most precious treasure that could be transferred from the possession of one man to that of another. It appeared almost needless—even to the dying man himself—to doubt or question Silvester's willingness in this matter; for the young man loved the sweet Marion Gunstone with a pure and manly love that time or circumstance could not alter.

Shortly after the old man's death, it was arranged between the two lovers that they should postpone entering the married state until such time as Silvester made himself a satisfactory and permanent position in life. Marion had a small competency to live on; and he, with all the fervour and hopefulness of dawning manhood, had every confidence in carving out a high and secure pathway for himself. For sometime, however, his most sanguine hopes were disappointed. He got a clerkship in one of the mercantile houses in the town, but the duties and salary attached held out no prospect of the early consummation of his wishes. Fortune at length seemed to smile upon him, and the Kingston appointment came to pass. It need scarcely be said that there was great joy and happiness in the hearts of the lovers when this appointment was ultimately ratified. Marion, of course, experienced sorrow and depression at the idea of their temporary separation, but then it would only be for a few years, and the glowing prospects and large emoluments offered Silvester reconciled her to her loss.

Two years had passed away from the day of his departure to the time when he returned again to Liverpool, as the friend and companion of Roger Browning. During this period a great change had taken place in the appearance of his beautiful *fiancée*. She had grown thinner and paler than before, and if anything more beautiful and spirituelle. No doubt his long absence, her lonely and retired life, and the delicate and capricious nature of her health were the cause of this. She had ceased giving music lessons to her pupils, and seemed desirous of withdrawing herself altogether from the companionship of her few remaining friends and associates. She would sit for hours in her room, absorbed in a trance-like reverie, her large eyes gleaming with a supernatural brilliancy, and a smile of singular happiness irradiating her face; then a sudden shadow would pass across her brow and she would give way to uncontrollable grief and tears, which would continue for some time. At other

times she would seat herself before the piano, and make the house resound with the most touching and pathetic airs; at times accompanying them with her low, plaintive voice, until the emotion she felt choked her utterance, and the excess of her feelings paralyzed her hands. Notwithstanding Silvester's return, this strange conduct was to some extent still continued, but when in his company nothing could exceed her joy and happiness, and it was only when he took his departure, or was longer than usual without visiting her that her sad and melancholy fits returned.

On the afternoon following the interview between Silvester and Roger Browning, Marion, as usual, was absorbed in one of those trance-like moods, gazing abstractedly through the parlour window. All at once the figure of her lover passed the window, and mounting the steps leading to the entrance knocked with a loud and hasty summons at the door.

With an agility scarcely in keeping with the state of her health, she darted at once from the room, and immediately opened the door for him. When he entered he looked strangely pale and agitated, and throwing himself despondingly into a seat he leaned forward with a heavy sigh, without apparently taking any notice of his wondering companion. At length the tears welled up into her eyes, and going towards where he sat, she knelt down by his side and inquired anxiously the cause of his strange demeanour.

"Oh, dearest Marion, I'm a ruined man," said he, in a heartbroken voice, "something terrible has happened at the office, and I will be held responsible for it all. Give me a drink of something to slake my parched throat, and then I will explain all to you."

His request was immediately complied with, and then he related all that had occurred between Roger and himself, and also his discovery that morning at the office, that large sums of money had been clandestinely appropriated by his master's son. Up to this he had never told Marion of the irregular conduct of Roger, though she frequently questioned him about the

care and anxiety that was apparent in his face. He was reticent about all things that were likely to injure others, and seldom told his gentle companion anything about business but what was hopeful and pleasing. When the full truth was told her she felt great indignation against Roger, and her sympathy and admiration for her lover increased in an inverse ratio. She was grieved to think that any blame could be attached to him in this serious business, but in her inmost heart she felt sincerely pleased at this new illustration of the nobility of his character.

When the subject had been thoroughly discussed and deplored between them, Silvester told Marion the likely outcome of it all, and the course of conduct he had resolved upon pursuing under the circumstances.

"Things have assumed such a serious aspect," said he, "that it will be utterly impossible to sufficiently explain my conduct in the matter by means of a letter. I have, therefore, determined to start by the first ship to Kingston, and have a personal interview with my employer. I will fully confess my own weakness and dereliction of duty, and then resign the appointment he was so kind as to give me and the trust I have so signally failed to fulfil."

A strange shadow passed over the face of Marion as he uttered this, and a look of fear and disquiet came into her sad eyes. She became deadly pale in a moment, and then turning aside, she buried her face in her hands, and commenced to weep bitterly.

Her lover approached, and attempted to sooth the natural grief which she felt at his intended departure.

"I will not remain a day in Kingston after I have seen Mr. Browning, but will return by the next ship sailing for England, and then we shall never more be separated again. You will not increase my misery by giving way thus. After what occurred, I should not feel satisfied with myself nor again raise my head amongst honest men if I neglected my duty."

Marion brushed her tears away, and with a

sudden impulse seemed to suppress the grief that overwhelmed her. She raised her pale anxious face to his, and with a resigned though heart-broken expression in her eyes, she said,

"Forgive me, dearest Sil., I would not for the world increase your troubles at the present moment, but I am so lonely and forsaken here now, that I shall feel your absence very much, however short it may be."

"It will only be six or seven months at the furthest, sweetheart," said he.

She gave a deep sigh, and again the bitter tears came into her eyes.

"Six or seven months, love, may mean for ever," said she in a low and meaning tone of voice.

"Tut, tut, Marion, you take too desperate a view altogether. Why I have been two years away already, and you bore up wonderfully during my absence. I felt grateful and proud at the firmness you displayed at our first parting. Why not summon that courage which lies latent in my little lady's breast, and be your old self again."

"Ah, love, a great change has come over me since then, but for your sake I will endeavour to keep up."

"When I return from this journey," said he, "I will not leave the old town again. I will get a situation here, and, with what money I have already saved, we can manage to live comfortably and happily in the future."

They were standing before the window, his arms fondly embracing her, and his eyes tracing the exquisite outlines of the charming face partially upturned to his. She did not, however, appear to notice the last words he uttered, but, slightly turning her head, she gazed abstractedly through the window, over the flower pots and gardens, the adjacent fields and scattered houses that intevened between the house and the river, where numerous ships could be seen lying at anchor.

At length she said, keeping her eyes still fixed in the distance,

"And when do you purpose starting, dear?"

"At once, Marion; I must leave by the Royal mail coach for London to-night, so as to catch the first ship sailing. The sooner I get away, the sooner I will return."

"Then this is to be our last meeting!" said she, suddenly starting from her passive attitude.

"No, not our last meeting I hope, but the last for a few months until I am back to you for good."

"Oh! could you not remain a few days longer? Wait for the next ship, Sil," and she clung to him as though she would fain force him to remain. "It is all so sudden and unexpected, besides I had something to tell you—I mean I cannot bear to part with you without a little time to prepare myself."

"You will see the urgency of my case, dear. I must reach Kingston by the first vessel leaving England, so as to prevent further money losses, and inform Mr. Browning of all that has occurred. A week or two's delay would probably lead to unpleasant business exposures, which would be ruinous to Mr. Roger and seriously embarrassing to Mr. Browning himself. Come, dear, be reasonable, show me a little of that fortitude that I have so often admired."

She then threw her arms suddenly around his neck, and drawing his face towards her, implanted a long and passsionate kiss on his lips; then her strength seemed to forsake her, and she would have fallen to the ground had not Silvester quickly seized her, and supported her gently to the sofa. Placing her on the couch, he sat himself down beside her, and used all his endeavours to allay her grief, and encourage a more hopeful and resigned frame of mind.

"See, dearest," said he at length, "here is a little present which I had almost forgotten in our mutual trouble."

He took a little golden locket from his pocket, and opening it displayed two prettily finished silhouettes, one representing himself and the other Marion. He kissed the likeness, which occupied one side of the locket, and then handed the present to her.

She received it with unfeigned joy and delight, and glanced at her lover with a look of inexpressible gratitude and tenderness.

"I shall keep it ever before my eyes," said she pathetically, "and when I am buried in the grave it will be placed over my heart."

"What strange and melancholy thoughts, Marion. I hope we shall spend many happy years together before such an event takes place. Heaven forbid that anything should happen to you while I am away, for the knowledge of your grief and loneliness even now makes me the most miserable and unhappy of men."

Again she threw her arms around his neck with sudden impressement, and implanted another long and passionate kiss on his lips, as though she would draw his very soul forth in the rapturous embrace.

The excitement of the effort, however, seemed to completely overcome her this time, and, when she withdrew her lips from his, she swooned away in his arms, and lay as still and lifeless on the couch as though her sweet spirit had suddenly taken flight.

Alarmed and frightened he instantly summoned Mrs. Aitkin, an elderly lady who acted in the twofold capacity of housekeeper and companion to her. This lady was an old and valued friend of her parents, and had known Marion since she was a baby in long clothes.

"Poor, dear child," said she, on entering the room, "another of those fainting fits. She excites herself too much latterly, Mr. Gerrard, I wish you would advise her not to worrit herself so; it will seriously interfere with her already delicate health. Whatever you advise her she is certain to do."

"I am compelled to leave to-night for Jamaica," said he, "and the suddenness of the intelligence has no doubt been the cause of all this. Will there be any occasion to go for a doctor, Mrs. Aitkin? She looks the very picture of death."

"Oh dear no, sir, I shall bring her round shortly."

Silvester stood for some time watching the old

lady administer restoratives, and otherwise exert herself to revive consciousness. He felt sorely perplexed and sad at the new trouble that confronted him, but the importance of his journey was too pressing to postpone it, even at the request of his sweetheart. Nothing but her serious illness would justify him in abandoning the resolution he had formed. She was constitutionally frail and delicate, and her present appearance did not warrant any suspicion as to her general health. After a little time she would become reconciled to his absence, and learn to look more reasonably at the circumstances that enforced it.

At this moment the young lady gave a deep sigh, and indications of returning consciousness.

"If you have bidden her farewell, Mr. Gerrard," said the old lady, "it would be just as well not to let her see you again; it would only renew the excitement. I will sooth and comfort her when her senses return, and she will soon be all right again."

"Oh, Mrs. Aitkin," said he with considerable emotion, "be kind and gentle to her during my absence, act the part of a mother as you have always done, and I shall never forget it. If she should become seriously unwell or hysterical, send at once for me and I will return immediately. The Royal mail coach does not leave before nine o'clock, so if I do not hear from you by that time I shall consider all is right and set out upon my journey. Tell Marion I will write a letter from London before I take ship."

He then approached the sofa with sad and tearful eyes, and impressed a last affectionate kiss on the lips of his unconscious love. Without venturing to look at her again, he quickly seized his hat, and waving a farewell to Mrs. Aitkin hurried precipitately from the house.

He had not long gone before the patient opened her eyes, and stared wonderingly about the room. All at once the truth seemed to return to her, and a look of intense pain and anguish came into her eyes.

"Has he gone, Aitkins?" inquired she, looking wistfully at her companion.

"Yes, dear; he has only just left you. It was wise for him to do so, as another such leave-taking would have thoroughly upset you. There's a dear good child, keep yourself calm and resigned, he will soon be back again."

Marion glanced a strange incredulous look at the housekeeper, and then shook her head sadly.

"Did he leave any parting message—what were his last words?"

"He kissed you affectionately where you lay, and told me to be kind and gentle to you during his absence. He said he would write to you from London."

"Poor, dear, noble-minded Silvester! I shall never see him again, Aitkins, never."

"Nonsense, my dear; it is only folly talking in that way. When you have had a little rest and quiet you will think otherwise."

"Ah, you little know, you little know; it is not a presentiment, but a truth that I utter."

"I do not like your talking in that way, Miss Marion. It is not like your usual good sense and wisdom."

"Well, perhaps it is not wise for me to say so; but leave me a little time, Aitkins, and I will try and collect myself. Did he look sad when he was going?"

"Yes, he looked very upset and sorrowful, but he fought it down like a sensible man when he saw the folly of repining."

When the housekeeper retired, Marion opened the little locket, and gazing affectionately at it gave full vent to her sorrow in a flood of tears. At length, when a calmer mood supervened, she soliloquised to herself in a low, half-audible tone of voice.

"It may be wrong what I have done, but I had not the heart to augment Silvester's troubles by revealing to him a new and bitter sorrow. It has been a great struggle to keep the secret from him, especially at his sudden and unexpected departure, but I pictured to myself that it might have prevented him sailing to Kingston, and thereby jeopardised his good name and honour in the eyes of his employer. But what good

would have resulted in telling him, even if it were not so? It would not have prolonged my life, or lessened the deepening shadow that is approaching fate-like hitherward: it would only have occasioned him poignant and unavailing sorrow. That I would fain postpone until the last moment. Sorrow, pain, and misfortune are only intensified by anticipation; better let the blow fall suddenly and unexpectedly. I prayed for resolution and strength to do what was right and considerate, and I feel confident Silvester will not blame me for keeping back the secret. I shall miss his sympathy and condolence, but I shall be prevented from witnessing his grief and desolation.

"At my earnest request Doctor Crooke informed me the cause of my recent weakness and lassitude. I have never been strong, but I did not suspect that my condition was so dangerous. I resolved to know the whole truth from him—to have his honest opinion as to the time allotted to me in this world. Seeing I would not be deceived, he answered me candidly and unreservedly: I might live two months longer, but it was more than probable that a month or six weeks was the full measure of my sojourn here. The truth did not frighten or dismay me. All the grief and concern I experienced was on Silvester's account. It would be hard, Oh, cruelly hard to part from him, the only embodiment of my love and affections, which I have never fully possessed. Ah, that was the bitterest pang, the severest torture of all. But I would bear all for his sake, and by the reticence I have imposed on myself further exemplify the depth and intensity of the love I bear him. When I have sufficient strength and composure I will write him my last letter, explaining and justifying my conduct, and this shall be given to him when he returns to Liverpool, and then the whole truth shall be known to him. What I have suffered and endured to arrive at this resolution no one will ever know except the good God who directs and arranges everything to some wise end. I have implicit faith in the result hereafter, that we

shall know a fuller and happier love in that land beyond, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

She ceased speaking, and with a thoughtful and resigned expression of face drew her chair towards the window, and gazed out sadly at the prospect before her. The evening was growing apace, and the shadows of night were closing around the distant objects, and shutting out the gleaming river, with its warships and merchantmen at rest, and its smaller craft with white sails passing to and fro.

When the housekeeper re-entered the room some hours later, she found her young mistress in the same position. The place was now in darkness, and an intense silence prevailed. She almost uttered an involuntary shriek when she gazed at the white face and motionless attitude of her mistress, but a gentle touch reassured the old lady of her mistake, Marion had fallen into one of her customary reveries.

CHAPTER III.

About the year 1815 there was a certain house in Earle-street, St. Pauls, where a great deal of gambling, drinking, and duelling was carried on without any interference whatever on the part of the authorities. The place was known in the parlance of the frequenters as Bowie's Bunk, although the proprietor was a retired privateer skipper, named Bancroft, and rented a tavern adjoining, which was numerously patronised by seafaring men of all nationalities. The interior of Bowie's Bunk had been somewhat altered from its original purpose as a dwelling-house, and from the outside there was nothing in its appearance to attract special notice, save that the front door was seldom opened, and few were to be seen entering or leaving it. Those who desired ingress had to pass up an entry at the side of the tavern, and get admission through the back door by means of a key which was kept

by the proprietor. After passing through this door, you entered a narrow corridor which led into a large oblong room, elaborately furnished in the best style of the period. There were a number of small tables arranged at each side, with lounges and easy chairs surrounding them, there was also a costly carpet covering the floor, and all the requisite accessories for a first-class smoking and refreshment room of the time. During the greater part of the day, and at nearly all hours of the night a motley company of all classes used to assemble here, captains without ships, privateer skippers whose occupation had gone, merchants, spendthrift sons, clerks who made free with their masters' money, planters who had come home to spend their fortune, and others, who by plunder or good luck had amassed considerable wealth during the recent wars; in fact, adventurers of all kinds bitten by the mania of gambling, from the practised sharper, who lived by his wits, to the infatuated votary who risked his thousands in the cast of a die.

The sudden termination of the wars in which England had been so long engaged let loose on society a great number of desperate and unsettled spirits, who had no particular trade or occupation to turn to, and whose life of adventure and excitement had wholly unfitted them for the useful industry and quiet ways more consistent with the piping times of peace.

The apartment referred to was chiefly used for drinking, talking, and lounging, but in the rooms upstairs, the real business of the place was carried on. Here there were several small rooms exclusively set apart for gambling, and to these the earnest votaries of the game of chance adjourned betimes, to pocket their winnings or receive the fiat of irretrievable losses bringing ruin and disgrace.

One evening there was a fair sprinkling of the usual company assembled in the chief room, pleasantly engaged in quaffing their several potations, smoking expensive Havana and Virginian cigars, and talking and yarning away with the air of people luxuriously disposed to enjoy themselves. A few of the tables were

ornamented with chased and costly drinking bowls and goblets, which belonged in most cases to the drinkers, and were the spoil of many a tough sea fight with Spanish galleons or French merchantmen. There were also to be seen diamond studded snuff boxes, heavy gold chains, costly medals and insignia of honour, and watches of considerable value and size, which the owners every now and then exposed to view, as they recounted their numerous exploits and engagements in the stormy times that had just been brought to an unexpected close.

At one of the tables, a little removed from the rest of the company, there were seated two men, whose conversation was carried on in whispers, and whose manner and gestures betokened earnestness and caution. One of these was known by the name of Morgan Byrd, or the Cuban Pirate, as he was familiarly nicknamed, from the fact of his having been a pirate before he received a letter of marque from the English Government to prey upon the mercantile marine of France; the other was called Sir Lionel Kirby, but whether he was a baronet *de facto* or simply got the title from his aristocratic airs and bearing was never very clearly understood by those who claimed his acquaintance. Sufficient it was, that he answered to the title, and there were none amongst his ordinary associates who cared a brass farthing about his social standing or the nature of his antecedents. These two men as we have already seen, were not unknown to Roger Browning, and they were now waiting his promised arrival for the purpose of trying their fortune at a game of cards, when the stakes were to be high and the result more momentous than usual.

"Look here, Sir Lionel," said Byrd, raising his voice loud enough for others to hear him, "I venture to predict that the ten thousand prize you won in the State lottery will pass into other hands to-night. You are always so headstrong when luck is against you, and that young millionaire from Jamaica is such a keen player, and not to be denied when there's a good stake to be handled."

"Pooh! it matters very little to me," said the other indifferently, and with a careless shrug of the shoulder, "so long as one enjoys the excitement of the game and the society of boon companions. The result does not cost me a thought. Whether I lose the whole or whether I quadruple it gives me little concern. I have plenty to live on without it, and shall never allow either losses or gains to interfere with my appetite or disturb my rest."

"Ay, ay, mate," observed the skipper, "that is the true spirit of your *bon vivant*. I have lost many a hundred bright doubloons and pistoles, and they never cost me a sigh when I was from the table. What play we used to have to be sure when cruising about the Caribbean Sea on the lookout for a Spaniard or a Dutchman! Many was the round sum in valuables and prizes that passed from hand to hand until fortune at last inclined the scales, and left one of us the winner. No, Sir Lionel, not an angry word or a regretful murmur from any one of us, however large the loss, or persistent our ill-luck. The losers would often remark with a grim smile, 'Wait till we fall in with a foreign merchantman, and then we'll have at you again and take our revenge. Ah! those were the good times worth living in, not a coin in one's pocket of a morning, and when we turned into our bunk at night, possessing wealth enough to purchase an independency for the rest of our days."

At this moment Roger Browning entered the room, and glanced hurriedly around the company assembled there. At length he discovered where his two friends were, and immediately came forward and joined them.

"Good evening, Browning, glad to see you here so early," said the baronet, with easy nonchalance, as he threw himself back in his seat and glanced cursorily at the new comer

"How do you feel after yesternight's potations?" added Byrd, with easy concern, "bad work drinking deep and playing heavy at the same time."

"Egad, I've had a tough time of it since," said

Browning, throwing himself into one of the seats. "I could not rise from my bed until I emptied a bottle of brandy, and swallowed a nauseous prescription from Dr. Lomax. Even now I feel more dead than alive."

"Then we shall have no play to-night," remarked Sir Lionel, with the same undisturbed manner. "Well, I'm not troubled about that; indeed, I don't feel quite the thing myself. A little champagne supper, with a quiet chat and a good cigar, is more in my way. Will you join me, Browning?"

"No, thanks," replied Browning, looking somewhat disappointed. "For my part I don't require quiet and rest; it is something to excite and occupy my mind that I need. I came here purposely to have a good rubber or two. Come, Sir Lionel, don't disappoint me. We'll make the game interesting by staking high."

"Very well, old fellow, anything to meet your wishes. I'm not particular one way or the other, but I thought you were out of sorts, and did not care about the thing. Ring the bell, Skipper, and have number one room prepared for us. It is not so draughty as the other places. In the meantime, what will you take, Browing, wine, negus or—— ?"

"Thank you, I'll keep to cogniac for the present; it's the only beverage that seems to brace my nerves and clear my brain."

The room number one, which was quickly got ready for them, was a place of very limited dimensions, that is to say, about eight feet by six, with a ceiling almost low enough to touch the head of an ordinary sized man standing upright, and there was no aperture or window by which the daylight could gain an entrance. On each side where the wall joined the ceiling, was a small, movable grating, for the purpose of ventilation. With the exception of this and the doorway there were no other means by which the air could gain an entrance or exit. The room was simply furnished, with a small square table, a silver candelabrum with four branches, and two cushioned chairs facing each other. On the evening in question there was a bright fire burning

in the grate, a kettle simmering on the hob, and jugs, bottles, and drinking vessels arranged for the two gentlemen who were going to have a night of it at their favourite game.

As Roger entered this place, a strange chill and creeping sensation passed over him, as though he had suddenly stepped on some mysterious and fatal ground, and at the same moment the prophetic saying of our forefathers occurred to him, namely, that there was some one walking over his grave.

"I have given directions," said the baronet, "that we are not to be disturbed until midnight, when we shall adjourn to supper. Byrd will join us then, so let us make ourselves easy on that head. Now for business. Cut, Browning. By Jove, an ace! Come, that looks like a good beginning."

For some time profound silence reigned between the two players as they proceeded with the game; now and then their faces indicated the varying success that attended on them—at one time lighting with momentary triumph and the next clouded with doubt and chagrin. At length the tide of fortune seemed to turn in favour of the baronet, and the great pile of notes and gold at Roger's side grew small by degrees and beautifully less. Every time the latter would take up his cards after a deal, the baronet would throw himself back in his chair, and fix his eyes intently on the small grating that was facing him. After a time several cards would appear at this opening, which faithfully represented the markings of those that his opponent held in his hand. When the play reached its last stage, and Roger's remaining stock was thrown on the board, several of these mysterious cards happened to fall to the ground, and in the intense silence that prevailed the incident was distinctly audible to both of the players. With a sudden start Roger turned quickly round, and to his amazement discovered the cards scattered on the floor behind him. With an instinct of suspicion he glanced upwards, and at the same time noticed a movement of the grating and the withdrawal of a hand. The

whole truth seemed to flash across his mind at once, and he instantly sprang to his feet. Simultaneously with him the baronet also rose from his seat, and with a look of guilt in his eyes, which he vainly attempted to hide, exclaimed in apparent astonishment—

"Good heavens! What's the matter, Browning? You look pale and ill shall I ring for assistance?"

The other stood bolt upright before him, his eyes fixed with a terrible scrutiny on the baronet, while his face assumed a rigid and ghastly expression that was fearful to behold. The hot blood and fierce passions of his nature, seething and struggling within his breast made his form tremble and quiver like one forcibly attempting to repress the working of some approaching fit.

"Cheat! blackleg! scoundrel!" at length he hissed out between his closely set lips, at the same time dashing his hand fiercely on the table between them.

"You shall answer for those words, sir," replied Kirby, with well simulated anger, drawing himself up with dignified hauteur.

"Oh, what a fool—an arrant fool I have been not to have suspected this before! I have been led blindfolded to my own ruin. Answer for those words—did you say? Ay, by heavens I will, and this very night too! And suiting the action to the word, he seized a drinking vessel near him, and dashed it and its contents into the face of the baronet.

In the meantime Silvester had been working hard at the office, making out a statement of all that had transpired there from the commencement. It was now about half past seven, so he dismissed the clerks, and locking up the office turned his steps in the direction of Richmond Gardens, St. Anne-street, where he had apartments. He had already engaged a place in the Royal Mail, and had had his luggage taken to the London Tavern in Water-street, where the coach started from. He was going to make his final preparations for the journey, and also to see if any message had been sent from Marion,

while he would leave a letter for Roger, telling him what he had decided on doing.

The night was dark and wintry as he emerged from the office, but he found crowds of clerks and business men like himself hurrying homeward after the labours of the day. When he entered the house in Richmond-gardens, he found a young lad waiting for him with a letter from Roger. He took the letter from the lad, and with a vague suspicion of some new difficulty in his mind, he tore it open nervously, and read as follows:—

"Dear Silvester,—What you have long warned me against has at length come to pass. I have been robbed, cheated, ruined, by two scoundrels, but they are now within my reach, and I shall make them answer for what they have done by the only means left in my power. Before you read these lines the result most probably will be known, and if I do not come or send another messenger by eight o'clock, the worst will have happened. Sir Lionel Kirby and Morgan Byrd are the names of the scoundrels! If I should fail, do not forget to pursue them by legal or other means, until the memory of your illfated friend is avenged. I don't know the laws or customs in England for dealing with this class: I only know what we would do in Jamaica, and that is what I am now determined in doing.

Oh, dearest friend! break this news gently to my parents. The very thought of those dear ones overwhelms me with grief, and unmans me for the stern duty I have to perform. You have always been my best friend, and had I followed your advice this would never have happened. Show these lines to my father, they will exonerate you from all blame, and prevent anything arising which may be prejudicial to your future prospects. Should I die, my last thoughts will be of my father, mother, and my dear friend.

ROGER.

When he finished reading this he staggered back some paces, and groaned aloud in the anguish of his soul. A cold clammy sweat oozed from every pore in his body, and for some moments the terrible news seemed to deprive him of all power of thought or volition. Then, as if by magic, a sudden reaction set in, and he started fiercely forward pacing the room with firm and hasty strides. His face, in the meanwhile, although pale and haggard had assumed a fixed

and determined look. Beckoning the boy towards him, he drew forth his watch and examined the time. It was now a quarter past eight, and no Roger or messenger had arrived.

"Here boy, tell me who gave you this letter?" inquired he, in a voice of strange and repressed calmness. "Please, sir, I got it from a gent in Earle-street" said the urchin. "He seemed a foreign looking man, very dark and swarthy. After giving me the letter and this bit of money he told me to lose no time in delivering it, and then he went into a tavern there which is kept by Mr. Bancroft."

"Can you point out this tavern to me?" said Silvester, locking up the letter and some other papers he had in his writing desk.

"Yes, sir; I know it well."

"Then come along at once. Take me the shortest route you know, and I will reward you handsomely."

They emerged from the house in hot haste, and lost no time in traversing the streets lying between Richmond-gardens and the locality where Bowie's Bunk was situated. When they reached the tavern Silvester dismissed the boy, and then proceeded to examine the place from the outside.

"I must keep myself calm and collected," said he, "or I may not be able to gain admittance. Sir Lionel Kirby; yes, that is the name of one of the scoundrels. I'll call at once at the tavern and request an interview with him. It may be too late to prevent the deed, but before apprising the authorities I will see the position of affairs myself."

Although Silvester muttered this to himself he was far from being calm and composed in his manner. He walked hurriedly across the street, entered the tavern, and inquired if he could see the landlord. When that functionary made his appearance, the visitor said that he wished to see Sir Lionel Kirby on important business, and, after some suspicious hesitation on the part of the landlord, he was at length admitted into Bowie's Bunk, by the customary means of entrance.

The large room was by this time enveloped in smoke from the pipes and cigars of the numerous loungers there, but he had no difficulty in discovering two figures, a little removed from the rest, whose appearance was not altogether unknown to him. No one had been sent to apprise the baronet of the stranger's visit, so, feeling confident that he was right in his surmise, Silvester approached the place where they were seated and accosted the baronet by name.

That individual started to his feet on the mention of his name, and gazed with wonder and a feeling of apprehension at the tall and pale-looking man that confronted him. One of his arms was bandaged with a handkerchief, and was suspended by a sling from his neck. This was not unnoticed by Silvester, and the thoughts which it produced sent a quiver of horror through his frame. "The meeting has taken place," thought he, "and I am too late; this fellow has escaped with a slight wound, while Roger, my friend, my trust, is lying cold and lifeless somewhere, the victim of these scoundrels' avarice and villany."

Unable altogether to repress the rising fury that he felt, he glanced fiercely at the baronet and demanded in a peremptory voice the whereabouts of his friend, Mr. Roger Browning.

"What business have you to address me, sir? I have not the honour of your acquaintance."

"I am a friend of Mr. Browning's," said he, "and he has written telling me of a certain quarrel between you."

"Oh! indeed! well, and what else?"

"I want to know where he is. I see by your arm that the deed has taken place," said Silvester, pointing towards the bandaged arm.

"It will be sufficient for you to know that I am not Mr. Browning's keeper, and I decline to have any more conversation with you."

"But you must and shall tell me where your victim is," blurted out Silvester, his anger getting the mastery of him, and seizing at the same time the baronet by the collar, and holding him at arm's length in a threatening manner.

"I say, stranger," shouted Byrd, jumping to

his feet, "mind what your are about; that man is wounded."

"Yes, you're another of the cheats that have robbed, and perhaps murdered my friend," said Gerrard, turning with flashing eyes towards the pirate, "but, by heavens if there was an army of you I'll have my question answered."

"We'll see about that very soon," remarked Byrd, with a sudden resolution. "Unhand that gentleman at once, or I'll strike you to the ground, you ruffian."

He had scarcely uttered these words when Silvester pushed the wounded baronet aside, and springing quickly towards the other delivered him a powerful blow on the chest, that sent him reeling back several yards, until he finally stumbled, and fell.

By this time the disturbance had attracted the attention of the rest of the company, and a number of half intoxicated fellows surrounded Silvester, and wanted to know what the quarrel was about. But his agitation was so great that he could not answer them; his blood was up, and he saw only the two men who were the robbers and perhaps the murderers of his employer's son. The baronet volunteered a story of his own about the affair.

"This is some unknown ruffian," said he, "that has got admission into this place on the pretence that he is the friend of a gentleman who has lost a few hundreds upstairs. He has been trying to intimidate Byrd and myself, with the object no doubt of extracting some of the winnings from us, but he has mistaken his men on this occasion."

"He has uttered an infamous falsehood," shouted Silvester, making an effort to seize the baronet; "he knows I came here to inquire about my friend, whom they have robbed and I believe murdered. I will not leave this place until I learn where he is."

"This is evidently a matter they will have to settle amongst themselves," said one of the company, "but we must have no fighting or brawling here. The Cuban Pirate is well able to take care of himself, and there is plenty of

space beyond the church for a good stand up fight. Take my advice friends and adjourn to that quarter.

"Ay, ay," said the others, delighted with the idea, "let them have it out by torchlight. The stranger is a tall, well-made fellow, and ought to be a good match for Bully Morgan."

The majority of the company, however, were desirious of maintaining a show of respectability in the place, and despatched a messenger for the landlord for the purpose of having the disputants ejected.

In the meantime Byrd had regained his feet, and smarting from the effects of the blow and the disgrace it entailed, he approached quickly to where the group was gathered around the excited Silvester. There was a gleam in his bloodshot eyes, and a resolve in his firm set lips that boded no good for his assailant. With the treacherous instinct of all brutal natures, he seized the opportunity of the almost defenceless position of his opponent to wreak a terrible and summary vengeance for the blow which he had received. While the other was surrounded and held back by several of the party, the pirate rushed furiously at him, and, without a word of warning, struck him a terrible blow between the eyes with his iron clamped forearm. The result was instantaneous ; the victim fell senseless to the ground, and the blood spurted out on all sides from the frightful wound inflicted. A general murmur of disapproval arose from all present, but the landlord had now arrived, and wishing to prevent any further disturbance he had the unconscious Silvester removed from the room, and also intimated that the Baronet and Byrd should take their departure.

"By heavens, Byrd, this is more serious than my little affair," said Sir Lionel, when they had reached the street. "We must clear out of Liverpool until it has blown over. You should be more careful in using that fearful arm of yours: the lives of men nowadays are of more consequence than they were a few years back."

"Curse him!" replied the other with

unabated ferocity; "he struck me as I have never been struck before. I hope it is the last blow he will ever be able to give."

We must now hark back a little, for the purpose of witnessing the duel that took place between Sir Lionel Kirby and Roger Browning. The place selected was a large outhouse or shed in the vicinity of St. Paul's church, and close to where the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway lines now cross. Morgan Byrd acted as the second to his friend, while a frequent visitor at the Bunk performed a like office for Roger Browning. When everything was in readiness the two men confronted each other, and the signal to fire was quickly given. At the first shot the baronet staggered forward—apparently hit—and throwing up his hands fell heavily to the ground. The two seconds immediately ran towards him, and stooping down unbuttoned his coat and vest, and proceeded to examine the nature of the wound he had received. In the meanwhile Roger remained at the spot where he was placed, and could only indistinctly see what was going on from the smoke that followed the discharge of firearms, and the imperfect light that did service on the occasion.

After a time his second returned to him, apparently flurried and excited, and in an earnest manner said,

"You have hit him, friend, and he is either dying or in a swoon. The pirate is off to hunt up a doctor, but in my opinion no doctor can do him any good. In the meanwhile you had better make yourself scarce; leave the town with as little delay as possible, or you may find yourself locked up on a charge of murder."

This seemed very plausible advice to Roger; he had exacted satisfaction for the wrongs done him, and, with his limited knowledge of the laws of English life, he could see nothing but prudence and safety in the course suggested.

"These things are now taken seriously by the authorities," continued he, "and since the wars have ended, an affair of honour is treated much in the same way as a case of murder. In a few

hours the whole thing will be the talk of the town, and if you take my advice you'll put a good distance between yourself and this place before the morning."

Roger did not wait for any further parley; he started at once for Richmond Gardens, when, finding that Silvester had only just left, he scribbled a few lines explanatory of what had taken place, and then collecting some luggage together he started immediately to catch the Royal Mail coach for London. When he reached the metropolis he engaged a passage on the first ship sailing for the West Indies, determining to take the bull by the horns, and make a full confession of all his past conduct to his parents.

The circumstances of the duel were in keeping with the character of the men engaged in it, with the solitary exception of Roger Browning. The pistols had been loaded with powder only, the pseudo-baronet was not wounded at all, and Roger's second was in league with the others to carry out the mock duel. In fact they belonged to a gang of swindlers and sharpers, who frequented the Bunk to victimize the gambling youths that went there, and managed their business so well that few save the landlord and one or two others were really cognisant of their true characters.

CHAPTER IV.

An interval of eight or ten years had passed since the incidents recorded in the preceding chapters. The head of the firm of Browning, Browning & Co., has been consigned to his last resting place, and his son Roger is now the head of the concern, and a shrewd, practical, and intelligent successor he makes, notwithstanding the early misconduct and extravagances which we have had occasion to record against him. The effect of the duel, and the large money losses, wrought a permanent change in his character.

From the moment he quitted England the whole course of his life was altered, and he set about forming his habits and conduct after the model of his lost and ill-fated friend, Silvester. The pseudo-baronet, Kirby, was caught red-handed in an affair of robbery, in which he was assisted by his boon companion the pirate, but, owing to some bungling on the part of the captors, the latter escaped conviction, while Sir Lionel was sentenced to penal servitude for the remainder of his days. With regard to the fate of Silvester Gerard there was little known, beyond the fact that he was carried out of the Bunk senseless and placed in some entry at a distance, where he was afterwards found by a constable who had been summoned to the spot. A drunken brawl or something of the kind had taken place, and all the constable had to do was to have the injured man conveyed at once to the new infirmary. The total disregard of life by the frequenters at the Bunk, the suspicious nature of several of their own doings, the earnest solicitations of the landlord, and the dread of Eyrd's wrath, was sufficient to seal the lips of all who had witnessed the occurrence.

When Roger returned to Kingston and made a clean breast of all his delinquencies, his parent was terribly wroth at what had occurred, and not less so at the deception practised on him, as he thought, by his hitherto trusted and confidential clerk. To tell the truth, Roger exonerated his friend from all blame, but his parent was implacable, and would hold no further communication with Silvester. He remembered the strict injunctions he had given him, and nothing could excuse such a dereliction of duty, in his mind. With regard to his son, however, the case was different; besides being a privileged party, he was placed entirely under the control of the other; when he showed any inclinations to fall into forbidden ways, Silvester should have acquainted his parents at once. No; his conduct was inexcusable, and he was made the scapegoat. In addition to this, Ralph Browning had never received a line from his clerk, either apologising for his neglect

of duty or explaining, as he was bound to do, the full circumstances of what had occurred in Liverpool. In fact, it appeared as if he treated his master with contempt, or was less guiltless in the whole affair than his son cared to admit.

But in the course of time, when father and son became reconciled, and Roger was ultimately taken into partnership, the latter felt it his bounden duty to find his former friend, and make some compensation for all that he had sacrificed in his well-meant desire to shield his early misconduct from the knowledge of his parents. Although he had written repeatedly to Liverpool, and instituted what search he could, still, no trace save the most problematic could be found of his missing friend. The most he could learn was, that a person of his description was frightfully injured in some street brawl about the time, and after remaining for some time in the Infirmary was eventually discharged convalescent. After leaving the Infirmary all trace of him was lost, and the efforts of his correspondents failed to find any other clue. However, when the elder Browning died, and Roger became head of the firm, he determined to make a last effort to recover traces of his friend. With this object he came over to Liverpool himself, and had the purpose of his visit advertised in the local papers.

Poor Marion Gunstone never looked up again after the departure of her lover. She grew rapidly worse day by day, and when at length she was unable to leave her bed, she would lie there in a semi-swoon or trance for hours together, never uttering a word or moving a muscle, but her eyes wide open, gazing sadly but steadily into the future. The non arrival of the promised letter from London affected her deeply, but as usual she had abundant excuses for Silvester. He was too preoccupied with his own troubles, and perhaps had not time to write it before the ship started on her voyage. At length the end arrived earlier than expected. One morning she called Mrs. Aitkins to her bedside, and told her that she had had a vision. A man, with Silves-

ter's figure and voice approached her during the night, and remained for some hours beside her couch, weeping bitterly. She did not see his face, although she made every effort to do so, but she heard his voice and saw his figure plainly and distinctly enough. In fact, she believed she held his hand within her own, and felt it cold, clammy, and deathlike. Then all at once the scene changed, and she saw a splendid palace before her. The gateway leading to this was dark and forbidding, with immense cyprus and willow trees casting a melancholy gloom around. Friends and acquaintances seemed to accompany her towards this gate, but the figure of Silvester alone passed the portals along with her. The pathway towards the palace was now spread with cloth of gold, and the former gloom was dispersed by a flood of inconceivable light and glory that seemed to burst from every object around them. "I can go no further," murmured the companion by her side, "I am drawn back through the gloomy entrance, and must say farewell." The sound of his voice had a magical effect; the fabric of the vision became confused and chaotic, the glittering palace melted away, and the wonderful and beautiful objects around her were dispersed like thin vaporous cloudlets before the breath of some mighty wind. Long after all had disappeared, she could hear the sound of his last words ringing in her ears, "I can go no further, I am drawn back through the gloomy entrance, and must say farewell."

"Had I breath and time to describe all that I saw," said Marion, "it would take me years and years to do so satisfactorily. But I just give you the faint outlines of the vision, so that you may assist me to interpret it. That my companion was Silvester I am morally certain, but why should his face be veiled from me, and why should he have the privilege to pass the gloomy portals?"

Mrs. Aitkin humoured her with some fanciful and pleasing interpretation, and then attempted to smile the whole vision away, as something emanating from her continual thought and anxiety regarding her lover.

But Marion was seriously in earnest, and believed implicitly that something of an unusual nature had happened to her lover.

"I told you I would never see him again in this world," said she, "and you disbelieved me and laughed at my fears. I am as positive now that some misfortune or accident has overtaken him, and when I am sleeping in my grave you will discover the truth of what I say. But stay. The vision rises before me again, and I will now learn all that has occurred. Give me your hand, Aitkins, and do not let me pass from your presence."

These words were spoken with great difficulty and in a voice scarcely above a whisper. The good housekeeper lifted the white and wasted hand in hers, and gazed sadly at the pale and beautiful girl that lay before her. All was silent and breathless in the chamber. She remained for some time watching the motionless patient, expecting every now and then that she would open her eyes and describe the wonders of her second vision. But alas ! the sweet spirit had taken flight.

She was buried in the grave where her parents rested, and, in compliance with her wishes, the little locket that Silvester gave her was placed around her neck in the coffin. All the money she possessed was left to her lover, after making provision for the good old lady who was so attentive and assiduous during her illness.

When years had passed away, and the little grave in the churchyard showed unmistakable signs of decay and neglect, a stranger came one day, and paid lavishly to have it renovated, and a new and costly head-stone raised above the honoured remains. Visitors to the place often wondered at the newly ornamented grave, and the wreaths of beautiful flowers and forget-me-nots that were regularly placed upon it. There could be no doubt that some fond and loving heart remained behind, and that memory and affection for the silent dead was unchanged by the absorbing cares of life or the slow consuming process of advancing years.

About this time there was a solitary cottage standing on the Wavertree-road, which had a sort of mystery and notoriety attached to it. It was inhabited by a certain blind man and his dog, and, with the exception of an old woman who called occasionally to do some charing, no one else was ever seen to enter or leave it. Who he was, what business in life he followed, or whether he was rich or poor was a mystery to those who resided in the neighbourhood. He was observed to leave the cottage every afternoon about dusk, with a green baize bag under his arm, and it was often three or four o'clock in the morning before he again returned. In stature he was tall, but stooped slightly, giving the impression that he was once a strong and muscular man, but now considerably reduced by disease or accident. He was dressed in shabby genteel clothes, the remains of former respectability, with a tall hat, and a green shade covering the upper part of his face, thereby leaving the form and expression a perfect enigma to the inquisitive beholder. He was seldom heard to speak, and then only in the most gentle and kindly accents, but he appeared to be continually moving his lips, as though muttering some words to himself, or engaged in silent and earnest prayer. Altogether he was a person of considerable interest to his suburban neighbours; but as his habits were unobtrusive and harmless, their inquisitiveness seldom extended further than an occasional gossip at his expense, or the expressed opinion that he was a decayed gentleman or harmless lunatic.

When he left the cottage in the evening he usually made his way, guided by the dog, to the most populous parts of the town, where he visited several public-houses, chiefly the resort of sailors, playing a violin which he carried, and receiving in return a small subscription from the company for his pains. At this period Bowie's Bunk was a thing of the past. Bancroft had taken flight, on some nefarious doings having been made public, and another proprietor rented the tavern, conducting it on lines more respectable and legitimate. Few seafaring men, and none

of the old school, used to patronise it now. The centre of attraction had moved more southward, and in these localities the blind man was generally to be found. After making his customary round among the taverns he then proceeded to a notable singing saloon in Frederick-street, where his musical talents were specially retained for the edification of the boisterous frequenters there. This place was a nightly rendezvous for roughs, sailors, loafers, thieves, and ladies of questionable reputation. Here until the early hours of morning they used to cheat the fleeting time with numerous songs, dances, and recitations, in which the blind man and his fiddle did duty as the orchestra. There was no stint to the drink consumed on both sides. The clatter of pots and glasses, the frequent calls for the waiter, the huzzas, oaths, and maudlin ejaculations of the inebriates, in addition to the rattle of the chairman's hammer, and his stentorian voice commanding silence, as Mr. or Miss So-and-so was going to oblige the company with a song, completed a concert of din and discord that may be better imagined than described. But amongst this hilarious assemblage there were several dark and sinister individuals that usually sat apart, whispering among themselves; sometimes glancing meaningly from one to the other, as some sailor was particularly lavish of his money, or another paid any special attentions to the painted and simpering ladies of their acquaintance. When the night wore on and the company began to disperse, several of these fellows remained behind, and, when the place became deserted they would throw off all restraint, and talk aloud about their plans and doings, with careless indifference as to the presence of the musician. This individual usually sat still and motionless as a statue when he was not playing, and appeared to take no interest whatever in what was going on around him.

On a certain night in January, before the general company had began to assemble, a thick set, rough looking fellow, with something of the gait and appearance of the sailor about

him, lounged carelessly into the place, and sat himself down beside the only other individual there, except the musician who had already arrived. There was a small space partitioned off where the latter used to sit, so that to the ordinary occupant of the saloon his presence would be overlooked. After ordering in drinks, the newcomer, being an old acquaintance of the others, commenced at once a confidential chat intended only for his friend's ear, but loud enough to be heard in all its details by the silent musician. There was something particularly harsh and strident in the speaker's voice, and now and then his conversation was momentarily interrupted by a painful habit he had of stammering.

"Look you here, mate," observed he with a significant nod, "there's a craft in the offing that I mean to overhaul before the morning. The prize is not over tempting, but times are bad, and a fellow has to be satisfied with small mercies nowadays. Just give me your ear a moment, and I'll spin you the whole yarn. Well, in the first place, there's a gent—a millionaire from Jamaica—who has just landed from one of the West Indiamen. A sailor friend of mine aboard informs me that he has come over to Liverpool to hunt up an old chum of his that's missing. Now, would you believe it, this swell from Jamaica and the chum he is seeking for are both old acquaintances of mine. Ha! ha! ha! Poor Dick Kirby—you remember Dick?—had the agreeable duty of fleecing the former of them chaps out of a good round sum at cards. The little game was detected, and a sham duel resulted. Dick pretended to be shot, and we frightened the other party out of England, under the idea that he would be hung if caught, and then we set about spending the money among ourselves in a truly royal manner. But it did not end there; the other chap—the fellow that is now missing—came to the old Bunk and openly accused Kirby and me of having robbed his mate. Let me see, what was his name—ay, Browning—Roger Browning. Well,

a bit of a tussle ensued and—curse him, he gave me the heaviest blow ever I received in my life. I have never had the same power in my left arm since. But I was evens with him afterwards, I got a drive at him with this, (showing his iron clad stump) and he was carried feet foremost, out of the old Bunk. I tell you all this by way of leading up to the little game I have hatched for execution to-night. Well, I got my missus to send a letter to this Roger Browning, telling him that she is prepared to take him to where his friend is, if he meets her at a certain place on the Walton-road at ten o'clock to-night. He is to come alone, and keep the whole thing a secret, or she will decline to fulfil her promise."

"Do you know where his pal hangs out?" observed the other.

"Know! I wish to heaven I did," exclaimed the speaker fiercely, "I'd soon make a pretty sight of him before I introduced them. Look here, mate, I owe that fellow an eternal grudge, and if we ever fall foul of each other there'll be a man less in the world."

"Well, go on; let us see what you're about," said the companion. "Perhaps you expect this Browning will bring coin along with him?"

"No, you are out of it altogether—Is it likely he'd bring any amount of money on an errand like that? What I want to finger is a splendid diamond ring which he wears. The ring is of fabulous value; he used to wear it when he was here before, and Kirby and I had a covetous eye to it, but could never manage to get it. A Jew once told me that it was worth five-hundred guineas. I happened to meet him an hour ago, and sure enough the same ring is on his finger. He did not recognise me, and I wasn't particularly anxious that he should, but, as soon as I twigged the ring my mind was made up. I have just got my missus to write the letter, and have it delivered at his hotel."

"It's a serious move, Byrd, but I hope you may get safely through it. How are you to dispose of the ring if you get it?"

"Leave that to me, that's easy enough. I have all my plans arranged for that business. All I want is to get hold of it, and the rest is easily done."

"It may be a tough job to get hold of it, though," observed the other, "he is not unlikely to be well armed against surprise and danger."

"Yes, yes, I am prepared for that too; I have taken everything into consideration." Here he touched something significantly bulky in the pocket of his coat.

"Be careful of bloodshed, Byrd; you're inclined to be rash when excited. The big wigs are terrible severe on that sort of thing nowadays. You know the final scene in the play — a long rope and a short shrift."

"If there's any bloodshed the fault will be his," remarked Byrd. "The diamond ring I mean to have, and will have, at all costs."

At this point there was a slight noise behind the partition where the musician was seated. Byrd instantly sprang to his feet, and glanced fiercely at his companion."

"What's that? Why the——didn't you tell tell me there was someone here?"

"Be easy, man, its only the daft fiddler," said the other, "he's blind, deaf, and I believe dumb, no one ever takes any notice of him."

But Byrd was by no means reassured, and stepping quickly forward he glanced round the intervening partition. The musician was seated before a small table with his head bowed between his hands, as though in a sound sleep. The ruffian gazed at him for a moment, as if uncertain whether to shake him or not, but feeling convinced that he was really asleep and not shamming, he turned away, and went back to his companion.

"I must be at the turn o' the road this side of Walton Church before ten o'clock, so I have no time to lose," said he. "I will see you later on, and tell you the result. Keep your eye on that lubber that's sleeping yonder, I'm by no means satisfied about him."

The other laughed and shook his head indifferently. "You have nothing to fear in that quarter, Byrd, he knows as much of what you said as this here table before me."

CHAPTER V.

Roger Browning was agreeably surprised to receive the anonymous letter offering to take him to his missing friend. He entertained no doubt or suspicion regarding it, and readily made up his mind to follow the instructions given. The writing was in a female hand, though evidently written by an illiterate person, and as there was no reward mentioned or conditions stipulated for, save secrecy, he saw no reason to consider it otherwise than *bona fide*. As to his correspondent's knowledge of the object of his errand, that was easily enough explained—he had made no secret of the matter from the first—advertised repeatedly in the papers about it, and during his voyage to Liverpool he had freely conversed with the passengers and sailors on the subject. No doubt it seemed strange that his friend was so difficult to find, but from the purport of the letter it was evident he did not desire a renewal of their acquaintance, and hence the condition of secrecy stipulated for by his correspondent. Perhaps she was some servant in his friend's employ, and was afraid of incurring his displeasure by what she had offered to do. In any case he was satisfied that the letter was genuine, and would have no hesitation in keeping the appointment.

When the time for the interview approached, he hired a vehicle to take him part of the way, and then dismissed it, and made the rest of the journey on foot. He was to recognise his correspondent by certain signs (not mentioned by Byrd in his conversation) and he had only to proceed along the road until he overtook a female who would make the necessary signals. He was greatly overjoyed at the prospect of

meeting his old friend again, and did not doubt his ability to remove any feeling of bitterness or injustice that might still linger in his breast. The time that had elapsed only endeared more and more the memory of that true friend, his words of wisdom and brotherly advice, the noble manliness and integrity of his character, and the unfulfilled hopes and ambition that they had so confidentially discussed together. Roger's generous nature saw and acknowledged his own culpability for all the misfortunes that had overtaken his friend, but now he would show him that his heart was in the right place—that he was true at the core—that he was prepared to do all that now lay in his power to remedy the injustice of the past.

While he was proceeding along the road thinking thus of his friend and the past, some quarter of a mile in advance of him a man and woman were walking in the same direction. The man was Morgan Byrd, and he appeared to be instructing the woman how she was to act, and with many brutal phrases and threatening oaths, he impressed on her the importance of what they were about to do, and that if they failed in the undertaking the fault would be undoubtedly hers. If she did not follow his instructions to the letter, she knew what to expect when they met again. She was to take the stranger from the high road, and lead him across the fields to the left, towards an old, disused barn that stood some distance off. She was then to leave him there, and he would do the rest. After imparting his instructions, Byrd quitted the woman's side, while she remained standing at the spot, waiting the the arrival of the expected stranger.

It was not long before the sound of approaching footsteps were heard, and shortly afterwards a gentleman appeared, coming from the direction of Liverpool. As soon as the figure advanced close enough, she dropped a white handkerchief, and coughed slightly to attract attention. This was the signal, which Roger understood, as he immediately crossed the road, and came over towards the woman.

Thanking her for her punctuality, and the information which she had volunteered to give, he promised to reward her handsomely after the meeting between himself and his friend took place. She made no answer to anything he said, and it was evident that she did not wish to be entrapped into conversation. The night, though cold, was clear and bright, but she was so closely muffled up, and her face so concealed, that he could not quite make out whether she was a lady or a menial. However, he could see that she did not wish to be recognised, and without endeavouring to satisfy his curiosity further, he at once informed her that he was at her disposal. At this she beckoned him to follow her, and then led the way along a bridle path that crossed some fields in the direction of Bootle. They had not been many minutes gone, when the blind musician, accompanied by a boy, came running along the road panting, and out of breath.

"Where are we now—where are we now?" interrogated the blind man anxiously as they reached the spot where the bridle-path commenced. "It is already past the time I fear, and we may be too late after all."

"This is the turn of the road you mentioned," said the boy, "and yonder is Walton Church."

"Look about you then, and try if you can see anyone. This is the place I heard him mention. You say the night is clear and bright, so you'll have no difficulty in seeing if anyone is in the vicinity."

The boy looked carefully about, but could see no one. He left the blind man's side, and proceeded some distance towards the church, examining the road cautiously as he went. In the meantime the musician exhibited considerable nervousness and anxiety; he gave expression to repeated sighs and groans, while he muttered hurriedly to himself, "I feared this from the first — I suspected I would be too late. The time lost in apprising the constables, and finding a boy to guide me has been fatal. Oh, God! what must I

do to save the life of my friend?" Here the boy returned to his side, and informed him that there was no sign of any one about. At this he staggered back a step or two, and appeared to tremble from head to foot. He was completely paralyzed by the terrible apprehensions that seized upon him. When the ruffian he had pursued for years was within his grasp, the same ill luck that dogged him through life interposed, and defeated his purpose. Roger Browning would be incautious enough to wear the ring, and he would not part with it save at the cost of his life. The result could easily be imagined. As he stood there with his arms outstretched and his face turned upward, as though appealing in his despair to heaven, the boy gazed on him with fear and terror, and felt half inclined to give him the slip and retrace his steps to Liverpool. All at once, in the profound silence that reigned, something seemed to strike on the ear of the distracted man, he instantly started from his position, and whispered aloud to the lad.

"Here, boy—quick, quick. I hear the sound of footsteps, a cough yonder. Look in that direction, and tell me if you see a figure." He pointed towards the bridle path which Roger and the woman had taken. A sharp, crisp frost had hardened the ground, and the sound of distant footsteps might readily be distinguished by the keen sense of hearing that blind people are generally gifted with."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, "I think I see something moving down the by-path that leads to Bootle. The moon has just risen, and I can see a good distance now. Yes, sir, I am certain, there are two figures there—about two hundred yards distant."

"Thank God!" ejaculated the other piously; "we may be in time yet. Where is this by-path?" give me your hand and lead me after them."

"We are close beside it, sir; here is the stile, be careful of the steps."

"Good boy, good boy," said the blind man repeatedly; "your services have been invaluable

to me to-night. I shall reward you well when it is over."

His hand felt deadly cold as he grasped that of the boy, but his step was firm and elastic. He hurried forward almost joyously in pursuit of the retreating forms.

"You must return by this pathway again," said he, "the constables will be here shortly, and they will remain on the road until you come. I will show you where you are to bring them."

In the meantime Roger and his companion had made their way to the old barn, which stood a little distance to the north of the bye path. It was a tumble-down, roofless building, deserted for all useful purposes, and occupied a very solitary and unfrequented spot on some waste land. When they reached this place the woman led him into the interior, and then told him to remain a short time there until she returned. Immediately after the woman's departure, a man emerged from a dark corner of the building and suddenly approached him. For the first time a suspicion crossed the merchant's mind, and he drew back towards the doorway in order to get a better view of the unknown figure. Quick, however, as he was, the other reached the doorway first, and barred his further retreat.

"Who are you, and what does this mean?" said Roger, beginning to feel that his indiscreet credulity had led him into a trap.

"I want no words with you," replied the other, in a harsh, low whisper, "If you value your life give me that diamond ring you wear."

The diamond ring sure enough was gleaming on his finger. A trinket of great value, both from intrinsic worth and association, in fact, a priceless heirloom of the family that money could scarcely buy. Sooner than part with it Roger would peril his life a hundred times. Before answering at once he glanced quickly around to take the bearings of his position. With his natural carelessness he had come away unarmed, and, it was highly probable that the man who confronted him had not followed his example. There was no other help for it but to trust to his physical powers, and make a desperate effort for

his life. He was strong and active, and barring deadly weapons could take his own part.

"What! have I been entrapped here to be robbed and murdered. Never while I have an arm to defend myself shall you possess the trinket you covet."

He had scarcely uttered the words before he sprang suddenly forward, but the Cuban pirate had anticipated him, and dealt him a blow with the fatal forearm that sent him reeling across the shed. Following this up with another well-directed blow, he presently hurled him to the ground completely helpless and unconscious. In the excitement of the moment the victor failed to notice the hurried approach of footsteps close behind him. The moon was now shining brightly, and the figures of the two men in the roofless barn were fully defined. All at once the boy's voice, like the knell of doom, smote upon his ear.

"There he is before you—two paces distant, the other is lying dead upon the floor."

Before Byrd had time to face around and defend himself, he was seized with a grip of iron by the infuriated blind man. With a strange unnatural cry—more like the shriek of a madman—his assailant tightened the grip about his throat, and forced his body forward toward the opposite wall. A terrible struggle hereupon ensued, both men were powerful and muscular, but the half insane fury of the musician gave him a decided advantage from the first over his amazed opponent. While they writhed and struggled fiercely, he shrieked out at the top of his voice—"Morgan Byrd, robber and murderer! I have you now. I got your confrére transported two years ago, I shall get you hanged! You deprived me of my eyesight by a treacherous blow once, I shall soon shut out the light of the world to you for ever!"

It was in vain that the powerful ruffian contended against his desperate adversary; he was almost suffocated by the terrible grip upon his throat, and his most formidable weapon, the iron clamped arm was rendered useless by the position in which he was held. The end was

not far distant; after one superhuman effort to shake himself free, his mind became confused and unconscious; the unrelaxed pressure on his throat told its tale; like a heap of inert matter he rolled to the feet of his antagonist. and lay there, helpless and overpowered, an easy prisoner to the victorious musician.

At this moment two constables entered the barn accompanied by the boy. They quickly secured the exhausted Byrd, and had him lodged in prison that night. He was a notorious malefactor, and several cases of murder, in which he had played the leading part, were charged against him at his trial. He was sentenced to be hanged, and paid the penalty of his numerous crimes some time afterwards.

When the conflict was over, the blind man was led to the side of the injured merchant. He lifted him into a recumbent position, and dispatched the boy and some strangers, who had now arrived, to find a doctor and to procure what restoratives could be obtained. It was not long before Roger Browning was fully restored to himself again; he was greatly delighted to discover his long-lost friend in the person of the blind musician, and to whose timely aid and bravery he undoubtedly owed his life.

When the newly restored friends returned to Liverpool they spent the night in talking over old times, and the changes that had taken place since they last parted. The merchant could not induce Silvester to return with him to Kingston, but he made him his principal agent here, and set him up in a commodious office with several clerks to attend on him.

The gentle, kindly blind man was a well-known figure amongst the commercial community, about sixty years ago. He lived to a good old age, but his latter years were spent in comparative seclusion. When he departed this life his remains were laid beside those of his sweetheart, Marion Gunstone.

THE SLAVE MERCHANT.

CHAPTER I.

Exactly one hundred years ago, a gentleman, named James Norton, was commissioned by one of the societies for the suppression of the slave trade to take a voyage to the coast of Guinea, and report upon what he saw there: the means employed for capturing slaves, the localities whence they were deported, and the treatment they underwent before being finally handed over to the English captain for shipment to the West Indies. It must be understood that he had to keep the object of his journey a secret from those engaged in the trade; for the agitation it was then causing throughout the country, the considerable wealth that was invested in it, and the impetus it gave to several of our own manufactures, made it incumbent on those whose interests were concerned to keep the general public in ignorance of its more brutal and inhuman practices. It was, therefore, with the ostensible object of opening a storehouse on the coast of Guinea that James Norton engaged a berth on board the schooner Jemmy, and sailed from the port of Liverpool in the early part of the year 1786.

Besides Norton, there was only another passenger on board the schooner during the outward voyage; he was a low-sized, square built, elderly gentleman, named William Meyrick, who was remarkably distant in his manner and unsociable in his disposition. He seemed to be suspicious about the nature of his fellow passenger's errand, and showed a decided inclination to avoid his society as much as possible. A little incident occurred, however, one morning which had the effect of bringing

them into closer and more friendly intercourse. It happened in this wise: While Meyrick was standing on deck reading over some important document, a sudden gust of wind whirled the paper from his hand, and carried it over the bulwarks into the sea. He made a sudden plunge forward, as though he intended following it, but, quickly recollecting that he could not swim, he turned round excitedly and shouted vigorously for help. "Save the paper! Save the paper for heaven's sake! I am a ruined man if it is lost. Is there a man on board who will recover it? I'll give him fifty pounds if he does." The other passenger happened to be the only person within hearing at the moment; he had been a witness to what had just taken place, so without any hesitation he cast off the greater part of his clothes, and made a desperate effort to regain the lost document. Fortunately the sea was tranquil at the time; so being an expert and practical swimmer he at length succeeded in recovering the lost paper for its distracted owner. From this day forth the taciturn Meyrick became the most sociable and agreeable of companions. The reward of fifty pounds was not claimed by Norton; and the other, no doubt, from interested motives, saw no reason why he should refer to the matter again.

Many of the Liverpool merchants engaged in the slave traffic were largely interested in other branches of commerce. This, however, was not the case with William Meyrick. The slave trade was the only line of business he followed; it absorbed all the faculties of his busy brain, and all the capital which he had at his disposal. He was a remarkable character in his way; outside his own business there was nothing to interest or attract him in the world; he was as indifferent to the doings and movements of his fellowmen as if they belonged to an entirely different race of beings altogether. Existence had but one grave and solemn claim upon him, and that was to use the energies of his mind and body towards the advancement of his own interests. Still, despite his successful trading, and the

considerable wealth he had already amassed, there was ever a grim and threatening spectre that hovered near him; it chilled and affrighted him in vague warnings about possible eventualities in the future; it became, in the course of time, the very terror of his life and the ready incentive to all the worst actions which he committed. This vague, undefined, impalpable something was nothing else than the gaunt spectre of poverty. It was seldom absent from his mind, ever freezing up the better channels and impulses of his heart; in fact the sole agency that held undisputed swayover all the considerations and incidents of his mercantile life.

One evening, when the voyage was drawing towards its close, the two passengers had a longer chat than usual together, the elder in particular taking a more than ordinary interest in the subject they discussed. They were seated on deck looking at the low line of African coast in the distance, the almost moveless expanse of ocean that spread around them, the large number of ships that were lying at anchor in the roadstead, with smaller craft passing regularly to and fro between these and the coast; overhead a fiery, copper-coloured sky extended, the atmosphere was as dull, heavy, and oppressive as that in the neighbourhood of some immense furnace, whilst away where the sun had just disappeared a crimson sheet of light illumined the surrounding heavens.

"Henceforth our walks in life will be different, and with the termination of our journey we may not meet again for years."

The younger man spoke thus, as he contemplated with a curious eye the strange and foreign scene before him.

The other glanced keenly at the speaker for some seconds, and then replied in a tone of voice that suggested suspicion,

"Why, I thought you were going to open a store out here? At least that is what you led me to believe."

"Well, yes, that was my intention at first, but I begin to fear the climate may not agree with

me; and, besides, after what you have told me it is very evident that my little capital will be too limited for the purpose."

"As far as I can judge your health appears right enough," said the merchant, taking another steady look at him; "but how about your general habits? Are you given to drink and that sort of thing?"

"On the contrary I am almost a total abstainer," returned Norton.

"If that is the case then I see no reason why the climate should disagree with you. What is the amount of money you have, if I may ask that question?"

For a moment the other hesitated before answering this plain question, but seeing no necessity for reticence on the point he immediately replied.

"Only a matter of two or three hundred pounds; a trifling sum to begin life with."

"Young man, the value of money does not consist so much in the quantity, as in the profitable uses you apply it to," said the merchant sententiously.

"If I do not decide to open a store here," continued Norton, "I must get away to America where there will be more scope and opportunity for a person in my position."

"Look here, mister," observed the other, after reflecting for some time, "I have been turning something over in my mind these last few days, and if it should fit in with your ideas, I see no reason why it cannot be put into practice. I told you what my business was, I think, but I did not inform you the purpose of my journey to these parts."

Norton nodded his head to signify that this was correct.

"Well, then I'll tell you what brought me here. I have come to dismiss some of the fellows looking after my business, and I am now open to engage a managing man, an honest, careful, steady party, who will look after my interests in the future, and relieve me of all anxiety and bother about this part of my business. Would I be wrong, young man, to offer you such a position?"

The other shook his head diffidently, and replied, "I have no experience or knowledge of the duties whatever, Mr. Meyrick."

"That can be easily settled if other things are satisfactory," said the elder man, again casting a suspicious and penetrating look at him; "I can make the duties as clear as the noonday sun, and as simple as eating and drinking. I confess I have taken a liking to you, mister; I can see you are shrewd and sensible enough to know when your bread is buttered. Now the man I want must be a sort of automatic figure; he must move, act, and think only when I touch the springs, he must forget, as all good and proper servants should, his own personal interests and ambitions, and render himself mind and body to the service of his employer."

Here the speaker paused for a few seconds looking at the same time steadily at the listener.

"Again," he proceeded, "the man I want must have firmness of character and determination of will. He must be tainted with none of that maudlin sentimentality which is becoming such a nuisance and danger in England at the present day. I think you will understand what I refer to here. It is nothing but robbery, injustice, and vengeance under the garb of religion and humanity. Pshaw! the intermeddling fools and humbugs that have raised this agitation are only committing an injury on the race they pretend to benefit. But I will say no more on this head now. My advice to you is to leave religion and all that sort of thing behind you in England. It is well enough there where people can practice it, but out here, in these barbarous regions, it is at a discount, and no one ever bothers his head about it. Now the position I refer to is one of great confidence and authority; in my absence there is no one to gainsay your orders, and you will be made acquainted with all the inner workings and secrets of my business. It may appear strange that I should offer such a position to a comparative stranger, but, never mind that, I have a way of my own in doing these things, and, as I

just said a while ago, I have taken a liking to you. Now as to references in Liverpool—these of course I can inquire into on my return—but what is to be done about the security I shall require? Don't interrupt me, mister, I shall have finished in a moment. You say you have only two or three hundred pounds. Well, under the circumstances I shall be willing to accept that as a guarantee for your conduct while in my service. There will be an agreement drawn up between us, specifying your duties, and the salary I am prepared to give, and everything shall be lawfully done to protect either of us in the event of one of the party failing to carry out the terms of the agreement. Now I have done. Let me hear what you have to say on the subject?"

Norton, who was inclined to treat the proposal as a joke at first, now began to take a more serious and practical view of it, not however with the intention of entering the service of Mr. Meyrick. A happy thought had occurred to him. If he could get his would-be master to give him a few weeks to consider the proposal, he would be enabled to utilize the interval by making such inquiries and investigations into the slave traffic as would be of invaluable assistance to him in the fulfilment of the mission upon which he had come. There could be no doubt that, as the friend and possible servant of the merchant, he would be permitted to see the inner workings and details of the system, which as a stranger and new comer would be carefully and pertinaciously hidden from him. Therefore, without binding himself to anything positive in the future, he determined to make a bold stroke by attempting to carry out this idea.

"Your kind offer is so unexpected, Mr. Meyrick, that I am at a loss to know how to answer it," said he. "If, however, you would give me a few weeks to consider I should be able to give you a definite answer."

"A few weeks—humph! Let me know exactly how long it will take you to make up your mind?"

"Well, a month would be amply sufficient. I

should like to look about me a little, learn something of the duties that will be required of me, and see the effect of the climate upon my constitution before entering into any permanent engagement."

"Very well, a month then be it," replied the other, "I have a party coming here from Liverpool to fill the post, but I would rather give it to you for certain reasons that have occurred to me. I'll tell some of those fellows yonder (pointing shoreward) to take you in hand, and show you over the place."

The day following this interview the two passengers and some sailors got into one of the boats, and pulled towards the shores of the dark Continent. The moment Norton's foot touched land a strange and unaccountable feeling of sadness and dejection took possession of him. It was not produced by anything that met his view just then, for at the spot where they landed there was nothing but sand and shingle to be seen. But, no doubt, the terrible crimes that were being committed in this land, under the name of commerce and through the agency of English money, appealed to the better nature of a humane and high spirited man, and made him feel sad and humiliated over the leading part which his own liberty loving countrymen were taking in the demoralizing business. Shortly after landing they proceeded some distance up the beach and came to an irregular group of wooden huts, and a few roughly constructed stone buildings, and several covered sheds or slave-pens; where every evidence of the trade carried on was unmistakably apparent. There were few of the manacled negroes to be seen at the time, but this was owing to a great scarcity of the supply just then, and to the fact that some of the vessels standing off the coast had just received their cargoes.

The merchant beckoned to a sort of nondescript individual who appeared to be lounging about, and after giving him some confidential instructions in an undertone, he commended him to his fellow-passenger, Norton, telling the

latter that this man would show him over the neighbourhood, and enlighten him to some extent on several of the duties connected with the subject of their last night's conversation.

When Norton and his new guide were left alone, the former was somewhat astonished to find himself addressed in the following manner:—

"It is evident you do not recognise me, Mr. Norton."

That gentleman looked very hard at the speaker for a moment, and then confessed his inability to remember having seen him before.

"Can you see no trace of Harry Johnson in the individual before you?" said the man looking him straight in the face.

"Bless my soul! can it be possible," exclaimed Norton, thoroughly amazed. "I should never have recognised you, Johnson, if you had not called my attention to it. What a metamorphosis to be sure!"

"Ah, it's a miracle that I am alive at all, sir; few men would have gone through what I have and be now standing before you."

"Yes, I can see you have had a rough time of it," remarked the other, noticing his injured leg and a great scar traversing his face. "But what in the world induced you to leave the more respectable branches of the service for such a place as this?"

"Alas! Mr. Norton, the old story—the temptation, and company that surround the unfortunate sailor when ashore. I fell into the power of the crimps, and had to sign articles for a voyage on board a slaver to this God-forsaken place."

"You indeed surprise me, Johnson; I thought you the last person in the world to be guilty of such imprudence."

"Ay, ay, sir, but it was not altogether imprudence in my case; I was the victim of that system of kidnapping sailors which is largely practised by the Liverpool merchants; you perhaps know what I mean?"

Norton shook his head, signifying ignorance on the point, and the other proceeded to explain it more fully.

"You see, sir, all the merchants connected with this trade have a number of subsidized coffee-houses in Liverpool. Coffee-houses forsooth! it would be more correct to call them drinking dens and haunts of debauchery. Well, when a sailor is paid off he is induced, by fellows in the merchant's employ, to put up at one of these places for board and lodging. While there, he is continually thrown into the company of these rascals, who spend heaps of money in drink and harum-scarum living, and, as a natural consequence, induce the poor Jack Tar to spend his hard-earned money in return. This goes on for some time until the sailor's funds become exhausted, and then he falls gradually into the trap prepared for him—he becomes indebted to the landlord of the coffee-house. When this point has been reached he is rudely made aware of the position in which he stands: he is threatened with immediate imprisonment for debt or the alternative to take service in a Guineaman that is in want of hands. You are doubtless aware that no ordinary seaman would dream of joining the crew of one of those vessels. The terrible privations and severities they would have to undergo, and the belief that they would never again return to England make the most venturesome of them hesitate before shipping in a slaver. I can speak from experience, and I honestly confess that all the blood-curdling stories of the sailors have fallen far short of the terrible atrocities that I have witnessed with my own eyes. Indeed, what I have seen and know of this trade has almost eradicated any faith I had in the immortal instincts of man; I begin to look upon the whole human species as more closely allied to the ravening beast of prey than your philosophers or theologians would be willing to admit."

"That is a very sad conclusion to come to, Johnson, but no doubt your surroundings here, and the misfortunes and sufferings you have encountered embitter your mind against certain individuals. I am very sorry for your present position, when I remember the education you

have received, and the bright prospects that were once before you."

"Ah! if I dared tell you all that I have seen you would readily acknowledge the great reason I have for coming to that conclusion."

"Dare! why, what is there to be afraid of, Johnson?" inquired the other, looking suddenly at him.

"Well, Mr. Meyrick informs me that if your health keeps right you are certain to be our next overseer here. In the heat of the subject I quite overlooked that fact, so you will forgive me if I have said anything to annoy or displease you."

Norton smiled to himself at this, but still determined neither to deny nor confirm the statement until he became better acquainted with the present character of his former friend.

"Would you like to see me installed here as manager or overseer?" interrogated he with an inquisitive look at his companion.

The man's eyes flashed fire, and his brow became overcast at once.

"No, sir, I would not, and that is the plain truth."

"And why, pray? Would I not be as lenient and forbearing as the general run of such fellows?"

"You mistake me, Mr. Norton, it is for quite a different reason altogether. A gentleman like you to become the servant of—of—by heavens I cannot keep it in, if I was to be hanged for it I'll tell the truth—of one of the most brutal and miserly wretches that walks on the face of the earth. Yes, I mean that dark-browed, tyrannical slave merchant who has just left us. Surely you do not know the character of the man or you would never condescend to exchange words with him, much less to demean yourself by entering his service. But what am I saying, perhaps like myself you have fallen into the hands of the crimps, or, worse luck, some disaster in money matters has driven you to this."

James Norton quickly seized the other's hand, and then said,

"I thank you for what you say, Johnson. I

have no intention of entering the employment of the person you name, in fact, I have come out here on a very different errand. But for the present we'll say no more about it."

"I understand, sir, mum is the word. I would not wish the bitterest enemy I have to be under the authority of that detestable old villain. You see this broken leg, and this scar across my face, and my strangely altered and emaciated appearance? Well, I have to thank that fellow and his brutal myrmidons for these, and for all that has happened to me during the last five years. When you last saw me in Liverpool I was strong, healthy, and vigorous, but look at me now. Did you ever see such a human wreck in all your life? Ah! I can see the answer you would give in your eyes. I am only one out of thousands that the respectable Liverpool merchants decoy into their coffee houses, and ship out here to meet a similar or even worse fate than mine."

"I heard something before about this practice," remarked Norton, "but I never knew it was carried on in such a wholesale manner."

"Because they take good care the poor sailor shall never return to tell the tale. The captains, mates, and doctors are in league with the traders in keeping the general public from knowing the real facts. What with the agitation at present going on against the trade, and the high rate of wages which these fellows receive, it would be manifestly against their interests to let the workings of the system be brought to light. The sailors are positively starved and tortured on the passage out; so when the vessel reaches Jamaica, Antigua or any of the islands, they are only too glad to find an opportunity of deserting the ship, and all their hard earned wages as a consequence goes into the pockets of the traders and captains. There is wonderful method in the whole proceedings; by starving and overworking the sailors the expenses of the trip are kept down, by forcing them through ill usage to desert, their wages go to increase the profits on the cargo, and also to remove any tell-tale witnesses of the brutality practised towards the unfortunate

negroes. But what can you expect from natures familiarized with the inhuman associations of the slave trade! Look here, Mr. Norton, if that trade is allowed to continue much longer, the fellows that are connected with it will become transformed into the fabled monsters that are written of in ancient books, and even now, in my opinion, there is no monster ancient or modern that can compare with that cold hearted, feelingless villain, who has been the means of wrecking my life, and leaving me for the rest of my days without home, happiness, or comfort of any kind. But wait—he that laughs last, laughs best—my turn has yet to come."

At this moment our two friends came upon a knot of black brokers and Europeans earnestly discussing some subject of evident interest to them. They turned at once on seeing the newcomer in company with Johnson, and exchanged several meaning and sinister glances amongst themselves. Strange rumours were being bruited abroad about the probable abolition of their trade, and the appearance of a new face among them, gave rise to all manner of suspicion and uneasiness. They had no reason to suspect or doubt Johnson's character, but they were somewhat disturbed at the personal appearance of the stranger, and the sad and sympathetic expression which his face betrayed. He was altogether a different class of man to what they were accustomed to meet with in those parts. With the cunning and shrewdness of quick witted, ignorant men they were seldom mistaken in summing up the character of a stranger, and the impression which Norton's conveyed was anything but satisfactory to them. The power which the trades exercised on the coast of Guinea was something similar to that which the East India Company wielded over our Asiatic possessions at an early stage of their existence. There was no one to dispute their authority; and the occasional visit of a ship of war, with the formal inquiries of the officers sent ashore, gave them little uneasiness or apprehension. It

will, therefore, be seen that the errand upon which Norton had come was surrounded with considerable risk and danger. Woe to the intruder who was discovered sailing under false colours; the entire community would rise like one man, and quickly make an example of him.

When the two friends had been wandering about the locality for some time, they at length approached an ill-constructed wooden shanty which was situated at some distance from the village proper.

"Yonder palatial dwelling belongs to a notable character in these parts," said Johnson, pointing out the shanty to his companion, "no less a personage than his serene highness, Prince Nemma-nemma."

"Indeed; there do not appear many vestiges of royalty about the miserable abode. Where are his chieftains, spearmen, and retainers?"

"Oh, he is one of the discrowned and banished potentates; he has neither territory nor followers now, but he is, nevertheless, a most intelligent and noble fellow, yes, although he is a black man and a heathen."

"You greatly interest me," said the other; "I must make it a point of being introduced to this royal personage."

"You shall have that opportunity when we reach the abode, that is, if his highness is at home. In the meantime I'll give you a short sketch of the tribe he belongs to, which may be of use to you hereafter. The Fantees are an intelligent and vigorous people inhabiting one of the provinces on the coast. Their king, an enlightened and powerful monarch, sets his face against the slave trade, and will not permit any of his subjects to be sold into slavery. When the captain of a slaver happens to run short of hands he invariably anchors off their coast, and applies for a certain number of the tribe to take the place of his missing crew. This request is only complied with on one condition, and that is, that none of the Fantees are to be removed from the country. On the king receiving an agreement to this effect, countersigned by the

English Governor, the people are allowed to go, but not till then. The Fantees as a rule speak English and sometimes French, with great fluency, owing, in a great measure to the intercourse they have with the Europeans that frequent their coast. With regard to our prince here, he is even more intelligent and civilized than the general run of his countrymen. He acts as our interpreter, and knows all the gibberish spoken for miles around. But come, we are at the royal residence now; let us next see if his serene Highness is at home."

As soon as they reached the doorway of the shanty, a tall ascetic looking negro came forth, and saluted them with a respectful though distant bow. Johnson at once introduced his companion, intimating with a significant nod to the prince that he was one of the right sort; whereupon the reserved and cautious manner of the latter changed immediately, and he made himself as pleasant and agreeable to the visitor as it was in his nature to be. It was evident that the encomiums passed upon him by Johnson were neither exaggerated nor undeserved, but still there was something in the sternness of his character, and the repeated expressions he made use of that seemed to jar unpleasantly on the mind of Norton. He appeared to be one of those men of a single purpose, with all the efforts of his mind concentrated on some object he had in view, and exhibited no enthusiasm or interest in anything else. In short he had the mental grasp and penetration of a highly gifted pagan, but not a spark of the humanizing influence which Christianity imparts.

After they had talked together for sometime, the Dutch like figure of the merchant could be seen approaching, and Johnson at once called the black man's attention to the fact.

"Here is the great man himself coming to see you, Nemma-nemma. He landed this morning, and is taking his rounds to see everything is going on all right. You must bow low when he approaches, and kiss the ground three times before attempting to address him."

A haughty and disdainful frown was the only reply to this, and Johnson continued in the same vein.

"You have often wished to see the mighty white man in the flesh, you now have the satisfaction of gratifying your curiosity. He is not exactly a Hercules nor an Apollo in form and symmetry, but he has an imperial heart within his breast—the heart of a Nero. Look at him as he comes along with his swinging gait; can you not see the cringing mate, the brutal captain, and the money grabbing trader, all rolled into one."

Before, however, Meyrick had reached the hut, the speaker notwithstanding his words limped forward with agility to meet him. "I want to see the black interpreter," said he, "is that the fellow yonder?"

"Yes, sir," replied Johnson, "shall I call him to you?"

"No, never mind, as I have come so far I may as well go the whole distance."

While the Fantee prince was being presented to the merchant the latter surveyed him with a keen and penetrating glance. It was believed from the merchant's experience of his fellow men that there were few who could equal him in comprehending the character of a stranger, but with regrad to the individual before him his knowledge of human nature afforded him no assistance in forming an opinion. Standing erect and imperturbable the Fantee appeared more like a piece of mechanism than a human being. With a command of his feelings that the Stoics would have envied, he withstood the severest scrutiny of the other. At length, somewhat doubtful and perplexed, the merchant withdrew his glance, and directed Nemma-nemma to proceed at once to his office, as he wanted to confer with him. Then turning towards Norton, he said—"Well, what do you think of these quarters, mister? you will find things very different here to what you have been accustomed to in England. I hope Johnson is doing what he can to show and explain everything to you?"

"Oh, yes, he is endeavouring to cram what he can into my head during the short time we have been together."

"That's right, that's right. I want you to see all that is going on about the place, you will soon fall into the ways after being here a few weeks. I am sending a party up the country to-morrow—would you like to join it?"

"Thank you, nothing would give me greater pleasure," said Norton.

"Very well, I will give instructions for you to go. The supply of slaves is running short in this locality, and I have three ships lying out yonder waiting for cargo. I must find slaves for them at any cost, so I am sending out an expeditionary party for the purpose."

Here he dismissed Johnson about his business and asked Norton to accompany him back to the office.

"When I have finished with the black interpreter, I will show you over my warehouses, and instruct you in the various articles of merchandise I import here. You must never make too free with the fellows hereabouts, you will have to play the tyrant with them by and bye. No man can ever rule his fellow men without first making them afraid of him."

And so conversing together they both proceeded slowly in the direction of the place mentioned.

CHAPTER II.

Next morning the men selected for the expedition were early afoot, making preparations for their journey inland. They consisted of black brokers and traders with samples of English merchandize, Europeans who represented the owners of the vessels lying off the coast, and several sinister and Herculean natives who were specially retained to look after the slaves and have them expeditiously conveyed to the coast. Norton and the Fantee Prince took their places

amongst this motley company, the former pleased at the opportunity afforded him of being an eye witness to the dealings contemplated, and the latter appointed for the purpose of acting as interpreter between the English merchants and the chieftains in the interior. Meyrick was present himself, superintending all the preparations, and giving instructions to the leaders of the party as to how they were to act, and the value to be offered in barter for the slaves captured.

When everything was got in readiness, and the party at length started on their journey, the old merchant retired to his private office, well pleased with the completeness of his plans and the manner in which the whole thing had been carried out. Singular to say, he was in a wonderfully good temper this morning. The mail had just arrived from England, bringing him a large number of letters and despatches, and these were evidently of a most agreeable and satisfactory nature. It was a phenomenon to see this stern-visaged man smile, but sure enough he smiled and laughed and cracked an occasional joke this morning, and altogether conducted himself in such a manner as to puzzle and astonish his employèes. The fact was he had just received a letter from his son Walter, the pride of his heart and the apple of his eye, and the only living being who had any place in the affections and thoughts of his hardened and exclusive nature. All the wishes of his heart and the efforts of his mind were centred in this young man, and the niggard hand that clutched closely the purse strings was freely opened to supply his every want, and to gratify his most capricious fancies and desires. He alone was the recipient of all that proceeded from the better qualities of his parent; no expense had been spared to give him the best education that could be acquired, and to afford him every opportunity of associating with the higher and *elite* classes in England. He had just completed his course of studies at Cambridge, where he distinguished himself by carrying off several prizes, and it was now his intention, by way of putting the finishing touch to

his education, to enter on a round of travel through Europe. All this was set forth in the letter he had written to his father. That gentleman, notwithstanding the great expense it would entail, saw no reason to oppose his son's wishes, especially as it was considered a *sine quâ non* to the completeness of his education, and in accordance with the established practice of the better class of young gentlemen of the day. But what seemed to tickle him more than anything else was a request which his son had made. It was a most singular request, and showed the ambitious aims and love of notoriety which animated young Walter. It pleased and amused the merchant immensely, and made him laugh and chuckle to himself over its novelty and originality. The fact was he asked his father to send him home to England an intelligent, full grown negro, the best looking that could be procured, so that he might dress him up, instruct him in certain necessary duties, and appoint him to the position of body servant to accompany him in his travels through Europe. "Only imagine," wrote he, "the sensation it will cause to have a servant of this sort attending on me, the great interest and *éclat* it will confer, and the effect it will produce towards disproving all that arrant nonsense and humbug that these humanitarians are saying about the cruelties and barbarities of the slave traffic. Here will be a *bonâ fide* negro, well-dressed, well-fed, and warmly attached to the son of a slave merchant. Could anything be better conceived to take the wind out of the sails of the anti-slavery societies? Indeed, if I had my way, I'd make every gentleman in England have a nigger for a body servant; that would do more to protect the Guinea trade from interference than all the money and influence that could be brought forward in its defence. Be sure to send the nigger by the first ship sailing for Liverpool; I will rely on you choosing a good, strong, well-made fellow for me."

William Meyrick read this letter over repeatedly, and seemed more and more taken up with

the idea the oftener he pondered over it. At length he gave orders that Johnson was to be brought to him immediately. This man was a sort of confidential servant of his, he took a kind of pity on him, owing to his injured health and broken leg, and allowed him a small salary for doing any light work about the place. He was well aware as to the origin of Johnson's injuries and bad health, but he flattered himself that any hand he had in bringing them about was entirely unknown to the other. Therefore, he occasionally took him into his confidence, and endeavoured to inspire him with a feeling of gratitude and fidelity in return for the kindness and indulgence which he showed him.

When Johnson presented himself at the office, the old merchant was still smiling as pleasantly as he could, and holding his son's letter open in his hand.

"Look here, Johnson," said he, "I want to have a talk with you; there is no man better fitted than yourself to give me advice in this matter. I have just had a letter from my son Walter; you have often heard me speak of him; and what do you think he wants me to do? Why, nothing less than to send him a negro over to England. He wants to dress him up, instruct him, and make him his principal man in attendance."

"And a very good idea too, sir," remarked Johnson, entering at once into the spirit of the thing; "we have plenty of fellows here who would only be delighted to jump at the chance of going."

"Yes, yes, it is a capital idea, Johnson; just such a one as Walter would be sure to hit upon. He is full of the most original and novel fancies, and what is more there is always something useful and practical at the bottom of them. To be sure he is a great scholar, and full of book learning, and that sort of thing. He is going to travel abroad a good deal, and wants to take the black servant along with him. Now, I want you to assist me in selecting a good man for the purpose; and we can send the negro off

by the first ship sailing for England. You are a good judge of these black fellows, and the most likely party to hit upon the one that will suit him. But mind, I want the whole affair kept a secret, we can smuggle the fellow on board at night time, and no one will be the wiser of what has happened."

Johnson at once agreed to do what his master desired, and then the merchant opened the letter again, and for the twentieth time began chuckling over it to himself.

After waiting to see if he was wanted for anything else, the man was just about to leave the office when the other requested him to remain where he was, as he wished to ask him a few questions about another matter.

At last Meyrick folded the letter up, placed it away carefully in his pocket, and then the normal expression of shrewdness and cunning returned to his strongly marked features.

"I want your opinion Johnson of the gentleman who arrived here yesterday—I mean, of course, Mr. Norton?"

"He seems right enough, sir," replied the man, "about as good as the general run of such fellows."

"I received a letter from Liverpool which makes me feel uneasy and dubious regarding him. I want you to keep your eye on him in the future, tell me everything he does, and what he says about the business carried on here. Ingratiate yourself into his confidence, and find out for me the real motive he had in coming to this place. I will reward you well for all that you do in this matter."

Johnson nodded his head, but did not say anything.

"It was a mistake in allowing him to join the party this morning," continued the merchant, "but when I received the letter it was too late to interfere." He, however, added under his breath, "If I was only certain of my suspicions, I would take good care that he did not return to this place again."

During this conversation the old man kept his eyes fixed steadily on the other, as if to fathom

the thoughts that were passing through his mind, and to satisfy himself that he was not mistaken in the confidence he reposed in him.

"I will make your position here more comfortable and remunerative if you attend to this little business with caution and intelligence. Of course you understand that everything I say is a profound secret. Now, you can go, and think the matter over; arrange in your own mind the best and safest means of carrying it out."

For a week or ten days after this, Johnson had the life of a gentleman in the merchant's service. His wages were largely increased, and the duties allotted to him were of the most simple and matter of form kind. When batches of slaves came in now and then he was supposed to look them over, and see if he could select one for the purpose mentioned. One day a courier arrived from the expeditionary party with information that there was a large body of slaves on their way towards the coast. Johnson, therefore, deemed it advisable to await the arrival of this body before he finally decided upon making his choice.

In the meantime, Norton had a good opportunity of witnessing one of the methods of procuring slaves when a scarcity in the market occurred, or the bribes of the English traders were more tempting than usual. This was a very simple and effective method, and there was little risk or bloodshed attending it. A certain village was selected, where the inhabitants were known to be inoffensive, industrious, and at peace with all the neighbouring tribes. This place was secretly surrounded at night time, the whole of the dwellings suddenly set on fire, and when the startled villagers attempted to escape they were summarily captured by the ruffians who lay in wait for them. There was little time then lost in chaining the more stalwart and obstreperous males together, in huddling the females and children into a group in the centre, and starting the whole lot off like a flock of sheep or a herd of cattle for the scene of their barter, oftentimes several hundred miles distant.

It was with feelings of the greatest horror and amazement that Norton witnessed these dastardly proceedings. He could not interfere without raising a suspicion in the minds of his companions; so he was compelled to act the part of the silent spectator through all the scenes of this terrible drama. During the journey back he managed to keep in company with the Fantee Prince, and they both spoke openly and unreservedly of the inhuman scenes which they had just been witnessing. There could be no doubt as to the black man's sympathies in the matter, and Norton learned to respect and admire his character from the feelings of indignation and anger he displayed on the occasion. The rest of the party and the captives were some hours march in advance of them, so they were at liberty to unbosom themselves to the fullest extent, and discuss the dangerous subject of slavery without fear of consequences. On many occasions when the Englishman had gained an elevated point on the route he would pause for some time looking at the tropical scenery around him,and taking note of anything special or interesting that was presented to his view. Every time he did this his eyes were attracted by a dark object in the distance, which appeared to follow them with a dogged and untiring persistency. When the country was hilly or overgrown with long grass and bushwood the object seemed to be always closer to them, but, on the other hand, when a sealike waste of sand intervened it could be barely discernible on the line of the distant horizon. It also struck him as singular that, everytime he turned to make his survey, there was a palpable movement on the part of this object to escape his notice. For some time he refrained from calling his companion's attenion to it, thinking that perhaps it was owing to some imperfection in his vision, or some solitary animal that was attracted or disturbed by the sound of their voices. However, when their journey was near to its end, he happened to turn suddenly around to take a last look at the scenery behind them, when he distinctly saw the figure of a negro, as

he thought, endeavouring to screen himself from view behind a mimosa bush in their track. He quickly informed the Fantee of what he had seen, and they both returned immediately to the bush mentioned. When they reached the spot, there, sure enough, was the figure of a person crouching; a sickly emaciated negress, trembling with fear and terror, and looking upwards at them with a supplicating expression of fear that was pitiful to behold. There was a scanty covering thrown over her thin and almost fleshless frame, and her hands and feet were torn and bleeding from the thorns and tangled bushwood she had encountered on her way. It was plainly evident to both of them that she was almost fainting with hunger and fatigue; so Norton immediately drew forth some biscuits and a flask which he carried and proffered them kindly to her. She seized the biscuits and ate them ravenously, but declined to put the flask to her lips. When questioned by the Fantee she told a sad and deplorable story of the object of her pursuit. It appears she had followed them since the night of the attack on the village. She had an only child, a youth about ten years old, who had been captured and carried off with the other villagers and she wanted to find out where he was taken to, so that she might be enabled to see him again, and remain in the neighbourhood during the short time she had to live. With the exception of this child she was quite alone in the world. All her friends and connections had gone to the land of the Great Spirit. Oh! it was hard, cruelly hard, to have her only child torn from her. But she would tell the mighty white man her story, and he would take pity on her, and return the little boy to her arms.

The Fantee explained that the poor negress was left behind because she was sickly, and therefore of no value in the eyes of the white traders. It took the strongest and most healthy negro to stand the trying "Middle passage," as the voyage from Guinea to the West Indies was called, so the dealers were careful only to ship the most robust and sound that could be procured.

After doing what they could to minister to the poor black woman's wants, Norton gave a promise to interest himself in her behalf, and use his influence to obtain the release of her child. On this being interpreted to her she shed tears of gratitude and delight, and threw herself prostrate on the ground at his feet.

This incident occupied a considerable portion of their time, so there being no chance of overtaking the main body of the party they determined to travel the rest of the journey at their leisure, and give the poor enfeebled negress an opportunity of keeping them in view. Towards the close of the following day their journey came to an end. Norton on arriving at the place was surprised and dismayed to find no trace of any of the slaves about, and on enquiring the reason from one of the brokers he learned that every one of them had been sent on board that day. There was, therefore, no time to be lost if he intended keeping his promise to the negress. Going at once to the office where old Meyrick was generally to be found, he met Johnson on the way with a bundle under his arm, and accompanied by a well-favoured negro, who was smiling pleasantly at the good fortune that had befallen him. Without stopping to speak, Norton entered the rudely constructed edifice, which did duty in those parts as the business seat of the slave merchant.

William Meyrick was seated with one of his captains, smoking a cigar, and discussing the *pros* and *cons* of the business that had been transacted that day. He appeared well satisfied with what had taken place, and looked in the best of spirits when Norton entered the office. On recognising that gentleman, however, a certain shadow passed over his brow, and he became all at once reserved and collected in his manner. Bowing his head slightly forward he appeared to be revolving something in his mind that had only just then occurred to him.

"Can you spare me a few moments, Mr. Meyrick?" said Norton, after waiting for an opportunity to catch his eye, "I want to ask

a favour of you, and there is no time to be lost."

The other looked up with an air of astonishment, and remarking that there was no secrets between the captain and himself, signified that he was at liberty to hear what the other had to say.

"There is a poor negress outside," continued Norton, "who has followed us all the way from the village where the slaves were captured. Her only child, a little lad of ten years old, is among the captives brought in here to-day. I promised to use my influence to obtain his release for her and I feel certain if you saw the wretched mother and heard her heartrending story, you would instantly give instructions to have the youth restored to her. She is now waiting outside, would you like to see her yourself, Mr. Meyrick?"

The merchant nudged his companion, the captain, and smiled grimly at the earnest manner of the speaker. He then shook his head seriously, and said,

"We never interfere in these cases, mister; you should have made your request to the black chieftains up the country; shouldn't he, skipper?"

"Ay, ay, sir," replied his companion, after emitting a great cloud of smoke from his mouth.

"But the child is in your possession now, and you can do what you like with him," persisted Norton."

"Too late, mister, it is beyond my power to do anything. He is now aboard a schooner that is about to weigh anchor, isn't that so, skipper?"

"Ay, ay, sir, she'll be on her way by this time."

"I will buy the child if you let me; give any reasonable price for him. You can then write me a note to the captain, and I will find means to reach the schooner before she gets too far out."

"Couldn't be thought of, mister, against all the rules and regulations of the trade. If we

released one of those niggers, all the aged, decrepit, and sickly would be flocking to the coast and kicking up a rumpus to have their relatives set free. It's a bad precedent to establish, and no man in his senses would think of doing so; would he, skipper?"

"Certainly not, sir; certainly not, too much of a good thing for these parts."

"You owe me some return, Mr. Meyrick, for a little service I did you once," said Norton, beginning to feel uneasy for his client, "I shall be amply repaid if you deviate from your customary rules in this instance. I need scarcely say that I will take precautionary measures to keep the whole affair a secret, and I am certain this poor woman will do her best to aid me in that respect."

The merchant nudged his seafaring neighbour again, and then answered with a cunning leer, and a look of suspicion and inquiry in his eyes.

"You seem to take as much interest in this matter as one of those anti-slavery fellows at home. Let me tell you, mister, that your sympathies are altogether misplaced. The young fellow will be well cared for, and taught to work for a living where he is going, a very different thing than to be wandering about like a wild beast in his own country—isn't that the case, skipper?"

"Never uttered a truer word in your life," remarked that individual.

"But you seem to overlook the poor mother's feelings altogether," returned the other, "surely a parent's sorrow and desolation under the circumstances will find an entrance to your heart, Mr. Meyrick. I never knew a worthier case for sympathy and commiseration. Do not refuse me this request, and you will be rewarded a hundred fold in your own family. There is One above who never overlooks a kind or humane act, and He holds the future of every one of us in the hollow of His hand. Listen for this once to the better promptings of your nature, and do not hesitate to perform a Christian and merciful act."

"You are more concerned about that lying black woman's story than about a knowledge of

my business, which I sent you up the country to get an insight into. Let me tell you, mister, that this looks very bad as a beginning, especially in a man who is intended to take my place—doesn't it, skipper?"

"Couldn't be worse, sir, just like what one of those missionary fellows would do."

At this point Johnson entered the office, and at once engaged the attention of the merchant. For some moments they whispered together aside, and the latter seemed highly pleased at something the other told him. "Capital, capital, Johnson," said he, tapping him familiarly on the shoulder, "couldn't be done better. I will see you further about it in the morning." When Johnson was leaving the office he cast a sudden and peculiar look at Norton, but that gentleman was too much engrossed with his own thoughts to notice it. He began to feel how fruitless and unavailing were all his efforts in behalf of the poor distracted wretch outside. How he was to move the callous nature of old Meyrick he did not know; and every moment lost increased the difficulties of the situation. When the merchant returned to his seat, Norton summoned courage to make a last and more earnest appeal to his feelings of humanity. He pictured the poor woman's friendless and forlorn condition, her maternal affections and anxieties regarding her only child, and the sufferings and privations she must have endured in her sickly state to have followed them to that distant place. Could there be a greater evidence of love and attachment—a brighter example of a mother's natural feelings than she displayed? But all to no purpose; he might as well have addressed a bronze statue, or the heedless wind that swept over the desert: The merchant was invulnerable to all appeals of sympathy. At length growing angry and indignant at the unfeeling stolidity with which he was confronted, Norton concluded the interview by breaking off all connection with the business, and contemptuously declining the offer made him with regard to the overseership.

"He! he! he!" laughed the other sarcastically at this; "a darned nice sort of a superintendant you would have made to be sure; Look here, mister, take my advice, and go back to England as fast as you can; for it strikes me that the climate will never agree with you—what's your opinion skipper?"

"I wouldn't stand in his shoes for all the gold I could stow in yonder schooner; a white man has no chance here when the climate is against him."

Here the captain winked meaningly at his employer, and Norton bursting with rage and indignation retired defiantly from their presence.

But the severest part of his task was yet to come; he had to acquaint the unfortunate negress of the failure of his efforts. This was the most trying and painful duty that could fall to the lot of a kind hearted and sensitive man. With gesticulations and dumb show he managed to inform her that there was no possibility of recovering her child, he pointed to Meyrick's office, and shook his head despondently to explain his failure in that quarter, he pointed towards the ships that were lying in the offing, to indicate that her boy was there, and could not be brought back to her. The poor creature understood the fatal signs at once, and started to her feet in a frenzy of despair and anguish. For a moment she glanced wildly about her, and then uttering a loud and heart-piercing shriek, hurried quickly past him towards the beach, as though the ocean could not separate her from her child. He watched her for a short time until she had reached the water's edge; then he could hear her loud and unavailing cries, while she waved her arms frantically above her head, signalling her despair to the still and motionless ships in the distance.

He could not bear to witness her distraction longer, and with a sad and heavy heart he turned aside, and hastened from the scene precipitately.

Next morning he wandered down to the shore, anxious to know what had become of her. During the night his thoughts and slumbers were haunted with visions of her frantic despair and

desolation. Yes, sure enough she was still there, stretched on the sandy beach with her face downwards, and her hands clasped firmly above her head. He approached to where she was and spoke kindly to her, but she made no movement. He touched her clenched hands and bare shoulders gently, but they were damp and chill, and seemed unconscious of his touch. He stooped down and shook her form slightly, but it was cold and rigid. The poor, friendless, childless, homeless creature was dead.

CHAPTER III.

It was fully a year after the incidents recorded before William Meyrick returned from his visit to the coast of Guinea. Several matters had occurred to detain him there, the most important being the loss of two of his largest ships, and the fatality that attended the cargoes of slaves he imported to Antigua. It was his custom never to insure a cargo of slaves—with the intention, no doubt of making his profits the larger—but from some cause or other all his late shipments were visited with sickness, and oftentimes only half the complement taken on board arrived at the port of consignment. Indeed, all his business transactions during the last year had been disastrous; a persistent run of ill luck seemed to follow everything he did, and the gaunt spectre of poverty, already referred to, was his constant companion on the homeward passage. It will be taken for granted that these misfortunes did not improve his temper, or exert any softening influence in his selfish and hardened nature. In no very amiable frame of mind, he turned his steps after landing in the direction of his counting house, situated in Argyle-street. He had sent no notice beforehand of his return, so he hoped to pay his clerks a visit of surprise.

The clerks engaged to look after the business of the office were three in number. There was

Arthur Penny, the cashier, a cripple, who, as some intimated, had received his appointment, because it was out of the bounds of probability that he could run away with any of the money; there was Richard Grimes, the book-keeper, a timid, nervous, seedy old gentleman, whose whole lifetime had been spent amongst dusty ledgers and account books, and whose chief solicitude was to afford his master no opportunity of sending him about his business, it being a usual habit of the merchant's to keep his *employées* in continual suspense by frequently holding out threats of immediate dismissal; and then there was the junior clerk, as he was called, a young man named Leatherbarrow, who was still serving a sort of apprenticeship to the business, and whose parents in the country imagined he was on the high road to commercial prosperity, while he himself was under the impression that he was undergoing a term of seven years' penal servitude. Of course the salaries received by these gentlemen were in keeping with the economical system which embraced every department of the merchant's business.

On this particular morning, as ill-luck would have it, the clerks were indulging in a little harmless fun at the very moment that their master thrust open the office door, and stood before them. The cashier was perched on a stool, mimicking, with his squeaky voice and malformed limbs, the language and gestures of some of the popular orators of the day; Mr. Grimes was leaning against his desk, smoking a short black pipe, and laughing immoderately at the other's performance; the junior clerk was holding a glass of water above his head, while he addressed his companions in a loud and jovial voice—"Now gents, here's to the absence of old Meyrick! may the niggers eat him up boots and all before———"

Had the building tumbled about their ears, or a frightful earthquake suddenly yawned to engulf them, their faces could not have expressed more surprise, terror, and consternation than the unexpected entrance of their

master produced. For a moment they gazed vacantly and dumbfounded at him; they did not attempt to move from their places, but became mute and motionless as if they had been there and then pertrified. The dark and scowling visage confronting them seemed to possess the property of the fabled head of Medusa; the cashier remained on his stool, with his mouth open and his hand partially raised; the book-keeper kept his pipe in his mouth; the smoke in this instance only emerged from the bowl; the junior clerk still held the glass aloft, while the sound of his last words seemed to linger with a malicious persistency about the place.

"Humph! ha! don't let me disturb you, gentlemen," remarked the merchant, after casting a withering glance at them; "you are evidently in want of a holiday, I will see what can be done for you by-and-bye."

After this remark he passed through the office into his private sanctum, and banged the door loudly after him. When he had read over some of the correspondence that awaited his return, he touched a small bell on his desk, and summoned the cashier to his presence.

"Well, sir," said he, as soon as that individual made his appearance, "I am glad to say that I understand your character at last. Stay, no craving forgiveness or anything of that kind; I know too well what that sort of thing is worth. I am a man of few words, and want as little time as possible wasted in talk. You have forfeited my confidence by what has occurred, and I have, therefore, determined to put you on the footing of a new beginner. From this day forth your salary will be reduced to half what it is, and if you have any objection to this, you can make up your books, and leave my service at once. I can get a well formed, healthy clerk to do the duties of your place for that salary, and I see no reason why I should be paying you double the sum. You can go now, I have nothing further to say. Tell that fellow Grimes that I want to speak to him."

The stupified cripple shuffled nervously out of

the room, and shortly afterwards the door was again timidly opened, and the trembling and terrified book-keeper stood before his master.

"He, he, he; you've been enjoying yourself, Mr. Grimes, and very naturally too. The blood sometimes gets overhot and wayward through high living and indulgence in luxuries. I wish it was my good fortune to possess the high spirits and love of pleasure with which nature has gifted you; I could then thrust aside the duties and responsibilities of business, and sit at my desk smoking a pipe or cigar, and laughing loudly at the most silly things that occurred. That would be more agreeable than toiling from year's end to year's end, endeavouring to keep everything straight, and finding constant employment for those about me. Would it not, Mr. Grimes? Yes, to be sure it would. But then nature has not so gifted me, and I must be content to take the consequences. I must work and toil, body and mind, while others are at liberty to enjoy themselves and grow sleek at my expense. Alas! Mr. Grimes, the good things of this world are very unequally divided."

The poor book-keeper thoroughly understood the drift of this sarcasm, and his heart sank within his breast as he foresaw the inevitable result.

"Let me see, Mr. Grimes," continued the merchant, in a somewhat more serious tone, "I told you several times that I should be compelled to make a change in the office. How strange to have foreseen it so long ago! At all events it will have afforded you time to prepare for a rainy day. It is some consolation to know that, Mr. Grimes, is it not?"

"Will you allow me to say one word, sir," said the clerk in an appealing voice. "I am thoroughly grieved for what has happened, but I can pledge my word that it is the first time anything of the kind occurred. You will see by the books and accounts in the office that nothing has been neglected during your absence; indeed, for my part, I was more assiduous and careful than if you were present."

"Hoity-toity, Mr. Grimes, you mistake me

altogether. Your little pleasantries in the office have nothing to do with what I am saying. The truth is I have had a most disastrous year's trade; two of my best ships at the bottom of the sea, enormous money losses in all my Guinea ventures, in fact everything is going to rack and ruin about me. I must, therefore, discharge most of my servants, reduce expenses at home and abroad, and work my business in future with fewer hands. Do you understand me now, Mr. Grimes? Very well, that is a point gained, you can now make up your books within the next few days, and also tell me what salary is due to you, and then we shall part friends. I would rather you did not say anything, Mr. Grimes; I have so little time to spare just now. Send young Leatherbarrow in, I have something to say to him."

The book-keeper retired from his master's presence crestfallen and sad at heart, but he knew it would be vain and fruitless to make any attempt at altering the decision come to. The miserable stipend he received was barely sufficient to maintain himself and the aged partner of his life. This was perfectly well understood by Meyrick, notwithstanding his hints to the contrary.

When the junior clerk entered the sanctum, the merchant was busily engaged looking over his letters, and therefore took no notice of him for some time. The suspense and uncertainty thus inflicted was the solitary punishment to which his master intended subjecting him.

"What is your age, Leatherbarrow?" at length he inquired, after putting the letters aside, and looking at the young man with a rather comical expression of face. The other told him, and then he continued in a tolerant tone of voice—

"Yes, yes, young folks will be young folks. Some allowance should be made for them, but none for those who are old enough to know better. Now listen to me, I am willing to pass over what has happened, and return good for evil by advancing your position in the office. For the future you shall take charge of Grimes'

ledgers, and if you keep them correctly and to my satisfaction, I will see about offering you a suitable salary. Write and tell your parents that I am pleased to give you this responsible position, and I hope you will show your gratitude by industry and earnest attention to your new duties. No thanks, please; I will be well satisfied if you exert yourself to justify the confidence I place in you. That will do—I have no time for further talk."

When Meyrick was left alone again, he turned at once to his letters, and began reading them over with a grave and occupied look. Every other letter he opened contained something to annoy and upset him. The agents he had employed to buy his Manchester and Sheffield goods had given considerably higher prices for them than he would have done had he been at home. Again he was not properly posted up as to the cost of these goods, or he might have bartered them to better advantage in his dealings with the African slave catchers. No attempt had been made to buy up damaged and faulty merchandise, which was quite good enough for the purpose of his trade, and he had been parting with fine genuine manufacture to those barbarous black princes, when an article half its value would have suited them just as well. Oh, it was monstrous! the opportunity for netting a good round sum was lost to him in consequence. Everything that had happened during his absence appeared to display the same mismanagement and want of foresight. Even the captains of his ships had received wrong directions, and most of the goods imported had been sold on a falling market. No one about him exhibited the zeal and interest requisite to meet the occasion. The arbitrary supervision which he practised when at home told its tale upon his *employées* when left to their own resources. These things were, however, of little consideration compared with what was to follow. The next letter — a legal one — administered the finishing blow to his disasters. A large planter of Barbadoes, one of his heaviest debtors, had

become bankrupt, and his assets were almost nil. For a moment this terrible news seemed to suspend the beating of his heart, and throw all his thoughts and calculations into utter confusion. The sum of money, which this failure represented, was fully a quarter of his entire capital. A tide of misfortune had set in against him, and there was no knowing how or when it would end. Overwhelmed and prostrated with this news, he remained seated at his desk for hours, a prey to the most startling apprehensions, and his mind filled with all the gloomy forebodings that were characteristic of his nature. When at length he had somewhat recovered from the shock, and saw all the unopened letters that were still lying on his desk, a new and depressing fear took possession of his heart. What story of disaster and misfortune might not these contain? Would it be prudent to acquaint himself with their contents now, or let them remain until he became mentally and physically stronger? In his then state of mind and nervous depression he resolved to have recourse to the latter expedient. He therefore put the letters away in one of the drawers, and seemed to breathe more freely when they were removed from his sight. In doing so, however, he selected one from amongst them, which he recognised as coming from his son Walter. Even this correspondence which he was accustomed to welcome with so much joy and pleasure, seemed to affect him at the moment with a singular presentiment of danger and trouble. He must write to his son immediately, and tell him to forego his travels for the present. He could not afford the expense of his living abroad any longer, he had been six months on the continent, and that surely ought to be sufficient for his purpose. These thoughts passed through his mind as he drew the bulky epistle towards him, and broke the seal.

DEAREST DAD,—I have taken advantage of your good nature, and drawn a larger bill than usual upon you, but it was out of my power to avoid it, owing to the extravagant charges which

these foreigners are in the habit of making whenever an Englishman comes amongst them. I will endeavour to be more circumspect in future, but the society I am thrown amongst abroad, and the fellow countrymen I meet in my travels oftentimes force me into extravagances that I would otherwise feel inclined to avoid. Every Englishman you meet here is either a lord or a millionaire, and if you wish to enjoy their society you must be equally liberal in spending your money. It will be to my advantage hereafter to form connections of this kind, so, as you would say yourself, I am only investing my money at good interest, it will all come back again considerably augmented. So much for the business part of my letter, now for the mysterious and interesting.

You remember the negro that you sent me a year ago? Well, it's about that individual I am now going to write. When you have read this letter through I dare swear you will be equally mystified with myself in forming an opinion of the singularly strange character that you hit upon sending me.

On his first appearance in Liverpool I was favourably impressed by his keen intelligence, the modified type of his negro features, and the general manner in which he conducted himself before strangers. I was also surprised to find that he spoke English remarkably well. I had him dressed in clothes befitting the station for which I intended him, and spent a few hours each day in coaching him in the duties he would have to perform. He was an apt scholar, seemed to understand almost instinctively everything I told him, and soon became sufficiently enlightened to take the part of the most sagacious and intelligent attendant. There was a certain hauteur and stiffness in all that he did, but this I set down to the ineradicable habits of his nation. He was obedient, willing, and respectful, and that was amply sufficient for me.

The first few months of my travels were chiefly spent in Switzerland. I happened to meet with a French artist there, a most agreeable and pleasant companion, with whom I spent the greater part

of the evenings, conversing in French, and availing myself of that opportunity to improve my pronunciation. What was my surprise one day shortly after the departure of my friend, to find that the black servant was tolerably conversant with the French language. Surely he could not have learned it from what he had heard passing between the artist and myself, and yet, as far as I could judge, he had no other means of acquiring his knowledge. You told me in the letter you sent at the time that the negro being shipped to Liverpool was young, healthy, and good looking, but would require a considerable amount of training before he could be trusted to fill the position for which I wanted him. Now the individual at present in my service is a very different character to that which your letter bid me to suppose. In the first place he is not young, rather middle-aged I should say. He is healthy and good looking enough for one of his race, but, contrary to your anticipations, he required scarcely any training whatever; in fact he seemed as much at home with the usages and customs of civilized life, as if he had been to the manner born. Has there been a mistake made at the last moment? or were you trying to play off some joke on me by sending this singularly intelligent and superior person instead of one of those wild and uncouth savages usually sold into slavery? However, I am not going to complain of the mistake made—but there are many traits in his conduct and character which fill me with doubt and suspicion, and I would like, if it were possible, that you would enlighten me a little as to his antecedents in your next letter.

One day, as we were climbing one of the Swiss mountains, we had to traverse a causeway which ran along the edge of a dizzy precipice; a sheer descent of rock some three to four hundred feet in depth. Our guide had left us some distance behind, as we loitered now and then to have a good view of the sublime scenery that surrounded us. As I stood for a moment on the brink of this vast abyss, craning my neck forward to measure its depth with my eyes, the

black attendant came close behind me, and uttered these startling words into my ear—"Would it kill your father if you happened to overbalance yourself, and be hurled to the bottom of that great gulf?"

I started nervously back, and glanced wonderingly at the face of my companion. There was a singular questioning look in his eyes, and a stern earnestness in the fixity of his features that filled me with surprise and disquietude.

"What an extraordinary question to ask, Robinson?" (this is the name I have christened him)—"You almost frighten me by the bare suggestion of such a catastrophe."

At another time, while staying at Florence, I felt extremely anxious about not receiving any letters from home. I was gloomy and out of sorts in consequence, and remained several hours each day in the hotel lounging about my apartment, or reading any book that fell into my hands to wile away the time. On every occasion I happened to raise my head, I encountered the eyes of Robinson fixed thoughtfully on me. After a time I grew rather annoyed at this, but still managed to keep my countenance without letting him discover that I winced under his scrutiny. Becoming suspicious to know if there was any meaning in his looks, other than of idle curiosity, I beckoned him to my side, and questioned him as follows—"Is there anything you wish to ask me, Robinson? I have caught your eyes several times turned towards me, and suspect that there is something on your mind which you have not the courage to speak about."

He raised his shoulders and shook his head like a veritable Frenchman, and answered carelessly.

"There is nothing I want to say, master."

"Then why keep staring at me in that manner?" replied I. "Do you not know the habit is very rude and sometimes offensive, Robinson."

"Forgive me if I have displeased you," said he, "but I notice a great change in you since

we came here, and wondered to myself what could account for it. The people of the hotel tell me you are disappointed at not receiving letters from home, but that surely could not be the cause of your sorrow, you have no mother, sister, or brother at home."

"Yes, but I have a father, Robinson, he is the only relative that is at present left me."

"But he is a cruel, wicked, and tyrannical man, one that is abhorred and execrated by all who know him. It is not possible that you could feel sorrow for the death of such as he!"

Surprised and startled by this extraordinary language I looked keenly at the fellow for sometime, but, believing the words he uttered were only an evidence of his barbarian stupidity, I took no further notice of the remarks, only attempting to remove his impressions about your wickedness, and set him right concerning the nature of filial duty in general.

I find he is remarkably friendly with the servants in every hotel I stop at, and oftentimes as well informed about matters of local interest as if he had been living there the greater part of his life. On one or two occasions I thought it necessary to warn him against several suspicious looking characters with whom he consorted. The descendants of the Romans are thieves, villains, and cut-throats, they will use the stiletto on the slightest provocation, and if you happened to get murdered in a street brawl there is no probability of ever bringing the criminal to justice. I told Robinson this, but he smiled incredulously at me, and remarked that he could always read the character of the man in his face and consequently only mixed with those who would do him no harm.

I prolonged my stay at Florence for over a month, but no letter of any kind from England. I then started for Naples, which I hoped to reach by the time the mail from England arrived there. True to my calculations, I finished my journey a day before the mail arrived, but again there was no letter for me. This disappointment was increased by finding that my man Robin-

son received a letter from some friend in Liverpool, addressed to the hotel where we were putting up. I left a list of the places when letters would find me at the office in Liverpool; so I felt rather uneasy at my man receiving this letter, and no communication of any kind for me. The thought struck me that something unpleasant had occurred to you, and the people at home were scrupulous about informing me. I was, therefore, curious to know the contents of Robinson's letter, and before handing it to him I took occasion to read over the superscription. The hand writing was very indifferent and the spelling faulty, but evident pains had been taken, so that the letter should reach the party for whom it was intended. It ran something like as follows :—

"For Mr. Walter Meyrick's black servant man; he is also known as Prince Nemma-nemma, the Fantee." Here followed the name of the hotel at Naples, and then on the reversed side of the letter was written—"If unknown or not to be found please return this letter to Henry Johnson, of Upper Frederick-street, Liverpool, England, by whom all extra expense will be paid."

When Robinson entered my apartments, I told him there was a letter for one Prince Nemma-nemma which had all the appearance of being intended for him. He looked surprised and disconcerted for a moment, but, quickly recovering his self-collected manner, he took the letter from me and placed it in the pocket of his coat.

"If there is anything referring to my father in that letter," said I, "perhaps you will be good enough to let me know."

He started suddenly and glanced at me with a suspicious and frightened look, but without complying with my request he thrust his hand into his pocket, and held it there.

"I have no desire to pry into your private affairs," remarked I, "but I feel very anxious about having no word of any kind from home. I suspect my father is ill, or something wrong has occurred. Will you kindly read the letter

over to yourself, and let me know if there is any foundation for my fears."

His suspicious look disappeared at this, and drawing forth the letter, he went over towards one of the windows and read it carefully.

"No, sir, there is no grounds for your fears; your father has not yet returned from my country."

I was somewhat relieved at this, for my suspicion began to take the form of certainties; so, hoping that the next mail would bring me satisfactory tidings, I dismissed the whole matter from my mind. Some days afterwards I received the letter you had addressed to Florence, it was sent after me by the landlord of the hotel, and at once set my mind at rest as to the cause of your long silence, and the incidents that prevented your return to Liverpool.

I must now bring this very lengthy epistle to a termination. I have given you as far as I can an idea of the character of my black servant,and I shall await with much interest your replies to the following queries. Who is this man Johnson, of Upper Frederick-street, Liverpool? and is it a fact that the negro you sent me was known as a prince in his own country? What do you know about the latter's antecedents, and how has he become so well educated and conversant with the usages of civilized life? Give me all particulars in your next letter, for I have a reason for being well informed in the matter. During the next few days I hope to pay a visit to Vesuvius, and other sights of interest in these parts,then I purpose taking a trip up the country, seeing the ruins of some of its ancient strongholds, enjoying to the full its health inspiring climate at this season, and beholding with my own eyes the picturesque and romantic scenery that I have heard so much about.

I send this letter to Liverpool, as I gather from what you say that it is your intention to return there at once. In my next I will give you a further history of my travels, and until then accept as usual the best wishes and love of your dutiful son, WALTER.

P.S —Don't neglect to enlighten me about the

man Robinson. Every day I am more and more puzzled to make him out, in fact I sometimes think he bears me no good will."

While reading this letter, William Meyrick never moved a muscle until he came to that part where the name of Nemma-uemma was mentioned. Then he started instantly to his feet with a feeling of inexpressible alarm and apprehension. Until that moment, he had never harboured a suspicion about the negro whom Johnson had been deputed to send to England, although the Fantee interpreter had mysteriously disappeared from the locality at the same time. Now, however, the whole thing seemed to flash across his mind at once, and the full explanation was not difficult to see. The very being of all others whom he most feared and dreaded was now the sole attendant of his son Walter in a foreign country. True, he had not seen much of him, but what he learned of his antecedents and character made him cautiously suspicious of his power. Besides this, there was an occurrence some few years back that now troubled him exceedingly. He had had a favourite brother of the Fantee's seized clandestinely one night, and hurried on board one of the ships sailing for Barbadoes. He denied all knowledge of the fact when the Fantee wrote to him about it, and repeatedly refused to obtain his release, although he might easily have done so. Would this incident influence his conduct in regard to his son Walter, or had the circumstances of the case anything to do with his present position? These reflections filled the paternal heart of the merchant with terrible apprehensions and alarm. Again, there could be no doubt that Johnson was in league with him, and from the subsequent conduct of the English sailor this only served to increase the peril in which his son was placed. Johnson knew the weak spot in his armour, the great affection he had for his only child, and would doubtless inform his dusky confederate of the fact. All the circumstances in connection with the affair supplied startling and incontest-

able evidence, abundantly confirmatory of his worst fears. For the first time he felt himself powerless to contend against the machinations of his known enemies. He was accustomed to circumvent and crush his antagonists at once, but here was an incident entirely beyond his control, and yet of the most vital interest. A strange fatality seemed to beset all his later designs and contrivances, he was defied and outwitted by his enemies—hoodwinked and misled by his presumptive friends. Norton had escaped his clutches when he was about taking means to prevent him from doing any harm. He and Johnson got into a boat one morning and pulled towards an English ship that was standing off the coast. They told the captain that they were in fear of their lives from the slave dealers, and were prepared to pay their passage to England, let the cost be what it might. Norton had plenty of money, and was willing to pay for his companion as well as himself. The captain, after making some inquiries, consented to their proposal, and the two men whom the merchant had determined on keeping away from England were fortunate to escape his power. Johnson knew too much of his business, and he had already proved himself a dangerous witness from what had reached him before he started on his homeward journey.

These distracting thoughts passed and re-passed before the merchant's mental vision. The money losses and trade disasters were for the moment forgotten, and all the tension of his mind was directed to this new and appalling misfortune that seemed to threaten his dearest hopes. All former troubles only stimulated him to greater activity and energy, but this latter seemed to annihilate his mental and physical rigour, and cast a shadow over all his future life.

He sat silent and motionless in his chair, until the light had faded away and darkness filled all the spaces in the room. The noise and bustle of traffic at length ceased, and the solitary footstep of the belated clerk or merchant hurrying homeward was the only sound that reached his ear. The very silence that

supervened seemed to awaken him from the lethargic state into which his prostrated energies had thrown him; and at last struggling to his feet he discovered that the hour was unusually late, and he must make an effort at once to reach his home. To-morrow would bring back physical strength and mental resources to his aid, and then he would resolve upon what he should do. Passing into the general office he found the silent clerks still writing away at their books. They dared not leave the place before their master, and would have probably remained all night if he had not made his appearance.

"I feel rather unwell, Leatherbarrow," said he, speaking in an unusually quiet tone of voice, "and I want you to call a hackney coach for me."

His face was pale and distorted, and he appeared to tremble nervously as he stood in the office, waiting the arrival of the vehicle. To the furtive glances of the clerks a great and startling change had taken place in his appearance. With the assistance of Leatherbarrow he was at length placed in the hackney coach, and as it rumbled slowly away, an incubus of fear and suspense was lifted from the anxious clerks, and the happy moment of their release had at last arrived.

CHAPTER IV.

The day following, James Norton, who was a solicitor by profession, received a somewhat startling communication from an old friend of his, the British consular agent at Naples. After reading this letter over, and making himself acquainted for the first time with an evident plot on the part of Johnson and the black servant attached to Mr. Meyrick's son, he as once made up his mind to call on the former person and elicit some explanation of the extraordinary news which he had just received. During the whole time they were brought together

—more especially on their homeward passage—Johnson had never mentioned anything about sending Nemma-nemma to Europe, or even the fact that his master had requisitioned a black servant to attend on his son. He therefore went to the place where Johnson lodged, resolved in his mind to learn the full particulars of the case, and see if anything could be done to prevent the dangerous consequences that already threatened the life of Meyrick's son.

Since his return to England, Johnson had been a confirmed invalid. The injuries and treatment he had received while in the merchant's employment, both as a sailor and on the coast of Guinea, completely ruined his constitution. He was unable to do any kind of laborious work, and had to eke out a precarious living by going on errands, or taking the place of a watchman on the quays, when any of his patrons had merchandise stowed there. On reaching the house in Frederick-street, Norton was considerably surprised to notice the unmistakable evidence of poverty on all sides. He had never been to Johnson's lodgings before, although he had taken a note of the address in his pocket-book, and gave him a sort of promise that he would call and see him when in the neighbourhood. The mistress of the house, a slatternly and impoverished-looking woman, informed him that her lodger was upstairs ill in bed, and that there was no likelihood of his ever getting well again. If the gentleman wanted to see him he would find the room at the top of the stairs. She couldn't abear to hear him cursing and carrying on, so he must excuse her showing him the way upstairs. When Norton entered the room of the sick man he was greatly shocked at the sight that was presented to him. On some coarse bedding in the corner of the room Henry Johnson was lying, his face turned wistfully towards the door, and his voice, strangely altered, muttering fearful imprecations on his landlady's head. There was the mark of death on his worn and distorted features, the madness of despair in the wild and restless gleam of his eyes. For a moment he failed to

recognise his visitor, but at the sound of the latter's voice his memory at once came to his aid.

"I never suspected that you were in this condition, Johnson," said Norton, approaching the bedside, "why did you not send me word of your illness, I might have been able to render you some little assistance."

The sick man shook his head determinedly, and replied, "No, no, Mr. Norton; you have been too generous already. I could not think of bothering you with my private misfortunes. It will be all over with me in a few days—perhaps a few hours, and then I shall have peace and rest. Yes, sir, that peace and rest which I have never known since I fell into the clutches of that cursed tyrant Meyrick; but wait, his time has yet to come. Oh! Heaven grant that it may come quickly, and then I will die happy when I know that he suffers."

"Those are unchristian words, Johnson, and you pain me by uttering them at the present moment. I came here for the purpose of asking you a question, which I am certain you will not refuse to answer me. It will explain the substance of a letter I received this morning from a friend in Naples. I will read you a portion of what my friend says, and you can then give me your answer.

"'I have just heard some bad news regarding a young Liverpool gentleman, who has been staying here for the last few months. His name is Walter Meyrick, and he has a black servant who bears the outlandish cognomen of Nemmanemma. This latter individual has been in the habit of associating with some notorious brigands in the neighbourhood, and I hear that he has succeeded in leading his master into an ambuscade; so that the unfortunate gentleman is now in the power of these banditti. I am now told the black servant has a correspondent in your town, I forget the fellow's name, but there cannot be a doubt that he is an accomplice in this affair. As far as I can see it is their intention to extort a large sum of money from the relatives of the young man, and then

divide the spoil between themselves and the brigands. If you have any means of tracing this fellow in Liverpool, it would be an act of justice to have him arrested, and kept in durance vile until the release of Mr. Meyrick.'

"There is a postscript which appears to have been added after he had heard further particulars.

"'The young Englishman has fallen into the hands of one of the most determined and blood thirsty of the brigand chiefs. The ransom demanded is twenty thousand pounds, and there is small hope for his life if this enormous sum is not forthcoming. If his friends can afford the sum, let it be paid at once, for several of the Neapolitan soldiers inform me that his captor has never been known to fail in carrying out his threats.'"

During the reading of these extracts, Johnson sat up in his bed, and seemed to be under the influence of frantic joy and excitement. He laughed a strange hollow laugh, while his face displayed all the emotion and delight of one who suddenly received joyful and unexpected tidings. "Yes," said he, when the other had finished reading, and turned towards him—"Yes, I will answer the question you're about to ask. I am the Liverpool correspondent your friend refers to. I planned and arranged all this a year ago—on the very evening you appealed in vain for the poor black woman's child. I chose a man after my own heart for the purpose, and see how nobly he has fulfilled my instructions. Bravo, Nemma-nemma! You are a prince indeed amongst men. Ah! I knew the metal you were made of. Now will the Nemesis seize upon the cruel-hearted tyrant that has wrecked my life and the lives of thousands of other unfortunate beings who have fallen within his power. Ha! ha! ha! I can die easy now. How his heart strings will break when he has to disgorge twenty thousand pounds to save the life of his favourite son."

The sick man fell back heavily on the bed after uttering this, and for a moment Norton imagined that the shadow of death had inter-

vened, and his vengeful spirit had passed away with the frantic laughter upon his lips. But this was not the case, he revived shortly afterwards, and continued speaking in a low and more collected tone of voice, interrupted now and then by a loud and distressing fit of coughing. "You must not blame me, Mr. Norton, for the feelings of rancour I cherish towards that man; I would not be natural if I felt otherwise. Look at what he has done to me, and I am only one out of thousands that suffered at his hands, and the hands of the other scoundrels that are making money in the slave trade. The bones of many a British seaman lie bleaching on the sand of Africa or in the jungles and forests of the West India Islands. I am not talking now of the unfortunate negroes, but of my own countrymen, the hearty, healthy, hardworking blue jackets that you may meet along the docks, or passing down any of the public streets. You yourself remember me a few years back. What a strong, robust, energetic young man I was! full of hope, full of life, with the prospect of a happy and comfortable future before me. Look at the picture now! see me shattered in constitution, writhing in pain and anguish, and tottering slowly towards the brink of the grave. What right under heaven had that man to shorten my days—embitter the life that God had given me, and thrust me as it were forcibly out of existence. Why should he have the power to cancel all the hopes and intentions I cherished—all the blessings and happiness that the future had in store for me. But never mind, the scheme I planned so cautiously and cleverly has at length succeeded. I can now feel, even with my last gasp, a satisfaction in knowing that he will writhe and suffer under the torture that my vengeance has inflicted."

Here a desperate fit of coughing ensued, and the dying man lay back exhausted in his bed. He appeared to breathe with great difficulty and pain, and all power of further speech seemed to have left him. Seeing the hopelessness of continuing the interview, Norton arose

from his seat beside the bed and, after leaving some money to meet the immediate necessities of the case, he quickly took his departure from the house. What should he do next? The affair was evidently more serious than he was at first led to believe. Would he call at once at the merchant's office and have an interview with him about it? Here a difficulty confronted him at the outset. William Meyrick and he were on the worst possible terms, in fact he was publicly known to be one of the local promoters of several meetings and petitions for the suppression of the slave trade. Again, his experiences on the Guinea coast made him in the strictest sense of the word an open enemy of the merchant's. However, he thrust all these considerations aside in a matter of this importance, and forthwith turned his steps in the direction of Argyle-street.

It was noon by the time he reached the office, and he had the satisfaction to know that Mr. Meyrick was there and not specially engaged at the moment. When he entered the merchant's presence the first thing that struck him was the remarkable change in that gentleman's appearance. If twenty years had passed over his head there could not have been a more startling and palpable alteration. His face was pale and haggard, his eyes dull and spiritless, and the robust energy of his frame seemed to have collapsed into the feeble and hesitating movements of a decrepit and sickly old man. He greeted the visitor's entrance with a suspicious look and frown, but without uttering a word, and pointed mechanically to where there was a chair, then lay back in his seat to hear the reason of the unexpected visit.

Norton at once proceeded to read the letter which he had received from his friend in Naples, taking what pains he could to break the unpleasant news as gently as possible.

At first a suspicious smile seemed to lurk in the old man's features, as though he perceived some cunning ruse to frighten him and extort money, but presently a more serious and concerned look supplanted this, and he immediately

pulled forth his son's letter and glanced at the date. It was dated fully three months back, a fact that he had quite overlooked when reading it the day before. Here the thought flashed across his mind that perhaps there was another letter from him which he had failed to recognise last night. He unlocked the drawer at once, and taking out the letters commenced to sort and examine them with nervous haste. The possible truth of this crushing news began to take hold upon his mind; the worst fears and suspicions which his son's letter had suggested might have come to pass after all. At last he selected a strange, foreign looking letter, which, on close examination, proved to be in the handwriting of his son. With a beating heart and trembling hand he tore this letter open, and read as follows:—

Dearest Father,—I have bad news to tell you; I have fallen into the power of the brigands, and they demand a sum equal to twenty thousand pounds for my release. If this ransom is not forthcoming a cruel and summary death will be the result. I have great confidence in your fatherly love and affection, and therefore do not fear that such a terrible fate will overtake me. Forgive me father for bringing this great trouble on you, but the fault was not entirely mine. This letter will be read by my captors, so, for certain reasons, I cannot be more explicit now. On no account take any steps to find my whereabouts, or hold any communication with either the British or Neapolitan authorities in this matter. By so doing you will place me in great peril, and destroy the only means left for my release. The brigands are well informed of everything that occurs here, and have friends and confederates in the high offices of the state. Lodge the money at once to the credit of Paolo Narvi, Naples, and get the people at your bank to write off immediately, and acquaint their agents at Naples of the fact. Lose not a moment in carrying out these instructions, for every thing depends on promptitude and despatch. Any delay or hesitation

always occasions suspicion, and besides I am anxious to get my liberty as soon as possible. I now leave my life entirely in your hands, and I need scarcely add that I have no doubt of the result.—Your unfortunate son, WALTER.

Norton watched the old man's face while he was reading this letter. The emotion and terror that was there expressed, naturally assured him that it referred to the subject of his visit. His eyes appeared to start from their sockets in amazement and wonder. He read and re-read the letter over like one whose mental faculties had failed to grasp the true import of its contents. Gradually, however, the terrible truth seemed to burn itself into his brain; he recognised the peril and danger in which his son was placed; and the enormous money ransom was written in flaming characters before his mental vision. He dropped the letter from his hands, and fell back horrified in his chair, as though he had been seized with a sudden fainting fit.

Norton sprang at once to his feet to render assistance, but he waved him aside, and motioned that he was to remain in his seat. Slowly and gradually his native strength returned to him, the keen and far-seeing intellect began to re-assert its dominion; the energy and force of his character was again in the ascendant. Passing his hand across his brow, as if to dissipate the vision that produced his weakness, he looked steadily at his visitor, and spoke for the first time during the interview.

"This letter is from my son, confirming all you have just told me. What would you advise me to do in this terrible business?"

"The only advice I could give, Mr. Meyrick, is to pay the money at once, and save the life of your son."

"What! pay twenty thousand pounds and leave myself a pauper for the rest of my days—impossible! Ah, you little know that every farthing has been coined out of my anxious brain, and by laborious days and nights during a long

lifetime. No, no, I could part with it only at the sacrifice of my life."

"Well, you know the alternative. There is nothing more certain than that the brigands will carry out their threat, and the fate of your son is sealed."

"But, why—why should they want all that I possess? Could they not be satisfied with five hundred or a thousand? Neither my poor boy nor myself have done them any harm."

"I fear," remarked Norton, "that they are well informed of your means, and as the whole thing has been designed with the object of revenge, you have a poor chance of getting mercy at their hands. Now that your son is in their power the only prudent course is to comply with their demand."

"But their informants—Johnson and that black scoundrel—did not know what I was worth. I am only a poor man after all, Mr. Norton, I have had great losses latterly—everything has been going to the bad about me If my creditors were to press me I could scarcely pay them twenty shillings in the pound."

"All that I can say then is that you will never see your son alive again. I am heartily sorry for the fate of the young man, and equally indignant at the vile machinations that have compassed his death."

"Yes, yes, I'll have that devil Johnson arrested and hanged forthwith. Oh, I would like to act the part of the executioner myself. As to the other ruffian I shall live to see him drawn and quartered before my eyes. Oh, do not fear, Mr. Norton, I am not forgetting what is due to these conspirators. I am not slow in returning blow for blow."

"If you'd take my advice, Mr. Meyrick, you would not trouble yourself at present about these culprits, think only of the danger that surrounds your son, and the means within your power to save him. Let every other thought be put aside until that is accomplished. I have now said all that I can in the matter, and must leave the result entirely in your own hands."

As he stood up from his seat, prepared to take his departure, the merchant begged him earnestly to remain a little longer. He had no one to advise him—no one to give him any information in this business, and his mind was so confused and upset that he could not determine on a line of conduct for himself.

"Suppose I send them £5,000, Mr. Norton, would not that be sufficient to satisfy their demands?"

"From what I am led to believe they will not abate a jot in the sum mentioned," replied the other.

"Then—then £7,000, Mr. Norton? Only imagine the enormous sum that is! It has taken me years and years to scrape it together."

"I can only tell you what I should do under the circumstances. I would not endanger my son's life by stopping to haggle and bargain in the matter. I would pay the sum demanded, if I had it, and then, when my son was safe in England, I would take any steps I thought fit to bring the guilty parties to punishment."

The merchant was now standing up, confronting his visitor with a fixed and searching look. Did he suspect that Norton was in league with the others, notwithstanding his sympathetic words and friendly interference? With all the knowledge of his fellowmen with which he was credited, there was one thing that he could never understand, and that was generous and disinterested sympathy. In his mind there was always some selfish motive underlying every good action, and in forming his opinion of others he was ever searching for this ulterior object which should reveal the character.

"I will make one more offer," said he, still keeping his eye fixed on the other. "It will leave me a poor man—almost a beggar—but never mind, if it will save the life of my child. I will give 10,000—£10,000, Mr. Norton!"

"I could not think of counselling you further, Mr. Meyrick; you must speak to some of your friends, and hear what they have to say about it."

"Will not that do, Mr. Norton, £10,000?" reiterated he, paying no attention to what the other said. "It is like tearing my heart out to part with all my life-long earnings, but they shall not harm a hair of my son's head. He is the last of my kindred—the only joy left to me in this world. He is a good young man, Mr. Norton, dutiful, learned, and religious. He has a bright future before him, and all my hopes and ambitions are centred in him. Would it not be monstrous to take his life away, and for no other reason than that his aged parent could not pay the sum demanded? Is there any feeling or justice in the breasts of his captors? Surely, if they understood my position, they would accept the sum I offer, and not darken my declining years by shedding the innocent blood of my child."

"I fear, sir, you do not know the character of the men you talk about. Besides, it is out of your power to communicate with them; they are away in the mountain fastnesses of Italy, the whereabouts of which is only known to their confederates."

"You do not mean to say they will murder my boy if I refuse to send them all the ransom money?"

"That, I regret to say, is my firm conviction, Mr. Meyrick."

The old merchant staggered back some paces, and groaned aloud in the agony of his soul. He was not so ignorant of the desperate character of the brigands, but he cherished a hope that Norton possessed some mysterious means of communicating with them, and could, if he liked, render him incalculable service in his extremity. Now, however, the delusion of this hope was apparent to him; he saw no succour, no helping hand, no aid of any kind within his reach. Turn how he would the vision of the money ransom or the terrible alternative of his son's death confronted him on all sides. The sudden vigour of mind which he displayed at first seemed now to desert him. He tottered and trembled feebly towards a seat, and then threw himself into it with the air of a man thoroughly and irretrievably crushed.

"You may leave me now, mister," said he, in a voice that partook of the desolation of his heart. "I must have a little time to think. My mind is so bewildered at present that I cannot reason or reflect. I have no power or energy to do anything, even if my life depended on it. No, I will have no doctor or physic, I am only too well aware of the nature of my complaint, and the remedy it requires. Call and see me again this evening; I shall expect you about six o'clock, and will tell you then the result of my deliberations. Oh Heavens! the tortures to which these villains have subjected me. To think that the fortune I have struggled so hard to make should at last pass into the hands of scoundrels and cut-throats."

When Norton found himself in the street again he experienced all the relief that one feels who has passed through some trying and depressing ordeal. The terrible effect of the blow was only faintly shadowed forth in the merchant's language; the despair and agony that wrung his heart was more fully revealed in his expression and bearing. Habitually reserved and silent, the tortures that he suffered could only be adequately conceived from the appalling changes that his appearance underwent. Knowing his character by this time—his insatiable thirst for money, his miserly and penurious habits, and the life-long struggle he was engaged in to amass wealth, no matter how—the keen intensity and force of his sufferings was easily comprehended by Norton. But what the upshot would be between his love for money and the affection he was known to cherish for his son, even that gentleman could not safely predict. The reputation he bore gave but scant hope of that humanity which all ordinary individuals would be certain to show under similar circumstances.

Norton returned slowly towards his own office, revolving over in his mind all that had just happened, and deeply incensed at the wickedness of the two men who had brought it all about. How or when it would end he could not say, but of one thing he felt certain, the slave merchant would never be the same man again. When he

entered his office he was surprised to find the landlady of the house where Johnson lodged waiting to see him. She told him that her lodger was on the point of death, and wished to see him particularly, as he had something important to communicate. Witnout hesitating a moment he immediately turned round and accompanied the woman with all haste to the house in Frederick-street. In accordance with her statement it was plainly evident that Johnson's time in this world was only the matter of an hour or two. He lay back in his bed still and motionless, with no sign of life or movement, save the anxious and wandering glances that shot from his wild and restless eyes. He could scarcely speak, and that only with the greatest difficulty, and a lapse of some moments intervened between the utterance of each word. As soon as Norton approached the bedside, the dying man exhibited unusual anxiety to say something, but was prevented from doing so by sheer physical exhaustion. The distressing cough had left him by this time, and it appeared to have taken all his remaining strength and vigour along with it. His voice was altogether gone; nothing but his intellect and the faintest fluttering of life remained behind.

"If you sit by him a short time, sir," said the woman, "he may recover his breath and be able to speak to you; but you must keep your ear close to his mouth to hear what he says."

Johnson glanced gratefully towards the woman for saying this, and then closed his eyes, as if to await patiently the return of the desired power. In the meantime Norton took a seat beside the bed, wondering to himself what the important something could be, which he wished to communicate before sinking into eternity. He was somewhat shocked at the suddenness of the collapse since the interview that morning, but the passion and excitement he then displayed might have had the effect of hastening his end.

After a time the sick man opened his eyes, and motioned Norton to lean forward and place his ear close to his mouth. He did as he was directed, and then the following—uttered slowly

and somewhat incoherently—was the substance of what he heard :—

"I do not want to leave this world in your bad opinion, Mr. Norton. I am not the desperate and cruel-hearted character that my words this morning would seem to imply. Although I suggested and designed the plot for the capture of Walter Meyrick, I did so out of no ill will to the young man, but simply to be revenged on his father for the injuries I have suffered at his hands. In the event of the capture I made one condition indispensable, the young man was not to be punished for his parents sins; whether the ransom money was forthcoming or not he was to be liberated after a few months' detention. I cannot now fully explain all, but you may set your fears at rest on that head. I refrained from mentioning this before, because I knew you would have informed his father, and then the purpose of my revenge would be rendered futile. However, on the verge of eternity a calmer and a better spirit took possession of me. I wish to leave this world at peace with all men—even with that one who has done me so much wrong. It is not too late yet to undo what I have done; but you must promise me not to take any steps to punish the Fantee. He was only my tool in the matter; I alone am responsible for everything that has happened. I have full confidence in your honour and justice to see that my wishes in this respect are carried out. Now, when the cable snaps, I can drift out peacefully in the ocean of eternity, and meet the Great Judge without fear or trembling. Farewell, Mr. Norton—farewell. The lesson which your kindness and humanity inculcated was the means of turning my thoughts into this better channel at last. Let the wrongs I suffered compensate in your mind for the evil deeds I attempted."

He ceased speaking, and, to all appearance, breathing, but Norton remained at the bedside until the last spark of life flickered, and then was extinguished for ever in this world. When all was over, his first step was to hasten at once to the merchant's office and communicate the

good news he had heard from Johnson. The hour was long past the time appointed by the merchant, but he took no notice of this in his anxiety to convey the good tidings he possessed.

When he reached the office he thrust the door open quickly, and entered the place in breathless haste. The clerks, who were busy at the time, looked round perfectly horrified at the disturbance which his entrance created. The cashier wriggled off his stool and hobbled forward to the counter, raising his finger at the same time to enforce silence. He leaned over the counter, and whispered timidly into Norton's ear.

"Mr. Meyrick left strict orders that silence was to be maintained here, as he is busily engaged on some important business inside."

"Oh, I beg pardon. I have some very good news to tell him, and was rather precipitate in my entrance. Can I go through?"

"I am afraid not; he cannot be disturbed on any account."

"But I have an appointment with him," said Norton, "he told me to be here about six o'clock."

As he said this, he looked up at the ancient timepiece hanging against the wall with its long pendulum swinging too and fro, and discovered that he was fully an hour and a half beyond the appointed time.

"I dare not act contrary to his instructions," said the cashier, "but if you like to take the responsibility you are at liberty to enter."

Without further talk he at once proceeded towards the door of the private office, and knocked quietly with his fingers. After pausing a while he knocked again, and again somewhat louder, and at length he thought he heard a voice from within telling him to enter. He turned the handle of the door, and walked into the room accordingly. It was growing late at the time, and he was surprised to find the place in comparative darkness, and a sense of profound stillness pervading it. However, he could distinguish the merchant sitting at his desk near the window and immediately approached him

with the words—"I have good news to tell you, Mr. Meyrick, Johnson has confessed all."

He stood for a moment close to his chair, expecting that he would turn his head and reply, when all at once he became aware of something strange in the merchant's position. By this time his eyes were more accustomed to the gloom, and he could see that Meyrick's head was bent forward, resting on the desk before him, and, to all appearance, as though he had fallen fast asleep while engaged with his writing. At the same time a vague suspicion flashed across his mind; so stooping quickly down he listened eagerly for the sound of breathing. No, he failed to notice any sign of respiration; and then, growing alarmed, he touched his hands and brow and found that they were deadly cold. Fully convinced of what had happened he rushed into the general office and acquainted the clerks. Lights were at once procured, and, when all returned to the room, the sad truth was quickly verified beyond a doubt. There, seated at his desk, with his bankbook open before him, the stern and hard-hearted slave merchant had taken his leave of this world. The ransom money for his son was entered to his debit in the bankbook, and the mental struggle which the loss of that sum had occasioned him was more than likely the cause of the suddenness of his death.

To Norton's mind there was all the appearance of a stern retribution in the sad event. The poor negress on the Guinea coast came back to his memory at once. The parallel in the fate of the rich and powerful trader, and that of the poor homeless barbarian, was singularly remarkable. He had dismissed her maternal appeal with cruel contempt and indifference, and, only a short year afterwards, he was compelled to purchase his own child's freedom by disbursing a sum of money that cost him his life. Norton had witnessed the black woman's frantic despair—had stood by her cold and lifeless remains in that distant land; now he was standing beside the rigid and motionless body of the man who had been the cause of all her mis-

fortunes. In each case he had been made the confidant of their wrongs—in each case he was the first to discover the fate that had befallen them.

Owing to the excitement that followed Meyrick's death, the despatch of the ransom money was unheeded until it became too late to countermand it. In any case, Norton was fearful of interfering, lest his well-meant intentions might result to the detriment of the captive. How could Johnson or anyone else rely on the promises of the brigands when they had such a rich prize within their power? No, "ill got, ill gone;" it was better to forfeit the money than risk the young man's life.

With the exception of some commotion in business circles the death of the slave merchant was a matter of little concern to the general public. The circumstances of his son's captivity were not known until long afterwards, and the event of the sudden death of an old man was only a matter of common occurrence.

In due time Walter Meyrick was released from his bondage, and returned post-haste to England on hearing what had taken place. Notwithstanding the heavy trade losses and the money sent to the brigands, the old merchant died immensely rich. The business was transferred into other hands, and young Meyrick returned to Cambridge, where he renewed his studies, and finally entered the church.

What had become of Nemma-nemma was never satisfactorily known. Some said that he had joined the brigands and become a great leader amongst them; others that he had returned to his own country, and attempted to stir up the natives against the cruelties of the slave trade.

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