J. E. Sionde

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LEAVES:

BEING A COLLECTION OF PIECES WRITTEN FOR PUBLIC READING.

BY

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MR. PIPER'S MITTENS.

It *was* cold that New Year's Day. The people in the streets looked as they only can look when Jack Frost, Esq., is at work. All the noses which were not red were blue, saving a select few (mostly Romans and Grecians), which were purple. Teeth held long conversations without any sort of reference to the wishes of their owners. Fingers and toes were either aching acutely, or else indulging in all known varieties of pins and needles, or else perfectly devoid of any feeling whatever. Breath issued out of mouths in clouds of steam until one might have fancied that all the boilers and steam-engines in London had assumed a human shape and gone out for a holiday.

Marvellous garments and head-coverings were brought into requisition; astounding fur caps—stupendous coats—gloves that nobody could possibly have shaken hands in—comforters that appeared to wind round and round and round, and to have no perceptible beginning or end. The thermometer was falling fast, and so were the foot-passengers, for the pavement was covered with a coagulated mixture of frozen mud and snow as hard as iron and slippery as glass.

Verily it *was* cold, and no one was more thoroughly persuaded of the fact than was Mr. Piper as he walked and ran, and slipped and stumbled along on his way to the City

as best he might. There was no appearance of poverty about Mr. Piper, but his throat was fully exposed to the biting wind, and his hands were innocent of all covering except a pair of thin kid gloves, through divers rents in which his half-frozen fingers protruded visibly and most unwillingly. And there was generally about him an indescribable air of neglect, a want of being, as it were, finished off, which would have caused any person of discernment to say in a moment, "That man has no one to look after him at home."

Nor had he; for he was a widower, and his only child, a daughter, was for all practical purposes dead to him. She had married secretly, and very imprudently, a young gentleman with light-blue eyes and little fluffy whiskers, and whose means were even smaller than his whiskers. Mr. Piper had all along set his face against the match, and when one evening after he had got home the young couple appeared before him, and went down on their knees, by a preconceived movement, with the intention of reciting a carefully-prepared petition (not a word of which they could recollect at the critical moment)—I say when this happened he had turned both of them out of the house in a fury, and had vowed that he would never see their faces more. Every avenue of Mr. Piper's heart had been locked tight against the luckless couple. The front door had been, so to speak, fastened, the bolts drawn, and the chain put up. Nay, even the letter-box had been sealed, for showers of epistles had remained unanswered, if not even unopened. And now on this particular morning, as he walked along, Mr. Piper said aloud with a most determined air, "I won't." And when he said "I won't," he didn't

mean that he wouldn't fall down, because he fell several times, and generally immediately after he said it; but what he did mean was, that he would not open a fat little parcel which was in his pocket, and to which his hand occasionally glided as if involuntarily. And it was when his hand had got hold of it that he said "I won't," and then, as I before observed, he generally tumbled down.

Now, the little fat parcel had come by the post that morning, and the direction on it was written in a female hand well known to Mr. Piper, who, when he saw it on the table, uttered an expression which is generally spelt "psha" in books, but which it is difficult to reproduce on paper without suggesting to the reader an abortive effort to sneeze dismally. And then, I regret to say, he threw it on the floor.

The little parcel went down in a saucy, unconcerned sort of way, and lay on the carpet in full view of Mr. Piper, as he sat at breakfast. And the funny thing was, that whenever he took his eyes off it, they always went back again with a furtive, inquisitive look.

"What is it?" said Mr. Piper, soliloquising. "It can't be a letter. She could never have written all *that*. But it does not matter what it is, I *won't* open it."

It was rather a singular circumstance that he should pick up the little parcel and stow it away in his pocket almost immediately after saying this; and more singular still, that as he struggled along in the cold afterwards (still with the parcel in his pocket) he should think it necessary to say, "I won't," so often and with so much determination, as if, indeed, somebody else kept saying, "Yes, you will;" whereas, he was absolutely alone and free to make any

remark he pleased, without the least fear of contradiction. However, Mr. Piper got to business at last, with the parcel still unopened; but again and again during the day his thoughts reverted to it, and just before he started to go out in the cold that evening he took it out of his pocket and began to turn it over and over, as if it were a hot potato, and he could not make up his mind where to take the first bite.

"After all, I may as well see what is inside it," said he at last, and he tore it open. A slip of paper with writing on it fell out and fluttered to the ground, and inside the parcel, exposed to view, was one of the neatest, nattiest, cosiest, warmest pairs of woollen mittens that ever you did see.

Mr. Piper looked at them in amazement for a few moments, and then he stooped down and picked up the slip of paper.

"For my dear father. A New Year's gift from the sorrowful, repentant little girl that he used to love."

He read these words slowly, and then he tried to read them again; but he could not manage it the second time because there was some water in his eyes. Eyes do water in cold weather; and Mr. Piper was standing in a draught.

Then he appeared to be lost in reflection; so lost, indeed, that he slowly put the mittens on over his cold hands and wrists, and placed the slip of paper carefully in an inner pocket. And with that off he started home.

"For my dear father. A New Year's gift from the sorrowful, repentant little girl that he used to love."

How these words kept ringing in his ears! And how his eyes did water from the cold, to be sure.

Mr. Piper was in such an absent state of mind when he

sat down to dinner that evening that he quite forgot to take off the mittens, and instead of eating, he kept looking at them, and pulling out the slip of paper and putting it back again; and he did not even hear a timid footstep, which glided into the room and softly approached the back of his chair.

But he did hear voices sounding in the air—voices which spoke of love and pity and forgiveness. And he did see visions—visions of a child, once the darling of his heart, but banished from it for one heedless act of disobedience; visions of that child as she used to be in the happy days gone by; visions of that same child, sorrowful, repentant, pleading these six weary months past for his forgiveness; but in vain.

"For my dear father," he murmured once more. "A New Year's gift from"——

"From me, father; from your wicked, disobedient girl, who begs for your pardon and longs to win back your love!" cries a voice close to him, and two arms are thrown round his neck, and soon his child is sobbing on his bosom, while the blessed peace of the forgiver and the forgiven falls upon them and consecrates their reconciliation.

The young man with light-blue eyes and little fluffy whiskers had been surreptitiously waiting outside the door in a state of profound trepidation; but soon he was conducted in triumph into the room, whereupon he instantly went down on his knees before Mr. Piper, and, although he was forcibly hauled up and violently shaken hands with, it was observable of that young man that he could not all the evening quite get over a fixed impression that it was his

bounden and imperative duty to place himself in a posture of supplication towards Mr. Piper, and that he at intervals relapsed into a sort of triangular attitude, from which he was with some difficulty recalled.

Mr. Piper lives now with his daughter and her husband, and he revels in mittens, knitted gloves, and every other accessory to the comfort of an elderly gentleman that the ingenuity of love can devise. But I have reason to believe that a certain pair of mittens sent to him on a certain New Year's Day are secretly regarded by him as possessing properties of warmth and beauty not to be equalled by any other pair of mittens ever yet made.

MRS. PAGGLEBY'S JUVENILE PARTY.

THERE was bustle and animation everywhere in the Paggleby's abode on the evening of that Juvenile Party—so much bustle and animation, in fact, that Mr. Paggleby, who was a nervous man, took himself off to his club at the precise moment when the drawing-room sofa was being placed on the top of his study table, and did not return until ten o'clock, when he took his boots off in the hall and crept upstairs to his bed in a general state of uncertainty as to where he was likely to find it.

A casual and thoughtless observer, looking in at 5.30 P.M., might have supposed from the confusion which prevailed that there was an execution in the house. But had he taken one peep into the drawing-room at 7 P.M., oh! how different would have been his opinion!

For there sat Mrs. Paggleby and the youthful Pagglebys, awaiting their guests. Mrs. Paggleby had on a silk dress, cut with a "V" bodice, and adorned in such a bewildering manner that the difficulty of finding out where the trimming really started from was a task which might have compared favourably with the discovery of the source of the Nile. Then there were the two eldest Masters Paggleby, in velveteen knickerbockers and white silk stockings. The two eldest Masters Paggleby were twins, and they were born on the 18th of June; so, in commemoration of the great event which happened on that date, Mrs. Paggleby

had christened them respectively Wellington Waterloo and Napoleon Bonaparte. As they were now twelve years old, and they had fought daily during the whole of that period, the names were, in more than one respect, appropriate.

Besides these young gentlemen—who were pummelling each other furiously on a rout seat, to the great distraction of their mamma—there were three little Misses Paggleby, dressed exactly alike, in three little white muslin dresses, with three little blue sashes, and whose three little frizzled heads were tied round with three little bits of blue ribbon—and who had three little one-and-ninepenny aluminium lockets fastened round three little necks with three more little bits of blue ribbon.

Lastly, there was the smallest Paggleby of the lot, a most audacious child of five, familiarly named Toodles, as to whom it had been purposed that he should, at the precise moment of which I speak, have been in bed, fast asleep; but who, disdaining all artifice, had flatly declined to allow the removal of one single garment, and, after making several most daring escapes from the nursery (with the result of being discovered, on the last occasion, under the dining-room table, surrounded by sponge cakes and other delicacies abstracted from above), had ultimately undergone a hasty washing and been let loose on society as an irretrievably bad character.

Suddenly there was heard a ring at the bell, and a loud rat-tat-tat at the knocker, whereupon the three Masters Paggleby and the three Misses Paggleby made an incontinent rush at the stairs, and looked downwards through the balusters in a state of wild expectation. The five elder ones were content with a comparatively moderate inspec-

tion, but Toodles, in order to see what was going on to the best possible advantage, pushed his head through up to a certain point, and then got wedged in, insomuch that it became necessary to pull him out backwards by his legs, in a very crumpled-up and far from hilarious condition.

"It's Laura," whispered Amelia Paggleby, the eldest of the three girls, speculatively, as the servant went to open the door.

"'Tisn't; it's Tom Jackson," answered Wellington Waterloo.

Before any more guesses had been ventured the door opened, and all the little Pagglebys, except Toodles (who was compelled to remain, for the reason to which I have already adverted), beat a reluctant retreat into the drawing-room.

The first arrival turned out to be a convoy composed of no less than eight fat children rejoicing in the name of Lumpit. Regarded as a whole, the eight Lumpits were very like organ-pipes; for they were all round and exactly alike; each one, except the largest of all, was a little shorter than the one that went before, and they made a prodigiously loud noise out of comparatively small mouths and generally at the same time.

Scarcely had the Lumpits been unpacked and conducted upstairs, when clang went the bell and bang went the knocker again, and for the next half-hour the guests came pouring in, the last of them being Mrs. Miffin and her little boy, whom she conducted to the scene in person.

Mrs. Miffin was a rather vulgar but very good-natured lady, whose ancestors had, I believe, taken root originally in the Old Kent Road—the reason for their doing so being

that they got into that interminable thoroughfare one day, and became so exceedingly exhausted in trying to reach the other end that they were obliged to take a house in the middle. But for some inscrutable reason Mrs. Miffin affected to be Scotch. Her propensity took the outward form of dressing up Master Miffin as if he were a Highland chieftain who had shrunk in the wash, and of adorning her own ample shoulders by throwing obliquely over them from right to left a stupendous plaid not owned by any particular clan with which I am acquainted.

Mrs. Miffin, like Mrs. Paggleby, had a great idea of appropriate Christian names, and having adopted Scotland as her nation, she determined not to do the thing by halves, so she christened Master Miffin, Malcolm Stuart Ross Douglas. It had been said by a malicious person that, but for the clergyman's inability to take in any more, the infant Miffin would have returned from baptism as Malcolm Stuart Ross Douglas Scots-Wha-Hae-Wi'-Wallace-Bled Miffin—but I believe that to have been a libel.

The arrival of the last guest was the signal for the appearance at the drawing-room door of Mary Jane, the parlour maid, very smartly and cherry-coloured-ribbonly got up as to her costume, and with a face that shone like unto the morning sun from circumstances not altogether unconnected with yellow soap.

Mary Jane's mission was to announce that tea was ready, but the remark was fated not to fall from her lips, for the instant she appeared Wellington and Napoleon, forgetful of all the lessons of politeness which Mrs. Paggleby had impressed upon them in the morning, shouted out, "Tea's ready, Mar, come along," and made a sally past Mary

Jane in the direction of the dining-room. And such excellent use did they make of this temporary advantage, that by the time Mrs. Paggleby had reached the tea-table, the two young gentlemen had secured for themselves the very best seats, and had made considerable havoc with the muffins. But the principal features at the tea-table were the eight Lumpits, whose capacities for containing food seemed to defy all ordinary calculations of a given quantity of internal space; and of whom it was to be observed that when everybody else had finished they still lingered at the table, and were with difficulty constrained to depart. As for Toodles, he plied a brisk guerilla warfare and seized plunder whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Wellington and Napoleon having fallen to at the tea to their entire satisfaction, proceeded, as was their wont, to fall to at each other, and as the largest Lumpit boy was between them, and they hit out without the smallest reference to that trifling circumstance, I may say that on the whole the largest Lumpit boy did not come off a gainer by their proceedings. But the combat was, fortunately for that personage, of brief duration, for the idea suddenly seized both Wellington and Napoleon that by this time the conjuror had probably arrived, and this circumstance impelled them to cease hostilities and make another rush back to the drawing-room, where, when the rest of the party ascended, they were discovered rummaging about among the conjuror's appurtenances, to his great discomfort and speechless indignation.

In the meantime, and while tea had been going on, the rout seats and chairs had been arranged in rows to face the conjuror, and after a good deal of pushing and elbowing (in

the course of which Mrs. Miffin was nearly doubled up by a charge from Napoleon Bonaparte, while Toodles sat composedly on a tempting Lumpit), the audience settled down in a state of whispering excitement.

Suddenly Wellington shouted out—

"Mar!"

"Well, my dear?"

"Tom Jackson says their conjuror always wears spangles and a grand dress, and he s'poses this man doesn't 'cos he isn't paid enough."

Mrs. Paggleby immediately became engaged in a most interesting conversation with Mrs. Miffin, and pretended not to hear, but again a voice broke on the air—a much smaller voice—

"Ma-ar!"

"Well, Toodles, what is it?"

"I may stay up for supper, mayn't I? 'cos Napoleon says I mustn't, and he says you said we mustn't take any negus or lemonade, as there wouldn't be enough if we did, as the Lumpits always eat and drink enough for twenty."

A violent spasm of coughing was the only resource left to Mrs. Paggleby at this dreadful moment, but a diversion was created, to her immense relief, by the conjuror.

I have no recollection that anything worthy of note occurred during his performance, and I imagine, therefore, that he kept Mrs. Paggleby's little guests in a state of concentrated attention, for which they made up by the tumultuous noise and confusion which prevailed while the rout seats were being cleared away afterwards.

The conjuror was followed by a quadrille, and the quadrille by a polka, in both of which dances the little Misses

Paggleby showed to great advantage, by reason of their having had lessons at school, if you please, for which Mrs. Paggleby paid extra, if you please. And then, when the polka was over, Mrs. Miffin, who had been looking on in a state of obvious impatience, and, as it were, champing at the bit, went across the room to Mrs. Paggleby.

"If you want a little assistance, dear Mrs. Paggleby, to amuse the young people, my Malcolm can dance the real Scotch 'Ighland Fling fine, and the Henglish 'Ornpipe also."

"Can he, my dear Mrs. Miffin? Oh! how very enchanting! My dears, Mrs. Miffin's little boy will dance a Highland Fling or a Hornpipe for us. Which would you like best?"

A general chorus of "Hornpipe" was the answer, the only lukewarm voice being, in fact, that of Toodles, who was getting desperately anxious lest he should be sent to bed before supper, and greeted with secret dismay every new event which postponed that meal.

Mrs. Miffin graciously signified her assent, and settled down at the piano to accompany the performance. She presented a very imposing aspect as she did so. When I say that she took off and scattered about enough rings to satisfy the ambition of any ordinary pawnbroker—when I say that she bared her arms up to the elbows, for greater freedom of action—when I add that she so adjusted her tartan plaid that it wobbled majestically up and down at every note—when I have said all this, I shall still have failed to convey to you the determination, the fiery zeal, which distinguished Mrs. Miffin at that moment.

The room was cleared; the infant chieftain advanced to

the middle. Mrs. Miffin played a thrilling chord, which comprised every note on the piano, except two which were out of order and would not respond, and then began the hornpipe. Mrs. Miffin followed the tune with a running accompaniment, which was something after this sort: "Tiddle-*um-tum-tum.* Cross your legs, my dear. Tiddle-um-ti-*tum-tum-tum.* Throw your arms about, love. Tiddle-iddy-iddy-iddy-iddy-iddy-iddy-iddy. Make believe at pulling ropes, my darling boy. Cross your legs again. Ti-iddy-um. Pre*tend* to row. Throw your legs about, and arms about, my sweet; just *so.* Tiddy-*um*ti-iddy-iddy. Plunge about like mad, my dear. Oh! cross your legs; *do* cross your legs, my dear! Oh! oh!"

By the time this point was reached, the infant Miffin was nearly exhausted, while his mamma was panting audibly. So the performance was brought to an abrupt close by Mrs. Miffin, with the immediate result of leaving the young gentleman pulling violently at an imaginary rope, with one leg in the air and no tune to finish on.

By this time Mrs. Paggleby had expected supper to be ready, but as no announcement was made upon the subject, she bethought her to fill up the gap by singing a song. Now Mrs. Paggleby had had a very good voice, but it was a matter of somewhat remote history (so much so, that some ill-natured people did not believe it); and the fact that she specially prided herself on being able to sing without having either the music or the words before her, and that she generally forgot most of the music and a good many of the words, led to curious results.

On this occasion Mrs. Paggleby sang, "Believe me, if all those endearing young charms." The first verse went

pretty smoothly, but in the second verse Mrs. Paggleby got upon the breakers, and it came out something like this :—

Oh ! it is not while beauty and youth are thine own,
And thy face unbeknown to a tear,
That the strength of a heart so devoted as mine can be known,
To which time will only make thee more clear——I mean dear,
For the heart that has once loved truly doesn't forget,
But at the close—but loves truly—
[*Mrs. Miffin, prompting:* But as truly loves on to the close——]
Thank you, Mrs. Miffin—But as truly loves on with the close,
As the dahlia——I mean the sunflower——turns on her god when he sits
The same look which——which——
[*Mrs. Miffin:* She turned when he rose——]
Thank you, my dear Mrs. Miffin—The same look which she turned to the rose.

The last note of Mrs. Paggleby's song had just expired when again Mary Jane appeared at the door to announce supper.

Curiously enough, Toodles was not visible when the party began to move downwards—indeed, no trace of him was seen until Mrs. Paggleby had brought up the rear and sailed out of the room, when there might have been observed a gentle upheaving of the settee, followed by the appearance from under the same of a very small head, and that, at a respectful interval, by a very small body. The truth was that Toodles had conceived an idea that the less he obtruded himself under his mamma's gaze before supper the better chance he stood of eluding the maternal authority and joining in that meal. Whence it came that he had selected the settee for a hiding-place, and that he now went stealthily downstairs and deposited himself unobserved

at that precise corner of the supper-table at which he was farthest removed from Mrs. Paggleby, and could, moreover, obtain a good deal of cover from one of the most corpulent Lumpits.

It was a beautiful supper. There were twelve oranges, which were cut up into twenty-four pieces each, and made an immense show. Then there were two chickens, which looked perfectly compact until you undid some pieces of white ribbon with which they were tied up, when they fell into the most convenient and obliging little helps. And there were custards; and grapes set like precious stones in golden jelly, and corn-flour (I mean *blanc-mange*), and a most dissipated-looking tipsy-cake. As for the negus and lemonade, they simply ran. I don't think I am exaggerating when I say that there must have been enough to go very nearly once round in small sherry glasses. Lastly, there were crackers—lots of crackers—six crackers. Of these six crackers Toodles abstracted one when nobody was looking, Wellington and Napoleon each seized two, and the remaining one would not go off. On the whole, therefore, it must in candour be admitted that the guests did not get much change out of them.

All things come to an end—the most gorgeous of suppers, the most successful of juvenile parties. The Lumpits ate till they could eat no more. Toodles, exhausted by late hours and deep scheming, went to sleep with his head on the table in a dessert-plate. And then servants arrived to fetch home young masters and misses, and whispered the usual inquiries in the hall as to whether or not they had conducted themselves with that propriety which their respective Pas and Mas had fondly hoped for, but only faintly

dared to expect; and little heads disappeared in large wrappers, and the eight Lumpits were packed up again and left in a comatose and apoplectic condition, and Wellington Waterloo and Napoleon Bonaparte went to bed too tired to pinch Amelia on the way upstairs, or to indulge in any more active form of hostility in their bedroom than a dropping fire of brushes and pillows. And one by one the lights went out; the Paggleby establishment was buried in a profound repose, and the Juvenile Party was a thing of the past.

A STRIKE; AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

"Ho! you've been and *struck*, 'ave you?" inquired Mrs. Dobkins in tones which I cannot conscientiously describe as silvery.

"Yes, I *'ave*," answered Samuel Dobkins.

"And what did you do *that* for?"

"Dunno."

"What do yer mean with yer *dunno?*" This last with a tremendous jerk.

"Well, I means as a party with a red face come and told the chaps something about slaves and starving. And 'e says, 'You're hall worms of the hearth,' 'e says, 'but Hi'm a Delicate,' 'e says (only 'e didn't look wery delicate), 'and Hi'm a-going to show you 'ow to be Rule Britannias.' And 'e says, 'You must *strike*, that's wot you must do; and if you *don't* strike, the Society as Hi comes from, for pro*moting* strikes and giving the working man more pay and scarcely no work at all, will *crush* you.' So we all come away; and 'e says, 'You leave *me* to deal with your masters, and don't you come back till Hi tell yer.'"

"Well, Dobkins!"

"Well, Mary!"

"Is *that* all as you've got to say?"

"Yes! on'y as the party with the red face sent round 'is 'at for a subscription on behalf of the Society, and said as

sixpence was the smallest donation as the Society would take from hanybody."

Mrs. Dobkins had listened to this story with an air of calmness which was obviously forced, and boded no good for Mr. Samuel Dobkins. Now she struck an attitude in front of that worthy, in which the placing of the arms akimbo was a prominent feature.

"Who's going to find the dinner?"

Mr. Dobkins didn't seem to know.

"Who's going to feed Mary, and Sally, and Bill, and them blessed twins?"

Dobkins didn't appear to know this either.

"Who's going to keep a 'ome over our 'eads, and prevent our all going into the werkus?"

Dobkins didn't appear to know *this* either.

"The party with the red face," he observed in a puzzled tone, "never said nothink about that. 'E only said as we wos worms of the hearth."

"Worms of the hearth, indeed!" retorted Mrs. Dobkins; "you ain't 'arf as good. Worms of the hearth don't go striking because parties with red faces come and call 'em names, and tell 'em a parcel of stuff. Worms of the hearth don't go subscribing sixpences to societies as they don't know nothink about, and then come 'ome and look their wives and children in the face."

Mrs. Dobkins paused—not because she had finished, but for want of breath—and Samuel Dobkins, roused to desperation (he very seldom dared to interrupt the flow of the good lady's tongue), broke in—

"It ain't no good your a-going on: 'Ave I struck? Yes, I 'ave struck. Do I know wot for? No, I don't know wot

for. Wot's the good of it? I don't know wot's the good of it. Why did I do it? Cos the other chaps did it. If you wos to talk till you wos black in the face you couldn't make that no different."

Mrs. Dobkins burst into tears. Mary Dobkins, junior, Sally Dobkins, and Bill Dobkins burst into tears. The twins (not yet named) burst into one tear between them.

Let us pass over a week or two, and give another peep into Mr. Samuel Dobkins' establishment. It does not look so nice as it did when we left it just now. There is a bareness about the sitting-room difficult to make out at first, but when we look round we find that several useful and ornamental articles have disappeared mysteriously.

There were two little china shepherds on the mantelpiece before, playing two china flutes—they seem to have passed on, flutes and all, to the next street. There was a good old-fashioned clock, which ticked away as regularly as Mrs. Dobkins' tongue, but not nearly so fast. There was a gigantic warming-pan, so bright on the round part of it that you might have looked into it and ascertained whether or not you had a smut on your nose. Clock and warming-pan have both gone.

There was a wonderful picture on the wall—a gentleman with a big head and a small body stabbing another gentleman with a small head and big body; and the gentleman with the small head and big body used to smile away, as if being stabbed through so hard that the sword came out at his back, like a skewer through a joint of meat, were rather a joke than otherwise. They appear to have killed each other, and been carried away and buried.

Nay, I could declare that there was at least one chair more than there is now, the last time we called; that there was a table-cloth on the table, a complete set of fire-irons in the grate (there is only a poker there now, which must evidently have been nearly related to the tongs and shovel, it looks so dull and melancholy without them), and many other things of which we haven't time to take an inventory.

Mrs. Dobkins is out, but Mr. Dobkins is sitting there, still on strike, and looking very much down in the mouth. He has a twin on each knee (left there by Mrs. Dobkins before she went out), a circumstance which does not appear to increase his comfort. Moreover, the twins are not used to sitting on Samuel Dobkins' knee, and they don't like it. Consequently, the twins stiffen themselves out like two ramrods, and begin to slide downwards. Samuel Dobkins holds them up by their necks as well as he can, one with each hand, a course of treatment under the influence of which the twins begin to gurgle in the throat, and show signs of suffocation. At this precise juncture, happily for the twins, Mrs. Dobkins comes in.

"Wot are you a-doing of with them blessed twins?" cries Mrs. Dobkins, as she rushes to their rescue. She snatches them from Mr. Dobkins, gives him her opinion of his nursing powers and domestic usefulness generally in terms more plain than elegant, and then imperiously bids him go and turn the mangle. Mrs. Dobkins does mangling, by-the-bye.

Mr. Dobkins, with a groan, goes to the mangle. Oh, how he does dislike that mangle! Mangling, like skinning eels, is an employment which you can't thoroughly enjoy until you're quite used to it. Mr. Dobkins is not used

to it, for until he went on strike and was about the place all day Mrs. Dobkins had been able to pay a boy to do it for her; and it takes him just in the small of the back.

Mrs. Dobkins proceeds to cook the dinner—not nearly such a good one, by-the-bye, as they used to sit down to a short time since, when Dobkins came home from work for an hour in the middle of the day. She is not an amiable woman, Mrs. Dobkins, but she works very hard, poor thing, and tries all she can to keep the wolf from the door, now that Samuel is at home on strike, doing nothing. She makes as much use as she can of him, as you have already seen; but that, as you have also seen, is not much.

"Much good you and your *strike* have done," she jerks out, as she busies herself with slapping the children all round (except the twins, who have not yet arrived at a slapping age), and looking after the dinner at the same time. "A great, lazy, idle, good-for-nothing man like you, sitting about the place and grumbling over a little mangling, as if it wos the tread-mill! 'Ow long am I to go on toiling and working till I'm fit to drop, and the things being pawned one after another till the place is getting as bare as a prison cell, and all along of you and your strike, indeed?"

Samuel Dobkins went on mangling, and as he mangled he thought within himself that, upon the whole, it was better to be a worm of the earth than to look after the twins, turn the mangle, and be subject all day to the attacks of Mrs. Dobkins' active tongue. Moreover, Samuel Dobkins preferred having enough to eat to being half-starved; and more than that, it did not delight Samuel Dobkins to see his ornaments and portable articles of furniture removing by instalments to the establishment referred to by Mrs.

Dobkins, where tickets were issued which were not railway tickets.

It took Samuel Dobkins, in a general way, a considerable time to find his mind—which was not a large one—and, when he had found it, to make it up; but, when he *did* make it up, the dome of St. Paul's was a balloon compared to the firmness of it. And Samuel Dobkins made up his mind now. He left the mangle without a word, put on his cap, and darted out of the house. He did not return for several hours; indeed, Mrs. Dobkins began to get rather alarmed at his prolonged absence. But he came in late in the evening, and his face, although he was evidently very tired, looked brighter than it had done for many days, and a weight seemed to have been taken off him.

"Where *'ave* you been to, Dobkins?" asked the good lady, in astonishment.

"Give us summat to eat, and then I'll tell you," answered that worthy.

Mrs. Dobkins was not an ill-natured woman at heart, and she saw that her husband really did want something to eat very badly, so she curbed in her curiosity—a mighty difficult thing for a woman to do, mind you—until she had set food before him, and had seen it disappear down his throat. I can assure you it didn't take long to do that; the slices of bread and butter seemed to go down like letters into a post-office.

And then, when the post-office was quite full, Samuel gave a grunt of satisfaction and began his explanation.

"Mary, I've been round to all the chaps as is on strike, and I says to them, I says, I dunno wot *you* think about being on strike, and I dunno wot the party with the red

face thinks about it; but I knows wot I thinks, and I thinks this, that if I was a worm of the hearth afore I went on strike, I'm summat a deal more unpleasant now; and I'm a-going back ter-morrow morning to be a worm again, I am, so you may do wot you likes. Well, I found the t'other chaps didn't seem very comfortable neither, and Bill Jenkins, 'e says to me, says 'e, 'I'd rather be a worm with summat to heat, and do my work honest and manly, than be a Rule Britannia with a hempty hinside and a un'appy 'ome.' So wot with talking with one, and wot with talking with another, we're all agreed as we're a-going back ter-morrow morning, and we ain't going to strike no more, not if we jolly well knows it."

Samuel Dobkins and his comrades did go back next morning. I understand that the party with the red face, who had been blustering with their masters, and sowing discord in every direction to the best of his ability, made his appearance a day or two after he heard that the men had returned to work. I am further told that the party with the red face did not get any subscriptions for the Society on that occasion. I have even heard that he was observed a few minutes afterwards to be running away with much energy, and to be holding one hand to his nose, even as people do after that tender organ has received an unexpected blow.

And I have also heard that Samuel Dobkins and his mates still find themselves more comfortable in the character of worms of the earth than they did when playing the part of "Rule Britannias."

LETITIA'S GOOSEBERRY.

A LOVE-STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS.

—o—

CHAPTER I.

Augustus and Letitia were engaged to be married—no underhand secret affair, but a regular out-and-out engagement. Augustus's Pa and Ma approved—Letitia's Pa and Ma approved. Augustus wore a locket at the end of his watch-chain, the size of an ordinary saucer, containing about a pound and a half of Letitia's hair. Letitia had a ring on the third finger of her left hand, from which finger, as is well known to all lovers, there proceeds a vein which communicates with an artery which goes straight to the heart. Augustus called Letitia sometimes "Tisha" (as if she were a sneeze), sometimes "Lettice" (as if she were a vegetable). Letitia called Augustus "Gussie." Last, but not least, Augustus adored Letitia—and Letitia idolised Augustus. The happy day was not fixed, for a reason which often applies in these cases, to wit, that Augustus had not yet made his way in the world to any appreciable extent (his net revenue being, in fact, eighteen shillings a week); while Letitia's parents, who lived in a mysterious manner in the basement of a house, and let

all the rest to lodgers, were not in a position to endow that young woman with any more substantial fortune than their blessing—an article which is all very well in its way, but doesn't go far towards furnishing a house, and won't even pay for a tin of Australian meat. Consequently, Augustus and Letitia were obliged to wait in mutual trust and confidence—to see each other on every possible and impossible occasion—to write to each other at intervals of twelve hours—and to walk out on Sunday afternoons arm in arm up to the elbow.

I say to walk out; but if you imagine that I mean to walk out *alone*, you do a grievous wrong to Letitia's Pa and Ma. They were far too prim and proper to allow anything of the sort; and so, if you please, when the lovers sallied forth, Letitia's younger sister, a maiden of thirteen, went with them and played that part which is commonly called "gooseberry."

Let me here ask parenthetically, but with deep feeling, whether any reader of mine has ever played gooseberry? I have; and I am prepared to state on oath that the leading features of the character are not pleasing.

You are expected to look intently at earth, sky, sea, brick wall, or whatever else may be visible to the naked eye—but NEVER (that "never" is spelt with five capital letters) at the engaged couple. You are NEVER (five more capitals) allowed to hear one sentence, word, exclamation, or sigh proceeding from the two persons you have been sent out with. You are expected to maintain the silence of the tomb; and if you infringe against this inflexible rule you are regarded with a stony glare on the part of the gentleman, while the lady favours you with a contemptuous toss of the

head, as if to say, "The idea of such a thing, indeed." Lastly, you have a depressing conviction that you are regarded as an unmitigated nuisance, an intolerable incumbrance, a condensed essence of wet blanket, by both your companions.

Having avenged a few past injuries with these remarks, and fervently hoping that one or two people, whom I could name if I would (but I wouldn't if I were on the rack), may writhe under them, I come back to Letitia and Augustus; and I reproduce two letters which passed between them.

No. 1.

Letitia to Augustus.

(Pink paper, scolloped; handwriting faint and somewhat angular; total absence of stops.)

"27 Pump Street S.W. *Saturday morning.*

"My dearest *dearest* DEAREST Gussie—I long for to-morrow afternoon when you will take me out and I shall be quite ready and in my new grey and I think you will like it and oh! don't be late because the moments I shall count and also long for them to go that I may see my Gussie and I can't write more because of the lodgers' dinners but oh! dear Gussie till the world do end I am yours

"Tisiia.

"*P.S.*—Maria isn't going with us to-morrow but a gentleman as is a friend of ours."

No. 2.

Augustus to Letitia.

(Handwriting round and mercantile, with flourishes.)

"42 Smiff Street. *Saturday evening.*

"My precious Tisha,—Yours to hand. How can you s'pose I would be late, when I can hardly eat cos of wishing so tremendous to see my angel in her grey. The gent named in the P.S. I have not heard of previous and is puzzling; and as regards going out, would prefer Mariar as is used to it and don't trouble. Not, I'm sure, because jealous; far from same; and I know you would never go to do anything to break my heart and make the world a dessert

[In the original the word is spelt with two s's, but Augustus probably meant "desert"]

"To your loving Gussie."

CHAPTER II.

Punctually to the fraction of a moment, Augustus sped to the abode of his Letitia that Sunday afternoon; and such was the ardour of his mind, that he disregarded the steps which led to the front door of his beloved one's castle, tripped up them, and went head foremost into the waistcoat of—*another*.

Yes, another—a man—and what's more, a tall, handsome man, with a bronzed face, and curly hair, and blue eyes, and spick and span clothes, and brand-new boots. The door was wide open, and this person was standing in front of it in an easy and familiar attitude, as if he had lived there all his life.

Augustus had scarcely recovered a perpendicular position when out came Letitia, all smiling and shimmering in her new grey dress, with a jaunty little bonnet trimmed with an impossible-looking crop of wheat and cherries, and carrying in her hand a shawl in size about fifteen inches square, and in texture of the thickness of tissue paper—one of those preposterously useless little shawls that young ladies carry about in order, as I verily believe, to give young gentlemen an opportunity of saying, "I'm *sure* you will catch cold. *Do, do* let me persuade you to put your shawl on," &c. &c.

"Oh, Gussie dear, how pleased I am to see you how do you like my new dress and this is the gentleman I named in my letter he's a *very* old friend of ours though you haven't seen him before and his name's Jack." This in one breath.

The tall man smiled, held out his hand to Augustus, and said, in a hearty voice, "How are you?"

Augustus did *not* smile, and did *not* hold out his hand, and only answered sulkily, "Oh! I s'pose I'm all right." Whereat the tall man only smiled rather more pleasantly than before. But Letitia arched her eyebrows, and pouted her lips, and tossed her head, and said, "*Well*, I'm sure *that's* a nice way of speaking."

Augustus muttered something between his teeth which sounded like "Jack, indeed! Very old friend, I should think!" an observation which, far from offending the tall man, seemed to cause him infinite amusement.

"Yes," said he, "I *am* a very old friend—older even than you, I fancy. But suppose we make a start. Come along, Letitia." And therewith, in front of the very eyes, nose, and teeth of Augustus, the tall man held out his arm to Letitia.

Letitia took it, and before he knew what he was doing, Augustus found himself walking along dismally on the other side of the young lady, and surveying with tumultuous bosom the obvious delight which the false maiden seemed unmistakably to find in the companionship of the tall villain. Neither of them took any notice of Augustus for some time, but at length the tall man looked over Letitia's head at his woe-begone visage, and observed blandly, "You don't seem quite well. Anything wrong?"

"No, thank you," snapped back Augustus, "there ain't anything the matter with me, though p'r'aps *other* people" (here a vindictive glance at Letitia) "might be pleased if there *was*."

"Oh!" said the tall man cheerfully, "you looked so glum that I thought you must be unwell. Not unhappy about anything, I hope?"

"Never was 'appier in my life," snarled Augustus.

"I'm afraid your life can't have been a very festive one then," said the tall man, laughing outright.

Well, this set the young lady off giggling; and for the rest of that walk the tall man and Letitia were seized with uncontrollable fits of mirth, which first wound up Augustus to a point bordering on frenzy, and then produced on his features an appearance of awful gloom.

By the time they reached home again he had taken a deep and dreadful resolution, of which he decided to unbosom himself on the door-mat.

Little guessing what was about to ensue, Letitia gaily opened the door, and the trio marched in, Augustus bringing up the rear. He closed the door behind him, solemnly, drew himself up to his full height (five feet three inches in

his stockings—thick stockings), and remarked, in a tone of supernatural calmness—

"Serpents!"

Letitia and the tall man turned round, amazed.

"I said serpents, and I mean serpents. I cast you hoff for hever, girl. You 'ave destroyed my 'appiness; but there is rest in the Regent's Canal for the pilgrim of love. You will never, never, never see me more till my corpse is found—and then my spirit will 'aunt you with remorse. Take 'er—take 'er—you who 'ave come and blighted my hevery 'ope—take 'er, and may she be to you a tormentuous scourge!"

It is mournful to have to say that the sole effect which this oration produced on the tall man was to convulse him with laughter. Letitia, however, turned pale; and when Augustus waved his hands, and was about to start from the house as one distracted on his dreadful errand of self-destruction, she rushed to him, and clung hold of him by his paper collar. Augustus struggled, and the paper collar, not being adapted to this sort of thing, would infallibly have given way, when, just at this moment, Letitia's Pa and Ma, who had heard a commotion going on, ran up the kitchen stairs.

"Why, mussy on us! what's the matter?" exclaimed Letitia's Ma, bewildered. "Why, *Gustus*, you *ain't* been quarrelling with my son Jack, as is just 'ome from India?"

Augustus jumped as if he had been shot, and in so doing freed himself from Letitia's grasp.

"What! your son—Tisha's brother, as sent 'er 'ome the Hinjan hear-rings and cadgmere shawl—why, they never

told me. Oh! Tisha, *can* you?" And Augustus held out his arms.

Tisha could, and the way in which she signified that she could was to make a corresponding movement.

The fact is, don't you see, that Letitia's brother had just come home from India unexpectedly, and that a little joke had been got up between himself and Letitia that he should be introduced to Augustus as a friend, and that Augustus should not be told at first who he really was. Augustus, who was dreadfully jealous, had unfortunately taken him to be a rival the moment he saw him, and certainly had not enjoyed the fun quite so much as had been expected. Indeed, although he and his Letitia have long since been united in the bonds of holy matrimony, he can never, to this day, recall, without a shudder, that Sunday afternoon on which her brother assumed Maria's place as gooseberry.

HOW MR. SMIGGLES WENT TO A PUBLIC DINNER.

A DRESS-SUIT of faultless cut—a pair of patent leather boots, the brightness whereof was dazzling in the extreme —a shirt-front of snowy, a collar of snowier, and a tie of snowiest whiteness—a hat which, when its services were not required, would, on being gently pressed at the top, cease to be a hat, and resolve itself into a something which might be sat upon, or squeezed, or dropped, or assaulted in any manner whatsoever, without sustaining the smallest injury. These various elements, united in one, constituted the outside of Mr. Ferdinand Smiggles, as he started from home on that eventful evening.

He was what you might style a mild-looking person. He had a small body and a large, fat, smooth, sleek face, upon the left cheek of which had appeared seven years previously a something very like a Brussels sprout (only that it was straw-coloured and not green), which he designated his "whiskers." He had been waiting ever since for a similar eruption to take place on his right cheek, as one who waited for the millennium.

On this occasion Mr. Smiggles looked unusually animated and important. And not without cause, indeed. For he was going out to dinner—not a mere everyday dinner-

party, where Mr. Smith would take Mrs. Brown in to dinner, while Mr. Brown was doing the same kind office for Mrs. Smith. No, indeed; but to a grand public dinner—a dinner given in honour of that great man Sir Spratby Haddock.

This more than lion of the hour—this lion and tiger, and Polar bear, with a hippopotamus thrown in—had done something of such profound service to the country (I don't quite know what it was, but I think it was an improvement in the art of skinning eels), that 250 of his admirers had agreed to eat 250 very rich, unwholesome, and expensive dinners for the privilege and glory of seeing Sir Spratby Haddock submit himself to the same operation.

The circumstances which enrolled Mr. Smiggles in the band were these. He had an acquaintance, by name Barnaby Blazes, a captain in the Royal Navy. Now Captain Barnaby Blazes, R.N., being interested in the skinning of eels, had obtained a ticket for the banquet, but, unable at the last moment to go, he had presented it to Mr. Smiggles, who was only too proud to take his place.

Behold him, then, triumphantly journeying to the scene of action in a hansom cab—and behold him ten minutes after his arrival devouring turtle soup with his mouth and Sir Spratby Haddock with his eyes!

Then, leaving him for one minute thus pleasantly occupied, let us listen to a hurried conversation carried on in an undertone between the chairman and a member of the committee.

"Who is there to return thanks for the Army, Navy, and Volunteers?" asked the chairman.

"The name of Captain B. Blazes, R.N., is on the list,"

replied the member of the committee; "you had better call on him."

"Do you know where he's sitting?" continued the chairman.

"I don't know him even by sight," said the committee-man, looking down a list which he took out of his pocket; "but I see that his seat is No. 13 on the left-hand side down the table; so, counting the numbers on that side, it must be that man with the fat face and big white choker," and therewith the committee-man pointed at our unconscious friend, Mr. Smiggles.

"All right," said the chairman, "I see the man you mean," and with a nod of mutual understanding, the conference ended.

Dear me, what a grand dinner it was! Dish followed dish, and course followed course! Champagne corks were popping away with all the force of musketry, and nearly as much noise; while from the assembled company there arose the indescribable hubbub which is produced when a large number of people eat and drink and talk as hard as they can at one and the same moment.

The soul of Mr. Smiggles expanded with pleasure and enjoyment.

He had never before seen either the gentleman who sat on his right or the gentleman who sat on his left; but before many courses had been completed, he had vowed eternal friendship with the former, and called the latter "old boy" three times.

The dinner at last gave way to dessert, and to the business of the evening—the health-drinking and speech-making.

First of course, there was the toast of the "Queen," and then of the "Prince and Princess of Wales, and all the Royal Family."

Then came the "Army, Navy, and Volunteers." Time forces me to pass over the glowing terms in which the chairman referred to the army, and to come at once to an event fraught with stupendous consequences to Mr. Smiggles.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Chairman—[Mr. Chairman, by the way, had a vast idea of his own powers of speaking; he was given to using very long words, not having much apparent reference to the subject in hand, and to quotations of doubtful accuracy, and of which the author's name was not given with that degree of correctness that might have been desired; and he brought out every word he said as if it were his own private property, entered at Stationers' Hall, and with the right of foreign translation reserved]—

"Gentlemen, I pass from the army"—[here the chairman waved his hand as if he had sent the army to bed]—"to the illustrious, the invincible, the transcendental navy of this realm. What the immortal Shakespeare so aptly called the 'wooden walls of old England' have now given way to impenetrable and majestic iron. But have our sailors changed? Has Britannia ceased (if I may borrow from Wordsworth) to rule the waves? Are the traditions which have descended from the heroes who (as Lord Byron once observed) 'proudly ploughed the azure deep and on its bosom went to sleep' to be degenerately falsified in this our day?"—[Here the chairman paused and looked fiercely at a decanter, as if awaiting an answer to these crushing

questions.]—"No! Never will Britons be the minions of a degraded foe, or 'tune to please a peasant's ear the harp a king once loved to hear' in miserable captivity.

"Gentlemen, we have not among us a soldier or a volunteer, but we have here a distinguished member of the service to which I have just referred, that of the navy; and in proposing the toast of the 'Army, Navy, and Volunteers,' I have great pleasure in coupling with it the name of Captain B. Blazes, R.N."

The chairman bowed straight at Mr. Smiggles—there was no doubt about it—as he rose to drink the toast. Everybody else followed the example of the chairman, and rose also. Mr. Smiggles followed the example of everybody else, and rose too. But what was his astonishment to feel the tails of his coat pulled violently by the gentlemen on either side of him, while one of them whispered hurriedly, as he yielded to the combined assault and sank back amazed, "Sit down; you mustn't stand up while your health is being drunk."

Amidst great cheering was drunk the health of the "Army, Navy, and Volunteers," as represented by the imaginary Captain Blazes.

And now that individual was expected to return thanks for the compliment.

In other words, every eye was turned upon Ferdinand Smiggles; and if every eye had been the barrel of a loaded gun Ferdinand Smiggles could not have looked more completely astounded.

A fearful pause ensued.

"Now you must make a speech," said the gentleman on his right.

"For goodness' sake get up and begin," said the gentleman on his left.

Simultaneously the gentleman on his right and the gentleman on his left applied a gentle upwardly propelling process to Mr. Smiggles, which resulted in his standing before the assembled company in a perpendicular position, and with a look of abject vacant astonishment on his sleek visage which no pen can describe.

All that the mind of Smiggles could grasp was this, that he, who had never made a speech in his life, was called upon to respond to the toast without a moment's preparation; but whether because Captain Barnaby Blazes wasn't there, or because he was sitting in Captain Barnaby Blazes' place, or for what other reason, his bewildered mind could form no idea. Nothing but the desperate nature of the occasion, and a certain amount of courage derived from the champagne, could ever have enabled him to begin.

"Mr. Gentlemen and chairman—I mean Mr. Chairman and gentlemen—the army and navy and volunteers are very much obliged—and—and—pleased at the honour they've done you—at least, of course, I don't mean that—I mean the honour you've done them in being drunk—I—I—mean their health being drunk. The army is—is—I say the army isn't the navy; in fact, they're quite different; and—and—the volunteers too." (Long pause, not a sound—not even a funeral note.)

"Gentle chairman—I mean gentlemen—I—I—in point of fact, what I mean is that—I don't quite exactly know what I mean—but as I said before, we're very much obliged; and, I think, it might be as well if I didn't say any more." (Long pause—still a dead silence.)

"Gentlemen, I'm quite *sure* I'd better not go on—Gentlemen"—[that word was the straw of the drowning Smiggles]—"the army and Blazes,—I mean the army and navy and volunteers are very much obliged to you for drinking their honour—for the honour of their being drunk—for drinking their volunteers—and I'll—I'll—I'll tell Captain Blazes—thank you—and oh! I wish with all my soul"—[here Mr. Smiggles burst into tears, and sobbed]—"that Blazes was here to do it himself."

Mr. Smiggles sank down at this point in a state of unutterable collapse.

The whole assembly had seemed transfixed with astonishment throughout his hapless oration. The gentleman who had raised his glass half-way to his lips kept it exactly in the same position—the gentleman who had put his hands together for the purpose of applause moved them not, and sat like one in the attitude of supplication—the gentleman who was about to regale himself from the snuff-box of his neighbour, and the neighbouring gentleman who had proffered the snuff-box, might have come straight from Madame Tussaud's for any sign of movement that they gave.

But suddenly the features of the committee-man whom I mentioned before resumed their suspended animation, and relapsed into a broad grin.

He bent towards the chairman and said, "There must be some mistake here; this gentleman seems to have taken the place of Captain Blazes."

The explanation speedily circulated through the room, and was followed by a roar of laughter at the expense of Mr. Smiggles, who would have welcomed a moderate

earthquake. As it was, he seized an opportunity, when everybody was engaged in cheering Sir Spratby Haddock, to beat a precipitate retreat.

. . . . . .

Mr. Smiggles was very ill for several days.

He has never been to a public dinner since.

He never means to go to one again as long as he lives.

UNDERGROUND JOTTINGS.

If any doctor, after feeling my pulse, and examining my eyelids, and otherwise investigating the state of my health, were to say to me, "Sir, you *must* have a complete change of air; it does not matter what sort of change it is, so long as it is a thorough change," I should not go to the east coast of England, or the west coast, or any other coast, or island, or isthmus, or promontory whatsoever; but I should just invest in a suit of exaggerated tweeds and a two-and-ninepenny straw hat with the name of a ship on the ribbon (all in for the money), and I should go and sit comfortably inside the Gower Street Station, on the Metropolitan Railway. It is about the most complete change of air that I know of. And it has this peculiar advantage, that when you have sat long enough, and would like to go home, you can cut two or three slices of the atmosphere with your knife, and take them away with you, so that you need never be without it.

I believe that few people are really alive to all the medicinal advantages of the Underground Railway, and I humbly trust that these pages may be the means of directing attention to the subject, written as they are by one who travels on it twice a day, and can appreciate it in all its richness of delights.

Suppose you have a tendency to languor and debility. Very well. Take your ticket for a third-class carriage, and when the train comes in, look into all the compartments till you see the one in which fish is carried, and get in. You will show little languor and debility in getting out at the next station.

Suppose you are afflicted with headaches. Take your ticket for a third-class carriage (all the virtue is in third-class carriages), and get into the guard's compartment. When you approach the next station he will begin to turn a handle, and you will suddenly feel a buzzing sensation in the feet, which will rise like a galvanic shock to the head, and deprive you of every nerve you possess to the end of your life. You will have no more headaches.

Suppose you are recommended a Turkish bath. Take your ticket, as before, some time in August, and get into a compartment in which, as is usually the case, six people are sitting on each side, four are standing up, and both windows are shut. Turkish baths are nothing to it.

Instances of this kind might be multiplied indefinitely; but I pass on to the moral benefits of the Underground Railway, which are inestimable.

I flatter myself that when I travel on it my privileges of displaying patience would compare favourably with anything that came in Job's way.

I have sometimes travelled along with a very fat man overlapping me on one side, and a very angular man, with peculiarly pointed bones protruding in every direction, on the other side, so wedged in that I could move neither hand nor foot.

I have had every sharp substance sticking into my ribs

which it would be possible to get inside a railway carriage, and a good many as to which I should have thought it impossible that they could get in, if I had not seen them and felt them.

I remember, one night, a man getting into my carriage at Aldersgate Street, bringing with him, as I am a sinful man, a wooden plank! And while I was reeling under the effects of the visitation, and wondering whether he would have thought it an out-of-the-way thing to introduce a cart and horse, behold! the train pulled up at Farringdon Street, and another man got in with a ladder. I remember nothing more of that journey.

I dislike noise. I even object to hearing the lungs of my children develop actively in my immediate vicinity. I think, therefore, I may fairly claim credit when I say that I have sat and smiled—a ghastly smile, I own, but still a smile—while a greasy man with one arm has produced from under the recesses of a fustian jacket the most diabolical instrument you ever heard, and played it in my ear as a running accompaniment to the rattle of the train.

I have often felt as to that man (who travels as regularly as I do, and always picks me out for his victim), that if I once dropped that artificial smile I should brain him with his own instrument of torture.

My patience comes out very strongly too under another class of inflictions. There are some people who never by any chance get into the right train, and there are others who never get into the wrong one, but whom nothing on earth will persuade that they are going in the direction that they wish. Thousands of these persons travel on the Underground Railway, and I have simply to state that they all sit next to me.

I travelled one day from Moorgate Street with a specimen of the former class.

He sat (next to me of course) in a state of semi-slumber, which caused his head to droop obliquely in front of mine, the brim of his hat to take a conspicuous position in my eye, and his shoulder to indent itself firmly in my side while we passed two or three stations.

When we got to King's Cross he suddenly roused up. "Is this Liverpool Street?" he inquired.

"No, sir! this is King's Cross; we are going in the opposite direction to Liverpool Street," replied I mildly.

"Opposite direction!" he retorted fiercely. "Why, I took my ticket for Liverpool Street, and I passed King's Cross half-an-hour ago!"

I answered mildly, "My good sir, I am extremely sorry, but as a matter of fact, this *is* King's Cross."

My soft answer did not turn away his wrath; for the unreasonable traveller pushed past me in a state of extreme irritation, trod on both my feet on his way out, and, I believe, considered me personally responsible for his having calmly sat in the carriage at Liverpool Street while porters were shouting to every one to get out, fully persuaded that because he had taken a ticket for a certain place and got into a train, he must of necessity arrive without further ado at his destination.

Middle-aged ladies often beset me. A female in ringlets, surrounded by packages of various kinds, got into my carriage one day (next me, of course). She first stretched her neck out of the window right across me—a process which involved my being smothered in packages and excoriated with a most intensely metallic chatelaine.

Having got a good "purchase" out of the window, she screamed to a porter to know whether she was right for Marlborough Road.

"Quite right, ma'am," said the porter; "but you must change at Baker Street." Little did that porter know what he was letting me in for.

The train reached Aldersgate Street. The female, who had been fidgeting my life out from the moment we had left Moorgate Street, plunged across me again, put her head out of the window—saw "Aldersgate Street" written in immense letters on two or three boards and about thirty lamps—plunged back again—and asked me, in the most barefaced manner, "Is this Baker Street?"

I told her gently that Baker Street was five stations off, whereupon she made another plunge, and asked a porter the same question.

To say that that awful woman did the selfsame thing at every station we passed till we reached Baker Street—to say that she occupied the intervening periods while the train was in motion by repeating the names of the stations we had passed, as if it were information of a light and pleasing character—to say that she was seized with an irresistible impulse, at intervals of about two minutes, which caused her to fish out parcels from under the seat and look at them, and put them back again with a bang—to say that by the time we got to Baker Street she had so elbowed, and pushed, and flattened, and smothered me that I was reduced to a condition of pulp—to say all this is to state a simple narrative of facts. But will you believe me when I add, that no sooner had I tottered out of the carriage at Baker Street than I heard the jangle of that dreadful

chatelaine, and in another moment was overtaken by the tormentor, and requested to see her into the train for Marlborough Road?

Even in that supreme moment I raised a hollow smile, and gasped, "With pleasure." If that woman doesn't leave me a legacy of £10,000, she ought to be ashamed of herself.

I conducted her through the passage which leads from the Baker Street Station to the St. John's Wood line, in the course of which journey she pulled up three times to ask other people whether I was taking her right; and eventually I got her into a train. I would not have entered the same carriage if the floor of it had been paved with bank-notes. But as I turned the handle upon her, wishing, for the sake of mankind, that it might positively refuse ever to open again, a head covered with attenuated ringlets was thrust out of the window, and, as the train moved off, a shrill treble voice screamed out, in tones which I shall remember while I live—

"You're sure I'm right for"——

The rest of that sentence was carried away by the breeze. I congratulate myself on not having been the breeze.

The trains on the Underground Railway are arranged carefully, so as to develop this same virtue of patience in another aspect.

In every case in which you have to make a change in order to complete your journey, the train into which you have to make the change generally starts just thirty-five seconds before the train that you have to get out of comes in.

The result of this is that you see train No. 2 snorting at the end of a passage—that you pull yourself together, and make a rush, which gives you an incidental attack of palpitation—and that you arrive at the end of the passage at the precise moment when the gate is shut in your face with a bang. And as you stand there panting, with your nose flattened against the rails of the gate, you hear the engine go puff, puff, puff—the train moves majestically off—and you have to wait twenty minutes or so for the next one.

I could enumerate many more of the special advantages of this delightful line of railway—the facilities of getting luggage in and out of a train which stops for five seconds at a station where there is only one porter, who is invariably at the extreme other end of the platform having his boots cleaned, the affable civility of the gentlemen who issue tickets, and many other points; but I dare not dwell further on the subject, lest you should all insist on taking tickets for my train to-morrow morning, in which case my carriage might be inconveniently crowded, and I might have to stand up, instead of sitting with my dirty boots on the opposite seat.

I will, therefore, by your leave, get out at this station.

OUR DEBATING CLUB.

PERKINS sat in the chair. When I say that he sat in the chair, I don't mean that he was in the habit of sitting on the floor, but I mean that Perkins sat in *the* chair of all other chairs in the room, and presided at the meeting of the club.

Perkins was a person whom we all regarded with considerable awe and respect. In the first place, he was the oldest person in the club. It was even darkly whispered that he was twenty, and it was an undoubted fact that his upper lip was adorned with what might be called the first cousin twice removed of a moustache. In the next place, Perkins had the reputation among us of being very clever. In fact, it was known to his more intimate friends that he was quite a literary man, and had written a great many pieces for the magazines. The circumstance that no one had ever seen a magazine, alive or dead, with a piece by Perkins in it, went for nothing, because, as we all agreed, if he wrote a beautiful piece, and the editor of a magazine was foolish enough not to accept it, why, the loss was the loss of the editor, and the publisher, and the printer, and the public, and *not* the loss of Perkins, who could afford to look down on that periodical with scorn. Perkins must have looked down with scorn upon a good many periodicals, considering the number of book-post parcels that came to

him, addressed in his own writing, and very often with twopence to pay for insufficient postage.

Perkins was the founder of our debating club. It was said that for some time he and two other young gentlemen named Gosling and Grigsby were the only members; that Perkins was chairman, Gosling secretary, and Grigsby treasurer; and that they used to hold meetings and make speeches to each other in Perkins' bedroom, and dispose of matters of vast importance to their entire and triangular satisfaction. But members had gradually enlisted, and the club had swelled to such dimensions, that instead of going to Perkins' father's house, we had arranged with the landlord of a respectable inn for the use of a large room once a week, and there we used to assemble.

By an arrangement which did infinite credit to the combined wisdom of Perkins, Gosling, and Grigsby, we used to discuss subjects of foreign policy and matters of domestic importance in alternate weeks. Apart from the fact that this arrangement gave a pleasing variety to our debates, Perkins had some reason to think that the secret agents of the Government had their eye on us, and that, if we attracted too much attention by constantly deliberating upon the affairs of Europe in its present unsettled state, the Cabinet mightn't like it, and we might get into a mess. Perkins said that, and, being twenty, he was of course a thorough man of the world.

On the particular evening from which my sketch is taken we had a very full gathering indeed. There was, as I before observed, Perkins in the chair, and there was Gosling on his right hand and Grigsby on his left, and there were something like twenty other members present, not to

mention a young gentleman of remarkably self-possessed aspect, who, by an indulgence which we granted in special cases, was introduced by one of the members as a guest for that evening, and whose name was Muggles.

For this evening the subject was to be of a domestic character, and Perkins had chosen as its title, "Home and its Influences."

At eight o'clock punctually Perkins rose to open the debate. And when he rose to open a debate, I beg to state that he rose, if I may so say, exceedingly. He not only stood erect, but he always passed both his hands upwards through his hair before he began to speak. The effect was cockatoo-like, but majestic. There was one other feature connected with Perkins which, I am forced to admit, detracted a little from the effect of his oratory, which was, that his voice was an alto voice, occasionally varied by an unearthly bass, which came up at unexpected moments, and seemed to have its origin of domicile in his boots.

"Gentlemen," said Perkins, "before proceeding to the subject chosen for this evening's debate, I have to propose for your consideration a matter affecting ourselves personally, and which is, I think, worthy of your attention. I visited, on Friday evening last, the House of Commons, and I was struck with the circumstance that, in one important respect, our mode of procedure differs materially from that of our Legislature. I mean hats. It has not, I think, occurred to any of us that every member of Parliament possesses, and, if I may say so, exercises in a defiant way, the right of keeping his hat upon his head, instead of putting it down to be kicked by the honourable member behind, or sat upon by the honourable member in front.

"Gentlemen, there are two reasons which make me think it would be desirable if we were to adopt this custom.

"The first is, that we wish to form ourselves, in all things, on the model of the House of Commons; and the second is" (and here Perkins shuddered feelingly), "that there is a very unpleasant draught between the broken window at the end of the room and the fireplace. I move, gentlemen, that the following addition be made to our rules:—

"'That each member shall keep his hat upon his head while a debate is in progress, except when actually addressing the meeting.' Mr. Grigsby, will you second that?"

"Oh, yeth," said Grigsby, jumping up. (Grigsby lisped. He couldn't help it, and I cast no reflection upon him.) "I'll thecond it; only I thuggetht the addition, after the word hat, of the wordth, 'or cap, ath the cathe may be.'"

"I am much obliged to you for the correction, Mr. Grigsby; it is a distinct improvement. Gentlemen, if the proposal, as amended, meets with your approval, kindly signify the same in the usual manner."

The usual manner meant thumping vigorously on the table with both fists for about ten minutes. Everybody signified, and it made a good deal of noise, but that didn't signify.

Immediately the assent of the club had been made known in this manner, every member present dived down under his chair, and in an instant there might be seen every possible description of hat on the top of every possible description of head. The visitor, Muggles, who had been observed, somewhat to the surprise of the members, to thump on the table louder and longer than any one else, further scandalised our august body by placing on the left-hand side of his head, at its extreme back—so much so that it seemed as if

it must be clinging to a few hairs—a most rakish, not to say disreputable, species of billy-cock hat, quite out of keeping with the dignity of the club; a proceeding which caused a flush of anger to mantle on the face of the chairman when he beheld it.

"And now, gentlemen," resumed Perkins, "I proceed to bring under your notice the subject of 'Home and its Influences.' What is home, and what are its influences? May not home be appropriately described as—as"——

At this moment, and while Perkins was flourishing his arm about, and, as it were, getting up the steam for a definition, a distressing incident occurred. A sound broke upon the air which distinctly resembled the humming of a tune—a ribald, vulgar, offensive tune, identified with the song, "We won't go home till morning."

Perkins was transfixed with astonishment. He left off flourishing, and his eyes passed from member to member with an indignant look of interrogation.

Everybody looked at everybody else, and no one seemed to have the smallest notion where the sound came from. But it might have been observed that Mr. Muggles appeared less concerned about it than the members of the club, and that his eye, if anything, rather twinkled.

Perkins soon recovered his composure, and in a tone of withering scorn proceeded—

"Gentlemen, I was *about* to ask, when interrupted by a most *offensive* piece of vulgarity, the authorship of which I *disdain* to inquire into—I was about to ask, What is home, and what are its influences? I would describe home, when considered in its first aspect, as being a place where our earliest years are passed, and to which, in the evening of

life" (Perkins said this in a tone of subdued sadness, as if to imply that, being twenty, he was naturally well up in the subject of the evening of life), "our thoughts return with infinite fondness and yearning."

Again was the flow of the discourse interrupted, and in a most curious manner. Mr. Muggles, the visitor, began to sob violently from behind his pocket-handkerchief. This outburst being, however, a fitting tribute to the moving nature of his speech, and suggestive of Muggles having recently lost his mother, Perkins merely smiled gently on him and proceeded.

"Regarded poetically [*sob from Muggles*], is it not the place to which they took her warrior dead [*sob from Muggles*] on that interesting occasion on which she could not by any persuasion be induced to speak or utter word? [*Sob from Muggles.*] Is it not the place which holds all that is dear to us? No, gentlemen, not *all* that is dear to us, perhaps" (and here Perkins became rather pink in the face, and sighed, for reasons not altogether unconnected with a young lady, a fraction of whose hair was in a locket which he wore at the end of his watch-chain, and was seen to clutch at this juncture), "but, at all events, some part of it. And, gentlemen, the influences of home—just think of them!" (The thought of them so acutely struck one very young member who was ordered to be home at nine, and who knew that influences of a rather forcible character would follow if he failed to do so, that he made a precipitate exit on the spot.)

"Where is it that in childhood's hour we take the place to be kissed and made well? Where is it that that judicious correction is applied to us which we value so highly in after-

life? [Perkins' father used to thrash him about once a week with a strap until Perkins was quite grown up, so that he had a good stock-in-trade of that kind to value in after-life.] Where is it, if not at home? Gentlemen, I could say more but I won't; and, with these brief observations, I call on our friend, Mr. George John Ferdinand Augustus Pumpkin, to continue the discussion."

Perkins sat down amid a respectful murmur of applause, and Mr. G. J. F. A. Pumpkin rose, as requested, to continue the debate.

The gentleman in question was a youth with pale yellowish hair, and a general appearance of having been under a flat-iron at some period of his life. He had no particular features to speak of, and nothing on them which could be tortured into being called an expression. And when he spoke at our debates—which he did on every possible occasion—his remarks could not be strictly described as exciting or original. He always monotoned on one note, and must have made that hard-worked note often long for a change of air.

"Gentlemen, the subject for this evening is a very beautiful one—very beautiful indeed. I think there are few subjects more beautiful, in fact, than the subject for this evening. Home, wherever it may be, whether in the palace or in the humble cabin of the poor, is always home! I have heard a very beautiful little poem on the subject of home. I don't know whether any of you have ever heard it. It is called 'Home, Sweet Home,' and I will just say the first two lines—

> 'Midst pleasures and palaces, wherever we roam,
> Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.'

I remember, when I was at school" (he had left school about six weeks), "how glad I always was to go home for the holidays. The boys used to call me horrid names, and put stinging nettles in my bed. But Papa and Mamma—at least, I mean, of course, my Governor and Mater—never did that."

The club was much scandalised at this point by Muggles asking, in a tone of general inquiry distinctly audible all over the room, "When that feller was going to dry up?"

Pumpkin heard the remark, and was so overcome that he dried up on the spot—without another word—without the semblance of the ghost of a peroration—and sat down in a more flat-ironed condition than ever.

A breathless silence prevailed for a few moments—if silence can be called breathless in which breathing is the only sound heard. And in the midst of it, to the profound astonishment of all, an apparition was seen to rise in the person of Muggles.. His hat was still balanced on the extreme back of his head, and he placed his thumbs in his waistcoat in a manner which was distinctly suggestive of easy familiarity.

"I'm going to make a speech," said he, with a pleasant smile. "I don't know whether it's against the rules and regulations of the establishment, but if any member likes to go and fag up the bye-laws hanging on the wall there, I daresay he'll find it *is*—and by the time he does, I shall just about have finished."

Up jumped Grigsby excitedly. "Thith ith motht iwegular—I protetht againtht it."

"All right, old chap, protest away. Let's see now; what was I saying when the gentleman on the right of the head

bottle-washer there interrupted me?—Oh! I remember, I was just going to remark in a friendly manner"——

"*Gentlemen*," shouted Perkins, "will you sit still and hear your chairman called a *bottle-washer?* Have I come here to meet with insult and approbriation?" [Perkins meant opprobrium, but he was too excited to mind about terminations.] "I say, gentlemen, that this proceeding is a disgrace and scandal to our club."

And with that Perkins sat down in his chair with such a bump that he bounced up again like an india-rubber ball, and folded his arms so intensely that they almost went all round his back and came up on the other side.

No one stirred or spoke. The fact was, that the audacity of the stranger had taken away our self-possession altogether, and he remained the master of the situation.

"All right, old chap—all right—don't take on so about nothing—I'm not going to hurt you. I was only going to say that in my opinion this debating club beats the House of Commons into fits; and as for you, old boy" [this to Perkins—the revered Perkins!] "why, you ought to be prime minister and lord high admiral of the fleet. I was very sorry to interrupt that last gentleman's remarks, because there was a sparkling brightness about his observations, and a soothing don't-call-me-till-eight-in-the-morning sort of flow which was very pleasant. But the fact is, he seemed to be rather in the eight-day clock line of business; and as the Lord Chancellor is waiting for me to go and have supper with him, and I wanted to say good evening before I went away, I just cut in. I hope you'll have a very pleasant evening, and that you won't keep your

anxious mothers sitting up for you, or forget to let 'em know you're out."

Muggles here nodded in the most convivial manner to the members generally, and then melted from view, first putting his handkerchief to his eye and affecting to sob, and then humming the disgraceful tune which had so scandalised the club, so as to leave beyond doubt the insincerity of the one proceeding and the authorship of the other.

. . . . . .

Before the club broke up that night a vote of censure was passed on the unlucky member who had introduced Muggles as a wolf into the flock, and another amendment was made to our rules, which was posted up conspicuously before the next meeting, and read as follows :—

"47A. That no one except members of the club, the landlord, and the pot-boy shall be allowed, on any pretence whatever, to enter the room while a debate is pending; and any member who connives at, or aids or abets in, the infringement of this rule shall be expelled with ignominy, or fined one shilling and a penny halfpenny, as shall be decided at a general meeting of the members to be convened for that purpose."

MRS. MOLEBY'S FRITTERS.

"THIS way, Mr. Pobsy, sir; this way," said Mrs. Moleby, as she conducted the individual in question down the flight of kitchen stairs which led to her sanctum sanctorum.

Mrs. Moleby kept a lodging-house of comfortable but unpretending aspect in—well, it was not, strictly speaking, the west end of London. Having said that she kept a lodging-house, it is quite superfluous for me to add that Mrs. Moleby was a widow. A lodging-house *not* kept by a widow is a falsity, a delusion, a contradiction of terms.

If Mrs. Moleby had had as many "Backs" and "Fronts" personally as she had when considered in a lodging-house-keeper point of view, she would have been a most curious study for anatomists. Every floor of her establishment was divided and subdivided, and even sub-subdivided amongst different occupants; and the bells which dotted the front door on either side, and communicated with the rooms occupied by the various inmates, were in number and appearance not unlike the stops of a cathedral organ. How anybody ever contrived to ring the right bell will be matter of mystery to me until the end of time.

Now Mrs. Moleby was neither old nor ugly. On the contrary, she was a buxom, chubby, circular, apple-faced kind of widow. Moreover, Mrs. Moleby disliked solitude, and she had selected a victim to fill up the gap in her

affections occasioned by the untimely demise of the late Mr. Moleby. That victim was none other than her front ground-floor lodger, the very Mr. Pobsy to whom the observation with which this veracious chronicle commences was addressed.

Mr. Pobsy had something to do with gas. In what exact way Mr. Pobsy was professionally connected with gas I do not know; but there was a peculiar meter-like savour about him calculated to convey the idea that if a lighted candle were to be put very close to him an explosion would probably ensue.

The heart of Pobsy was an adamantine heart. For two whole years had Mrs. Moleby been laying siege to it without any visible result. She had languished in the hall, sighed on the stairs (when she felt quite sure that Mr. Pobsy was within hearing), and dropped on the doorstep. Her love had taken the form of frequent offerings of tripe and bloaters. She had looked demure, and coy, and sad, and beaming, and pensive. In short, she had done everything she could possibly think of to secure this man of stone, without the smallest success.

It had become evident to Mrs. Moleby that only by bold and determined measures could she hope to gain the victory over such an obdurate adversary; and she had arrived, after much anxious thought, at the conclusion, that if anything in this world could kindle in Mr. Pobsy the much-desired flame, it would be a heavy, solid, substantial tea.

This much prefaced, let us hasten back with all gallant speed to the lady, whom we left rather rudely at the foot of the kitchen stairs.

"This way, Mr. Pobsy, sir: this way."

But Mr. Pobsy, instead of going this way, or that way, or, indeed, any way whatever, stood in a statuesque attitude half-way down the stairs, bereft apparently of all powers of movement.

He was completely engrossed in the occupation of sniffing a grateful odour which ascended towards him and proceeded from Mrs. Moleby's sitting-room.

"Why, Mr. Pobsy, wot *are* you a-doing of?" inquired that lady laughingly, as she stood at the foot of the stairs waiting for her motionless guest to complete his descent.

"It's fritters—I know it is!" was Mr. Pobsy's somewhat indirect reply, given in a voice husky with agitation and excitement.

"Never you mind wot it is, but come along, and then you may find out the truth afore your 'air's grey," rejoined Mrs. Moleby, with a waggish smile.

Thus adjured Mr. Pobsy came along, and was forthwith conducted by Mrs. Moleby into a room never before trodden by the foot of lodger.

Such a snug, comfortable little room it was, too. On a bright red little fire was singing a bright brass little kettle, while on a round little table in the middle of the room was spread a "tea," so heavy that the little round table complained in querulous creaks of the weight of its unwonted burden. And this was not all, for the top of an earthenware dish cover peeped over the fender at Mr. Pobsy with a sly saucy look which said "Take me off" as plainly as if it hadspoken the words.

"Sit down, Mr. Pobsy, sir, and make yourself at home, pray do," said Mrs. Moleby, as she placed two little armchairs before the table. Mr. Pobsy retired into silence and

his allotted chair. His eyes were fixed upon the peeping dish-cover, which he contemplated with a look of deep and affectionate curiosity.

"Now, Mr. Pobsy, sir; milk and sugar for you, sir?" inquired the widow cheerily, as she poured out two large cups of tea.

"Yes, Mrs. Moleby, mum; fritters and sugar; that is, I mean milk without, if so be as you please," he answered abstractedly.

"Mr. Pobsy, sir, your meal's afore you, waiting to be eat and drinked; and all as I says is, 'elp yourself, and spare not the wittles."

"Thank you kindly, Mrs. Moleby, mum, which I will;" and Mr. Pobsy was in a few minutes transformed into a living mausoleum of buttered toast, poached eggs, and mutton-chops, which he washed down with copious libations of tea.

He still glanced at intervals towards the peeping dish-cover, and Mrs. Moleby as invariably detected every glance. At length, when he appeared to have laid a sufficiently substantial foundation, she stepped to the fireside and took up the dish, the contents of which had been concealed from Mr. Pobsy's view by the invidious cover.

"Mr. Pobsy, sir, I think as you fancied you sniffed fritters as you was a-coming down the stairs; and wonderful correct your oilfactory organs air, Mr. Pobsy, sir; for fritters it is."

And fritters it was—apple fritters, crisp and delicious as fritters could be.

Mr. Pobsy's eyes filled with tears.

"Mrs. Moleby, mum, if there are one thing considered in

the light of food which are in my opinion more superior than any other thing, it's fritters."

Mrs. Moleby beamed with triumph as she filled Mr. Pobsy's plate with a pile of fritters which assumed, for a very short time only, the appearance of a pyramid.

Mr. Pobsy again relapsed into silence, and for the all-sufficient reason that Mr. Pobsy's mouth was very much too full to admit of even the most indistinct articulation.

To do justice to the manner in which Mr. Pobsy excavated, and pulled down, and decreased, and finally altogether demolished the three successive pyramids of fritters built up on his plate would be impossible. Mrs. Moleby watched him with a smile of inward satisfaction on her jolly visage. After two years of unsuccessful angling, she had accidentally hit upon the right bait, and she saw it.

All joys terrestrial come to an end sooner or later, and before very long Mr. Pobsy was gazing with one eye upon an empty plate and the other eye upon an empty dish. He sighed deeply.

"I'm only sorry there ain't no more, Mr. Pobsy, sir; and I'm sure, if I'd only knowed as you was so fond of 'em, you should 'ave 'ad has many has hever you could heat, that you should. I 'opes as they were done to your fancy?"

Mr. Pobsy removed his eyes from plate and dish simultaneously, and fixed them on Mrs. Moleby's face with a look which threw that excellent widow into a state of the utmost confusion.

"Be-au-ti-ful!" observed Mr. Pobsy in tones of rapture, after a silence of several moments. Whether he referred to the fritters or herself Mrs. Moleby's fluttering heart could not determine; but he solved the doubt by adding solemnly—

"Did *you* cook 'em?"

"Why, la! yes, Mr. Pobsy, in course I did; and though I says it from which it didn't hought to come, I should like you to go hout and find me a man, woman, or child on the firmamential globe as can cook *happle* fritters like Betsy Moleby."

Instead of sallying forth upon the rather vague expedition suggested by Mrs. Moleby, Mr. Pobsy rose with much gravity and deliberation, and taking up his chair, placed it in direct and unmistakable contiguity to the chair of Mrs. Moleby. Having done this. Mr. Pobsy, with equal deliberation, sat down upon it, and solemnly placed his arm round Mrs. Moleby's waist.

Mrs. Moleby gave a little scream—probably it was the very smallest scream ever heard.

"Fie! Mr. Pobsy, I'm shocked—get along with you this minute."

It would have been somewhat difficult for Mr. Pobsy to have obeyed this mandate, even had he felt so inclined, for Mrs. Moleby—doubtless overcome by the scandalised state of her feelings—was leaning her full weight upon him in such wise that the smallest movement on his part with a view to "getting along" must have infallibly brought her to the earth.

But he had evidently no such intention. He sat buried in thought, even as one who would argue inwardly the "pros" and "cons" of some great step in life.

At last Mr. Pobsy cleared his throat and broke the silence. "You're quite sure as you cooked them, Betsy?" he inquired tenderly.

Mrs. Moleby reiterated her assertion on the subject.

"Mrs. Moleby—Betsy, I ain't a horator, and I speaks my mind short and blunt. Marry me!"

"Oh! Mr. Pobsy. Well, I never; 'ow sudden you takes one; you makes me feel all fluttery up and down like."

"Yes or no, Betsy?" said Mr. Pobsy solemnly.

"Ye—es," she gasped at last.

The marriage was celebrated very shortly afterwards. Space will not allow me to describe how the bride most becomingly fainted three times without changing colour in the least, and "came to" in the most astonishing manner each time at the precise juncture when it was proposed to throw cold water in her face; how Mr. Pobsy, thinking he had forgotten the ring, stopped the service in the middle while he went out to buy a new one, and discovered the original in his waistcoat pocket five minutes after his return; and how all parties concerned came back from the church to a most substantial breakfast, whereof an enormous dish of apple fritters was the leading feature.

I cannot, however, refrain from giving the short and pithy speech in which Mr. Pobsy returned thanks for the health of himself and his buxom bride, proposed in a flood of tears by a maternal uncle of Mrs. Moleby.

"Mr. Gumpy, sir, and friends all,—You does me and Betsy that proud as I cannot name in drinking our two combinated 'ealths so kind and corjal like on this occasion. Me being a man of few words, and one as don't like a lot of palaver w'ich takes your breath away to say, and don't mean anything when you 'ave said it, I wish to hoffer just this one hobservation, and no more, namely—it was the Fritters as done it!"

SOLOMON POPKINS.

THERE never was such a disagreeable, cantankerous, vinegary specimen of humanity as Solomon Popkins. He was crusty from the soles of his boots to the roots of his hair; and the baker opposite used to say, that if he could only make his loaves half as crusty as Solomon Popkins' temper, he would be able to retire on a large fortune in six months.

He was, I need hardly say, a bachelor (particularly sour elderly gentlemen generally are bachelors); and all that was known of him in the neighbourhood was, that nothing was known of him at all, save and except that he did not appear to have a single acquaintance, and that he was commonly believed to have given twenty-seven organ men, five hurdy-gurdy boys, and three Punches and Judys into custody for performing in front of his area gate.

But, one fine day, there happened an event which created an immense excitement in the street, for up to the queer old house in which Solomon Popkins lived there drove a cab, and on the top of that cab was luggage, and inside it was one of the very brightest, merriest, sweetest looking little girls you ever saw.

Mrs. Johnson put her head out of the second-floor front window of No. 33, and remarked to Mrs. Newby, who had put her head out of the second-floor front window of

No. 35, that it took away her breath; whereto Mrs. Newby replied that she never, never; and many other remarks, equally expressive of astonishment, proceeded from other heads at other windows.

However, astonishing or not astonishing as it was, the luggage was taken off, and the little girl got out and ran into the hall, the front door of which was opened, in answer to the cabman's ring, by an aged female with one eye, upon the top of whose head were arranged, in military order, some twenty-five ringlets, looking rather like an assemblage of retired corkscrews in needy circumstances.

And now please, we will pause for one minute, and explain in a few words, how this state of affairs came to pass. The little stranger was the child of a younger and only brother of Solomon. Her father had died when she was an infant, and she had, from the time of her being left an orphan until now, been living with a faithful servant of the family, upon a pittance remitted periodically by Solomon, with much grumbling and many threats not to go on supporting another man's brat.

Now, however, the servant had died, and Solomon had determined to see the child, and make up his mind what to do with her.

Thus much explained, we will follow our little stranger into the hall.

"Air you she?" inquired the one-eyed servant.

"Yes," answered the little girl, looking up at her with an irresistible smile, "I'm little Rosie; and, please, I'm just come. Who are you?—you're such a funny-looking old lady!"

Barbara, Solomon's drudge, was a good-hearted old

creature, who, strange to say, had borne his ill-humours for some five-and-twenty years without being turned sour herself. She was not in the least offended at this somewhat personal remark.

"Yes! I ain't beautiful, my dear; but, la! I'm a *Venus* to he" (pointing to the door of the sitting-room). "He's that hugly, and that rasping, and that disagribble as there ain't no bearing on him. But keep up 'art, little miss, and don't be afear'd."

With which kindly encouragement Barbara put her dusty old cap very much more on one side of her head than it was before (under the full impression that she was doing just the other thing), and, opening the door of the sitting-room which led out of the hall, remarked to some one inside (while holding her nose, as if instinctively dreading that it might be bitten off), "I say, she's come."

"Well! didn't I know that? Do you suppose that that luggage has been banging about the hall, and a draught coming in at the door fit to cut my legs off, without my knowing that anything had happened?"

To add force to this observation, Solomon, who was sitting in an arm-chair by the fire, took off his slippers and threw them at Barbara's head; but that personage caught them with a business-like air, as if it were quite a matter of course. As, in truth, it was.

"Show her in," said Solomon; whereupon Barbara beckoned to the little girl, who was peering about the hall, and standing on tiptoe to see the different articles. Rosie ran into the room, and before Solomon could draw a breath, she climbed on to his knee.

"You're my uncle Solomon, and I'm Rosie. My nurse

used to say that you were very cross, but we mustn't mind it, because you kept us. What makes you so cross?"

Solomon Popkins opened his mouth wide with astonishment, as well he might. This little thing—this child—to dare——

He put his arms up to thrust her from his lap, and was about to say something violent, when he looked down at the little face peering into his, and—and—somehow or other, he didn't do it.

Barbara was still standing by the door, but Solomon's eyes happening to rest upon her, he suddenly recovered his presence of mind sufficiently to stretch out his hand and seize a book, which he aimed with great precision at that worthy female, when suddenly Rosie put her little plump, dimpled hands on to his uplifted arm, and pulled at it with all their small might.

"You mustn't. You mustn't. You mustn't. You naughty uncle!"

For the second time Solomon turned his face towards the child in amazement, and seemed about to speak harshly to her; but again two little blue eyes looked up fearlessly into his, and the angry words died away in his throat; and in another moment Barbara had vanished.

And so those two were left together—the cross, crusty, hard-grained man, and the little merry, fairy-like child still resting on his knee.

She was very like his dead brother, too. He began to think of years gone by, ever so long ago—before he shut every kindly feeling out from his heart, and became the morose, sullen, solitary man he now was—when he and that child's father were boys together.

Suddenly he gave himself a shake, as if the memory were not altogether a satisfactory one to recall.

"You're taking it very easy, child," he said, addressing her for the first time, and trying to speak in his usual crabbed tones, but with very poor success. "What makes you get on to my lap?"

"Oh! I always used to sit on nurse's lap. Yours isn't as comfortable as hers was, and you don't look kind and sweet, like she did. But she told me that whenever I saw you I was to be good, and try to like you; so I'm trying. But I don't think I like you very much."

"Oh! you don't think you like me very much—humph—and pray, why's that?"

"Because you look cross; just like I used to look when nurse made me stand with my face to the wall, because she said I looked so ugly."

Solomon coughed and moved about uneasily in his chair, and then he rubbed his nose, and then—yes, then—he absolutely (being the first time on record for fifteen years, three months, eleven days and one hour) broke out into a smile. Such a smile too. His face was so unused to the operation that it moved up and down in all sorts of unexpected directions, as if suffering from an internal earthquake.

Little Rosie, seeing Solomon smile, gave a little laugh; and as Solomon went on smiling, she gave another little laugh, and then several more little laughs, until the room rang with her silvery peals of merriment.

Now, it is a well-known fact that laughter is contagious, more especially some kinds of laughter; and little Rosie's was uncommonly catching.

So much so that there suddenly came from Solomon Popkins' lips a sound as if a large assemblage of rusty keys were clanging against each other. *Which* meant that Solomon Popkins was laughing too!

"Now you're a nice uncle; and if you will always laugh like that, I'll—I'll *love* you—ever so much, too; quite 1000 yards."

Now the notion of being loved at all, much less of being loved 1000 yards, was a complete novelty to crusty Solomon Popkins; and not only was it new, but there was something so amazingly pleasant about it that he stopped to say—

"No! will you, though?" And then he went on laughing for several minutes more.

All of a sudden an idea struck him.

"Have you had anything to eat since breakfast, child?"

"No, I haven't; and I'm very hungry," answered Rosie candidly.

"Of course you are—I knew you were," and off darted Solomon to the bell and pulled at it till Barbara thought, as she ran up from the kitchen, that the first-floor must be on fire and burglars in the parlour, at the very least.

But *when* she came into the room and saw little Rosie as happy as possible, and Solomon smiling with all his might—well! when she saw this her very ringlets stood upright with astonishment. But before she could speak Solomon broke out—

"Here! run out immediately and get 1000 yards of Banbury cakes and three penn'orth of love; no, I mean five shillingsworth of Banbury cakes and three shillingsworth of biscuits, and meat, and puddings, and sweetmeats, and oysters, and baked potatoes, and everything else you

can get. The child's starving; ain't you, my dear?" he added, turning to Rosie.

"I'm very often hungry," returned that outspoken little lady, "but I don't want to eat quite all that; so please don't tell the funny-looking old lady to get so many things."

The idea of the venerable Barbara's being called a funny old lady brought the rusty keys into full operation again, and Solomon laughed till the tears ran down his face.

"Mussy!" ejaculated Barbara. "Why, I ain't seen you laugh like that, master, not since I come!"

"Ho!" said Solomon, trying hard to recall his usual expression of face, and looking about for something heavy and sharp to throw at Barbara. "What do you mean, you witch? I haven't been laughing now."

"Oh! fie," said little Rosie; "oh! you good-for-nothing story! Nurse used to say it was very wicked to tell stories, and you're *much* older than I am."

Solomon looked down at the child. "Umph! Well, I suppose I *am* a little older than you; but somehow I don't feel quite so old as I did when you came."

"Oh! then you go on getting younger till you're the same age as I am, and then we'll play at 'dab-dab.' *I'll* teach you, if you don't know it."

Solomon Popkins playing dab-dab! Why didn't the queer old house tumble down? Well, I don't know—but it didn't. And five minutes later, while Barbara was out buying all sorts of good things, Solomon Popkins—cross, crusty, vinegary Solomon Popkins—was sitting with the child still on his knee, trying with all his might to learn the mysteries of dab-dab.

And then, not long afterwards, in came Barbara with her purchases—some in one pocket and some in another, and some in her hands, and some in her arms—so loaded and puffed out that it was difficult to tell what was Barbara and what was parcels.

Solomon wouldn't eat anything. He said that he wanted to see Rosie have a good meal all to herself; so he placed the child in a chair at the table, and hovered about her.

"Now, we'll make believe that we're playing at being grand people. I'm the grand lady and you're the footman, and when I want anything I'll knock on the table, and you must say, 'Yes, my lady.'"

Solomon was simply delighted. He ran about to fetch the different things that Rosie knocked for; and I am bound to tell you that that small personage knocked on the table very often indeed. I don't know whether grand ladies eat a great deal in a general way, but this particular one certainly did make a most uncommonly good dinner.

And when it was at length over they played again for a little time; and then the child grew tired and sleepy.

"Now, please, I should like the funny old lady to put me to bed. When I'm in bed I shall pretend she's a bogey, and scream."

So Barbara was summoned again, and little Rosie marched off after kissing Uncle Solomon, and telling him that she loved him £5000, which was a very respectable figure, and quite as satisfactory as 1000 yards.

Solomon sat on his chair after the child had left him, with a new and softened expression on his face, from which indeed nearly all the hard lines seemed to have vanished as if by a magic touch. And he thought to himself—

"Here have I been all these years wasting my time and opportunities, and making myself and everybody about me miserable. I never knew till this child came—because, since I shut myself up here, I never tried to know—how enjoyable it is to be cheerful and pleasant and kind to others. Solomon Popkins, sir, you have been a grumpy, cantankerous old nuisance. But it's not too late—it's not too late."

And it wasn't too late. In two days he had ceased entirely to throw his slippers at Barbara; another week, and he sat and listened to a hurdy-gurdy without rushing out and giving either the hurdy-gurdy or the boy who played it into custody. And so things went on, until, to cut a long story short, Solomon Popkins became the most popular man in the whole street. And the last time I passed that way I heard Mrs. Johnson observe to Mrs. Newby, that that blessed child had been and turned Solomon Popkins inside out, and made him one of the benevolentest men as ever was.

'Twould be an insult and an idle task
If I were, in this cheerful room, to ask,
Whether amidst you there's a sullen form—
A person given to sulk, and stamp, and storm.
You look too pleasant; and to me it's clear
If you were sulky—why, you wouldn't be here!
Still, if you hap to know, *outside* this place,
A vinegary, sullen, crusty face,
Just tell the owner that he's sadly needing
To come some evening to a "Penny Reading;"
For here we'll teach that person in two-two's
To cure his melancholy sulks and blues;
No longer by the fire to sit and spin,
Or take a cup and call his neighbours in,
Like nursery cross-patch; but with spirits gay
To laugh and sing, and "dab-dab" oft to play.

ON THE 10TH INSTANT.

—o—

CHAPTER I.

MR. SKIPWASH was without exception the most confirmed, inveterate, unmistakable bachelor you ever saw. Dynasties might topple over, countries might go to war, the Lord Mayor might journey to Westminster on the 9th of November in a hansom cab drawn by one of Sangers' elephants, with Mr. Remembrancer sitting on the roof and balancing the mace of office on his nose, anything and everything remarkable or unexpected might happen—BUT —Mr. Skipwash would never marry.

He had not had what is commonly called a disappointment. He had simply come to the conclusion, after calm deliberation, that he preferred single blessedness ; and for eight-and-thirty years he had adhered to that conclusion, that is to say, assuming (which I believe to have been the case) that he began to come to it immediately after he was born.

Mr. Skipwash held a responsible position at the bank of Messrs. Slumpy, Hardcash and Slumpy, in Lombard Street, and he lived in lodgings at Kennington. He had selected these lodgings because he considered that Kennington combined all the advantages of the country with none of its

drawbacks, and he had remained in them for many years. In all his habits he was punctuality and method itself. He went to business every morning by the same omnibus at the same time; he parted his hair regularly at the same time, and in the same place, with the same comb; he had his boots placed in a particular corner of his sitting-room every day; he had a bronze young gentleman on one side of the mantelpiece, and a bronze young lady on the other, and he invariably adjusted them so that they looked at each other at precisely the same angle, and had no opportunity of becoming more intimate; he ate the same mutton chop at breakfast day after day—at least no, of course I don't mean that—I mean that he always ate just the same sort of mutton chop, and drank just the same sort of cup of tea, and finished breakfast with just the same sort of slice of toast and marmalade.

Indeed, I verily believe that if any part of Mr. Skipwash's daily machinery had gone wrong, the whole apparatus would have got mixed up in wild confusion. If he had not found the comb to part his hair with, my impression is that he would have gone distractedly to his boots, as coming next in order, and that he would then have endeavoured to drink his mutton chop, and eat his cup of tea, and brush his overcoat with his piece of toast and marmalade, and generally get into a state of inextricable complications; and I am not at all sure that the whole proceeding might not have been wound up by the bronze young gentleman and the bronze young lady, in defiance of all precedent, advancing solemnly to each other across the mantelpiece and indulging in a cordial embrace.

There was, however, running through the method and

regularity of Mr. Skipwash's life one great absorbing passion which lighted up the even tenor—or perhaps, in his case, I might more correctly say baritone—of his way, and that was an intense love for music. He had a beautiful piano of his own at his lodgings, on which he played incessantly in every leisure hour which he did not spend at a concert, or opera, or oratorio, or musical entertainment of some kind. He was also an expert performer on the French horn; but the people next door had threatened to indict him for a nuisance, in consequence of his having, in the consummation of a most brilliant piece, thrown a teething baby into convulsions; and so he was obliged to confine his operations on that instrument to an occasional nocturnal expedition into Kennington Park, from whence, in that event, sounds as of a buffalo in distress were faintly heard in the distance, to the wonderment and professional indignation of Policeman X 1.

The floor which Mr. Skipwash occupied was the first-floor. The ground-floor was also let in lodgings, but Mr. Skipwash, who was a reserved, self-contained man, had never concerned himself about the tenant thereof; and beyond a dim consciousness of the happening of something unusual, arising from the fact that he tumbled over a large box one morning as he sallied out, and barked his shins against another large box when he came home the same evening, he did not even know that there had, at the time from which my story is taken, been a recent change of inmates.

CHAPTER II.

"I SHALL not be home until late this evening, Mrs. Gammon; I'm going to a concert. You know what I should like when I come home—nine oysters, a pint of stout, and some brown bread and butter."

"Law! bless you, yes, sir; of course I know. I allers says as you hare the most reg'lar and least-trouble-givingest gentleman as hever I knowed. Nine hoysters hafter a concert, twelve hafter a horatorio, and fifteen hafter a hopera, and brown bread and butter in amount according. Halways the same, sir, and likewise never varying 'cept when hoysters is hout, and then you 'as winkles. I sometimes think, sir, as if hoysters was to fail and musink to bust, you'd never 'old up your 'ead again."

"Pray don't suggest anything so exceedingly dreadful, Mrs. Gammon," answered Mr. Skipwash with a shudder, as he hurried out to meet the advancing omnibus.

Now the concert to which Mr. Skipwash went that evening was a concert got up by Signor Gulielmo Smithi (known to a few familiar friends who were in the secret as Billy Smith); and Signor Smithi, having got it up, felt fairly entitled to monopolise nearly all the solos, to take a large slice out of the duets, and to divide the honours in the trios and quartettes—insomuch that there was scarcely an item in the programme in which the name of Signor Smithi was not to be found. But, alas! on the very day of the concert the signor caught a violent cold, and the result was that when the evening came his voice (if you shut your eyes) sounded very much as if he had got into bed and was singing from under the blankets.

Mr. Skipwash, who had a most acute ear, listened patiently to a muffled solo from Signor Smithi, and then less patiently to a duet in which Signor Smithi seemed to be more covered up than ever, and to have thrust his head under the mattress—and then Mr. Skipwash, unable to endure it any longer, rushed out and made wildly for home, with intent to console himself at the piano.

When he reached the house he beheld, to his astonishment, a bright light in his sitting-room, and sounds of music, which appeared to proceed from his own piano, were borne in upon his ear—soft, sweet, pathetic music, played with a touch such as is given to only a favoured few. He paused in blank amazement. Who on earth could it be? It could not possibly be Mrs. Gammon. It could not possibly be Mrs. Gammon's general servant. It could not possibly be Mrs. Gammon's baby. He stood and listened in a trance of delight for many minutes—until, in fact, he became aware that he was nearly freezing with the cold—and then, softly turning the key, he went in and crept upstairs to his room. He opened the door, and behold, there met his view a young and pretty lady, dressed in deep mourning, who was seated at his piano. She started as the door opened, and, seeing Mr. Skipwash, blushed crimson, and stammering a hasty apology, fled from the room before he could utter a word.

Mr. Skipwash sank into a chair, and gave himself up to a state of vacant astonishment, from which he was roused by the entrance of Mrs. Gammon, who seemed dubious as to her reception, and hung her head down at an angle of forty-five degrees.

"Hi'm sure, sir, if I *'ad* but knowed as you would have

been 'ome so hearly, it wouldn't 'ave 'appened. The fack is, as the poor young lady—which 'er name is Seaford, and I nussed 'er when a hinfant—'as come 'ere to lodge becos she's a giving musink lessons in consequence of the death of 'er par, as died penniless, and 'er being fond of musink, and 'aving 'ad to part with 'er hown piano in consequence of the beef-tea as was required for 'er par in 'is last moments—she hasked me whether I thought it would give hoffence if she was just for to play a toon sometimes when you was away, and I" [here Mrs. Gammon's voice began to tremble with emotion], "foolish-like, says 'Yes,' which I can only arx pardon for the liberty" [here Mrs. Gammon broke down altogether], "hand 'ope as you'll look hover it on account of sich a thing never 'aving 'appened previous."

Mrs. Gammon signified her emotion at the end of the peroration to her speech by throwing her apron all over her head, and sobbing underneath it.

"Mrs. Gammon, no apology is necessary; the young lady is welcome to play on my piano *whenever* she pleases; and you may tell her so with my compliments."

Mrs. Gammon, overjoyed to find that she had not offended a person so important to her financial welfare as Mr. Skipwash, came out from under the apron with a bob, and proceeded to impart to that gentleman various particulars concerning Miss Seaford, to all of which he listened with attention. And then she retired to give the young lady his gracious message.

"What a singularly beautiful touch," murmured Mr. Skipwash, as he slowly took a boot off. "What taste, what expression, what exquisite execution! One of my most favourite pieces, too! How well she must have

been taught, and what a soul for music she must have! Obliged, too, to earn a living by giving music lessons! Poor thing! poor thing!"

Mr. Skipwash's reflections were so engrossing that he not only forgot to take his other boot off, but he deliberately put on again the one that he had taken off, being apparently under the impression that, as the proceeding represented two operations with a boot, it came to the same thing. And when Mrs. Gammon presently brought in his supper, she found him so buried in thought that he didn't observe her entrance, and started violently when he saw her.

Another curious occurrence was, that Mr. Skipwash couldn't eat the nine oysters and the brown bread and butter, or drink the pint of stout. He looked at them, and circled round them, and made pecks at them like a bird; but he had not the ghost of an appetite, and at last he pushed the tray away and gave it up.

He had been through life one of those people with whom the act of getting into bed means the act of going to sleep until it is time to rise next morning, and who come down to breakfast and tell you of the fact in a bragging tone, when you have been tossing about nearly all night, perhaps, until you felt as if the bed had entered into a conspiracy against you, and have only fallen into a deep and peaceful sleep twenty minutes before you have to get up.

But he couldn't sleep for hours that night. He turned over and over like an animated rolling-pin—and he kicked the clothes about—and he sat up and shook the pillow, as if it were a refractory baby—and he turned down the

counterpane because it was too hot, and about two minutes afterwards he pulled it up again because it was too cold—all without avail. And at length when he did go to sleep he dreamt that the young lady in black came into his sitting-room and got on the top of the piano and rode off with it like a witch, playing a beautiful tune on it with her two feet as she vanished—and he dreamt that he rushed after her and tried to stop her flight and implore her to remain—and he woke up to find that the dull light of a November morning was just sulkily beginning to enter the room, and that he was conscious of having had a particularly bad night of it.

CHAPTER III.

"MRS. GAMMON, I—I—don't at all expect to be home this evening, and—and—if the young lady downstairs would like to come up and play the piano, pray say that I shall be very gleased and plad—I mean pleased and glad."

"Thank you, sir. I'm sure it's wery kind of you—but, law! sir, I'm afraid you ain't well! I never knowed you to fail at hoysters afore last night; and when I see 'em on the plate this morning, a lookin' quite ashamed of themselves, you might a knocked me down with a 'airpin. And, has for breakfast, wy, you ain't eaten scarcely a mussel."

"I'm quite well, thank you, Mrs. Gammon. At least, very nearly so. At least—thank you; yes. You won't forget my message, please."

Mr. Skipwash started off hurriedly, as if anxious to close

the conversation, and his obviously flurried manner, coupled with his loss of appetite, so filled Mrs. Gammon with alarm that she followed him anxiously with her eyes, and wagged her head at intervals, like a depressed pendulum.

Mr. Skipwash's business suffered that day. He couldn't concentrate his attention on it. Figures got mixed up with the young lady in black, and he found himself multiplying her by ten, and dividing the result by the piano; and whenever he thought that he really had settled down to work, and would stick to it like wax, he was suddenly seized with a violent inclination to write "Miss Seaford" on his blotting-paper, and his writing-paper, and his envelopes, and the smooth wooden edges of his table, insomuch that Miss Seaford's name seemed to be indigenous to the soil, and to sprout up in all directions.

Now, when Mr. Skipwash had no evening engagement, it was his wont to go home to tea. He did not go home to tea on this particular evening, and yet, for the life of me, I can't think that he had an evening engagement. If he had, he most certainly didn't know where it was; for when he left the Bank he wandered about for quite two hours, turning indiscriminately to the right or the left, coming back by devious routes to points from which he had made a start, and seeming to have no fixity of purpose whatever, until eight o'clock struck, when he suddenly made for the direction of Kennington, and went straight to his lodgings.

The light was in the window of his room, as before—the sound of the piano was wafted to his ear, as before—he stood and listened outside till he nearly froze, as before—he turned the key softly, crept upstairs, and opened his

door, as before—the young lady rose up confused, as before—she was about to escape, as before—but, NOT AS BEFORE, Mr. Skipwash arrested her progress, and begged her to pardon the liberty he took in asking her whether she would mind please going on playing, and said it would delight him above all things, and told her that he passionately loved—music. And the young lady did play—and then Mr. Skipwash sang a song, which she shyly accompanied—and then she played again—and then she accompanied Mr. Skipwash in another song, not quite so shyly as before—and then they played a duet, in which Mr. Skipwash's hands in the bass notes showed a tendency to get unaccountably mixed up with Miss Seaford's hands in the treble notes—and the time passed like lightning———*AND*

CHAPTER IV.

"ON the 10th instant, at St. Mary's, Kennington, by the Reverend James Tootle, M.A., vicar of Little Slappum, Sussex (second cousin, three times removed, of the bridegroom), assisted by the Reverend Orlwerk Nopay, curate of St. Mary's, Ebenezer Skipwash, chief cashier to Messrs. Slumpy, Hardcash and Slumpy, of Lombard Street, to Mary Seaford, only daughter of the late Captain Seaford. No cards. Friends will please accept this melancholy intimation."

TWELVE INSIDE AND FOURTEEN OUT.

I LIVE at a considerable distance from the scene of my labours, and it has been my habit for many years to betake myself thither by an omnibus. For a long time I rode inside, partly because I much doubted my ability to climb up on to the roof, and partly because I entertained a very serious apprehension that, if I ever succeeded in completing the ascent in question, I should experience difficulty in getting down again.

Indeed, I should in all probability have remained an inside passenger to the end of my days but for my conductor, who—observing me one day to be wistfully gazing from my accustomed seat in the corner at a pair of legs which provokingly dangled before my view for a moment and then rapidly disappeared in an upward direction—volunteered the information, in tones of husky emphasis, that it was as "heasy as nothink."

This classic piece of encouragement so fired my breast that I stood the conductor a liberal modicum of whisky-and-water at the very next halting-place, and found myself on the following morning gazing proudly from a positively giddy height at the foot-passengers in Oxford Street.

I very soon became a regular outside traveller. I developed into such an accomplished climber, that I would purposely allow the omnibus to get a little in front of me

in order that I might run after it, and clamber lightly on to its summit while it continued in full motion. It is needless to add that I never did this without first looking round and ascertaining that I could not fail to be seen by several people.

I look back upon those days with some contempt now —now, when I dexterously catch hold of a hanging leather strap, put one foot on a wheel, give a hop, skip, and jump, and find myself forthwith seated on the box—now, when I distinctly know the "near" side as distinguished from the "off" side, and am so familiar with our driver that I hesitate not to call him "Tom," utterly regardless of any name which might have been originally bestowed upon him at his baptism.

I have an immense respect for that last-mentioned personage; I always sit on his right hand, and supply him regularly with cigars. (*Mem.*—Omnibus drivers seldom descend to the inexpensive and modest pipe.) He is by far the most profound man I know. He seldom speaks, but thinks immensely; and there is a depth of intellect in his purple face when he emphasises some pithy observation by nodding in my direction which awes me greatly. He is well up in sporting matters, and often indulges in a sibylline prophecy as to the result of a coming race. He never drives, even in the very height of summer, without divers voluminous wraps and aprons. He is very particular about his collar and tie (the latter fastened with a horse-shoe pin), which are a pattern of neatness, and he would not permit the vestige of a hair to luxuriate under his chin for worlds.

I respect the conductor very much too, but not quite in

the same way. The driver is a fixed immovable object of regard, but the conductor is never still for an instant. One minute he will be propelling a very fat man into the omnibus, the next he will be dragging an equally fat man out of it. As he stands on his little pedestal, he sweeps the street on either side with unerring eye, and never misses a fare by any chance. Inasmuch as he is not allowed to sit down for five minutes himself from morning till night (more shame, say I), he naturally cares not one iota for the comfort of his passengers; and having once put them inside or outside, as the case may be, his part is done, and they may gain a seat as best they can. He always divines, as if by instinct, the exact coin which you are going to place in his hands, and has the change for it ready before you pay him. He is withal a civil, merry fellow, and in the repartee peculiar to his class incomparable.

Life is full of trials, but, in a small way, I know of none more sore than that of getting inside an omnibus when it is full. The conductor having pushed you in and shut the door on you, the omnibus goes on with a sudden jerk which very nearly throws you on to your back. Convulsively grasping the roof, you regain your feet and look round with the view of sitting down somewhere. The passengers one and all scowl at you fiercely, and completely fill up between them the one foot square of space to which, in theory, you are entitled. People, people everywhere, but not a single seat! You continue to stand there, still clinging wildly to the roof—nobody moves an inch—your head begins to swim, and you speculate confusedly upon the precise knee on which it will come when you fall exhausted. Getting at length desperate, you sit down indiscriminately upon the

two nearest passengers, who, grumbling mightily, yield to the pressure, and enable you to descend between them, with a gradual and measured movement, to the cushion. The oddest thing is, that when you have thus gained a seat, no one in the omnibus glares more fiercely at the next helpless incomer than yourself.

I often derived a great deal of amusement, in the days when I rode inside an omnibus, from studying the characteristics of my fellow-passengers. Just opposite to me there used to sit every morning one of the very fattest and most benignant old gentlemen I ever saw. It was a perfect treat to watch that man. He took a delight in gallantly helping a lady into the omnibus, and would insist upon taking her child on his lap and holding all her parcels until she was seated. If some unfortunate being in the very inmost recesses of the omnibus looked hopelessly at the door, as if he would very much like to be set down, but did not see the smallest prospect of attaining his desire, this dear old fellow always caught his glance, and began forthwith to smite the conductor violently with his umbrella, upon which the conductor gave a sort of yell at the back of the driver's head, and then the omnibus stopped. I made great friends with the old gentleman, and always felt the better for a look at his jolly, good-humoured visage.

How often I have come across the bony, middle-aged female, who gets periodically into an omnibus with enough parcels and paraphernalia to stock a luggage-train, who requests everybody to take most particular notice of the fact that she desires to be put down at the corner of Johnson Street, and that she shall write a letter to the secretary and all the directors of the omnibus company, as well as to the

leading newspapers of the day, if she is carried on to Mumford Street instead.

Almost as familiar to me is the highly objectionable omnibus-child, who points its fingers straight at you, and asks its mamma in a shrill treble voice (which is distinctly heard above the rattle of the wheels) "Why that man has such a funny nose?" who eats oranges with a perfect disregard for the ultimate destination of the peel, and, when tired, fidgets until you are nearly mad and squeals until you are quite deaf.

I know so well, too, the choleric and nervous old lady who travels by omnibus. She always loses her purse immediately she gets in, and, after rooting up all the straw in the omnibus, and thereby making everybody supremely uncomfortable, finds it in her pocket. Every street we pass from the commencement of our journey is her street—she knows it is. When her street really does arrive, and she is about to get out, she is seized with a sudden conviction, of which nothing but a second uprooting of straw can disabuse her mind, that she has left something behind.

Then there is the chirpy, talkative man, who plunges into conversation the moment he gets into the omnibus; and there is also the sullen, saturnine man, who repels the overtures of the chirpy, talkative man. Many a time, too, I have seen the pale, worn little sempstress who is obliged to spend a large portion of her scanty pittance in riding to or from the scene of her long daily labours; and, next to her, the bilious-looking clerk who, shut up in an office all day, is too lazy to embrace an opportunity of getting the fresh air and exercise afforded by a walk.

Many such odd associations has the omnibus for me,

and for all who take an interest in the genus homo. But woe unto thee, my sometimes crazy, often overladen, and always uncomfortable friend! For thy glory is waning, and in dreams I have seen thy driver piloting a train on the Metropolitan Railway, and thy conductor acting as guard, and astonishing the public by requesting them to get up on the near side.

MR. SMITH'S BRIEF.

MR. DEMETRIUS SMITH was thirty-six years old, and he had been called to the bar ten years.

I don't know who it was that called him, but I can't say much for the person's manners; for, although Mr. Smith had answered the summons with great alacrity, and had presented himself in a brand-new wig and gown, he had been waiting ever since to know what he was called for, without receiving any sort of intimation on the subject

Mr. Smith had not expected anything very great, for he was aware of the circumstance that gentlemen called to the bar usually remain in legal longclothes for several years, that when the hair is just tinged with grey they are promoted to the knickerbocker stage, and that when middle age is fairly reached they begin to be regarded as grown-up young fellows, who know what they are talking about. Mr. Smith, I say, knew all this; and he was not very ambitious, and he was not at all poor, but still he would have dearly liked to see his name on ONE brief.

He had chambers in New Square, Lincoln's Inn, and, as he used to sit there, he would wonder whether, when that first brief came, his name would appear thereon as plain "Mr. Smith," or as "Mr. D. Smith," or as "Mr. Dem. Smith," or, perchance, in all its glory, the full-blown title, "Mr. Demetrius Smith." He kept a boy in a little ante-

room which measured four feet by six, and had a large stove in the middle, and he had kept that boy, and other boys before him (who had all been called Henry by Mr. Smith, and had succeeded each other like the kings of England), for all these ten years, at salaries varying between five shillings and seven shillings and sixpence a week, for the express purpose of taking in that first brief. Owing to the forcing properties of the atmosphere in which they sat, several boys, who had gone there smooth-faced, had left bushy-whiskered without accomplishing this end.

But now it had COME. I say it had come. It had been left by a solicitor's clerk, and the boy Henry the Eighth had taken it in. He was so frightened when he opened the door and saw it that he turned quite pale. He knocked at Mr. Smith's door.

"Come in," said Mr. Smith.

The boy went in, holding it up, and said—

"Oh, hif you please, Sir, yer's a brief."

"A what?" shouted Mr. Smith, jumping up as if he had been shot.

"A brief, Sir—a reg'lar brief, like I see the gents in court 'ave."

"Give it me!" said Mr. Smith, and he snatched it out of the boy's hands in a state of wild excitement.

It was not a very bulky brief. There was only one sheet, and it had nothing written inside; but on the outside was an intimation that Mr. D. Smith was requested to appear for somebody in one of the Courts of Chancery on Friday next, and say that that particular somebody was quite agreeable to something which somebody else wanted to do, his principal reason appearing to be that it could not,

under any circumstances, make the least difference to him whether it were done or not. Mr. Smith had seen several other barristers hold these briefs. He had noticed them rise up from all sorts of unexpected corners, and say, "I-appear-Millud-for-the-defendant-Jane-Pump-and-I-am-instructed-to-consent-to-an-order-and-to-ask-that-my-client's-costs-may-be-provided-for-I-believe-my-learned-friend-does-not-object-to-this-'f-your-lordship-pleases."

And then he had seen them bob their heads, as if they were suddenly seized with a conviction that the judge couldn't be happy until he had inspected the crowns of their wigs, and then subside.

And now he was to do it himself on Friday next. He, Demetrius Smith, was to appear for the defendant, Timothy Noodles, and make that exciting observation on behalf of the said Timothy Noodles, and bob his own wig before a lot of people. It was only Tuesday yet, but he sallied out in his wig and gown, brief in hand, and went into all the courts; and then he went back and practised his part in different voices, to see which would sound best. Thus—(*deep bass*) "Millud, I appear for the defendant, Timothy Noodles;" (*rich baritone*) "Millud, I appear for the defendant, Timothy Noodles;" (*melodious tenor*) "Millud, I appear for the defendant, Timothy Noodles."

And then he placed himself before the glass, and bobbed his head about 250 times, until he felt quite certain that he had got a very bad headache, and nearly certain that he had learnt the right sort of bob; and then he sat down and wrote the following letter:—

"61 NEW SQUARE.

"MY DEAR MR. TOPPER,—It has come! I have got a brief; and I feel that the way is at last opened for me to the career at the bar for which I have waited so long. I must celebrate the event in some way, and cannot do so better than by asking you and other bachelor friends to dine with me, in honour of it, next Thursday evening—the night before I appear in court. Dinner at seven, in a private room at Anderton's. Do come.—Yours in ecstasy,

"DEMETRIUS SMITH."

Ten other missives of invitation did Mr. Smith despatch before he left chambers that evening, and to all of them came answers of acceptance, with fervent congratulations.

He had great difficulty in wearing away the next two days.

Never had the hours dragged so wearily. But Thursday evening, the prelude to the eventful Friday, arrived at last, and by five o'clock (two hours before the time fixed for the dinner) Mr. Smith was sitting at his chambers in full evening dress, with his watch in his hand.

Suddenly there was a loud knock at the door, which deposited Mr. Smith's heart in the middle of his mouth.

Could it? Was it? Oh! *could* it be another brief?

The boy had left, so Mr. Smith rose, trembling, and went to the door. A youth was standing there—a youth in whose appearance there was that nameless savour of writs, and ink, and brazen impertinence which distinguishes a certain type of solicitor's office-boy.

"Hare you Mr. D. Smith?" inquired the youth saucily.

"My name is Mr. Demetrius Smith," was the dignified response.

"*His* it? Then you've took in a brief as were meant for Mr. David Smith of *Hold* Square."

Mr. Smith absolutely gasped for breath.

"W—w—w—hat do you mean?" he at last asked faintly.

"Wy, I means has hour new clerk 'ave mistooked the chambers, hand left the brief hat the wrong place. Smith ain't such a *wery* huncommon name, neither."

Mr. Smith tottered back into his room as one in a dream, took up the brief from his table, went to the door again, handed it to the youth [who went off whistling in the most hardened manner]; and then he returned, and sat down in his chair in a state of utter collapse.

He had been sitting there how long he knew not, and cared not, when suddenly a clock in the neighbourhood struck seven.

"Good gracious! that dinner at Anderton's!"

Mr. Smith rose, took up his opera-hat, which was lying flat on the table, pushed it out with a bang, and stuck it on his head; and, having done this, he rushed out desperately and hailed a cab to Anderton's.

Arrived there, he found that his eleven guests had all assembled, and that they were sitting round the room and glaring at each other in that sociable manner which distinguishes English people before dinner. Mr. Smith responded to the greetings which hailed him in a tone of laboured cheerfulness, and stammered an apology for his late arrival, which, to his great relief, was cut short by the entrance of dinner. He took the head of the table, of course, and made desperate efforts to be lively, which, for the most part, took the form of laughing an unnatural

laugh at unexpected and not altogether appropriate moments.

For instance, when Hockin referred to the loss of his father last year, and Johnson said he had just been ruined by a scoundrel, Mr. Smith was convulsed with mirth, to their great astonishment.

Other marks also of a disordered mind might have been noticed by the close observer, as to which time will only allow me to mention that Mr. Smith helped himself to salt and mustard until the rim of his plate was covered with little heaps all round, and that his dinner-napkin reposed generally on the floor, sometimes on the table, was once tied round his neck in a sailor's knot, and was eventually placed in his pocket, under the impression that it was his handkerchief. In fact, there was an awful foreboding in Mr. Smith's mind, which gave him a cold chill whenever he looked at Topper, who was sitting at the foot of the table, and which rose to agony-point when dinner gave way to dessert, and Topper *began to clear his throat.*

If Mr. Smith's garments had been lined with nutmeg-graters—if he had had several pointed pebbles inside his boots—he could not have looked more exquisitely uncomfortable than he did when Topper executed this manœuvre. In vain he tried to catch Topper's eye, but he couldn't. Topper's eye seemed to work on a sort of aggravating swivel; for it looked up and down, and this way and that way, but not once at Mr. Smith before he rose from his chair, glass in hand, and spake as follows :—

"Gentlemen, I believe I am the oldest person present, and I believe that I have the privilege of being also the oldest friend present of our excellent host. I cannot, therefore,

let this evening pass without saying a word as to the occasion which we have met here to celebrate.

"Upon the social qualities of our friend, his kindly, generous heart, his wit, his high character, of these I need not speak [No! no!], for they are known to all of us. [Hear! hear!] But of his legal knowledge—of his forensic ability—of his power to take a worthy place in history beside Lord—Lord—I say beside Lord—in fact beside all the great and gifted lawyers who have adorned the bar, the senate, and the bench—of these we have thus far been able only to surmise, to speculate, and to hope. And why is this, gentlemen? Why is it that our friend has not luminously shone in that profession which he has, I venture to say, been born to adorn? I will tell you. It is because he has been under a bushel—at least, of course, I mean his light; in one word, because he has wanted *opportunity*. Gentlemen, I believe it is no secret among us that a path *has* been opened at length for the display of the commanding abilities of our friend; that the laurel wreath is, so to speak, being prepared for his brow; that the triumphal car" (and here Topper pointed theatrically towards Fleet Street) "is waiting to carry him into the golden land of success. *Our friend has got his first brief.* His first, I say; but who can doubt how many will succeed it? Who can doubt that this is the *opportunity* which has alone been wanted? Can it, under these circumstances, be wondered if I, his old friend, shed a tear of manly emotion" (the tear dropped into Mr. Topper's claret-glass), "and ask you to fill your glasses to the very brim, and drink, with musical honours, long life and a brilliant successful career at the bar to Mr. Demetrius Smith."

Topper, amid thunders of applause, raised his glass to

his lips, and everybody else's glass was raised to everybody else's lips.

If you have never had your own health drunk with musical honours, may I be permitted respectfully to express a hope that you never may. It implies the raising of every voice in the room to its top note, and sometimes to regions considerably beyond any note recognised among civilised nations; and it also implies the singing by every person of different words in different tunes as near to you as it is possible to get.

When this ceremony had been gone through in Mr. Smith's case, every one sat down with an air of expectancy, and up rose the object of the toast.

"Gentlemen,—The boy left it, don't you see, at my chambers, and—and—my name was on it—Mr. D. Smith;—and I read it—there wasn't much to read, only outside, but I read it—and I took it into court yesterday—just to show I had one, you know—and, of course, I couldn't tell, could I?

"You see, the boy never said that *his* chambers were in Old Square, but they were—and his name's D. Smith too—David Smith—and that other boy came to-night just as I was dressed—I don't mean my boy—and I don't mean the boy that brought it—I mean that other boy—that *beast* of a boy—and I went to the door—and I thought it might be another, but it—it—wasn't—it was only that beast of a boy come to say that it was a mistake.

"I never had one before—and I didn't have this one—only for two days, at least—and I hadn't any opportunity to tell Topper, or I should have asked him not to speak his speech.

"I'm not angry with you, Topper. You did not mean to make me look silly. And the boy brought it, don't you see.

"I don't mind, you know—only perhaps you wouldn't mind not laughing at a fellow."

Mr. Smith's appeal was not in vain, for when he sat down nobody laughed.

It must be confessed that Hockin gurgled, that there was about Johnson an appearance referable only to apoplexy or suppressed mirth, while several of the guests seemed to have great difficulty in persuading the contents of their wine-glasses to proceed down their throats in an orthodox manner.

To the everlasting credit of Topper, be it recorded that he looked really pained at the position in which he had unwittingly placed our Demetrius.

It is recorded in history that on the morning following Mr. Smith's luckless banquet—over the close of which I draw a veil—a painter might have been seen erasing the name of Mr. Demetrius Smith from the lintel of No. 61 New Square, Lincoln's Inn, and that, at the very earliest moment at which the regulations permitted, Mr. Smith took all necessary steps for casting the dust from his feet, the gown from his back, and the wig from the top of his head at the Ancient and Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn.

SHAKESPEARE ON BOARD.

I HAVE never personally embarked upon the ocean wave for any longer period than is implied in a journey to Boulogne (upon which occasion candour compels me to state in a parenthesis that I was extremely ill, and invisible to all but a select circle of sorrowing friends, from the mouth of the Thames to Boulogne Harbour), but I have been given to understand by others, that on every passenger ship in which a large number of people are confined to a small space for several days or weeks together, there is usually to be found some one person who is the life and soul of the ship, and who keeps everybody, more or less, from yielding to the monotony of the situation.

At all events, such a man was there on board the good ship "Palmerston," in the person of one John Lumsden, during a certain voyage, in a certain year of grace. There was no end to the versatile energy of that man. He talked, laughed, sang, conjured, played the piano, violin, and bones; ate his meals with perfect enjoyment, when the empty places at the saloon-table plainly told a tale of blighted hopes on the part of the passengers generally; he knew all about the ropes, was learned as to the wind, and was more or less well up in every possible subject.

But if there was *one* thing at which Mr. Lumsden excelled above all others, it was in the organising of entertainments.

He was a born stage-manager; and so great were his own enthusiasm and his power of imparting it to other people, that all on board went musically and dramatically mad—so much so, indeed, that if he had not exercised considerable firmness, everybody would have insisted on taking an active part in the performances, and there would have been no audience at all, except the cook's boy, who came from Peru, and couldn't understand a word of English.

Several entertainments had gone off with great success; and Mr. Lumsden was sitting in the saloon one afternoon, arranging the programme for the next one, when Mobbs, the steward, might have been observed to approach him in a sidelong and rather guilty manner. Mr. Lumsden looked up.

"Well, Mobbs, what is it?"

"Well, you see, Mr. Lumsden, sir! me and the cook 'ave been thinking as p'r'aps you might let us do it?"

"Do what, Mobbs?"

"Why, sir," said Mobbs modestly, "we 'ave been reading parts of ''Amlet,' and the cook *hand* me thought as p'r'aps you might put us in to do the Ghost scene at the next entertainment, if not hinconvenient or hotherwise full up."

Mr. Lumsden's eyes opened very wide, and then twinkled very merrily; and then, assuming an air of deep gravity, he answered—

"By all means, Mobbs. I'll put your names down at once."

Mobbs bowed gratefully, and departed to inform the cook of the success of his mission.

When the programme was stuck up in the saloon next

morning, it contained, sure enough, among others, the following item :—

> "Recitation: The Ghost scene from 'Hamlet.'
> *Hamlet* . . . Mr. James Mobbs.
> *Ghost* . . . . Mr. Robert Spriggins."

An air of unusual importance pervaded the lineaments of Mr. J. Mobbs and Mr. R. Spriggins during the interval of time which elapsed before the entertainment took place. On every possible occasion they escaped together into a cabin, from whence there would forthwith proceed strange sounds; and when engaged in their ordinary pursuits, there might have been observed in both of them a lofty abstraction, which caused them to be regarded by the steerage passengers with mingled awe and admiration.

At length the evening came, and a crowded audience filled the saloon, at one end of which was a small platform, which had been improvised by the ingenious Mr. Lumsden.

The proceedings were opened with a regular rockets-and-fireworks duet by the Misses Simpkin, in the course of which the Misses Simpkin displayed such powers of execution, that they very nearly fell off their music-stools, and the piano looked quite hot when they had finished.

Then came a song by Mrs. Waggletail. She was a very fat woman, with a shrill voice, which was often raised in melody (to the serious inconvenience of the family in the next cabin), and oftener still in anger at Mr. Waggletail, a much-enduring little man, of whom Mrs. W. would have made about six, with his hat and boots thrown in.

When the applause which greeted Mrs. Waggletail's retirement had subsided, Mr. Lumsden rose and announced the recitation from "Hamlet," by Mr. James Mobbs and

Mr. Robert Spriggins; and thereupon those worthies appeared on the platform.

I believe there have been learned controversies as to the personal appearance and dress of Hamlet. I have never studied the subject with close attention, and I am therefore not prepared to express any opinion as to the accuracy of Mr. Mobbs' rendering of the Danish prince's outward man.

I simply state, that on this occasion Hamlet was identified with a face totally devoid of beauty or intelligence, and a costume consisting of an immense bird's-eye necktie, a red-and-white-striped shirt, a shiny-black coat and waistcoat, and a pair of white ducks; the whole column having for its base an apoplectic-looking pair of blucher boots. Hamlet's Ghost, as personified by Mr. Spriggins, was a spirit with a very red face and a decided tendency to stoutness. Mr. Spriggins gave a novel rendering to the part by substituting for the dismal expression which usually pervades the features of Hamlet's papa a cheerful, not to say hilarious, smile, as if, on the whole, the incident of being murdered, and then dropping in from the spirit-world to inspect the scene of the disaster, presented itself to his mind in a comic aspect. He had, moreover, a natural hoarseness of voice, which conveyed rather an impression that the spirit-world was draughty, and had given him a cold.

It had been arranged that Mr. Lumsden should act as prompter, and accordingly that gentleman sat in front, with a "Shakespeare" on his lap.

The particular part of the Ghost scene selected for the programme was that in which the Ghost, having beckoned Hamlet to leave his companions, and Hamlet having obeyed

the bidding, they stand together and hold a little private conversation, which is started by Hamlet.

With this introduction, I will, by your leave, pull up the curtain.

Ham. "Whither wilt thou lead me? Speak! Hi'll go no farther."

Ghost (*pleasantly*). "Mark me."

Ham. "Hi will."

Ghost (*confidentially*). "My *h*our is almost come,
When I to blazin' torments"——

[*Mr. Lumsden, aside.* "Not 'blazing torments'—'sulphurous and tormenting flames.'"]

Ghost. "I don't mean 'blazin' torments,' but, as the gentleman says, kindly setting me straight—

'When I to sallyfurious and tormentin' flames
Must go and give in'"——

[*Mr. Lumsden, aside.* "Must render up myself."]

Ghost (*argumentatively*). "Well, it's the same thing, ain't it? Still, of course, *as* the book says, 'Must render up myself.'"

Ham. "Alas! poor Ghost."

Ghost. "Don't go for to pity me, but listen 'ere."

[*Mr. Lumsden.* "Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold."]

Ghost (*aside doggedly*). "That's jest what I says."

Ham. "Speak! Hi ham bound to 'ear."

Ghost. "So hart thou to rewenge when thou shalt 'ear."

[*To Mr. Lumsden.* "I suppose *that's* right, anyway?"]

Ham. "What?"

Ghost. "W'y, I says to the gen'l'man, as I s'pose that was right anyway?"

Ham. "What?"

Ghost. "W'y, didn't I tell you? Wot are you whispering about *now*, Mr. Lumsden?"

[*Mr. Lumsden.* "'What' is in Hamlet's part, and you should answer, 'I am thy father's spirit.'"]

Ghost. "Law! to think of me forgetting that, Mobbs! I thought you was a-talking to me private.

'Hi ham thy father's sperrit, Mobbs (I mean 'Amlet),
Doom'd for a sartin time to walk about.'"

[*Mr. Lumsden* (*emphatically*). "Walk the night!"]

Ghost. "Doom'd for a sartin time to walk about at night,
Hand for the day to roast upon the fire."

[*Mr. Lumsden.* "And for the day confined to fast in fires."]

Ghost (*pityingly, as if his own rendering were much better*),—

"Hand for the day confined to fasting fires,
Till them there deeds, done in my days of natur',
Hare reg'lar frizzled hup."

[*Mr. Lumsden.* "Are burnt and purged away."]

Ghost (*in a tone of remonstrance*). "Well, now, wot *is* the difference between burnin' and frizzlin' up? Still, of course, *'ave* it your way, sir!

'Hare burnt and purged away.
But that I ain't allowed.'"

[*Mr. Lumsden.* "But that I am forbid."]

Ghost. "But that I am forbid to say I ain't allowed.
I mean to tell the secrets of my prison 'ouse.
Hi could a tale hunfold has would (*pause*)
—has would"——

[*Mr. Lumsden.* "Whose lightest word."]

Ghost. "Thank you, sir!

'Whose lightest word would—would'"——

[*Mr. Lumsden.* "Would harrow up thy soul."]

Ghost. "Thank you, sir!

'Would 'arrow hup thy soul—freeze thy'"——

[*Mr. Lumsden.* "Young blood."]

Ghost. "'Young blood.' Look here, Mobbs, you know it better than me. You finish this lot about the fretful porkypine—squills, and all that."

Ham. (*abandoning blank verse*). "'Ow can I, stoopid? 'Ave I not got to say wot's down for 'Amlet in the book? Wot's the good of puttin' me down H-A-M 'Am,' short for 'Amlet, if I'm a-going to be a ghost likewise?"

Ghost (*in very earthly tones*). "Who are you calling stoopid? I ain't no more stoopid than you, I s'pose, a-standing there calling yourself 'Amlet when your name's Mobbs. I s'pose 'Amlet was a stooard, was he?"

Ham. "I s'pose the Ghost was a *cook*, was he?"

Ghost. "Think you can act fine, I s'pose?

Ham. "It ain't no good trying to act fine with some parties."

Ghost. "Don't be insultin', Mobbs!"

Ham. "Don't be impertinent, Spriggins!"

It is impossible to say how long this passage-of-arms might have lasted, and to what extremities it might have gone, had not Mr. Lumsden—whose presence of mind was equal to any emergency—jumped on to the platform and sent Mr. Hamlet Mobbs and Mr. Ghost Spriggins unceremoniously off the same. They kept up a heated personal controversy while melting from the view; but I am happy to say that at a later period of the evening they might have been seen harmoniously imbibing grog together, and congratulating each other upon having, as they considered, played their parts exceedingly well. In which belief they will live and die.

MISS WIFFIN'S BIRTHDAY PRESENTS.

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CHAPTER I.

THE PROLOGUE.

Mr. William Woozle lodged on the ground floor; Mr. and Mrs. Wiffin and Miss Sarah Wiffin, their daughter, lodged on the first floor; and Mr. Paul Poppit lodged on the second floor.

Mr. Woozle loved Miss Wiffin—Mr. Poppit also loved Miss Wiffin. It is, therefore, quite unnecessary for me to add that Mr. Poppit and Mr. Woozle also loved *each other* dearly, and that neither of them would have been delighted to smother the other one; no, not if he had been specially licensed by Act of Parliament so to do.

To say that Mr. Woozle and Mr. Poppit vied with each other in their attentions to the young lady is to convey but a faint idea of their rivalry. They kept a close and incessant watch on each other; and Mary, the servant-maid, was a considerable gainer by their proceedings, inasmuch as she was liberally paid by Poppit to keep him informed of Woozle's last move in the way of presents to the young lady or otherwise, and equally well paid by Woozle to perform exactly the same office as to Poppit.

The result was, that if Woozle presented Miss Wiffin

with some token of regard—say a box of preserved fruit—forthwith would Poppit eclipse the gift by a much larger box of much more intensely preserved fruit. If Poppit sent *down* to the first floor for Miss Wiffin six pairs of the best gloves, immediately did Woozle, on learning of it, send *up* to the first floor, for Miss Wiffin, twelve pairs of the very best gloves.

Nay, when Woozle, inspired by a bright thought, serenaded Miss Wiffin from the bottom of the stairs with a violin, Poppit rushed out, and within one hour had borrowed, conveyed home in a cab, carried upstairs, and began to play on the landing of the second floor an immense violoncello. It is true that he had never played it before, and that his amorous efforts produced sounds dubious as to the amount of music, and most unquestionable as to the quantity of appalling noise; still the great point remained that the violoncello was at least four times as large as the violin, which was an immense consolation to Poppit, not to mention the fact that the noise on the second floor utterly drowned all the efforts at the foot of the stairs, and reduced Woozle to an extremity of baffled rage and despair.

But what, may be asked, were the feelings of Miss Wiffin at being made the object of this double-barrelled adoration?

Well, the feelings of Miss Wiffin were, that it was pleasant—distinctly pleasant.

In the first place, it meant presents—so many presents that she spent quite a considerable fraction of her time in untying parcels.

In the second place, Woozle and Poppit were both very

nice-looking young men, and very eligible young men—and Miss Wiffin was by no means indifferent to either of them.

But as she could not marry both, and had not made up her mind which she liked best, she preserved an equal balance between them—insomuch that hope and fear filled their respective bosoms alternately, and the two bosoms never had the same feelings at the same time, but when the one was exultant the other was always filled with despair, and *vice versâ*.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOT.

A THREE-CORNERED note sent downstairs to Mr. Woozle :—

"MY DEAR MR. WOOZLE,—Pa and Ma join me in hoping that you will be able to take tea with us next Wednesday, as it is my birthday. We are asking Mr. Poppit to meet you. —Yours truly, SARAH WIFFIN."

A square note sent upstairs to Miss Wiffin :—

"MY DEAR MISS WIFFIN,—To say that it will give me the *greatest* pleasure to avail myself of your kind invitation, is not to say what I would say, but, on the contrary, much less so. Excuse me if I add that there are persons whom other persons do not care to meet, although outward concealment of feelings may be necessary though storms within do rage.—Yours most sincerely, WILLIAM WOOZLE."

A three-cornered note sent upstairs to Mr. Poppit :—

"MY DEAR MR. POPPIT,—Next Wednesday being my birthday, Pa and Ma join me in hoping you will be able to take tea with us. We are asking Mr. Woozle to meet you.—Yours truly,

"SARAH WIFFIN."

A square note sent downstairs to Miss Wiffin :—

"My dear Miss Wiffin,—There are times when the human heart—excuse me naming it—is full, and the feelings difficult to repress. Such is this. I thank you most kindly, and will joyous come. 'Tis not for me to say who should be asked to your natal tea-party, but there are people whose whiskers are fair, but whose deeds are dark, and who—but I will not add more.—Yours very truly, Paul Poppit."

"I wonder what that fellow Woozle's going to give her on Wednesday," observed Poppit to himself as he thoughtfully paced his room on the Monday evening before the entertainment. "Mary can't find out what he's up to, and if I don't take care he'll beat my present. Never mind, he won't dream of my writing a birthday ode ; and if that doesn't take the shine out of him I don't know what's what. Still I *should* like to know what his little game is. I know what I'll do ; he's out this evening, so I'll slip down and have a look about his room myself."

With stealthy gait and shoeless, not to say sockless, feet Mr. Poppit descended the stairs, and gently entering the vacant room of Woozle, forthwith began making a thorough search.

The sideboard ! No, nothing but jam, and briar-root pipes and anchovy sauce, and other little matters of that kind.

The cupboard ! No : boots, a cricket bat, an old Persian scimitar, more briar-root pipes—but nothing wrapped up, nothing bearing the remotest resemblance to a birthday present. Poppit hunted in every nook and corner in vain, and was about to retire thoroughly vanquished, when suddenly he bethought him of the bedroom ; and there—there, in the clothes-press, on the top shelf, flanked by a suit of

tweeds, and covered over by six pairs of socks, was a great, big, heavy, uncompromising looking parcel.

With a subdued chuckle of triumph, Poppit hauled it forth, uncovered it, and brought to the light a handsome musical-box, with the initials "S.W." stamped on the lid.

"I think my present will put *that* pretty well in the shade, remarked Poppit, as he lifted up the lid contemptuously; but *oh!* how shall I describe his transport of despair, how shall I do justice to the emotion depicted on that young man's face, when I relate that the lifting up of the lid disclosed to view a richly-embroidered envelope, with the words inscribed thereon, "To S. W., A Natal Ode."

"BLOWED if he hasn't written a natal ode too!" exclaimed Poppit.

With trembling fingers he took out of the envelope an intensely creamlaid sheet of paper, with scolloped edges and a most bewildering allegory at the top, which might at first sight have been Margate in a thunderstorm for anything that distinctly appeared to the contrary, but on closer inspection seemed, like a great many other allegories, to be totally devoid of any meaning whatsoever.

Poppit ran his eye down the rival composition, and then, by way of variety, he ran his eye up it, and then he observed in a hoarse whisper, "Ha! ha!" which pertinent remark was followed by a thoughtful rubbing of the nose. Then he put the ode back into the envelope, and balanced it on his finger; and then, with a deep groan, he placed it back in the musical-box.

But suddenly an extraordinary change came over Poppit. He took the envelope out again hurriedly, and whispering, "Shall I?—Dare I?—Is there time?—Yes!—I will!" he

closed the musical box, and restored it to the companionship of the tweed suit and six pairs of socks. And having done that, he rushed from the room, bearing with him Woozle's Natal Ode, envelope and all.

CHAPTER III.

THE CATASTROPHE.

THE day was Wednesday; the time evening; the place Mr. and Mrs. Wiffin's sitting-room on the first floor; and the persons present, Mr. and Mrs. Wiffin, Miss Wiffin, a young lady friend of Miss Wiffin's, Mr. Woozle, and Mr. Poppit.

Tea was just over, but they were still sitting at the table. Miss Wiffin sat with Woozle on one side of her, and Poppit on the other, and she divided her attentions most equally between them.

In the early part of tea, Woozle, who was indeed naturally of a subdued temperament, had looked gloomy, and not without some cause: for, whereas he had only contributed to the feast an ordinary plum-cake, Poppit had come out very strong with a much richer cake, all snowy white at the top, and crowned with a sugar Cupid playing a chocolate harp, and not by any means too warmly dressed for the time of year. But, under the soothing influence of muffins, Woozle gradually recovered himself, and was now comparatively cheerful.

Woozle had secretly hoped that his rival would bring in his birthday present for Miss Wiffin before tea, so as to have the satisfaction of getting the last smile and "thank you"

from that fair damsel, and Poppit had nurtured a corresponding hope. But when it became obvious to each of them that his design had been frustrated, they were both seized with a violent attack of fidgets, and the last crumb had scarcely been swept off the table when Poppit murmured an apology and rushed out of the room, followed at an interval of five yards by Woozle.

A few moments and they returned in a dead heat, jostling each other spitefully in the doorway, and each bearing a package done up in paper.

"Miss Wiffin," said Poppit, very much out of breath, and tearing eagerly at the paper, "I've taken—the liberty—of buying you—a little birthday present" [it measured about two feet by one]—"with many happy returns of this eventful day—and I hope—it will be kindly taken as meant."

By the time this speech was finished the present was uncovered. It was a lady's dressing-case; and as the delighted Miss Wiffin lifted up the lid, what did she see but an illuminated sheet of paper with poetry—evidently poetry—upon it, comfortably settled on the top of a pair of brushes and a scent-bottle.

Miss Wiffin took up the sheet of paper and looked at it; and then Miss Wiffin blushed, and put it down again.

"Read it, my dear," said Mr. Wiffin encouragingly.

"Read it, my dear," said Mrs. Wiffin inquisitively.

"Read it, Sarah dear," said the young lady friend coaxingly.

Miss Wiffin vowed she wouldn't, and declared she couldn't, and then, as is usually the case under such circumstances, she did. It was headed "Natal Ode," and Miss Wiffin read shyly as follows:—

"The sun was bright—the earth was gay,
Sweet Sarah, on thy Natal Day—
At least I venture so to say,
And hope with no offence I may.

And since then, each succeeding year
Hath made thee to thy friends more dear;
Both as you are and as you were,
You are an angel, I declare.

The humblest of your servants, I
A birthday gift have dared to buy;
And greatly do I hope, oh! my,
That you to accept it won't be shy.

Let sun, and moon, and stars unite
In wishing you a future bright!
May all things ever turn out spiffin
To you, adored Miss Sarah Wiffin!"

Everybody declared it was *beau*tiful, except Woozle, who folded his arms and glared unutterably. But his turn was now to come, and scarcely had the chorus of praise died away when he began to untie *his* parcel.

"I, too," said Woozle, in a melancholy tone, "I, too, have dared to mark the occasion by a trifling little gift," [this one measured about three feet by two]—"'tis but a silly bauble—a musical box—and yet the feelings that accompany it, Miss Wiffin, are warm—I may say fervid."

Woozle handed the musical box to Miss Wiffin, who looked at it all round in girlish pleasure, lifted up the lid, and, behold, an embossed envelope was seen. She toyed with the envelope as if afraid to open it, when the doleful voice of Woozle was again heard.

"'Tis but a sorry ode on this your birthday. It may not be equal to the compositions of *other* persons" [here Woozle glared at Poppit], "but it comes from the heart—which is more than some other persons' do."

Thus adjured, Miss Wiffin tore open the envelope, and drew forth another illuminated sheet of paper. She looked at its contents, and they had the curious effect of causing her to turn as red as fire. Without a word she passed it on to Mrs. Wiffin, who perused it, and also turned, if possible, redder than fire; and she passed it to Mr. Wiffin, who likewise looked at it, and, not being able to manage a deeper shade of red, turned purple.

"Sir!" gasped Mr. Wiffin, in a tremendous voice, "is this intended for a *joke?*"

"A joke!" faltered Mr. Woozle. "I never was more earnest in my life. I hope you don't feel offended by its warmth."

"Warmth, indeed!" shouted Mr. Wiffin, getting purpler and purpler; "I'll teach you how to play off your infamous tricks here!"

"But, sir," said Woozle, becoming calm in utter desperation, "read it—ask the young lady there—ask even *him*" [pointing to Poppit] "whether there is any harm in it!"

"Read it! yes, I will read it, you impudent scoundrel," said Mr. Wiffin; and therewith he gulped down, by a violent effort, his choking wrath, and read in gasps as follows:—

"You're very proud and haughty,
Of your looks you make the most;
But I b'lieve to-day you're forty,
So you've got no cause to boast.

With your many airs and graces,
You would try men to attract;
But your smiles are ugly faces,
And that is a blessed fact.

You think to matrimony
You will lure me on by tea;

But I see your game so funny,
And I say you won't catch me.

Not for such as you is Woozle,
However hard you try;
Though with presents I bamboozle,
And with love pretend to sigh.

In short, to speak quite flat, Miss,
By another I'm bespoke,
And you may as well know that, Miss,
Though with anger you should choke."

"W—w—what's this?" exclaimed Woozle, who had been standing with his mouth open all the time, speechless with astonishment. "It's a plot—a conspiracy—I never wrote it—it's not my writing" [he had snatched it out of Mr. Wiffin's hands]—"it's a wicked, base invention. Mine began, 'When first adored Aurora rose.' Who did it? Who has been trying to ruin me?"

"*I* knows," said a voice suddenly, from the back of the room; "I seen him do it. It was Mr. Poppit there as I see put a sheet of paper into that there envelope, and creep downstairs mysteriously, like as appeared to me queer, and watched him go into Mr. Woozle's room."

The speaker was Mary, the servant-maid, who had come into the room unobserved while the scene which I have tried to describe was at its height.

. . . . . .

That malicious piece of work was fatal to Mr. Poppit.

He slunk away from the lodgings next day before any one was up, and

Miss Sarah Wiffin is now—MRS. WOOZLE.

MY OLD OVERCOAT.

A STORY OF A WICKED LITTLE BOY.

THE question, the all-absorbing question which I asked myself as I walked home from school, but without any practical result, was, how in the world I was to raise the money.

The agonising circumstances were these. I owed Plumby two shillings. Plumby was a schoolfellow of mine. Plumby was bigger than I was. Plumby could, in fact, polish me off with his left without requiring the smallest assistance from his right. Plumby's last words to me as we emerged that day from the scholastic portal of Dr. Canem, with a view to wending our respective ways home, had been, "Now look here, young Harrison" [I looked there, and beheld the aforesaid "left"], "you've owed me that money for weeks, and you've promised over and over again to pay it, and you never have. I'm not going to stand it any longer; and if you don't bring it in three days' time, I'll th-r-r-r-r-r-r-r ash you within an inch of your life." Plumby hissed out the "r" in "thrash" in a manner both meaning and dreadful.

I had spent my week's allowance, notwithstanding that

I owed money to Plumby. I never had been able to resist bath-buns. I was drawn to bath-buns even as steel to a loadstone.

I had not a penny in the world.

Now I lived in Pimlico, and on my daily walk to and from Dr. Canem's Academy I had often noticed a particular shop. Its stock-in-trade seemed to comprise anything and everything, from waistcoats to warming-pans—a circumstance which had often excited my astonishment. There was a public entrance to it, and a quiet sneaking-round-the-corner door, the great object of which appeared to be that nobody should ever discover the fact of its existence. Over the principal doorway were suspended three round golden balls of surpassing brightness.

I felt no attraction for the shop as I walked home that day. My thoughts were divided wholly and solely between Plumby's left and my despair of raising two shillings; but just as I passed by I gave one gloomy look into the shop window.

What was it that caught my eye? It was a dingy placard, so ashamed of itself that it blushed dirt, and written on it were these words, "The best price given for old clothes."

Now my mamma had just bought me a new overcoat. Why did this fact shoot through my brain as I looked at that particular placard of dingy appearance? For this reason. Having a new overcoat, it was obvious that I should not want my old one. I had always been ashamed of it in consequence of its remarkable colour, which was a conspicuous purple. It had procured for me the soubriquet at school of "Claret bottle." Well, then, could I, should

I, would I, dare I convey that garment, in the obscurity of eventide, to the shop outside which were hung those three golden balls, and request the "best price" for it? It would never be missed.

It was a daring scheme—but the bare thought of Plumby's left was awful.

I would.

It was winter-time. I generally got home soon after four o'clock, by which time it was dark, and tea was not till five o'clock.

My plan, then, was to get home as quickly as possible, take down the purple garment from the peg in the hall, roll it into a small bundle when no one was looking, and, slipping out unnoticed, rush back to the curious shop and do the deed at once.

Behold me, twenty-five minutes after I had formed this desperate resolve, standing outside the shop, with the purple garment tucked under my arm—shaking all over as one smitten with palsy, and feeling as if my heart were about to make its exit out of my mouth.

I dared not go in by the principal door. There were several people in the part of the shop to which that led. I would enter by the obscure, out-of-the-way door, round the corner.

I went to the obscure door. I opened it in fear and trembling, and found myself in a quiet corner of the shop, separated from the other part by a wooden partition. There was a man behind the counter—a dirty man, with a hooked nose and sharp black eyes, which seemed to look right through my guilty soul and come out somewhere at the small of my back.

"If you please, sir," I said in very quavering tones, "will you give me the best price for this coat?"

"Vos you vanting to shell it then, my tear?"

"Yes, sir, I do, please."

"Let me look at it, my tear."

I placed the purple garment on the counter for his inspection. After looking at it, carefully turning the pockets inside out, and otherwise putting it through a very searching examination, he turned his sharp black eyes on me and said—

"It ish a very old coat, and worth shcarcely anything, but I vill rob myself and give you two whole shillings for it."

The generous, noble man, to rob himself on my account! How could I thank him enough! The very sum I owed Plumby, too.

"Oh, thank you, sir, so much; that will do very nicely indeed. I hope you won't lose *very* much by it?"

The dirty man smiled so benevolently, I thought, as he handed me the two shillings, and said sweetly—

"Ve often lose, my tear, by giving too much monish for the articles ve buy; but ve love to do it, and so ve put up vith our losses."

I made my exit out of the obscure door, and ran home quickly with the two shillings jingling victoriously in my pocket.

I freed myself from the contingency of Plumby's left by making payment to him in full on the following day. But I was not out of the wood yet.

I used on Saturday afternoons to go out walking with my mamma.

On the Saturday afternoon following my visit to the curious shop I came home to dinner at one o'clock. I was going out with my mamma as usual.

"By-the-bye, Willie dear, we will do something this afternoon which I meant to do immediately I had bought your new overcoat. You will not want your old one now, and there is a poor little boy in Lampton Street whom it will fit exactly. We will take it to him this afternoon."

A cold chill seized me from head to foot.

"Ye-es, ma," I stammered, and pretended to eat my dinner in order to conceal my agitation.

Merciful heavens, this was a nice state of things! How I existed through the remainder of that dreadful meal I know not. The moment it was over my mamma turned to Sarah, and told her to fetch Master Willie's old purple overcoat from the hall, and make it into a small bundle.

"Sarah will have to look uncommonly hard," thought I, as I sat trembling in her absence.

It is quite superfluous to add that Sarah could not find it, and that she came back and told mamma so.

"Not find it?" said mamma, greatly surprised; "why, it must be hanging in the hall! You have not put it anywhere, have you, Willie dear?" she added, turning to me.

Now, I had that morning at school written twelve times in large round hand, "Truth is glorious." On this occasion, however, I was quite unable to see it in that light. Indeed, something very far removed from glory was prospectively before my mind.

This being so, I said "No, ma, dear."

Search was made for the purple garment, and no one searched more vigorously than I did. Indeed, I made

myself quite hot over it. But the purple garment had vanished.

"Well, it is a very extraordinary thing," said mamma; "but we must not waste any more time over it; so put your coat and cap on, dear, and we will go and see Mrs. Badminton instead."

I obeyed with light heart; for though the fib I had told stuck rather heavily under my ribs somewhere, I thought I was safe.

Our way led us through the street in which was the peculiar shop. We were passing quietly by, when mamma suddenly stopped and looked hard at something in the shop window.

I followed her gaze. I believe the intense agony of that moment to have taken quite ten years off my life.

In the most prominent part of the shop window, bounded on the north by a set of fire-irons, on the south by a mattress, on the east by some old china, and on the west by an umbrella, was my purple-coloured, conspicuous, unmistakable overcoat, labelled "17/6."

When my papa came home from business in the evening I was——yes, exactly so.

It hurt me very much.

It hurt me more than Plumby's left would have done.

MY FIRST AND LAST APPEARANCE.

How I ever came to do it I don't know. I was not a theatrical man. I had never acted a part in my life, except once at charade when I was a little boy, and then my elder brother smacked my head in the passage afterwards because I let out the word with appalling significance immediately I came on. As far as I have anything like an impression on the subject, I think it was all owing to Duncan. If it was not, I have done him a wrong of tall dimensions, inasmuch as I have cut him persistently ever since it occurred, seven years ago.

If I am not dreaming, Duncan called on me on the day of the performance, and said, in about two breaths and a half, that it was for the benefit of a charity, and somebody could not play the small part of Giuseppe Diavolo at the last moment because his mother was ill, and would I do it, and it was as easy as possible, and I should only be on the stage a few minutes, and the theatre was in Bayswater, and would I start, please, not later than a quarter-past six, and he was sure I could not refuse, and it was very kind of me to say I would do it (I had not said anything of the kind), and there was the book with the part all marked, and he was very sorry he could not stop, but he had to go and see the costumier, who had only sent him one grey whisker instead of two to play an old man's part in, and, as he said

before, it really was very good-natured indeed, and *au revoir*—and then I found myself alone with the book.

If I am not still dreaming, I rushed out to call Duncan back; but by the time I got to the top of the stairs, the tails of his coat were just whisking out of the door, and he either would not or could not hear my despairing shout.

I believe, also, that when I came back into my room again, I took the book up and began to learn my part. I shall always declare to the end of my life—and thumb-screws won't make me depart from the statement—that at 5 P.M. I knew every single word of it. But I confess myself totally at a loss to account for the phenomenon, that at 5.30 I didn't know it quite so well; that at 6 a distinct coolness had sprung up between me and it; and that at 6.15, when I had been requested to start for the scene of action, we were complete strangers to each other.

I started mechanically, book in hand, and I hailed a cab. My composure of mind was not augmented by the circumstance that the driver confounded the elegant little bijou theatre to which he was directed to take me, first with a low music-hall, and then with a lower music-hall; and that he then, as it were, suddenly repenting, drove me in triumph up to the front entrance of a dissenting chapel. We ultimately arrived at my real destination; but the devious route by which I had come, and the stoppages which had occurred on the way, had consumed so much time, that the performance was about to begin; and all hope of my having a little quiet "study" at my part had vanished.

I think, but I am not sure, that I expected, when I got to the door, to see Duncan there in the act of putting on

his whiskers. If I did I was doomed to disappointment, for he was nowhere visible. This being so, I thought I had better ask for the "green-room," and I did so of a man who was standing at the door, in a tone which might naturally accompany an inquiry for the condemned cell.

"Green-room, sir? Bless yer, there ain't no green-room 'ere; but the dressin'-rooms is hunder the stage. You've come to the wrong hentrance haltogether; but if you go along that there passidge, and hopen that there door at the hend of it, and go down the stairs (which, the roof being low and the timbers sticking hout, you'll wery likely 'it your 'ed as you goes), you'll find another door as leads into another passidge, and the dressin'-rooms leads hout of that."

This complicated and not, strictly speaking, cheerful direction is impressed on my memory with exactness, because I *did* hit my head against a protruding timber as I went down the stairs to which the man had alluded. And as I have the scar now, I am led to think that this part of the evening, at all events, is not a creature of my imagination.

Giddy with the blow, I found myself, somehow, in the passage out of which the various dressing-rooms led, and the questions which I had to solve were, which dressing-room was intended for me, how I was going to be dressed, and who was going to dress me. I gently tried a door with the words "Dressing-room" written over it. It was locked, and a shrill treble scream from within gave me reason to suppose that if it had *not* been locked the consequences might have been embarrassing. I fled on tiptoe, and was getting desperate, when a door lower

down opened a little way, and an anxious head was thrust out. It was so disguised with paint, an unearthly wig, and two venerable grey whiskers, that I should not, I think, have recognised its owner but for the fact of his speaking to me in the unmistakable tones of Duncan.

"My dear fellow, this is your room. I told the man at the stage-door to show it to you. For mercy's sake, make haste! you've got to be dressed, and you come on quite early in the first act. Come along, pray."

I went along, pray; and the next thing I remember is that I found myself dressed up as a brigand, with a long cloak thrown loosely over me, as to which I can recall that whenever I walked I tripped up in it, and fell forwards, and whenever I stood still I caught my heels in it, and fell backwards. After I had done this impartially about six times each way, I thought it advisable to tuck it up. I am inclined now to believe that I must then have looked rather more like an elderly lady going over a crossing on a wet day than a bloodthirsty brigand.

I was scarcely tucked up when Duncan, who had gone upstairs and told me to wait in the dressing-room till he called me, came rushing down.

"Come up instantly—you'll be on in a minute. Don't forget the pistols, and the sword, and the rifle, and the dagger."

I had put those weapons all down while arranging the cloak to my satisfaction, and I now seized them hastily, and put the dagger through my belt on one side with the handle downwards, and the pistols on the other side with the barrels pointing upwards, so that if they had been loaded and had gone off they must infallibly have blown

my head off; and I clung to the sword in one hand, and to some part, but I really don't know what part, of the gun in the other hand, and ran after Duncan.

The moment I got to the top of the stairs the dagger began to wriggle, and the weight of the handle being at the wrong end, it fell out of the scabbard, and I had to pick it up; and as the scabbard had got mixed up with the belt, and I could not unfasten it, I had to make dabs at it with the dagger, which resulted in my receiving six small flesh wounds, and then throwing the dagger away. I was in the very act of doing so when my turn came to go on.

I am prepared to state on oath, that from the time of my reaching the theatre until that moment no subject had been more distant from my mind than my part. Owing to my lateness, the succession of events had been so rapid and startling that I had not had one instant for reflection of any kind, and had given myself up to the situation like a straw in a whirlwind.

Accordingly, when Duncan gave me a push and whispered, "Now then, fire away; flourish your gun, and say, "Ha! ha! whom have we here?" I was as much astonished at the moment as if he had asked me to assassinate his mother.

The scene must, I think, have been a forest. My reason for thinking so is, that there were two or three evergreens and a general appearance of green paint about, and that two ladies, an old and a young one, were wandering up and down and trying not to see me (which was a difficult matter, as the size of the stage would not allow of my being more than about three yards off them), and that they mentioned at intervals that the carriage had broken

down, and they feared they had lost the path, and they sincerely trusted that Heaven would not, in that very unpleasant dilemma, desert them.

I have sometimes since, in a quiet hour, speculated in my mind as to whether, in happier circumstances, I might have gone so far as to deliver myself of the ridiculous observation, "Ha! ha! whom have we here?" I almost think I should have got to it in time; I seem even to recall a desperate effort to clear my mind and be equal to the occasion; but at the critical moment when my lips were about to move and say something—it might have been "Ha! ha! whom have we here?" or it might not; I won't pledge myself on the point—I dropped a pistol. I stooped down instinctively to pick up the pistol, and down went the gun, and then the other pistol, and then the sword, and then the pistol I had just picked up; and the more agonised I grew, and the more desperately I struggled, the more hopeless I found it to retain all my weapons at one and the same moment. If I got a firm hold of the pistols, the gun was prostrate and the sword between my legs; if I secured the sword and one pistol, the other pistol rolled about the stage like a nine-pin, and the gun fell with a thud on my toe. The violence of my exertions caused the arrangement by which I had fastened up my cloak to give way; and just as I had at last fairly got hold of sword, gun, and pistols, and was clutching them in my arms like a person nursing several babies at once, down went that abominable garment to its full length, and the next moment I had tripped up, and was rolling about the stage on my back, with the implements of war on the top of me, clutched in my arms as before, and hurting most dreadfully.

I know that Duncan has denied it since, but I am positively certain that exactly at that moment he observed, in a most unkind tone of voice from the side-wings—it is painful to me to repeat his coarse language, but I must do it—he observed, "Come off, you ass."

I was so convinced of it at the time, and so full of indignation that I sat up (I couldn't stand), forgetful of audience and of everything but my wrongs, and threw first one pistol and then another at the place from which Duncan's voice came. The first one broke a plate-glass window, and the other hit the stage carpenter on the head.

The discharge of these missiles was followed by an instant burning desire for precipitate flight. I got up like lightning (I managed it that time), made for the wings, tore off my cloak, went upstairs, downstairs, and along passages, as if pursued by all the furies; reached the stage-door, rushed past the man who was there, opened it and made for home in a costume consisting of buff-coloured boots up to the thighs, a leather belt about two feet wide, with the scabbard of the dagger still thrust into it wrong side up, and a crimson coat and trousers. I must add that I was also garnished with a gigantic pair of beetle eyebrows, a large black beard, and a shaggy wig. I had been originally finished off with a conical-shaped hat, but that must have come off somewhere, for I certainly had nothing on my head, except the wig, when I started from the theatre. My impression is, that it fell off and rolled about like a pudding-basin in distress when I tumbled down.

How I ever got through the streets I know not. At all events, I am persuaded that if I had had to be let in at my

lodgings by the servant, I should have been responsible for her sudden death from fright. But luckily I had, from some instinctive impulse, transferred my latch-key, notwithstanding the haste in which I had dressed, to the pocket of my theatrical costume, and I was able to let myself in.

I sent back the costume in a hamper next day, anonymously. No one ever sent me back my own clothes, and, for the wealth of the Indies, I couldn't have gone to the theatre to claim them.

I have stated here what I believe to have been facts that actually occurred. There is only one thing which makes me doubt whether my whole story is not based on some extraordinary hallucination. It is this—that in a theatrical magazine, which I took up accidentally soon after the date on which I suppose these events to have happened, there was contained a criticism on the performance in which I had, as I thought, taken part in the character of Giuseppe Diavolo, and in that criticism appeared the following paragraph :—

"The play was a melodrama of the heaviest type, and it was relieved only from intolerable dulness by the irresistibly droll acting of the gentleman who played the part of a comic brigand named Giuseppe Diavolo. This actor contrived, out of the slender materials of pure pantomimic action, to provoke the most side-splitting laughter we ever remember to have heard in a theatre, and his sudden and somewhat unexplained disappearance left a blank which was not supplied during the remainder of the evening."

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN UMBRELLA.

I AM an old umbrella now. Five—six—dear me, seven years have rolled over my handle. I feel that I cannot last much longer; and as I do not want to pass away without attracting any attention whatever, I feel constrained to record some of the more prominent events of my career.

I cannot exactly remember the circumstances attending my manufacture, or, as mortals call it, birth. Indeed, when my powers of observation first began to develop, I was a full-grown, and, I take leave to add, a most handsome umbrella. I am sure the public thought so, as I stood bolt upright in the front window of my proprietor's shop in Regent Street. The way in which the passers-by looked in was something wonderful; and although there were several hundreds of other umbrellas there as well as myself, together with innumerable quantities of walking-sticks, I felt quite certain then, and I see no reason now to doubt, that every glance was directed wholly and exclusively at me.

I had been thus on view for a few weeks only, when one day a gentleman came into the shop. He was dressed in the very height of fashion, and to complete his appearance one thing only was wanting. He felt this to be so, and purchased me. I emerged from the shop suspended gracefully from the right hand of my new owner; and from this

period date all the vicissitudes and adventures of my remarkable career.

Within a few hours afterwards I became aware of the purpose for which I was brought into existence.

A shower of rain descended. Scarcely had the first drops which fell imparted a speckled appearance to the pavement, when my owner touched a spring in my chest, the existence of which had hitherto been a great mystery to me, and hey! presto! I was expanded over his head, stretched out, as to my silken garment, to the fullest extent, and preserving him from the rain almost down to his boots.

The next four months of my life were spent in the most polite and aristocratic society. I figured in the nobleman's hall, the club umbrella-stand; I was repeatedly ticketed with an individual and distinctive number at balls, operas, concerts, and entertainments of all sorts, to which we (that is, my owner and myself) went together.

Ah me! I love to dwell in memory upon those bright young days, when sorrow and trouble were words unknown to me!

One afternoon my owner started forth to pay a visit to his lady-love.

Oh! fatal journey! Oh! most unhappy day! The lover's ardour, which caused him to get into a cab, caused him, when he got out of it, to forget—yes, absolutely to forget—me! Words fail to paint the agony I endured as the cab drove away with me in it.

The driver of my moving prison soon stopped, and getting down, entered a gin palace. Imagine the feelings—but no, you cannot; it is impossible—of a high-bred, delicate-minded and aristocratic umbrella in these harrowing circumstances!

To be in the power of a man at once a cab-driver and a frequenter of taverns; to be even now waiting for him to emerge from his disgusting orgie, with the positive certainty that in a very short time he could not fail to discover and take bodily possession of me! It was, indeed, terrible.

At length he came out from a door, on which was written "Bar entrance." He was a stereotyped specimen of his race. His only visible garment was an enormous coat, which extended nearly to his feet, and the upper part of which seemed to be composed of an indefinite number of folds, presenting in their entirety the appearance of a gigantic pen-wiper drooping under the influence of reduced circumstances. From the top of it emerged a visage composed, as to colour, of a delicately proportioned mixture of red and purple, with perhaps just the slightest preponderance of purple. His hat might have ornamented the head of a racing man on the occasion of the first celebration of the Derby.

A moment afterwards and he was gloating over me, murmuring at intervals ecstatic observations such as "My heye! wot a stunner! 'Ere's pickles and sauce!"

He put me under his driver's box during the remainder of his day's work, where my misery was augmented by the close proximity of a clay pipe, a piece of bread and cheese done up in newspaper, an old waistcoat, done up in point of wear, but not in any other way, one driving-glove, and a broken mug smelling intensely and simultaneously of gin and porter.

Let me pass quickly over the indignities which succeeded. Suffice it to say, that I had been in the unlawful possession of this ruffian for scarcely twelve hours, when I was handed

by him over the counter of a low pawnbroker, who absolutely declined, however, to give more than a few shillings for me.

Once more, now, I was put into a shop window; but oh! under what different circumstances, and amid what different surroundings! My present abode was situated in one of the very lowest quarters of London, and its proprietor was a pawnbroker of doubtful—or rather of not doubtful—reputation.

A good many flies came into the parlour of this particular spider by a peculiar side entrance, but certainly not on account of its being the prettiest they had ever spied. Everything about the shop was dingy to such an extent, that if the principal commodity offered for sale had been dinginess itself (done up in pound and half-pound packets, the proprietor would have been stocked for life, and must have secured an overpowering custom.

I stood upright, but melancholy, surrounded by a Dutch clock, a mattress, and two brass candlesticks, all of which articles had been undergoing a gradual process of removal to this evil shop without the necessity for any assistance by road or rail on the part of Taylor's vans.

I soon began to fade and droop in this hateful place, and to catch the prevailing dinginess. My handle ceased to glisten, while my silk covering and ferrule assumed a dull and shabby appearance. Bitterly did I regret the change which had befallen me, and many were the tears which I would have shed, if I could, over my master, now lost to me for ever.

I think I must have led this weary life for about six months, when once more I underwent a change. A vain

young man, who was engaged behind the counter of a haberdasher's shop in the neighbourhood, had gazed wistfully at me on several occasions. At last, unable to resist the desire of becoming my possessor, he entered my proprietor's establishment one morning, and, after a good deal of haggling on both sides, he became my owner for the sum of seven shillings and sixpence.

I was now the property of a thoroughbred not-to-be-mistaken snob. I was bought for the express purpose of being paraded about the streets on Sundays and other days of rest and recreation, identified with, and forming part of, a get-up, the leading features of which were a preternaturally and most offensively shiny suit of black cloth, a scarlet tie, a blue-and-white shirt and collar, a hat consisting almost entirely of brim, a sham gold watch-chain, and a pair of green kid gloves.

I proved but a poor bargain to him. My silk covering, which had been shamefully neglected at the pawnbroker's shop, began to slit and tear the very first time he opened me. Finding this to be so, he folded me up very carefully in such wise as not to reveal my shabbiness, and, fully persuaded that this was a remarkably clever artifice, he would walk through the streets in the rain without opening me, in a manner truly ridiculous.

It chanced that one Sunday afternoon my snob started off for a walk, taking me with him as usual. It was a very windy day, and we had not been out long when down came the rain. My snob stood both elements bravely for some time, but at last he began to get so wet that fears for his hat and scarlet tie induced him to open me. Just as he did so a violent gust of wind came, which, catching my ex-

tended surface, blew me upwards with such force that my snob was nearly lifted off the ground in his efforts to maintain his hold of me. Suddenly an intense wrenching pain shot through me, and my whole organisation appeared to be displaced by a convulsion. I was, in point of fact, blown inside out. What happened then I cannot say, for I fainted away.

It must have been next morning, I think, when I came to a state of consciousness. I found myself in a back corner of the haberdasher's shop, suffering acute agony in my ribs, two of which I could feel were unmistakably fractured, while my silk covering was hopelessly torn and my whole system terribly upset.

What was to become of me now? I wondered. The problem was soon solved.

There was a pale, thin, fragile-looking young girl attached to the shop, who came daily from a long distance, and worked there, ever so many hours, at shirt-making. Very often, too, she would start late at night from the shop, after plying her needle from the early morning, and take work with her, to be done, I conjectured, in some poor lodging. And yet, despite her arduous labour, she seemed to earn scarcely enough to keep herself from absolute want. I found out the reason afterwards.

Now my snob was a nephew of the haberdasher, and a person of much importance in the shop, while the poor little shirt-maker was a person of no importance whatever. Moreover, my snob, whose one great object in life was to be mistaken for a gentleman, considered it a very fine and gentlemanly thing to be habitually insolent and rude to the defenceless little shirt-maker. In fact, my snob had formed a noble and lofty ideal of the attributes of a gentleman.

On this particular morning he was in a very affable and condescending humour, and when the little shirt-maker came up into the shop from the wretched underground room allotted for her to work in, he thus addressed her—"I say, you there, I smashed my humbreller yesterday, and as it's all broke and don't look genteel, I can't use it any more, and I'll give it to you. It's hup in that corner there."

The little shirt-maker thanked him humbly, and advancing to where I stood, took me in her thin hands and conveyed me downstairs with her. Despite the intense pain from which I was still suffering, this change of ownership caused me the keenest delight, for I had often seen the poor girl come into the shop dripping with rain, and I had longed to shelter her from the pitiless elements.

Late that night we started off together, she holding my injured ribs in their original places in a way that greatly alleviated my sufferings.

It was a long, long walk for the poor child, and she was but thinly clad, and her boots were full of holes; but she went steadily on; and as we neared our journey's end, each street seemed dirtier and more squalid than the last.

At length she stopped before the door of an old tumble-down house, the last repairing lease of which must have terminated in the time of William the Conqueror or thereabouts. Every pane of glass in the front windows was broken, and the air admitted by the fracture was excluded by a piece of paper or rag, as the fancy of the inmates dictated, the result being a considerable diminution of light to the inhabitants, and a not ornamental appearance when viewed from the exterior.

Opening a ricketty old door, which creaked out in quaver-

ing tones its remembrances of better days, the little shirt-maker entered the house.

Up we went flight after flight of stairs (every floor representing the abode of several large families and a few casual single men) until we came to the very top floor of all, and, in a moment, the whole life of the little shirt-maker was presented to me at a glance.

No wonder that her face was pale and careworn, and that her clothes were poor and shabby. An invalid mother, with three little children, lived in that room utterly dependent for support upon the shirt-maker's scanty earnings. I found out soon afterwards that her father, who had held a good position as captain in a merchant vessel, had started on a voyage a few years previously, and nothing had been heard of him since by his wife and children. Since that time they had been travelling down the hill of poverty at a fearful pace, despite the efforts of this brave girl to arrest their journey; and the mother, never strong, had utterly broken down in health.

Before going to bed that night my new mistress, who had put me carefully in a corner, from which (utterly oblivious to my wounds) I had watched her with the greatest interest as she prepared the tea, looked after the children, and lovingly tended her sick mother, took hold of me, and, with a skill and ingenuity which were absolutely marvellous, set my broken ribs in their original places; having done which her busy needle was soon running in and out of my torn silk cover until all the tears and holes of any size had disappeared, and I, although my beauty had fled for ever, was transformed into a very serviceable umbrella.

From that night we became inseparable companions,

and many and many a time have I sheltered her from rain or snow as we journeyed together to and from the haberdasher's shop. For the first time since I lost my first master I became happy and contented. To watch this heroic, self-sacrificing girl—to be of some use to her—I desired no better destiny.

Time passed on, and I grew very, very shabby, but my framework continued very hale and well for an umbrella who had been through as much as I had; and the little shirt-maker had become so much attached to me that I do not believe she would have abandoned me if nothing had been left of me but my stick.

The poor child could not afford to have me re-covered with even the cheapest material. It was hard, hard work to provide daily bread for the four mouths at home; and little thought did she give to any wants of her own.

So we lived on, getting worn and shabby together. The little shirt-maker never complained of her lot, and was ever ready with a cheerful word and smile for her sick mother and little brothers and sisters; but her poor pale face grew thinner and thinner, and her health began visibly to give way. She was earning but a few paltry shillings a week in this world, but it is the solemn belief of this old and reflective umbrella that she was day by day heaping up treasures in another and better world, compared with which the whole wealth of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America would show a very poor sum total.

One evening we left the haberdasher's shop together. The little shirt-maker was even unusually late; and her limbs were heavy, and she was very, very tired. Nevertheless she hastened on, anxious to dispel any fears which

her unusual lateness might create at home. Quite wearied out, and supporting herself partly on me, she reached the old house at last.

A great, big, burly, sun-burnt man was lingering about, apparently uncertain which way to go. Just as the little shirt-maker was opening the ricketty door he advanced quickly towards her, and accosted her thus—

"Can ye tell me, my lass, whether a Mrs. Murley and her children hail anywhere about this queer place?" His voice trembled, and he seemed very much troubled.

The little shirt-maker started violently, and looked hastily into his face. In an instant the one word "Father!" rang through the air, and she was sobbing in his arms.

Yes, it was father—come back from shipwreck and perils of every sort—come back with health and wealth—an earthly father sent to the little shirt-maker by her Heavenly Father to take from her slender, sinking shoulders the burden she had so long, so unflinchingly supported.

I was dropped on the pavement; but I didn't mind in the least, not I! I was in a state of frantic joy, and I hugged an adjacent straw till it grew black in the face.

Soon I was picked up, and we all went in together. Who can picture, who can realise, the joy of that united family? I neither can nor shall attempt it—for I should be certain to tarnish this interesting autobiography by breaking down miserably.

I need not say how soon and how gladly the family quitted the top floor of the tumble-down old house; neither need I expatiate upon the manner in which they were looked at as they descended the stairs for the last time by

the inmates, amounting in number to about a hundred and twenty-seven people, amongst whom a rumour was current to the effect that somebody had come back from the sea for the express purpose of taking the fourth floor back away.

I went with the family to their new abode, and I have been moved only once since that time. It was when Rose Murley (that was the little shirt-maker's name) left her father's roof, with the blessing which she so richly deserved, to become a proud, happy wife. She took me to her new home, and installed me there with her own hands.

I have never heard or seen anything of my first owner since we parted company in the cab.

My snob came to see us very soon after the little shirt-maker's circumstances had undergone so great a change. He was dressed exactly as of old, save that his black cloth waistcoat had been abandoned for a seven-and-sixpenny production, which he had purchased, fully believing it to be sealskin. It was, as a matter of fact, composed of the skins of one or two adjacent cats, dyed brown. His reception was of so extremely cold a character, that my snob, who had, he said, "just dropped in to see how his friend Miss Murley was getting on," speedily dropped out again, and returned no more.

When looking at the newspaper some time since, I observed, with much gratification, that the pawnbroker in whose shop I passed so many miserable days was sentenced to seven years' transportation by an unfeeling judge, for making the little mistake of receiving certain goods, well (in fact, intimately) knowing the same to have been stolen.

I am breaking fast now, and I suffer a good deal from

rust and stiffness in the ribs—a sure sign, in an umbrella, of coming dissolution. But of this I am quite certain, that, when I am dead, so long as one part of my framework adheres to another, so long, in fact, as there is anything of me to keep, so long will my dear mistress keep me.

SNIFFY TOODLEKINS;

OR,

ALL BUT A TRAGEDY.

THE heart of Sniffy Toodlekins was heavy—heavy as lead, and his brow was clouded, as he sat at tea that evening, with his father and mother, and all his younger brothers and sisters (for Sniffy was the eldest son and heir of the house of Toodlekins), vainly endeavouring to derive comfort from bread and butter, and consolation from hot muffins.

There was a look of melancholy despair upon his face—a look which seemed to say, "I am only fifteen, but I have done with this cold, heartless world."

For the tenderest susceptibilities of Sniffy's heart had been most cruelly outraged. Matilda Simpson, the cherished object of his now blighted heart, had been false—that is to say, she hadn't exactly been true—to him. To be sure, there were mitigating circumstances in the case. For instance, Matilda—now, alas! no longer Matilda Simpson, but Matilda Scroggie—was twenty-five years old, and consequently ten years older than the love-lorn Sniffy. Moreover, Matilda was perfectly unconscious of having inspired such a consuming flame in the breast of Sniffy; for he had never avowed the circumstance to her, or indeed to any living creature.

Now the author of Sniffy's being was the proprietor of a baker's shop in Westminster, while Matilda's papa kept an establishment just opposite, behind the counter of which Matilda had (previously to her becoming Mrs. Scroggie) been in the habit of dispensing most sticky "sticks" and most rocky "rock" to the younger inhabitants of the locality.

Thus was it that Sniffy had met his fate. He came to the sweetmeat shop for the purpose of investing one penny in the purchase of almond-rock—he saw the divine Matilda—he was conquered!

Many and many a time since had he lingered over that counter; many were the excuses which he had devised for the purpose of prolonging his visits. But now all was over. Without having ever hinted to Sniffy her intention of taking such a step, Matilda had—married; yes, absolutely married a person named Scroggie!

Consequently Sniffy felt that for all practical purposes his life was over. Existence without Matilda was insupportable, unendurable.

So he sat that evening in moody silence; and, as I before observed, his heart was heavy as lead and his brow was clouded.

Suddenly he rose from the table, and, seizing his cap without a word, darted out of the back-parlour into the shop, and out of the shop into the street.

"I can't make out wot's come hover our Sniffy," remarked Mrs. Toodlekins, a thoroughly comfortable-looking matron of indefinite size; "'e's that strange and queer, as I can't hunderstand. I'd give fippence to know wot it is, that I would!"

Mrs. Toodlekins looked round, as though ready to produce the amount she had named to anybody who might feel disposed to accept her terms.

"I dunno, my dear, no more than what you do," was the response of Mr. Toodlekins—a tall, thin man, who lived in a perpetual state of flour, from which commodity his face and garments were never free by any chance.

In an equal state of ignorance were all the assembled offspring of Mr. and Mrs. Toodlekins—albeit Toodlekins Number Six, who liked coppers and was not truthful, at once made up his mind to concoct a story by the following morning, accounting in some manner for the lamentable state of Sniffy, in the hope and expectation of obtaining fivepence for the same.

Sniffy walked along the street at a wild hurried pace; then he took the first turning to the right. Subsequently he took the second turning to the left. Finally Sniffy went into a chemist's shop—still with the same look of fearful, hidden meaning on his pallid visage. He addressed the man who was in the shop thus—

"If you please, I want three-ha'porth of prussian assic." The man looked very much astonished.

"Oh! you want some prussic acid, do you?" said he.

"Yes, please, I want some prussian assic."

"What do you want it for?"

"Never mind, please."

The man looked hard at Sniffy, as if undecided. Then he filled a small bottle with liquid, put a label of "poison" on it, and handed it to Sniffy. Sniffy tendered three-halfpence.

"Oh, never mind the money," said the man.

Sniffy pressed it on him, but the man obstinately refused to take it; and Sniffy was obliged to replace the coppers in his pocket, and leave the shop holding the little bottle tight.

Out into the street again—hurrying along—looking now to the right and now to the left, as if pursued by some hidden demon—Sniffy soon reached home. Passing through the shop, and without rejoining the Toodlekins family, he went straight upstairs to the room in which he, together with various other Toodlekinses, slept.

"Was that Sniffy as come in then?" asked Mrs. Toodlekins, as she heard his step on the stairs.

"Yes, mother," screamed eight Toodlekinses in various keys of the treble voice.

A minute or two afterwards the voice of Sniffy was heard above shouting, "Father! Mother! Everybody! Come up quick."

"Good gracious!" said Mrs. Toodlekins, starting up in great alarm. "Has the boy been and set hisself on fire?"

Forthwith did Mrs. Toodlekins ponderously rush to the stairs and begin to ascend them, followed by Mr. Toodlekins, who was in his turn followed by the eight small Toodlekinses. In such a close and continuous chain did the Toodlekins family make the ascent, that the casual observer might have supposed them to be indulging in a game of mother-goose.

A harrowing sight was presented to their view when they entered the room from which Sniffy's voice had proceeded. He was lying on the bed, looking remarkably pale in the face, and giving vent at intervals to the ejaculation, "Oh!"

"Wy, Sniffy—wot—are—the matter?" inquired, or

rather panted Mrs. Toodlekins, who was much out of breath.

"Oh! father, and mother, and Sally, and Bob, and every one, I've been and done a dreadful thing," responded the prostrate youth, in hollow tones.

"Wot, you ain't been and robbed a till?" inquired Mr. Toodlekins, who considered this to be the greatest crime of which Sniffy could possibly be guilty.

"Or torn a 'ole in your noo trousers?" added Mrs. Toodlekins, who considered this to be the greatest crime of which Sniffy could possibly be guilty.

"No, father, and mother, and Sally, and Bob, and every one: it's much worser than that. O-o-o-h!"

"Oh! mussey, wot 'ave you been a-doing hof, Sniffy?" said Mrs. Toodlekins. Simultaneously Mrs. Toodlekins began to cry; whereat the eight small Toodlekinses began to cry also: whereat Sniffy began to cry also.

"Oh! mo-ther, and fa-ther, and Sally, and B-b-b-ob, and every one, I've be-en and go-one and to-ok Pison!"

At this tragic announcement the eight small Toodlekinses gave forth eight loud screams. Mr. Toodlekins lost all power of movement and expression. But as for Mrs. Toodlekins, although she turned very pale, the mother was strong within her.

"Where did you get it, Sniffy?" she asked hurriedly.

"A-at Sweedleby's, the che-mist, in Thumby Stre-e-e-t; a-and I d-d-d-on't think I wa-a-nt to d-d-d-ie now, and I wish I hadn't ta-ta-ta-ken it!" responded the sobbing Sniffy.

Quick as lightning Mrs. Toodlekins turned to her still motionless spouse.

"Don't stand staring there, man. Run to Sweedleby's

this minute, and tell 'im as the boy wot bought some pison there this evening 'as been and swollered it; and if 'e don't give Sniffy summut to make 'is inside right in two two's, we'll 'ave him transported for pretty larceny, for selling pison to a mere boy."

Mr. Toodlekins did not seem to grasp immediately the idea of his being gifted with powers of movement, but happening, when gazing up and down in a perfectly vacant manner, to see his legs, the purpose to which they might be turned on this occasion suddenly occurred to him. And Mr. Toodlekins vanished at the precise moment when Mrs. Toodlekins was preparing to restore him to a state of sublunary consciousness by the application of a vigorous shake.

The scene which ensued during the absence of Mr. Toodlekins was pathetic beyond description.

Mrs. Toodlekins knelt down by the recumbent Sniffy, and the eight small Toodlekinses grouped themselves round and on the bed in divers attitudes of youthful woe.

"Where do yer feel it, Sniffy?" This inquiry proceeded from Mrs. Toodlekins.

Sniffy felt it all over "inside," and gave a sobbing answer to that effect.

"Wot did the 'orrid stuff taste like, lovey?" continued his mamma.

"It tasted dread-dread-dread-ful nasty," returned Sniffy convulsively.

"Wot *never* made yer take it?"

"I can't t-t-t-t-ell you." Sniffy was reticent on the subject of his affections, even at this awful moment.

Sniffy had been rolling about all this time in a state of internal pain most distressing to witness. But suddenly a

change came o'er the expiring boy. His sobs grew less frequent, he ceased to roll about, and even his face showed signs of returning colour. Considered in a thoroughly prosaic light it was obvious that his inside was more at ease. Doubtless it was a lull before Sniffy must cease to be Sniffy, and become a corpse!

No longer distracted with pain, Sniffy bethought him of addressing a few parting words to his weeping relatives. He lay quite still now, and his voice was clear and firm.

"Mother, I don't feel no pain now, but it'll soon be all over. I wish as I 'adn't gone for to do it; but I 'opes you'll forgive me."

"Ho, Sniffy; my parding you know you 'as!" interjected Mrs. Toodlekins.

"Sally, I've often slapped you; but you giv' it me back just as 'ard, now didn't you?"

Sally, unable to respond for weeping, gave several very expressive bobs of the head to indicate her acquiescence in the truth of the remark.

"And Bob and Dick, I walloped you frequent, which I shan't do no more when I'm gone; not once, no never. And, Wobby" [this was the avaricious and untruthful Toodlekins before mentioned], "there's fourpence in my little box downstairs, wich you may 'ave for your very hown."

Now the effect of this last bequest upon the legatee in futuro was peculiar. The avaricious and untruthful Toodlekins was seized with a violent and (under the solemn circumstances) scandalous desire to take a precipitate departure from the room for the express purpose of acquiring instant possession of this unexpected treasure. The avaricious and untruthful Toodlekins felt, on the other hand, that so inde-

cent and unfeeling a procedure on his part would excite in the bosom of Mrs. Toodlekins a wrath which would inevitably take the form of several very painful and accurately planted slaps. The result of this conflict in his mind was a succession of hurried and sudden starts for the door, before reaching which he would stop and come back to Sniffy's bedside.

Sniffy, who had paused to take breath, was about to resume his touching observations, when a step was heard on the stairs, and in another moment Mr. Toodlekins was before them.

Down the visage of Mr. Toodlekins two distinct channels were running between banks and fields of flour. He was weeping *tears of laughter!*

The family looked perfectly aghast at him, but he continued to stand just inside the door shaking with laughter, and apparently not the least ashamed of himself.

"The man's gone stark mad!" almost yelled Mrs. Toodlekins.

"I'm very sorry, my dear," began Mr. Toodlekins apologetically, when he was seized with another fit of laughter, which completely overpowered his faculties of utterance.

Mrs. Toodlekins, exasperated beyond all degree, made a plunge at her unfeeling spouse, and, seizing him by the collar, shook him fiercely—until Mr. Toodlekins, arriving at the conclusion that this, although a shaking, was anything but a laughing matter, was fain to shout, "For goodness' sake, let be, and I'll tell you all about it."

Mrs. Toodlekins, thus adjured, relinquished her grasp.

"'Ave you been to Sweedleby's, you brute?" she gasped.

"In coorse I 'ave, and that's just what I'm a-laughing

at." [Mr. Toodlekins here showed a disposition to relapse, but a warning movement on the part of Mrs. Toodlekins enabled him to subdue the inclination.] "Sweedleby says as 'ow 'e thought as Sniffy were not after no good; consequently Sweedleby gave him a summit as 'e called by a name as nearly brought his front teeth out to pernounce, which were calkilated, 'e says, to make Sniffy feel uncomfortable for a little time in his habdormineral parts, but wich were not pison at all, no, not in no wise 'owsoever."

To describe the revulsion from sorrow to joy through which the Toodlekins family passed on this announcement, and the mingled shame and relief of the rescued Sniffy, would be impossible. I said the family, but I was wrong. The avaricious and untruthful Toodlekins No. 6 did not participate in their rejoicings, but, on the contrary, looked sulky. That depraved young person had conclusively settled in his own mind the precise manner in which his expected legacy should be laid out (to wit, in a judicious proportion of marbles, peppermint and acidulated drops), and it was patent to him that this sudden turn of affairs would infallibly result in his losing the bequest.

. . . . . .

Sniffy Toodlekins bound up his broken heart, and eventually presented it, thus repaired, to a little girl who had assisted his lost Matilda in the sweetmeat shop. The little girl became a big girl in process of time, and has been Mrs. Sniffy Toodlekins for several years.

UNDER THE SURFACE.

"WHEN *IS* he coming down?"

This query had been propounded some five and twenty times by various members of the numerous family of Squire Heathcote as they sat at breakfast one summer's morning—and echo had with monotonous regularity repeated "When?" in a doleful and interrogative manner on every occasion.

In truth, it was now nearly ten o'clock—the squire's breakfast-hour being nine—notwithstanding which circumstance the "he" alluded to had not exhibited the slightest indication of an intention either to get up or (which was more to the point) to come down.

The individual who formed the subject of this inquiry was none other than Dashleigh Heathcote, a nephew of the squire's, who had arrived on a visit to Beechley Hall (the squire's mansion) at a late hour on the previous night. The squire had not seen his nephew since the latter was a mere child. He was now perhaps twenty-five.

"When *is* he coming down?"

This time it was Laura, the squire's eldest daughter, who spoke.

"You see, my dear," said Mrs. Heathcote, "he came from a long distance yesterday, and is very likely tired. Still, it is a strange thing that he should not be down by ten o'clock. Can Robert have forgotten to call him?"

Robert, the footman, was forthwith summoned.

"Did you call Mr. Dashleigh this morning, Robert?"

"'E-es, mum," answered Robert, with a broad grin; "I called Mr. 'Eathcote times out o' number, because I didn't hear him a-moving after I'd called him previous. And when I went up the last time, mum, he asked from hinside the room who it was, and I said it was me! And he says, 'Who's me?' And I says, 'Robert.' So he says, 'Very well, Robert,' he says, 'don't you go making yourself needless warm on such a hot day,' he says, 'by a-banging away at my door,' he says. 'You might make yourself hill,' he says; 'and then think how the family would miss you!' He spoke, mum, in a strange, lazy kind of woice, mum."

"You may go, Robert."

"Thankee, mum."

"What a very strange fellow he must be," said the squire; and everybody at table agreed with him. As for the young ladies, they were inclined to think it a slight on the part of their cousin that he should not have come down early for the express purpose of making friends with them.

A quarter-past ten. It was really too bad; and they could wait at table no longer.

Just as this conclusion had been arrived at the culprit entered the room.

He was a tall fellow—upwards of six feet high, and the depth of his chest and general appearance gave indications of great physical strength. His face presented a strange contrast. It was a handsome face, rendered still more so by a luxuriant head of black curly hair, and the firm cut of the mouth was by no means suggestive of a wavering disposition. But the expression on his features was one of

intense languor, amounting almost to sleepiness, and every movement of his herculean frame was made as if it involved an exertion too great ever to be repeated.

He looked carelessly at the breakfast table. Then he shook hands with the squire and Mrs. Heathcote, Jack, Laura, and Amy, and, to the speechless indignation of the younger members of the family, nodded to them collectively in the laziest manner.

"Fear I'm rather late," said he in what Robert had truly described as a lazy voice; "fact is, I'm never equal to much exertion, but least of all in hot weather."

The squire and Jack glanced at him with a look in which amusement was not unmixed with contempt.

"Oh! never mind, Dashleigh. I'll ring for some hot breakfast at once," replied Mrs. Heathcote.

"Thanks—sorry to trouble you."

They could *not* make him out.

Hot breakfast arrived in due course, and Dashleigh proceeded to eat it in the languid, deliberate manner which seemed to characterise his every movement. Of the fact that everybody else had finished long since and was looking intently at him (a state of things which in a general way leads to much gulping of hot tea and swallowing of fish-bones on the part of the observed), he appeared as unconscious as if they were individually and collectively at the Antipodes.

"You shoot, of course, Dashleigh?" said the squire, by way of opening a conversation with this remarkable visitor.

"No—I don't."

"Fish?"

"No."

"Hunt?"

"Can't say I do."

"Are you fond of walking?"

"Can't bear it."

"Riding?"

"No—I'm not."

At each of Dashleigh's answers in the negative to these questions addressed to him by the squire, the faces of the elder ones round the table had fallen several degrees. Commencing with temperate, they had now got to zero. What in the world was to be done with this great big fellow who seemed unable to do anything whatever with himself?

Mrs. Heathcote telegraphed her despair to Laura, Laura passed it on to Amy, Amy propelled it to Jack, and Jack communicated it straightway by means of blank looks to the squire.

The squire, who dearly loved all outdoor sports, was much annoyed.

"I wonder," he said, "that a fine big fellow like you should be unable to join in any of these sports."

"Oh! of course I *can* do all that kind of thing," answered Dashleigh in the same listless tone; "I fancied you asked me whether I *did* do them—and I never do when I can help it, because it involves exertion, and exertion is such a nuisance."

The squire smiled in spite of himself.

"You don't look as if exertion ought to have much effect upon *your* frame, Dashleigh. But I don't know how in the world we shall be able to amuse you?"

"Please don't try to amuse me. It makes both the persons who amuse and the person who is, or tries to be,

amused so dreadfully hot. I suppose there are grass mounds within easy distance of the house?"

The squire laughed outright.

"Plenty; but why in the world do you ask?"

"By your permission, I will lie on them and smoke—or, if I feel very active, read."

This answer so astonished the squire that he relapsed into total silence.

Dashleigh having finished breakfast at last, Jack proposed to him an adjournment to the stables for the purpose of inspecting the squire's nags, and to this proposition, on being fully satisfied that they were not far distant from the house, Dashleigh acceded.

"What do you think of him?"

This inquiry proceeded simultaneously from the lips of the squire, Mrs. Heathcote, Laura, Amy, and all the young members of the family the instant the door had closed upon Jack and the indolent young Samson.

"I think he's a great big puppy," said the squire, who could not forgive Dashleigh for his indifference to field sports.

"Perhaps there is something beneath the surface which we have not seen yet," said Mrs. Heathcote in her quiet, gentle way.

"I don't think I like him at all," said Laura.

"I don't think he's a bit nice," said Amy.

"I think he's horrid," said all the young ones in a juvenile burst of outraged dignity.

Scarcely had the family thus announced their opinions of the new-comer, when Jack returned, looking extremely out of temper.

"The lazy brute!" exclaimed that young gentleman. "I showed him the horses, and then I tried to get him to go for a ride, or do something; but all he would say was, that I really must excuse him, but he never did anything in hot weather, because it made him so warm, and was such a nuisance. As he wouldn't do anything, I left him to himself. There, look at him now," added Jack, pointing out of the breakfast-room window to the lawn.

Thus adjured, all looked out of the window at the precise moment when Dashleigh, who had walked round from the stables on to the lawn, was quietly settling down upon a tempting slope of grass. Chancing to look up, he saw the family assembled at the windows of the breakfast-room; but without exhibiting the smallest surprise, he nodded slightly, and proceeded to light a cigar. Having done this, he sank back, and lay extended at full length, apparently engaged in placidly contemplating the curling wreaths of smoke which he puffed from his mouth.

"Well! he is the very incarnation of everything that's cool," said Jack.

"In that case," remarked Laura, "he succeeds in the great object of his life, which, on his own account, is to avoid getting warm."

It was obviously superfluous to waste time or trouble upon such a visitor as this, and the family soon came to that conclusion.

Dashleigh would lounge out of the house in the morning, without having apparently any definite object whatever; and, if questioned on his return as to where he had been, generally replied that he had been lying on his back in the

shade under a tree, smoking and endeavouring to keep cool.

One day, about a fortnight after Dashleigh's arrival, the squire, who had been out riding, returned to lunch in a state of much excitement.

"What do you think has happened?" said he.

Nobody had the least idea.

"Well! when we were all away yesterday afternoon at the Moxford Flower Show, Lurmey's farm, on the other side of the wood there, caught fire."

"Was anybody injured?" "Was the farm burnt down?" "How did it happen?" These questions burst out on every side.

"One at a time, one at a time, my dears," answered the squire. "If you will listen patiently, you shall hear all about it; and a most extraordinary tale it is. No one knows how the fire originated, but it is supposed that one of the farm-labourers, in lighting his pipe, threw the burning match among some loose straw, which ignited and set the whole place on fire. When the fire was discovered, everybody, as was thought, rushed out of the house. But, in the flurry of the moment, Mrs. Lurmey had forgotten that her two youngest children—the eldest of whom is only three years old—were asleep in an upper room. By the time this was discovered the flames had spread all over the house, and to re-enter it seemed impossible.

"Well! the flames gained every instant—the farm-house, you know, is built mainly of wood—and the danger was increasing, when suddenly a stranger, quite unknown even by sight to all there, came up. The instant he had learnt the state of things, he asked quietly which room the chil-

dren were in, and, on being told, plunged without a moment's hesitation into the burning house. The suspense was fearful to all outside—for no one, not even Lurmey himself, had thought of doing such a desperate act as this. He did not return for some minutes, and all thought that he was lost, when, behold, he emerged from the farm-house in his shirt-sleeves, carrying in his arms the two little children wrapped in his coat, and both in perfect safety.

"The oddest part of all is to come," continued the squire. "The stranger, after placing the children with their mother, said quickly, 'Now, don't stop to waste words, but let everybody help to bring water and pour it over the out-houses, or they will catch fire too.' All obeyed his commands. The strength and dexterity which the stranger himself displayed were, they say, something superhuman; indeed, mainly through his aid all danger to everything but the farm-house itself was soon past. When further exertions were needless, Lurmey, who could wait no longer before tendering his thanks to the preserver of his children and of a great part of his property, looked round for him, but, lo and behold, he was gone!"

"Gone!" echoed all the Heathcotes.

"Yes, gone—gone without having waited to receive so much as a 'Thank you,' and no one has heard anything of him since. The supposition is, that when the danger was all over, but the attention of everybody else was still bent on the fire, he walked off as strangely as he came."

When the squire had thus finished his tale, an animated conversation ensued. All the family were agreed that it was a very extraordinary thing, and that the stranger's conduct had been most noble.

The fame of the stranger spread throughout the country, and his praises were sung on all sides; but there seemed no hope of solving the mystery as to who he was, whence he came, and whither he disappeared after his exploit.

It happened that one afternoon shortly after this event the squire was seated in his library reading the *Times*, when a servant entered and announced that Lurmey, the farmer (who was, by-the-bye, a tenant of the squire's), wished to see him.

"Send him in, by all means," said the squire.

Lurmey, a minute afterwards, stood confused in the squire's presence. Now Lurmey had a great deal to say on the subject of the late fire, and of his insurance, and of his desire to build a better and larger farm-house on the site of the one destroyed, and on other matters connected therewith; but Lurmey could not begin—and the reason why Lurmey could not begin was that he had boots on. To impress the soles of those muddy articles upon the squire's carpet would, he evidently thought, be an offence second in degree only to sacrilege. And the result of this opinion, as opposed to the fact that to stand at all without committing that crime was a simple impossibility, was to produce in Lurmey an inclination to slip and shuffle and slide about in a manner wonderful to behold.

"Pray, sit down, Lurmey," said the squire.

Lurmey, thus invited, ceased his skating operations, and sat down upon the very edge of the nearest chair. This balancing of equilibrium between the back of Lurmey and the chair produced a gentle and continuous movement not unlike see-saw.

There was, as I observed, a great deal to talk over; and

Lurmey, having once started, did not stop for a very considerable time—indeed, it was nearly two hours afterwards when the squire and he emerged from the library.

They were talking about the stranger when they passed through the hall, and as they got to the door Lurmey said, "I hope, sir, afore I die as I shall have the chance of telling that there noble gentleman o' my deep gratitude. If I ever forget what I owe to him"——

Lurmey suddenly stopped speaking and stood perfectly motionless, with his mouth open so wide that an egg might have been thrown into it with ease. He was looking, too, with staring eyes, at something or somebody.

The squire looked in the same direction—there was nothing whatever to be seen, save and except Dashleigh, advancing with lazy strides towards the house.

Lurmey recovered movement as quickly as he had lost it, and—the squire thought he must be mad—rushing towards Dashleigh, seized that individual's hand in a convulsive grasp, while he ejaculated incoherently, "Hooray! hooray! I've found the gen'lman! God bless you, sir! I knowed somehow that I should be able to thank you afore I died."

"Who?—what?—how?—which?—in what manner?—where?"

These queries now proceeded from the bewildered squire.

"Why, THIS is the gen'lman as saved my children's lives, and a lot of my property as would have been lost if he hadn't been there. You're a brave, noble gentleman, sir," added Lurmey, again addressing Dashleigh, "and I pray God to bless you for it!"

A minute afterwards Mrs. Heathcote, looking out of her

window, saw the squire pulling one of Dashleigh's hands, and Lurmey the other, as if they were endeavouring to ring changes out of an obstinate cathedral bell.

Then when Lurmey had departed (after praying so many blessings on Dashleigh that he had finally—nothing else occurring to him at the moment—prayed for rain to fall upon him and cause him to blossom) Dashleigh was brought into the house by the squire.

"Here, mamma, Laura, Amy, everybody, come here this moment," shouted that excited personage, and as they all rushed in, the squire, after telling them in his bewilderment that the farm had saved Dashleigh, and the fire put out the children, and that Dashleigh had set the farm on fire, at length brought out the real state of the case.

More hand-shaking, more excitement, more incoherence. And what did the object of all this do? He did nothing whatever.

"Oh! but, Dashleigh, *why* didn't you tell us?"

"It would have involved needless exertion—and needless exertion makes me so hot."

. . . . . .

Dashleigh is a frequent visitor at the squire's mansion now—and Laura is his promised wife.

The whole family dote on "lazy old Dash," as they call him; and it is Laura's mischievous and special delight to make him accompany her for the longest possible walks on the hottest possible days, notwithstanding his remonstrances as to the needless exertion entailed upon him by such proceedings.

NOBBS'S MYSTERY.

—o—

CHAPTER I.

MATTHEW NOBBS kept a shop, and the shop kept Matthew Nobbs. Nay, more, it kept Mrs. Nobbs and Matthew Nobbs the younger, and Juliana, Jane, Albert, Sarah, and George Nobbs, and a Nobbs who had been in the world long enough to acquire a local habitation but not a name.

Flourishing and resplendent was the shop of Matthew Nobbs, and all the more so by contrast with those around it, most of which were squalid and dirty, and seemed to be divided into the two classes of shops which sold nothing, and shops which had nothing to sell.

Over the outside of Matthew Nobbs's shop three words were inscribed in letters of black and gold, artfully painted (on a scarlet ground) in a manner which gave each letter the appearance of being made of solid and tangible material; and if possible, still more artfully curved in the middle, as if each letter had been afflicted with spinal complaint from its birth, but didn't mind in the least, because it was adorning the flourishing and prosperous shop of Matthew Nobbs. Those three words were—

"GENERAL NOBBS GROCER."

This heading was perhaps a little calculated to mislead, as suggestive of the retirement into trade of a military gentle-

man of high rank. But the result of calm inspection was to satisfy the thoughtful reader that the words were intended to convey the intimation that Nobbs, simply Nobbs, was a general grocer.

The attractions of Matthew Nobbs's shop were not confined to its extensive and varied stock-in-trade. Far from it. Placards of every colour in the rainbow, and a good many more, were nailed, and pinned, and stuck, and posted up, at every available point of view. These parti-coloured manifestoes made known to the outside world that it might walk or drive an indefinite distance, and pay an indefinite price, without being able to secure Brown Sugar in any way comparable to the Brown Sugar which was daily and hourly sold in that shop at a most moderate price by Matthew Nobbs. That the T (thus in a paroxysm of wit had he caused it to be written) vended by him at two shillings per £ (thus in a further paroxysm of wit had he caused it to be written) defied all competition, a fact upon the truth of which he was ready to stake £500. That the Colza oil, absolutely given away to the public by him, Matthew Nobbs, was simply above comparison with any and all and every Colza oil ever before supplied to anybody by anybody. That Candles were falling rapidly. That the oranges of Matthew Nobbs at 2 a penny were prime, but that the oranges of Matthew Nobbs at 2 for three halfpence were simply delicious. This, and much more valuable information, was conveyed to all who looked into the shop of Matthew Nobbs by means of these gorgeous placards.

Matthew Nobbs was a short man: so was the Duke of Wellington, so have been most of our historically famous

characters. He was also—I say it with all respect—a chubby man. He was in perfect proportion, for his head was round, his body ditto, his legs likewise. In age he was perhaps forty-five, but Time had glided lightly over the round, smooth surface of his physiognomy, and it was no easy matter to tell. He was withal a thriving, industrious little fellow.

Mrs. Nobbs was a good wife and a good mother. She was also a model of cleanliness, and she regarded all things from that point of view. She looked hard cakes of yellow soap at everything in the least degree savouring of want of its application. Did Augustus Nobbs by playing upon the floor acquire a grubby appearance,—then Augustus Nobbs was forthwith caught up and yellow-soaped. Did Jane Nobbs present, as to the face, a raspberry and a jammy aspect,—then was Jane Nobbs walked off from the scene of action and yellow-soaped. Did Matthew Nobbs the younger come in from school with his hands behind him, and a guilty look upon his brow,—then did Mrs. Nobbs at once divine that Matthew Nobbs the younger had been beguiling the journey home with the manufacture of an occasional mud-pie, and, without a moment's delay, Matthew the younger was yellow-soaped.

Bright and joyous dreams floated before the eyes of Matthew Nobbs as he gazed upon the little round ball which represented Matthew Nobbs the younger—for he thought of the time when the inscription over the front of his shop would require the addition of more letters looking as if each was visible and solid, and curved in the middle to represent that they were afflicted, like their predecessors, with spinal complaint, but, like them, did not in the least

mind it. Altered by these letters, the inscription would then run—

"GENERAL NOBBS AND SON GROCERS."

And in the contemplation of this, and of the other little round Nobbses (as they tried to sit upon his knee, but could not, because it was so slippery), and of the resplendent shop—I say, in the contemplation of all this, Matthew Nobbs was happy. Mrs. Nobbs was also happy. Subject to occasional immolations on the altar of yellow soap, the little Nobbses were also happy.

CHAPTER II.

"WHY, Matthew, my dear, what air you a thinking about?"

The speaker was Mrs. Nobbs, and the question not altogether unreasonable; for Mr. Nobbs, with whom business was over for the day, was sitting opposite to her in a state of profound abstraction, muttering at intervals words the burden of which she could not catch.

Now it was a very unusual and a very extraordinary thing for Matthew Nobbs to bury himself in meditation. Mrs. Nobbs would have about as soon expected to see him bury himself in the mountain of brown sugar. And it troubled her.

"Why, Matthew, my dear, what air you a thinking about?" Matthew gave a sudden start.

"Oh! nothing, nothing, my dear," answered he hastily; and he strummed his fingers upon the table with an affected air of unconcern.

Matthew, after being thus roused, talked in his usual way

for the rest of the evening. He discussed with his better half the state of trade and of the shop (and as they talked of the shop a mysterious light came over his features, which passed away with the subject). He grieved with her over the fatal accident which had that day occurred at school, by means of a protruding nail, to a new pair of knickerbockers which had just been bought for the use and benefit of Matthew Nobbs the younger, until he grew out of them; by which time, it had been fondly imagined that Albert Nobbs would have grown into them, with a reversionary interest in favour of George Nobbs, whose estate being over, they would—turned inside out—have done admirably for Augustus Nobbs.

Many other subjects of domestic interest did Matthew enter into, but there was a something unusual about him which Mrs. Nobbs could not understand, and which caused her uneasiness. He did not seem unhappy or distressed—but as if something were (as she confidentially informed a friend afterwards) "inside of 'im wich 'e wasn't scarcely large enough to 'old."

Matthew was just the same on the next day, and the next, and the next. If anything, he grew rather more strange daily in his demeanour.

Mrs. Nobbs taxed him with it frequently, but his answer invariably was—"Oh! nothing, nothing, my dear; nothing at all." He would go up to his room after business hours and remain there alone for a long time—a thing his wife had never known him to do before. He would sit muttering to himself abstractedly, in a way that puzzled her beyond measure. Among other strange proceedings, he took to carrying scraps of paper about with

him, which he produced on all manner of incongruous occasions, for instance, at dinner or chapel. He would, even when walking in the streets with his better half, suddenly take out a piece of paper, and, placing it against a convenient door, put his little round head on one side to get his eyes into a focus, and write something on it in pencil, after which he would restore the paper stealthily to his pocket.

Mrs. Nobbs became very unhappy. Matthew had never kept a thought from her before, and had always been the brightest, cheerfullest, merriest little man in the world. Now he was strange, and absent, and silent in his manner —and it was but too evident that he was keeping back something from her.

The shop of Nobbs became (in addition to its ordinary stock-in-trade) a shop of tears—for Mrs. Nobbs wept often when her husband was not in sight or hearing, and such of the little Nobbses as saw her weep accompanied her lamentations with a doleful and a blubbery Miserere most touching to hear.

And now the worst came to the worst. Matthew began to absent himself from the shop at odd times, and on being questioned by his wife as to where he had been, he would return evasive and unsatisfactory answers.

Thus, an indefinable jealousy began to be added to Mrs. Nobbs's other sorrows. The mountain of brown sugar pondered heavily over the altered state of the once sprightly Matthew Nobbs; the candles said they didn't care a fig (an observation which made the figs exceedingly angry); the oranges moralised over it; and the Colza oil fairly wept.

CHAPTER III.

One morning Matthew had gone out on one of the mysterious expeditions which brought anguish to the soul of Mrs. Nobbs.

Lo! he returned in a state of exuberant delight and much excitement! He curvetted about the shop regardless of customers, and imprinted a bouncing kiss upon the face of Mrs. Nobbs (who assisted to serve in the resplendent shop), also regardless of customers. He seemed to be expecting somebody or something, for when there were no customers to attend to he would rush to the shop-door and look up the street with straining eyes.

Still he would vouch no explanation to his astonished wife.

"Never mind, my dear, it's all right; and you'll know everything very soon."

And he looked so bright and joyous and delighted that Mrs. Nobbs felt it must be all right. So she waited quietly, and her mind was already more at ease than it had been for many days.

The astonishment of Mrs. Nobbs culminated when Matthew, after looking up the street for about the thirty-eighth time, shouted out at the top of his voice, "Here it is!" and rushed out in his white shop apron and without a hat towards a man who was advancing towards the shop, supporting on his shoulder something that looked like a picture wrapped up.

Matthew ran hard till he met the advancing biped, and crying out, "This way, this way; *pray* take care of it!"

led both man and burden into the shop, and through it into the parlour.

The moment the man had placed the package down and gone, Matthew began to count the assembled members of his family.

Mrs. Nobbs was there, and gathered round the packed-up curiosity were all the seven little Nobbses—some on, and some under chairs, and some on the floor. Matthew hoisted the package on to the table, quivering with triumph.

"My dear, you've noticed lately as I've been strange and not like my nateral self. Well, I knows I 'aven't been so, and I'm just a going for to show you the reason why and because."

Suiting the action to the word, Matthew slowly undid the fastenings of the precious package.

Mrs. Nobbs and the young Nobbses were nearly bursting with pent-up curiosity.

He began to remove the covering.

Mrs. Nobbs and the young Nobbses must burst if it went on much longer.

He removed the covering altogether.

Mrs. Nobbs and the young Nobbses became eight pairs of eyes. For unfolded to their view was a placard far exceeding in splendour all the placards in Matthew's shop put together, and framed, too—framed in a choice and lovely frame.

The ground of the placard was *gold* in colour.

There were words written on it in *purple* letters.

The marvel and the delight of all the young Nobbses, except Matthew junior, stopped at this point, because they

could not read. But the marvel and delight of Mrs. Nobbs and her first-born went further.

There was *poetry* written on it. And it was this:—

"M. Nobbs this golden rule he learns,
And sticks to day by day,
Which is 'Small profits, quick returns,'
As is the motto for to pay."

"It took me a 'eap of time and thought, my dear; but I did it all myself—all original, my dear. Fancy me a reg'lar poet like! When I'd wrote it, and gave orders for to 'ave it put in a frame, I kep' a going to see 'em at it. I was so mortal afraid they might put it down wrong, and spile the rhymes."

This was the mystery. This was the cause of Matthew's strange bearing of late. He had conceived the ambitious idea in secret of composing some real live poetry to put up in the resplendent shop, and the pangs and supervision of composition under which he had laboured for weeks past had resulted in this masterpiece. Matthew had resolved to bring it all out as a surprise. Hence his silence and his secrecy.

A convivial evening was spent by the Nobbs family, now once more happy and re-united. Matthew was in a transcendent state of delight. Mrs. Nobbs felt that she was the wife of a poet, and was lost in the attempt to realise that proud and glorious fact. The little Nobbses danced round the beautiful placard till they were tired, and then ate sugar until they became resolved into living molasses.

And then, how the public gazed at the placard next day when it appeared in the most conspicuous part of Nobbs's shop! They gazed as only the British public can gaze, and

the British public is a very good hand, or, more correctly, a very good eye at gazing. Moreover, the British public is perfectly indifferent to the circumstances whether there is or is not anything to gaze at. Indeed, it gazes, if anything, rather harder in the latter case than in the former. And naturally, for when there is nothing to see, it requires a considerable straining of the organs of vision to behold it.

Matthew Nobbs and the resplendent shop prospered more than ever. He acquired, moreover, the reputation in the neighbourhood of being a poet. This reputation, it is true, rested solely on the magnificent placard; but where could a more superb resting-place be found indeed?

The inscription on the shop front is now

GENERAL NOBBS & SONS GROCERS.

And the nameless Nobbs was christened "Shakespeare Milton" thirteen years ago; "for," said Mr. Nobbs, with great force, "being a bit of a poet myself, you see, I think it's as well to show a sort of respect like for others as have been in the same business."

CAPTAIN FITZ-WALLACE'S SPECULATION.

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CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN FITZ-WALLACE ARRIVES IN SWILLINGBOROUGH.

THE small provincial town of Swillingborough was situated in a county traditionally noted for a superabundance of squires, spires, and spinsters,—and Swillingborough was especially well provided, not to say overstocked, with the last-mentioned commodity.

Now it came to pass one day that the town of Swillingborough might have been observed to be in a state of considerable excitement. And not without cause, indeed,—for a military gentleman had come down from London and put up at the "White Lion;" and it soon became known in well-informed circles that the military gentleman, by name Captain Eustace Fitz-Wallace, had announced to the landlord of the "White Lion" his intention of staying at Swillingborough for some months. As to whether he had brought three large portmanteaus and a leather bag, by way of luggage, or two large portmanteaus, a carpet-bag, and a hat-box, public opinion was about equally divided.

The news of his arrival was speedily propagated far and wide. Mrs. Wampage, the solicitor's wife, who had

absolutely seen the military stranger's advent with her own eyes from the window of *her* residence in High Street, and Mrs. Napper, the doctor's wife, who had been a witness to the same spectacle from the window of *her* residence in High Street, forthwith donned their respective shawls and bonnets, and spread the intelligence in all directions.

The other particulars which have been mentioned concerning the military gentleman were in an incredibly short space of time tapped from the landlord of the "White Lion" as from a barrel, and fermented in like manner.

Now the "White Lion" boasted a billiard-room; and in this billiard-room congregated, on certain evenings in the week, most of the leading professional and commercial gentlemen resident in Swillingborough, for the purpose of indulging in a harmless game of pool, resulting in great loss of "lives" to those who were not skilled in the game, and a considerable gain of threepences to those who were.

On the evening of the Captain's arrival it chanced that Mr. Wampage, and Dr. Napper, and Mr. Cloppin the local brewer, with certain other diamonds of the first Swillingborough water, were thus engaged at the "White Lion."

The conversation turned upon the all-pervading topic—the arrival of the military gentleman.

Mr. Wampage, and Dr. Napper, and Mr. Cloppin, and nearly all the gentlemen there present, had wives and daughters. And nearly all the daughters of those gentlemen were, after the manner of Swillingborough, unmarried. And quite all the unmarried daughters of those gentlemen were extremely desirous of redeeming the manner in which they had hitherto hung fire by "going off" without any further delay, and with as great an explosion as possible.

Hence it was that Mr. Wampage, and Dr. Napper, and Mr. Cloppin, and most of the other occupants of the billiard-room, were already under strict orders from their better halves to leave no stone unturned which could possibly be of assistance in making the acquaintance of the military gentleman; and while they talked about the all-important arrival, each was revolving in his mind the speediest and most effectual manner of doing this.

"Where is this Captain Fitz-Wallace?" Mr. Wampage inquired of the marker.

"In the *cor*fee-room, sir," answered that personage, who was wont to make all observations, not immediately connected with his professional pursuits, in mechanical and measured tones, as if they formed part and parcel of a melancholy game which was not played upon the billiard-table, and brought in no sixpences to the coffers of the "White Lion."

"I'll go and have a cup of coffee there the instant this game is over," thought Mr. Wampage.

"What is he doing there?" asked Dr. Napper.

"'E's hevin' a s'gar, sir."

"I'll go and smoke there the moment we have finished," thought Dr. Napper.

"Anything else?" Mr. Cloppin was the interrogator.

"Readin' of the noospaper, sir."

"I'll lose my three 'lives' on purpose, and go and ask him whether he has finished with the newspaper." Thus planned Mr. Cloppin. But lo! these and all other schemes were at the same time frustrated and rendered needless by the entrance of the military gentleman himself.

The military gentleman was perhaps in age thirty-five. He was tall, and had a good figure, which he displayed to advantage in a tight-fitting frock-coat. His face was adorned with a pair of bushy black whiskers; and large eyebrows of the same sombre hue, together with a pair of scintillating restless eyes, also black, imparted an aspect to his physiognomy which would perhaps have been not altogether prepossessing to observers more acute than were the Swillingborough inhabitants.

"Pray don't let me interrupt your game," said the Captain; for they had all stopped playing and were looking at him with much curiosity.

Dr. Napper first recovered speech.

"Won't you join us in a game, sir?" said he.

The invitation was echoed all round eagerly.

"By so doing, you will," continued Dr. Napper, who was an orator of much local celebrity, "confer upon us an honour, and a pleasure, and a delight. We shall, in fact—ah—be charmed—ah—to make your—ah—acquaintance through the medium of what I may be allowed familiarly to term the roley-poleys"—here Dr. Napper pointed gracefully with his fore-finger at the billiard balls.

"You do me great honour," answered the military gentleman. "I am not much of a player, but I shall be charmed to join you."

A game was accordingly made up, and Captain Fitz-Wallace, previously to commencing, doffed his frock-coat and displayed to the view of the astonished Wampage, and the astounded Napper, and the petrified Cloppin, a watch-chain of prodigious size and solidity, and sleeve-links sparkling with jewels.

The game proceeded, as also the conversation; and at the close of both the military visitor (despite his diffidence as to the quality of his play) left off the winner of an infinite amount of small silver emanating from the pockets of his fellow-players, and the recipient of a shower of invitations.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN EUSTACE FITZ-WALLACE STAYS IN SWILLINGBOROUGH.

On the evening succeeding that of his introduction to the aristocracy of Swillingborough in the billiard-room of the "White Lion," Captain Eustace Fitz-Wallace was seated at dinner; and upon this important guest Mr. Wedge the landlord was himself waiting, his outward person merged in one large, fat, oily, obsequious smile.

The Captain, who was most condescending and affable in his manner, asked Mr. Wedge many questions as to the local celebrities with whom he had come in contact on the previous night. And it was observable that he seemed to take much and special interest in their pecuniary position and well-being.

"Well now, Mr. Wedge, whom do you suppose—I ask merely by way of curiosity—is the wealthiest man in this town?"

"Mr. Cloppin, the brewer, sir, is reckoned by a long chalk the richest man in Swillingborough. They do say that he's got a mint o' money, and that he could give a tidy big portion to them daughters of his, if somebody would only marry them; only nobody don't seem inclined

to tackle them. Do you know, sir, it's a strange thing, but there ain't a decent lodging to be got in the whole of this town."

Mr. Wedge had made this last statement to his guest exactly twenty-eight times that day. Possibly he was desirous that Captain Fitz-Wallace should remain at the "White Lion," and wished to smother in anticipation any idea which that gentleman might entertain of removing to other quarters.

"Is there any drawback about these young ladies then which frightens away suitors? I happen to be asked to dine there to-morrow, and I should like to know something about them beforehand."

"*Young* ladies, sir—they ain't over young! They're getting on in years now. They never was anythink pertic'ler to look at, sir, but I don't know as they was much worse than the average. But this ain't a marryin' place, sir, this ain't—and what's more, you can't get lodgings here for love or money."

Captain Fitz-Wallace appeared satisfied with his inquiries, for he changed the subject, and soon afterwards dismissed Mr. Wedge from the room.

. . . . . .

The Misses Cloppin were first in the field—the military gentleman was coming to dine with them before going anywhere else, and they felt that advantage must be taken of this to the full before the Misses Wampage, and the Misses Napper, and the Misses Pagduff, and the Misses Slamby, and several other Misses, could enter into competition with them for the prize.

Arabella Cloppin, the eldest daughter of Mr. Cloppin,

was turned up as to the nose, turned in as to the toes, turned in a very extensive and large manner as to the waist, and turned thirty when considered in the light of age. Notwithstanding these varied proclivities for turning, she had never succeeded in turning her maiden name from Cloppin into anything else.

Sarah Cloppin, the other daughter, was a sentimental young thing of twenty-nine. Long brooding over the troubles of true lovers, as depicted in fiction, had produced an impression in her mind that she herself had in early life—I should say, in still earlier life—been disappointed in love, and that a blight had in consequence darkened her existence. She was much given to reading poetry—which she couldn't in the least understand; and to sighing in a manner suggestive of her feeling very bad somewhere, but where it was difficult to surmise with any degree of certainty.

Arabella Cloppin was determined to seize, and Sarah Cloppin was determined not to lose, this golden opportunity of hooking a matrimonial fish. Hence Arabella shook out her somewhat meagre curls, and prepared to be charming, while Sarah learnt by heart twelve lines of poetry, and was ready to be even more than usually sentimental; and both baited themselves extensively with muslin, and with ribbons, with lace, and with jewels. Thus did they await the victim's approach, armed equally against him and against each other.

The dinner hour arrived, and with it Captain Fitz-Wallace. He was received with heavy solemnity by Mr. Cloppin, with gushing cordiality by Mrs. Cloppin, and with coy timidity by the Misses Cloppin.

The evening passed away very pleasantly, and, to the speechless delight of Mrs. Cloppin, the Captain paid a good deal of attention to the spinster blossoms of her establishment. He seemed, if anything, to affect Arabella rather than Sarah, notwithstanding that the last-named young lady had rendered herself almost breathless by the number of sighs in which she had indulged, each one of which seemed to breathe softly the words, "Ah! if I had some one to love me;" notwithstanding also that she had asked him, in most meaning tones, his opinion on the subject of the plighted love of two hearts beating in unison, as opposed to the conventional indifference of this cold, heartless world.

Arabella, who was not sentimental, confined herself principally to military inquiries, to which Captain Fitz-Wallace did not seem to respond with much alacrity; but he nevertheless made himself exceedingly pleasant to the fair Arabella, and talked upon a variety of subjects in a manner which quite charmed that mature provincial damsel.

That evening was but the prelude to several more evenings of a like nature. And despite the utmost endeavours of the Misses Wampage, and the Misses Napper, and the Misses Pagduff, and the other single ladies of Swillingborough, ably seconded by their mammas, it became evident before the Captain had been long in Swillingborough, that if he were caught at all by the matrimonial nets spread for him, it would be by the machinations of those horrid Cloppins, though what (as all the other young ladies agreed in saying) he could possibly see to fascinate him in that elderly and designing spinster, Arabella Cloppin, they were one and all quite unable to discover.

But apparently the Captain *did* see something attractive about Arabella Cloppin, for he continued to pay her the most marked attentions, and, in fact, laid a vigorous and well-sustained siege to her maiden heart, which showed in return every disposition to capitulate.

Before Captain Fitz-Wallace had been in Swillingborough six weeks, rumours were current among the female population of that important town, that "that odious thing," Arabella Cloppin, was on the high road to become Mrs. Eustace Fitz-Wallace.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN EUSTACE FITZ-WALLACE DEPARTS FROM SWILLINGBOROUGH.

CAPTAIN FITZ-WALLACE, to the great delight of Mr. Wedge, continued to stay at the "White Lion," and to live upon the very best accommodation afforded by that establishment.

He had been there some seven weeks or so, and the rumour before mentioned had spread right and left; indeed, the Captain was joked freely about it in the billiard-room without making a show of denial, when another arrival made its appearance in Swillingborough.

But no excitement ensued this time, for it was a quiet, unobtrusive third-class arrival; and it didn't even take the omnibus, but it walked into the town and took a small lodging in a back street, without making the least show or fuss about the proceeding.

The arrival was a man without the least pretence of

gentility about him. He was attired in a rusty speckled suit, which looked as if it had originally been black and had derived its present appearance from a copious sprinkling of admingled snuff and pepper, which might be shaken out of it on the shortest notice. He had a face principally remarkable for absence of hair and presence of two very shrewd, searching eyes.

Unlike Captain Eustace Fitz-Wallace, the stranger had brought no profusion of luggage; indeed, if public opinion had wasted thought at all upon so insignificant a person, the question would probably have been whether he had brought an infinitesimally small carpet bag, or nothing at all.

After arranging for the occupation of his lodging for a few days, the new-comer proceeded to saunter into the streets in a listless kind of way. Nevertheless, a close observer would have noticed that he seemed to be looking about with those shrewd eyes of his in a manner by no means devoid of purpose.

Just as the stranger walked up the High Street, Captain Eustace Fitz-Wallace, unexceptionable as to his outward appearance, and apparently in a high state of satisfaction inwardly, was advancing in the opposite direction, on his return to the "White Lion," from the Cloppins' house, at which he had been paying his afternoon visit.

Captain Fitz-Wallace had that afternoon proposed to and been accepted by Arabella Cloppin; and he was to dine there that evening for the express purpose of arranging matters matrimonial with Mr. Cloppin.

He had candidly told the fair Arabella that he was not rich, but Arabella was sure that her papa would accept him readily as a son-in-law nevertheless, and would smooth away

any pecuniary obstacles. Not only, in fact, was Arabella most desirous of marrying, but, in a feeble, vapid kind of way, she had really become attached to the dashing Captain.

The proceedings of the stranger on seeing the advancing Captain were odd. He suddenly stopped walking, and was fain to avert his face by looking violently into a greengrocer's shop, while at the same time he still further concealed his features by pulling up the collar of his speckled coat with a jerk.

He continued thus until Captain Fitz-Wallace had passed him, and then turning round walked after that gentleman, keeping a short distance behind, and never removing his eyes until the latter entered the "White Lion."

Curiously enough, the stranger went into the "White Lion" too, and repaired to the bar, behind which Mr. Wedge was dispensing alcoholic liquors to individuals of the Swillingborough lower orders with a gracious and condescending air.

Said he of the speckled coat to Mr. Wedge, after obtaining from the latter a modest supply of brandy-and-water, "Is that tall, dark gent, who came in just now, staying at your *Ho*tel?" At this high-sounding appellation of his establishment Mr. Wedge swelled with visible gratification.

"He hev," replied Mr. Wedge, "been staying at my *Ho*tel for severial weeks, and, if rumours is correct, he ain't likely to go away just yet."

"What rumours are them?"

"Well, it is rumoured in Swillingborough as that gentleman, whose name it is Captain Fitz-Wallace"—(the faintest chuckle here emanated from the stranger's throat, terminating abruptly in a cough)—"is a going to be married to the

eldest daughter of Mr. Cloppin, the brewer. She ain't beautiful, nor she ain't young, but she'll have lots of money. He's there a'most every evening now, and he's going there to dinner to-night."

"At what time?"

"At seven o'clock," Mr. Wedge answered. "Why? What should *you* want to know for?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing." As the stranger returned this answer to Mr. Wedge's surprised question, a metallic click might have been heard in his pocket, which click bore a kind of family resemblance in sound to the chuckle which had previously escaped him.

It was now six o'clock, and the stranger continued to stay in the bar, sipping his brandy-and-water and chatting with Mr. Wedge.

Half-past six. He still lingered, and now his quick eyes seemed to be turned towards the staircase, down which anybody about to make an exit from the White Lion must pass.

A quarter to seven. He had not gone yet, but had finished his brandy-and-water and moved gradually nearer to the bar entrance. And now behold, Captain Eustace Fitz-Wallace appeared in sight, and descended the stairs in readiness for dinner at the Cloppins'!

Just as he passed the entrance to the bar, the stranger —was he mad?—drew something swiftly out of his pocket and made a rush at the Captain, who had not so much as glanced in that direction.

The movement was so sudden that Mr. Wedge and the loungers who were in the bar could do nothing but stare. Recovering power of movement, they were about to seize the assailant and rescue Captain Fitz-Wallace from his grasp,

when the former suddenly released the struggling Captain, and revealed to their astonished gaze the spectacle of Captain Eustace Fitz-Wallace, the well-dressed, the military, unmistakably and absolutely handcuffed! Turning to the group, the stranger thus addressed them:—"My name's Ned Coggs. I'm a detective from Scotland Yard, and this is Jack Hamilton, or 'Gentleman Jack' as he's called. He ain't no more Captain Fitz-Wallace than I am. I've been after him for months, and I tracked him at last to this town. He's wanted in London for a little matter of £500. He's dyed his 'air and his whiskers; but, bless yer, I knowed Jack in a moment. He's very nearly pulled off a nice little game 'ere; but Ned Coggs got scent of him. You *are* a artful one, *you* are, Jack," Mr. Coggs added, apostrophising the revealed swell-mobsman with an admiring, professional grin.

An hour or two afterwards Mr. Coggs and his prisoner were on their way to London on the best of terms with each other. Mr. Jack Hamilton, who was a swell-mobsman of the very first water, had gone in for this quiet little matrimonial speculation with the assistance of the £500 mentioned by Mr. Coggs.

Once more was Swillingborough in a state of excitement.

The condition of the Cloppins baffled all description.

The Misses Wampage anxiously inquired of the Misses Napper whether they had ever heard anything like it in all their lives.

The Misses Pagduff had felt quite sure from the beginning that there was something about him.

All were agreed that it ought to be a lesson to that designing Arabella.

I grieve to add that the Misses Cloppin, Wampage, Pagduff, Napper, and Slamby are single still.

JACK LINTON'S STRATAGEM.

—o—

CHAPTER I.

Sir Frederick and Lady Augusta Swansdown had come to town for the season from the family place in Gloucestershire. It was an expensive luxury, and bore rather heavily upon an income which an unfortunate propensity indulged in by Sir Frederick's ancestors for creating mortgages had reduced to somewhat modest proportions. Indeed, Sir Frederick had gone so far as to put it to her ladyship,—simply to put it to her in a modest, casual, abstract way,—that, upon the whole, it would be more convenient to him to stay at home. But her ladyship, who had the most complete ascendancy over Sir Frederick, had declined to see the matter in that light. She had made up her mind to come, and there was an end of it.

The truth was, that her ladyship's eldest daughter, Gertrude, an exceedingly lovely girl, had just reached that age at which young ladies usually 'come out'—and Lady Swansdown looked upon a London season as an investment that would yield substantial interest in the future. In other words, she had resolved that Gertrude should make a good match.

Quarters had been secured for the campaign at a little brick band-box in a fashionable part of London; and the

curiosity of anybody sufficiently ill-mannered to look into the dining-room window thereof at the precise moment at which my tale opens would have been rewarded by the spectacle of four people at dinner.

And here I may observe by the way that people who *are* sufficiently ill-mannered to look into the dining-room window of another man's house (and their number, is it not legion?) invariably do so as if they expected to behold something essentially different from anything that they have ever gazed upon before or ever expect to gaze upon again: and further, that when made aware, by keen scrutiny, that no greater tragedy is being perpetrated than dinner or breakfast, they quit the post of observation with an injured and disgusted air.

But to return: the quartette consisted of, first, and very much foremost indeed, the Lady Augusta Swansdown, presenting a cold and stately appearance; secondly, Sir Frederick, presenting no appearance at all; thirdly, Gertrude Swansdown, presenting a very sweet and charming appearance, and withal blushing at odd periods in a somewhat unaccountable manner; and fourthly, John Linton, presenting a very handsome, manly, and genial appearance.

John—familiarly Jack—Linton was the son of a very old friend of Sir Frederick. His parents died when he was very young. His father had committed unto Sir Frederick the guardianship of master Jack, and the modest sum of £200 per annum was the extent of that young gentleman's patrimony.

Sir Frederick had acquitted himself of his charge in the most approved fashion. He sent the boy to school, where he learnt a little; then to college, where he forgot what he

had learnt at school. At the age of twenty-one Jack left college, took lodgings in London, and ruminated as to the particular career upon which he should embark.

He had been speculating upon this subject for precisely two years without the least visible result at the time when he formed one of the quartette which I have described; and I am bound to say that intense meditation did not appear to have prematurely wrinkled his brow or grizzled his curly hair.

Jack had always been a great favourite with Sir Frederick, and indeed with all at Oakwood Hall—her ladyship perhaps excepted, whose thermometer of affection seldom rose much above freezing-point. He had invariably spent his holidays there as a schoolboy and undergraduate; and had several times since he left college stayed there for some weeks at a time.

He was a fine, tall, handsome-looking fellow, and there was a generous, taking way about him; a kind of way that irresistibly impelled nearly everybody who came in contact with him to call him "Jack" at the very first interview.

I have observed that Jack's patrimony amounted to the not stupendous sum of £200 per annum. Now he was one of those easy-going fellows who never bother themselves about anything so trying as financial calculation. If he saw a particular article which struck his fancy—he got it: for, as he acutely argued, "I like it—therefore I ought to have it—therefore I will have it." Therefore he did have it.

His income was unfortunately not so elastic as his ingenious theory, and in the two years during which he had been deliberating so anxiously over his future, he had contrived to get into debt to the extent of owing money in a good many

of the leading streets of the metropolis. Jack did occasionally curse his folly; but the idea of seriously retrenching was about as far from his mind as that of making a pilgrimage on bare foot to Mecca.

He was a frequent visitor and guest at her ladyship's temporary establishment in town. He was tolerated there by the Lady Augusta, welcomed very much by Sir Frederick and—how about Gertrude?

The programme for the evening was a ball at my Lady Poppinjay's, to which Jack Linton had obtained an invitation.

Dinner over, the Lady Augusta's brougham was announced.

"Drive to Lady Poppinjay's, 27 Mammon Square."

CHAPTER II.

Who shall attempt to describe a London ball? As well try to photograph the crowd that throngs an important railway station as each human component part scampers to and fro, and rapidly lapses into such a hopeless state of confusion, that it were a real charity on the part of the officials to clap a label upon the owner as well as the luggage, and to convey both with equal care, and on the same truck, to the right train. As well attempt to find the beginning or end of a visible, tangible, actual ball, by turning it over and over and over again!

Mirrors, flowers, lights, music, dancing—a hundred conversations, blending, and twirling, and mingling, in all sorts of odd combinations, such as "What a very brave man he must have been, he"—"went to the opera and saw"—"the volunteers reviewed by"—"Charles Mathews, who"—

"killed his mother, wife, four children, and then"—"sang at a promenade concert," &c. &c. &c.

Let us select from the mass the particular specks with whom our business lies.

In an ante-room removed from the buzzing crowd which we have just been compelled to leave because our heads began to ache, sat two people, Gertrude Swansdown and Jack Linton.

"Oh! but, Jack, what *will* mamma say?"

It would have puzzled a head very much more addicted to profound mental speculation than was the pericranium of Jack Linton to guess what mamma would have said had that compound of steel and aristocracy been made aware of the fact that he—John Linton—had permitted feelings of attachment for Gertrude Swansdown to take root within *his* heart; while she—Gertrude Swansdown—had permitted feelings of attachment for John Linton to take root within *her* heart. And I opine that if her ladyship had been further made aware of the fact that Jack and Gertrude had on this particular night at my Lady Poppinjay's ball plighted their troth to each other, that aforesaid mixture of steel and aristocracy would have been perfectly speechless on any and every subject for the remainder of her unnatural life.

It was the old story. The friendship engendered by frequent contact and participation in the same great little sorrows and pleasures as children had ripened to that which is known as love. I suppose that no two affectionately-disposed young people of the opposite sexes ever yet did come in contact with each other constantly for any period exceeding, we will say, three weeks, but that a firm conviction has

sprung up in the minds of both, that with each other, and only with each other, can they ever, ever, ever hope to extract from the materials furnished by this world the remotest grain of joy.

"Oh! but, Jack, what *will* mamma say?"

This caused Jack to come down with a very unpleasant bump from the realms of bliss to the earth inhabited, among other people, by the Lady Augusta Swansdown. He testified the fact of his arrival by a low but prolonged whistle. Then quoth he—

"Well, you see, darling, I don't exactly know. Her ladyship is a very excellent woman, and all that sort of thing; but, when I come to think of it, I don't fancy she *would* exactly see the force of this move—as yet. We must keep it quiet for a short time till I have made my way."

[Jack said this as if his time had been exclusively occupied hitherto in making somebody else's way.]

"And, then, when I have got a sort of—kind of—position, you know."

[He had been hitherto contented with a position which savoured rather of the recumbent style of thing than otherwise.]

"Her ladyship will, no doubt, come round."

[Already, in the eye of imagination, Jack beheld her ladyship in the act of describing the needful circle.]

"And then, darling, everything will be square."

Jack's phraseology was not strictly logical in a mathematical aspect, but it was sufficiently powerful to soothe the fears of his fair companion—at all events, for a time.

So they left the earth inhabited by the Lady Augusta Swansdown, and went up, up, up again—into that happy

region where castles stand without any foundations to speak of, where all is bright, and sunny, and beautiful; where the sky is never clouded, and the birds are always singing; where the flowers never think of fading, and the leaves would ridicule the very idea of falling.

Brief are the moments spent in that happy land, and even while those who are privileged to enter it walk hand in hand lost in its joys, relentless foes are waiting to assail them as they leave it. Trouble, sorrow, separation, estrangement—each is eager for its victim!

Turn we to another couple. They are standing just without the mass of dancers, and are engaged in conversation. In the cold, stately female we recognise at once the Lady Augusta Swansdown. But who is the middle-aged gentleman on whose account the Lady Augusta is endeavouring to infuse into her steely physiognomy something that might be mistaken by a casual observer for cordiality?

The middle-aged personage is Mr. Hunniun Spraggles.

Mr. Hunniun Spraggles was a self-made man. It was more than suspected that his Christian name was not to be found in any baptismal register, and had been bestowed on him by the author of his being as a tribute to the genteel calling of an itinerant vendor of onions, by which it was whispered, and for once whispered truly, that Mr. Spraggles' papa had gained a livelihood.

Master Hunniun was of an aspiring disposition. He looked down upon his parent's calling (his parent's calling was "D'yer wornt any hunniuns?") at a very early period of his existence. Becoming more and more discontented with the lowly sphere in which he moved, he at length formed a

plan, in pursuance of which he decamped from the parental roof—which, I may note in passing, was wont to admit the rain in a very free and unconstrained manner whenever the rain expressed the smallest wish to be let in—by stealth, and, after many vicissitudes, obtained the honourable position of errand-boy in a large mercantile house in the City.

From this point, the progress of Hunniun—whose perseverance and application were indomitable—was slow, sure, and steady. From errand-boy to office-boy—from office-boy to office young man—hence to junior clerk—senior clerk—managing clerk—partner.

Mr. Spraggles was not only a "self-made" man—he was also a self-educated man. His papa, profoundly conscious, perhaps, of the fact that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing," had carefully abstained from instilling into his mind any knowledge whatever, save and except only a knowledge of the mysterious ceremonies of boiling, and shining, and rubbing, and otherwise causing his staple commodity—the onion—to look in the eyes of the beholder very much larger, and finer, and a very much more desirable purchase, than it would have done in its natural state.

Conscious of the disadvantage at which this want of education placed him, the ambitious Hunniun had, early in his rising career, devoted many spare hours to the acquisition of reading, writing, and arithmetic; and, later on, he studied with the greatest assiduity the English tongue, to which his own vernacular had not presented much resemblance.

To sum up, Mr. Spraggles had retired from business, shortly before my tale commences, a single man (he had

never had time to marry); a middle-aged man; a modest, unassuming man; a man who, partly by means of self-culture and partly from long contact with educated folks had lost all trace of his origin, with the exception of his name; and a man of enormous wealth.

This latter commodity secured him an *entrée* wherever he chose to enter, and in a quiet sitting-up-in-the-corner kind of way, he did enter a good deal.

The Lady Augusta had encountered Mr. Spraggles frequently during the season, and had observed, or fancied she observed, a growing partiality for Gertrude on the part of the mature Hunniun, which caused her much inward satisfaction.

The approaching close of the season induced her ladyship to-night to take the only step which she thought would be necessary for finally and effectually landing the desirable Spraggles.

"We leave London next week for our country place in Gloucestershire, Mr. Spraggles. It is very dull there, but we are not altogether devoid of resources; and if you will favour us with a visit at Christmas time, we shall be charmed to see you, and to make it as pleasant for you as we can."

Mr. Spraggles bowed, and intimated that he should have great pleasure in availing himself of her ladyship's invitation.

"Gertrude, too, will be delighted to see you," resumed her ladyship. "By-the-bye, where is she?"

Scarcely had Lady Augusta spoken, when Gertrude hurriedly made her appearance, trying to look very much indeed as if she had only been away five minutes.

To avert suspicion, Gertrude had arranged with Jack

that she should return to the scene of action (alas! they had been obliged to descend to earth again!) first, and Jack afterwards!

Accordingly, some minutes after Gertrude had been set to talk to Mr. Spraggles, Jack was seen to struggle round the room supporting, in the mazy waltz, an enormous bundle, which he vainly endeavoured to twirl. On calm inspection, this bundle assumed the proportions of the Honourable Miss Fitz-Slumby, a young lady of fifty-five who weighed 14st. 8lb., and was very fond of dancing.

Having at length deposited this panting heap upon a couch, Jack made towards her ladyship.

"Mr. Linton, will you kindly see to our carriage?"

"Certainly, Lady Swansdown," and off went Jack.

The carriage was duly brought up to the door. Sir Frederick was dug up from the recesses of the whist-room; Mr. Spraggles handed in my lady, and Jack handed in Gertrude, with many a surreptitious squeeze of the hand, and off went the brougham.

Her ladyship suspected Jack Linton about as much as she suspected Pluto, the house-dog at Oakwood.

As Jack walked home to his lodgings he thought deeply, and the substance of his reflections was this:—

"I have been a lazy, idle, good-for-nothing rascal. I *will* make up my mind between now and Christmas what profession to adopt, and when I get back from my visit to Oakwood, I will economise like an anchorite, and work like a nigger."

He was going to Oakwood at Christmas, as a matter of course, so that he and Mr. Spraggles—although they did not know it—would meet under the same roof.

CHAPTER III.

THE Lady Augusta Swansdown sat in her boudoir at Oakwood Hall. It was a biting, cold, bleak day in the latter part of December; but by divers luxurious combinations of fire, screens, and curtains, the Lady Augusta was most effectually shielded from the inclement weather. Nevertheless, at the precise moment of which I am speaking, her ladyship's visage partook, in no small measure, of the nature of the atmosphere so carefully excluded from her sanctum—the expression thereon being bleak, cold, and withal biting.

She was not alone, for opposite to her sat her daughter Gertrude; and a single glance at the two faces could not have failed to indicate to the observer that the subject of conversation was not of the most pleasing nature in the world.

"But, mamma, he is so very much older than I am; and indeed, indeed I could not bear to marry him!"

The Lady Augusta yielded to astonishment so profound at this most unlooked-for opposition, that she sat for some minutes with her aristocratic eyebrows elevated to a positively giddy height. Recovering at length her utterance, she addressed her daughter thus:—

"Gertrude, you surprise me greatly; Mr. Spraggles is a man of *enor*mous wealth, and in every respect a most eligible person. Your father and I have decided" (her father had had about as much to do with it as the Emperor of China) "that the alliance will be in many ways advantageous to the family; and although Mr. Spraggles is *ra*ther

older than yourself" (Mr. Spraggles was exactly fifty-three), "and although his veins do not contain very refined and blue blood" (her ladyship said this with a critical air, suggestive of her having chemically analysed the blood of Mr. Spraggles)—"although he is not, in fact, a man of good family" (Mr. Spraggles' papa, as we have already learnt, had gained an independent livelihood by means of hawking onions), "still he is, as I before observed, a man of e*nor*mous wealth, and—and, I believe, sterling worth" (the sterling worth of Mr. Spraggles was £250,000), "and, therefore, it is my desire that you pay him every attention during his approaching visit—a visit made almost avowedly with the view of proposing for your hand. As for your 'not liking to marry him,' I am astonished beyond measure that any daughter of mine should so far forget herself as to dream of allowing a petty dislike to intervene *between* herself and a marriage by which she would secure *for* herself e*nor*mous wealth." (It *was* astonishing that any daughter of Lady Augusta Swansdown should thus act.)

"Go, therefore, to your room at once. I am quite sure that on calm consideration you will see this matter in a more becoming light. For the present, let the subject drop; but understand my distinct and emphatic wish to be, that if Mr. Spraggles proposes for your hand you will accept his offer."

Having delivered herself of these feeling and motherly sentiments, the Lady Augusta sank back on her luxurious couch, while her daughter rose and left the room without a word, looking the picture of pretty misery.

On the afternoon of the same day Jack Linton arrived, and the sound of his voice in the house quickly brought

Gertrude from her room. She had made a hasty attempt to conceal the traces of her grief—but the pretty eyes told an unmistakable tale of 'tears, idle tears,' and Jack Linton divined in an instant that something was wrong.

They very soon had an opportunity of talking alone together. Sir Frederick was engaged with two other members of the "great unpaid" in sitting judicially for the purpose of inflicting heavy sentences upon all culprits brought before them who were clearly innocent, in permitting those who were obviously guilty to depart "without a stain upon their character" (the said characters had been in general so effectually stained long before, that—as the worthy magnates of justice doubtless divined—to stain them any more would have been a most reprehensible waste of magisterial varnish), and in committing for trial all whose cases they could not understand. In the latter contingency bail was consistently accepted in every case where it ought to have been peremptorily refused; and, on the other hand, sternly refused where it should have manifestly been accepted.

As for the Lady Augusta, she was in her boudoir, supremely indifferent to, if not absolutely ignorant of, so insignificant an arrival as that of £200 a year.

It remained only to ship off Gertrude's younger brothers and sisters. This was a matter of no small difficulty, for they all adored Jack, and clung to him like oysters (and some people) cling to their beds. Nevertheless it was managed at last, and Jack was left alone with Gertrude.

"What is the matter, my darling? you seem so sad and miserable. I thought when I saw your sweet face looking so full of trouble, that I should have become a transmogrified weeping willow."

"O Jack!" said Gertrude—need I allude, by-the-bye, to the relative positions occupied by the two lovers now that they were alone?—"what shall I do?"

"The best thing you can do, darling, is to tell me all about it, whatever *it* may happen to be, for at present I am somewhat in the dark."

"You remember that Mr. Spraggles we met in London, Jack—you saw him talking to me at the Poppinjay's ball? Well, mamma says that she believes he is fond of me, and he is coming to stay here, and mamma says that he will propose to me, and mamma says that if he does propose to me I [*sob*] must [*two sobs*] marry [*three sobs*] him [*an indefinite number of sobs*]."

If anybody had assured Jack Linton that he had been that morning made Lord High Chancellor or Archbishop of Canterbury, or that he was about to be taken up as having been the author of the Rye House Plot, he could not have been more astonished than by this revelation.

"What! you—*my* Gertrude—marry that fat old pumpkin? oh! it's monstrous—it can't be."

Gertrude wept, and, as well as the obscurity of vision which results from tears would permit, looked ruefully at Jack. Jack did not weep; and with unimpaired organs of vision looked ruefully at Gertrude.

It had never occurred to him before that such a state of things as this could arise ere he, starting with running garb composed of £200 a year, but hampered by a considerable weight of debts, could reach the goal of prosperity and claim Gertrude for his wife.

But after the first crushing effects of the sudden blow had passed away, Jack set his mind to work, hoping to think

of some plan whereby to escape from its impending consequences.

Gently disengaging himself (I don't mean in a matrimonial point of view) from Gertrude, he placed his forehead upon the table, and his hands upon the back of his head. This intellectual proceeding was, he thought, business-like, and calculated to prevent the escape of any idea which should be mean enough to fly away before he could give it due consideration.

After he had remained thus for some minutes, he started up.

"Stay!"—the admonition was quite needless—"I have it!"

Gertrude became suddenly bright.

"No! I haven't," and down went the head again, forehead foremost, the hands being duly adjusted in their former position.

Gertrude became suddenly dull.

Three consecutive times did Jack jump up and observe, "Stay! I have it," and each time Gertrude became bright. Three consecutive times did Jack settle down again in the attitude I have described, remarking "No! I haven't," and each time Gertrude became dull. And, lo! once more did he jump up, literally jump up, and exclaim, his face irradiated with triumph, "Now I *have* got it!"

Blended with Jack's look of triumph was one of profound mystery; and drawing Gertrude towards him until they once more occupied the mutual position which I have left the intelligent reader to understand, the oracle thus spake:—

"My darling, everything shall be right; I have arranged a stratagem in my mind which will effectually prevent

Spraggles from proposing to you now or ever. I cannot tell you what it is now, but be perfectly easy and leave everything to me."

Gertrude believed implicitly in Jack's power to do anything in the world; and although she would have liked to know the mighty thoughts which now filled his brain to the prospective annihilation of Spraggles' matrimonial intentions, she was quite content to fulfil his wishes to the utmost—to be perfectly easy upon the subject, and leave everything to him. One lingering doubt, however, she was fain to solve.

"Jack, darling, may I ask one thing?"

"What is it, dearest?"

"You're not—going—to—hurt—Mr. Spraggles?"

Jack laughed heartily. "No, you little goose; of course I'm not."

This unpleasant subject disposed of for the nonce, they were at liberty, during the time which yet intervened before Sir Frederick's return, to leave the earth of the Lady Augusta and Spraggles, and to go up once more to the dreamland of lovers. And quickly as Aladdin was transported from place to place by means of his wondrous lamp, were these two lovers carried from this earth to that bright realm.

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Hunniun Spraggles had arrived. The fact was somewhat uncertain for some minutes after its accomplishment—and for this reason. The weather was cold, and

Mr. Spraggles was extremely averse to cold. Accordingly, he wrapped up in cold weather in a very full and extended sense of the expression.

The effect of this was that when the carriage, which had been sent to convey Mr. Spraggles from the station, returned to Oakwood, a profusion of bear-skins, tiger-skins, and railway-rugs met the expectant eye, but nothing more.

An excavation of this anomalous heap resulted, however, in the digging out of a remarkably fat man, with a remarkably good-humoured face, and that man was none other than Hunniun Spraggles.

Mr. Spraggles, on coming to the surface, was forthwith inducted to the presence of her ladyship, who welcomed him with cordiality. Gertrude put out her little hand timidly, but the man of *enor*mous wealth shook it—oh! horrors—with unmistakable warmth.

Her ladyship presented her younger children to Mr. Spraggles, and they were soon on good terms with him; for Mr. Spraggles seemed to be fond of children, and had a nice homely way of showing it too.

He looked inquiringly at Jack. "Your eldest son, Lady Swansdown?"

"No," said her ladyship; "Mr. Linton, the son of a very old friend of my husband's."

Jack bowed stiffly.

Mr. Spraggles trotted across the room to him, held out his hand, and shook Jack's heartily.

"Seems a good-natured old buffer," thought Jack, "but oh! the villain, to think, at his age, of marrying my Gertrude!"

The day wore on. Mr. Spraggles talked in a pleasant,

beaming, kindly way to everybody; and, in spite of himself, Jack Linton, somehow or other, could *not* help liking the old fellow, albeit Mr. Spraggles (to the holy and immeasurable joy of her ladyship) obviously paid much attention, and talked most to Gertrude.

The evening over, Mr. Spraggles was conducted to the apartment prepared for him, which was in a quiet and solitary wing of the house. He went to bed. Very shortly afterwards he went to sleep.

But he was not destined to enjoy a night of undisturbed repose.

At about 1 A.M. he was awakened by hearing his name pronounced in solemn and ghostly tones.

Mr. Spraggles, who was, as I before mentioned, much averse to cold, had piled up the fire previously to getting into bed in a substantial manner, calculated to last several hours, and, by the aid of the light which emanated therefrom, he now perceived, on looking up to ascertain whence the unearthly voice proceeded—an apparition!

"Stuff!" muttered he; "I'm dreaming;" and he sank back again, with a view to composing himself to slumber.

"Hunniun Spraggles!" repeated the ghostly voice.

Mr. Spraggles sat up in bed, and had another look.

Yes, there was no doubt about it. At the foot of his bed there stood a tall figure, completely draped in white, the ghostly raiment covering even the face of the apparition.

And I am fain to say that the visage of Mr. Spraggles became in hue not many degrees less pallid than the robe of his ghostly visitor, as he sat up in bed and gazed upon the intruder.

The spectre moved nothing except its mouth, which it

used for the purpose of addressing the astounded Hunniun as follows :—

"Hunniun Spraggles"——

For the third time did that individual hear his name pronounced in tones far from re-assuring.

"I have come from another world"——

[If Mr. Spraggles' thoughts could have collected themselves in words, he would doubtless have represented to the spectre the discomfort which his absence must create among his family and friends, pointing out to him the expediency of his forthwith returning to the orb in question.]

"To warn you of the fate which will befall you unless you leave this house by break of dawn and abandon the iniquitous design which brought you hither! You seek to gain the hand in marriage of one who is unsuited to you in every respect, and who, moreover, loves another. Know, then, that Gertrude Swansdown cannot be yours, and that if you persist in your unholy suit, vengeance speedy and dire will fall upon you. Be warned while it is yet time—I say BE WARNED!!"

Did the spectre, at the conclusion of this remarkable oration, mutter, in singularly earthly tones, "I think that'll do for the old boy;" or did the wind whistling down the chimney seem to shape those words?

Now Mr. Spraggles was a very practical man, and not a believer in ghosts. The sudden terror into which this visitation had thrown him subsided quickly, and the substance of the spectre's observations seemed to profoundly astonish rather than to terrify him.

He sat bolt upright in bed, and looked hard, very hard, at the spectre, who moved not.

Suddenly Mr. Spraggles grasped in both hands the bolster, and, taking secret aim, swung it forcibly and with much precision at the spectre.

Lo, marvellous was the effect of this substantial missile! Instead of simply passing through the apparition in white without taking the slightest effect upon him (for are not ghosts proverbially invulnerable to all earthly weapons?), it caused him to stagger backwards several paces—in staggering backwards he tripped—yes, the spectre absolutely tripped—against a chair, and measured his supernatural length upon the floor. But this was not all. The spectre, while describing these singularly fleshy evolutions, shed his immortal coil! or, in other words, off came the loose flowing white raiment—and revealed to the courageous Spraggles, by the dim light of the fire, the face, the form, and the appearance of John Linton!

The discomfited Jack picked himself up slowly, and stood irresolute, looking particularly red in the face, and apparently hesitating whether to strangle Mr. Spraggles and then rush away, or to make his escape without that preliminary.

And what did Mr. Spraggles do? Simply this. He surveyed Jack intently for a moment, and then sank back into bed and gave way to a prolonged fit of silent, apoplectic laughter, which caused the bed to shake as though stricken with palsy, and Mr. Spraggles to assume the appearance of a convulsive hippopotamus.

At length recovering himself in some measure, he again sat up in bed.

"So, Mr. Spectre, ha! ha! ha! you came from another world to tell me that I must not marry Gertrude Swansdown. Ho! ho! ho! fancy Hunniun Spraggles, aged fifty-

three, marrying that little blue-eyed child. He! he! he! well, that *is* good."

"What!" gasped Jack, "you don't mean to say you have not come here intending to propose to her?"

This question so intensely tickled Mr. Spraggles that he again sank back in fits of mirth.

"Why, I'd as soon think of marrying you," he said at last, the tears of laughter running down his great, big, fat benevolent face.

"Then, all I've got to say is, that I've made a confounded ass of myself, and I beg your pardon. And now I *have* put my foot in it, I may as well make a clean breast of it."

"Well, well," said Mr. Spraggles, in a hearty, jovial voice, "there's no harm done; but if you are not too proud, Mr. Spectre, please put some coals on the fire, and then bring me that dressing-gown to keep the cold off (I do *hate* the cold), while I sit up in bed, and you tell me all about it."

Jack readily did as he was asked; and, indeed, there was something about the old fellow's benignant face that made Jack's heart warm to him, and he began to feel very much ashamed of his recent exploit. Mr. Spraggles adjusted his dressing-gown to his satisfaction, and then, turning to Jack, said with a merry genial smile—

"Now, Mr. Apparition, I'm ready for you."

Jack proceeded to expound to him, in a simple, unaffected way, the whole of the circumstances with which the reader is acquainted—how that he was very much in love with Gertrude, and Gertrude very much in love with him—how that her ladyship was under the impression that he (Mr. Spraggles) contemplated marrying Gertrude, and was desirous of bringing about the said marriage in consequence of

his (Mr. Spraggles') worldly possessions, and had asked Mr. Spraggles there for the express purpose of facilitating the preliminaries—how that the advent of Mr. Spraggles had been looked upon by poor Gertrude (whose disinclination to marry Mr. Spraggles had been totally disregarded by the Lady Augusta) and himself as a most alarming misfortune —how that the sole mode which presented itself to his mind of averting the disastrous marriage was that which he had adopted with such a singular result—and, finally, how that he was deucedly sorry for the fright he had given Mr. Spraggles, and that he hoped the latter would complete his forgiveness by consigning the apparition performance (as Jack expressed it) to the tomb of oblivion.

Mr. Spraggles listened intently to Jack's narrative, and at that part of it which related to the Lady Augusta's behaviour to Gertrude, and matrimonial designs upon himself, there came into his face as deep an expression of anger and indignation as its fixed and accustomed expression of benevolence and good-nature could permit of.

At its conclusion he remained silent for some minutes, and had a good look at his revealed and now human visitor —and, judging by his complacent grunt, the result seemed satisfactory to him.

"So, Mr. Spectre, 'she loves another,' eh?"

"Yes," answered Jack, "she does love another very much indeed—and another reciprocates the sentiment."

"And you hope to marry her?"

"Fervently."

"What do you expect to marry on?'

This was a poser. Jack silently looked first at the floor, then at the walls, then at the ceiling, as though he expected

to discover something visible and tangible to which he could point and say, "I expect to be married on that." At last he answered very slowly, "Well, sir—the fact—is—I—don't—exactly—know. I have only £200 a year, and—and—I've been very careless and—and—I owe a good deal—of money."

Mr. Spraggles gave another grunt,—this time not quite so satisfied.

"But," added Jack, with a sudden burst, "I'm determined to make my way."

"Where to?"

"To—to—wealth, you know, and position, and all that sort of thing."

"How?"

This was another poser. And the floor, walls, and ceiling not having been satisfactory, Jack showed a disposition this time to look up the chimney, which certainly afforded him means of making his way upwards, but not exactly in the manner required. Again he answered slowly, "I've been thinking about it for a long time, sir, but I—I—can't quite see how to make a start."

Another and a thoughtful grunt from Mr. Spraggles.

"Now, listen to me, young gentleman," said he; "I *am* fond, very fond, of that sweet young girl, but not in the way that her she-cat of a mother supposes. I took a great fancy to her in London. I have neither kith nor kin of my own, and my heart warmed to her. I was rather astonished when Lady Swansdown asked me to stay here; but I came because I wanted to know more of that sweet child, and I hoped that she might come to like me, and then, perhaps, my wealth might have benefited her in some way or other,

—for I know that Sir Frederick is not a rich man. And that's why I came, Mr. Spectre."

Every time Mr. Spraggles applied this name to Jack he evinced an inclination to lie back and resume his ebullitions of mirth.

"And what's more," continued Mr. Spraggles, "I like *you*, although you did wake me up in the middle of the night, and nearly frightened me to death with your 'visit from another world.' You have a frank, honest countenance that does one good to look at, and a straightforward, manly way about you—and what's more, you don't mind confessing you're in the wrong when you *are* in the wrong. Now, it seems to me that it may be in my power to benefit that child and you too; so if you'll allow me to stay just a few minutes after the 'break of dawn' (which was, I think, the time you fixed for my going), I'll think it over and see what's to be done. So good night, or rather good morning, you substantial young specimen of a ghost."

Mr. Spraggles, after a long search among the folds of his dressing-gown (which, in his anxiety to escape from the cold, he had put on with the wrong side in front), found his hand, which he held out to the defeated yet delighted Jack.

Jack shook it warmly and then retired, dragging after him his late insignia of spectredom—a large sheet which he had taken out of his bed for the purposes of his deeply-contrived scheme. Just as he reached the door he turned towards the heaving mass which represented Mr. Spraggles (for the sight of Jack's ghostly raiment had again sent that gentleman into convulsions), and said—

"You won't?" and he paused awkwardly.

Mr. Spraggles understood him, and gasped out—

"No. I won't mention it."

Jack thanked him gratefully and withdrew.

Mr. Spraggles did not go to sleep for a long time after Jack had left him. He was one of the kindest-hearted old fellows that ever breathed, and he was determined to set matters straight for these young lovers, the course of whose true love showed an inclination to run in such a particularly rough and turbid manner. Moreover, he had taken a great fancy to both of them, and he thought of the pleasure he would derive from seeing them happy together, and by his means—yes, and looking upon him as their best and kindest friend. He saw plainly that the one obstacle to their union was—money. And that obstacle he could, would, and should remove. The *modus operandi* required some consideration, but he soon hit upon a plan, and having done so, he went to sleep.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Spraggles came down to breakfast in the morning radiant with benevolence and good-humour. He showed irrepressible and extraordinary inclinations to be moved to laughter (and this was when his eye caught Jack's, who, by-the-bye, looked just a little sheepish and uncomfortable) without the least visible or tangible cause. He paid more particular attention than ever to Gertrude, whereat the Lady Augusta absolutely scintillated with triumph. Poor Gertrude was puzzled—he seemed so kind and good-natured, that she could *not* dislike him; but oh! the idea of marrying him instead of her darling Jack!

That young gentleman, be it observed, had not as yet said anything to Gertrude about the *dénouement* of the previous night. Indeed, although he was dying to tell her all about it, he was restrained from doing so, inasmuch as it involved a description of the decidedly ridiculous figure which he had cut.

Breakfast over, Mr. Spraggles took advantage of an opportunity to request her ladyship to grant him a few minutes' private conversation. Sir Frederick was too obvious a nonentity to need the slightest consideration.

"Now it's coming," thought the Lady Augusta.

And so it was.

Her ladyship led Mr. Spraggles to another room, where, when they had seated themselves, he cleared his voice and thus began :

"Lady Swansdown, you cannot have failed to notice the marked liking for your daughter Gertrude which I have evinced whenever I have had the pleasure of being with her. In fact, I like her more than I can tell you."

The Lady Augusta became simply one aristocratic beam of triumph.

"And," he continued, "there is nothing I would not do to secure her happiness. Now I think, indeed I am sure, it is in my power to do so in the way she most desires, and I am about to ask your permission to my taking a step which will, I am certain, effect that object."

"Rather an odd way of putting it," thought the expectant Lady Augusta.

"In fact, to come to the point, I ask your consent to her marriage with"——

Her ladyship quivered with joy.

"Mr. John Linton."

To describe the sudden alteration which came over the features of Lady Augusta would be simply impossible.

"*What!*" she almost screamed, rising suddenly. "Are you mad, are you mocking me, or is this a miserable joke?"

"I am neither mad, nor mocking you, nor is this a miserable joke, Lady Swansdown," answered Mr. Spraggles quietly; "and possibly your ladyship will see it in a different light if you will allow me to finish what I am going to say. I am quite aware that Mr. Linton is not in a pecuniary position to marry your daughter, but, provided you consent to this marriage, it is my intention to settle a portion upon her, which will of itself remove all difficulties of *that* kind (understand me to say, *provided* you consent to this marriage), and, moreover, to place Mr. Linton in a position which will, in a short time, yield him an income of a substantial and considerable amount."

Her ladyship went through another revulsion, and did, as Mr. Spraggles anticipated, see it in a very different light indeed.

"Mr. Spraggles, you must pardon the hasty expressions I used just now. My daughter's happiness must ever be my first consideration."

["Rather a warm one that, my lady," thought Mr. Spraggles.]

"And if I am satisfied that her wish is to marry Mr. Linton, and also under—the—the—circumstances that you mention, my feelings as a mother will not allow of my raising any opposition. We will determine the point at once."

Her ladyship rang the bell, and desired the servant who appeared to request Gertrude's presence for a few minutes.

Gertrude attended the summons in fear and trembling, for Jack had only just made up his mind to tell her everything when she was sent for.

She looked from her ladyship to Mr. Spraggles, and from Mr. Spraggles to her ladyship, and turned very pale, for she divined, as she thought, what was coming.

"Gertrude, dear," said her ladyship, in tones of most unusual fondness, "Mr. Spraggles tells me that he thinks it will make you very happy if I—that is, I mean, of course, if your papa and I—give our consent to your marriage with Mr. Linton. Is this so?"

Gertrude, who had been expecting her ladyship to finish up with a maternal command that she should forthwith consent to marry the elderly Mr. Spraggles, was now as much astonished as her ladyship had been when Mr. Spraggles had made his strange proposition. It seemed a dream, a vision, a beautiful impossibility. One look, however, at the fatherly, protective expression which pervaded the benevolent face of Mr. Spraggles, brought her in some measure to a sense of the unutterable good fortune which had befallen herself and Jack, although by what means she had not the vaguest idea.

"Ye—es, mamma, I do want, at least I should like to marry Jack; and I—I—rather think Jack wants to marry me, mamma."

"Well, then, my dear child," said the Lady Augusta, trying very hard to look like a fond mother, "Mr. Spraggles has been interceding on your behalf in such an exceedingly kind manner, and has promised so generously to remove the—the—little obstacle that would otherwise compel me to refuse my consent, that I cannot under the circumstances

withhold it. Subject, therefore, to your papa's approval, you may consider Jack Linton your future husband."

Gertrude murmured, "Oh! *thank you*, mamma, dear," and imprinted a loving kiss upon the frigid lips of that conquered, and yet not dissatisfied, schemer. Then, turning to Mr. Spraggles, she was about to say something, when he smiled even more benevolently than usual, and drawing her to him, kissed her forehead, while he said—

"There! never mind, my dear—don't thank a stupid old fellow like me. But go and tell him all about it."

Gertrude did go and tell Jack about it, and forthwith did these two young people give way to their joy in the most extravagant manner. Gertrude cried and laughed alternately, while Jack set up a perfect dance of joy, in the course of which he broke a good deal of Sir Frederick's oldest and most valuable china, and rendered himself extremely warm.

At length it occurred to Gertrude that Sir Frederick's consent had to be obtained.

As to this she entertained little fear, for she knew not only that Sir Frederick was very fond of Jack, but also that if the Lady Augusta had consented to her marriage with an Ojibbeway Indian, already possessed of thirty-five squaws, Sir Frederick would not have dared to gainsay the permission.

Forthwith Jack and Gertrude started off to find Sir Frederick. They entered the library and saw him not, but a local newspaper which stood up straight before them, and was apparently held erect with the aid of human fingers, whereof the extremities were visible to them, gave indications of his presence. They advanced to the ex-

tended newspaper, and, on looking over the top of it, perceived the amiable baronet so intently engaged in the perusal of a political article, whereof he understood exactly as much as the writer (*videlicet* nothing whatever), that he had not been aware of their entrance.

"If you please, papa dear, Mr. Spraggles has asked mamma to let me marry Jack, and I think he promised to help Jack to be rich if mamma would let me marry him; and mamma says I may marry Jack if you will let us."

Sir Frederick had not the remotest idea how or in what manner her ladyship had been brought to give her consent to this engagement. He only knew that she *had* consented, and that was amply sufficient to make him do the same in all readiness. Nay, more. In a hazy kind of way he had often thought how much he should like to see the son of his oldest and dearest friend married to Gertrude. Consequently, the simple-minded baronet was more than ready to give his consent. He was not much less delighted than the young people. He kissed Gertrude over and over again; he shook hands with Jack violently, first with both hands, then with the right, then with the left. Not contented with this, he rushed out of the room, ejaculating, with various alterations of accent, "*Oh!* I am so pleased." "Oh! I *am* so pleased." "Oh! I am *so* pleased." "Oh! I am so *pleased*."

Above all, he could not satisfy his temporary infatuation for shaking hands. He shook hands with the butler, the footman, he did not forget the page-boy, and he went without his hat to the stables for the express purpose of going through the process with the groom and coachman. But no! *this* was not sufficient; and he was com-

pelled, in sheer desperation, to rush up to a stone figure of his great, great grandfather, which had stood in the hall for a hundred and forty-seven years, with his right hand half extended, as if for this express purpose. Sir Frederick grasped the protruding digits and shook them warmly for several minutes. Recollecting then that his judicial presence was required by his fellow J. P.'s, to assist them in not administering the law, he seized his hat, put it on sideways, and darted off, shaking hands with everybody by the way and informing them that he was *so* pleased. Even in the hall of justice, although much subdued, he could not quite settle down; and at a particular period of the proceedings, when he was called upon as chairman to pronounce a sentence of six months' imprisonment with hard labour upon a prisoner, Sir Frederick did it in these words: "You have been guilty of a very serious offence, and you leave the court without a stain upon your character. The sentence upon you is six months' imprisonment with hard labour. Oh! I *am* so pleased."

How satisfied her ladyship was—how demented Sir Frederick continued for several weeks—how unutterably happy and how gratefully affectionate to Mr. Spraggles Jack and Gertrude were—and how the last-named personage beamed and smiled, and glowed and grunted, and chuckled—no pen can tell.

Jack and Gertrude were not married for a year, and during that time Mr. Spraggles, true to his word, established Jack in a lucrative and rising position in a house of business with which his interest was unbounded.

Jack worked hard and lived economically, and long

before the year was finished had paid off the greater part of his debts.

This short happy time of probation over, Jack Linton took unto him Gertrude Swansdown to be his partner for life. And on her did Mr. Spraggles settle a portion which far exceeded in amount her ladyship's most sanguine expectations.

Jack and Gertrude have been married some years now. They look upon Mr. Spraggles as almost more than a father,—and that genial, kindly, benevolent old fellow is constantly with them, and they with him. He frequently calls Jack "Mr. Spectre," and to this day never does so without being convulsive for several minutes afterwards; and many a laugh do they have over "JACK LINTON'S STRATAGEM"—and what came of it.

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