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THE
WAY OF THE WORLD

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AUTHOR OF "HEARTS," "JOSEPH'S COAT," "COALS OF FIRE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London
CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1884

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THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

A YOUNG man was leaving home and the widowed mother who had made the shabby house homely. He was a very small young man in stature, but rather above the average height in courage, and he believed in himself profoundly. He had as yet failed to decide about the future, except in a general way, and only time could tell whether he would be a London Editor, Prime Minister, or Lord Chief Justice. He was a very small young man indeed, but his hair rose high above a clever-looking face and a compact big head, and his carriage did what it could to atone for the brevity of his figure. He had eyes of singular keenness, but no depth, and he faced the world with a heart full of pluck and cheek and self-importance. What with his aspect of alert impudence and courage, his exceeding smallness of body and the upstanding hair which crowned his head like the cropped comb of a fighting cock, he was prodigiously like a bantam.

A dingy room in a dingy house was the scene of the only farewell the small young man had to offer. The widowed mother was as faded as the furniture, and her drooping air contrasted strangely with the fearless promise of success which was blazoned on her son's face and figure. There was a musty smell in the room,—traceable to the little front shop on which it opened, where the packets of haberdashery on the skimpy shelves had somehow a fatal look of never being untied. The gauze of the smartest cap in the widow's window had lost its crispness, and its artificial flowers had reached an artificial autumn, and looked bedraggled and forlorn. The very painted letters above the window seemed to have faded out of shamefacedness, and announced the name they spelled in a sort of husky lettered whisper. MRS. AMELIA was the name painted on the wrinkled scrap of boarding over the shop window, and Mrs. Amelia was the widowed mother who cried at the farewells of the very small young man.

"Don't take on, mother," he said, in a crisp, loud voice. "Ten shillings a week will be a help to you, and I can afford that. I can live on thirty. And whatever increase of salary I get, you profit by it; that's a promise. I shall always send a quarter of my income home."

"You're a good son, William," said the widow, drying her eyes—vainly just yet.

"I mean to be," said William alertly.

"But you don't seem sorry to leave home," pursued the widow.

"Sorry?" said the crisp young man. "Of course not. Why *should* I be sorry at having a chance to help myself and mend your circumstances? I should deserve to be kicked if I pretended to be sorry."

"You were born and bred in the house, William," mourned his mother.

"I certainly did labour under those disadvantages," the young man answered. His attitude and the expression of his face showed how much he approved of this retort.

"You might be sorry at leaving it, poor as it is," said the mother.

"I might," returned the young man, "if I were a cat, and capable of contracting unreasonable affections for localities. But, being blessed with brains, I'm not sorry; and, having a conscience, I can't pretend to be."

Thus early in life had Mr. William Amelia learned to despise sentiment. Now the widowed mother would have liked to see a little sentiment infused into his leave-takings. It would have softened the pang of parting if he could have left her a little tenderly. He was a pearl among sons, and had never neglected his duty. She knew how clever he was, and she knew that he had common sense on his side. But a mother's heart is an exigent foolish thing, and somehow common sense is cold comfort for it.

"It's worth while, William," said the faded woman, whose eyes were red with crying, "it's worth while to have some love for a place where you've lived for two-and-twenty years, even if the place *is* shabby."

"It's worth while, mother," he answered with unshaken cheerfulness, "to have a definite sense of duty to one's-self and one's own people. I can't put myself into a graceful attitude and sing 'My humble home, farewell'; but I can make forty shillings a week, and send you ten. If I loved the place I don't suppose I should leave it."

"But you're leaving me as well, William," said the widow, with her apron at her eyes again.

"That's a different thing," said the young man briskly. "If an affection is worth anything, it's PRACTICAL. I'm not going to cry at leaving," and he looked singularly unlike that; "but I'm going to do my duty when I'm gone. The proof of the pudding is the eating of it. Good-bye, mother."

The small young man's voice was loud and hard, and whenever he spoke and whatever he said, there was an air of self-approving smartness about him.

"Good-bye, William," said his mother, embracing him. "God bless you!"

"God bless you," returned the young man, alert and business-like—as a shop-walker calls "Number six—forward!"

Small as he was he looked too big for his portmanteau, assuming it to contain, as it did, his whole possessions. He was eminently respectable in aspect, though his tidy tweed suit and his silk hat had alike been brushed too often to retain their freshness. Every barleycorn of his figure had its full advantage as he walked, and in the clearer light of the streets it was noticeable that the constant tucked-up carriage of his head had creased his cheeks into a line which ran below the chin, and promised, if ever he should grow stout, to make that feature double.

Courage and resolution are fine things, and the world would be a poor place without them. The young man had them in plenty; but after all the world is a big place, and he was such a very small young man that there was some sense of disproportion in the coming battle. And yet, he was really almost as clever as he thought himself, and his life sermon on the great Gospel of Getting-On was likely to be effective. He was as keen as a razor and about as sympathetic. As the result of rare good health and a perfect self-opinion, he was almost always cheerful, though his cheerfulness was sterile and comforted the world no more than the play of light on an icicle. There is no denying that he was well furnished for the progress of a pilgrim whose ultimate bright goal was a booth in Vanity Fair.

Mr. Amelia was a member of the Fourth Estate. In less lofty language a newspaper reporter. It is probable that no other business or profession includes within its ranks so varied an array of mental endowments. There are men in that line of life too stupid to be bricklayers, and there are men of surprising learning and the keenest acumen. No other profession offers such a range of high and low employment. The range includes the penny weekly sheet issued at Mudhole-cum-Podger and the daily prints of the great cities. The reporter at

Mudhole-cum-Podger is sometimes below his business, even there, and the reporter of the great town or city is often more than master of his work, hard and responsible as it may be. He blossoms in due time into the able editor, he reads for the Bar and becomes a famous pleader, he sits on the woolsack, he writes books and is known all over the world. His origin as reporter is almost a proof of want of riches to begin with. If his parents had had money he would have gone into some recognized profession, or would at least have been bound apprentice. Newspaper reporting is a business in which you may begin very low down indeed. That you cannot spell is scarcely a bar against your aspirations. And through it, and out of it, you can rise to just such heights as your mental endowments fit you to stand on. Ignorance and incapacity need hardly starve in it. Respectable mediocrity can flourish in it, and a man with brains and resolution can make it a stepping-stone to greatness.

Mr. William Amelia entered at the gates of journalism because they were opened to him when other avenues to the land of independent bread and water were closed, but he was not long at the business without reflecting on the chances that lay within it. It was his first ambition to become a parliamentary reporter. What might come when that desire was fulfilled he could not tell. He would at least have planted both feet on the bottom rung of a ladder which had been known already to reach the very zenith of Fame's firmament. Others had mounted as high as the ladder led them. Why not he?

He was bound southwards, to a country town a hundred miles from his birthplace, and geographically as well as professionally he made a stride towards London.

A young man making a new departure in life may be excused if he looks kindly on the dreams Hope spreads before him. If Mr. William Amelia, in his mind's eye, saw himself occupying positions which were unlikely for him, he was less mistaken in his estimate of himself than many men have been before him.

He had never been remarkable for a humble bearing, and having just administered a severe rebuke to the Prime Minister from his own independent seat below the gangway in a fancy House of Commons he was none the more likely to look submissive now, as he stepped from his third-class compartment to the platform.

"Can you direct me to the office of the *Whig?*"

He put the question to a porter in tones so crisp and clear that an elderly man standing at the little bookstall a dozen yards away turned to look at him, and after a second's pause advanced.

"Excuse me if I am mistaken," said the stranger. "Have I the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Amelia?"

"If it is a pleasure," said the very small young man, "you enjoy it."

The elderly stranger smiled, languidly and innocently, like a tired infant. His dress was threadbare and a little neglected; his hair long, ragged, and inclining to grey.

"My name," he said, "is Rider — John Hawkes Rider. I am the Editor of the *Whig.*"

There was a mighty contrast between the Editor and the new Chief Reporter. The Editor was a man of evident weak refinement. It was obvious that he had never been a gentleman. Probably he had been a compositor with a taste for reading—local rumours said as much—and a gradual way had been opened for him by the hand of friendly circumstance. He was not at all like the sort of man who makes his own circumstances. "When I heard you asking for the office," he said, "I thought you might be Mr. Amelia." His two thumbs went searching irresolutely in his waistcoat pockets as he spoke. "I'm afraid," he said by-and-bye, "that I haven't a card. But that doesn't matter."

"A stock trick," said Mr. Amelia to himself with a smile. "He says that to everybody."

"Would you like to see the office?" asked the Editor. "You must be tired. Allow me to carry your bag."

Mr. Amelia allowed him, and gave the reins to his own reflections.

The new Chief Reporter of the *Gallowbay Whig* had not read Shelley—he was no great lover of verse—but he knew from observation that man looks before and after, and pines for what is not. He knew that strength and cunning are useful weapons in life's battle-field, and he did not expect to receive quarter or intend to give it. The fancy which showed him his own figure at the editorial desk might be premature without being ridiculous. His own compact big head was compactly filled with brains, and he knew it; he overflowed with energy and vitality; under his leadership the *Whig* might become a live organ of public opinion instead of the limp invertebrate thing he knew it.

"This is the office, Mr. Amelia," said the Editor; "walk in." He set the portmanteau down before the stationer's counter, and led the way upstairs into an untidy and dreary room with a tall desk, a couple of tall stools, a table, and two broken chairs for sole furniture. Lounging against the tall desk were two young men, of whom one looked respectable and dull and one seedy and clever.

"This," said the Editor, indicating the respectable young man, "is Mr. Flinch, our second reporter, and this," indicating the seedy one, "is Mr. Kyrle Maddox, our junior. This is Mr. Amelia, gentlemen, our Chief of Staff." He gave something of a humourous pomposity to this announcement, and rubbed his hands with the air of a man who is pleased with his own pleasantry. The seedy junior laid down a briar-root pipe and shook hands with Mr. Amelia. The respectable second followed suit, though he looked as if the salute went against the grain with him. "This," said the Editor, pushing open a creaking door, "is my own den."

The word described the apartment fairly. Mr. Amelia peered through the doorway and nodded.

"The thunderbolt manufactory?" he said.

"We thunder very mildly here," responded the Editor, groping irresolutely at his waistcoat pockets with his thumbs. "There is very little party-feeling in Gallowbay."

"That's rather a pity, isn't it?" asked Mr. Amelia.

"A pity? Surely not," said the mild Editor, taking off his hat and polishing his head with a crimson cotton handkerchief. "Liberal and Tory, lamb and lion, lie down together here. The county papers never touch politics except at election times, and then they only recommend their several candidates. The *Independent* is the Tory journal in Gallowbay, but it and the *Whig* have nothing to quarrel about."

Mr. Amelia nodded once or twice, but made no verbal response. If the management of the *Whig* should ever come into his hands, he thought he could find reasons enough for warfare. The seedy young man had resumed his pipe, and was smoking like a furnace.

"I'm glad you've turned up," said he, addressing the new chief. "Flinch and I have been filthily overworked since Horner left. Haven't we, Mr. Rider? You'll find us both a little sore at first. Flinch thinks he ought to have been chief—not that he's fit for it, but human vanity's a comprehensive thing—and I certainly ought to have been second."

Mr. Flinch accepted this in sulky silence, the mild Editor chuckled, and Mr. Amelia looked inquiringly at the seedy junior.

"That was the proprietor's affair, not mine," said the Editor, defensively.

"We know that, sir," said the junior, laughing.

The whole condition of things in the *Whig* office was evidently, to Mr. Amelia's fancy, subversive of discipline. An editor who voluntarily acted as porter on his first introduction to a subordinate, and who allowed himself to be addressed with familiarity by the junior member of his staff, was very far removed from Mr. Amelia's ideas of what an editor should be. It was plain that the junior reporter had been bred in a very bad school.

"We're all here together," said that young gentleman, with blundering friendliness, "and I don't think we can do better than go round to the 'Cow' and have a drink on the strength of it. Not more than others I deserve, yet God has given me more. I have half a crown, and it's pay-day to-morrow. You'll come along, Mr. Amelia?"

"No, thank you," said Mr. Amelia, coldly.

"You don't drink?" asked the junior.

"Unless I am thirsty," responded the new chief in his own crisp way.

"Ah!" said the junior; "I couldn't afford that. I'm thirsty too often."

The inoffensive Editor laughed at the junior's repartee, but catching sight of the great disapproval expressed in Mr. Amelia's face, he himself became grave, and expressed a half apology in the feeble chafing of his hands.

"It might be convenient, sir," said the chief, "if Mr. Flinch would go with me through an account of the routine work at once."

"Certainly, if you wish it," said the Editor. "Mr. Flinch." The speaker waved an uncertain right hand with a vaguely disconcerted air, and Mr. Flinch produced a dog's-eared diary, labelled "Engagement Book," and opened it before his superior officer.

"A glass of beer, Mr. Rider?" said the junior, inquiringly.

"Well," said the Editor, still vaguely disconcerted, "while Mr. Flinch explains——"

The junior opened the door and Mr. Rider edged through it. Mr. Maddox nodded amicably in answer to Mr. Amelia's uplifted gaze, and followed his editor. Mr. Amelia turned his eyes back to the pages of the dog's-eared diary, and began his work in cold scorn. He had been fifth reporter on a big daily journal in the north, and he knew what discipline ought to be.

Mr. Rider and the junior reporter had been absent for perhaps a quarter of an hour, when Mr. Amelia heard a great rush upon the stairs without, and the seedy youth reappeared, out of breath, but still clinging to his pipe and smoking, though with difficulty. Close upon his heels came the Editor, also out of breath, and upon the countenance of each was an expression of high excitement.

"A most extraordinary event has happened," said Mr. Rider, gaspingly. "A thing quite outside the ordinary routine." Mr. Amelia looked keen inquiry, but said nothing. "I shall want to bend all the forces of the office to the task," pursued Mr. Rider, when he had partially recovered breath. "You, Mr. Amelia, will oblige me by going to the 'Windgall Arms,' where you will inquire for Mr. Ragshaw. Give Mr. Amelia a note-book and a pencil, Mr. Flinch. Mr. Ragshaw will tell you all he knows, I have no doubt. You will inquire about the newly-discovered heir to the Gallowbay estates—Mr. Bolsover Kimberley. I shall seek a personal interview with Mr. Kimberley. You, Mr. Maddox, can accompany me, and take a note of the conversation. You, Mr. Flinch, had better walk up to the Woodlands and ask to see Mr. Sheeney—Mr. Clarence G. Sheeney—who will tell you all about the enhanced value of the estates."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Amelia, "I had better know something of the matter beforehand."

"Yes," returned the Editor; "it will be as well. The late owner of the Gallowbay estates was a minor, and an orphan. He had no known relatives, and was believed to be the last of his line, the survivor of his whole race. Messrs. Begg, Batter, and Bagg, solicitors, have discovered a perfect title to the estates. It is vested in the person of Mr. Bolsover Kimberley, who was a solicitor's clerk this morning, at a salary, I should say, of thirty shillings a week.

This evening he is worth at least a million and a quarter sterling."

Mr. Rider took off his hat and polished his head with the crimson cotton handkerchief, glancing from one to another of his staff with an almost bewildered air.

"A million and a quarter sterling, gentlemen," he repeated. "A million and a quarter sterling."

"Tidy lump of money, isn't it?" said the junior.

"If ah'd got it," said Mr. Flinch, "ah'd travel."

"To the local asylum," said the junior. "Flinch's intellect," he added, with an explanatory manner, "is constructed to bear a pressure of one shilling a week to the square inch. A thirteen penny pressure would burst it."

"Mr. Maddox," said the Editor, mildly, "you are ungenerous. It has always seemed to me as unmanly to say a cruel clever thing to a man who has no faculty of repartee as it would be to hit a man with his hands tied."

"Or to kick a cripple," returned the junior. "I'm sure I beg your pardon, Flinch. Not that he knows why, sir, and I'm sure he doesn't mind. Do you, Flinch?"

"Ah don't mind," returned Mr. Flinch, surlily. "You can say what you like abaht me."

Mr. Amelia looked sharply from Flinch to Maddox, and from Maddox to Rider, taking mental stock of the three. Flinch was obviously a dullard. Rider was a child, and a very foolish one. Maddox might have some promise in him apart from the bar-lounging fear, but his nails were dirty, his clothes dusty and disordered, his boots unblacked and broken, and his linen and his hair were monuments to neglect. Mr. Amelia resolved that Maddox should be polished. It did not suit him to have a junior so disreputable in aspect. The disreputability would be reflected back upon himself.

"Excuse me," he said, "for breaking in on your conversation, but since there is work to be done might it not be as well to do it? Perhaps Mr. Flinch will direct me to the 'Windgall Arms.'"

"We will meet here and compare notes before anything is written," said the Editor. "I can show you to the Arms, Mr. Amelia. My business lies there as well as yours. On second thoughts, Mr. Amelia, I fancy that it will be more agreeable to Mr. Kimberley in his altered position to encounter a stranger than to meet one who knew him in his humbler sphere. I think that will be a little more thoughtful—more considerate."

He put this doubtfully, as if inviting Mr. Amelia's opinion.

"As you please, sir," returned the new chief.

"I think," said the Editor again, "it will be a little more considerate. Mr. Kimberley is not a—a self-possessed gentleman, and I knew him in less fortunate days, and perhaps the remembrance of that fact might embarrass him. Our functions," he added with an uncertain smile, "are a little inquisitorial, Mr. Amelia, and we naturally like to make them as little unpleasant as possible." Mr. Amelia returning no answer to this doctrine other than that conveyed in a crisp nod which might mean either assent or its opposite, the Editor once more became vaguely disconcerted, and groped in his pockets without apparent purpose. "You will ask Mr. Kimberley to furnish you with the chief facts of his career, Mr. Amelia, and his intentions for the future. I am afraid you will find him a little embarrassed at first."

With this he edged himself from the room, and the others followed. Mr. Flinch turned up the street to the right and the other three to the left, Mr. Amelia wonderfully erect and self-important, the Editor walking apologetically on a level with him, and the junior with his hands in his pockets and pipe in mouth bringing up the rear.

CHAPTER II.

If you are not anybody in particular—and the chances are that you are not — you are invited to ask yourself one question before pursuing this history. How do you think you would feel if you suddenly became somebody very particular indeed? A little embarrassed, do you think? I fancy so.

Your sympathies are requested for Mr. Bolsover Kimberley, a gentleman embarrassed beyond measure. Perhaps you may be better able to sympathize with him when you know more particularly who he was and how he suffered.

There was a shadowy unsubstantial-seeming Commodore in the Kimberley family legends. This Commodore had fought somewhere, and was reported to have secured a good handful of prize-money. He had bought land, so the legend ran, and had settled on it and flourished exceedingly. Mr. Bolsover Kimberley used sometimes to speak of his ancestor, the Commodore. Bolsover's father had used the phrase before him, and it was generally conceded that it was a reputable sort of thing to have had a Commodore in the family.

Bolsover began life in canary-coloured stockings, blue small clothes, and a tail-coat which touched his heels as he walked, a pensioner on the bounty of one Harward, who flourished in the days of Elizabeth, and left an annual sum of money for the education of twelve poor boys, and their clothing according to a design held to be reputable in his own day. So Kimberley's earliest memories were of the jeers of the unsympathetic, and (being a boy of great natural meekness and indisposed to popular notice) he suffered grievously through all his school years because of that absurd livery. The other eleven, his compeers, could fight, and being animated by that spirit of brotherhood which is sometimes the offspring of misfortune, they were formidable enough to be left alone. But Bolsover could not fight, and was therefore a Pariah amongst those who should have been his chosen. The history of the chivyings of Kimberley was varied and prolonged enough to furnish forth an epic. His tortures lasted six years, and when he was set free from them and transplanted to a solicitor's office, his native shyness and cowardice were fixed in him for life.

His earlier functions in the solicitor's office were to sweep out the rooms, light the fires and run on errands; but in the fulness of time he became a clerk. He regarded this as the beginning of life in earnest, but he seemed likely to live to the end of his days in the pursuit of labours no more profitable or pretentious.

He was now thirty-five years of age, and honorary secretary to a Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society. He was meek, and had no features to speak of. His hair was unassuming and his whiskers were too shy to curl. His eyebrows—always a little elevated—bore in their troubled curve a nervous apology, "I *hope* I don't intrude." Sometimes at friendly tea-drinkings, when, save himself, there were only ladies present, he could be moved to sing. "I have a silent Sorrow here," "She never told her Love," and "The Lass of Richmond Hill,"—these were his favourite ditties. Their character and his single estate encouraged the belief that he was consumed by a hopeless and unspoken passion. This conjecture, like some stories of the old school, was founded upon fact.

Poor Bolsover burned at times to be rid of his secret, but he felt that he would have been thought no better than a madman if it had once been known. It *was* an undeniable madness in a solicitor's clerk even to dream of loving the Lady Ella Santerre. You may fancy—and fancy is not greatly exercised to compass the exertion—the sentiments which would have filled the girl's heart had she known. Bolsover never troubled himself with accusations against Fate, because no shadow of Hope's wing ever came within measurable distance of him. He knew perfectly well what a fool he was, but he was in love for all that.

A cat may look at a king. A solicitor's clerk may love an earl's daughter. But he is surely wise to hold his tongue about it, if a creature guilty of so astonishing a folly can be said to be wise at all.

On the morning of that day on which Mr. Amelia arrived in Gallowbay, Bolsover was seated in a little room with a dingy red desk, a dingy red door, and a cobwebbed skylight. A dusty window showed him nothing—when he looked up from the deed he was laboriously engrossing—but a blank wall baking in the dreary and oppressive sunshine. Suddenly a knock sounded on the dingy red door, and the clerk, without looking up from his work, pulled a cord, and cried "Come in." The person who had knocked entered, and illumined the place—Mr. Ragshaw, senior clerk to Messrs. Begg, Batter, and Bagg, the leading firm of solicitors in the county town. Mr. Ragshaw's employers mingled with the county people. almost on terms of equality, and Mr. Ragshaw—almost on terms of equality—associated with his employers. He was, therefore, a person of some distinction, and his manner displayed a consciousness of the fact, not too obtrusive. His taste in dress was undeniable. The burning weather justified a departure from the soberer tints of British fashion, and he was attired in trousers of a large plaid, a buff waistcoat, a white hat, a drab dust overcoat thrown open, and a morning coat of blue cloth with a rose in his buttonhole. He displayed cuffs and a shirt-collar besprinkled with dog's heads in pink. He wore cloth boots and white gaiters, and on his breast glittered an opalescent bulb the size of a bronze halfpenny, backed by a wide expanse of scarlet scarf.

Bolsover received his guest with a befitting reverence. He was quite amazed with the gorgeous creature's condescension when Mr. Ragshaw removed his white hat, and, advancing, proffered his right hand.

"My dear Mr. Kimberley," said Mr. Ragshaw, "allow me the honour of shaking hands with you. Permit me, sir, to congratulate you. I believe that I am the first bearer of good news."

Mr. Kimberley held his tongue and turned pale.

"You have doubtless, sir," said Mr. Ragshaw, resuming, "heard frequent mention of what is known as the Gallowbay Estate?"

Bolsover waved his hand towards the deed he had been engrossing a minute before. It related to a portion of the property his visitor had mentioned. Mr. Ragshaw cast an eye about it and then elevated his eyebrows with an expression of genteel surprise.

"At its northern boundary," he continued, "it adjoins Shouldershott Park, the estate of Lord Windgall. It is bounded on the south by the High Street, and includes the whole of the northern side of that thoroughfare. On the west it includes the foreshore, and on the east its boundaries are somewhat more intricate. The leases have all fallen in during the lifetime of its late owner."

Bolsover, paler than before, nodded to signify attention, but still said nothing.

"My firm, sir," pursued the splendid creature, "represented the trustees of the late owner, who inherited the estate in early infancy. He died three months ago at the age of twenty, leaving no known relatives. We instituted a search, sir, which resulted in the discovery of an indisputable title to the estate. Permit me to congratulate you, sir,—the estate is yours."

Bolsover Kimberley laid his hands on the high stool from which he had recently arisen, and held it to steady himself. He gasped, and his voice was harsh.

"How much?"

"The estate, sir," said Mr. Ragshaw, "has almost trebled in value during the long minority of the deceased, and it is now approximately valued at forty-seven thousand per annum."

The owner of the Gallowbay Estate lurched forward and fell over the high stool in a dead faint. The senior clerk of Begg, Batter, and Bagg caught him by the shoulders, held him up, and straightened him.

The family belief in the existence of the Commodore was justified. But so far as the new-made millionnaire had known he had no kith or kin in the world, and he had never expected anybody to leave him anything. In the forgotten language of the Fistic Ring, he was hit all abroad, knocked out of time by this intelligence.

Mr. Ragshaw's attentions restored him to his senses, and he drank a little water and sobbed hysterically.

When he had recovered sufficiently to understand what had happened, he arose weakly from the one office chair, took off his office coat, rolled it up neatly, and put it in his desk. He next detached the desk-key from the ring on which it kept company with his latch-key and the key of his chest of drawers. Then he put on his walking coat and his hat, and went out, leaving the unfinished deed behind him with the first syllable of the word "consideration" staring at the waste of unwritten parchment which lay beyond it. Mr. Ragshaw accompanied him, writhing his own features into an expression of the deepest sympathy, as the owner of the Gallowbay Estate, still much shaken, walked slowly along the shady side of the street.

"Don't you think, Mr. Kimberley," asked Mr. Ragshaw with profound respect, "that a little something—"

They were outside the "Windgall Arms," and Kimberley understood the half-spoken query.

"Why, yes, sir," said the millionnaire, "but I never keep it in the 'ouse, and having had to pay a tailor's bill this week, I don't happen—"

Mr. Ragshaw spoke with genuine emotion.

"My *dear* sir, allow me!" He ushered Mr. Kimberley through the portal.

"Ow de do, Kimberley?" said the host, who lounged in the cool shadow of the doorway with a cigar between his lips.

Mr. Ragshaw eyed the landlord with some severity.

"Show us into a private room, if you please," he said; "and bring up a bottle of cham. Do you keep Heidsieck's monopoly? All right. Let's have a bottle, and a couple of your best weeds."

"Certainly, gentlemen," said the host. There was something in Ragshaw's manner which overawed him, and Ragshaw was so deferential to Kimberley that the host knew not what to think of it.

"There's a swell upstairs," he told his wife, "as is treating young Kimberley to champagne and cigars."

"I don't want the young man ill on *my* premises," said the Grey Mare, who was the better horse. She had found the money to purchase stock and goodwill when she and the landlord married.

"It's a queer start," said the landlord. "The man's a swell, there's no doubt o' that, and yet he's a bowing and scraping to that Kimberley as if he was a lord."

The landlady glided away to listen, and the conversation now to be recorded was public property before closing time.

"Are you strong enough to listen to the rest, sir?" asked Ragshaw in tones of delicate sympathy.

"Yes," said the landed proprietor.

"There is, of course, a large sum of money, the product of the rents of the estate during the long minority of the deceased. It has been invested by the trustees in various ways, and it represents, in round figures, a quarter of a million."

The listening landlady gasped at the question which followed.

"Does that," said Kimberley feebly, "does that—belong—to me?"

"Yes, sir; most undoubtedly, sir," responded Mr. Ragshaw.

"When shall I—have it?"

"You enter, sir, upon immediate possession of the whole property. My firm has given instructions to our bankers to honour your draft at sight, and I am instructed to hand you this cheque-book. I need not say, sir, that I am delighted to be honoured with such a commission, sir."

"Oh, dear me," said the millionnaire, and taking the cheque-book he sat crushed.

"Pray permit me, sir." Mr. Ragshaw filled up Bolsover's half-empty glass and replenished his own with an air of homage. The landlady arose from her place and went gliding down the stairs. Curiosity was still strong in her, but she was faint and needed support before she could endure farther.

"George," she said to the landlord, "give me a little drop of brandy. I'm in such a twitter you might knock me down with a feather. Now don't you ask me no questions, for I can't stop to answer 'em."

"If I can be of service to you in any capacity, Mr. Kimberley," Ragshaw began, just as she resumed her post, "I am instructed to place myself entirely in your hands for a day, or even two. About your temporary abode for a day or two, sir? Will it be convenient for you to stay here?"

"Ye-es," said Kimberley; but the idea more than half-frightened him.

"Any little addition, sir," hinted Mr. Ragshaw, with an almost ladylike delicacy of demeanour; "any little addition to your—wardrobe, sir?"

"I've got another suit at home," returned Kimberley, with much dubiety.

"There is a position to maintain, sir," said Ragshaw, "if I may respectfully mention it."

Poor Kimberley took a sip at his champagne. He was unused to the beverage, and he began to experience a strange wild glow, an unaccustomed half-hysterical exultation; so that he hardly knew whether to laugh or cry, and was on the point of doing both together.

"There is something in what you say, sir," he returned. It crossed him, with a feminine sense of the loveliness of bright attire, that he might even dress like Ragshaw, if he chose. He had never longed for finery. In his meagre, unambitious way, he had been contented with his lot, and what he could not hope for he had never dared to wish for. But now the egregious plaid of Ragshaw's trousers, his buff waistcoat, the opalescent bulb on his breast, his yellow dog-skin gloves, and all his other outrageous sartorial gaieties, might even be shared by Kimberley, and the late quill-driver's head swam with the first thought of personal vanity which had ever assailed it.

"Wilkins in the High Street, sir," suggested Mr. Ragshaw, "is a very passable tailor. Shall I send for him, sir? Or, would you prefer to employ a man in town?" Kimberley made no response. "Perhaps Wilkins will do at present, sir? He is a tenant of your own." Kimberley was still silent. "You will be expected, sir, to encourage local trade a little, if I may venture to suggest it."

"Yes," said Kimberley, tremulously. "We'll go presently."

"Oh, dear no, sir," returned Ragshaw, blending instruction with worship, as a prince's preceptor might. "That would never do, sir. We will *send* for Wilkins, sir."

He rang the bell, and the landlady, having noiselessly retired, came up with a bustle, and answered the summons in person.

"Oblige me," said Ragshaw, "by despatching a messenger to Wilkins, the tailor in the High Street, requesting him to wait upon me here."

The landlady, having received this command, retired to put it into execution.

"Young Kimberley," said the landlord, addressing a visitor, as she entered the bar, "is up-stairs with a swell as is standing fizz to him and the best cigars."

The visitor was Mr. Blandy, solicitor, a bald-headed man, with an angry, brandified complexion; no less a person than Mr. Kimberley's employer.

"Is he, begad?" said Mr. Blandy, with amazement. "That's a new move."

"'Sh!" cried the landlady; for the solicitor's voice was not only dogmatic but loud, and the door was open. "Mr. Kimberley is proved to be the heir to the Gallowbay Estate."

The landlady had never enjoyed so supreme a triumph in her life. The recipients of the astonishing news fairly gaped at her. She told what she knew, but omitted to state the means by which she had acquired her information; and, as they listened, the solicitor and the landlord each surrendered his tumbler, and let fall the hand which had caressed it.

"Who is it?" asked the solicitor, who was the first to recover. "Who is with him?"

"It's a ginger-headed person," said the landlord, "with whiskers of the same, tallish and dressed tip-top."

"That's Ragshaw for a fiver," said Mr. Blandy. "For a fiver it's Ragshaw. Begg and Batter were agents for the trustees, and Ragshaw is their head man. God bless my soul! What a windfall! Well, there never was a man who deserved good fortune better. I have been honoured by that young man's presence in my office for twenty years, Burridge, and I say of him that he is worthy of his good fortune, and that he will be an ornament to any sphere into which it may please Providence to call him. You will remember, Burridge, that I was the first to say so. As an honest man, Burridge, you will bear me out in that."

"Certainly," said Burridge. "As an old employer of the young man's, I should say as you ought to be met with a sort of exceptional favour, so to speak. I should think there could not be a fitter man than you, sir, to conduct the interests of the estate."

"For once in your life, George," said the Grey Mare, "you're talking sense." The landlord was sensibly elated by this modified compliment, and having sipped at his tumbler, he murmured with the contemplative look of an admitted judge of things:

"There is not, I should fancy, a fitter man anywheres."

Mr. Blandy felt that his host and hostess were people of sound judgment, and his own prospects brightened in the effulgence of Kimberley's magnificent fortunes.

"Wilkins, the tailor, is to be sent for at once," said the landlady.

"I'll step down myself," replied the landlord, "and bring him back with me. This ought to bring a bit of prawsperity to Gallowbay, Mr. Blandy. The deceased owner being a minor, there's been no money spent in the town off that estate for nigh on fourteen, or may-be fifteen years."

"Kimberley," said the solicitor, "is a local man, and may be relied upon to promote local interests. I have some influence with him, some little influence, and you may rely upon me to use it."

"I am sure of that, sir," said the landlady fervently; and Mr. Blandy felt, and, if he could have managed it, would have looked, like a local public benefactor.

"Begg and Batter," said Mr. Blandy, when the landlord had gone out, "will doubtless do their best to retain a full control of the estates; but after an association which has extended over a score of years, an association uninterrupted by one unfriendly breeze, I do not think that Bolsover Kimberley is the man to throw over an old friend."

"No, indeed, sir," said the landlady.

Meanwhile Kimberley and Ragshaw had started on a new conversational tack.

"I think," said the new-made man of money with trembling lips, "that you gave me a notion that the estate adjoins Shouldershott Park?"

He knew that well enough, and had known it years ago, but he could not help drifting to the question.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Ragshaw, in respectful affirmation. "It was generally supposed," he added, without a guess of the tremor into which this statement would throw his companion, "that the late proprietor of the estate would marry a daughter of Lord Windgall's."

"Lady Ella?" inquired Kimberley in a choking voice.

"Oh, dear no, sir," responded Ragshaw. "Her sister, the Honourable Alice Louisa Santerre, who is four years younger. Only fifteen, I believe, sir."

"That's very young," said Kimberley, trying to look as if he were discussing a matter which had no interest for him.

"It was understood, I believe, sir," replied Ragshaw, with the manner of a man of fashion. "These great families, sir, look upon marriage as a sort of affair of state. Lord Windgall is not a wealthy peer."

"I never heard," said Kimberley, with the champagne beating wildly in his head, "that Lady Ella was engaged."

"Well, as a matter of fact there never was an engagement," said Ragshaw, who was as intimate with the affairs of the aristocracy as if he had been a reporter to a Society journal. "But it was understood, I believe, that there was an attachment. A Mr. Clare—the Honourable Mr. Clare—a younger son of Lord Montacute's. The parents, it was understood, were opposed on both sides."

"Oh," said Bolsover Kimberley, and for the time being said no more. But in the middle of a great auriferous glow, the spirit of Heidsieck's extra sec showed him the lovely face and figure of Lady Ella. And it was he himself who was kneeling at her feet. Then, at that amazing awful presumption, he awoke and groaned aloud with sudden shame, and Mr. Ragshaw jumped to his feet and stared at him across the table.

"Are you in pain, sir?" inquired Ragshaw, twisting his features to imply a sympathetic understanding.

"I don't feel altogether comfortable," said the millionnaire.

Mr. Ragshaw twisted his features anew, until his face was a mere mass of wrinkles.

"Perhaps, sir," he suggested with profound respect, "you are not accustomed to tobacco."

"I take a pipe of an evening," said Kimberley. "It isn't that. I'm better, thank you."

A knock at the door announced the arrival of the tailor. He had heard the news, and so ducked and grinned at Kimberley that if the little man had been in full possession of his faculties he would have thought the tailor deranged. The patterns were spread out upon the table, and Kimberley, egged on by Ragshaw and the tradesman, found himself choosing an unheard-of number of samples and ordering clothes enough to make dandies of half-a-dozen commercial travellers for a year.

Ragshaw followed the tradesman from the room.

"It will be worth your while," he said in an impressive whisper, "to see that all those things have the real fashionable cut. It might pay you, sir, to engage a special man. Mr. Kimberley, as a Gallowbay man, will naturally wish to cultivate local interests, but he will need to be well served. You are not yet aware, perhaps"—he was sure the man *was* aware, but he wanted to know how the story had got abroad—"of the change in Mr. Kimberley's fortunes?"

"Why, yes, sir," replied the tailor, "I learned from Mr. Burridge. You may rely upon my doing my best, sir. My first cousin on my mother's side, sir, is cutter-out to one of the best London houses, sir—a Bond Street house—and I shall send the patterns and measurements up to him and ask him to oblige me."

"Very good," said Mr. Ragshaw loftily. "I hope your efforts will be satisfactory. You will push the goods forward? Thank you."

The tailor departed, first to display the selected patterns in the bar, and next, after a friendly glass, to his shop. Then the bootmaker was sent for, and the hatter, and the hosier, preference in each instance being given to Bolsover's tenants. The thing began to look like a mad and fantastic dream, and there were moments when the confusion of Kimberley's thoughts mounted to such a height of stupefaction and bewilderment that he would have been glad to awake from it and find himself bound to the desk again.

To all this excitement and bewilderment succeeded dinner, but Bolsover played a very poor knife and fork indeed, in spite of Ragshaw's promptings. He saw several things he had never seen in all his simple life before; and the little paper ruffles at the end of the cutlets, the sheet of stiff writing-paper which lay between the fish and the dish on which it was served, the coloured claret-glasses, the table-napkins, the silver forks, the dish-covers, were all new to him. Black coffee was a curious and distasteful novelty. He had been used to take a very weak and watery decoction of coffee and chicory. He had, in short, been used to all the ways of decent poverty, and had never dined at a hotel table before. It was natural that he should take Ragshaw as his model in dealing with these unexpected and unknown things, and he held his knife and fork like Ragshaw, and a bit of bread to hold his fish steady whilst he got at it with his fork like Ragshaw; and whatsoever that cultured being did Kimberley followed suit.

The landlady herself served at table, and was embarrassingly obsequious, and but for Ragshaw's presence Kimberley felt that he would have sunk altogether beneath the weight of her attentions. He did not quite know it, but he had never been so unhappy in his life before, never so helpless, never so little satisfied with himself. But the great blow of the day fell when the triumvirate from the *Whig* appeared, and the landlady ushered in first the Editor, next Mr. Amelia, and last Mr. Maddox, a terrible youth who had publicly chaffed him at the weekly meetings of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society, and whom he knew to entertain the meanest opinions of him. When they were announced Kimberley almost clung to Ragshaw.

"You won't leave me, sir, will you?" said the miserable millionnaire.

"Allow me to take all the trouble from your shoulders, sir," returned Mr. Ragshaw. When the trio entered he ushered each one to a seat with magnificent courtesy. "And now, gentlemen, in what way can we be of service to you?"

"Well," said the meek Editor defensively, "the sudden change in Mr. Kimberley's position (upon which I am sure nobody congratulates him more heartily than I do)—the sudden change is of course likely to be very interesting to the townspeople, and indeed to the country at large. I am the editor of the *Gallowbay Whig*, as Mr. Kimberley knows, and these gentlemen are members of the staff. We are here to ask if Mr. Kimberley will oblige us with a few little details of his career. This is Mr. Amelia, our chief of staff, Mr. Kimberley. Perhaps if you would be so good as to talk to him for a few minutes whilst Mr. Ragshaw—Mr. Ragshaw I believe?—whilst Mr. Ragshaw gives me a few particulars about the estate, and the tracing of the family connection, we might economize a little time."

Mr. Amelia fixed the millionnaire and drew a chair up to the table near the corner at which he sat. Next he produced a notebook and a pencil ready sharpened.

"We may as well begin at the beginning, sir," he said, with cheerful affability. "Kindly tell me the date of your birth."

"I was thirty-five last March," said Kimberley feebly, with an appealing glance at Ragshaw.

"Day of the month?" said Mr. Amelia.

"The tenth."

"Native place?"

"Gallowbay."

"Christian names of parents?"

"Bolsover and Mary Ann." Kimberley began to find himself at ease. Mr. Amelia was not abasing himself before him as everybody else had done that day, and his crisp business manner was like a tonic to the bashful man.

"Any facts about your father's history?"

"I don't think so," answered Kimberley, uncertainly.

"Must have been *some* facts," said Mr. Amelia, cheerfully. "Born somewhere. Died somewhere. Got married between-whiles. Pursued some occupation, probably."

"He was born in Gallowbay," said Kimberley, thus stimulated. "I don't think he had any occupation in particular."

"Private means?" asked Mr. Amelia.

"Oh, dear no, sir," replied Kimberley. "But he was rather feeble in his health, and, mostly, my mother provided for the 'ouse."

"We are willing to give information freely," said Mr. Ragshaw, breaking in at this point, and leaving a query of the Editor's unanswered; "but we expect discretion to be employed."

"Certainly; certainly," says the Editor. "Perhaps Mr. Kimberley would like to see the proofs before we go to press. He can then—eliminate anything he would prefer not to appear."

"That will be quite satisfactory, sir; quite satisfactory," said Mr. Ragshaw in his grandest manner; and the examination being continued, Bolsover laid bare his simple annals.

The proof-sheets came next day, and he read with blushes, and with pride and shame and a strange crowd of mingled feelings, the life and history of "our distinguished townsman." He read that he was rather below than above the middle height, of pleasing exterior and unassuming manners. He read that he looked back at his boyhood's days with affectionate regret, and that he still cherished a lively interest in that benevolent foundation to which he himself owed his early training. He read all the proofs of his descent from the Commodore "on the distaff side," and discovered that a far-away ancestor of whom he had never heard before had been ennobled by Richard the Second. After all he was somebody in the world, and it was a proud thing to know it.

But his long life of servitude, his native shyness, and his want of nerve, the habits formed in the thirty-five years for which he had been nobody in particular, all weighed heavily upon him, and he was far from being happy.

CHAPTER III.

THE offices of Messrs. Begg, Batter, and Bagg, solicitors, stood back a little from the High Street of the county town, behind a bower of trees and shrubs, and the senior partner sitting alone, with his window open to the summer weather, could, if he were so minded, see, without being seen, all passengers and equipages that moved along the road. Messrs. Begg, Batter, and Bagg performed the very highest class of business, and enjoyed the confidence of the nobility and gentry. Even though the profits of the firm had to be parted into three shares, each partner drew a fat and comfortable income. The senior partner's share was naturally the fattest and most comfortable, and the senior partner himself was a man of genial and tolerant aspect, ecclesiastical rather than legal in his looks; something like a rural dean—if one could fancy such a thing—in mufti.

He sat back in his chair, staring placidly at the street and toying with his gold-rimmed double glasses, a sunny, respectable, well-to-do old man, with scarcely a care upon his mind. A knock at the door awoke him from his reverie, and a clerk announced Lord Windgall.

"Show his lordship this way, Mr. Yielding," said the senior partner, and the clerk retiring, the old gentleman arose, pulled down his portly waistcoat with both hands, and settled his tall collars.

"The Earl of Windgall, sir," said the clerk, throwing open the door. Mr. Begg advanced to meet his lordship, and shook hands in a way which implied a recognition of the privilege bestowed upon him.

"A fine day," said the solicitor. "Beautiful growing weather. We should look for a fine harvest this year."

"Yes," said his lordship, dropping into the chair the clerk had set for him, and laying his hat and cane upon the table. "What's this news about Gallowbay, Begg?"

The Earl of Windgall was a small man with grey side whiskers and grey tufty hair. He was a good deal withered, and features that had once been delicate had grown pinched and careworn. His grey eyes were kindly, and looked from under his shaggy grey eyebrows with a glance of sagacity and sometimes of dry humour; but the dominant expression of his face was to be found in the region of the lips, and was almost querulous.

"What's this news about Gallowbay, Begg? Is it true?"

"What *is* the news, my lord?" asked the solicitor, rubbing his hands and smiling comfortably, as if to say that a lawyer should stand out for precision.

"That a clerk in the office of that fellow Blandy has turned out to be heir to the Gallowbay estate."

"That is certainly true," said Mr. Begg. "That is undeniably true."

"Ah!" said his lordship, pulling his gloves off nervously and beginning to pull them on again. "It is true, eh? M-m-m. No possibility of a flaw in the proofs? No Tittlebat Titmouse business over again?"

Mr. Begg let off a mellow laugh, subdued to the confidential tone, and rubbed his hands again.

"Capital story that," he said. "Apart from its treatment of the legal element, a capital story."

"Do you know the man?" asked Windgall. "Have you seen him?"

"No," said Mr. Begg, lightly. "We expect him to call to-morrow. Mr. Ragshaw, our managing clerk, went over and communicated the news to him in the first instance."

"What sort of a fellow is he?" The peer wore a self-conscious and almost guilty look when he put this question. "Can he carry his money?"

"Well," said Mr. Begg, "so far as I can judge from Ragshaw's report, he will find it rather hard to carry his money. He seems to be a shy little man, gauche and—and—underbred, even for his late position."

Mr. Begg made this announcement with an

air of delicacy. One would scarcely have thought him likely to be so tender to an absent stranger, howsoever considerable his affairs might be. When he had spoken he looked at Lord Windgall, and Lord Windgall looked at him, with an odd kind of reticence in expression.

"That is a pity," said the withered peer.

"Yes," assented the lawyer, "it is something of a pity, certainly."

"After all," said his lordship, throwing one leg over the other, and taking up his cane from the table, "these are radical and republican days, and a man who has more than a million is bound to be respectable." He took the cane at either end and bent it to and fro, examining its texture closely meanwhile.

"No doubt," said Mr. Begg, as if there were comfort in the reflection; "no doubt."

"I should like to see him," said the grey little nobleman, glancing at the lawyer in a casual way. Kimberley was a natural object for curiosity, and it was likely that many people would care to see him. He was the nine days' wonder of the county. "I suppose you will act for him, as you did for poor young Edward?"

Poor young Edward was the deceased minor—Edward Bolsover—whose early death had wrecked the brightest chances the Windgall family-craft had ever carried.

"I suppose so," said the lawyer. "It is not probable that he will take his affairs out of our hands. Blandy is after him—his late employer. That, of course," said Mr. Begg, with a gesture of allowance, "is only natural."

"I presume," said the Earl, "that even if he wanted to call in his money you could arrange elsewhere."

"With regard to the first mortgage?" asked Mr. Begg. "Certainly. Your lordship need be under no apprehension in that quarter."

"And what about the new arrangement?" the Earl asked, nervously.

"Impossible, my lord," returned Mr. Begg, with regretful emphasis. "I regret to say it, but—impossible."

"Very well," said the Earl, with a sigh. "I suppose the timber must go."

"I am afraid so," returned Mr. Begg, "I am very much afraid so. In fact, I can see nothing else for it—nothing—else—for it."

"It looks bad," said his lordship.

"It is bad," answered the solicitor. "Very unfortunate. Very. But unavoidable."

"If poor Edward had lived," said the Earl, rising and laying his hand upon his hat, "it would all have been very different."

"Yes, indeed," assented Mr. Begg. "He was young, but he understood things. He saw, from both sides, the advantages of the match. Birth and beauty on one side, and on the other vast possessions."

"But then he wasn't a parvenu," said his lordship, "any more than I am a pauper. Poor Edward was a gentleman to the finger-tips. He was beginning to take an intelligent interest in politics; he would have contested a borough or two against the Whigs, and, with his wealth and the influence one could command for him, reward was sure; he would have had his peerage to a certainty." Lord Windgall sighed again, and dug the point of his stick half a dozen times at a particular spot in the carpet. "I can speak to you, Begg, with some freedom," he went on. Mr. Begg bowed slightly in acknowledgment, but the other was not looking at him. "Poor Edward's death was the greatest blow I can remember. Even the death of her ladyship was not so great a misfortune. Every man thinks his own corns ache worse than his neighbour's, but, upon my word, I seem to be marked out for trouble."

Mr. Begg looked sympathetic, but had nothing to say. The Earl after a short pause went on again—

"The timber has to go now, and that's an unpleasant thing to happen, a confoundedly unpleasant thing. But I suppose you're right, and there's no help for it."

"To tell you the plain truth, my lord," said Mr. Begg, "nothing but the knowledge of the existing engagement between the Honourable Miss Alice and poor young Bolsover prevented the timber from going a year ago. The estates lie side by side, and a union between the two families looked a very natural and very fitting thing. Very natural. Very fitting."

Mr. Begg was plainly embarrassed, and was doing his best to seem at ease. He and his noble client were friends in a way, and he was as grieved at the Windgall family troubles as any lawyer could be expected to be. He had it in his mind that his lordship was willing to see a way out of his troubles, and the idea disturbed him, because the way seemed disgraceful to an old family even if it could be taken, and could only be entered on with a sense of meanness. If Bolsover Kimberley had been a gentleman—if he had only been ever so little like a gentleman—it would have been better. Any newly-made millionnaire might rejoice at the chance of a union with the Santerres; and if the millionnaire were only presentable, the Santerres had right enough to rejoice at the chance of union with him.

"We're asked to pity the poor working classes, begad!" said the Earl, with a half-hearted laugh. "Who pities a poor peer?" He tried to make jest of this, but it was too obviously a serious thing with him, and Mr. Begg's embarrassment deepened. He could have wished that the head of so noble a family should have been a little more like his own ideal of a nobleman, and he was certain that no troubles of his own would have drawn him into this sort of confidence with a lawyer if he had been a peer of the realm. Most people think more highly of worldly dignities than the holders of them can afford to do. The wearer of any dignity is conscious of the man within the robe. The most undignified pains do not spare him. "I must have a look at this fellow," said Windgall, suddenly, and with as casual an air as he could assume. "All the county's talking about him, and I'm curious to see what manner of man he is. If he isn't actually impossible one can hardly help meeting so near a neighbour."

Mr. Begg allowed a silent sigh to escape him.

"He is staying at the 'Windgall Arms,' my lord, at Gallowbay."

"I can't call on him there," said the Earl, hastily. He actually blushed a second later to think how plainly he was showing his hand. But the very shame he felt helped him to harden his heart. "I shall either have to know him or not to know him," he went on, "and I may as well know which it is to be at once. About what time is he to be here to-morrow?"

"We expect him at noon," said Mr. Begg, accepting the inevitable, though with an audible sigh this time. "If your lordship should care to call at one o'clock we could introduce him then. Ragshaw," he added, "is not the best judge of a gentleman in the world, to be sure, but he has formed the meanest opinion of him—the meanest opinion."

"Ragshaw?" said the Earl. "Oh! Your managing clerk! Yes, I remember to have seen him. Well, you know, Begg, if the man's impossible, he *is* impossible, and there's an end of it. Don't bother me about the timber until you have made the best arrangement you see your way to. Good day. I shall drop in to-morrow, to have a look at our nine days' wonder."

The head of the eminent legal firm himself escorted the Earl to the carriage which waited without, and then returning to his own room rang his bell and asked for Mr. Ragshaw. Mr. Ragshaw appearing, in raiment of more sober dye than he had worn on the memorable morning of his visit to Kimberley, the lawyer feigned to be busy for a moment or two with the papers on his desk. Two or three of these he handed to the confidential clerk with instructions, and then, with the manner of one who suddenly remembers, he said—

"By the bye, Mr. Ragshaw, Mr. Kimberley comes to-morrow?"

"Yes, sir."

"At what time? At noon, did you say?"

"At noon, sir."

"What sort of person is he, now?" asked Mr. Begg, turning round in his chair and fixing the gold-bound glasses on his nose. "You knew something of him, didn't you, before anybody guessed that he was worth a farthing?"

"I met him once or twice, sir, in the way of business," returned Ragshaw.

"Well, now, what did you think of him then? I don't want to know what you think of him now, for nobody thinks disrespectfully of a man as rich as he is; but what were you accustomed to think of him?"

"Why, sir," said Mr. Ragshaw, with a smile which meant, if it meant anything, that Ragshaw had known the distance between Kimberley and himself, and had not been disposed to examine him too closely.

" Speak out," said Mr. Begg. "What did you think of him ? "

" Well, sir," returned Ragshaw, smiling still, "I thought him a very inconsiderable sort of person. I don't know, sir, that I thought about him at all, to speak quite truly. He was not the sort of man, sir," added Ragshaw, " that a man feels inclined to think of."

" Nervous, I think you said ? "

" Dreadfully nervous, sir. Very shy and awkward. Tried to cut a raised pie with a spoon at table, sir, and doubled it clean up. Then put the spoon in his coat pocket when he thought I wasn't looking."

" Well, now," said Mr. Begg, conversationally, and as if he were in a mood to unbend pleasantly, " he won't be able to hide himself. People won't let him hide himself. Do you think he'll polish ? Is he the sort of man to polish ? Has he any nous or *savoir faire* at all ? "

"I don't think, sir," returned Ragshaw, "that he ever will get polished, since you ask my opinion. I should say you might as well try to polish a bath brick, sir."

"You might japan or lacquer even that," said the lawyer. "Let me see, how old is he—thirty-five?"

"Yes, sir," answered Ragshaw, "thirty-five."

"M-m-m!" said Mr. Begg. "You'll look into that matter of Barber's personally, Mr. Ragshaw?"

"Yes, sir," responded Ragshaw; and, feeling himself dismissed, withdrew. The old lawyer turned towards the window and fell to tapping his knuckles with his glasses.

"I'm afraid," he said to himself, "that his lordship will find him 'impossible,' as he calls it. And yet I don't know. There are men who would consort with a Caribbean savage hunch-backed, if he owned a million of money. There are men who would consent to become father-in-law to a gorilla for half the money. I shall see the young man for myself to-morrow."

He dismissed the theme from his thoughts, and scarcely allowed it again to enter his mind until nearly noon on the following day, when in spite of himself he became interested in the approaching visitor, and wondered what he would be like. The Cathedral clock was chiming "Adeste Fideles" to mark the hour of noon, and the sound came pleasantly subdued through closed windows, when one of the clerks tapped at the door, and, being told to enter, presented Mr. Begg with a card which bore the name of Bolsover Kimberley.

"Show the gentleman into this room," said Mr. Begg, and a minute later he had his wish, and beheld the new-fledged millionnaire. Poor Kimberley had lost no time in the adornment of the outer man, and he was carefully modelled on the lines which had been presented to his admiring mind by Mr. Ragshaw. The egregious glare of scarlet scarf, the buff waistcoat, the sky-blue morning coat with the rose in the button-hole, the drab dust overcoat thrown open to display these glories, the loud-patterned plaid trousers, the white gaiters, and the patent leather boots—all were there. Kimberley's fingers were cased in kid gloves of primrose colour; his all-round collar fixed his neck as if he had been pilloried; he carried a white hat and a tasselled walking cane with a gold knob; his watch was cabled to his waistcoat by a gorgeous golden fetter. To make matters worse, he was not merely overdressed, but he knew it, and looked as if he knew it. He perspired with shame and vain-glory, and his harmless countenance was a compendium of embarrassments. His meek whiskers drooped as if in deprecation of their owner's splendour, and his meek hair stood up in places as if it protested against any possible supposition of its own approval of the vulgar magnificences below it.

The old lawyer received him with gravity, and having shaken hands with him, offered him a seat, and talked trifles for a moment or two to put him at his ease. Then he began to speak of business, and Kimberley listened at first with a pitiable whirl in his head, but later on with some understanding. Mr. Begg was a great man, of course, and Kimberley had known of him almost from the beginning of his own legal career, but had never before been called upon to face him even for a moment. Messrs. Begg, Batter, and Bagg were undoubtedly the first solicitors in the county, and Mr. Begg was senior partner and a sort of monarch among country solicitors, like Kimberley's late employer. But the awe with which the clerk had always regarded him was melting away, and if he had been less burdened by his clothes, Kimberley would have felt almost at his ease. The announcement of the Earl of Windgall was like the bursting of a bombshell. There was nothing in the world which could have terrified him more.

"Pray show his lordship to this room at once," said the lawyer. "Have you met his lordship, Mr. Kimberley?" He asked the question in the most commonplace tone, and as if Kimberley to his certain knowledge had been on intimate terms with half the peerage. "If not, I shall be delighted to introduce you."

The visitor arose feebly with trembling limbs, and was indeed so alarmed that he found courage to protest.

"Not to-day, sir, if you please. I'm very sorry, but I'm——"

"You are not at all in the way, Mr. Kimberley, I assure you. I know his lordship's business, and shall not detain you more than a moment." His lordship entered and saluted Mr. Begg, disregarding Kimberley, though he knew perfectly well who he was. "Permit me to introduce Mr. Kimberley to your lordship." His lordship turned with a sort of delighted alacrity. "The Earl of Windgall, Mr. Kimberley."

The Earl of Windgall was a little man, but Kimberley was still smaller of stature. The nobleman carried himself, if not exactly like a nobleman, like a well-bred man of the world; and Kimberley shrank and shrivelled before him, so that the difference in physique was emphasised by attitude. There are lawyers' clerks in the world—so high a development has courage reached in man—who would endure a personal introduction to an Earl with a pretence of self-possession, but Kimberley had always been shy, and had never got out of the habit of being crushed by the lecturers whom it was his duty to receive in behalf of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Kimberley," said his lordship, shaking the wretched little man by the hand.

Mr. Kimberley gasped and gurgled in response, and his meek and distressed little figurehead looked curiously in contrast with the vulgar finery which decorated his person. The Earl took a seat and talked easily with Mr. Begg about the ordinary topics of the moment, and now and then a turn of the head plainly but unobtrusively included Kimberley, who began to feel less oppressed. Really an Earl did not seem to be so terrible a creature after all; and in a little time Kimberley began to plume himself in harmless trembling vanity upon sitting in the same room with a nobleman and a great lawyer, and to feel that he was somebody in the world after all.

Windgall had seen his perturbation, and gave him time to recover before he again addressed him.

"I hope," he said, after a time, but even then he spoke to the lawyer, "that Mr. Kimberley will see his way to a residence amongst us."

"I hope so too," said Mr. Begg, with an inquiring and encouraging eye on Kimberley; but the mere mention of his name had driven the millionnaire into his shell again.

"Property," said the Earl, with a little sigh, "entails responsibilities, of which no man can venture to be unmindful."

"The long minority of the late owner," said Mr. Begg, with a regretful air, "was a great grievance to the Gallowbay people—a great and legitimate grievance. Mr. Kimberley will be expected to spend a little time in Gallowbay. Perhaps," he rubbed his hands and laughed, "a little money."

"A good deal of trouble," said the millionnaire, with fatuous countenance, but with more wisdom than he was aware of, "seems to go along with having money." He blushed and looked unhappy, but having found his tongue, he managed to go on in spite of his discomfort. "But if you'll be so good, sir, as to let me know what I ought to do, I shall try to do it. The money might have come into 'ands that could dispense it better, but into none more willing, I'm sure."

"There is good sense and modesty in this young man," said the Earl to himself, trying hard to think his best of Mr. Kimberley.

It is not often that the effort to think well of any of our fellow-creatures makes us feel mean, but the Earl of Windgall was not proud of himself whilst he tried to think well of Bolsover Kimberley.

"I shall always be happy to advise you, Mr. Kimberley," said the lawyer.

He did not speak as a lawyer to a client, but as a man of experience to a man of inexperience, and Kimberley so understood him, and murmured that he would be very much obliged.

"I won't interrupt you further, Mr. Begg," said his lordship. "I am pleased to have met Mr. Kimberley, and I trust we shall see more of each other."

Mr. Kimberley blushed, and bowed in a prodigious flutter. The Earl of Windgall would be glad to see more of him! There is nobody who does not like to be flattered by his own good opinion; and to have been shy and humble all one's life is no defence against vanity if it really makes an assault. Whilst the lawyer saw the gracious nobleman downstairs, Kimberley struck into an attitude of mild swagger, and twirled his cane, though he blushed even as he did so. It crossed him with a thrilling sense of daring that he would shave off his whiskers and allow his moustache to grow. He might even take to wearing an eyeglass. Then even the Lady Ella might look at him, and for one minute might forget the lowliness of his first estate.

The Earl was driven homeward, and as he went he tried to persuade himself that he was weighing things in his mind, and trying to arrive at an honourable conclusion. In spite of himself he felt that he was engaged in a shameful enterprise. People would talk if he invited this gilded little snob to Shouldershott Castle, and would know very well why he was asked there. Let them talk. The man was a cad? There was no escape from that conclusion. Well —lots of men were cads.

"Caddom," said his lordship, with a flash of cynical humour, "is not monopolised by the peers. It isn't actually amazing to meet a cad who is a commoner!"

It was very shameful, all the same, to be fishing for a fellow whose only recommendation was his money.

"And a very good recommendation too, by gad!" said the poor peer. "A million and a quarter! And if I don't catch him, somebody else will, and the people who will be the most bitterly satirical will be the people who have failed."

CHAPTER IV.

THE Honourable John George Alaric Fitz-Adington Clare was the second son of Lord Montacute, a nobleman famous for his prodigious losses on the turf. To be as unlucky as Montacute had been almost a proverb among sporting men. His fortune had known no deviation: no big win had ever consoled him. In his youth he went to Baden with an infallible system, intent on breaking the bank; and, as does occasionally happen, in spite of the most infallible of systems, the bank broke him. He was, until his father died, as poor as Job after this escapade, but the kindly tribes helped him until he came into the family estates and married money. The man who at one-and-twenty could realise his all to set it on the hazard of the black and red, could thereafter borrow at exorbitant interest to lose his borrowings. When he came into his own he "went the whole elephant"—an elegant and expressive locution indicative of thoroughness in pursuit of an object—and whatever he could lose he lost. But for the entail and the marriage settlement he would have beggared his wife and children. The human intellect is so curiously arranged that there were people who admired him, and he was with many the type of the Good Old English Gentleman. He squandered money which was not righteously his own, he associated mainly with people who were miles beneath him in social state and education, he was an hereditary legislator and the boon companion of jockeys. A hard drinker, a bad husband, and a careless father, he was popular with the community he cared most to know, and he died lamented, a nobleman of the old school, whom the sporting prints mourned as the last, or almost the last, of his race.

He married an angel of a woman, and but that she was blessed with the care of children, he would have broken one of the sweetest hearts in the world. Lady Montacute had two sons, and she made it her study to breed them like Christian gentlemen. Even when lads do not remember all their mothers' lessons, they remember some of them, and the memory of the sorrowful soul who stayed at home and prayed for them kept them many a time out of mischief of the graver sort. She taught them her own simple religious creed, and if they forgot it, as boys do forget, they cherished, at least, a sort of heathen reverence for sacred things, and led lives which in the main were pure and wholesome.

The new Lord Montacute, poor as he was, was a model landlord, and he laid himself out to secure an honourable position in politics. The Honourable John, his brother, chose the profession of arms, and was a favourite alike with the men of his regiment and with his brother officers. The two young men, in short, conducted themselves with so much probity and good sense, had so high a code of honour, and were withal so genial and likeable, that the heart of their mother was glad in them, and her widowhood made atonement for the unhappiness of her married life.

It is not held to be convenient, even in the most leisurely circles, to speak of a man by so lengthy a style as that owned by the Honourable John George Alaric FitzAdington Clare, and it was the custom among his intimates to call the young gentleman Jack. The reader will acquit me of presumption if I follow that example. It is simply—I assure you—a matter of convenience.

He was a model of graceful strength, and had a plain English face, expressive of many pleasing qualities, amongst which candour and good humour were conspicuous. His hair was of a reddish chestnut hue, and his disposition was proportionately warm, hopeful, and impetuous. He was five-and-twenty years of age, had just got his troop, and was an almost universal favourite. Yet, in spite of all his advantages of youth, health, birth, and temperament, Jack Clare was unhappy, and his sorrows arose from one of the commonest of causes. The young man was in love, very loyally and honestly in love, and he had good reason to believe his passion hopeless.

There are few growths of social life so curious as the various conditions of poverty. Jack Clare had his pay and an allowance of three hundred pounds a year. The Lady Ella Santerre, to whom he was profoundly devoted, had in her own right an income about equal to her lover's, and she liked him well enough to have married him, if poverty's stern barrier could have been taken down. The young people, with the improvidence natural to youth, were ready to brave the world on this absurdly insufficient income, but the lady had a father who had known the grip of poverty all his life, and the young man had a mother who had felt its sting for many years, and the one commanding and the other persuading kept the two children out of mischief.

Jack, being quartered at Bryanstowe, was within an easy drive of Montacute Honour, and was naturally often to be seen at home. He made very creditable efforts to appear cheerful there, but both his mother and his brother could see through his artifices, and knew that he was taking his love affairs seriously. Lord Montacute was something of a Liberal amongst the Conservative Peers with whom he sat, and he was regarded by some of the more old-fashioned as being a little dangerous in his views, but Jack, who had never hitherto meddled with politics at all, began to have such awfully freethinking ideas that his elder brother trembled for him.

"I'll be hanged," he said one day, "if I can see the good of an aristocracy at all." Lord Montacute looked at his brother with an eye of doubtful expression. Was there a tile loose anywhere, or was there a joke in store? "We're all one flesh and blood," said Jack, "and I've got just as many toes and fingers as a ploughman has. And I'll tell you what it is, Charley. There's a smash coming—a break-up—here, there, and everywhere. We can't stand the racket, Charley. Those Radical fellows won't have us much longer unless we wake up and do something."

Lord Montacute answered only the concluding sentence of this discontented young man's address.

"The loyal party in the country is quite strong enough to hold the Radicals in check."

"I am not so sure of that," said Jack; "and even if it's true, I am not sure that it always will be, and I am not even sure that it ought to be."

"Jack," said Lord Montacute, "these are very serious opinions."

"They are, indeed," said Jack.

"They are crude and dangerous opinions," said Lord Montacute, with gravity. "The only way with them is to think them clearly out."

Then Jack Clare arose and delivered an harangue which well-nigh caused his noble brother's glossy and combined locks to part, and each particular hair to stand on end. Time had been, he declared, when an aristocracy had been useful to the world, and its growth a thing inevitable. Whilst the priesthood conserved learning, the aristocracy conserved or modelled manners, and created a heathen code of morals to supplement and perfect the code taught by the priests. Now their work was done, their day was over, the only thing left for them was to sing *Nunc dimittis* and gracefully retire. The chariot of public progress was coming down the road, and the aristocratic apple-cart would be overturned. Then, ceasing to be figurative and general, the young man proceeded to handle his own case, and to show by it that an hereditary aristocracy was placed in a false position.

"I am as poor as a rat, and I am not only poor, but I am a prisoner, I am hampered by ten thousand absurd conventions."

"Mention ten," said Montacute.

The Honourable Mr. Clare did not see his way to the immediate mention of ten. This kind of request is apt to be disconcerting to an orator, who must needs have a little fervour to get along with.

"If I were not a gentleman," he declared, "I should be free to choose whatever career seemed fittest for me."

"Do you propose to abolish gentlemen?" Montacute demanded.

"That's very well as repartee," said Jack, "but it isn't argument. I don't want to abolish a slave because I ask you to knock off his fetters. Why am I poor?"

"You are poor and I am poor," said Montacute, "for reasons which are best not talked about."

"I am poor," cried Jack, "because I am the son of a nobleman and the brother of a nobleman. I am poor by convention and general understanding. But I am not poor in reality. My little handful of money goes in things that are necessary to no man's happiness or well-being. If it were reasonably spent it would give me all a man need ask for. Apart from the conventions, I am wealthy. Restricted by the conventions, I am only not a pauper. And these same conventions, let me tell you, Charley, are blackguard and scoundrelly things. See what they lead to in our case. See what they can do, even with an angel of a woman like our mother: the best woman we ever knew, and most likely the best woman we ever shall know."

"What have the conventions done to our mother, Jack?" asked the other, seriously.

Jack shrugged his shoulders, and turned away with a blush upon his cheek.

"You know well enough. It doesn't need that a man should have to storm against them, when he knows that they have persuaded such a woman as she is that her own sons are doing well in trying to marry money."

Lord Montacute lit a cigar—it was in his own private den that this conversation was held—and smoked for a minute or two before he answered.

"Jack," he said then, "the murder's out."

Jack, standing at the window, shrugged his broad shoulders anew, and blushed a second time.

"The cat is out of the bag," said his lordship, and again Jack shrugged his shoulders. "These ideas are not political, but personal. I put it to your better judgment: Is it worth while to hold and express such sentiments as I have listened to—sentiments which, if translated into action, would lead to serious consequences, possibly to disastrous consequences, not because you have deliberately and patiently arrived at them by much thinking, but because you have formed an unfortunate attachment to a lady?"

Jack Clare responded, without turning from the window.

"I submit to *your* better judgment. Is there nothing at fault in the social rules which makes the attachment unfortunate? Why should the attachment be unfortunate? What is there in the nature of things to make it anything but fortunate?"

"The world was made for us, Jack," said the elder brother, not unsympathetically. "If we could make it over again, there are many things in it we might like to alter. But we have to endure it as it is, and, in the main, even as it stands, it's not a very bad world."

"It *is* a bad world," returned Jack, turning upon his brother somewhat hotly, "and at the bottom of your heart you know it. A world full of lies, and humbug, and pretences—a world full of cruelty, and oppression, and bitterness."

"Jack," said my Lord Montacute, from his stand near the fireplace, "I am only half-a-dozen years older than you are, but I have been through the mill myself, and I know what it is; and I'll tell you what I did all the time, and it's the identical thing I should advise you to do."

"You were always a superior person," said Jack, half humorous, half angry. "What did you do?"

"I held my jaw," said his lordship, watching the smoke of his cigar as it curled about him.

"All right," said Jack. "I can take a hint as well as my neighbours. I'll hold mine." He took a cigar from the open cabinet upon the table, lit it, and sat staring out of the window. By-and-by he asked, in a softened voice, "When was it, Charley?"

"When I was at Trinity," said Montacute, tranquilly.

"Who was she?"

Jack could lend a sympathising ear to an unprosperous love tale, when he could do it without looking sentimental, as he surely might do in the case of his own brother. "Who was she?"

"Little girl named Carmichael," answered Montacute, still staring at the smoke wreaths. "Cigar divan—opposite——"

"What?" cried Jack, rising with a gesture almost tragic. "You have the cheek to tell me that *you* have been through the mill, because you spooned a girl at a cigar divan before you were one-and-twenty! I supposed—if you honoured me with your confidence at all—that I should hear a story of lady and gentleman, and not of undergrad and shop-girl." He reseated himself, and smoked with a look of deep disgust, as if his tobacco were turned to wormwood. Lord Montacute smiled, and settled his shoulders against the mantel-shelf.

"King Cophetua wooed the beggar-maid," he answered, with no abatement of tranquillity. "You think the parallel between your case and mine unfair. I don't. A man can only be in love, just as he can only be dead. There are no comparatives—dead, more dead, most dead; in love, more in love, most in love. The thing is absolute, or it is a mere pretence. I was in love. I loathed the world, and I cursed social distinctions. Well, I got over it, and here I am, fairly happy, tolerably contented. But while the thing was on," he concluded, "I held my jaw."

"So I should imagine," said Jack, still mightily disdainful and disgusted.

Jack dined at Montacute Honour and drove back to barracks in the cool of the evening, beneath a moon which inspired all the quiet landscape, and seemed for all its peacefulness to be in some strange way in consonance with his own unsatisfied desire. It was unwise in him when he had reached his quarters and dismissed his man to take out from a secret drawer the photographic presentment of the Lady Ella, and bending over it beneath the lamp to stare at it for an hour together. It was unwise to call to mind all the sweet things the beautiful lips had said to him, and all the tender glances the lovely eyes had given him, before the edict went out for their separation. But this was a sort of unwisdom which is common with five-and-twenty, and not very reprehensible to the mind of the sternest sage who can remember the days of his own youth, when his heart was warm and tender. That we should all *have* to grow grey, my brethren! That there should be no help for it!

There were young ladies in Bryanstowe and its neighbourhood who thought well of Captain the Honourable John George Alaric FitzAdington Clare, and some of them had money enough to have kept his starven coffers full for life; but they knew that smiles were wasted on him. A military man, handsome and nobly born, who has a romantic attachment to a lady in his own station, is likely to be an object of friendly interest to the young women who happen to know him, and Jack's story was, somehow or other, abroad. Nobody is altogether sure as to the way in which these things come to be known; but the attempt to keep them secret is very rarely successful. And when it became known that Lady Ella was a visitor at the house of her late mother's dear friend, Lady Caramel, and was thus brought within a dozen miles of Bryanstowe, all the fashionable tongues of that quarter of the world, were busy with conjectures as to what would happen. It was universally admitted that the poor girl's mother would have known better than to have brought her into such close proximity to an old lover—unless, indeed, contrary to general belief, the attachment had only been on one side—and it was owned that a father could not be expected to act with any great prescience in such a matter. For one thing, during the London season, a good mother would have taken care that a marriageable daughter should be in town, where she might have a chance of forming a desirable union, though as a set-off against that argument it was urged that there were two or three very eligible gentlemen in the neighbourhood, who were at home in good society, and had money enough to make them welcome to so poor a noble family as the Windgalls.

Lady Ella came, and local eyes and tongues were busy. Lady Ella's time of stay was over, and she went away again. The Argus eye had noted nothing; but something had happened beyond its vision. It had been seen that Captain Clare had not accepted, if he had even received, a single invitation from Lady Ella's hostess, and that he had half-a-dozen times ridden out of town alone in the direction of Montacute Honour. But it was a secret buried in Jack's own breast that on each of these occasions he had turned off to the right, and had gone as straight as the roads would carry him towards the house which held his love. It was a secret from the prying eyes and gossiping tongues that he had prowled like a poacher about the park, eyeing the mansion from sheltered places like a thief, or a member of an Irish Brotherhood. It was a secret that on the occasion of the fifth of these visits (when, having left his horse at an obscure inn half-a-mile away, he had scaled the park-wall), he had been pounced upon by a wary gamekeeper, who prowling about without his gun was at no particular advantage, and not being at first amenable to reason had to be soundly thrashed and then propitiated with three sovereigns and the promise of more if he behaved himself in future. It was a secret also that a part of the reformed gamekeeper's good behaviour—for which Jack Clare gave him high credit, and afterwards, little as he could afford it, a five pound note—was the dexterous smuggling of a missive into the hands of Lady Caramel's maid, who in turn stuck it in the frame of the mirror in Ella's dressing-room That Lady Ella found the note and knew the handwriting, that she cried over it and kissed it, and that she kept the rendezvous it prayed for, were secrets also, as they had a right to be.

I should like to describe the Lady Ella before we go further with the history of her love affairs. She was proud and tender, and at once enthusiastic and reserved. She was truer in friendship than ninety-nine girls in a hundred, and she was not merely pretty but downright lovely, so that she impressed with a sort of gentle splendour all who beheld her. Her eyes and hair were as dark as an Englishwoman's well can be, the rich blood mantled in her cheek with any touch of emotion at music, or a lofty thought, or the recital of a good deed; her lips were sweet, rosy, and mobile. She smiled rarely, seeing how young she was, but when her smile came it atoned for rarity. She was tall for a woman, and in mould full and fine, and there was an inbred refinement in her which could only come of many generations of gentle living and high thinking. A female novelist has told us recently that the word "Lady" is odious. For my part, I like the word so well that it seems worthy to describe this delightful and high-bred young Englishwoman. It is only amongst people of the great Anglo-Saxon race that human products so exquisite are found, and there are few general possessions with which a rational patriot would not more readily part. A beautiful young woman is a benefaction to mankind at large, and when an old English stock flowers out in the full glory of perfect health and form and texture, with a nature serviceable and sweet to suit the frame it lives in, there is no wholesome human creature who can look upon that delicious growth without pleasure.

In spirit Jack Clare used to go upon his knees to her whenever he thought about her, and when, on this especial day, he saw her coming through the sunlit woods to meet him, she was like the creature of another sphere to him.

"Jack," she said, with only a half-reproach in her candid eyes, "this is wrong and foolish."

"Don't say that, dear," answered Jack appealingly.

"I must say it," she responded. "It is wrong, because you promised me——"

"I know," said Jack mournfully.

"It is foolish, because it pains you, and can do no good."

"Pains me?" said Jack, in tender scorn. "Pains me! If you knew how I love you, Ella, you would never think so!"

"Hush!" she said. "You must not talk so."

"I must," he answered. "I have come to make a last appeal, Ella. If you care at all to know it, and I think you do, I love you as I don't think a man ever loved a woman before. I must speak, darling, if it is for the last time. We have very little, but we have enough, and I have been thinking how slavish and poor it is to sit down here in this worn-out country and let the social weeds grow over us until they shut out our last glimpse of sunlight, when we might go away and be free and happy, and perhaps a little useful in the world. If I sell my commission and realise everything"—she raised her hand against him, but he took it in both his own and went on in spite of warning—"I shall have eleven thousand pounds, and with that in New Zealand, or Australia, or Manitoba, or wherever the chances are best and brightest, I could buy land and cultivate it, or rear sheep or cattle, and own more acres and have more money by-and-by than ever the Windgalls and the Montacutes owned in all their idle lives. Give me just a word of hope, darling, and I'll go out and work as many years as Jacob served Laban."

It seemed to him so possible, so reasonable, so natural that she should see his scheme as he saw it, that his grey eyes flashed with anticipations of triumph, and the diffidence with which he had begun melted into thin air.

"You pain yourself," she said, looking at him with eyes of pity. "Jack, dear,"—he held her hand still, and at this sweet address he thrilled and trembled; she had never spoken so since they were children—"if I seem cruel now it is only to save you from more pain and trouble. It is all quite hopeless and impossible." She did not shrink from his imploring eyes, though her heart ached as sorely as his own. "I must stay with my father till he sends me away."

"Till he marries you to some man you can never care for!" cried Jack; "some snob with money, Ella. You can't do it. You can't submit to it. It's against nature." Her glance reproached him, and he knew that it was scarcely manly to have spoken so. "I beg your pardon, darling. If I could see you happy I shouldn't mind so much."

"I came to see you, dear," she said steadily, "because I could tell you so much better than I could have written it. It is all quite hopeless and impossible. I can't break my father's heart, and I have to stay with him. Good-bye, Jack. The longer you delay the harder it will be to say it. Good-bye!"

There was no use in lingering, and he knew it, and yet he was fain to linger.

"Well," he said, summoning all the resolution his sore heart could hold, "good-bye. I shan't trouble you again. I'm not going to wear my heart on my sleeve for fools to laugh at. It's hard to say it, but good-bye. God bless you! Oh, God bless you!"

He kissed the gloved hand twice or thrice, and turned away. Once, when he had gone a hundred yards, he looked back, and could see her standing amongst the trees where he had left her. She waved her hand to him, and he went on again. When next he turned the intervening trees had hidden her, and he could not tell that she was kneeling in the fern and crying. He did not think she loved him well enough for that — it seemed almost like a sacrilege of her to dare to think that she loved him at all.

He crept half-dispiritedly to his horse and rode to quarters, where he threw a boot at his batman, and sat smoking alone for hours in dogged misery. She went back to her hostess, dressed and dined, and sang and played after dinner, managing her griefs so well that nobody guessed them. They were as real as her lover's for all that, but it was better for him to think her cold to him than to break his heart because she was breaking hers.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. William Amelia found his lines in fairly pleasant places at the office of the *Gallowbay Whig*, but he occupied almost the whole of his leisure in looking about for avenues to fortune. Ambition spurred him, and he was ready to scorn delight and live laborious days. At present his sphere was narrow, and found but small employment for his energies. He had no great native tendency to study, and for a young man who had entered even upon the outskirts of the kingdom of literature he was amazingly ill-read. He knew nothing of history or of poetry or fiction. But in the parliamentary debates, and in the leading articles of the newspapers, there is a prodigious amount of scattered knowledge of a handy sort, and these supplied Mr. Amelia's mind with most of the pabulum it drew from foreign sources. With one little leg cocked over the other, and his small person, compact big head and up-standing hair obscured by an open sheet of the *Times*, he would skim through the debates with searching vision, and long to scarify this or the other honourable gentleman who ran his head against fact or common sense, or reasoned right from wrong premises or wrong from right ones. The young gentleman had had no training in logic, but he knew what the thing was notwithstanding, and false reasoning made him angry. He was often angry when he read the debates in Parliament, and felt, as Hamlet did, that the world was out of joint.

At these times of office leisure Mr. Flinch would sit in his respectable frock coat with his well-oiled hair fitting close to his head, and would practise shorthand.

"Ah say!" would Mr. Flinch exclaim, with an accent of triumph. "What d'ye think o' that for a phraseogram, Mr. Amelia? 'I have reason to believe that you have already received the articles in question.' Ah can write that in Pitman's system without takin' the pen off the paper."

"Indeed!" Mr. Amelia would respond, appearing from behind his *Times* as if he were getting out of bed, and then would glance at Mr. Flinch's invention, and retire again.

Mr. Maddox, with his pipe in his mouth and his volume of fiction or of verse before him, would generally look up and laugh at these times.

"How often do you think you'll want to write that sentence, Flinch?"

"That's mah business," Mr. Flinch would answer.

"Don't you ever get tired of eating sawdust, Flinch?"

"Eating sawdust?" cries Flinch. "Nah, what's the fool talkin' about? Ah niver mentioned eating anything. I was talkin' abaht shorthand."

"So was I," from the satiric Maddox

"You're a liar," responds Mr. Flinch, whose weapons of controversy are unpolished.

When things came to this pass, as they

generally did, the seedy junior reporter would drop his book and burst into a shout of laughter disproportionate to the occasion. Then the mild Rider would enter from his own den and look about him for an explanation of the jest. A very small joke served to break the monotony of office life at the *Gallowbay Whig*.

"Flinch was born in Bœotia," said the junior, on one such occasion, "and was expelled by a catapult, so that he picked up no civilising influences by the way."

"Ah was born in Rotherham," Mr. Flinch answered, "and I niver was expelled from anywhere. And I won't have these things said abaht me. Mind that, Mr. Maddox."

Then the mild Editor made peace, when the disreputable junior had done laughing, and to soothe Mr. Flinch's wounded feelings invited him to dinner. Mr. Flinch, whose salary was not large and whose habits were enforcedly penurious, became gracious at the prospect of a dinner for nothing, and took airs of patronage with his subordinate. Mr. Rider, going back to the manufacture of his column of local notes, bethought him that it was invidious to bid one member of the staff to dinner and exclude the others, and after some battling with himself and many extricately figured reckonings of ways and means, shuffled into the reporters' room again and shyly asked the chief and the junior to be his guests on the same day. They accepting, he retired again, and went over his figures once more somewhat sadly, not seeing his way to an added expenditure of ten shillings, and dreading a domestic explosion.

Whatever domestic difficulties were encountered in the interim the dinner took place on the appointed Sunday at two o'clock, and the three reporters turned up in time, Mr. Amelia appearing in a tall hat and new gloves, Mr. Flinch scrupulously respectable as usual, and Mr. Maddox unexpectedly clean in honour of the ladies. Mrs. Rider was a thin and careworn woman, whose constant complaint it was that her nose was never away from the grindstone. The actual feature was thin and red, as if the figure were to be taken literally, and the poor woman, who had a big family and a wofully small income, was much put to it to make ends meet. The three grown-up girls were present at table, and the members of the staff were introduced with his favourite manner of mildly humorous pomp by the editor. Junior members of the family were heard scuffling and fighting in an upper room, and once or twice, maddened by the knowledge that pastry was in the house, and stung by the unwonted presence of apples, nuts, and oranges for dessert, they broke into organised rebellion, and descended in a body. These outbreaks overwhelmed the girls with confusion, and threw the head of the house into great discomfort, and it was then that the junior showed himself worth his dinner, rattling off gay stories (gathered from many years' back numbers of the *Family Herald*, whose "Random Readings" supply a section of society with harmless facetiæ), and otherwise taking upon his own shoulders the burden of entertainment.

An incident occurred which made this dinner an historical point in the career of Mr. Amelia. It arose in this way. The ladies having withdrawn, and the editor and Mr. Maddox having each set his pipe going, the talk drifted about the public affairs of Gallowbay until mention of one Major Septimus Heard was made, and the junior was found to be suddenly choking with smoke and laughter. Being patted on the back by the editor he recovered, and assumed an aspect of preternatural gravity until Mr. Flinch, who naturally imagined that he was the object of any mirthful manifestation which might occur in his neighbourhood, took up the matter as being personal to himself, and demanded an explanation.

Being much enforced by Flinch, the junior at length drew from his pocket a copy of yesterday's paper and read gravely:

"The gallant Major concluded by observing, amidst great applause, that however it might recommend itself to the general opinion, it occurred to him that in goodness lay the only genuine nobility, that kind hearts were infinitely preferable to coronets, and that simple faith was more to be esteemed than Norman blood."

"Flinch," said the junior, beginning to gasp again, "has been editing Tennyson."

"What's the matter?" cried Mr. Flinch, "Ah've got it on my notes. It's what he said, Mr. Rider. Ah'll swear it's what he said, only, of course, he didn't put it in such flowing language. I think," he added with a touch of pity, "Maddox is laughin'-mad. He's always on the grin."

"Dear me, Mr. Flinch," said the editor, putting on his glasses and reaching out for the paper. "This is a serious mistake — a very serious error. That is a verse of poetry. Quite a well-known verse of poetry. Dear me." He read it sadly and folded it upon his knees. "What makes it the more lamentable is the fact that Major Septimus Heard is sole proprietor of the *Whig*. That is a secret, gentlemen," he added a moment later, looking around him with a countenance of added distress, "which I ought never to have revealed. I was, in point of fact, pledged to secrecy about it, but the shock of this mistake—dear me. Gentlemen, I am sure I may rely upon you to respect Major Heard's wishes, though I have myself been betrayed into an inadvertence."

"If he'd only said, 'as the poet says,' ah'd have gone and asked him for the quotation," said Mr. Flinch defiantly; "but he didn't. He just reeled it off as if it was out of his own head. And you know what Pitman says, Mr. Rider—the function of a reporter is to make good speeches for bad speakers. That's what they call the peroration, and you always reckon to touch the peroration up a bit."

"Major Heard is a very precise man, indeed," said the editor, whose spirits were altogether dashed by the discovery.

"It's nothing, after all, sir," said the junior, trying to make light of it. "I oughtn't to have mentioned it, but it was nothing but a joke to me, and I thought we should all enjoy it. If he comes and makes a row about it, sir, tell him I did it. I don't mind."

"A knowledge of general literature," said the mild man, "is essential to journalistic pursuits."

"Ah don't think," said Mr. Flinch, with a vengeful look at the junior, "that a man can be expected to have literature at his fingers' ends for thirty shillings a week."

"No, Mr. Flinch," said the editor, "not for thirty shillings a week, but for the love of knowledge and the charms of fiction and the delights of poetry. My brother," he went on inoffensively, "had a very fine business connection as an ironmonger. He was entirely a self-made man, as I am"—Mr. Amelia smiled—"and he offered me a partnership in the concern; but though it restricted me to narrower means I preferred the literary life. There is not much pure literature in the conduct of a weekly newspaper," he added, with his own languid and weary smile; "but there is a certain mental atmosphere in it, after all, which one would miss behind an ironmonger's counter. One feels conscious at times of directing the minds of the masses." His wandering glance fell upon the paper on his knees, and the look of distress his forehead had worn a minute or two before returned. "Dear me — this is a melancholy error. We will say no more about it now, but we must exercise greater vigilance in the future."

"I don't see how anybody cares to live without reading," said the blunder-headed junior, not meaning to tread on anybody's corns, but offending two out of the three who heard him. "If there were no books in the world I'd cut my throat."

Mr. Amelia said nothing, but it crossed his mind that in such a case the loss of literature would not be without its compensations. He was not a young man who liked to feel inferior, and he made up his mind that, much as he hated poetry, he must begin to read it as a duty.

"I'm sorry for poor old Rider," said the junior, when he and his chief left the editor's house pretty early in the afternoon. "The editorship of the *Whig* is a poor berth for a man with a big family. And he's really a man of very surprising learning. Good Latinist—fair Grecian—knows French and German thoroughly—knows Orr's 'Circle of the Sciences' by heart. You can't mention an event in history but he knows the date of it."

"General knowledge is a good thing, no doubt," said Mr. Amelia; "but what's the use of having a bag of tools if you don't know how to handle them? Money's a good thing, but it isn't serviceable on a desert island. Mr. Rider can't use his tools. He has gone to live on a desert island—one might suppose that he was born there—and there's nothing to buy for all the coins he has gathered." He walked as if he had deluded himself into the belief that he was seven feet high. "A man's mind must be naturally expert," he said, "before any of the tools of knowledge can be useful to him. The expert man" (he was thinking of himself) "can make use of rough and simple tools. The clumsy-minded man may be furnished with the most delicate appliances for labour, but he can do nothing."

"Rider isn't a clumsy-minded man, by any means," said Maddox; and this observation awoke Mr. Amelia to the danger of reposing too much confidence in the junior. "He writes very charming verses."

"Mr. Rider was not in my mind when I used the expression," said Mr. Amelia, unblushingly. "The aphorism was general, and was not intended for particular application."

That sentence was a quotation from Friday's

Times, and it came in usefully. Mr. Amelia learned a great deal in later years, and before he reached his present exalted position his native dexterity of mind had made informal studies profitable to him; but at that time he could not have told you with any clearness what he supposed an aphorism to be. It was a good alternative word for "remark," or "observation," and it gave an air of finish to the sentence. Mr. Amelia, who had no great mental stock as yet, contrived as good a show for the shop window as his neighbours. He was alert in the search for showy goods; but he was never audacious and rarely adventurous in displaying them, so that when they went into the window they looked natural there, and persuaded the observer that a large assortment might be found within.

Now this art of seeming to know a great deal whilst knowing very little is pre-eminently the journalistic art, and Mr. Amelia had done well in selecting journalism as his profession. No man can long pursue the calling without learning much (though the cram of to-day drives out the cram of yesterday as often as not), but it is not necessary to know anything an hour before you handle it for the edification of the world. What Sir Blaise Delorme believed was "much, but nowise certain," and a practised journalist's knowledge is like Sir Blaise's belief. Mr. Amelia looked for success with an eye almost prophetic in its certainty of vision, but he did not know as yet how curiously qualified he was to attain it.

He and the junior parted, and he went home thinking chiefly of Rider's unfitness for practical struggle with the world. That he could discover a verse of a popular poem even in the disguise of newspaper English was but a poor compensation for his want of energy and knowledge of the world. What a much smarter paper the *Whig* might be if edited by William Amelia than it now was—edited by John Hawkes Rider! Mr. Maddox had surprised a secret which might be useful to Mr. Amelia, and the little man turned it over in his mind. He had once or twice inquired after the proprietors—Mr. Rider had always spoken of proprietors—and he had been met with mystery. Now, Major Septimus Heard was a well-known figure in Gallowbay, and it was said that at the next election he would contest the borough in the Liberal interest. It was known that he had already expressed his intention to retire from active military duties. It would undoubtedly be useful to Mr. Amelia that Major Heard should know that he had an energetic, smart, and attentive man as chief of his reporting staff; and here was an opportunity for letting him know it.

It befell next morning that Major Septimus Heard, who was in temporary command of his regiment at Bryanstowe, sat at breakfast in his own quarters with Jack Clare as his guest. Jack and the Major were staunch friends, and the elder was greatly esteemed by the younger, who regarded him as being in all things the very soul of honour, and made his judgment a final court of appeal in many things, as ingenuous young officers will with seniors whom they trust and like. The Major was elderly, and was thought by some of the youngsters of the regiment a shade too grave for a good fellow. He had a long hooked nose, a grizzled head, and a great sweeping grey moustache which he habitually fondled with his left hand. He was terrible to evil-doers, and in the frequent absence of the lieutenant-colonel, who was often on the sick-list, old offenders trembled at the prospect of appearing in the orderly-room, whilst first offenders were held to be lucky in coming before him.

"Light up," said the Major, thrusting a box of cigars across the table, "and if you don't mind I'll have a look at my letters."

Jack selected a cigar and pushed back the box. The Major helped himself also, and for the space of two or three minutes there was silence, till on a sudden the senior officer arose with a profane ejaculation.

"Hillo!" said his companion. "Anything the matter?"

Major Heard read to the end of the letter which had so disturbed him, and then gravely dropped it before Jack Clare.

"Read that," he said.

"It's marked 'private and confidential,'" said Jack.

"Never mind that," replied the Major. "Read it." Jack began. "Read it aloud," said the Major; "let us enjoy it together."

"Sir," read Jack, "as Chief Reporter of the *Gallowbay Whig*, I was greatly annoyed to observe the absurd close of the report of your excellent speech which appears in this day's issue of that journal. The report was unfortunately entrusted to a subordinate member of the staff, who was ignorant of the verse you quoted. I beg to assure you that no such solecism shall again occur. That it should have occurred at all naturally points to incompetence in more than one direction. I learn from Mr. Rider that you are proprietor of the *Gallowbay Whig*, and I venture to submit to you that Mr. Rider's business as a stationer and general printer absorbs somewhat too much of his time to permit of his giving such full attention to its affairs as the prosperity of the journal demands. If you should regard the application I now venture to make in a favourable light, I shall be glad to devote the whole of my time and attention to the interests of the journal. It is a matter of public rumour that at the next election you will contest the borough in the Liberal interest, and if this rumour be justly founded, it is all the more essential that the editor of the *Whig* should be abreast of the times. I am not aware of the rate at which Mr. Rider's services are remunerated, but I shall be happy to undertake the position he occupies, and to accept a reduction of his salary to the extent of twenty-five per cent.

"I am, Sir, yours very truly,

"WILLIAM AMELIA."

"That," said the Major, pulling at his moustache as if it were a bell-rope, "is what is called by the working-classes 'ratting,' which does not mean to hunt rats, but to play the rat. The phrase appears to me to be just and appropriate."

"What shall you do about it?" asked Clare, throwing the letter on the table.

"I shall send it to Rider," said the Major, grimly.

"Won't that be rather nasty for the fellow that wrote the letter?" Jack demanded. "Besides, he marks it 'private.'"

"Do you tell me, Captain Clare," cried the grizzled Major, "that you would respect the appeal for privacy from an assassin like this, sir? A snake in the grass, begad, sir, who—who bites the hand that feeds him? Why, sir, would you believe it, this man Rider, who is a very estimable man indeed, a very estimable man, has held the position for twelve years, and he gave this young man, who now addresses me, employment? Gave employment, sir, to the man who now tries to undermine him! Respect his appeal for privacy, sir? No. I will teach the young man a lesson."

With that he cleared a space upon the table, and setting down a writing desk upon it proceeded, with occasional ejaculations of "low scoundrel" and "I'll teach the fellow," to write two notes, which, when finished, he read aloud, with fiery emphasis. The first was addressed to Mr. Amelia, and ran thus:

"SIR,

"I have forwarded your polite letter to Mr. Rider.

"SEPTIMUS HEARD."

I 2

The second read: "My dear Rider, I received the enclosed this morning, and have no more respect for the writer's desire for secrecy than I should have if I saw him trying to pick another man's pocket in a more usual way. I have informed him of the fact that I have forwarded this letter to you. I may take this opportunity of expressing my most cordial approval of the manner in which the *Whig* is conducted." And then, "I am, my dear Rider, yours sincerely," followed by the signature of a man who writes with a broad quill in angry earnest. Having declaimed these epistles, with much striding to and fro, and frequent wavings of his cigar, the Major strode to the table and dashed off a postscript. "Give the fellow a month's wages and send him about his business." This he also declaimed, and having enveloped the letters, rang his bell, and on the servant's appearance ordered him to the post at once. "Begad, sir," he cried, turning upon Jack Clare, who was smiling at the Major's wrath, "that any man should dare to address such an epistle to me is an insult to my honour. Does the fellow take me for a huckster with his infernal bribe of twenty-five per cent. Confound him!"

When on that same Monday afternoon Mr. Rider met the postman at his door and took from his hand two letters addressed in the character of Major Septimus Heard, he felt that his time had come. He was by nature a nervous and self-distrustful man, and he was persuaded within himself that the proprietor had sent him his dismissal, and had by the same post conferred brevet rank upon Mr. Amelia. There was no other hypothesis on which he could ground a reason for the two letters, and for a time he feared to open his own. Then it occurred to him that Mr. Amelia was upstairs in the office, and he might perhaps venture a guess as to the nature of his own letter if the Chief Reporter read his first. So with a fast-beating heart he ascended the narrow staircase and pushed aside the door.

"A letter for you, Mr. Amelia."

The handwriting was strange to Mr. Amelia, and he opened the envelope with no emotion, but reading the contents of the letter at a glance he started, and stared at Rider with so curious an aspect that the poor man took his fears for certainties, and moved dejectedly with bent head into his own den. When at last he dared to open the missive addressed to himself the first words that met his eye were, "cordial approval of the manner in which the Whig is conducted." Was it all a mistake, then? He read the letter and its postscript and then turned to the enclosure. This fairly staggered him, because to his simple and unselfish mind it looked like perfidy, and he had never met anybody who had acted perfidiously before. He did not know how to deal with the case, and the thought of meeting Mr. Amelia and putting him to further shame was intolerable to his meek and easy-going nature. It seemed to him inevitable that a man detected in such a proceeding should be ashamed, but he did not take it into his scheme of the thing at all that Mr. Amelia might think otherwise.

That young gentleman's mental attitude was one of almost unmitigated amazement. He was shocked—unaffectedly shocked at the conduct of

Major Septimus Heard, and for a moment his belief in human rectitude was scattered ; but his amazement transcended the shock. Major Heard was spoken of by everybody as a man of honour! That he himself had done a mean thing did not even occur to him. Probably it was impossible that such an idea should approach him in any circumstances, for he was quite persuaded that if a thing seemed mean to him he would not do it. Of course he had not desired the editor to know of his efforts to supplant him, however it might have turned out; but his offer was a fair one and in the way of business, and he felt bitterly that a confidential communication had been shamelessly abused. Well! he would know better with whom to trust the secret of his desires in future! Major Septimus Heard and Mr. Rider were probably friends, and being friends were probably birds of a feather. It was a pity to have sacrificed his place, for he saw clearly that he would have to go. Taking it altogether he felt as if he had been martyred.

It is a little curious, seeing for what a length of time the world has been going, that there never has been any serious recognition of the fact that Virtue is the most fluid of all qualities. Did it ever enter the mind of any philosopher to say that virtue is identical with self-approval? If a man were conscious of no inward virtue he would die. Even remorse raises a man to the height of his own heart, and tells him that there is something in him which can rebel at baseness, though the baseness be his own.

Mr. Amelia felt that he had been betrayed.

When the shy, mild editor at last found strength of mind to creep from his den and laid Major Heard's letter before him, together with its enclosure, he felt ill at ease and humiliated, but undeservedly. When Mr. Rider, without a word, handed him an open cheque for eight pounds, drawn on the Gallowbay Bank, he understood that this was his dismissal, and went his way. He cashed the cheque, and called at the post-office on his way to his lodgings. There he procured an order for two pounds, the promised quarter of his salary. He wrote a dutiful letter to his mother, telling her that his engagement at the *Gallowbay Whig* had come to an unfortunate close; that he had a little money in hand, and sent her a share of it, and assured her of his best efforts for her future and his own. Then he packed up his small belongings, paid his landlady an arranged percentage on her claim for a week's notice, and took train for London.

"I have learned a lesson," he said to himself; and truly, though it was not the lesson many men would have learned. "This need not turn out a misfortune, after all. At any rate, I can try one back fall with London."

CHAPTER VI.

Fleet Street (the ear of England) listens day and night to the clicking of electric messengers, who travel over great tracts of land, and under ocean spaces, with tidings of peace and war, of the coronations and deaths of kings, of the rise in jute and the fall in indigo. Keen-faced men sitting walled away from the constant racket of traffic, say to the special correspondent "go," and straightway he goeth, to New York, to Vienna, to Timbuctoo, to Kamschatka, to the celebration of a century of republican freedom, to the silver wedding of a royal couple, to famine, pestilence, or war. And the keen-faced men say to the leader-writer "come," and he cometh, and at the word of command sitteth down to teach Ministers the art of government, generals the art of war, and the whole race of grandmothers the art of sucking eggs. Here the great human passion of Gossip, cramped no longer, finds room and breathing space. The world tells Fleet Street everything, and Fleet Street tells the world again, with tagged surmises, comments, diatribes, and exhortations. There are in Fleet Street full a hundred temples to this great human passion of gossip, and in every one of them, the great high priest, and all the lesser priests, and all the acolytes (called reporters), listen and babble, listen and babble, listen and babble without ceasing from one year's end to another.

Mr. Amelia, passing through Temple Bar for the first time, knew that he had come upon these magic precincts, and his keen glance wandered hither and thither as he walked, reading the names of scores of journals, to the fortunes of any one of which he was willing to attach himself.

"The traditional Lord Mayor," he said to himself, "always comes to London with one half-crown in his pocket. I start with forty and a spare twopence."

He felt in his waistcoat pocket for his solitary five-pound note, and assured himself of its continued presence there. He trod the pavement like a gamecock, and felt that he had come to conquer. He was resolved to conquer, but resolution gave him no cue, and he could not guess where to attack. He walked until he came to Ludgate Hill, and standing at the foot saw and recognised the great dome of St. Paul's. He needed these occasional reminders to assure him that he was really in London.

The Farringdon Road was useless to him, the Blackfriars Road offered him nothing, Ludgate was barren for his purposes. He turned back towards Temple Bar and took the footpath on the right-hand side. Here he jostled against a great author, whom he recognised by his likeness to the published portraits of him, and that momentary contact seemed a thing of good omen. A moment later he saw the name of a certain chop-house inscribed upon a lamp which hung over a narrow, covered way; a house famous among pressmen for a generation or two, and even at this day, supposed in country places to harbour the very genius of journalism, though in reality the tide of fashion has fallen away from it and left it high and dry. Bohemia's citadel is deserted. The great MacGuffog, the amiable Dexter, supposed to know by heart the reference library at the Museum, and crowned king of ready writers; Wobbler of the droll wit and strident voice, fresh from the law courts with a new story of how he had set down the Bench, and now away to write his daily funny leader;—these and many of the rest are yet alive, but the clubs have caught them, or they love the home arm-chair too well to leave it for the sawdusted floor and the bleared gleam of the gas that winks against the dreary daylight in that old resort. You may as well seek the big-wigged guests of the days of Queen Anne, who, as almost everybody knows, are dead and buried, like their royal mistress.

In Mr. Amelia's first days in London the house was still the occasional resort of people eminent in the journalistic world, and it was not without reasonable hope of rubbing shoulders with some one or two of them that he entered, and standing at the cramped little bar-window—vanished now like the guests who used to stand about it—demanded a glass of pale ale, and paid his twopence. A portly man, with brown eyes full of fun, was telling a story to half-a-dozen listeners, who gathered close to catch the subdued tones of the narrator, and every now and again broke away from him to laugh with bent shoulders and stamping feet. Mr. Amelia, arguing from the brown eyes and the look of humour, thought this might possibly be the great Dexter, but suddenly the narrator broke off short with a cry of "Dexter, come here," and the novice saw the great man, mild-eyed, white-waistcoated, with a flower at his buttonhole. The other, who could thus familiarly hail him, must certainly be somebody out of the common. Whilst the story was retold, the undersized, red-headed waiter scattered the group without concern, and flung unintelligible orders upstairs, while chop-house guests, full or hungry, jostled them on their way to or from the eating-room.

By-and-by two new-comers, who nodded

familiarly at the great ones—assuredly great because in Dexter's company—attracted Mr. Amelia's attention, and their conversation, which was carried on in a loud tone, became interesting to him.

"Ye tould me," said one, "that Barney was out o' collar."

"So he is," said the other, "and in deadly low water tew."

"Anybody might know you were a poet," said the first, "be the lovely mingling of your similes. What's he doin'?"

"Oi left 'm chewin' his silver toothpick. Divil the thing else is left 'm to chew."

"Gammon!" cried the first speaker. "What's a man want to sit down for, and grind his teeth for need o' grist in London? A journalist that knows his way about is loike Autolycus, me boy, if ever ye heard o' the gentleman. There's matter for a hot brain everywhere. Every lane's end, every shop, church, session, hanging, yields a careful man work. If I were out o' collar, what do ye think I'd do? Sit down and chew a toothpick? Not I, when there's half-a-guinea to be earned for an occasional note for the *Piccadilly* —a stickful o'matter, and no more."

"That's all right," said the second; "but where to find the stickful?"

"Where to find it? Anywhere! Prowl round St. Paul's till ye find a statue with its nose knocked off. Then go to the Readin' Room at the British Museum, and find out all about the broken nose's original, and do twelve lines of public virtue in English, lamenting the decay into which the memorial of the hero or divine, or whatever he is, has been allowed to fall. Work at the thing for a week, if you loike. Dew an article about it, chopped into nice little pars, so that the editor can stick 'em in among the notes. When ye've done that, come to me and I'll give y' a tip a day for twelve months, gratis. There's just one little requirement they have at that same office of the *Piccadilly*, though, an' maybe Barney's a little weak-kneed there."

"What is it?"

"English. The well of English undefoiled, me choild. Not Reportese, but English pure and simple!—unadorned, like this." He held up his glass and eyed it fondly. "Bill," he said, with sudden feeling—he had spoken until now with a light and almost sportive manner—"it's the best whisky in London."

Mr. Amelia finished his modest glass of bitter beer, and found himself again in Fleet Street, conscious that he had not invested his twopence unworthily. He felt inclined to run to St. Paul's Cathedral, lest the unknown Barney should be before him. Half-a-guinea for a dozen lines! Could that stupendous news be true? London was indeed paved with gold if one had the eyes to see it. Autolycus—if that were the name of the person whom the Irish gentleman had mentioned—was undoubtedly right. Matter for a hot brain everywhere—every lane's end yielding work! He would buy the *Piccadilly* before he wrote a line, would study it, and master its style. English? Well, he thought he could write English. That is a common delusion.

There were no statues with broken noses in St. Paul's, but there were some signs of dilapidation and decay, which he carefully noted—quite enough to justify the call of popular attention.

Some of the worthies whose monuments were thus neglected he had heard of, others were strange to him, but he booked them all, and got away to the British Museum Library in time to find it closed. His journey, however, was not altogether fruitless, for he learned the form of the necessary application for a reader's ticket, and sent it in that evening. All night and all next day, whilst by a temporary permit he explored the library shelves, he was haunted by the visionary Barney. Any of the men who sat at the silent stalls reading and writing might be Barney; any one of the cluster of ladies might be his *locum tenens*, his wife, sister, or other feminine aid.

He wrote his notes on the neglected memorials in the library itself, and he trimmed them as well as he could. At Gallowbay he had been told that he wrote a fair sub-leader, and before Gallowbay he had felt himself warranted in advertising himself as a smart paragraphist; but between the provinces and London there is a gulf, and the thought that he was writing for the *Piccadilly* made him nervous, and almost for the first time in his life self-distrustful. This, however, was so unaccustomed a sensation, and so little native to him, that it soon withered, and as he walked to the office of the journal, bearing his copy and a neat little letter to the editor, his spirits rose higher and higher, until it seemed that the baseness of Major Septimus Heard had really made the fortune of the Major's victim. He handed his small packet to an uninterested boy behind a counter, and went home to await the result. He bought the *Piccadilly* that evening and next day with no effect but that of disappointment, and had began to nourish the poorest opinion of the judgment of the famous journalist who presided over its destinies. But on the third day he ventured another penny, and lo! he was in type in a London journal. A fig for Gallowbay! A fico for the world and worldlings base—like Major Septimus Heard. It dashed him a little to find his superfine sentences all rewritten, but his hand was still recognisable, and when the first sense of chagrin was over he set himself to discern the difference between his draft and the printed paragraph, and to make out the reason of it. To believe in himself so profoundly as he did and yet have common sense and humility enough for that argued well for his chances of advancement. He told himself so, though in another way.

"I wonder if that gentleman is still chewing his silver toothpick," he said, with a triumphant sense of humour, when he thought of the visionary Barney, probably still out of collar. It seemed something of a wonder to him that he had ever fancied it worth his while to be editor of the *Gallowbay Whig*, when in his first three days in London he had been able to find foothold in a place so lofty.

This question of public monuments could not yet be worn out, and he decided to exploit it thoroughly. Westminster Abbey should be his next stalking-ground.

His little cuffs and his collar were spotlessly white and irreproachably unwrinkled, his own hands had polished his neat little boots, *à merveille*, his hat was brushed, and his umbrella was rolled with scrupulous exactness. The day, for London, was lovely, and Mr. Amelia, though he took little note of the manifestations of nature either in town or country, was sensible to her influences, and walked the more briskly for the brightness of the weather. He reached the stately old pile, and plunged into it businesslike, intent on ten and sixpence per paragraph. The organ was rolling a solemn wind of sound, and the voices of the choir-boys were soaring in it, while the echoes murmured of the peace which only dwells within hearing of choir and organ in sacred places. Peace has many moods, but the peace of the abbey and the cathedral is theirs alone. With his hat in one hand and his umbrella in the other, Mr. Amelia paced the various aisles, and kept a keen eye on the main chance, but by-and-by a verger laid a hand on him, and directed him to be seated until the service should be over. Obeying this injunction, and beguiling the time by an examination of the scattered worshippers, he became aware of Mr. Bolsover Kimberley, who sat, with his shy whiskers drooping, and his meek eyes turned towards the roof, on a bench to Mr. Amelia's right.

He was attired in gorgeous raiment, in which he would have looked as appropriate perhaps beneath the light of the sacred lamp of burlesque, as in that of the stained windows of the Abbey, but his mood was unmistakably devotional. He had forgotten himself and his clothes and the dreadful weight of his money, and he was away on the wings of the music as high as his heart could carry him. His figure was very meekly curled, the tips of his toes just reached the floor, and his gloved hands lay in his lap. He smiled feebly at the ceiling, and there was a glint of moisture in his eyes.

A month or two ago Mr. Amelia, whose high sense of his own deserving did not prompt him to a ready belief in the deserts of other people, would have snubbed Mr. Kimberley if he had encountered him, and Kimberley would have accepted the snubbing as his due. But now, though he knew his history, and though he had often thought despitefully of him, and thought his attitude at this moment ludicrous, there was a dignity in the sense of the man's possessions which made it difficult to despise him. Mr.

Amelia felt that if he had inherited money he could have carried it with a better grace, but you can gild a man so thickly with a million and a quarter sterling that you can half cover the defects, even of a creature like Kimberley.

When the service came to an end, the little millionnaire wiped his eyes furtively and with a look of shame, and then glancing about him met the eyes of Mr. William Amelia. He recognised him with a blush and a forward duck of the head, and Mr. Amelia responded by advancing with outstretched hand.

"Lovely weather, Mr. Kimberley," he said. "I had the pleasure of meeting you in Gallowbay at the 'Windgall Arms.'"

"Yes," said Kimberley, shaking hands, "I remember. Beautiful place this is, sir, isn't it?"

"Gloomy," said Mr. Amelia, glancing round.

"Oh, do you think so?" asked Kimberley. "I should have thought a litery gentleman would appreciate it."

"Noble building," responded Mr. Amelia, "undoubtedly. One of the finest specimens of ecclesiastical architecture in the world. But—gloomy."

"I don't think," said Kimberley, "it would be so nice if it wasn't gloomy." Then he shrank within himself, fearing to be thought sentimental. To Mr. Amelia the place was big and rather ill-lighted, and there was an end of the matter; but to Kimberley there was majesty and the sacred peace of age in the stone vistas and the lofty roof, though he could not say so, and would not have dared even had he been able.

It was a constant habit of Mr. Amelia's to put himself shoulder to shoulder with anybody he encountered in a position better than his own, and to ask himself in what way they adorned the station more than he himself would have done. Concerning Kimberley, such a question could of course find but one answer. The man was a snob—gild him as thickly as you pleased, he would remain a snob—he had the accent, the aspect, the taste in dress of a snob. Mr. Amelia naturally regarded all men from a lofty standpoint, but it was a little hard on the world at large to be contrasted with William Amelia, when William Amelia settled not only the world's demerits but his own deservings.

However undeserving Kimberley might be, he had still a million and a quarter; and though his momentary companion had no hope of drawing from him one penny of his money, and though he honestly despised the money's owner, he was yet glad to know him, and would have been pleased to be seen in his society. It flattered him that Kimberley followed him when he moved away and began to inspect the monuments, and to enter short-hand observations of them in the big reporter's note-book he carried.

"I suppose that's short-hand, sir," said the millionnaire to the reporter, in a respectful murmur. The reporter nodded crisply and went on with his notes. How many things there were in the world, thought Kimberley, of which he knew nothing, and could never hope to know anything! If only his money had come sooner! —if he had been born with it, and had been so reared and taught that he could fill the place it set him in!

He followed Mr. Amelia about whilst that young gentleman completed his tour of the place, and now and again the inspector of monuments dropped him a crisp word or two about the more decayed ones. The history of the Abbey is readily accessible at the Museum Library, and Mr. Amelia, who had been at it the day before, knew a good deal about the place—knew it for the moment, that is, reporter's fashion—and Kimberley had unquestioning faith. It was very kind of so clever a young man to take notice of him. He felt this the more strongly because Mr. Amelia was not respectful, as almost everybody had been since he became a millionnaire. He was not used to being treated with consideration, and the self-ingratiatory kotowings with which people greeted him made him miserable. It was refreshing to meet one man who treated him as he had always been used to be treated, who thought him of no particular account and was simply civil with him.

When the walk was over Kimberley followed Mr. Amelia still, and, being by this time almost at his ease, ventured to beg a favour.

"I don't know whether it's in your line, sir," he said, "but if you would be so good as to answer a letter for me I should be very much obliged to you."

Mr. Amelia intimated that at this moment his time was unusually valuable.

"Oh!" said Kimberley, ill at ease again, "I shouldn't dream of asking a professional gentleman to give me his time for nothing."

"A guinea," said Mr. Amelia, tentatively, "is the lowest usual professional charge." If the millionnaire shied at that, an abatement might be made.

"Yes," said Kimberley readily. "A guinea? Oh yes, with pleasure. It'll be worth a five-pound note to me to 'ave it off my mind, I'm sure, if you'll be so good as to do it for me."

Mr. Amelia felt that he had suffered from his own modesty. The sensation was novel and disagreeable.

"Will you kindly come to my hotel, sir?" asked Kimberley. "I could have got a professional gentleman to do it, a week ago, but I didn't know where to go to get it done, and it isn't nice to have to explain things, is it? At least, I don't suppose you'd mind it."

He blushed and rubbed his gloved fingers together.

"What is the nature of the letter you wish me to answer?" asked Mr. Amelia in a business tone. Kimberley stopped in the street to grope in his breast pocket, and, producing a letter, handed it to his companion. The little man took it, stuck his neatly-folded umbrella under his arm, and walked on slowly, reading as he went. Horatio Nelson Blandy addressed his dear Mr. Kimberley to the effect that his fellow-townsmen of Gallowbay had thought fit (in view of the amicable relations which had for years subsisted between Kimberley and himself) to nominate him as chairman of a committee which had for its purpose the organisation of a public reception on a grand scale—including fireworks and a banquet—of their eminent townsman, than whom, &c. Mr. Amelia skipped the compliments. That the committee begged Mr. Kimberley to name his own day, and assured him of the deep and widespread gratification with which the inhabitants of his native town, &c.

"This is the hotel, sir," said Kimberley, as Mr. Amelia folded the letter and returned it to its envelope. The manager stood in the hall and bowed and rubbed his hands at Mr. Kimberley. The waiters and the hall-porter bowed also, and a gorgeous lady in a glass case smirked and nodded. The little millionnaire and his little visitor went upstairs side by side, and a waiter in the first-floor corridor beholding them ran forward and opened the door of a magnificent solitary apartment gorgeous with mirrors and ormolu, a Turkey carpet and furniture upholstered in amber satin. Mr. Amelia had never before seen such a chamber, and if its accustomed guest had been at all in accord with it, he would have been bowed down in spirit before the furniture. But Kimberley was a snob, and Mr. Amelia was still possessed of his own soul.

"Do you desire to accept this invitation?" asked Mr. Amelia, setting his hat and umbrella on the table.

"No," said Kimberley, with an air of alarmed decision. "I couldn't—rea'ly. No. I want you, please, to write a letter saying I'm very much obliged, but I can't accept a public reception. I couldn't bear it. And say, please, how obliged I feel. They'll put it in both the papers," said Kimberley, with a miserable aspect, "and that's what I am so particular for. But you write for the papers regular, and you'll know what to say."

Mr. Amelia is older now by several years than he was when he first entered upon life in London, and his ideas of literary grace have undergone some change, but at that date he was under the impression that long words were always to be preferred to short ones. Kimberley rejoiced in the roll of the imposing sentences when their author read them over, and felt that anything he might do or leave undone must seem good to those who heard his intentions announced in tones so lofty. Even Mr. Amelia, who got through the business with the modest confidence of a man to whom such an effort was an affair of every day, was pleased with his own workmanship. When Kimberley sat down to transcribe the letter from Mr. Amelia's dictation, he felt almost affectionate in his gratitude to his assistant, and the long words looked splendid in the trim legal hand in which he set them down. But when he regretted, clerically, that an acceptance of the committee's generous and flattering proposal would be incompatible with engagements upon which he had already entered, he felt a twinge of conscience, and paused, with the end of the penholder between his teeth, to remember that he had entered into no engagements whatever. But suddenly, as stronger men have done before him, he determined to atone for a venial falsehood by a good deed to follow, and he wrote on elaborately until the end of the final paragraph.

"There's something else which I should like to add, sir," he said then. "I think there might be a banquet—to the poor people in the town." It warmed him to think of it, but his heart was not so warm as his cheeks. He blushed as he spoke, and felt generously ashamed.

"A sop to Cerberus," said Mr. Amelia to himself. He did not know who Cerberus was, but the phrase was warranted, and came from his *vade-mecum*, the *Times*. "He's afraid to go, but he wants to be popular." He took his pen once more and added a polysyllabic sentence or two.

"Whilst regretting my personal inability to be present at the proposed festivities, I should nevertheless be rejoiced if a scheme could be proposed which would render their abandonment unnecessary. Such a scheme might perhaps be found in a general invitation to the respectable indigent population of Gallowbay to a banquet to be given in my name and at my expense. Should this proposal meet the approval of the gentleman who have so generously addressed me, I shall conceive myself especially honoured if they will kindly undertake the preparation of the feast."

"Ask Mr. Blandy to take the chair, please," said Kimberley, when Mr. Amelia had read this out to him.

"And," murmured Mr. Amelia, as he wrote, "if anything could add to the gratification your acceptance of this modified arrangement would convey to me, it would be the intelligence that you yourself had consented to preside upon an occasion so interesting."

"I think I'd stop at 'preside,'" suggested Kimberley. Mr. Amelia made the alteration. His client took up his pen in turn, and the copy was fairly written.

"I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure, sir," said the millionnaire, surveying the letter with a charmed eye. "I shall be glad if you don't 'appen to 'ave any change," he added awkwardly, as he blushingly drew forth his pocketbook and passed a five-pound note across the table to Mr. Amelia. That gentleman accepted it as if the crisp leaves lay as thickly in his own path as in Kimberley's.

"You are a generous paymaster, Mr. Kimberley," he said, as he pocketed the note.

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you," answered the blushing Kimberley, "and I'm sure you've expressed what I wanted to say beautiful. And," he added awkwardly, "it isn't anything to me—not now."

A millionnaire? thought Mr. Amelia. And a snob into the bargain! A snob inside and out. A most ostentatious snob. But poor Kimberley had meant no more by this clumsy sentence than to say that he was really paying very little for a valuable service. Luckily, he had no idea of the scorn he had excited, and parted from Mr. Amelia with renewed profession of thanks, having first secured his address in case he should need to write any more letters which were likely to be published.

Then, having taken luncheon, he walked to the jeweller's to consult him concerning a scarf-pin he had ordered. This especial article of jewellery is worth a word, partly because it had an influence—a very curious influence—on Kimberley's career, and partly for its intrinsic merit. It was a bulldog's head, carved in lava, and not quite life-size. The dog's eyes were represented by rubies, and the collar was of gold and brilliants. From the collar depended a chain of gold which could be attached to the lower part of the pin to secure it when it was stuck in the scarf, so that any marauder who might covet it would have to snatch scarf and all before he could make away with it.

This egregious jewel was of his own designing, and was of a piece with his general notions of how a millionnaire should attire himself. He was audacious in the matter of personal adornment, and the courage with which he went ahead of his time in neckties was like that of desperation. He hooped and cabled and bolted himself with chains and rings and pins, for by this time he was in full command of his fortune, and at any hour of the day he was pawnable for five hundred pounds.

With all this he was trying to acquire something of the ways of men of the world, and the attempt made him very unhappy. He walked in the Row, and people stared at him and pointed him out one to another. This made him miserable, for he had neither *savoir faire* nor the insolence which passes for it. He had found some companions, but no friends, and in their society he had eaten luxurious dinners and had drunk rare wines. His companions enjoyed them, and he paid for them, and they made him ill. He smoked cigars of the finest brands, and they disagreed with him. He began to learn riding, and he suffered; he began to learn billiards, and he lost.

He was a coward; and yet every day of his life he faced dangers as great to him as those of the battle-field would have been, for nothing could have struck a keener terror to his soul than to face the ordinary passengers in the street when he had glorified himself with all the most extravagant devices he could think of. He felt this terror now, and he dodged into the jeweller's shop like a guilty creature. At the very instant at which he entered the door a cab drew up at the kerbstone, and a passenger leapt from it carrying something in his hands, and jostled against Kimberley. This was a day for meetings. The little millionnaire looked round apologetically, and confronted the Earl of Windgall.

His lordship, though commonly self-possessed enough, looked like a man detected in a theft, and shook hands with a tremor and confusion which were obvious even to Kimberley.

"Can you spare me half an hour?" asked his lordship. "Excuse me for a moment." He hurried into the shop, placed upon the counter the little package he carried, and positively stammered at the shopman whilst he fumbled for his card. "Take care of that. It is valuable. I am pressed for time just now, but I will call to-morrow and give instructions."

"Yes, my lord," said the shopman, catching sight of the name upon the card and bowing.

"Can you spare me a word or two, Mr. Kimberley?" asked Windgall, with a return to his ordinary manner.

"Certainly, my lord," said Kimberley, nervously.

"Where shall we go?" asked his lordship lightly. "Shall we drive to my club?"

"Will you come to my hotel, my lord?" asked Kimberley, wondering what my lord would have to say to him, and altogether fluttered by this unexpected encounter.

Windgall assented, and they drove away together.

CHAPTER VII.

The Earl of Windgall was in very serious trouble when he met Kimberley. He had been in serious trouble for a long time, but within the last eight-and-forty hours things had grown almost desperate for him. When Messrs. Begg, Batter, and Bagg, who were among the safest and least venturesome of financial advisers, had set an actual limit to the poor peer's borrowings, and had told him that he had come to the end of his tether, he had borrowed without their knowledge, and at heavy interest, from a member of the friendly tribes resident in Gallowbay—a thing sufficiently indiscreet in every way. A judicious man would never borrow at his own gates if he could help it, but the Earl was so pressed that he had not time to be judicious. In borrowing he had even felt himself impelled to disguise certain facts which were perfectly well known to the lender, and were accounted for in the scheme of interest, but unfortunately their concealment gave the creditor a power over his debtor. There is an offence known to the English law as the Obtaining of Money under False Pretences, and if the Earl of Windgall had not actually been guilty of that offence he had sailed so near it that in his inmost heart he felt guilty. He had been a proud and honourable man, and hunted by less pressing financial troubles he would have been proud and honourable still. There is the pity of it. This is the curse of poverty, that it blunts the keen edge of honour and lowers the standard of honest pride.

Mr. Clarence G. Sheeney was not a monster of fiction, but a modern Israelite of British breeding. He was a fattish man, with a head of curly black hair, a face clean shaven, and a perennial smile. He looked—but was not—guileless, and he was engaged in many speculations which demanded foresight, courage, and coolness. There were the most contradictory rumours afloat regarding him, and whilst on the one side people spoke of him as a man of prodigious wealth, others alleged that he was all but insolvent, and spoke darkly of times when he was puzzled to pay the very tradespeople who supplied his household with meat and bread and the other necessities of daily life. He lived in good style, kept a good stable, and a houseful of servants; had a generous table, subscribed to local charities with great liberality but strange fitfulness, and dispensed an ostentatious hospitality to all kinds of queer people—now entertaining within his own walls the Nonconformist divines of the county, and now in a great tent on his grounds feeding the volunteer force of Gallowbay, then just newly established. He entertained the Fire Brigade, he entertained the Amalgamated Association of Railway Porters, he gave a Foresters' Fête, and he gathered together the Oddfellows and the Buffaloes. It was rumoured that he meant one of these days to contest the county, and that he was preparing beforehand by all these works of munificence. All the people who liked to look on the dark side of things prophesied bankruptcy for him; and all the people who liked to think of riches, even in another man's possession, talked of him as a Crœsus. The plain truth of the matter is that he was nearly always involved in speculations to the very limit of his means, and that he never knew when he might not come to business wreck. He gambled with thousands and thousands of pounds as if he were playing at chuck-farthing. When he won (and he seemed generally to win) he went double or quits. He would have a dozen ventures on hand at a time, and nobody ever saw him ruffled or anxious. He was always rosy, smiling, and happy to look at, and he was always going to make a glorious victorious haul, or be cleaned out completely.

Now it chanced that on a sudden Mr. Clarence G. Sheeney had found two of his adventures exceptionally fortunate, and was looking about for a new chance of double or quits with Fate, when, with a crash and a rattle, two others fell about his ears. Each of these involved a lawsuit, and Mr. Sheeney's name being at this time questioned in many places, everybody began to pelt him, and he was much put to it to keep his head above water. In this momentary extremity he cast his arms abroad and clutched those who were nearest to him. One building speculator surrendered his life-buoy and sank—went down into the deep and appeared no more. The poor Earl of Windgall being clutched, protested that he had no life-buoy to lend, not even of the smallest. Then the financier whispered in his ear, and he saw not merely bankruptcy but disgrace before him, and was almost persuaded to throw up his hands and sink at once.

To escape from the metaphor, which begins to run some risk of growing confused, Mr. Sheeney really wanted his money, must have, would have his money in this crisis of his affairs, would at least have one-half of it, one thousand sterling pounds, within a week, or——

The demand, the protest, and the new demand were all made by letter, and the Earl had done his best to conceal his discomfiture from his daughters. Mr. Sheeney's ultimatum reached him in the early afternoon, as he sat in his library in wretched expectation of it, and stared gloomily at the trees which were so soon to be felled in the fair reaches of the park. They had been his father's pride and his grandfather's and his great-grandfather's. There was not a Windgall who would not turn in his case of lead in the family vault when those noble trees came to fall before the creditor's axe. The day when the first axe sounded in those pleasant glades would be the bitterest he had ever known, and his life had been embittered by poverty and its humiliations now for many and many a day.

The little grey man, who resembled many of his class in not looking like a lord, received from the hands of an overwhelming servitor the expected letter, and trifled with it until the man had left the room. Then he opened it and read it, and, laying his head against the window casement, he groaned aloud, and was discovered in the fact by the Lady Ella, his daughter.

She advanced anxiously, but there was something of a look of protection in her face and attitude, and she bent forward a little as she moved, as if eager to console. The Earl turned towards her, and she slipped an arm about his neck.

"You are in trouble, dear," she said. "What is it? Can I help you?"

"No, my dear," said the poor nobleman. "I haven't told you before, but you will have to know it. There's no help for it, Begg says, and they'll have to cut down the timber in the park. Poverty, my dear, poverty."

This was a blow, and a heavy one.

"Poor trees," said Ella. "Poor papa."

"Your landscape loves come out," said the Earl, trying to smile. "You cry out first for the trees."

"And last for you," said his daughter, with a world of tender meaning in the tone. The Earl stroked her head gently,—she was a little taller than himself and looked much stronger and braver. She kissed him once or twice, and then they stood side by side looking at the park, which lay before them in all the fulness of its summer beauty.

"That isn't the worst of it," said Windgall, after a pause. He looked gloomily out of window, and avoided his daughter's eye. "I am in the hands of the Jews."

Now that proclamation sounded very terrible, and the girl scarcely knew what to make of it. It brought an indistinct idea of merciless pursuit and helpless surrender, which alarmed her the more because its terrors were undefined.

"I owe that fellow Sheeney, at Gallowbay, two thousand pounds," the Earl continued. "He presses for it; says he must have it. I haven't it, and I can't get it, and there's an end of the matter." His daughter kissed him again, and murmured some unintelligible syllables of pity and affection; but of what use was that? "I shall have to put the house in the market," he said bitterly, "and the whole estate, and then I must pay off the mortgage; and we must go on to the Continent and drag out as well as we can in Brussels, or some other such refuge for the poor. There is no help for it." She kissed him once more, and he moved away with a little show of fretfulness, and walked up and down the room. "This wretched Hebrew fellow," he broke out querulously, "says he *will* have a thousand pounds by this day week. He might as well ask me for a million."

"The diamonds are worth more than a thousand pounds, dear," she said gently. The grey little peer stopped short in his walk and looked at her with melancholy affection.

"No, no, my darling," he said, "I have robbed you of everything already. You gave me the little yearly income your poor mother left you as soon as you could touch it, and now you want to give me her diamonds, poor thing!" There were tears in his eyes, and he felt ashamed of them, and walked away to hide them.

"You must take them, papa," she said, in tender decision. "You need not part with them altogether. You may be able to recover them, if Mr. Samson's hopes should turn out to be true."

"They won't," said the Earl, mournfully. "They have struck upon a stone, or a shale, or a chalk, or something of that sort which always lies below coal, and is never found above it. Samson knows perfectly well by this time that there isn't coal enough under the whole estate to fill that fire-grate. Let us have no false hopes, my dear, but let us face the truth." He took credit to himself for a sort of magnanimity in saying this, as if there had been a virtue in it, but his mental attitude was not very courageous, and the under consciousness of this fact disturbed him. He would have liked to take the diamonds too, and escape this trouble for the time, but it seemed base to do it. A great deal of his earlier love of honour and native pride had fallen away from him, but he was loth to see the last of them.

"Papa," said the girl, approaching him again, and embracing him once more, "I will tell you what we will do. You shall take the diamonds and pay Mr. Sheeney, and then we will close the house and go abroad, and live very, very cheaply until we can come back again with a little money saved. This great house is very expensive, and we are really too poor to live in it. Whilst we are away it might be let—the Malmsboroughs let De Wincey Hall last year. And you might sell the house in Portman Square, papa, and——"

"The house in Portman Square," said the Earl with a groan. "The house in Portman Square is mortgaged to the chimney-cowls. You don't understand business, Ella. Women don't grasp these things. The house in Portman Square no more belongs to me than the Bank of England does."

The beautiful girl stroked his grizzled hair and looked at him with mournful affection.

"You must pay Mr. Sheeney, papa. You must take the diamonds. I know how hard it is for you to take them, dear."

"You do me no more than justice, there," said her father. "My dear, there is no one so wretched as a poor peer."

She was not unused to this sort of statement, but she felt for him with her whole heart. Perhaps of the two the girl's burthen was the heavier, for she bore her own griefs as well as his. This affair of the diamonds was nothing. It was infinitely easier for her to give them than for her father to take them, and she knew that. But the Earl's last speech amounted to a reluctant acceptance, and with a parting caress she left him, but only to return in a few minutes' time with a dark shagreen case in her hands. Her father took the case and opened it, looked at the glittering stones within, sighed, closed the case and set it upon the table. "I have the best children in the world," he said then, "and I could almost wish that I were childless."

"Papa!" cried Ella, in a wounded voice.

"I could, indeed," said Windgall. "What can I do for you? I drag you into my troubles. I can do nothing but make you unhappy."

"No, no!" she answered. "We have one another, and we need care for nothing else."

"You are a good girl," said the little nobleman,—"a good daughter." He paced indeterminately about the room for a minute or two, and made one or two halting motions towards the shagreen case on the table, but at length he summoned courage enough to pause and lay both hands on it. "I take these," he said, "with bitter unwillingness, my dear. I take them because it would be worse for you and all of us if I refused them. I take them, in short, because I can't help taking them. God bless you, my dear. You are the best daughter man ever had, I think, and I am the unluckiest father that ever lived." He took the case in his hand and mechanically opened it and closed it. "I had best get the business over, Ella, since it has to be done. I will go up to town this afternoon."

"Yes," assented Ella; "it will be better to have the immediate danger removed. And when you come back, papa, let us take counsel together, and see what can be done. I am willing to live anywhere, dear. It will be best to go abroad."

Windgall drove to the railway station and set out for London, with the jewels in a despatch-box beside him, and through the whole of the journey one troublesome thought was with him. He despised himself very heartily and honestly for permitting this thought to take such hold upon his mind, but it seemed of no use to struggle against its intrusion, and at last he submitted to it, and sat staring at it through his cigar smoke with a distempered countenance and a heart full of bile. Had it pleased heaven that Bolsover Kimberley should have been something less of a snob, his lordship could have borne this intruding fancy better. But the little cad was *such* a cad, so hopeless, helpless, and complete, that in the contemplation of his awful perfections in that way the Earl shuddered. And all the while the over-dressed figure of Bolsover Kimberley stood before the embarrassed man, and a voice seemed to issue from it, "Catch me, flatter me, wheedle me, marry me to one of your daughters, and see the end of your woes."

A lady of the house of Windgall could marry anybody, and still be herself; but who could be happy tied to a fellow like that, if she had the barest notions of what a man should be? And yet was not anything better than that galling poverty in which the girls had lived all their lives?

"He is shy, confound him!" said the noble earl, contemplating this ignoble figure. "That's his one good point. He wouldn't want to show up much. He wouldn't be always *en évidence*, like some men one sees, who are just as little fit to be seen as he is. And I don't know, even if I ask him down, that anything will come of it. In point of fact, I don't think he'll have audacity enough to think he would stand a chance."

Windgall began to hope that nothing would come of Kimberley's stay at Shouldershott Castle if he should ask him to stay and the little man should say yes. This hope was very like that of the children who, having learnt the contrariety of fate, go about wishing for bad weather for a picnic. He caught himself thinking so, and derided his own weak shiftiness of mind.

"I shall find him out and ask him down," he said aloud, with a look of new determination, "and if he has the impudence to ask one of the girls to marry him, why—heaven help her! I sha'n't force either of them. I'm not a professional heart-breaker. He doesn't seem a bad-natured little fellow, and he has good blood in him."

So his mind wandered to and fro. Fate had dealt hardly with him in making him a peer, and condemning him to poverty, and filling his house with daughters who, though the best girls in the world, could not help being expensive. *Noblesse oblige* is a very fine proverb, but amongst other things to which nobility compels is the maintenance of a good aspect in the world's eye, though it does not always supply the means. He would have been well-to-do as a mere country gentleman, but his title and his great houses had made a pauper of him, as his father and grandfather had been before him. Whilst he thought of this Kimberley affair, he tried to solace himself, as he had done before, by satirizing the world, and he told himself that most men in his place would have no scruples such as he had, though every one would be merciless upon him if he threw his own scruples away.

He arrived in town too late for business that night, and spent an hour or two at the Carlton, where everybody was interested in politics, which, of all themes in the world, was perhaps the least interesting to this hereditary legislator. The great effects of party battle touched him, and he was a good Tory; but the continual affairs of outposts which keep the professional politician's blood warm and his heart in fighting trim were a weariness to his soul, and he left the place, feeling *triste* and bored, though almost anything had seemed a relief from the exigent thought of Mr. Bolsover Kimberley. It was pretty certain, of course, that the young man would not refuse the Earl's invitation; but it was by no means certain that he would of his own initiative fall in love with an Earl's daughter, and by no means certain, even if he did so, that he would speak out his mind.

"It is a dirty business," said Windgall, as he tossed to and fro on his bed, "and by no means a sure one. And when I have shown the whole world my hand, I may be disappointed, and have nothing but a little of the dirt through which I shall have crawled still sticking to me to remind me of my trouble."

That other affair of the diamonds was not one to be proud of, and his lordship tossing to and fro all night was perhaps as little to be envied as any man in her Majesty's dominion. He could not help himself. His poverty was no fault of his; he knew not, in fact, on whom to charge it; but he knew what a weight it was, and how inseparable it seemed from degradation of one sort or another, and once or twice in the course of the long, long night he felt half-inclined for suicide.

It was midway through the afternoon before he found courage to run with his daughter's jewels to the pawnbroker's. The pawnbroker was a jeweller also, and found the combination of trades convenient to his clients, and therefore convenient to himself. It was no wonder, when, having nerved himself to this disagreeable task, the Earl ran against the man who had so long filled his thoughts, that he was a good deal embarrassed. He had meant, as a matter of course, that his meeting with the little millionnaire should have as casual and unimportant a look as he could give it, and this unexpected encounter was valuable in its way; but he was so little fitted for it, and so taken aback, that he had made it seem a thing of urgent importance, and for a moment or two was at his wit's end to nerve himself. But on his way to Kimberley's hotel he pulled himself together, and an inspiration came to him.

"What I wanted to say," he began, when he and Kimberley were settled down, and he had accepted one of Kimberley's cigars, "was simply this: my lawyer tells me that a public reception is a-foot in Gallowbay, and that you, Mr. Kimberley, are the object of it."

He smiled therewith his smile of election times—not altogether a natural contortion, but scarcely so forced and wretched as that with which Kimberley replied to him.

"Begg says there is great fear of your refusing. Now, will you tell me if that fear is at all grounded?"

Kimberley drew out from his breast-pocket Mr. Amelia's elaborate epistle.

"I meant to have dropped this into the post this afternoon," he said; "but I'm glad I forgot it now, my lord, because it's my answer." He knew how clumsily he expressed himself, and blushed hotly, as he tore open the envelope and handed the enclosure to his lordship. "That says better—" he began, and trailed off into silence.

Windgall took the letter and read it, by this time quite self-possessed again.

"Admirably expressed," he said, returning it to Kimberley, with a slight bow; "and most honourable to your heart, I am sure, Mr. Kimberley; most honourable. But—may I presume to advise?" Kimberley said nothing, but he looked as if nothing the Earl could do would seem like a presumption to him. "If I may," pursued Windgall, "don't send this letter. I respect your desire for retirement, Mr. Kimberley. I have the fullest and completest sympathy with that desire, and yet I say, 'Don't send this letter.' The people of Gallowbay look forward to your occasional presence amongst them with natural anxiety, and the receipt of this letter will cause them considerable disappointment. People in our position have duties thrust upon us which are not always pleasant, but are none the less to be avoided on that account." At this flattery Kimberley blushed and trembled. "I had business in town this week," pursued Windgall, airily; "and when I learned from Begg that there really was a considerable fear of your refusal I made up my mind to intrude my counsel upon you. I will ask you to forgive the intrusion. I am an older man, and perhaps more experienced in the ways of the world. Let that consideration help you to excuse me."

"I should like to do my duty," said Kimberley, humbly; "but I couldn't endure a public reception, my lord. I couldn't, rea'ly."

"You will not find the ordeal so trying as you fear," returned his lordship. "You'll excuse my candour, Mr. Kimberley, I know. Gallowbay is not a wealthy place; I take a great deal of interest in the town myself—was born there—have lived there for the greater part of my life; and the people hope for your occasional presence. The late owner of the estate was a minor—not a penny was spent in the place for twenty years. People feel it keenly, I assure you."

"I'm going to give a norgan to the noo town hall, my lord," cried Kimberley, "and to build a wing to the grammar school. I shall be glad, my lord, to do anything in that way, but I couldn't endure a public reception, my lord. I couldn't, my lord, I rea'ly couldn't."

Inwardly my lord fairly writhed at the speech and manners of the millionnaire, but he put a good face upon the matter, and spoke with an air of unpretentious *bonhomie.*

"Well, Mr. Kimberley, don't have a public reception until you feel more equal to it. I'll tell you what you might do," he said, as if the fancy had presented itself to him for the first time that moment. "Come and stay at Shouldershott Castle for a week or two, and familiarise yourself with the new feel of things. You can meet the county people there gradually, and get used to them. You'll have to meet them some day, you know, and you may as well get it over. What do you say?"

Kimberley, as might have been supposed, was prodigiously flattered and fluttered by this proposal. The Earl pressed him a little—it was not worth while to *finesse* with a fish of so blunt a mouth—and in a while Bolsover, scarcely knowing what he did, consented. When he thought of being beneath the same roof with

Lady Ella, his spiritual vertigo became almost maddening, and he flushed and trembled as he had never done before. He—litttle snob of a lawyer's clerk as he had been—had dared to love her when there was never any distant hope in the world that he would even speak to her, and now he was going to be near her, to shake hands with her, to sit at the same table, to sleep beneath the same roof. The light scorched the vitals of the moth already.

He laid out his finest trousers, and waistcoats, and neckties with his own hands that night, and spent an hour or two before his mirror advancing and retiring, shaking hands with imaginary gentlepeople, taking off his hat, and practising a graceful employment of his pocket-handkerchief. When he got to bed he read a book of etiquette, from which he learned, amongst other valuable things, that "it is permitted to a gentleman to wear a black frock-coat in the bosom of his family," and that a lady may, if she choose, descend to dinner table in yellow gloves.

He pictured the Lady Ella in yellow gloves, and he saw himself beside her in evening dress, with diamonds glittering in his shirt-front—*his* —Bolsover Kimberley's.

"I shall see her," he muttered wildly to himself; "I shall meet her in the 'alls, the 'alls of dazzling light." He was choke-full of emotion and of such poetry as he could hold. He was heroic, he was tender, he had his hopes and his despairs, he worshipped his love and bewailed his own imperfections, as loftier people do in the like conditions. There were moments in his reveries then and afterwards when she stooped to him from her imperial place, and whispered that she loved him. There were hours when she scorned him, but despair was scarcely bitterer than the maddening draught of hope. Even if there had been no Lady Ella in the case, it would have been bad enough for a shy man of such humble breeding to find himself bound on a visit to an earl. As it was, it is something of a wonder that Kimberley did not lose his mental balance altogether.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Amelia's observations on the damaged memorials of Westminster Abbey were a good deal cut about by the editor of the *Piccadilly Gazette*, but they were inserted and they were paid for. He felt, not without reason, that he had made a curiously fortunate beginning, and being a young person of much natural aptitude he began to find and to work new mines of industry. He had not yet discovered who Autolycus was, but that light-handed gentleman's motto was constantly with him, "Every lane's end finds a careful man work." Rambling in one of the parks one day he overheard an aristocratic-looking old fellow haranguing a younger man on the disgraceful duck-weeded dirtiness of one of the smaller sheets of ornamental water. He dashed into the conversation with no embarrassment.

"Excuse me, sir, but can you tell me who is responsible for the condition of things you complain of?"

The ancient swell put up a gold double eyeglass and surveyed him with an air of placid curiosity, dropped his glass, and turning to his companion resumed his speech.

"That," said Mr. Amelia to himself, "is abominably insolent," and he walked away erect and indignant. Inquiries addressed to a good-humoured official of the park secured an answer, and Mr. Amelia booked another half-guinea, the *Piccadilly Gazette* demanding to know next day why it was that one of the lungs of London should be poisoned by the exhalations of this filthy pond, and calling pretty smartly on the First Commissioner of Works to attend to the business with which he was entrusted by the country. "It is not," added the editor, "that the Commissioner of Works is one whit behind his colleagues. In small things as in great the party now in power has agreed to proclaim its incompetence." This rebuke being founded on Mr. Amelia's observations inflated him in no small degree, and he began to feel that he was a personage of consequence.

Finding this pessimist game upon which he had entered a profitable one, he pursued it, and became a Censor of the Parks and Streets. Diligently studying the journalistic manner, he arrived at a closer and closer approximation of the *Piccadilly* style, and day by day saw better what was wanted. In the course of a week or two he was bold enough to present himself at the office of the journal, where his smart, crisp manner pleased the sub-editor on duty, and in a day or two he found himself entrusted with a commission for an abbreviated report of the proceedings of the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Traffic, then gathered at Exeter Hall. So, little by little, he pushed, and shouldered, and edged until he became a recognised figure at the office, and, though unsalaried, made such an income as he had never realised before. He scraped acquaintance among his fellow-penmen and examined them all with critical eye, seeing nothing in any of them to make him afraid of his own ambitions. The brighter sort were too convivially inclined, the respectable sort too dull to alarm him.

Now and again he contrived to commit amazing blunders, as when he asked in perfect innocence and good faith in what line of life Mr. Thomas Carlyle had distinguished himself, and in the after days of his success the envious remembered these things against him and quoted them one to another. But when we remember how full of pitfalls of this kind the life of an ignorant instructor of the public is sure to be, we shall wonder, not that Mr. Amelia tripped so often, but that he fell so seldom. Deft, adaptive, courageous, quick to seize and absorb, the little man took his place in the rough-and-tumble scramble of lower journalism in London, and made his way with wonderful rapidity. Some men are held back in the race of life by shyness; he had none. Some are weighted by humility; he had but a theoretical acquaintance with the quality. To some the fact that a place is filled already is a bar against application for it; Mr. Amelia never waited for a place to become vacant before he would ask for it, if he thought it in the least worth his having. He was unpopular, but people said he would rise. He despised the unpopularity, and determined to fulfil the prophecy.

It was about this time that he entered upon that line of life which led him to his present pitch of greatness—the satiric observation of men and manners. His note-book began to be rich in unpleasant phrases descriptive of people whom he saw casually in the performance of his duties. "A man with a bad hat and a tired sneer." That was Formby, the famous writer of *vers de société*. "A man with dejected eyebrows and apologetic hair." That was the noble lord the Home Secretary of the period. He forged and polished these little arrows at home with infinite labour, and when the man was mentioned he shot one of them with an admirable air of impromptu. Sometimes an arrow lay in the note-book quiver ready polished for months together, before he would fit it to the string and let it fly. His earlier efforts were somewhat clumsy, but practice brought perfection, and in a while there was no man in

London who could fit you with a phrase more completely than Mr. Amelia, if you would only give him time. Not your spiritual or moral qualities; but the cut of your coat, the set of your hat, the fashion of your boots, the colour and style of your waistcoat or necktie; any little characteristic gesture, any outside habit, or trick of feature; he could hit any of these things with unerring precision. His "Notes from Behind the Speaker's Chair," his "Thumbnail Sketches from the Peers' Gallery," his "Letters from the Member for Land's End," delight us at this hour by that very trick of surface observation, though, perhaps, after half-a-dozen years of hats, waistcoats, and neckties, we are getting a little weary, and would fain go deeper.

But let us go back to our muttons.

Mr. Amelia, in his earlier days in London, frequented a certain bar not far from the journalistic centre, where at that time many men of letters habitually took luncheon, or sat above their claret or whisky-and-water to chat among themselves. Here he familiarised himself with many of the details of good table service, and observed the manner in which fish is served and green peas are eaten. Here also he learned that champagne is drunk cold, and that connoisseurs prefer to have the chill taken off their claret before they consume it. His own modest refection rarely exceeded a sandwich and a cup of coffee, and the waiter, who found the rest of the guests far more liberal than men of fortune would have been, hated Mr. Amelia, who would detain the comic papers for an hour whilst he nibbled his sandwich and sipped his cold coffee, and would pocket all his change at the end of this moderate banquet.

Hither came many of the best known men in London. Clancarty, the genial, the lovable, the too soft-hearted man, would shed a tear there of a night into his whisky whilst he talked of his father, famous in letters, whose name all Englishmen honour, and whom his children adored with a passionate devotion. MacGuffog prince of all who have written of war—loud, animated, cheery, a dauntless man of most generous nature: the great Dexter, purblind with books, a mine of strange learning, bland and suave, but ready to be caustic: Harford, big and bearded, with Crimean shirt and ungloved hands, breathing threats and slaughter against all Whig Fellows and Radical Fellows, bombarding opposers with great rolling epithets—the most amiable and friendly of men, and the best of writers for boys: these and many more Mr. Amelia beheld as he munched and sipped behind the marble-topped table. He was not in the least oppressed by their greatness, but put himself mental shoulder to shoulder with each of them, and felt as big as any. There is something at once comic and sorrowful in the image of the little man in his corner, looking out of his keen, shallow eyes at this new world, and revolving in that ill-furnished, compact big head of his the constant comparison between himself and others. The comparison was always to his own advantage.

One day Jack O'Hanlon, with his Irish eyes twinkling behind his spectacles, sat down, with his glass of whisky, beside Mr. Amelia, and fell into talk with him. A royal duke and a chimney-sweep were one to Jack. He talked to anybody if he had the inclination, and seldom waited to be inthrojuiced. Mr. Amelia had some knowledge of him already.

"Ye're a young man from the country, I'm thinking," said Mr. O'Hanlon, twinkling at the little man beside him.

"And you a middle-aged gentleman from Ireland," responded Mr. Amelia, crisp and cool. Jack sparkled and twinkled for a second or two, and then laughed outright.

"Faith, I am, me nettle. Though how ye found it out's a wondher. I'm generally taken for a Neapolitan. Didn't I see ye at Exeter Hall yesterday, helping to convert the haythen?"

"We sat at opposite ends of the reporters' table," said Mr. Amelia.

"I thought I knew ye again," said Jack. "Have a drink. There's a dryness in the atmosphere of London which makes it the most delightful place in the world to live in. Ye're always thirsty here, thank God. A constant thirst's a great blessing."

"I'll take a cup of coffee," said Mr. Amelia, sliding his cup towards the waiter.

"Don't waste a good drouth on a material like that," Mr. O'Hanlon expostulated. "It's casting swine before pearls." Mr. Amelia resisting all pressure towards alcoholic beverages, Jack sighed and resigned the point. "What are ye for?"

Mr. Amelia rightly construing this as asking what journal he represented, answered that he was not formally attached to any journal, but was occasionally asked to represent the *Piccadilly Gazette*.

"Unattached!" said Jack. "Then there's hard times in front, begorra! The Session's coming to an end in a month's time, and there'll be thirty or forty men loose and out of collar, and every man Jack o' them eager for work. Poor devils! A man with a sessional engagement and nothing else, is a melancholy object. He draws his six guineas a week for half the year, and nothing at all for the rest of the time."

"A man should be able to live on that," returned Mr. Amelia. To tell the truth, his heart leaped within him at the thought. "One hundred and fifty pounds per annum, and half the year a holiday! I confess I see nothing to mourn for."

"It's a simple sum in arithmetic, isn't it?" said Jack. "But the multiplication table's the biggest liar unhung. Six guineas a week for six months is *not* three guineas a week for twelve. Ye think it is, but that's because ye're young and innocent, and put your trust in the multiplication table. Ye'd think seven pounds a week was a pound a day, wouldn't ye? I used to, till I had to depend on it, but I've found out the blagyard swindle now, and I know betther."

"If seven pounds a week is not a pound a day, what is it?" demanded Mr. Amelia.

"It's seven pounds," said Mr. O'Hanlon, "ontil ye break it. Then," with a grave sweep of the hand, "it's vapour."

"I am inclined to believe," said Mr. Amelia, crisply, "that the multiplication table is right, after all. I think I could undertake to demonstrate its accuracy if I had that seven pounds a week to experiment on."

"Rosy illusions of me youth," said Mr. O'Hanlon, raising his glass and looking with one eye at the pale amber fluid within it, "farewell." He finished the whisky at a draught, and catching the waiter's eye at that instant he beckoned him with a backward nod.

"Do it again, Alick," he said, with suavity; "hot, but no lemon. May be," he said, turning to Mr. Amelia, "you're a total abstainer. That makes a difference."

"If I drink at all," said the little man, "I drink in strict moderation."

"Do ye now?" asked Mr. O'Hanlon. "I'm told there's people like that. I'm a beveragist meself."

This to Mr. Amelia's mind was not a statement which called just then for outspoken comment. His companion of the moment had drollery of a sort, no doubt, but it was not of the kind that Mr. Amelia was readiest to appreciate. A jest that stung was the sort of jest he liked most, when he saw it levelled at another; he loved a cut that laid the bone bare or a thrust that set the victim quivering—something nice and nasty and vindictive. Poor Jack O'Hanlon's sunny, careless, Irish heart, with all its beams tinged by passing through a medium of whisky-and-water, seemed a worthless sort of organ to our young censor. Since he had first set eyes on Mr. O'Hanlon, in the little Fleet Street hostelry, where the good-natured Irishman's scheme for Barney had served as the foundation-stone of Mr. Amelia's London fortunes, he had seen him half-a-dozen times or so, generally twinkling and sparkling behind his glasses in the middle of a knot of good fellows, whom his quaint sayings kept in continual mirth, and Mr. Amelia had even heard Jack described as the humourist *par excellence* of the reporting world.

"I suppose," he said to himself, "the man talks this sort of flippant, whiskyfied nonsense everywhere." He sat silent for a minute or two, labouring to characterise his new acquaintance. By-and-by out came his note-book and down went the formula—"A man who pelts you with whisky-sodden pellets of stale Irish humour." This was written in Mr. Pitman's system of shorthand, under O'Hanlon's nose, but Mr. Amelia was careful not to let his companion see it. He surveyed the signs with a one-sided appreciative droop of that big compact head, and nodded, as if to say that the phrase would do when filed down a little. One of these days, he thought, he might write a novel, and scarify the press crew of London. So poor and pitiful a set as the rank and file of the London press he thought he had nowhere seen; but this was not an honest opinion with him, because in obedience to his comparative instinct he had measured them all by himself—a standard by which they were sure to fail."

"Would ye like t' earn a guinea?" said Mr. O'Hanlon suddenly. "Don't think I'm insultin' ye, now, and mockin' ye with th' unattainable. Are ye free this evening?"

"I am disengaged this evening," responded Mr. Amelia, returning his note-book to his pocket, "and I should like to earn a guinea if I saw a way to it."

"There's a nephew o' mine," said Jack, "from Ballykillfadden—me own place—that's taught himself shorthand and imported himself to

London. Barney Maguire's his name; maybe ye've met him? No? The better luck's yours. I got 'm a berth in the Gahl'ry o' the House o' Commons—where he is about as fit to be as me aunt's cow is to be field-marshal—and he's on the burst this two days with his first week's salary. I did his work meself last night, but to-night I'm busy, and since you're new and out o'collar I don't know why ye shouldn't have the guinea as well as anybody else. The work'll be light to-night, with as likely as not a count-out after dinner; but ye'll get the guinea all the same."

"When shall I be wanted?" asked Mr. Amelia.

"We've time for a quiet walk down there," said O'Hanlon. "Wait while I get a cigyar, an' then we'll stretch our legs."

As Mr. Amelia walked westward along Fleet Street and the Strand, and past Trafalgar Square and Whitehall, his mind was busy with all kinds of ambitious fancies. He was actually going into the Gallery of the House of Commons, and though it was but as *locum tenens* for a single evening, he would have set foot as a worker within those precincts, and would have realised the aspirations of the last three years. Might he not find a permanent place? and who knew what would happen if he did so? His companion's Irish drolleries fell on ears that scarcely heard them, but Mr. O'Hanlon was in a talkative humour, and did not care to be interrupted, so they went along amicably, the one having all the talk to himself, and the other following his own fancies. In a while they came to Palace Yard, and Mr. Amelia, with head erect, chin tucked in, and his little figure pulled out to its height, trod for the first time the stones with which his feet in after years became so familiar. A police officer on duty in a corner of the yard recognised O'Hanlon with a nod, and drew aside from a doorway to allow him to pass, and the Irishman opened a door and beckoned Mr. Amelia to enter.

"They say," he said, "that this used to be the Star Chamber. I'm no antiquarian meself, but I believe they're right."

The new-comer beheld a small but lofty room with cushioned benches at the wall, an open fire-grate, a table strewn with long pipes, with a dozen pewter pint-pots and glasses amongst them; and seated on the benches, or in arm-chairs at the table and on either side the fire-grate, a dozen gentlemen of varying ages in a cloudy haze of tobacco smoke.

"Begorra," said O'Hanlon, in a half-whisper, "I'd forgotten to make meself acquainted with your name. What d'ye call yourself?"

"My name is Amelia," said the little man.

"Oh the little dorlin'!" cried Jack.

"William Amelia," said the little man, with mighty stateliness. He is a poor humourist, indeed, who can find no better fun than to make jokes on a man's name. Jack laughed in answer to the reproof Mr. Amelia's manner conveyed, and saluted a friend or two about the room.

"Mickey," he said, seating himself beside a gentleman who looked almost as important as Mr. Amelia himself, "Barney's on the burst still, I'm sorry to tell ye, and I won't be able to be here to-night. But here's me young friend Mr. Amelia will be glad to teek his pleece for an evening."

"Very good," said the important man, nodding curtly at Mr. Amelia, and then, as if by an afterthought, shaking hands with him; "but I'll tell ye what it is, Jack, me boy, it's not me own fault at all, for so long as the work's done, I don't care who does it, but Barney can save himself the trouble of comin' back again this session. The last night he was here he was that mixed he turned over three pages of his note-book at a time, and plunged right out of a speech of Disraeli's into one of Isaac Butt's, and meed Disraeli talk three-quarters of a column of sinse and rayson and peetriotism about Ireland. Crowther sent down to the printer for the copy, and I have a note from him saying that he can't afford to encourage that sort of eccentricity. He says the *Her'ld's* not a comic paper, though I'm not so sure o' that as Crowther seems to be."

"Well," said Mr. O'Hanlon, with a sigh, "glory be to God, murphys an' buttermilk's plenty at Ballykillfadden. Barney 'll dew very well there till the beginning of next session."

"So he will," asserted the other; "an' maybe 'twill learn him a lesson."

Things promised better and better for Mr. Amelia. The chapter of accidents seemed to hold leaf after leaf that read in his favour. It was just and fitting that sober integrity and competence should prosper by the fault of drunken incapacity, and nobody could reasonably ask that the little man should pity the defaulting Barney. He seemed to be climbing to fortune on Barney's back, and though he had never seen him, he had quite a distinct image of that good-for-nothing gentleman in his mind.

"Let me see," said the chief of the *Herald's* staff, making a small mental calculation; "in alphabetical order, Maguire follows Lawrence, and Poultney follows Maguire. Ye relieve Lawrence at six o'clock, Mr. Amaylia, and at half-past ye'll be relieved be Poultney."

"I'll show ye up-stairs," said the kindly O'Hanlon, "and inthrojuice ye to the noble Steele, the janitor." Mr. Amelia followed the Irishman up a winding flight of stone steps, and, passing through a room in which a dozen men sat writing, stood before a pair of folding glass doors, through which he took a peep at Her Gracious Majesty's Commons, most of whom within view appeared to be peacefully dozing, each with his hat pulled forward over his nose. Immediately before him, shutting out the greater part of the House from view, were a number of men penned in little square sunken holes, all of whom seemed to be taking life as languidly as the gentlemen below.

"Don't block up the way, if you please, gentlemen," said a grave voice at Mr. Amelia's elbow, and the little man, looking up, beheld a big man in evening dress, with a silver chain and badge upon his waistcoat. For a moment the little man was abased in spirit before the big one, discerning in him a functionary of this ancient and honourable House; but O'Hanlon was evidently on familiar terms with him, and Mr. Amelia's awe was dissipated.

"Mr. Amelia, Steele," said O'Hanlon, "he's for the *Her'ld* this evening. Ye'll mind an' do what Steele tells ye," he added to Mr. Amelia; "onless ye want to find out where the Torture Chamber is." Mr. Steele smiled and produced a silver snuff-box, from which O'Hanlon took a pinch. The owner of the box took a pinch also, and the two bowed gravely at each other as they sniffed at the powder.

"Might I go inside?" asked Mr. Amelia. "I should like to hear what's going on."

"Ye may, then," said O'Hanlon, "but it's a fancy ye'll be cured of mighty soon. D'ye see where the grey-headed man's sitting? him with the bald spot? Very well. When the clock across there says 'six o'clock,' ye walk into that box, and when it says 'half-past,' ye walk out again. For me own part, I'm dry, thank God, and I'm going to the refreshment-room for a drink."

Mr. Amelia nodded a farewell, and edged himself through the folding-doors. For the first time in his life he was in the House of Commons, actually there for the purpose of reporting a debate; and he thought of Charles Dickens and Lord Campbell, who had entered on that function before him. He found a vacant corner seat, and peering over the edge of the Gallery, looked down on a gentleman with an extremely large, flat bald head, who was barking and coughing out a speech at an almost unintelligible rate of speed. Twenty or thirty men, thinly scattered about the benches, slept around him. Nobody listened except a distracted reporter in a corner, who had been especially retained by the honourable gentleman below to secure his luminosities for the *Mudpool Echo*, so that at least his constituents might be enlightened. Now and then a weary-looking personage, with a face of accustomed boredom, pushed aside the folding-doors at the entrance to the Chamber, and after a hasty glance at the slumbering figures and the gabbling old gentleman on his legs, went away again.

"And this," thought Mr. William Amelia, "is the British House of Commons!" It was duller than a meeting of Guardians or Commissioners at Gallowbay. It could not hold a candle to the Town Council of his native city.

When the bald-headed gentleman had barked, coughed, and cackled in Mr. Amelia's hearing for one half-hour or thereabouts, one of the recumbent gentlemen awoke, yawned, looked at the clock, took off his hat, and arose. "I beg to move, Sir," he said, "that the House be counted." Everybody awoke, and there was a little bustle for a while. Then twenty or thirty members strolled in and took their places, and when the old gentleman had been set a-going once more they all went out again. At six o'clock Mr. Amelia relieved his colleague according to instructions.

"Don't take a word of this fellow," said the colleague as he climbed out of the sunken box. Mr. Amelia nodded and took his place. The old gentleman talked through the whole of his half-hour of duty, and at the end of it Mr. Amelia was visited by the chief of staff, who told him to write, "Amelia follows Lawrence—Poultney follows," on a strip of paper and drop it into a specified basket in Committee Room Number Eighteen. Having fulfilled this arduous duty Mr. Amelia found himself free until nine o'clock, and spent the time in wandering about Palace Yard and Parliament Street. When he re-entered the Gallery and prepared to take his place, there were but half-a-dozen members on the benches below, and this time a long, gaunt man of preternaturally solemn aspect was haranguing the great waste Chamber, and nobody was taking the faintest notice of him except, as in the former case, a solitary reporter, who craned painfully over the edge of the Gallery to catch his merest murmur. By-and-by somebody awoke, yawned, and stretched luxuriously, looked at the clock, rose to his feet, and moved that the House be counted. There was a longish pause, and then a cocked hat was seen by Mr. Amelia to wave below a sort of carved wooden canopy, as the Speaker counted the members present, and then a solemn voice announced that the House was adjourned. Mr. Amelia received his guinea, and went home rejoicing, with instructions to present himself anew on the morrow. He exulted, and his little breast was inflated as he walked proudly home. What a leap in life he had made, to be sure! Two or three months ago fourth reporter on the staff of a mere provincial journal, working hard for thirty shillings a week, and now picking up a guinea a night for doing nothing.

But Linden saw another sight four-and-twenty hours later, when every bench was packed, when the Peers' Gallery and the Strangers' Gallery were thronged, when the place echoed with laughter and cheers and counter-cheers, and the swiftly-stammering Grecian, standing with his hands behind him like a boy reciting a lesson, launched bitter invective, and sarcasm tipped and barbed and polished by scholarship, at his old impassive enemy, and the panting Amelia, like Time in pursuit of Shakespeare, toiled after him in vain. The speech was a mosaic of quotations from Homer and the author of the last new comedy; Father Prout and the prophet Malachi, Shakespeare, Vanbrugh, Sheridan, Horace, and Juvenal. The stammering tongue plundered each of these and many more, stealing here an epithet and there a phrase, and here an apt little parable. Allusions familiar or recondite sparkled in every sentence. Every now and then, amid the tumult of the House, Mr. Amelia heard a crackling laugh from a white-headed old gentleman on his right, and this laugh always spoke of intense approval of the Greek and Latin. This old gentleman was a profound classic, and had a rare literary humour. The little Amelia sweated and writhed whilst the merry old gentleman sniggered beside him, and his heart sank as he toiled. The clock struck, his relief, note-book in hand, tapped him on the shoulder, and he left the box with a headache and a heartache. He was a failure and an impostor, and he knew it.

"That's something like parliamentary eloquence, if you like," said the white-headed old gentleman in a mellow mumble. "You're new to the work, and I daresay you found that a difficult speech to take. You can look over my copy in Number Eighteen, if that will be of any use to you."

"Thank you," said Mr. Amelia, self-possessed again. "I *am* a little uncertain about the foreign languages."

"M—m," said the old fellow, with an odd sidelong look at him, "I fancy you are! We call Greek and Latin dead languages, sir, not foreign. When I was your age, sir, the Gallery was a place for scholars. Now, any ignoramus can get into it. The foreign languages!"

He shuffled on with an indignant air, and Mr. Amelia followed meekly. The old gentleman did not repeat his invitation, but the little man sat down beside him and squinted askance at his crabbed manuscript. He was the faster penman of the two, but he regulated his pace, so as to leave the leader always one folio in advance. When the task was done he breathed freely.

"Shall I be required to-morrow?" he asked his chief at midnight, when he pocketed his second guinea.

"Yes," said the chief; "you'd better come regularly now, till the end of the session;" and away went Mr. Amelia, fatigued but happy.

But next evening the chief wore a face of wrath, and encountering Mr. Amelia in the refreshment-room, he drew him into the corridor, and there laid upon a window-sill two slips of newspaper.

"This," said he, laying a finger on one, "is Mr. Blenkinsopp's report in the *Gazette*. This," with a finger on the other, "is yours in the *Her'ld.* They're word for word the same. When a gentleman lends his purse to you next toime, an' tells ye to take a sixpence, maybe ye'll know better than to help yourself to a fiver. There's a guinea for this evening's work, Mr. Amelia, and we'll try to do without ye in the future. Good evening."

In his after-day of success Mr. Amelia remembered and resented this contemptuous dismissal, but now there was nothing to do but to retire.

"I'd have let it pass, Mickey," said the white-headed old gentleman to Mr. Amelia's late chief, "if it hadn't been for the foreign languages. 'I *am* a little uncertain about the foreign languages,' says he, with the most confounded innocent *dégagé* air you ever saw in your life, as if he'd been a ripe scholar in his day and had grown a little rusty. I'm glad to see a young man like that get a lesson."

We all recognised Mickey's portrait in Mr. Amelia's recent brilliant novel, but not all of us knew what excellent reason the little man had for hating him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE great Intelligencer of Fashion made it known to the world at large that Mr. Bolsover Kimberley was on a visit to the Earl of Windgall at Shouldershott Castle, and the world at large put its own construction on the news. People knew that Windgall was poor, and that the late owner of the Gallowbay Estate had been engaged in his minority to one of his lordship's daughters. They knew that the early death of that promising youngster had been a terrible blow to the noble earl his neighbour, and the world was agreed that it was impossible to mistake the meaning of Windgall's latest move. With the curious exception of the people most interested in the projected arrangement, its whole history and meaning were known to everybody. Kimberley never guessed it, and the ladies of Windgall's household most assuredly did not so much as dream of it. Kimberley's native humility, and the constant sense he had of his own poor deserts, kept his mind from any hope so wild as such a suspicion must have confessed. He knew how ill-bred he was, or at any rate, if it was impossible for him quite to realise the full knowledge of his want of breeding, he knew at least most definitely that he *was* ill-bred, and that the ways of the aristocrat were not his own. His book of etiquette made him nervous, for the first time in his life, about that terrible letter "h," which is such a trouble to so many English minds; and now that he was aware of that social pitfall he was for ever tumbling into it and wallowing in shame. Now that he was near her, the Lady Ella frightened him, and he thought of his own presumption in having dared to love her, with fear and trembling. The beautiful, graceful creature belonged to another world, or, so it seemed—to an order of which he had not known. She was kindly, and pitied the poor fellow's nervous agonies, but there was a something in her manner which he felt as though it had been hauteur, and intended—as it never was—to mark the eternal social difference between them.

Yet with all this he fell more and more in love, until the mere sentimental fancy which had haunted the lawyer's clerk became to the millionnaire an absorbing passion.

You may be sure that the Earl of Windgall had many hours in which his own hopes looked extremely base to him. There are people in the world, as every one knows, whose geese are all swans, but there are also people whose swans are all geese. Windgall had more in common with the latter than the former tribe. Perhaps his lifelong poverty had had something to do with the formation of the pessimist opinions he held about everything that belonged to himself, but though he had as little family vanity as most men, he knew well enough the distance which separated his daughter from Bolsover Kimberley; and sometimes, when he thought of his own longing to pass his child through the fire unto Moloch, he would actually groan aloud with shame and sudden repentance. And yet what was he to do, after all? No gentleman with his pockets full of money came a-wooing. Kimberley was a snob, certainly, but was he more of a snob than many men who had actually been received into good families? Poverty—cruel spur—galled his flank whenever he would fain have turned aside from his own purpose, and there was always ready to his hand the sophistical, hypocritical hope that nothing would come of the visit, and that Kimberley would go away without insulting his host's pride. We need not think too hardly of him because he longed to have his pride insulted and had resolved to pocket the insult. Poverty is so hard a master! There are thousands of men who hold their heads high out of the reach of shame for no better reason than that they have a balance at the bank. There are thousands more who live seedy, shifty, shameful lives for no better reason than continual poverty affords. This theme, when one looks closely into it, begins to be terrible. How much of virtue is accidental, how much of human baseness unescapable! But the Earl of Windgall scarcely supplies the text for so awful a sermon. It is certain that if he had been but moderately well-to-do for his station he would have been an admirable father. It is certain that he had no vulgar love of money, and that in most respects he was a blameless man and a good citizen.

It was worth notice that the people who were severest on his manœuvre with Kimberley had been persuaded aforetime of the justice of his action with regard to the suit of the Honourable Jack Clare. It was also worth notice that there were few of them—and those the wealthier—who would not have been pleased to see the late lawyer's clerk approaching their own daughters with matrimonial intent.

Windgall did not care to discount the chances in favour of Kimberley's falling in love with one of the young ladies by bringing too many people to Shouldershott Castle at this time, and the little fellow was there on quite homelike family terms, so that in a little while his terror began to wear away. By-and-by he would prattle in an artless, sentimental way with Alice, the Lady

Ella's younger sister, and make her the confidante of many of his troubles, though never of the greatest. Alice had a touch of good-natured mockery, and would imitate Mr. Kimberley to her sister. They both enjoyed many a good laugh over him, but were not in the least disposed to dislike him. He was not of their world, but he was good-natured and obliging, and meek beyond description. It would have been difficult to dislike so harmless a creature.

"I think sometimes," said Kimberley to Alice one afternoon, when he had been domiciled at the Castle for a week, "I think sometimes that difference in station is a very cruel thing, Miss."

"Why do you think so, Mr. Kimberley?" Miss demanded, suppressing an inclination to laugh. Kimberley looked exceedingly embarrassed as he spoke. His humble whiskers drooped to a point on either side of his blushing countenance, and a loose wisp of colourless hair stood up above his forehead, and his nervous eyebrows offered their usual apology.

"Not as a general rule, I don't," said Kimberley. "But before I came into my fortune, if I make myself understood, I was a Liberal in politics, and they used to say that all men are born free and equal, and a cobbler is as good as a king."

"And now, are you a Tory?" said the young lady smiling.

"No," said Kimberley, awkwardly, "I don't think so. But what I was a-goin' to say—what I was going to say was—when I began to mix with the hup—the upper classes, I seemed to find there was a difference between them and the people I was bred up amongst. Not as they ain't—as they are not—as kind, but there's a difference, and they make you feel it." He blushed all over, and clasped his hands between his knees with a nervous gesture. "I speak so awkward," he said—"I mean so awkwardly. I can't say what I want to say. I was always shy," he added desperately, "even before I came into my fortune, and now I am worse than ever."

A good girl could hardly bear to make fun of so much humility when it came thus to sue *in formâ pauperis*, and the young lady answered with great good nature, "You will conquer your shyness in a little while, Mr. Kimberley."

"I wish you'd teach me 'ow—how!" cried Kimberley.

"I think," she said, "that shyness is very often a form of vanity. Shy people seem generally to be saying to themselves, 'Oh, what *do* people think of *me?*' and that makes them uncomfortable. Now, if I were shy by nature, the first thing I should set myself to do would be to teach myself not to think about myself at all. I should say, 'Think of anybody or anything rather than yourself,' and by-and-by, when I had grown used to that, I should begin to feel quite comfortable. To feel shy makes other people unhappy."

"Oh, do you think so?" asked Kimberley. "I might have done what you recommend me to if I'd 'ad the advantage of your advice when I—before I came into my fortune. But it's all so different now. Money doesn't make 'appiness—happiness, miss."

"Now, shall I give you some lessons, Mr. Kimberley?" asked the girl. He confessed his shortcomings so openly that there could be no shade of insolence in this offer. Kimberley jumped at it.

"Oh, will you, miss? If you only would!"

"Very well," she said gaily. "Now, in the first place you must never say 'miss' to a lady. Never. And secondly, when you make a mistake in speech you must never correct it aloud. That only draws attention to it and emphasises it. And thirdly, you must never allude to differences in rank, whether you are talking to a duke or a ploughboy. I think you would be too good-hearted to do it before an inferior. Politeness is good-heartedness polished, that is all, and it is not kind to the duke to make him see that you feel the difference between yourself and him, and that you are pained by it."

"You've named three things, miss," said Kimberley. The young lady held up a warning finger, and the little man blushed. "You've named three things, and I've done all of them this last five minutes."

It was in this wise that Ella's sister became Kimberley's instructress, superseding the work on etiquette. Kimberley showed that surprising publication to the girl one day, and she counselled its immediate destruction.

The servants at Shouldershott Castle knew very well why their noble master had invited Bolsover to be his guest, and the people of Gallowbay were as wise as his lordship's servitors. It was known in the town that his lordship's second daughter was setting a most industrious cap at the millionnaire, and Gallowbay chose to be shocked at such a sign of worldly wisdom in one so young, The people who had known Kimberley sneered and wondered openly, and he was derided and envied and slandered by all hearts and tongues. When by chance he came among them, they were all marvellously civil, and even those who had no hope of a penny of his money seemed to take pleasure in rubbing against the owner of it, but behind his back they aired their knowledge of the world to his disadvantage, and were as satirical at his expense as they could manage to be. Mr. Blandy, his old employer, was a man who prided himself on discretion, and being hopeful of some share of the crumbs from the rich man's table, was always loud in Kimberley's praises, not knowing what bird of the air might carry the news of his disinterested affection and esteem to the ears of their object. It has long been known that there is no talisman like money for bringing to light the hidden meannesses of the human heart.

Windgall's longing for his own respect would not permit him to indulge in frequent praises of his guest, but he found virtues in him which he had not expected to find.

"He's a good little cad," his lordship would say to himself, sometimes; "but, confound him, why does he shrink and tremble and kotow so? He's afraid of the very stable-boys and kitchen-wenches, and he is hardly more alarmed at *me* than at the butler."

Many and many an hour of shame the nobleman endured—shame for his own hopes, shame lest his girls should read them, and shame that the world at large knew them already. The shame was none the less biting because it seemed likely to be wasted and endured for nothing. It seemed a thousand to one that Kimberley would never summon the courage to propose, even if he had the audacity to fall in love; and if he should falsify the Earl's fears of him, was it likely that either of the girls would take him? Nothing—and he knew that very well—nothing but the strongest pressure from outside would compel either of them to link herself for life with a man so apart from her own sphere, so incapable of being friend or companion. If the girls' mother had but lived, it would have been her place to see to these matters, and the unhappy nobleman had never felt his widowhood so keenly as he felt it now.

Meantime he put a good face upon the matter, and Kimberley and he drove or walked together in Gallowbay or the county town as if they had been equals. They walked past the very offices in which Kimberley had earned his thirty shillings a week, and the head of the great hereditary house of Windgall gave no sign. It is not only when the enterprise is noble that the conduct may be that of a hero. Even a footpad must have a sort of courage.

One day Blandy saw Windgall and the late clerk at a distance, and having pulled one glove half on, and settled his hat before the mirror into what he thought looked like a hasty angle, waited and watched at his ground-floor window, so that he might run out in a hurry and meet them by accident. The two encountering a local magnate, and falling into talk with him, kept Mr. Blandy waiting for some five minutes, but at last they moved on again, and in the nick of time the lawyer made a dash at the door and emerged upon the street with great briskness and a look of preoccupation. His sudden recovery of the ordinary affairs of life, and his surprised and humbly gratified recognition of Mr. Kimberley and his companion, were in their way a work of art.

"My dear Mr. Kimberley," he cried, with a sidelong cringe at the Earl, "I am delighted to see you, sir. I am charmed to see you looking so well. I have not had a personal opportunity of offering my congratulations. Permit me now, though I am taken somewhat at a disadvantage. It was my felicity, my lord, to instruct Mr.

Kimberley in the mysteries of the law." He told everybody since his late clerk's aggrandisement that Kimberley had been articled, and would have made a great mark in the profession. "I am sure, my lord, that good fortune never smiled upon worthier shoulders."

My lord was not pleasantly impressed with Mr. Blandy's brandified visage and glib speech, but he was very gracious with him, and when Kimberley introduced his late employer by name, Windgall bowed and said, "Any friend of Mr. Kimberley's, I am sure," which sounded civil, little as its words expressed. Mr. Blandy, writhing and ducking with his snub features creased into an ingratiatory smile, protested he must have an opportunity of an hour or two with his dear Mr. Kimberley.

"That is quite natural," said my lord, affably. "Should auld acquaintance be forgot?" Mr. Blandy bobbed and bowed and laughed the flatterer's laugh.

"A most appropriate quotation, my lord," said he, "if I may venture on the impertinence of saying so."

"Don't let me be in your way, Kimberley," said the Earl, with a familiar hand on the little millionnaire's shoulder. "He will be more at home with this marionette of a fellow than he is with me," he thought, "and I shall be glad to be free of him for an hour or two." He fancied that Kimberley's hesitation of manner arose from a dread of seeming discourteous in preferring Blandy's company. "You'd like to spend an hour with Mr. Blandy?" he said aloud.

"Leave him to me for the afternoon and evening, my lord," said Mr. Blandy, with a blending of something waggish with the humility of his tone. "He shall be sent on to Shouldershott Castle in the evening, my lord, quite safely. Really you must eat your mutton with me this evening, Mr. Kimberley. You can't refuse an old friend so small a favour. Can he, my lord?"

"Well, then," said Windgall, still misreading Kimberley's awkward and embarrassed silence, "we won't look for you until evening, Kimberley. Good-bye until then. Good day, sir." My lord walked on, convinced that he had done a kindness to his guest, and assured, on better grounds, that he himself was pleased.

"Come in, Mr. Kimberley," cried Blandy. "You remember the old room, eh? Ha, ha! Here it stands still, you observe. The same old room still. Do you remember, Mr. Kimberley, the last deed you engrossed in this apartment? I keep it still, as a memento. You left off at the *con* in *consideration*, and I determined it should never be touched again."

This sentimental proceeding on the part of Mr. Blandy was not quite in consonance with what Kimberley remembered of him, but it was explainable by the fact that the intending purchaser had gone bankrupt a day or two after Kimberley's accession to fortune, so that the deed had no longer been needed. The late clerk, recalling this fact to mind, was smitten with a sense of vicarious shame—an emotion to which he was easily liable.

"We talk of you every day," cried Mr. Blandy, respectfully familiar and genial. "Mrs. Blandy speaks of you, if I may say so, as a son. It was beneath this roof that most of the years of your early manhood were spent, Mr. Kimberley; and though you have inscribed a flight so lofty upon the scroll of society and wealth, we cannot be unmindful of the fact. No, sir, no; we nurse that privilege, believe me. Believe me, sir, we nurse it."

Mr. Blandy had not been any better or much worse a master than the ordinary run of country solicitors are, but he was a crossgrained creature, who bullied when he could, and Kimberley had always been afraid of him. He felt a little more afraid of him now than ever, and yet he feigned to be gratified by the man's transparent humbug, and did his best to smile at his pretended friendship.

"Excuse me for one second, Mr. Kimberley," said the solicitor, "just one solitary second," as though to have him out of sight for a longer space were a thing unbearable to think of. Mr. Kimberley assenting with a disturbed smile and a disjointed nod, Mr. Blandy bustled from the room and seized the office-boy in the next apartment. "Run to the 'Windgall Arms,' Robert, and tell the landlord to send down at once. Let me see. Yes." He wrote an order for half-a-dozen of champagne and a bottle each of port and burgundy. "At once. You are to wait and come back with 'em. Now, you be back in five minutes, my boy, or I'll lace your jacket for you." The boy despatched, Mr. Blandy returned to his guest. "This way, sir, if you please. Ah! you know the way, Mr. Kimberley, as well as I do. This house was your boyhood's home, so to speak, sir. My dear, Mr. Bolsover Kimberley revisits his old home."

Mrs. Blandy, fat and fifty, arose with a little scream of welcome when her husband threw open the drawing-room door with this announcement, and received the millionnaire with two plump hands outstretched.

"How do you do, ma'am?" said Kimberley, breaking silence for the first time since his encounter with his old employer.

"My *dear* Mr. Kimberley," shrilled the lady, "I knew we should not be forgotten."

"We were sure of that, Maria," said Mr. Blandy, with considerable feeling. "For one day Mr. Kimberley is content to leave the society of his loftier friends to enjoy the humble hospitality of the companions of earlier days. Permit me to take your hat, sir. Maria, if you don't mind taking the trouble, perhaps you had better take the cellar-keys yourself and bring up a bottle of champagne. The extra sec, my love. You know." A swift wink in answer to Mrs. Blandy's momentary look of bewilderment set the lady's mind at rest, and, with a hospitable smile bestowed on Kimberley, she sidled from the room with a joyous little skip at the doorway, expressive of affection and alacrity. "Excuse me for one second, Mr. Kimberley," cried the solicitor anew, "for just one solitary second." He slipped through the open door. "Robert is gone to the 'Windgall' for it," he whispered.

Mrs. Blandy was wont to be extremely angry when Mr. Blandy proposed to introduce at his own table the beverages he loved, but she smiled so graciously at this that the fancy crossed the solicitor's mind like a sigh—what joy it would be to have a millionnaire in the house as a regular thing! When he re-entered the room Kimberley was nervously pulling at his gloves, and he put him officiously into a chair, with a hospitable hand on either shoulder.

"A woman of a rare good heart is Mrs. Blandy," he said, seating himself opposite to Kimberley, "a woman of a rare good heart, sir, though I say it who should not. It isn't in that woman's nature to forget a friend, sir. No; she couldn't forget a dog who had enjoyed the hospitality of her roof." It seemed to occur with some force to Mr. Blandy that this was scarcely the way in which he would have chosen to express himself if he had taken more time about it, for he blushed fierily, and was fain to cover his confusion by a fit of coughing. Kimberley was on thorns alike for the pretender and himself. The shy, sensitive little soul had never pretended in his life, unless indeed it had been in that helpful and tender way in which pretence becomes surely one of the best of virtues, and he knew well enough the coarse and sordid meaning which lay at the bottom of his host's welcome. Mr. Blandy had never professed to like him until now, but had treated him with a contempt which the clerk had always felt to be natural and befitting. Everybody had despised him and made little of him, and he had grown used to it, and had come to regard it as inevitable, and even proper for him. When strangers kotowed to him, he felt the sting of unfamilar usage, but not as he did now, for with strangers the sense of contrast was absent.

"Do you propose to stay long at the Castle, Mr. Kimberley?" asked the lawyer, when he had a little recovered from his confusion.

"Lord Windgall has been good enough," said Kimberley, shamefacedly, "to ask me to stay for the shooting in September."

"Ah!" said Mr. Blandy, rubbing his knees, as if to get the aristocratic idea well into his system. "You find him affable? A noble house, the Windgalls', Mr. Kimberley. It is an honour to entertain a guest of Lord Windgall's beneath this roof, sir, if only for a day."

Kimberley sat and suffered under Mr. Blandy's compliments until Mrs. Blandy returned bearing a bottle of champagne, and following closely on a ring at the door and a clanging sound of bottles there.

"I am afraid you thought me a dreadful time, Mr. Kimberley," cried the lady, with a giggle, "but I had mislaid the cellar-keys and had to hunt high and low for them. I'm afraid you'll think me a dreadful housekeeper, but I assure you it's years since such a thing happened."

"So long ago, my dear," said Mr. Blandy, with ponderous playfulness, "that I fail to recall the time."

Kimberley, rising nervously from the chair into which Mr. Blandy had placed him, looked out of the window, and saw the Blandy wine-cellar on the back of the hostler of the "Windgall Arms." He was not of a penetrating or suspicious turn of mind by nature, but in spite of himself he knew how the wine came, and the little humbug seemed typical to him of the greater, and his flesh crawled as he thought of it. He was indeed so keenly shamed in his nervous and sensitive heart, that he longed for courage to run away, and being unable to summon it sat down again with a revolving wheel in his head, and submitted himself to misery.

There are thousands of satirical people alive who have been amused by such pretences; there are many who have observed this identical pretence, which has figured in comedy a hundred times or more, and have been duly tickled by its discovery. But Kimberley was so framed by nature that when he saw through a little meanness of that kind—and, happily for himself, he saw but rarely—he endured in his own person all the shames and discomforts which he would have suffered had he been the sinner and detected. He upset and broke a champagne-glass in his agitation, and was so overwhelmed by this catastrophe that for a moment he had a wild idea of offering to pay for the damage on the spot—an inspiration which turned him hot and cold for years afterwards whenever he remembered it. Mr. Blandy would listen to no apologies for this mishap, and Mrs. Blandy treated it so lightly and cheerfully, and rattled away to other topics with so much vivacity, that, between his agitation at the accident and his bewilderment in attempting to follow the lady's speech, the shy millionnaire was well-nigh out of his senses. But the weariest hours will wear away, and the dreadful afternoon crawled on for Kimberley. He was so betrowelled by his host and hostess that he had a physical longing to go away and bathe himself. Their compliments seemed to thicken and stiffen upon him like birdlime.

Mr. Blandy besought his guest to drink, and meeting with a poor response to his entreaties did his best to atone for Kimberley's shortcomings, so that by the time the dinner was served the lawyer's brandified nose was redder and his swollen eyes moister than common, whilst he grew in affection, and became more mendacious in his memories of Auld Lang Syne with every glass he emptied. He had loved Kimberley like a son—he called Mrs. Blandy to witness how often he had said so. Kimberley might, if he pleased, verify this statement further by an appeal to Dr. Smith, to the landlord and landlady at the "Windgall Arms," to the whole world of Gallowbay. He had seen hidden qualities in the young man, he had prophesied loftier things for him, he had stood up for him again and again; he had drummed and clarioned for Kimberley for many years, when, perhaps, the object of all this solicitude had little dreamed of his affection. The wretched man of money scarcely opened his lips, but his heart bled and writhed above this liar and impostor. He felt no resentment, as a stronger man would have done; no amusement, as a man of humour might; the day was a revel of shame, and the bitter potion was held persistently to his lips to be emptied over and over and over again. But the crown of sorrow had yet to be laid upon his brow.

Mrs. Blandy had retired, and the lawyer, with eyes that by this time looked hard-boiled, sat noisily sucking at an unlighted cigar, and filled and emptied his glass with dreadful rapidity.

"Kimbly, my dear boy—you lemme call you Kimbly, won' you?—I shall live to see you occupying exshremely lofry station. Know I shall. Win'gall's a very fly ole bird, Kimbly. Win'gall can see as far through a milestone 's most men. Don't mind me calling him Win'gall, do you? His lor'ship always meant have the

Gallowbay 'state, Kimbly. He meant have it when young Bolsover was alive, and he means have it now. We don't live at Should'shott Castle, but we know a thing or two, my boy. Nev' you minow we know it, Kimbly—s' long 's we know it. Sha, shawlright. Must say we didn' expect see him do the trick in quite such barefaced way; but then, of course, he's as poor as Job—poorah, grea' deal poorah. Wonrer how he keeps his head 'bove warer. But he'll nail you, Kimbly, me boy, as sure's you're 'live. Young lady seems be quite willin' too, doesn't she? It's always been a sort of trarition with the Win'galls, to be poor, an' proud, an' pretty. Poor-prown-prirry—that's family morro. I'm a lill bit 'fected when I think seeing my dear Kimbly 'nited marriage noble family. That's what makes me talk like this. Can't speak quite plain when I'm affected 's I am at this moment. But the noble Earl'll nail you f' one o' the girls, Kimbly. I bleeve you're gone coon already, ole man. 'Gratulate you, all my heart. Gob less you."

Kimberley escaped this oppressive host, and walked to the hotel, where he had already ordered a carriage to convey him to Shouldershott Castle. He walked and rode in a degradation of soul. Was it possible that this lofty gentleman, this peer of the realm, could be so coarsely and openly bent on securing him and his money that the whole world should see it and know of it? Why else should he be so friendly with so poor a creature? What had Kimberley, he asked himself, bitterly, to recommend him but his money? Was he clever? Was he handsome? Was he a gentleman? Was he a fit companion for people who were nobly bred? No, no, no, to all these bitter queries. He was a poor little snob, whom nature meant to lead a life of drudgery and poverty, to be snubbed and disdained when regarded, but for the most part to be left alone. It was bitter, oh, it was bitter to have been lifted from that simple contentment he had known, to be made the target of such base tongues and the centre of such shameful hopes. He cried to think of these things, as he sat in his carriage alone. But then triumphing over his miseries came the fancy—he could have his dream of love—his lunatic fancy; he had cried for the moon, and now he could have it by asking for it. Was the news true? And if true, dare he ask?

CHAPTER X.

"KIMBERLEY," said the Earl of Windgall to his guest one fine morning as they walked in the park together, "you ought to go into public life. You should stand for Gallowbay. Has it ever occurred to you to think of it?"

This had no more occurred to Kimberley than the notion that he should offer himself as a candidate for the throne of China, and the mere suggestion of it took his breath away.

"No, my lord," he answered, after a frightened pause, "I can't say I have. In fact, I haven't."

The popular opinion that his daughter Alice was the object of Kimberley's attentions had not left Windgall altogether untouched, and since it had come to seem possible that his mean hope might be realised, and that the millionnaire would at least ask for one of the girls, my lord was ready to throw the little man at the world in a spirit of desperation. Let people see at once what manner of man he was, and if they wanted to laugh at him and to sneer at the nobleman who had made so open a bid for his money, let them get the laugh and the sneer both over, and have done with them! There was, besides, some faint hope in his mind that by attrition with the world Kimberley might even yet be rubbed into something like the usual shape. Painfully labouring to think well of his guest, in order that his own meanness might seem the less revolting to him, he discovered in poor Bolsover a score of good qualities. He was truthful to a hair, in spite of his painful shyness, and considering his dreadful breeding his sense of honour was remarkably delicate. It was not Windgall's fault that he had been told that a sense of honour was chiefly an aristocratic belonging, and it was not wholly his fault that he had believed it. Then Kimberley was generous, and most eager to help and oblige. He was amiable and tender-hearted, and slow to take offence. His money had not set him cock-a-whoop—suddenly as it came. He never bullied a servant, or presumed upon his wealth to be insolent to a gentleman. All these and many more admirable characteristics the Earl discovered in Kimberley, knowing perfectly all the while that if he himself had had a little more money he would never have taken the trouble to discover them.

Within the last few years a great change has come over the British House of Commons, and it is no longer the first assemblage of gentlemen in Europe. It may be a very bad thing, or it may be a very good thing, but it no longer prides itself upon being an assemblage of gentlemen. It includes many who have every imaginable claim to the title, and some who have no claim and make no claim at all. So that it is no longer so proud a thing to write M.P. after one's name, as it once was. Low people, actually sprung from the people, have had the audacity at most times in the History of the House to sit there as the people's representatives; but there was a time when they were less numerous than they are now, and when to secure a seat in that august assemblage was to give oneself a certain cachet of respectability. Windgall, in his time, had been too much within the life political to attach a very superstitious reverence to the sentiment, but he knew that it existed, and that Bolsover Kimberley, M.P., would be a person of measurably more consideration than Bolsover Kimberley plain and unadorned. With the common crowd it makes a difference still—the letters have a sort of magic even now; but a short time ago they had their weight with people in a higher sphere, and a Member of Parliament was a recognisable somebody. The distinction was, of course, trivial to a nobleman's view, but it was something. Pococatapetl would make light of the difference between Snowdon and a molehill, but the difference is there all the same, and a philosophically-minded mountain might acknowledge it.

"I have not yet heard a murmur from the press," said Windgall, "but we shall have a dissolution shortly. Bosworth is old, and not too plentifully furnished with money. I have it from his own lips that he will not contest another election, and there is a Major Heard who is talked about as being certain to fight in the Liberal interest."

"Major Heard is a very good man, my lord," said Kimberley, scarcely knowing what he said. "I should vote for Major Heard."

This was awkward, and it took his lordship a silent minute to digest it. The Windgalls had always been Tory, and he could not back Kimberley if he were Liberal. This was the first political talk they had had together.

"I had thought," said his lordship, "that you were a Liberal-Conservative, Kimberley. Surely you would uphold the throne?"

"Certainly, my lord," cried Kimberley with vivacity. The potion of ambition began to work in his blood with a perplexing current already. If he could only dare to think of being a Member of Parliament and addressing crowded audiences in the Gallowbay Town Hall! "I should certainly uphold the throne, my lord." He began to flush and tremble again. After all, even he might be somebody.

"You would support property?" said my lord.

"There are wild fellows who are beginning to talk about the abolition of property. A man in your position could scarcely ally himself with that crew."

"I think, my lord," stammered Kimberley, "that all vested interests ought to be respected." He had been used to read the leaders in his weekly paper, and he had even taken part in political discussions at the Young Men's Christian Association.

"Precisely!" cried Windgall. "Precisely! The sentiment in a nutshell." Kimberley felt flattered. "All vested interests must be respected." Thus sanctioned in familiar talk by noble lips, the sentiment received additional force. When Kimberley had spoken it he had felt a glow of public spirit, and the words reflected it. But when Windgall echoed them they took an almost sacred lustre.

"But," said Kimberley, a minute later, "the poor ought to be taken care of, hadn't they, my lord? That's what I think the 'Ouse of Commons ought to do—look after the poor."

"That is undoubtedly one of the functions of good government," my lord allowed. "But the Legislature of this country—and this is its proudest boast—exists alike for the benefit of the poor and the rich, the humble and the lofty. It works for the general good, without distinction of class differences."

Kimberley came to wonder later on what really was the proudest boast of the Legislature of this country—it had so many, and its admirers were so certain that each of them was the proudest. He was in a mighty flutter still at Windgall's suggestion, and in his mind's eye he saw a crowded hall, with himself upon the platform, and on his mental ear fell the sound of cheering, whilst the figure on the platform dug one hand into its ribs and rested the other on the table in that graceful attitude he had always admired in Major Heard. But the fancy made his head swim, and he thought that he could never, never dare to be so conspicuous.

"Gallowbay would be a certain seat for you," pursued the Earl, after a little pause. "Half the voters are your tenants, and if you chose to avail yourself of my name——" Kimberley blushed and bowed. It would be useless to try to hide the fellow away, his lordship was thinking. Better stick him up on a pedestal at once, and let everybody see him, and so get the wonder over. "Our politics, of course, must not vary too widely," he said, with a genial laugh; "but that is a matter which is easy of accommodation. When you come into political life you will find that in the main all parties have one object, and that is to keep office when they have it, or to regain it when they have lost it. The fight is to secure the confidence of the people, and that fact makes it certain that an appreciable amount of work will be done somehow. To my mind the Constitution is very like the land, and the Parties are very like the sea. They rave and rage about it, they wash away a bit here and a bit there, but they build up somewhere else. But I am not much in earnest as a practical politician, and I must not try to make you a Sadducee like myself."

Kimberley failed to understand something of this, yet it was pleasant to be talked to in such wise by one who had an hereditary place in the Legislature.

"So far as I make out your politics, Kimberley," said the Earl, stopping to confront him, and telling off the points by tapping the gold knob of his walking-cane with a pair of folding-glasses, "they indicate this. You are, first and foremost, loyal to the throne. You don't want to abolish the House of Lords, or to compel the Prince of Wales to dig for his living, or any nonsense of that sort?"

"Oh dear no, my lord," protested Kimberley, almost as scandalized as if the query had been an accusation.

"Of course not," said my lord. "Of course not. But you are a friend to the labouring classes. You think that their condition needs some amelioration—that they should have increased educational facilities, be better fed, better housed, perhaps better paid than they are in some cases. These are, in the rough, your main opinions? Then I should say that you are emphatically a Liberal-Conservative, and that your place is with the traditional supporters of law and order and the traditional friends of the people."

Kimberley murmured that he was certainly friendly disposed to law and order, and the people, but hinted that he thought himself much more Liberal than Conservative.

"In point of fact," said Windgall, "you are resolved to maintain your political independence."

Kimberley was vaguely pleased at this, and felt somehow an inch or two taller by reason of it.

"You decline to submit to the dictates of mere party spirit. You are an ardent supporter of the throne, and a champion of the rights of the people. To questions of party you decline to tie yourself. Exactly—exactly. You take the wise man's attitude; liberal in the admission of wise and necessary changes, but conservative of the great traditions of our Empire and our race."

Kimberley liked the picture of himself, and for a second he held his head up and threw out his wide expanse of scarf. Then the dread of it all got hold of him again. What an awful ordeal the hustings would be, to be sure! Oh, he dared not face it—he dared not even think of facing it! And yet the prospect was full of temptation. There is scarcely any human creature so small, so timid, as to be quite out of the way of ambition. Tender little girls in the nursery read of the deeds of great warriors, and would fain assume a masculine disguise and go out to fight and conquer. The feeblest folk have beaten their big enemies in that shadow world in which whosoever enters grows strong and stalwart and as good as his neighbour, if not a great deal better. It is not often that the very feeble and fearful have the chance of being ambitious thrust upon them as Kimberley had. If he began to make political speeches to himself, beginning and very often ending with "My lord and gentlemen," was it very greatly to be wondered at? Half the voters of Gallowbay were his tenants. Lord Windgall was willing to lend him the influence of his name. The expense would be a mere fleabite. If he could screw his courage to the sticking-point, he would dare anything, for—might not a Member of Parliament be somewhat nearer Ella?

Everything was very much in the air to my lord at present, as a matter of course. Kimberley might not propose, and even if he did the girl might flatly decline him, and in that case what could a father do? Clearly, nothing at all. He was not an ogre, living in an enchanted castle, and prepared to hand over his daughter to the demon of the glen. An English gentleman of modern days is restricted in the bestowal of his children. Windgall, who loved his girls and asked nothing better than that they should be off his hands and be happy, could only let affairs take their course—could at most offer a little mild reason in behalf of the excellent claims presented by a million and a quarter sterling.

As for Kimberley, he moved in a new world, and was, as most people would be under like conditions, excessively uncomfortable. Mr. Blandy's drunken utterances repeated themselves in his mind, and even whilst they revolted him they brought him hope. It was hard to think it possible that the nobly born should be mercenary; it was harder still to be sure that nothing but his money would have secured him their most momentary regard; and it was foolishly, dangerously sweet to think that these humiliations brought him within reach of love. He had never fairly realised the value of his money, and when his day-dreams were of making Ella happy with it, he would impoverish himself at a swoop by the purchase of some great gem, and having earned the right to kneel before her and kiss her hands he would go back to his clerkship. It seemed too absurd to think of her as purchasable by money. If his hourly income had equalled his whole fortune he would still have been poor when he thought of her, for that she should drink from hollowed stones of unheard-of value, and eat from dishes of prodigious pearl, seemed a sort of essential, and he would have hired the world to wait upon her.

To tell the truth, the unoffending little man's lot was a sad one. To be burdened with sudden wealth, to love out of his own sphere, to be fired with ambition—he was a weakling—he was fit for no one of these things.

That evening, in the pleasant summer dusk, Windgall, Ella, Alice, and Kimberley were on the lawn behind the Castle—the Earl pacing up and down with Ella by his side, and Kimberley walking by my lord's second daughter. The two pairs were at some little distance from each other, so that a conversation in a low tone might be carried on by either without being heard by the other; and yet they were near enough to address each other without effort if they chose. Kimberley scarcely ever spoke to Ella, and the girl, if she thought about him at all, may have been apt to fancy that he disliked her.

"You are very mournful this evening, Mr. Kimberley," said the young lady. Mr. Kimberley had twice or thrice sighed involuntarily.

"I do feel a little mournful, re'ly," he responded. He had hardly ever been so much at ease with anybody in his life as this young lady made him. She rallied him a good deal to be sure, but she did it in such a way that it saved him from embarrassment. He confessed his short-comings to her, as we have seen already, and her advice and instructions had almost entirely superseded the book on etiquette. Since he had first come to Shouldershott Castle she had been his most frequent companion, and she had an odd sort of liking for him. He was different from the people she generally met, but she had not seen enough of vulgar people to know a great deal about them, and Kimberley's faults of speech and bearing were idiosyncrasies to her mind, and not characteristic of an inferior class. Do you suppose that an earl's daughter is certain to recognise the social gulf which exists between a solicitor and a copying-clerk ?

"Of what is your melancholy compounded, Mr. Kimberley ?" she asked. "The scholar's melancholy is emulation, the musician's is fantastical, the courtier's is proud, the soldier's is ambitious, and, let me see, the lady's is nice—but that can scarcely be yours—and the lawyer's is politic, and the lover's is everything that the others are. I am talking Shakespeare, Mr.

Kimberley." This was half an apology, for she was suddenly afraid that she was out of his depth.

"Oh yes," said Kimberley, "I read Shakespeare a good deal."

"Do you?" cried the lady, a little surprised.

"I don't suppose I understand him like—like you do," said the little man, bashfully. "But I know 'To be or not to be' by 'art, and 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen,' in *Julius Cæsar*. Oh, I think him and Lord Byron are beautiful. 'She walks in beauty like the night,' ain't that a lovely poem, Miss Santerre?"

"I suppose that a man would think so," said the girl with some naïvete; "but ladies do not care much for descriptions of other ladies. When the poets describe a man, like young Hotspur—'Methinks it were an easy leap to pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon'—that is when they please a lady, Mr. Kimberley."

She indicated the pale-faced moon by a little wave of her fan—the bright satellite was just peering above the trees—and Kimberley sighed again, as he looked at it. The thought touched him suddenly—how very, very different all his life was from what it had used to be. There was for the moment an ineffable sweetness and gratitude in his heart. To be so beautifully clad, to walk on this soft lawn beneath this pleasant sky, and to interchange thoughts on such themes as these with such a companion, and to know that he enjoyed no ephemeral holiday! It was better than the dry drudgery at the desk. For a while it consoled him for all the troubles his money had brought him.

Meantime Ella and her father strolled apart without saying much to each other, but at this point Windgall made a slight *détour* and widened the distance between the pairs. When he spoke it was with a perfect affectation of commonplace.

"Alice and Mr. Kimberley appear to be very good friends?"

"Very good friends," assented Ella.

"I like the little fellow immensely," said my lord. "He is full of good qualities. It is a secret as yet, but I think he will stand for

Gallowbay at the next election, and I shall be glad to see him win."

"He will not make a very brilliant Member of Parliament, papa," said Ella, with half a laugh.

"The House of Commons is not in want of brilliant people just at present," her father answered. "To my way of thinking, it is somewhat dark with excess of light already, and most of the brilliant personages carry their heads in their lanterns, so that a man who does not boast a lantern of his own is likely to see as well as the best of them. He is a considerable landowner, and, being a quiet fellow, would at least fill one seat which might otherwise be occupied by some blatant cobbler who wants to abolish everything but leather and the lapstone."

"I should think," said Ella, "that from the cobbler's point of view that might be natural."

"Indubitably," cried my lord, with a chuckle. "The fox would abolish the hounds and conserve the hencoop, and the rooster would no doubt be contented to see fox and hounds abolished together, but would protect agricultural interests in order to secure a plentiful growth of barley. Well, will you wear the colours of the Castle candidate, my dear?"

"With pleasure," said Ella. "It is fortunate that blue is not our colour. I am afraid that even political principle could scarcely persuade me to wear blue, but it is pleasant to wear one's favourite colour and be loyal at the same time."

"I suppose," said Windgall, laughing quite gaily at the fancy, but speaking in a softened tone, "that our little friends will be marrying by-and-by. You and Alice are not likely to pull caps over him?" Ella looked up with an amused smile, but said nothing. Somehow the smile chilled his lordship, and froze the current of his gaiety for a minute. "You laughed just now," he said, when they had taken a silent turn along the sward; "but let me tell you, my dear, that there are scores of very charming young women who envy you and Alice the chance of being locked up in this lonely old house with a millionnaire."

It was spoken with an excellent tone of

badinage, but Ella found something in the speech she scarcely liked.

"It might lessen the pains of those charming people," she answered, "to know how lightly we esteem the privilege."

"Well, well," said the Earl, "he won't want to run away with the pair of you!" He thought she had partly read his mind, and he knew that he had not committed himself. "If anything happens," he murmured inwardly, "she will have grown used to think of it, and will be less likely to frighten Alice from the scheme."

Kimberley and the younger of the two girls were still walking up and down together, and were deep in the shadow of the trees. A nightingale was singing not far away, and Kimberley paused in step and speech to listen.

"Oh!" he said, "it's beautiful. I do declare, Miss Santerre, it feels almost wicked to be here and be so 'appy, when there's so many that are poor and un'appy. Don't you feel like that?" He was nine-tenths ashamed of all he said and thought.

"Could we make them happier by refusing to listen to the bird's song?" she asked.

"No," he said, "I don't mean that. It's me having so much money, and some 'aving none at all. There's people without bread this very minute while we talk, Miss Santerre."

The nightingale began to sing again, and they paused again to listen. The moonlight gleamed like frost among the branches and the leaves, and the patterned carpet of black and gold swayed at their feet. Kimberley looked out into the full glow of the moonlight, and there stood Ella by her father's side, gazing skyward and listening. The little man's heart ached with sweet anguish and helpless worship and desire. To be worthy of her for one second and then to die—to do some great deed of heroism and vanish, shrivelled in the heat of it—or to die then and there while the moon shone and the bird sang—he could not have said which would be the sweeter. How wonderfully impartial in the greater things great Nature is, to be sure! She has nothing to do with the anise and cummin—rank and wealth are not in her province—but in the weightier matters not many are forgotten.

Nobody can be relied upon always to act up to his character. Courage fails, the coward fights like a lion, the forehead of brass is lowered in shame, and the shy man, with whom it is an effort to say "Good morning," will reveal the innermost thoughts of his soul. Kimberley heaved a great sigh, and his companion turned with girlish drollery:

"Do you know how contradictory you are this evening, Mr. Kimberley? A quarter of an hour since you sighed and confessed yourself a little mournful; two or three minutes back you felt it wicked to feel so happy; and now you are sighing again."

"Oh, Miss Santerre," broke out Kimberley, "you've been so kind to me; you 'aven't laughed at me, or stood off, or been 'aughty with me, and if I don't tell somebody I shall—— Oh, Miss Santerre, you won't laugh at me? You won't tell anybody? You won't mind me telling you?"

"You shall tell me whatever you please, Mr. Kimberley," said the girl kindly, "and I am sure I shall not want to laugh at you. And of course," with a tempered severity, "I shall respect whatever confidence you may offer me."

"Oh, Miss Santerre," he began again, "when I was poor I was a clerk in Mr. Blandy's office, and I used only to get five-and-thirty shillings a week, and of course it was 'opeless to think of marrying on that, because I never could bear to think of bringing up a family of children on nothing, so to speak, and letting them be reared like I was. So I kep' single, though I did think about one or two young ladies. But before ever I dreamed of 'aving my present fortune I saw a lady in a very lofty rank of life, and I fell in love with her. I'd never spoken to her, but I'd heard her speak, and I'd looked at her a hundred times, though of course she never took any notice of me. She never dreamed I had the face to fall in love with her. She didn't know there was such a person." He groaned there, and rubbed his wet fingers together.

"And have you seen her since you became possessed of your fortune?" asked the young lady. Kimberley was not a very romantic personage to look at, and yet he had a romance after all, and he was so obviously in earnest that it would have been cruel to be less sympathetic.

"Offen an' offen," said Kimberley. "But I ain't a gentleman, Miss Santerre, not if I could paper my walls with thousand-pound Bank of England notes. It isn't money that makes a gentleman. It's bringing up and education; and she is a lady, and she'd never look at me. And while I was poor it didn't matter so much, because it was like being in love in a dream, wasn't it? And now it's worse, because I've met her, and she talks kind to me; and yet she's further off than ever, for she is in a very lofty rank of life, and compared by the side of that money isn't anything, is it, Miss Santerre? I never spoke to a soul before, and you're the first lady ever was free and pleasant with me, and I wanted to tell somebody, because I 'ave been so un'appy.

There Kimberley ended, blowing his nose and mopping his eyes with unconcealed emotion.

"Do you know what I should do if I were in your place, Mr. Kimberley?" asked his companion.

"No," said Kimberley, meekly.

"I should march," said the young lady, drawing up her pretty figure to its height, "straight to that lady's house, and I should speak my mind, and ask her for a plain 'yes' or 'no.' That is what I should do, Mr. Kimberley, and that is what you will do, if you have half the courage I credit you with."

"Alice, my dear," said my lord, from the other side of the spacious lawn, "the dew is falling rather heavily. We had best go indoors."

"Remember the proverb, Mr. Kimberley," said Alice, touching him lightly on the sleeve with her fan, as they crossed the grass in answer to this summons, "'Faint heart never won fair lady.'"

"My lord," said Kimberley, "shall we stay out a minute? I should like to speak to you."

"Certainly," answered Windgall, "certainly. Run indoors, girls." Ella and Alice twined an arm about each other, and went out of moonlight into lamplight. "What is it, Kimberley?"

The millionnaire had meant then and there to speak, but a great chasm of terror seemed to open in his soul and all his courage to fall into it. For a little while he walked beside the nobleman deaf and empty and blind, and his tongue was like dried wood. When at last he found the wit to speak he had to seize the first thing that came.

"You think I should re'ly have a chance, my lord, if I was to put up for the 'Ouse of Commons?"

"More than a chance," said my lord; "something very like a certainty."

"Then," said Kimberley, with something like the feeling a suicide has when he pulls the fatal trigger, "I'll do it."

CHAPTER XI.

At the westward corner of the Strand end of Catherine Street there used, not many years ago, to be a place of public resort much frequented by journalists and actors. It had a horseshoe-shaped marble-topped counter, about which men with ponderous voices and mournful faces would gather of an afternoon to drink and lounge and exchange the news of the hour. Day after day you might have found the same people there, all clean shaven, all sombre (except for the transient gleam of mirth which would rise and die at the latest of that vast inedited edition of *contes drolatiques*, to the creation and dissemination of which actors devote so large a share of their leisure moments), all faultlessly respectable in aspect, and all ponderously amicable one with another. At times a seedy man would enter, and would glance around with uncertain eye, as if in search of a familiar face. Sometimes the seedy man would be heavy-browed and large of frame, and sometimes he would be small of figure and would have a quaintly twisted face; but his features had always a curiously elastic look and a peculiar pallor, and always one of the trim and respectable figures at the horseshoe counter would hail him as "dear boy," and would pay for drinks for him. Sometimes on the seedy man's entrance, one of the sad-faced clean-shaven men would move from man to man the whole length of the marble horseshoe, with a deep murmur inaudible to the rest in each man's ear, and would then pass through the swinging doors and gaze calmly on the Strand. Then, in a while, somebody would come out and speak to him, and from one hand to another would pass a couple of half-crowns, and the lounger would slip them into his pocket and go on staring placidly at the Strand. Then another and another would come out and go through the same benevolent proceeding, and when the tale was fully counted the lounger would re-enter and fall into casual converse with the seedy man, finally leading him away in a perfectly accidental manner to empty the little gathered pile of silver upon him in a corner remote from traffic. It was not always that this would happen; but it was pleasant to observe that the seedy man never went empty away. The recognition of the bonds of brotherhood might be confined to the limits of four of Irish cold, or expanded to a general subscription; but the seedy man need only catch an eye he knew to be sure of some sort of welcome. This was not the least pleasant of the manners of that vanished resort. It was no more likely than the resort itself to be immortal.

The afternoon was hot, and the Strand was like a furnace, but one man in the crowd which panted and perspired along its flags was buttoned to the chin. He was tall and broad of person, and he walked with an air of consequence, which set off his close-buttoned shabbiness to great disadvantage. His silk hat, well watered, and brushed until it had taken an oily gleam, was creased at the side and flaccid at the brim; his frock-coat was threadbare and greasy, and he wore an extremely ancient and rusty pair of gloves—an indiscretion which emphasised his general seediness until all who ran might read. He had very mobile eyebrows, ink-black and heavy, and whilst every other feature of his face was at rest, these, in obedience to the workings of his mind, wandered up and down his forehead. His chin, upper lip, and throat were all of a bluish purple; his nose, which was well formed but fleshy, was of a decided pink; and the rest of his face wore an unhealthy and uniform pallor. At the westward corner of Catherine Street he paused, slapped his pockets with a mournful air, and looked about him. Then he laid an irresolute hand upon the door, and his pale face blushed until his cheeks equalled the glow of his nose.

"Five at home," he murmured, "and another coming, and the ghost hasn't walked for ten weeks. I am sworn brother to grim necessity." He pushed open the door and entering looked about him. A friendly hand clapped him on the shoulder.

"Joe, me boy," said Mr. O'Hanlon, "I've been lookin' for ye. What'll ye take? The wine o' the country? Cold or neat? Two glasses of Irish and a smile, me darlin'. I've news for ye, Joe, that I think'll turn out well. Good health, me boy."

"What is it?" asked the shabby man, standing with the tumbler in his hand and holding it half way to his lips as he waited for an answer.

"I dropped in at Cogers' Hall last night," said O'Hanlon, "just for the joke o' the thing, to hear O'Byrne open a discussion on the feasibility of Home Rule, as a bit of practical politics, and I sat me down be the side of a toyny little creachur that was dressed and jewelled to death's door. Don't hold your whisky in that aggravatin' way." The shabby man emptied his glass and set it down. "That's betther. Well, I got into talk with the little thing—he was shyer than a gyurl—an' he blushed when I spoke to 'm; an' what d'ye think he turned out to be? Nothing less than a millionnaire. I wrote a leader about him when he came in for his money, and directly he gave me his kyard I knew 'm. Bolsover Kimberley's his name. And now what the divil has this got to do with you? Well, I'll tell ye. He's going in for Parliament, and he wants a master in elocution, and I promised to recommend him to me friend Mr. Lochleven Cameron. So there y'are, Joe; an' all ye have to do is to walk up to the Langham, where he's staying now, and ye'll have the job."

Mr. Lochleven Cameron threw his hands abroad and took a downward look at his own figure.

"Bedad, ye're right," said O'Hanlon, ruefully, "but is them the only togs ye have?"

"Little bits of pasteboard," replied Mr. Lochleven Cameron. "Thirty-seven. Nothing else."

"Ah!" said the other, "ye can't walk about in a suit of pawn-tickets. Wait a minute. There's Basset, and Holt, and a crowd o' fellows here. Monday's always a poverty-stricken day with me, because I don't draw me screw till Saturday."

Pausing only to set another glass of whisky before his friend, Mr. O'Hanlon crossed the bar and buttonholed the great tragedian.

"Come here, Mont, me boy. Ye're not only rollin' in wealth, but ye have the best heart of any one man in fifty, and I want help for a poor divil that's a friend of mine. It's Cameron, yonder. He's out of a berth this three months, and I've found a fine thing for him—private lessons in elocution to a vulgar little ignoramus that's just come in for two millions of money, and's going to stand for Porliament. Joe hasn't the togs to go to the Langham in. Just make a walk round, Basset, do."

"Not I, dear boy," said Mr. Basset, in his magnificent deep voice. "But if the humble fiver is of service——"

"God bless ye, Mont," cried the kind-hearted Celt, his eyes flashing with sudden moisture behind his twinkling glasses. "It's a loan, mind. Cameron 'll pay back in a week or two."

"As he will," says Mr. Basset, seeming to relish the rich tones of his own voice more than common. "As he will, or as the destinies decree." He threw out his chest, as he produced a well-lined pocket-book and selected a note from the crisp little roll it held. "There you are, dear boy." Mr. Basset did not hide his light under a bushel, but allowed it to shine before men. His right hand knew of his left hand's benefactions.

"God bless ye, me boy," cried O'Hanlon again. The great tragedian shook hands in disclaiming thanks.

"A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind," he said. "I have seen hard times myself, dear boy, and I have not forgotten them." In Fancy's ear he heard the story told, and the listeners said, "A good sort, Basset. Greatness has not spoiled him." He had his money's worth already.

Two hours later or thereabouts, the hall porter at the Langham beheld a massive man in glossy black and blue, who shone all over, with hat, coat, gloves, boots, linen, all glossy new. The massive man had a pink nose, a blue chin, and inky eyebrows, and he spoke in a husky mellow murmur when he presented his card and asked for Mr. Bolsover Kimberley. Mr. Lochleven Cameron's garments betrayed no trace of their late confinement, having been passed beneath the tailor's smoothing iron since their release;

and it was difficult to believe that Mr. Lochleven Cameron had ever known the pinch of poverty—he bore himself so majestically. He walked to and fro in the hall, making an occasional pass at an imaginary opponent with his walking-cane, and hummed a snatch of song whilst he waited for the result of the porter's inquiries. Had any observer been present, he must have known at a glance that Mr. Cameron was accustomed to lodge at the hotels favoured by the wealthy classes, and that millionnaires amongst his every-day acquaintance were as plentiful as blackberries. When the porter returned and put him under the guidance of the waiter, who looked like a clergyman of the Established Church disguised, he still hummed his gay air and swung his cane, as he followed, unembarrassed; and when the waiter threw open the door of a gorgeously-furnished room, and the little millionnaire advanced to meet him, he flourished off his hat with amazing condescension and politeness.

"Mr. Cameron?" said Bolsover, blushing all over.

"Mr. Lochleven Cameron, at your service, sir," replied the massive man with a new flourish. He laid his hat upon a table as only an actor can, and, accepting the fire-grate as the footlights, crossed right, and holding his stick across his chest with both hands, faced Kimberley anew. "My friend, Mr. O'Hanlon," he pursued, "was good enough to tell me that he had mentioned my name to you last evening."

"Yes," said Bolsover; "I want lessons in public speaking." Mr. Lochleven Cameron bowed, and describing an airy circle with his cane, stuck one end of it upon the floor and sat upon the other. "The Earl of Windgall," continued Kimberley, "has persuaded me to stand for Parleyment for my native town of Gallowbay; but I've 'ad very little practice in public speaking—scarcely any, Mr. Cameron—and I must take some lessons."

"Precisely," said Mr. Lochleven Cameron, taking the stage by a step or two to the left. "The art of natural, easy, and unembarrassed speech in public can scarcely be too highly valued in a public man. There is nothing more essential."

"That's where it is," returned Kimberley. "You know, Mr. Lochleven—I beg your pardon—Mr. Cameron—I came into my money late in life—quite recent, so to speak—and I 'aven't 'ad many advantages."

"I understand you, sir," said the elocutionist, magnificently. "You desire now to atone for the defects of early education." There was a suspicion of Dublin in Mr. Lochleven Cameron's majestic tones. "My system is, I believe, infallible. In the course of a long experience I have never known it to fail. My terms, however, are somewhat heavy. The multitude of my engagements makes that necessary."

"Oh yes, of course," said Kimberley; "I should like to get as many lessons as you can find time to give me."

"Yes," said Mr. Lochleven Cameron, thoughtfully. "Let me see." He ran his eyebrows up into his hair, and then dropped them suddenly. "The progress made depends as much upon the aptitude of the pupil as the ability of the professor. Would you prefer, sir, to take a daily lesson?"

"I think so," said Kimberley. "A lesson a day? Oh yes, certainly."

"My terms for a daily lesson of one hour's duration," said Mr. Lochleven Cameron, "would be one guinea only. I can afford some reduction from my ordinary terms when the course is pursued with regularity and celerity."

"Yes," said Kimberley. He thought it a little dear, but the thing was obviously essential. "Can you begin now?"

"It will be an economy of time to me," said the tutor, "to give a lesson this visit." He threw his cane across his chest again and grasped an end tightly in each hand. "Would you like to include platform deportment also, sir?" he asked. "Platform deportment is an extra."

Yes, Kimberley would like to study platform deportment also, and agreed to pay an extra half-guinea per lesson for tuition in that necessary art.

"We will begin at the beginning, if you please," said Mr. Lochleven Cameron. It had never occurred to him to study the question of platform deportment until now, but he entered with great spirit and fluency upon a practical exposition of its principles. "Much depends upon first impressions. There is more, believe me, sir, than is generally supposed in the value which may be attached to the manner in which a candidate first approaches his constituents in public. There is a style of entering upon a platform which may give offence. There is, on the other hand, a style which may at once enlist the public sympathy. Permit me." He arranged a chair at the table. "Imagine this, if you please, to be a crowded hall, and yourself about to address the audience. You are at present at the head of the stairs and concealed from the eyes of the assembly. Pray, sir, approach the table and take your seat."

It is not an overwhelmingly difficult thing, on the face of it, to approach a table and to take a seat with but a single onlooker, but Kimberley felt that he had never embarked upon so desperate an enterprise in the whole course of his life. His legs were in the way, his arms were in the way. He hung his head, and sidled to the chair, and, when he reached it, slipped into it with the manner of one who has a rent in his garments and would fain conceal it.

"No, no, sir," said the tutor, in a voice of reproof. "No, no, sir. Permit *me*." He placed a chair on the side of the table facing Kimberley, and with his hat in one hand and his cane in the other, he retired to the far end of the room. There he stuck his cane under his left arm and took his hat by the brim, holding it crown upwards between thumb and finger, and having arranged his hair with a few light and graceful touches, set his right hand in the breast of his glossy broadcloth coat, and advanced with smiling majesty to the table. There, delicately bestowing his hat and cane before him, he bowed right, left, and centre, and sank into his seat, drawing it gradually towards him with his left hand, and finally suffering the left arm to fall negligently over the chair-back. "That is the sort of thing, sir. Try that, if you please."

Kimberley arose to try it, and Mr. Lochleven Cameron laid hands upon him like a drill sergeant with a new recruit, and pulled, pushed, and coaxed him into something like the preliminary attitude he desired. Poor Kimberley, with his chin stuck into what he felt to be an attitude of absurd self-importance, his stick under his arm, his hat, crown upwards, between finger and thumb, and his right hand thrust into the bosom of his waistcoat, felt like a statue of misery.

"Now, sir, advance," cried the tutor; and Kimberley set forward automatically and marched to the table, half ready to die with shame. "Better, much better," said the actor, as he watched him with a critical eye. "Much better; but remember the facial expression, my dear sir, remember the facial expression. A leetle more cheerful, if you can. But all that is very much a matter of use and custom. You must get your stage legs, to begin with. We will try again, if you please."

Kimberley had set himself in attitude anew, and Mr. Lochleven Cameron was patting and modelling him; retiring at moments to survey him with his head on one side, and then advancing to push him into some new attitude which felt more awkward than the last, when a knock sounded at the door, and the clerical-looking waiter entered with a card upon a salver.

"Show the gentleman up, please," said Kimberley in a tone of resignation, after glancing at it. "This is a gentleman," he said, when the waiter had retired, "who has, done some litery work for me already. Mr. Amelia. He's going to 'elp me to get up my speeches."

"I have not yet the pleasure of Mr. Amelia's acquaintance," said the tragedian, in his deep vibratory voice; "but I shall be pleased to meet him."

Mr. Amelia entered and shook hands with Kimberley, and he and Mr. Lochleven Cameron bowed at each other; the one with a quick bob, and the other with an elaborated and stagey slowness.

"Who's got hold of him now?" said Mr. Amelia to himself, regarding the stranger keenly. "Looks like an actor."

Kimberley was like the Bishop in the Robin Hood ballad—

A Bishop he was a baron of beef
To cut and come again—

but all the same, Mr. Amelia was natively disposed to look with jealous eye upon any man who stuck his fork into the joint and took his slice from it.

Kimberley pulled at his limp whisker and sleeked his meek upstanding hair whilst he explained Mr. Cameron's function to Mr. Amelia and Mr. Amelia's to Mr. Cameron.

"Mr. Amelia," he said, "is so good as to 'elp me to prepare my speeches, Mr. Cameron; and Mr. Cameron is givin' me lessons in public speaking, Mr. Amelia."

Mr. Amelia drew a roll of manuscript from his breast pocket, and laid it upon the table.

"This is the result of our conversation of yesterday," he said, in his own, crisp way. "I don't think I have missed any of the points you mentioned."

"Would you mind reading it out, if you please?" asked Kimberley. "Because then Mr. Cameron and me could listen both together, and we should know what I've got to learn." Mr.

Amelia nodded, and began to straighten out the roll of paper. "Would you take a glass of wine the while, gentlemen?" He rang the bell and ordered a bottle of champagne (whenever he wanted to be hospitable he thought of champagne; though for his own part he could discern no charm in that beverage, and would sooner have drunk ginger-beer), and the wine being brought, he produced a box of cigars and laid it on the table. He was beginning to enjoy a cigar by this time, and had some discrimination in the matter of tobaccos. The waiter uncorked the bottle, and frothed out three glasses of its contents. Mr. Lochleven Cameron and Kimberley each lit a big cigar, and Mr. Amelia seating himself, with one little leg cocked over the other and his pert hair staring straight up with self-importance in every fibre of it, began to read.

"My lord, and gentlemen,—In appearing for the first time before you as a candidate for parliamentary honours, I feel myself bound to declare that I do not approach you in that capacity—and never should have approached you in that capacity—of my own initiative. I did not feel, however, that I should be justified in disregarding the friendly pressure which has been brought to bear upon me."

Mr. Amelia's voice was what it always had been since Kimberley had first heard it, crisp, hard, loud, and self-possessed to the borders of vain-glory. The unhappy little candidate for parliamentary honours felt that—in Mr. Amelia's tone at least—this protestation of unwillingness sounded hollow and unreal.

"They won't believe it," he groaned inwardly. Mr. Amelia proceeded.

"Your lordship can bear me witness when I say that I only consented to become a candidate for the representation of my native borough with extreme reluctance."

"I'm afraid you must cut that out," said Kimberley. "I was reluctant. I was indeed. But I'm afraid Lord Windgall didn't think so." Mr. Amelia took up a pen from a standish on the table and struck out the sentence. It was not very easy for anything to increase the contempt he had learned to feel for Mr. Kimberley, but everything the millionnaire said and did only served to confirm it.

"Friendly pressure," he read again, "which has been brought to bear upon me. I am fully conscious of my own demerits, and am not at all disposed to vaunt myself as an ideal candidate."

"Oh, dear me," the candidate objected inwardly; "it sounds like bragging." Coupled with Mr. Amelia's voice and Mr. Amelia's manner, it certainly had no air of superfluous humility.

"I have not one word," pursued Mr. Amelia, "to say against the rival candidate; and I shall attempt to win this contest by no appeal to party passion or the rancour of political spite."

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Lochleven Cameron. "Well turned; very well turned indeed!"

"I have the highest personal respect for Major Septimus Heard." Mr. Amelia did not share in that sentiment, and perhaps his voice expressed something of his private opinion. Kimberley, in his own uneasy shyness, was identifying himself with this speech and with the manner of its utterance. If he could have disassociated the matter and the manner he would have been better satisfied; but he was himself and Mr. Amelia and a nervously sensitive audience all at once, and his uneasiness was compound. "And," Mr. Amelia pursued, "I shall endeavour in the course of this contest to make that respect manifest. For myself, however inadequate my powers may be, I can assure you that in the public service of this borough my heart and goodwill shall never be wanting." The reader's aggressive tone cut Kimberley like a knife. It was actually himself who, under this thin disguise of verbal humility, was openly proclaiming at least an equality with everybody. "I was born amongst you, and brought up amongst you, and I may fairly claim to know your wishes and your needs better than a stranger can ever know them. All my interests are associated with your own; and if I were animated by the most purely selfish spirit I could desire nothing more earnestly than that Gallowbay should prosper. My personal interests and the interests of the borough are identical."

"Admirable!" said Mr. Lochleven Cameron. "I should pause for cheers after each one of those four last sentences." That also seemed cold-blooded to poor Kimberley, and with all the terror he had endured in looking forward to the ordeal which awaited him, he had never had so little stomach for it as he had now. He began to think that if he had left himself to his own devices he would have fared better. Even if he had broken down he would have missed all these painful mechanics. But then he thought of his shaky grammar and his eccentric h's, and his poor upbreeding and his native shyness, and everything seemed to grow mountainous as he contemplated it, and he to shrink and dwindle into a mere atom full of terrors and reluctance. Mr. Amelia went on reading, and Kimberley could not make head or tail of the remainder of the speech, but sat in dumb anguish asking himself why, oh why, he had ever consented to bear this dreadful unnecessary burden. The exercise lasted twenty minutes, and seemed to have lasted a year. At its close Mr. Lochleven beat upon the table with his walking-cane and cried "Hear, hear!" and Mr. Amelia, as he laid down his manuscript, allowed a faint reflex of his own satisfaction with his own performance to appear in his face. It was an odd thing, and yet perhaps it was natural, that Mr. Amelia should have been reading at his fellow-servant rather than his employer all this time, and that he valued Mr. Cameron's applause more than he would have appreciated Kimberley's, though the one was worth nothing and the other meant money to him.

Kimberley was too shy to dismiss his visitors, unhappy as he felt in their presence, and too timid to run away from them. So they sat and talked above their wine and cigars, and had a good time of it, whilst the host suffered.

"Shall we continue our lesson?" asked Mr. Lochleven Cameron, when the bottle was empty.

"Not this afternoon, I think," replied Kimberley. "At what time can you come to-morrow?"

Mr. Cameron, whose heart was opened by

O'Hanlon's whisky and Kimberley's champagne, was about to say that he was free to attend upon his patron at what hour he would, but luckily remembered his former protestations just in time, and assuming an aspect of profound reflection, made abstruse reckonings on his fingers for a minute, and stated that he was disengaged either from nine to ten in the morning or from three to four in the afternoon. Kimberley engaged him thereupon for one hour each afternoon, and dismissed him with his honorarium. Mr. Amelia, having received his dues also, went away with the actor, and the millionnaire sat down lonely in his big and gorgeously-furnished chamber, and stared at the uninviting future.

No man's good nature is quite as complete when he is in pain or distress as when he is at peace, and Kimberley's troubles seemed to untune him for the moment altogether. He found himself in a curiously suspicious mood by-and-by. He was ignorant of the world, and he was slow to think evil, but he began to wonder whether or not he was in the toils of a conspiracy. Why did Windgall want to push him into Parliament? Was Blandy right, and was the social position he was about to take a necessary preliminary to the matrimonial scheme? And Alice, who seemed so gay, so innocent and bright, had she read his fable when he told it to her, and had her advice been mercenary? Any one of these fancies was bitter, but they were nothing to the fear that Ella also might know the base readiness of father and sister to catch an ex-clerk for the sake of his money, and might look forward to her own fate with equanimity. This was altogether unreasonable in a man who was in love and who wanted to secure the lady; but then he wanted to be loved himself and not quietly stalked for his money-bags. He wanted to make a woman happy, and to find his own happiness there; and if he had been greater of heart he would have seen its impossibility no clearer, but he would at least have torn himself away from a temptation which had so little to offer him. Love him? Why should she love him? He looked at himself in the glass, and could have wept for mortification.

Why should Windgall befriend him? Who could care for him? Who had ever cared for him? Nobody would look at him but for his money, and the fortune which had fallen upon him had brought him nothing but sorrow and humiliation. He was happier—oh, a thousand times happier without it.

Suddenly, like a spoken reproach, the memory of the moonlight on the lawn, and the nightingale singing in the wood, came to him, and touched him with a sense of keen ingratitude. He had been happy then, if but for a little while, and if his money had brought him no more than that, it was something to be grateful for.

"The truth is," he said mournfully, "money's spoiling me. Not as I ever was much, but I hadn't used to be as bad as this. I ought to be more 'umble and more thankful. What his lordship said the first day I ever spoke to him was right. 'Wealth has its duties as well as its privileges,' he said, and he's helping me to do them, and I can think nothing better of a nobleman who takes that trouble with me than fancy he wants my money. I ought to be 'artily ashamed of myself."

He felt it, perhaps without great reason, but he was happier in thinking poorly of himself than in thinking meanly of other people.

END OF VOL. I.