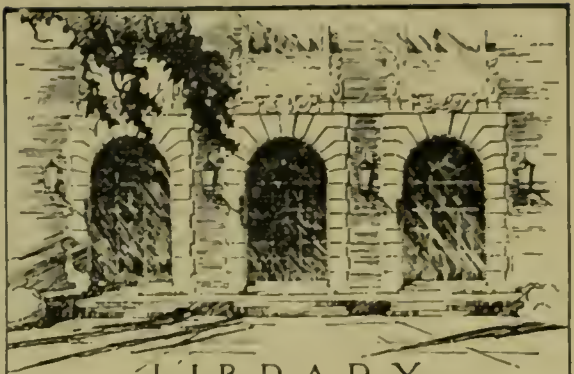
LOVE THE DEBT.



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LOVE THE DEBT

III.

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By BASIL

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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LOVE THE DEBT.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MR. SAGAR BECOMES A MAN OF BUSINESS.

In the last chapter we have summarised Mabel's work and success as a national schoolmistress, since we do not mean to recur to that side of her life. She had other interests and troubles than those of the school, for which we wish to save up the patience of the reader.

The first thing that helped her to realise fully their ruin was the sale of the 'Grange' and its furniture. It was a sharp wrench to have to leave a home consecrated by all her memories of her mother and by a thousand associations which, if sad for the most part, were like far-off and plaintive music, sweet in their sadness. The sale of the furniture of a lifelong home affects us almost like the dismemberment of the body of one dear to us in life by cold, callous, calculating professional hands.

Mabel's dearest treasures, however, were not submitted to this desecration. The day before the auction Bob Sagar called upon Mr. Slagg, the auctioneer, to negotiate for the buying in of the books and furniture of the 'nursery' and of the study. Mr. Slagg's countenance fell. If the gent had been two hours sooner, he (Mr. Slagg) might have stimulated a brisk bidding between him and the other gent for *all* the furniture of the study and most of that of the 'nursery.'

'Very sorry, sir,' said Mr. Slagg sincerely, 'every stick and leaf in the study's sold, and best part of the things in the ground floor sitting-room likewise.'

Mr. Slagg, however, cheered up when Mr. Sagar appeared bent on buying something, and was still further comforted by his buying a great deal. In fact, more furniture was bought in than could conveniently be stowed away in Mabel's new and much humbler home, a cottage near the school. Mabel was so certain that Mr. Sagar was the purchaser that she had ventured to put the question to him point blank, thinking the risk of his embarrassment through her being mistaken infinitesimal.

'No such luck,' said Bob regretfully. 'There was some fellow before me. I thought you might have employed him, and he left me little to buy. He bought in every stick and book in the study, and most of the "nursery" things.'

'I knew it was you,' said Mabel warmly, taking a part for the whole, and the will for the deed. 'I hoped it was you. I can bear being under an obligation to you, Mr. Sagar;' a very grateful and gratifying acknowledgment to Bob.

'You don't owe much of it to me, Mabel. I wonder who it was?'

'I think I know,' said Mabel meditatively and hesitatingly.

'Who? Miss Tubbs?'

Mabel shook her head. 'No, not Miss Tubbs. I think it was Mr. Lawley.'

'What! the parson in mufti?'

'Yes; he has been like a brother to me since my troubles.'

Bob liked not the relationship. These confounded parsons, being half women themselves, knew all the weak places in the fortress. Kneeshaw was bad enough, but here was this other *padre*, Lawley, elbowing himself between him (Bob) and Mabel.

'Don't you think it was rather a liberty?'

'A liberty? In the way he has done it, if it is he? Besides, Mr. Lawley *couldn't* take a liberty.'

This was conclusive. Woman's logic, like faith, is of course not against, but above reason.

'I wish you'd let me arrange with him, Mabel.'

'Do you mean pay him back, Mr. Sagar?' asked she in some consternation.

'Yes; as your guardian, you know.'

'But it mayn't have been he, after all. Besides, Mr. Sagar, you wouldn't like it yourself, would you? You wouldn't like, I mean, to be paid back yourself for all your great kindness to me?'

'You've taken care that there isn't much to pay back,' growled Bob. 'But even if there was, it's a very different thing, because your mother made you my ward, Mabel, and I've a right to look after you; but I don't see what right Mr. Lawley has to interfere in your affairs.'

'"The quality of mercy is not strained,"' said Mabel, smiling at the idea of Mr. Sagar, of all people, being for confining generosity in conventional fetters. 'Generosity has its own generous laws, and Mr. Lawley has kept within them in doing this—if he has done it—by stealth. Don't you think so? Of course you think so, Mr. Sagar. By what right were you so generous to my mother?' laying her hand on Mr. Sagar's great brown fist which rested clenched on the knee nearest her as they sat side by side on the 'nursery' sofa which had been transported to the sitting-room of the cottage.

'There's no use arguing with a woman,' said Bob, feeling himself beaten in argument, taking the little hand in his, and looking into the grey eyes, whose expression seemed always to accompany her words like exquisite music. 'If you like being under an obligation to Mr. Lawley there's nothing more to be said;' taking, however, all pettishness out of the words by the pleasant manner in which he uttered them.

'Yes, I do. Is it very mean of me, or very generous? I think it's very generous of me to forgive both you and him all you have done for me and all you have been to me.'

'No; you've not been generous, or even just, to me, Mabel,' said Bob, 'or you would have given me what your mother left me—the care of you.'

'Dear Mr. Sagar, what would you have me do? Do you think I could bear to be a burden to you when I can do something for myself? I should be miserable. And for the rest,' she added, smiling, 'I really think you are most unreasonable in expecting me to give you more trouble than I have done. I have given you all the trouble I could think of; letters, lawyers, house-agents, auctioneers, bills, butchers, bakers, everything. Haven't I?'

She certainly had. Bob had become a man of bustle and business in the last few weeks, and had developed, he considered, extraordinary administrative and financial abilities.

'The great secret of business,' he said to Mabel—with an air which would have become the communication of the discovery of the philosopher's stone—'the great secret of business is to have everything down in black and white. Then you have them.' 'Them,' *i.e.* the tradesmen &c., who would be awed into honesty by being compelled to the extraordinary practice of furnishing written bills. In truth the practice was extraordinary to Bob, whose own tradesmen never had to trouble him with bills or receipts either. He would pay at the time, or the next time he was in the shop or neighbourhood, and would never suspect that he was being charged too much, or twice over, or for things he had never got, as he often was. But it was different with Mabel's affairs. Here he must be lynx-eyed and serpent-witted. Accordingly, he now took the extreme and extraordinary precaution of having every bill in black and white, receipted, stamped, and dated. Yet the security even of this system was not perfect. No doubt the singular and awful ordeal would have something of the solemnising effect of the administration of an oath in a court of justice on the tradesmen subjected to it; but even this effect might wear away in time, and as Bob was nearly sure to lose the receipt, it might almost as well not have been set down in black and white. His loss of the receipt, however, by no means involved loss of his faith in it, or in his discovery of the soul and secret of business. Even to Mr. Broughton, the attorney, he thought it necessary to communicate it with a knowing nod and wink as he was exacting a receipt from him.

'Take my advice, Mr. Broughton, and have everything down in black and white.'

Like most of our greatest inventors, however, Bob profited little by his brilliant discovery, for, as he omitted himself to set down in black and white the sums he had disbursed, and as he could not find one in ten of the receipts so set down when he came to look for them, he couldn't tell whom or what he had paid at the end of a month. As far as Mabel was concerned this was all right; for, as she insisted on a settlement, and a settlement in full, Bob could produce with a safe conscience his tithe of receipts and assure her with evident sincerity that these were all he had.

But what if those tradesmen whose receipts he had lost were to send in their bills again to

Mabel? You see his discovery had made Bob suspicious. Of what use was his discovery, if tradesmen were not rogues? Therefore tradesmen must be rogues. The discoverer of a cure for a certain disease is sure to discover simultaneously that half the world are so diseased. And by astonishing coincidences, a vast number of such simultaneous discoveries have been made in the domains of politics and of theology. Bob's discovery, then, naturally made him suspicious, and having given Mabel strict injunctions to refer all claims to him, he invested in a ponderous ledger, in which he put two or three entries here and there, so lost in a wilderness of leaves as to need an hour's search to find them, and this he took down solemnly to conscience-smite the creditors who subsequently applied to him.

'Ah, let me see,' he would say, 'I make it a rule to put down everything in black and white.' Then he would lift down the intimidating ledger, and looking the creditor through and through would ask: 'What name did you say? Sugden? S;' and after a rattle of leaves and another insupportable glance, would exclaim in an accent of astonishment and reprobation, with his finger resting on an imaginary entry, ‘Not been paid before, Mr. Sugden?’

‘No, sir,’ Mr. Sugden would reply briskly, not disconcerted in the least. Whereupon Bob’s voice and manner, without the slightest gradation or preparation, would drop from shocked astonishment to perfect confidence.

‘All right, Mr. Sugden, here you are.’

But, indeed, Bob was always making some brilliant discovery or other which he would often run to death and replace in a week. For the time being, however, he did not so much possess it as it possessed him. He must communicate it to everyone, even to those whose very profession it was to master it. He would tell a doctor that ‘the secret of happiness lay in the stomach,’ or try to persuade a parson ‘to take things easy,’ or advise a lawyer ‘always to count his change.’ The discovery, whatever it was, was new to Bob, and therefore must be new to everyone. We have even overheard him, as we stood on the steps of the ‘Queen,’ giving this necessary advice to a postman whose emaciated appearance he was commiserating, and who pleaded guilty to being ‘bad in his inside.' 'If I were you, my man, I should take a walk every morning before breakfast. Nothing like it for the digestion.' The postman, we thought, didn't look pleased. Indeed, Bob himself seemed to perceive his offence and its cause, for he sent the man away appeased with another tip in the less equivocal shape of half-a-crown. For Bob was Irish both in the thoughtlessness with which he would blurt out the first thing in his head, and in the quickness and kindness with which he would perceive and atone for the offence it often gave. Sometimes, it is true, the advice which Bob would incontinently let fly was irreparable and would cover him with shame and confusion; when, for instance, Mr. Meekins,

> A little, round, fat, oily man of God,

came to condole with Mabel, but as usual with him, condoled only with himself, on the immense amount of work he had to do, on the neglect of his godless predecessor, Mr. Bray, on the prevalence of Dissent, especially in its Baptist form, and on the general activity of the evil one in all directions in his parish, Bob, who was a

Unitarian, rattled out his panacea with his accustomed glibness:

'You should join us, Mr. Meekins; we don't keep a devil at all.'

Mabel, though shocked herself, and shocked by the shock to Mr. Meekins, couldn't help a smile at this presentation of Satan as a kind of dog whom you might keep or drown at will. Mr. Meekins, however, took mortal offence and rose at once to leave, cutting Bob in the act. Bob was equally ready with a mode of exorcism for the MacGucken when he and Lawley became intimate, as they soon did. Lawley, after a walk, had brought him home to a meagre meal provided by the grudging MacGucken, supplemented, however, with excellent wine and cigars. The host, in apologising for the repast, took occasion so describe the MacGucken's odious characteristics.

'I should sack her,' said Bob, taking his cigar from his mouth and using it to emphasise this recondite advice.

Lawley explained how this was easier said than done.

'Try ratting,' said Bob with a knowing nod.

Lawley replied that he had thought of that, understanding Bob to mean migrating.

'That's your tip,' said Bob, encouraged into slang by the success of his suggestion.

'I tried it when I was a boy on an old cook who brained a ferret of mine she found in her bed. She was off in a week, faith. We had the hunt always in the meat cellar; but you might have it anywhere,' said Bob, casting a critical eye round the dining-room to take in its fitness for the purpose. 'You might give a young rat the run of the house with a good dog, then she would never know where it might turn up, bed or board. You see if it doesn't fetch her,' with an eloquent wink.

From these specimens of unconsidered counsel it will be seen that Bob was what so many Irishmen are through life—a boy. Not dull in brain or feeling, quick rather, but quicker still in tongue.

But to return from this long digression. Bob, as we say, was riding now the hobby of business furiously. He had made an inventory of the furniture of the Grange (as a check on that of Mr. Slagg's assistant) which would, doubtless, have been invaluable if it had been coherent. He, however, followed, so to speak, the order of nature, setting things down in black and white faithfully as they came under his eye, as thus: 'One sofa, two antimacassars, one coalbox, a chimneypiece gimcrack, one timepiece, another gimcrack, one desk or work-box, "Yorkshire Past and Present," four vols., a thing like a small punkah, one vase, one leather mat, one table, eight chairs, one fender, do. poker, do. tongs, do. shovel, one Parian bust of a young woman, do. of a young man, one carpet, one rug, five pictures, one ottoman, one "Pilgrim's Progress" (by John Bunyan), two spill-holders, one pier-glass, one paper-knife, two things for holding anything, one piano, &c. &c.' Mr. Slagg's assistant, on the other hand, to dodge him, as Bob hinted to Mabel—for Bob, having taken to dodges took to suspecting dodges—had inventoried the things in an arbitrary order of his own, skipping confusedly from one side of the room to the other, or sometimes even from one room to another. In this way Bob's inventory, of which he was naturally proud as the most business-like thing he had ever done, was made valueless, at least as a check upon that compiled by Mr. Slagg's young man. But Bob could not bear that it should be altogether valueless, and he made it therefore the groundwork of a new inventory he set to to compile of the translated furniture in the cottage. Mabel urged that there was no necessity, or prospect of any necessity, for this. But Bob, having old material to work up, and having discovered in himself a talent for compiling catalogues, shrewdly observed that 'It was as well to have everything down in black and white, to refer to when a servant was leaving.' And it's only fair to say that Bob's inventory was a perfect security against a housemaid walking off undetected with any considerable quantity of furniture concealed about her person.

But Bob's enthusiasm for business was not only the enthusiasm of an artist for the art he excels in, but a longing to do something or anything for Mabel, to whom he became a perfect slave. Having finished the inventory, he found or made himself as much work as a plumber. He had to put down carpets, to find the fittest corners for sofas, &c., to shift them back and forward into ever new positions, and to hang the pictures. When Mr. Gant called one day and was ushered into the sitting-room to wait Mabel's momently expected return, he found Bob high on steps with his coat off, hanging a portrait of Shelley between Keats and Burns, and of course took him for a joiner.

'Too stiff, my man, too stiff,' said Mr. Gant authoritatively, alluding to the three portraits being too much in a line. Bob looked down on his cool critic, and revenged himself for his unflattering mistake after his own fashion.

'Shtiff, is he?' said Bob, speaking in the very broadest Clare brogue. 'Ye'd be shtiff enough yerself if ye'd been hanging as long as he.'

Mr. Gant thought he would consult his dignity best by an indignant silence.

'How is it wid him now?' asked Bob after a pause, lowering the portrait two or three inches. 'Is he low enough for ye? There's them thinks nobody low enough for 'em; there is so,' *sotto voce*, but not inaudibly.

In palliation of Bob's having recourse to the kind of wit current among the Dublin cabmen, we must explain that he knew Mr. Gant, not wisely but too well, as a preacher, and still better by reputation from Mabel's account of him. From both he had formed an extreme dislike and even disgust to the man, to which he took the opportunity of Mr. Gant's mistake to give whimsical expression.

'Come, my man, that will do,' cried Mr. Gant, boiling with rage, and finding silence impossible as well as ineffective.

Bob slowly and lumberingly descended the steps, looked critically for some seconds at the arrangement of the portraits, and said with judicial calm :

'Ay, that 'ill do. Give us a lift wid the shteps, will ye ?'

Mr. Gant, white and trembling—men whose dignity is based on accidents are morbidly sensitive to disrespect—strode to the bell and rang it furiously. The discreet Jane hurried in.

'This—fellow has been drinking ; have him turned out at once,' stammered Mr. Gant.

'Ay, which ?' said Bob, with a jovial wink to Jane, who was looking bewildered from one gentleman to the other.

'It's Mr. ——' began Jane, intending to enlighten Mr. Gant about Mr. Sagar.

'Gant?' interrupted Bob, affecting to think the explanation addressed to him. 'I thought it must be,' in a by no means complimentary tone. 'It's all right, my dear, *I* don't mind him,' coolly reversing the situation, and dismissing the Discreet with a cheery nod.

Mr. Gant looked after the retreating Jane as at an apparition, with wide eyes and a quick gasp, then he rushed from the room and from the house.

When Mabel returned, Bob was again on the steps hanging other pictures.

'Mr. Gant has been here, Mabel,' he said, looking critically with his head on one side at a picture he had just hung. 'He took me for a joiner, but faith I heaped coals of fire upon his head,' in jocose allusion to the colour of Mr. Gant's hair. Then Bob described the scene exactly and graphically, and was rather taken aback at the concern visible in Mabel's face for the offence given to Mr. Gant.

'I couldn't help it,' pleaded Bob, on whom a look of Mabel's had more effect than a broadside of abuse from Mrs. Grundy. 'He's such a cad. I was only too glad to pay him back a bit for his treatment of you. Besides, I think we're quits.'

'Well, no,' said Mabel smiling; 'you don't care a pin about Mr. Gant's taking you for a joiner, but Mr. Gant cares a great deal about a joiner's taking him for a butt. I must explain to him who you were, and then he'll be sure to think you had quite provocation enough.'

As, indeed, Mr. Gant did when the matter was so explained.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TWO PRESENTS.

Even if Mabel had been plain and uninteresting, Miss Tubbs could have imposed her with ease upon the society of Wefton; as it was, it became a kind of fashion to have this wonder of a national schoolmistress on the only evenings when she was to be had, Friday or Saturday. Parties even were sometimes arranged for either evening only to secure her. You see, everyone would be generous if generosity cost nothing, for its exercise is accompanied with a consciousness at once of power and of goodness. In Mabel's case the generosity of an invitation not only cost nothing, but paid. She was both the most beautiful and the most agreeable girl in and about Wefton, and yet, being but a national schoolmistress, was little likely to attract the serious attentions of the golden youth of the neighbourhood. Mabel, therefore, became the rage, and had the society of Wefton all before her where to choose, and chose, of course, the inner circle, to which Miss Tubbs introduced her. It was not that she was proud, or that the self-made magnates were intentionally offensive, but somehow they always succeeded in making her feel that, if they forgave, they could not forget, her crime of poverty. And the generosity even of their forgiveness, like all their generosity, was loud and exacting. As a rule, if a self-made West Riding man gives you a shilling, he exacts a sovereign's change for it from you, in one form or another. By the gentlefolk of Wefton, however, Mabel was petted without being patronised, and took the pleasant place assigned to her as gracefully as it was conceded. Miss Tubbs, of course, fell more in love than ever with her fascinating *protégée*, and indeed took to herself the credit not only of Mabel's introduction into the inner circle, but of her popularity there.

Thus Mabel owed her social promotion to her social 'degradation.' She had 'come out' under the auspices of the Roxbys &c., who did not move in the best society of the place; but under the wing of Miss Tubbs she was welcomed into the much pleasanter and more appreciative circle of the few county families whom the smoke and smoke-makers of Wefton had not driven yet from its neighbourhood. We do not, of course, mean that Mabel cut her old friends the Roxbys. There was no question of that. There was some question, indeed, at first of the Roxbys cutting her. When Miss Roxby hurried back from 'The Grange,' breathless, with the news that Mabel Masters had made her mind up to become a national schoolmistress, the whole household held up their hands in horror. They were sorry for her, of course; but as self-preservation is the first law of life, they were chiefly concerned with the bearing of this bad business upon themselves. It was as though the girl had committed social suicide, and they were empanelled as a jury to decide if the case were to be treated as one of temporary insanity or of *felo de se*. Mrs. Roxby was inclined to take the worst view of the case; but Miss Roxby, being a superior young person, who carried about with her the consciousness of setting a Christian example, was not for utter outlawry—

for the exclusion of the corpse, so to speak—from Christian fellowship and treatment.

‘We can “move to her” in the street, Jane, if you mean that, and we can send her and her pa things, as he’s ill and they can’t afford to get them, but we can’t keep on visiting her and having her here, as if nothing had happened. It’s not likely. What would the Sugdens think?’

‘We need not have her when the Sugdens are here, mamma. We might have her for a quiet evening when we’re by ourselves. It’s not her fault that she’s poor.’

‘It’s her fault that she should take to be a national schoolmistress. So unladylike. But I always thought she had low tastes, grubbing about in those filthy houses.’ Indeed, Mabel had been detected by Mr. Roxby himself in one of those filthy houses, of which, however, Mr. Roxby was not ashamed to be the landlord.

‘I think she’s more to be pitied than blamed, brought up as she has been, with no mother, and a father who is an atheist,’ pleaded Miss Roxby, in extenuation of Mabel’s visiting the sick poor.

‘We have always been so kind to her,’ said Mrs. Roxby, querulously, as if Mabel’s choice of this low calling was an act of the grossest ingratitude to the Roxby family. ‘We introduced her into society, I may say, and had her at our best parties, and sent her in last Christmas with Major Starkie, you remember; but she always was a queer girl.’

‘Well, but, mamma, it isn’t as if she was a national schoolmistress *then*. How could we know that this would happen? People can’t say we took them in then, you know; and now we needn’t ask her to our parties, of course not—she couldn’t expect it—but we might have her now and then, when we’re alone.’

Miss Roxby had special reason for clinging to this point, since she had promised the amused Mabel an occasional treat of the kind. Accordingly, she kept dunning her mother, with the dogged and wooden persistence characteristic of her, until she won permission to ask Mabel to tea. She was not to be asked, however, until the scandal of her becoming a national schoolmistress had died down a little; nor would she have been received graciously then if Mrs. Roxby hadn’t heard that no less a person than

Miss Tubbs had taken her up. Then, indeed, when this good Samaritan found that Mabel was so well befriended already, she had compassion on her, and went to her herself—she and her exemplary daughter—with two bottles of port wine and a shattered jelly in a jam-pot. She chose, of course, Saturday for the visit, but took care in no other way to remind Mabel of her disgrace. She was helped to keep this ladylike resolution by finding, to her surprise, Mabel not changed in the least. What change she expected she could not have accurately defined, perhaps, but some change was natural, and would have been becoming. Mabel should have looked more like Miss Pochin—a draggled and blouzed person, whose fingers seemed tattooed with ink, for it never seemed to come out—and, above all, she should have borne herself more like Miss Pochin, in a subject and subdued manner. But Mabel was buoyant. She had that morning got a letter from George, and was in the happiest spirits.

‘How do you do, Mrs. Roxby? I thought you had given me up altogether, Miss Roxby.’

‘No, Mabel, I shall always be glad to come and see you,’ said the Exemplary exemplarily.

'That's very good of you. *You* don't forget your old friends either,' to Mrs. Roxby, in allusion to that good lady's slowly but surely identifying every article of furniture. 'You recognise them all. They are all presents, anonymous presents. They make me feel quite at home here.'

The mention of presents recalled the two bottles of port wine and the jam-crock of jelly to Mrs. Roxby's mind.

'Jane, tell Arnold to fetch in the wine and jelly. I brought a couple of bottles of port wine and a crock of jelly, Miss Masters, for your poor papa. I hope he's better.'

'No; he's not much better, thank you. I'm much obliged to you for the port, Mrs. Roxby, but I don't think the Doctor will allow my father to have it.'

'You'd better keep it, Miss Masters. It's always as well to have a little wine in the house. You can set it on the table, Arnold; that will do.'

Accordingly, the basket with the two bottles and jam-crock in it was set, among the other ornaments of the table, in full view of donor and donee.

'The Doctor can say nothing against his having the jelly, I'm sure. It's very good, from Grierson's, you know; some we had at a dinner party on Thursday.'

Mabel was not in the least affronted. If Miss Tubbs had tossed her the bones of her dinner, she would have been hurt; but Mrs. Roxby—one can't resent a blind man's blundering against one in the street.

'Jane, you had something to say to Miss Masters.'

Jane, you see, was to have all the whole credit of the coming invitation to herself, as her very own.

'I was going to ask you to spend this evening with us, Mabel. You might bring your work, as we shall be quite by ourselves.'

'Thank you, Miss Roxby. I should be glad to go, but I'm engaged for this evening.'

Jane looked at her mamma, and her mamma was graciously pleased to respond to the silent appeal.

'Jane will be glad to have you some other evening, then, Miss Masters.'

Mabel was silent. Mrs. Roxby's manner was a little too oppressive. The silence spread and deepened, but was broken by an exclamation from Miss Roxby—'Sedgwick is driving off!' And, indeed, the brilliant Roxby equipage was under way, but soon cast anchor again, giving place to a ponderous and ancient family coach, probably drawn by the fattest horses and driven by the laziest coachman in all England.

'It's Lady Saddlethwaite's carriage!' cried Miss Roxby, in a voice of awe.

To know Lady Saddlethwaite's carriage was itself something; to know Lady Saddlethwaite herself, and to be known of her, was everything. She was but a baronet's widow, but, in right of the very blue blood which flowed in her own veins, she assumed and had conceded to her the first place among the county families in the neighbourhood of Wefton. She was extremely proud and exclusive, and withal one of the kindest-hearted women in the world. She utterly ruined every servant, dependent, tenant, and villager she had to do with. She was the same to gentle and simple, but to those who were neither gentle nor simple, to parvenus, plutocrats, self-made men, she was implacable—in part through pride, but chiefly through a lost lawsuit with one Zachary Baines, who intercepted the loveliest view over her park with a vast and vile factory, piled up at her very gates. Almost the only person she condescended to know in Wefton was Miss Tubbs, who herself was of very good family, and through Miss Tubbs she heard of Mabel, not for the first time, for her under-housemaid's sister, who was married to a shoemaker in Wefton, used to rave about Miss Masters' kindness to her dying child; and as Lady Saddlethwaite made her servants' troubles her own, she got to hear all Mabel's praises at third-hand. They were still fresh in her recollection when Miss Tubbs told her the story of Colonel Masters' ruin, and of Mabel's eccentric choice of a calling. Lady Saddlethwaite thought it not in the least eccentric, but held the position to be much higher and happier than that of a governess.

'Wait till you see her,' said Miss Tubbs, 'and then tell me what you think of such a girl turning national schoolmistress.'

Lady Saddlethwaite did see her (indeed, Miss Tubbs arranged that they should spend a Saturday and Sunday together in her house), and pronounced her the most ladylike and delightful girl she knew; while Mabel, the most reserved of girls, who had never yet made a confidante, felt almost mesmerically compelled by the charm of the dear old lady's motherly kindness, to tell her everything! Henceforward there wasn't a week in which Lady Saddlethwaite didn't either write, or call, or have her at Hollyhurst—to the growing jealousy of Miss Tubbs. In truth, Mabel was a model pet—lovely, lively, artless, witty, graceful, and grateful with a kind of gratitude which, like a subtle and exquisite flavour, was never absent and never obtrusive.

Mabel met Lady Saddlethwaite at the sitting-room door, and the old lady—not seeing Mrs. and Miss Roxby—kissed her affectionately.

'Well, my dear, are you ready?'

'But, Lady Saddlethwaite, you said half-past four. It is only a quarter-past three.'

'I said I'd send for you, but I've come for you. I want to take you a drive that will do you good, and to have a chat with you that will do me good. What's the name of that pretty servant of yours? Jane? I like her face. Ring for her, and tell her to pack your things.'

‘She wouldn’t know what to put in, as I always pack for myself. And, indeed, I don’t know what to put in myself, Lady Saddlethwaite. Miss Tubbs said you were having a party.’

‘Yes; it’s a party. That’s the reason I’ve come so early for you, as I shall see hardly anything of you to-night. But’—here Lady Saddlethwaite perceived Mrs. and Miss Roxby, who were standing, looking nervous and seemingly expecting an introduction.

‘Don’t hurry yourself, my dear; I see you’re engaged. I should like to sit a bit, and as for Roger and the horses, they need a rest too; I don’t think they have had a wink of sleep for two hours. So you still keep up your sick visiting?’ seeing the hideously obtrusive basket, bottles, and jam-pot.

‘No, I have been sick-visited; I mean,’ she hurried on to add, feeling that her words were unintentionally ungracious, ‘Mrs. and Miss Roxby, who are old friends of mine’—Mrs. and Miss Roxby here bowed low, taking this for the expected introduction, but Lady Saddlethwaite never saw the salute—‘old friends of mine,’ stammered Mabel, ‘have been so kind as to—as to'—bring me two bottles of port and a jam-pot of broken jelly!—she couldn't say it. Lady Saddlethwaite, seeing her embarrassment, came at once to her relief by asking about the school, of which she spoke as she might speak to a clergyman about his parish, to the Roxbys' amazement. And, to their still greater astonishment, Mabel entered into the subject with extraordinary zest and spirit, describing her difficulties with the children and their parents with a humour which delighted Lady Saddlethwaite and puzzled the too, too solid Mrs. Roxby, to whom, out of politeness, Mabel chiefly addressed herself.

Indeed, Mrs. Roxby, feeling a good deal 'out of it,' notwithstanding Mabel's politeness, was trying nervously to make her mind up to rise, and at last summoned courage for the effort. She shook Mabel's hand now with extreme cordiality, bowed nervously to Lady Saddlethwaite, who slightly acknowledged the salute, and managed somehow to get out of the room, followed by her daughter, and by Mabel, who went with her to the carriage.

When mother and daughter had been shut

in by Arnold, they looked one upon another. The whole scene seemed as a dream to them. That Mabel's engagement should have been to a grand party at Lady Saddlethwaite's! That Lady Saddlethwaite should kiss Mabel, and treat her altogether like a daughter!

'The old lady is quite flighty,' decided Mrs. Roxby. 'Did you notice how she laughed at nothing at all?'

'Nothing at all' was Mrs. Roxby's flattering description of Mabel's humorous recital of her school experiences, which seemed low, or was lost upon both mother and daughter.

> A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
> Of him that hears it; never in the tongue
> Of him that makes it.

Miss Roxby was sad, solemn, and unconvinced, chiefly because she saw a chance of vindicating the wisdom of her advice.

'You should have let me ask Mabel when I wanted to, mamma,' which, being interpreted, meant, 'I have lost through you a chance of getting into the charmed circle.'

'It would have made no difference. *You* wouldn't do for a doll, Jane'—which was just what Jane would do for—at least, for a wooden Noah's Ark doll, in a serious household, to be produced only on Sundays. Still, neither mother nor daughter in their hearts believed either that Lady Saddlethwaite was doting, or that Mabel filled the place of a pet pug in Hollyhurst. The whole matter was a mystery, and remained so to the Roxby mind.

'I am so sorry to keep you, Lady Saddlethwaite,' said Mabel, on returning from ushering Mrs. Roxby to her carriage. 'But I shall not be many minutes.'

'You needn't hurry, my dear. And you needn't be anxious about your dress, child; Parker'—Parker was Lady Saddlethwaite's maid, who was sent to embarrass Mabel with her help at her toilet. 'Parker says you would look what you are, if you dressed like Miss Baines.' Miss Baines, daughter and heiress of the aforementioned Zachary, dressed so as to kill the colour even of the garish window, erected to her mother's memory, under which she sat in Selden Church. 'And so you would,' added the old lady, nodding dogmatically, for in this matter she held herself and was held to be an expert.

Mabel, with Jane's help, was soon ready, and hurried down to Lady Saddlethwaite.

'My dear, I wish you would ask Roger, from yourself, to drive round by Walton. I want you to see it. It's four miles round, and he'd grumble if I asked him; but I know he'll do it for you. He's very good-natured, but a bit spoiled, you know.'

Mabel undertook the commission rather nervously. 'Roger!'

'Yes, Miss,' waking up to touch his hat and blink benignly at her.

'Do you think it would be too much for the horses to take them round by Walton?'

Roger looked down upon the bloated beasts as if calculating to a nicety what further effort their exhausted energies were equal to.

'I have never seen it,' added Mabel, plaintively.

Roger looked back into her face and offered up to it in sacrifice himself and the sacred steeds without another moment's hesitation.

'I shall take you round by Walton *and* by Scarscliffe, Miss'—two miles further!

It never for a moment occurred to Roger that the round was his mistress's suggestion, or required her sanction.

'Well?' asked Lady Saddlethwaite.

'He says he'll take us round by Walton *and* Scarscliffe,' said Mabel, triumphantly.

'My dear, nobody can resist your face and manner,' said the old lady, patting Mabel on the cheek. 'He'd have done it for me, I dare say, only he'd have grumbled so.'

Lady Saddlethwaite, of course, said nothing directly of Mrs. Roxby and the jam-crock; but during the drive she took occasion to descant upon her favourite theme, the brutality of those upstarts.

'Their very kindness is an insult,' she said warmly, thinking of the jam-crock.

'It's want of manner,' pleaded Mabel, thinking also of the jam-crock.

'It's want of blood, child.'

'But the poor people are not so.'

'It's in them. Sunshine brings it out. What are the others but poor people—set on horseback?'

'Well, but, Lady Saddlethwaite, if *all* are like that when they get up in the world, it can't be their fault. If one or two were so, you might blame them; but if *all* are so, it must be through something they can't help.'

'No; they can't help it; it's their nature, my dear. A toad can't help being a toad, but it makes you shudder all the same. Still, one must make allowance, as you say, child, and I always do. I think it's one's duty as a Christian. I never hear that verse read in church about "creeping things after their kind," but I think of these people and pity them.'

It was impossible for Mabel not to smile at this extreme pitch of charity to which Lady Saddlethwaite was wrought up in her better moments—in church and through the reading of the Scriptures—towards Messrs. Baines, &c.

'And that's why pride of birth is wrong,' continued one of the proudest of women, after a pause which Mabel didn't know how to fill. 'We can't help ourselves any more than they. It's no credit to us, and we have no right to be proud of being born ladies and gentlemen.'

'But, Lady Saddlethwaite,' objected Mabel, 'I think people always *are* more proud of things to which they are born than of things which they get themselves. Don't you think so? I know at school a child would not be a bit pleased to be told she was dull but plodding, while she would be proud of being thought clever, though idle. And I think people always are more proud of being clever, or handsome, or well born, than of getting on in spite of their being ugly, or stupid, or humbly born.'

'But, my dear, *you* are not proud.' A very graceful answer to an unanswerable position.

When Mabel had gone to her room to dress for dinner that evening, a knock came, which she took for that of the embarrassing Parker, but which heralded Lady Saddlethwaite herself. 'My dear,' she said hesitatingly, in a fluttered and nervous way most unusual in her, 'I have had that box taken to your room with your luggage. I hadn't the courage to tell you to-day when you asked about your dress that I had taken the liberty to order one for you.' In fact, it was Mrs. Roxby's present which scared and discouraged her. 'I'm afraid you will think I have not known you long enough to take such a liberty, but I feel as if I had known you all my life, Mabel. You must let me call you Mabel, and you will wear the dress, to please me, dear, won't you?' She read

Mabel's answer in her face, and prevented any answer in words by a kiss, and was gone. It was a dress exquisite in its simplicity, and Mabel never was so much and so justly admired as that evening.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MURDER.

Mabel, as we have said, had a letter from George on the morning of the day of Mrs. Roxby's visit. It was a voluminous production, describing brightly his voyage, his fellow-passengers, his plans and prospects, and his first impressions of Melbourne; while a passionate love, like the wild music of a Greek chorus, filled every interval and lent the light in which everything was looked at. We know nothing of Australia except from George's letters, and not much from them, which, if torn from its sacred context, would be worth putting in the melting-pot and moulding into a link or two of our tale. Indeed, Australia itself did not figure largely in the unsentimental parts of this letter, which were taken up chiefly with a certain Hensley Shortland, one of George's fellow-passengers on board the steamer, and his partner afterwards in the colony. Mr. Shortland had been a doctor with a large, increasing, and well-deserved reputation and practice, but some chemical experiments casually made set him upon the scent of a discovery which would make not only his own fortune, but the fortune of the continent he sold his practice to seek. He had discovered a cheap, safe, and infallible chemical means of keeping meat sound and fresh in any climate and for any time. That the man was a genius George had no doubt at all, but he had great doubt of the infallibility of the process until he dined in Melbourne off part of the carcase of a lamb which had been killed in Liverpool. It was certainly as fresh and sweet and succulent as the day it was prepared, packed, and put on board in Liverpool. Dr. Shortland had sold off his practice impetuously and at a sacrifice, and needed at least as much more capital as he possessed to start the enterprise. There were some capitalists among his fellow-passengers, and of these he had his choice of partners, for all were eager for a share in an enterprise of whose success they had such a practical demonstration —for the Doctor had entertained the cabinpassengers to dinner on the lamb, whose transfer from the ship to the kitchen and from the kitchen to the table he had insisted on being watched by a deputation of their election. But Dr. Shortland declined the most tempting offers, and even bids mounting extravagantly one above the other, and chose George, who did not even venture upon a competition in which his little fortune would be nowhere. The two men had become close friends on board, and had interchanged full confidences; and the Doctor, who was really the most generous and disinterested of men, was as much bent on making his friend's fortune as his own. Thus he and George became partners. George went up country with an expert to purchase fat cattle and sheep in the cheapest market, and have them driven to Melbourne, where the Doctor remained to establish a laboratory and educate assistants, who, we need hardly say, knew nothing of the composition of the antiseptic with which they were instructed to deal. Among these, and the ablest of these assistants, was a man named Caleb Spaight, who was induced to apply for the post, not through the advertisements in the *Argus*, but through the notice of the dinner which appeared in the news columns of the paper. In fact, he meant to steal and sell the secret. He had himself been a doctor in Bath, but had to fly to escape prosecution for forgery, and after his flight evidence, circumstantial but overwhelming, of his having poisoned a sister-in-law in whose death he had an interest, came to light. Since his disappearance he had been everywhere and everything, and found no place or calling too disreputable to be disgraced by him. He had the advantage of uniting in himself two unusually incompatible characteristics—daring and subtlety—and was equal at once to the meanest and to the most desperate enterprise.

Dr. Shortland, who was as simple, generous, and impulsive a little man as ever lived, took to this fellow extraordinarily, and had not the least suspicion of his having been in the profession.

Spaight, we need not say, affected ignorance of the very first principles of chemistry, or of medicine, or of anything but butchering, to which, he said truly, he had had to take in his time. Indeed, being a man of immense strength and iron nerve, he acquitted himself of the butchering part of his business better than the professional who was also engaged.

Spaight abstracted and carried home to his dingy lodgings, for analysis, the Doctor's composition; but not being able to make much of it, he bided his time. It seemed to be a kind of air-proof varnish, removable only by another chemical preparation, but of course to be neutralised by puncturing any portion of the prepared carcase. For the present Spaight contented himself with so puncturing every carcase—all came under his hands as foreman—before it was put on board the vessel chartered for the venture. When he had discovered and appropriated Shortland's secret, he could point to the utter failure of the Doctor's antiseptic as a proof of its essential difference from that which he would profess to have hit upon himself,

But the Doctor's secret was difficult of discovery. Open as day in all other things, he was close and guarded about his discovery, whose nature he did not volunteer to communicate even to George, who, of course, did not ask for this confidence.

He took a lonely house perched on the

summit of a railway embankment (which had been built, we believe, for an engineer or contractor of the line), and had the inner room fitted up as a laboratory, with double doors and ingenious locks guarding the entrance. In truth, the little man, if childlike in heart, was often childish in conduct, and in many things was very French; fussy, fidgety, and self-important. He was specially so about his secret, which he seemed to regard almost as a religious mystery which it was profanity to attempt to pry into. He would speak of it to George in the low and reverent tone in which a man speaks to his bosom friend of his religious faith or feelings. He would allow no one but himself to enter the temple dedicated to this great mystery, and would himself even enter it and work in it only at night, when the sole servant he employed—a kind of charwoman—had gone home.

It will be seen, then, that Mr. Spaight had set himself a difficult task, but he was a patient man, bided his time, and watched his opportunity. It came at last when the ship in which the fortunes of George and the Doctor were embarked had been five weeks gone. It came, in fact, on the very night when their ship got back to Melbourne, having had to throw overboard its whole putrid cargo. During the Doctor's absence in the afternoon of that day Spaight forced his way through the window into the laboratory and found there just the thing for his purpose—an old clothes press, in which the Doctor had hung gruesome specimens of meat in all stages of arrested decay. In one of the leaves of the door of this press Spaight bored two holes on a level with his eyes, and then proceeded to ransack the laboratory for some written receipt in vain. Next he observed with extreme care and accuracy the place and nature of every drug on the shelves and in the boxes, helping his memory to retain their relative positions by mnemonic notes. This done, he drew from his pocket a revolver, which for twelve years had never been out of reach of his hand day or night, and assured himself of its being in perfect order. After this, time hung heavy on his hands and he was driven to smoke! It is true that the Doctor himself smoked in the sanctum, and that the smell of stale tobacco hung about it; still not many burglars besides Mr. Spaight would have risked filling a room with fresh smoke within two hours of the probable entry of the master of the house. The truth was, not only that Mr. Spaight was the coolest of scoundrels, but also, as the sequel will show, that he did not think detection fatal to his design.

It was nearer three hours, however, before the Doctor returned. He went straight to the laboratory (where the smoke had now cleared away and Spaight had secreted himself), lit his lamp, sat down, pulled out a paper, and began to read. He read steadily for another hour, to Spaight's considerable annoyance; but at its close he rose and set the lamp on a kind of shelf, where the shade with which it was fitted would throw its light down upon his compounding-board. Spaight began to breathe more quickly, and wondered that, in the deathly stillness of the night and of that lonesome place, the Doctor didn't hear him. But no. The Doctor put out his hand for a phial, took it down, shook it, replaced it, got up, walked to the press, opened it, and stood face to face with his foreman. He stood speechless for a few seconds, and then gasped 'Spaight!'

'Shortland!' echoing the Doctor's tone and stepping from the press. Was this the obsequious assistant? This startling change in the fellow's manner from servility to contemptuous familiarity was itself ominous, but still more ominous was the dogged and desperate determination in his face. A much bolder man than the Doctor might well have been unnerved at the expression in it.

'What do you want here?'

'I want your secret,' answered Spaight, drawing out his revolver, breathing on the barrel, then rubbing it on his sleeve, and finally cocking it as coolly as if he was about to practise at a target.

'I give you five minutes to write it out.'

There was no mistaking his manner. He meant murder.

'If I don't?' faltered the Doctor.

'I must shoot you, and I will by G—!'

'You'll be no nearer it then.'

'I shall then take that phial to the first analyst in London,' pointing with his revolver to a phial, full of the compound. 'Nearly one minute's gone.'

There was a frightful composure in the tone in which he spoke and the way in which he looked at the watch held in his left hand. Great beads of perspiration stood on the Doctor's forehead. He went to a little table with pen, ink, and paper upon it, wrote down a formula with a trembling hand, and held it out without a word to Spaight. Spaight put back his watch in his pocket to take it, read it, held it over the lamp till it took fire, and let it burn slowly in his fingers. While it burned he translated the symbols aloud as only a chemist or doctor could.

'What! You'd poison me like a rat'—and indeed the Doctor's prescription would have been an effective ratsbane. 'I can tell what the secret is *not* and what it is too, when I see it. Come; you've two minutes'—savagely.

The Doctor hesitated for a moment, looking into Spaight's face for any sign of a meaning less horrible than murder. There was no such sign. The man meant what he said. Then the Doctor stepped quickly to a drawer, unlocked it, drew out a revolver, faced round, and fired three chambers almost together like a volley, point blank at Spaight. Before he could fire the fourth he was dead.

The Doctor was flurried and fired wide, but Spaight was not flurried, and sent his bullet crash through Shortland's forehead into the brain. The body fell back against the drawers and slid down thence to the floor, where it lay in a limp heap. Spaight examined it to make sure it was quite dead and needed no other bullet before he put his revolver back into his pocket. Then he felt for and found the Doctor's purse (which was satisfactorily full) and appropriated it; but his watch, chain, and rings, he thought it prudent to forego. He next turned his attention to the locked drawers, of which there were four, and for which he soon found the keys in the bunch hanging from that the Doctor had opened. There were plenty of papers in them, but no prescription of any kind and no valuables. He relocked them, took out the keys, lit a candle from a lamp, went to the door, kicking aside with his foot the Doctor's body, which was in the way, with no more compunction than if it had been a dead dog. When we read in a book or paper of a brutal murder, we infer the murderer's feelings from our own, and fancy him affected with a creeping horror of the corpse of his victim; whereas to have been such a murderer at all, he must have long got rid of feelings of the kind.

Spaight took up the candlestick, and stepping carefully, he unlocked each of the double doors and proceeded to ransack the house. Two of the rooms were locked, but he went to an outhouse used as a shambles, fetched an axe, and broke open both doors. In the Doctor's rooms he found nothing which he dared to take; but in George's bedroom—for George, when in Melbourne, lived with the Doctor—he found many things which might be appropriated with more advantage and impunity. George, having gone into the bush to learn the farming part of the business, had left in the Doctor's care most of his valuables; among the rest even his grand watch with the inscription inside the case which had been presented to him by the children. He did not like risking it in the bush, and had therefore locked it in his desk, where Spaight, who prized the desk open, found it. This and many other portable treasures he pocketed, and then returned to the laboratory for the phial. What he had before abstracted of the

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elixir he had used up in attempting to analyse it. As he repassed the front door, which he had forgotten to shut after him, a gust of wind blew out the candle, and he had to grope his way to the laboratory in the dark. There was a passage, which midway turned sharply at right angles, leading out of the hall to the first door of the laboratory, and along this he groped his way; reached the door, felt over its surface for the handle, but before he found it the door was pushed slowly open from the inside. Spaight staggered back, his heart stood still; and when a cold and clammy hand clutched his throat he could not repress a cry of horror. Next moment a strong smell of rum convinced him that there was no other spirit in the case. But the man, whoever he was, must have been in the laboratory and seen the corpse. Spaight recovered his coolness quickly, drew out his revolver, and asked in a fierce tone, 'Who the h— are you?'

'Well, if it comes to that,' said a gruff voice, 'who the h— are you? You're not the Doctor, are you?'

Spaight breathed more freely. The man

couldn't have seen the body. 'I'm the Doctor's assistant. Did you want him?' in a conciliatory tone.

'Ay—I must see him. There's the devil to pay. All that meat stank like bilge water before it had been a fortnight on board. We had to heave it over to the sharks and put back. 'Where is he?'

It was the mate of the 'George Roberts,' who was sent by the captain to break the bad news to the Doctor. Finding the front door open, he had walked straight in and groped his way along the passage to the first door of the laboratory, which opened into what he thought must be a closet or cupboard. He was about retracing his steps when Spaight came to the door and felt the hand, cold and wet from the rain, touch his throat as it was stretched out to grope.

'He's busy,' said Spaight. 'I shall tell him you're here. Come along into the kitchen and have a drop of something.'

'That's your sort. You must pilot me, mate. I'd just got aground in a cupboard or summat, and had to go astern. Show a light, can't you?'

'All right; this way. I shall fetch a light in a moment.'

Spaight led him into the kitchen and left him there for a moment while he went back to light the candle at the lamp in the laboratory. He picked his steps very carefully this time, and took the precaution in leaving to lock the inner door behind him, and put the key in his pocket. He went then to a little pantry off the kitchen and fetched thence some bread, beef, and brandy, which he set before the mate.

'Let's hear about this business, and I shall break it myself to the boss.'

The mate told what there was to tell, which wasn't much, in rather strong language, muffled by bread, beef, and brandy; and Spaight left him on the pretence of breaking the bad news to the Doctor. While the mate was telling his story, Spaight conceived the idea of making it appear that the Doctor had committed suicide upon hearing of the failure of his venture. In pursuance of this idea he returned to the laboratory, put back into the Doctor's pocket his purse with two or three coins left in it, exchanged revolvers, as the bullet in the Doctor's brain was larger than that fitted to the toy implement the Doctor trusted to; locked both doors on the inside, and got out of the window. Entering the house through the still open front door, he rejoined the mate.

'How did he take it?' asked that gentleman, who had done eating, but not drinking.

Spaight shook his head. 'He couldn't speak for a bit; then he paid me a quarter's salary, shook hands with me, and said, "It would be all one in the morning."'

'That has a bad look,' said the mate with a sagacious nod. 'I say, I wouldn't leave him to himself to-night, if I were you; I'm d— if I would.'

'But he's locked himself in.'

'The devil he has! It's time I was off, as Cap'en will be expecting me,'—suddenly recalled to a sense of duty by the fear of being mixed up in an untoward business. Spaight made no objection, as the mate had drunk already more than quite suited his purpose. He saw his guest out, waited till he had gone two or three hundred yards, and then, having discharged the fourth chamber of the

Doctor's revolver, he ran after and overtook him.

'Did you hear it?' he asked breathlessly.

'Ay, ay—I thought so. It's a bad job.'

'You'll come back and help me to break in?'

The mate would have kept out of the way of the business while it was *in posse*, but he was not the man to turn tail when he found himself face to face with it. The two hurried back and knocked and shouted again and again to the Doctor at the outer door of the laboratory. Receiving no answer, not a groan even, the mate tried to burst in the door, but the Doctor's strong and ingenious lock resisted all his efforts.

'Is there an axe about?'

Spaight thought there was one in the outhouse, whither they went to look for it, but returned, of course, without it, as it was in George's room. He did not wish the mate to get in and find that the Doctor had been some time dead, his blood congealed, and his body cold. 'There's another door inside this,' he said.

'It's what I took for a cupboard, isn't it?

Look here, messmate, there's no use losing time breaking your teeth against one door like this, let alone two. Isn't there a window?'

'Yes, but it's barred like a jail.'

'Then we must fetch the police, mate, and the sooner the better.'

Spaight agreed, and the two hastened into Melbourne and returned in two hours with the police. There was little doubt in anyone's mind that the Doctor had committed suicide, even before the inquest; but after the evidence of Spaight—given with some natural and creditable emotion, but clearly and circumstantially corroborated in all important particulars by the mate—the jury, after a minute's consultation, brought in a verdict of suicide while in a state of temporary insanity; and everyone felt that no other verdict was possible, and no other hypothesis even conceivable. Not until after the inquest was it found by Spaight himself, who informed the police, that two doors had been broken open and one room ransacked by some one who took advantage of the suicide to commit burglary with little fear of interruption or detection.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

'THE NIGHTMARE LIFE IN DEATH.'

Mr. Spaight did not carry the elixir straight away to the first analyst in London. He found other fish to fry at present. He appropriated among other articles a pocket-book of George's which he found with the watch in the desk. He did not examine it particularly at the time, but finding it put away amongst unquestionable treasures he took its value for granted and reserved its examination to a more convenient time and place. He was at first disappointed with its contents when he did examine it thoroughly. There were no bank-notes and no marketable secrets in the papers it contained. Among these papers, however, he found a letter signed Archer Lawley, which, on second thoughts, seemed of some promise. It spoke of sending, in six or eight weeks, 300*l.*, the balance of a promised loan. Mr. Spaight was an accomplished and successful forger, and had, indeed, distinguished himself as such even in America, and he did not despair of intercepting the 300*l.* by the aid of this art.

There was no difficulty about getting the letters addressed to Mr. Kneeshaw. Such letters had already passed through his hands, as he had brought them from Melbourne to Dr. Shortland, to whose care they were addressed, and again, when they had beeen readdressed by the Doctor, Spaight had taken them back to post. He still, as the representative of the firm, called and got their letters, and would continue to get them until the one he wanted fell into his hands. In this way Mr. Spaight had the pleasure of reading over two letters from Mabel, which he had the bad taste to burn, before the one he looked for from Lawley came to hand. It contained explicit instructions as to the best way of getting the draft it enclosed cashed, by following which, and by forgery, Mr. Spaight was able to put three hundred sovereigns in his pocket.

Having netted now nearly 400*l.*, he made his mind up to get his debts in and start for England. His debts were of two kinds—debts of honour, or gambling debts, and debts of dishonour, or hush-money, extorted under threat of bringing charges, sometimes true and sometimes trumped up, against cautiously-chosen victims. Among these victims was a young man named Dewhurst—a wool-buyer for a great Melbourne firm—who was engaged to the daughter of the junior partner, Jabez Deane, a very strict and even ascetic Methodist. His engagement had steadied and reclaimed him from a life that was not very reputable—was, indeed, disreputable enough to bring him into the company and at last into the clutches of Spaight. Spaight got hold of letters of his written to a wretched girl—not nice letters by any means—and from time to time extorted money by the threat to put them into the hands of Mr. Deane; that is, to ruin his prospects in life as well as in love. The lad's life had not been over-respectable, but even Mr. Deane would have pardoned him if he could have known the horrible tortures to which Spaight put him in slowly sucking his blood. Spaight, having resolved to make off to England, sought up all his tributaries to put the screw on tight and once for all, and called last on

Dewhurst. The wretched youth was dressing for a dinner-party at Mr. Deane's when his landlady knocked to say Mr. Spaight was below. Dewhurst dashed the brush he was using against the looking-glass, and shivered it, and having exhausted his manliness in this hysterical outburst, he sat down and all but cried. However, there was no help for it. He must see this devil. He put on his coat and waistcoat and came down in sullen despair.

'You said you wouldn't come again for three months.'

'No more I would,' said Spaight cheerfully, 'if I wasn't going away. I'm off for England, and I came to give you up those letters, my boy.'

Dewhurst expressed his incredulity by something between a grunt and a groan.

'Look here,' said Spaight, in answer to this well-understood distrust, pulling out and handing Dewhurst a receipt for a first-class passage by the *Australasia*.

'How much?' asked Dewhurst, with a gleam of hope.

'Let us say 10*l*. a letter. There are thirteen in all; that is 130*l*. It's cheap,' he went on to say, in answer to Dewhurst's sinking his head upon his arms in hopeless misery at the mention of the sum. 'This letter alone is worth 50*l.*,' picking out from the packet and proceeding to read the most disgusting of the batch in a disgusting tone.

Dewhurst started as if stabbed, and snatched at the letter, which Spaight held out of reach, coolly read to the end, and then put back into the packet and into his pocket.

'Well, what do you say to 10*l.* a letter?'

'I haven't 10*l.* in the world, I tell you.'

'You can get it where you got the last.' Dewhurst had to embezzle his employers' money to pay Spaight's last call.

'I can't and I won't.

'Then I go straight to old Deane's.'

'You may go straight to h——.'

'Very good,' said Spaight coolly, rising and going towards the door. 'I shall not get as much from old Deane, but I shall get something out of him, you may depend.'

Dewhurst's hysterical strength of mind was spent in this effort, and before Spaight reached the door he was recalled, as he expected.

'Say 50*l.*'

'No, I said what I meant, 130*l*.

Dewhurst relieved his mind by an imprecation.

'How long will you give me?'

'I *can* only give you a week, as I sail on Wednesday next.'

'Call in a week, then,' he groaned.

Anyhow, there was a week's reprieve, which was something. Spaight having taken himself off, Dewhurst sat down, and wrote an apology for being unable to keep his engagement at Mr. Deane's, and, having sent it by the servant, set out to seek his friend and confidant, Hodson. Hodson had gone to a resort which was very popular with young gentlemen of his class and spirit, called the 'Digger's Dairy,' which seemed to combine the attractions of a hell, a dram-shop, and a music-hall, and here Dewhurst followed and found him.

'He's been to you, too?' was Hodson's first greeting.

'How did you know?'

'He's been putting the screw on all round. You should hear Larry swear at him.'

Larry was not an Irishman, but a Mexican half-caste, whose skill with the lasso—called in Mexico 'lariat'—had earned him the name. Larry owed Spaight a debt of honour, and so did three of those of whom Hodson spoke, but himself and two others were in Dewhurst's plight, and were tributaries of hush-money.

'I'll tell you what, we'll hold a council of war, by Jove,' exclaimed Hodson, and without waiting for the assent of his feeble and irresolute friend, he went across to Larry and asked him to come straight to his lodgings. Larry was the only one who owed Spaight other than hush-money debts whom Hodson summoned to the council, but Larry's invitation thereto was due to his undisguised and desperate hatred of Spaight. The other four present at the council had suffered such infernal tortures from that vampire that they would have knocked him on the head with no more remorse than if he had been a weasel—if they could have done it with impunity. However, at the council no one had a chance even of being heard but Larry, who, though he owed the common enemy only five pounds, and that won fairly from him at billiards, was the most violent and vindictive of them all. The fact was that Spaight had lodged for a short time in his house, and Larry suspected him of an intrigue with his wife. Larry proposed to lay a trap for Spaight and bait it with Dewhurst, who didn't at all like the *rôle* assigned to him. What if the tiger should bury his fangs in the bait in the very act of being trapped? This objection was overruled by the rest, who naturally couldn't see the point of it.

'There's no one else big enough for bait. A hundred and thirty pounds! He'll leap at it!' said Hodson, his own familiar friend.

'Pshaw!' broke in the impetuous and imperious Larry, 'there's nothing to frighten a chicken. You tell Spaight you're going up country with 200*l.* of your employers' in your pocket—going to buy wool—and arrange with him to rob you at a certain point. Before he comes to that point we shall settle with him, and you can skulk home if you like.'

'But how are we to settle with him?' asked Boothroyd.

'I shall bring him down with the lariat, and when he's down and his arms pinioned, maybe you'll have the pluck to bear a hand,' sneered Larry.

Hereupon, everyone, even Dewhurst, disclaimed being in the least afraid; Hodson and Bennet with perfect truth, but Boothroyd and Dewhurst not so sincerely. As for Larry, he was as truculent, if not as subtle, a scoundrel as Spaight himself, and knew as little what fear meant. Then the details were gone into. Dewhurst was to arrange with Spaight to meet and be robbed by him at a lonely spot called 'The Ovens,' twenty miles out of town, on the following Monday evening at sunset, and as Spaight reached the rendezvous he was to be lassoed, bound, and lynched. Dewhurst, who had as little brain as nerve, was coached by Hodson to put Spaight off his guard by bargaining particularly to have half the letters in hand and the other half at the rendezvous, and to be allowed to keep for himself 70*l.*, or at least 50*l.*, out of the 200*l.*

Spaight fell into the trap without the least suspicion, gave up half the letters, and promised to give back 50*l.* out of the 200*l.*; a promise he had not the least intention of keeping. Larry chose for the ambush some scrub near the rendezvous where the road was in such a state that Spaight would be forced to walk his horse, and the doomed man had no sooner passed this spot at a walk, whistling cheerfully, than he was lassoed and jerked off his horse by the unerring aim, strong arm, and iron nerve of the Mexican. In a moment, Larry, Hodson, and Bennet were upon him (Dewhurst and Boothroyd being extremely anxious to secure his horse, which they let loose next moment), Hodson and Bennet holding him while Larry secured and strengthened the pinioning of his arms. Spaight struggled desperately to get one hand into the pocket where the Doctor's revolver was, and failing, and finding himself wholly helpless, he kept sullen silence. He would not have begged for mercy even if he had the least chance of it; but he had not the least chance of it, and he knew it.

'Now, boys,' said Larry, when he had bound and swathed him like a mummy, 'what is it to be?'

'Hanging,' said Hodson.

Larry looked round, not for a tree, but for a rope. 'Wont do,' he said regretfully; 'I can't cut my lariat.'

'Well, then, shooting.'

'Who's to do it?' asked Bennet.

'Let's cast lots,' suggested Hodson.

'No,' decided the masterful Mexican, 'we must all be in it. No skulking, and no peaching. All shoot together.'

'But I've no pistol,' objected Dewhurst.

Larry looked at him with withering scorn, stooped and pulled from the pocket Spaight tried to reach the Doctor's revolver, and flung it to Dewhurst.

'I say,' he said, with sudden suspicion of his two craven allies, 'pass round the pops. Let's see if all are full loaded. We shall have a look at them again afterwards.'

Accordingly the revolvers were passed round, and every chamber of each was found to be charged.

'All right. Now, boys, bear a hand.' So saying, Larry took hold of the long loose end of the lasso, and the others fell in behind him, each harnessing himself to the strong silk rope, and by it they dragged the body of the wretched man as if it had been a log of wood, tearing it through the scrub, and bumping it over the stones and hillocks at the high speed set by Larry, until they pulled up at last at a tree a fair distance from the track. Here they lifted up the body, and Larry lashed it securely to the trunk of the tree.

'Ten paces!' he said, striding it.

'Hold on!' said Hodson, pulling out his handkerchief, and proceeding to blindfold the doomed man in due form. To this operation, however, Spaight made the silent objection of biting Hodson's fourth finger to the bone, and spitting back the blood into his face. Hodson used his handkerchief to wipe his face and to bind up his finger, and then retired ten paces with the rest.

'Ready?' asked Larry. 'Stop!' he shouted. 'Fire above the elbow. Don't cut the lariat.'

'Stop!' echoed Spaight, in a clear, commanding voice. 'I'll give the words myself, bl——ye! Ready! Present! Fire!'

Blood flowed almost with the word from his lips, as the Mexican's bullet pierced between the eyes. His head fell upon his chest, and his body hung limp from the fastenings.

'Died game, anyhow!' said Larry, with extorted admiration, as he strode towards the tree. 'By G—, you've cut it; I knew you would,' he added fiercely, for one of the three balls which pierced the body cut clean through the lasso. He examined the corpse critically, and finding only three wounds he turned and snatched Dewhurst's revolver and then Boothroyd's. Both had been discharged, so he tossed them back contemptuously. He then proceeded to unknot and unwind the lasso, with many muttered curses at the lack of skill or nerve of the marksman who severed it, but was restored to good temper on finding over 300*l.* on the body, and became quite genial when both Hodson and Dewhurst declined to take their share. Dewhurst was satisfied with his letters, and Hodson with his revenge. Even Larry wouldn't meddle with the murdered man's watch, pocket-book, or papers; they might be criminating. As for his horse, it started off at full gallop at the sound of the volley. The confederates then dispersed and disappeared, only Dewhurst and Boothroyd keeping together.

They disappeared just in time. A minute after they were lost to sight in the scrub, four men reached the spot. They were on their way up country from Melbourne, and hearing the volley and seeing Spaight's horse gallop wildly towards them, they stopped and caught it; then dismounted, tied all five horses to trees, and pushed through the scrub towards the spot whence the firing seemed to come. After some search they came upon Spaight's body, still warm and bleeding, lying at the foot of the tree. His pockets were turned out, but his pocket-book and papers lay on the grass, while his watch was yet in his pocket. They concluded that he had been murdered by robbers, who dragged the corpse, which bore every mark of having been dragged to this spot, and were interrupted in rifling the body by their approach. This would account for his purse being taken while his watch was left. It was no use whatever attempting to pursue the robbers in the scrub, and in the gathering darkness, even if they had much heart for that adventure, which they hadn't. The best thing to be done was to take the body with them to a little settlement five miles ahead, called Mapping. They would so save the murdered man's watch and papers, which the robbers were sure to return for when they found the coast clear. They carried the body between them with some difficulty to the track and slung it across the horse, which each took it in turn to walk beside, to stay the corpse from slipping off. At Mapping the body was identified by the letters and papers in the pocket-book, and by the inscription within the watch-case as that of the Rev. George Kneeshaw, late a curate of the parish church of Wefton, Yorkshire, England, who had, as the letters showed, given up the Church and left England to seek his fortune as a farmer in Australia. The murder made a sensation in Melbourne, and the *Argus* therefore devoted to it, and what it could learn of Mr. Kneeshaw, a whole column one day and two or three paragraphs on subsequent days, and the news was copied at some length from the *Argus* into the *Times* and other English papers. In this way Larry and his confederates escaped even a suspicion of the murder, which they would certainly not have done if the body had been identified as Spaight's. Spaight, indeed, had disappeared, but as those who knew anything of him knew that he had taken his passage by the 'Australasia,' his disappearance was not unlooked for and certainly not unwelcome. In this way also it came about that Archer Lawley read in the *Times* a most circumstantial account of the robbery and murder of his friend, Rev. George Kneeshaw, late a curate of the parish church, Wefton. And in this way also it came about that the Rev. George Kneeshaw himself read in the same number of the *Times* the startling news of his own murder, of which he had not heard, and had no chance of hearing till more than three months after it was said to have occurred. But how did it come about that George was so far and so long out of earshot even of the far-off hum of civilisation? Mr. Spaight, who calculated his days and plans to a nicety, had reckoned upon only three months' absence from Melbourne of Mr. Kneeshaw. It was the length of absence agreed upon in Spaight's hearing between him and the Doctor; and Spaight, when he booked himself to sail in the 'Australasia,' felt he was running things rather fine, as Mr. Kneeshaw was due in that week George, however, did not turn up in Melbourne till some days after the 'Australasia' had returned to it again from Liverpool. The truth was, George had written to the Doctor a letter which reached Melbourne the day after Spaight's death, in which he announced an irresistible speculation that would take him 200 miles further into the bush, and keep him at least six weeks longer from Melbourne. It kept him a little more than three months longer. The speculation was really promising, and would have turned out as it promised if George had not broken down from overwork and exposure, and hovered between life and death for the better part of two months. During his illness his men robbed him, some negatively by idling and drinking, others positively by decamping with the best part of his stock; and on his slow recovery George found himself little better than a beggar. He made his way back as he could to Melbourne, broken in body and spirit. What account of his stewardship could he give the kind-hearted Doctor? He had but a few shillings in his pocket, and the 300*l.* which would be waiting for him in a letter from Lawley was a poor equivalent for the capital he had lost. With these bitter thoughts in his heart he climbed the little hill to the lonely house above the railway embankment. He was walking straight into it, and had got half-way along the passage to the laboratory, when a surprised voice shouted, 'Halloa!'

It was the owner who had let it to the Doctor, but had returned to live in it himself.

'Where's the Doctor?' asked George.

'Who?'

'Dr. Shortland.'

The owner looked curiously at George. 'Just come from England, eh?'

'No, I've been up country. Can you tell me where Dr. Shortland's gone to?' as a second look round convinced him that the Doctor must have moved.

'You must ask his parson,' replied the owner, who was a coarse and facetious person, but not hard-hearted by any means. 'He blew his brains out in that there identical room,' pointing to the door at the end of the passage, at whose elbow George was pulled short up. 'That pickling business failed, and the shock was too many for him.'

George had not long got back or got back very far from the brink of the grave, and was still weak as water. He staggered and had to lean against the wall.

'I beg your pardon, sir. Here, James, bear a hand.'

James was his son, a lad of eighteen.

Between them they helped George into the nearest room, and set him in a chair, and gave him some brandy.

'I really beg your pardon, sir,' repeated his host, very much concerned; 'I didn't know you were a relative of his. You're a bit better, I hope.'

'Thank you very much,' replied George; 'I'm all right now.'

'It was an unlucky firm altogether, sir,' continued his host, thinking it better to turn George's thoughts from the Doctor's death. 'The other partner, Kneeshaw, was robbed and murdered a month after the poor Doctor died. It was a queer affair. I see it's got into the *Times*, pointing to a copy of that journal which had just arrived by the returned 'Australasia,' and lay on the table.

George stared at him with such a look as a man might have who, dying in his sleep, wakes in another world. His host, thinking he was going into a fit, plied him again with brandy very seasonably and effectively. George would not trust himself to look then and there at the *Times*, but rose, resisting his kind host's hospitable effort to detain him, took leave with many thanks, walked as in a dream into Melbourne, bought a copy of the *Times*, took it with him to a lonely place, and read and re-read of his murder till he had to give up the attempt to realise then the meaning of the words.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A CLUE.

George was too weak for continued or coherent thought. His mind reeled to and fro and staggered like a drunken man from point to point of the strange stories he had just heard and read, but could not grasp any one particular of them firmly or for long. These particulars seemed to come and go in his mind at their own will and not at his, and eluded and escaped his efforts to stay and question them. They were mysterious

> Fallings from him, vanishings,
> Blank misgivings of a creature
> Moving in a world not realised.

He rose at last from the stone on which he sat by the roadside, put the *Times* in his pocket, and crept back to Melbourne. He put up in the first inn he came to, went straight to bed, and fell, after a little, into a long and sound sleep. He woke late next morning, still weak, but able to think things clearly over. Indeed his thoughts seemed to have got themselves into order while he slept, for he had a clear idea when he woke that Dr. Shortland had been robbed and murdered, and that the robber and murderer, having his (George's) watch and papers upon him (for by these, said the *Times*' report, the body had been identified), had himself been robbed and murdered soon after.

This theory, however, he had to give up in great part on inquiry at the police office ; for the evidence of the police went to show that the Doctor had beyond doubt committed suicide, and that the robbery of his and his partner's property had taken place a day or two later. From the police office George went to the post office, but found no letters for him —not one. From the post office he went to the bank, and learned that Lawley's draft had been cashed more than three months since. When he left the bank he took out his purse and counted the silver—there was no gold— 17*s.* ! It was all he had in the world. He went back to the inn, paid his bill, and sought lodgings in the meanest part of the town. At last, when utterly worn out, he found a room frowsy enough to be probably the cheapest he could get. He had to pay for a week in advance, and this payment left him with 1*s.* 6*d.* He had eaten nothing since morning, and little then, and feeling now even weaker than he had felt yesterday, he flung himself on the foul bed in the frowsy attic. Here he lay long, not asleep, but just as he was yesterday at the same hour, dreaming awake, that is, having no control whatever over his thoughts, which, as in a dream, came and went and did as they pleased, like schoolboys escaped from their set tasks in their master's absence.

At last the landlady became uneasy about him. She used not to feel much interest in her lodgers, but since on that very bed where George had flung himself one lodger had committed suicide, and another had died of what the doctor called disease of the heart accelerated by want of food, she had grown morose and suspicious. Indeed, she hesitated at first about taking George in, as she thought he had the look of a third inquest in his face. However, as the room had been six weeks to let, she risked it and reconciled her weakness to her conscience by an addition of two shillings to the rent. She was beginning to doubt the wisdom of having accepted George even at this heavy insurance premium after he had been seven hours in the house and had never stirred from or in his room. At last her womanly anxiety drove her up the steep stairs to the attic.

'Come in,' answered George to her knock.

'Thought you'd want summot to eat,' said Mrs. Sproule, relieved to see that the dark stain of blood on the mattress, which the scanty bedclothes did not hide, was not freshened; 'tea or summot.'

'Thank you, I should like tea.'

'Bread to it?'

'Yes, thank you.'

'Butter?'

'Yes, thank you.'

'Sugar and milk,' added Mrs. Sproule, icking each item off upon her fingers as she mentioned it—'Ninepence'—shutting her lip like a steel trap upon the price as something that was likely to try to escape her if she wasn't firm.

George fumbled in his pocket and produced half of all he had in the world, but hesitated to hand it to her. 'I don't think I shall want butter, milk, or sugar; only tea and bread.'

'Sixpence,' if possible more snappishly.

George handed her the money, and in due time got very good bread, and plenty of it; but tea that seemed brewed from Irish thatch—smoked straw. After tea he lay down again on the bed in his clothes—he could not bring himself to undress and lie between those horrible sheets—and at last he got to sleep, and slept at intervals till morning.

In the morning he breakfasted off the remainder of the bread, and was clear-headed enough to realise his position. What was he to do? He longed to write to Mabel, or at least to Lawley, and let her know through him that he was alive. But *would* he be alive when the letter reached England? or, if alive, in what position? In a position to keep such a girl to her engagement? It would be dastardly selfishness. No; better she should think him dead and herself free. She would forget him. Had she not forgotten him already? Not a line from her for six long months. But his other letters—his letter from Lawley—had been intercepted—why not hers? Yes, she must have written; but her very disinterestedness and constancy pleaded with him for her that he should not bind her to his broken lot. And then George came back to the despondent thought with which he had started, that the report he longed to contradict might possibly—probably—be true before the contradiction reached Lawley. You see he was ill, exhausted and shaken by the shock of one piece of bad news upon another, and saw everything in the blackest colours. Having decided, after a struggle, against spending his last shilling in a letter to Lawley, he forced his mind to turn altogether from an idea about which it longed to linger, and set himself to face the present. He must do something or starve. But what could he do or get to do? It was a hopeless outlook. He would have more chance of keeping alive in a desert island in a deserted sea than in this teeming city of Englishmen, and he would have been less lonely. *Ἐρημία μεγάλη ’στιν ἡ μεγάλη πόλις.* It is strange how the mind escapes some present pressing misery by wandering off at the first turn it comes to. This Greek line coming into his head transported him to Bolton Abbey and the Strid, and a conversation he had held there with Lawley, in which his friend had quoted it. The whole scene, set in exquisite scenery, was before him as in a vivid dream, himself sitting flinging stones into the rushing water, Lawley lying on his back with his hands clasped beneath his head, and eyes half closed against the sunlight, arguing for the civilising influence of the country, as against the so-called civilisation of towns. Lawley had quoted Wordsworth's exquisite lines, beginning—

> The stars of midnight shall be dear

(the very lines, irrelevant as they were to his misery, haunted George's mind throughout this sickening day), and wound up by saying that 'men, like wolves, were most savage when in packs.'

With these ominous words in his mind, almost in his ears, George started up from the truckle-bed on which he had been sitting, went down the steep stairs, and out into the street. He bought a cheap local paper, and looked eagerly at the vacant situations in the advertisement columns. There were only three clerkships advertised as vacant, while there was half a column of advertisements from clerks seeking situations. It was not promising, and he was prepared for the reception his application met in each case. At the first two offices where he applied, the master or manager, after a look at his gaunt and ghastly face, said coolly that the vacancy was filled up. At the third he was asked for references or credentials, and having, of course, none to give, was bowed politely out of the office.

It was now well on in the afternoon, as the three places were nearly as far apart as they could be, and as George was too weak to walk fast. He felt too weak to walk much further. He sat on a doorstep and pulled out the local newspaper to look again at the advertisements, but the lines and letters ran into each other, and he could read nothing beyond the name of the paper. He must have something to eat. He put his hand in his pocket to count again the few pence he had left and pulled out with them the gold pencil-case the children had given him, with his name neatly engraved upon it. Then the pawn-office occurred to him for the first time as a resource. He might pawn his watch—the old one—the pencil-case, and his portmanteau and its contents, which would probably be at the station to-day, or at latest to-morrow; for as he rode on horseback to the nearest station from the bush, he could not take it with him, but left it in safe hands to be forwarded by the first wagon. In this way he might stave starvation off a little longer, and need hesitate less about spending the few pence he held in his hand upon some kind of dinner.

There were other eyes fixed greedily on these few pence at the same moment—eyes that looked large in the white, worn face of a young woman in a worse plight than George's. She was the widow of a drowned merchant captain, left with two children—destitute and as helpless as the children in her charge. If she could have parted with her children, or if she had been less of a child herself, she certainly need not have starved for lack of honest work in such a town as Melbourne. But she was starving, and, worse still, her children also. She stopped and fixed her eyes greedily on the few pence in George's hand until George looked up, when she hurried on 'like a guilty thing surprised.'

Relief of suffering had grown into an instinct with George, and the suffering expressed in the girl's face was irresistible in its appeal to him—a kind of mute, meek misery like that of a timid, hunted, and helpless animal. George's weakness and its cause made him only the more impressionable in this case.

'I beg your pardon,' he said hesitatingly. The woman stopped. 'I can spare this, if it would be of any use to you,' offering half what remained to him. The woman looked into the gaunt face uplifted to hers, and read her own story only too plainly in it.

'You are starving yourself, sir,' pitifully.

'I've been ill,' he said evasively. She shook her head, not trusting herself to speak.

'I can't be starving with this,' said George, pulling out his watch, his face lit up for a moment with one of his old kindly smiles. He rose as he spoke, and forced the few pence into her hand.

'I can't help it,' she said with a great sob. 'I have two children; they've not had a morsel of food since yesterday. God forgive me, I can't help it.'

'Nonsense,' said George cheerily, 'I'm all right. I only wish it was more,' trying at the same time to force the rest of the money upon her. But she was firm. She shook her head more decisively than before, and thanking him only with her tears—for she couldn't speak—she hurried away.

While George was feeling the shame of having been disproportionately thanked for so little, a sudden thought struck him as an open carriage with a gentleman in it, intent on a book, was passing. He stopped the driver, stepped to the side of the carriage, and, taking his hat off, apologised for the liberty he was venturing upon. 'That poor woman,' he said, nodding towards the figure in black, now some way ahead, 'is starving, and she has two little children depending on her. I think, sir, if you will kindly inquire into the case, you will forgive me for calling your attention to it.'

The little man looked up from his book and listened with some surprise. He was a celebrated doctor, and saw at a glance that George himself was in as sore a plight as the woman he pleaded for. Still George's manner was so perfectly self-respectful as well as respectful, that he felt some embarrassment about saying so.

'Not very well yourself, eh?'

'I've had a long illness, but I'm better, thank you, now.'

George was unmistakably a gentleman, and a gentleman who had unmistakably come to grief.

'You want strong support. If you'll allow me to prescribe for you—I'm a doctor, you know,' said the little man, taking his purse out and a sovereign from it, in a very embarrassed manner.

'Thank you,' interrupted George, so cordially and gratefully that there could hardly be suspicion of his being offended. 'I thought you would be kind enough to help her.' He again raised his hat, and the Doctor returned the salute with a politeness which he hoped would efface any offence George might have felt, and disgusted at his evident intention to offer him the sovereign. George watched the carriage, saw it stop when it overtook the black figure, saw her and the Doctor look back at him, and then turned and walked away.

It was well the widow had refused the few pence left to him, as he had not strength to walk to the nearest pawn-office. In his weak state the interview with her and the Doctor was an excitement which was followed by a reaction, and he had to rest more than once before he came to a little eating-house in a back street, which looked nasty enough to be cheap. He entered, and sat down at the foot of a long and bony deal table. All the flesh or soft parts of it had been worn down, leaving an archipelago of knobby islands. There were a good many guests, all seemingly navvies—huge, dirty, savage or sullen-looking, who ate like hyænas—suspiciously, ferociously, with occasional growls, which the one coatless waiter was skilled in interpreting. George sat beside perhaps the most tremendous and truculent-looking ruffian of the gang, who glared at him savagely, with his knife pausing midway between his mouth and the saltcellar for a moment. For the guests not only ate, of course, with their knives, but dipped them, before each bite, into a common saltcellar. However, Caliban did not bury the knife in George's bosom, as he seemed inclined to do, but carried it forward to his mouth with a grunt. After some time the waiter came up to George and said roughly, 'Well?'

'Let me have what you can give me for this,' said George, handing him the few pence. The waiter looked at them contemptuously, and was evidently hesitating whether to order such a beggarly customer out, when a far-off guest called him to him. From him he went to the proprietor, who was near, to refer George's case to him; and the proprietor, who was the carver, cut a scanty and carefully-calculated slice, and sent it with potatoes to match. It wasn't much, but it was too much for George. He tried to eat, but couldn't. He should have ordered some stimulant. He laid down his knife and fork, and leaned his head wearily on his hand, and fell into a kind of dull stupor, from which he was aroused by a fierce shout from his neighbour. The savage was merely summoning the waiter in his ordinary tone. George, thus roused, meditated, asking the waiter, when he came at the summons of the savage, to change the pittance of meat for a pittance of drink; but before he could muster up courage for the request, the waiter had gone again. He returned soon with a glass of brandy-and-water for the savage, who took it, paid for it, and set it down before George with a surly grunt. George was completely taken aback. He never saw a man who so thoroughly realised his ideal of a brutal murderer.

‘For me?’ he exclaimed at last. The savage grunted. George thanked him very cordially, and the acknowledgment was acknowledged with another grunt. When he had drunk some of the brandy-and-water, he found he could eat, and eat a great deal more than the morsel before him. He had just finished it, when the savage got up to go, receiving George’s renewed thanks as ungraciously as before. When he got to the door he summoned the waiter in a ferocious voice, growled out something, gave him something, and departed. Presently the waiter came to George with a vast plateful of meat and another of vegetables and potatoes, and set them before him.

‘Not for me,’ said George, shaking his head.

‘Paid for,’ said the waiter gruffly, poking his thumb towards the door by which the savage had just departed.

‘Does he come here every day?’ asked George, hoping to thank him some day. The waiter, of course, imagined George meant to prey upon him daily and did not condescend to reply. George was exceedingly touched by this unlooked-for-kindness, coming close upon that of the Doctor, and contradicting Lawley's cynical sentiment about men and wolves, which had been much in George's mind all day. Indeed, he was almost as much refreshed by the savage's kindness as by the dinner it provided, and began to look out into the wide world with more hope. Having dined, he pulled out the paper, which he now found he could read, and read every advertisement in it without finding one of the faintest promise for him. As he was folding it up again, his eye caught his own name in striking capitals. It was simply a short article copied from the *Daily Telegraph* into the local Melbourne paper commenting on the murder of the Rev. George Kneeshaw. There was nothing very striking in the article, but it had the effect of turning George's thoughts upon the difficulty of establishing his identity, if he cared or needed to establish it. Shackleton—the settler to whom he joined himself to learn farming—alone could prove it conclusively. The thought of Shackleton suggested the happy idea of rejoining him. He could pawn his watch and borrow on it more money than he would need to get to 'Turner's Take'—

Shackleton's place. There was not the least doubt of Shackleton's taking him on as a hand and helping him forward in any way he could. This idea put new life into George. He started up and left the eating-house to look about for a pawn-office. He felt a kind of shame about asking his way to one, so that he had wandered far and long, and was worn out, before he came upon one at last. He went in, produced his watch and chain and got 5*l.* 10*s.* advanced upon them. It wasn't much, but it was ample for his purpose. He then debated in his own mind whether it were worth his while to return to his frowsy lodgings to recover the knapsack he had left there, containing his toilet necessaries, and unfortunately decided to do so. It was a long way through the worst part of the town, where there was not a cab to be had, and before he had crawled much more than half the distance he reeled and fell fainting on the pavement. At once there was a crowd round him, and in the crowd a policeman. Of course the policeman knew that George was drunk before he saw him, and hardly needed the strong smell of brandy he detected, to put the thing beyond a doubt in his mind. As, however, George was dressed like a gentleman, he decided it would be more to his advantage to have him conveyed to his own house than to the station. To find where he lived the policeman had to search him, and his search was rewarded with the discovery of a gold pencil-case with Rev. George Kneeshaw engraved upon it! Here was a discovery! A clue to the murder which made such a stir, not only in Australia, but in Europe and throughout the world. The policeman's fortune was made. With trembling hands he proceeded with the search, and found in George's breast-pocket a pocket-book with two letters addressed Rev. George Kneeshaw—probably the pocket-book in which his money was—and in his other pockets two newspapers, the *Times* and a local journal, containing European accounts of the crime. The murderer had evidently bought them to gloat over the wide spread of his fame. The policeman sent for a cab, which came just as George was recovering consciousness, shoved his man into it, and drove to the station. George was too dazed and confused to say or think of anything till he reached the station, and the breathless policeman had told the great news. Here George asked for a glass of water, got it, drank it, came fully to himself, and asked where he was.

'In the hands of the police, my man, at last,' said his captor triumphantly.

'What for?' asked George, bewildered.

'What for?—for the murder of the Rev. George Kneeshaw!' said his captor, first stooping forward impressively, and then drawing himself back, to take in the full effect of the announcement. George was still very sick and shaky, but it was not possible to help a laugh at the ludicrous and original notion of being taken up for the murder of himself. The laugh only convinced his captor and his comrades, including the sergeant, that they had to do with a hardened and desperate criminal. Without more ado they thrust George into the foulest and securest cell at their disposal till morning. In the morning he was in a raging fever, and had to be taken to the hospital.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

'UNMERCIFUL DISASTER.'

George's imprisonment in the slimy cell of the police station probably only hastened an inevitable relapse, but it certainly aggravated it. There would not have been the least chance for him if his second attack, like the first, had seized him in the bush. There would not have been much chance for him even now, if Dr. Garstang—the first doctor in Melbourne—had not taken an extraordinary interest in his case. Dr. Garstang was the little doctor George sought to interest in the case of the widow. He recognised George at once in the hospital, and laughed when he was told that a policeman must be admitted with him to look after him, as he was without doubt one of the murderers of the Rev. George Kneeshaw. It was impossible for a doctor not to doubt the judgment on any and every subject of men who could mistake such a case as George's for one of drunkenness; while Dr. Garstang, we know, had his own reasons for thinking George incapable of robbery and murder.

'I shall be answerable for him,' said the little Doctor decisively. 'I can't have policemen prowling and parading about here. They're too clever, sergeant; they'd have half the fever ward in the police cells for drunkenness, and the other half for creating a disturbance in a public place. You may take him back to your own fever cells if you choose; but if you leave him here you must leave him to me. I shall take care he doesn't cheat you or the gallows. Good morning.'

The sergeant in his heart was not sorry to escape, and for his men to escape, duty in a fever ward, so he made but a mild protest against the Doctor's decision, and took himself off out of the reach of infection without more ado. The Doctor, upon the pretext of securing George more perfectly, had him removed to a private room, and provided for him a nurse that could be relied on not to mention the charge hanging over him until he was quite strong again. The woman, who was a vast

Scotchwoman, silent as a fish, and with about as much warm blood in her veins, did well for George in his unconscious and delirious stages; but afterwards, when he was convalescent, the Doctor replaced her by a more sympathetic attendant—no other than the widow. The Doctor took a deep interest in this poor woman's case, and bullied her as he bullied every pet patient. He took her children from her, put them where they would be well fed, taught, and taken care of, and ordered her into the infirmary to learn nursing as under-nurse of the children's ward, and finally transferred her to the hospital to nurse George, seven weeks after he had been admitted. George had dim associations with the face of his new nurse, but whether they were born of dreams or not he could not decide.

'Is Henderson ill?' he asked, with the feeble interest of feebleness. Henderson was the mass of 'flesh fishified' who had hitherto nursed him.

'No, sir,' replied Mrs. Minchin. She was penetrated with gratitude to George, and expressed part of it through a profoundly respectful manner. The belief, universal in Melbourne, and especially dear to the hearts of all the other nurses in the hospital, that George was an atrocious murderer, roused the wrath of the meek Mrs. Minchin outside George's room, and inside impelled her to the implicit protest of a most deferential bearing.

'No, sir; please, sir, she's been transferred to Ward No. 3.'

'Are *you* going to stay?' asked George after a pause, during which he was trying to make out the meaning of the new nurse's manner, which was as like to that of her predecessor as a bow is to a blow. Had he been murdered again, and had his soul transmigrated into some one else? For all through his delirium the idea of his murder had been before him in various forms, and so expressed itself in his ravings as to rivet the belief in his guilt of Henderson and any other nurse who happened to hear them, or hear of them.

'Yes, sir, I'm to stay if I suit.'

George lay with his eyes fixed steadily on her for a long time, trying to get fast hold of a memory which danced about and dazzled and tantalised him like a flickering reflection.

'Were you ever in Yorkshire?'

'Yorkshire! No, sir. I was never in England. I come from Canada.'

George was completely baffled.

'I've seen your face before?'

Mrs. Minchin was doubtful whether to help his struggling memory out or not. The Doctor had strictly forbidden the remotest reference to Kneeshaw's murder till the patient was strong enough to stand the shock of the charge hanging over him, and Mrs. Minchin feared to recall a single incident of that fatal day to his recollection, lest it might lead it up to the scene at the police station.

'Where, sir?' she answered with much presence of mind.

'Ay, where?' he said, giving up the wearying, worrying effort in despair.

He then relapsed into the delicious lotos-eating and selfish languor of early convalescence, from which the surprise of a new face by his bed had roused him, and took for some days all her gentle, watchful, unwearied ministrations as a matter of course. Seeing, however, the Doctor and her standing together by his bedside one day, the whole scene of their first meeting together flashed upon him in a moment. He started up in bed, exclaiming, 'Why, you're—you're the poor woman! Are the children well?' hesitatingly and with a sudden glance at the deep black in which she was dressed.

'They're quite well, thank you, sir, and thank the Doctor,' turning from one preserver to the other with her eyes full of tears.

'And you're the Doctor,' turning to the little man with hardly less gratitude in his face and voice than that of the widow.

'Yes, I'm the Doctor,' said the little man genially. 'Very clever guess of yours, considering I've been dosing you for two months. You'll find out next that you're the man who wants strong support, eh? And so you do—so you do. You can't run away from me now, eh?'

'I believe I owe my life to you,' said George, with much emotion, putting out his white, wasted, trembling hand to grasp the Doctor's.

'Pooh! You owe your life to a good constitution, and a good nurse, and a good God,' said the Doctor reverently. George was silent for a moment, offering up a silent grace.

'But how did I get here?' he continued. 'I remember when you drove on going to an eating-house—and the brandy-and-water the navvy paid for for me—and the dinner—and the long walk to the pawn-office, and his saying the chain was worn—and the 5*l.* 10*s.*—and my taking a cab. No, I didn't take a cab. Was there a cab? No; I set out to walk to my lodgings, and stopped to lean against a shop with a stuffed kangaroo in the window, and——'

The Doctor listened anxiously, but George couldn't follow himself further. He shook his head. 'I can't remember anything more. I must have fainted and been carried here?' looking inquiringly up at the Doctor.

'Yes, you fainted and were brought here, and so we three meet again,' said the Doctor cheerfully, much relieved to find George had no recollection of the police. He was resolved that he should not be troubled by them for another month, at any rate. They so exasperated the little Doctor by their daily inquiries after their prey that he never now gave them a civil answer, and they were fain to pump his assistant, or even his servant. Indeed, as the Doctor was going down the steps to his carriage to-day, he was delighted to overhear Mick Kenah, his coachman, giving this valuable information to the very policeman who captured George.

‘How is he, Mick?’

Mick shook his head ominously.

‘Worse?’

‘Divil a one of me knows how he is, barrin’ what the mashter tells me now and thin.’

‘And what does he say, Mick?’

‘He didn’t say nothing to me yeshtherday; but the day before he ses to me, he ses, “Mick,” ses he. “Yes, yer honour,” ses I. “I’m bate,” ses he. “Wid what, yere honour?” ses I. “Wid the murdherer,” ses he. “Is he dyin,’ yere honour?” ses I. “Dyin’?” ses he. “Begorra, he’s dead these two months; only he’s too lazy to close his eyes,” ses he. “Oh, the blaaguard!” ses I.’

Indeed, all Melbourne showed an eager and flattering interest in George’s health—an interest which reached even England—of course in a spent wave. The Melbourne papers discussed the matter with studied impartiality in articles which began with a disclaimer of the injustice and cruelty of prejudicing their readers in a case where life was at stake, and ended with a hopeless and unhappy shake of the head over the improbability of any theory compatible with the accused's innocence being established. What seemed to weigh most with the writers was not the property but the newspapers found in the possession of the accused. He might innocently and indirectly have come into possession of the murdered man's pocket-book and pencil-case, but why should he buy just those two newspapers which contained English accounts of the crime? It was evidently the morbid vanity so often found in murderers, or, to quote the passage from Tacitus which the *Victoria Telephone* thought appropriate to the case, in an article probably contributed by a wag in reliance on the editor's ignorance of Latin—'Etiam sapientibus cupido gloriæ novissima exuitur.'

Meanwhile, the criminal himself was the only person in Melbourne—we might almost say in Australia and in England—who knew nothing of his crime. He gave himself up to thinking of the unmerciful disasters which had come upon him in 'battalions,' and of Mabel. He yearned to write, but, notwithstanding his weakness, he kept firm to his original resolution not to bind her to such a wreck and ruin as he was. If he could recover his health, strength, and prospects, and make some way in this new world, he might write to Lawley, find out through him if she was still free, and, if so, through him break the news of his being yet alive. Meantime, he must keep his secret not only from her, but from every one; since this strange case of mistaken identity, if made known in Melbourne, would get into the English papers as certainly as the account of his murder. He therefore determined to assume his mother's maiden name of 'Barrington.' Only after a truly terrible struggle with himself was he able to resolve finally upon this renunciation of Mabel. It was one of those cases of which De Quincey speaks, where there's but a step between the heroic and the dastardly—no middle course being possible. To do this thing is heroic, not to do it, dastardly, and there is nothing between—

> Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
> And the little less, and what worlds away!

But such acts should be valued not by what would have been if they had been left undone, but by what they cost to do; and so estimated, George's renunciation was really heroic. It all but cost him his life. The Doctor was at a stand with his case. With extraordinary skill and care he had brought him over the dead point, so to speak, where Nature's recuperative force should have come into play, and done the rest itself, yet his patient seemed to make no headway.

After a week of such disappointment, the Doctor, standing by George's bed with knit brow and pursed-up lips, said suddenly:

'I tell you what, Mr. Barrington, you must have something on your mind.'

'I'm utterly miserable,' said George, with the impetuous confidence of a mind in which trouble, long gathering and close-pent, bursts suddenly the weak barriers of broken health. Then, recovering himself, he added with a wan smile, 'You can't minister to a mind diseased, Doctor, and pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow?'

'Therein the patient must minister to himself,' looking curiously at George with the passing thought, 'Is it possible he has had something to do with this murder, after all?' No, it was not possible; and the Doctor felt thoroughly ashamed that even the shadow of such a suspicion should darken his mind for a moment. ‘There’s such a thing as mental phlebotomy,’ continued the Doctor; ‘you must open your mind to some one. Write to your friends.’

‘You’ve put the lancet to the vein, Doctor. I have none. They’re dead to me; or I to them, rather. The only two I dare call my friends in the world at this moment are you and my kind nurse there, and good friends you’ve been,’ said George, looking with moistened eyes from one to the other.

‘Then tell nurse your troubles. She’s secret as the grave, or she wouldn’t be here. Would you?’ turning to Mrs. Minchin. ‘You must pump all his secrets out of him, nurse, or he’ll be still waterlogged, and we shall never get on.’

The Doctor’s advice was good, and was followed to some extent. Mrs. Minchin was the most receptive and sympathetic of confidantes, and had the essential qualification of a deep interest in George. She was not a very helpful person, or quick of resource or advice, but she was refined and affectionate, and had all a woman's tact and tenderness. George was not the strong and self-reliant man of a few months since. He was broken down with illness and trouble, and with a woman's weakness came a woman's longing to lean upon some one—even on Mrs. Minchin. He told her his story under such a necessary disguise as would prevent her identifying him, and was of course advised by her to write at once to Mabel. George, however, held to his renunciation, at least for the present, but was at last persuaded to promise that if in a few months he saw any prospect of getting on, he would write to Lawley. With this prospect kept by his kind nurse continually before him, George began to get better, and the Doctor congratulated himself and his patient upon the speedy and complete success of his advice.

Still another month elapsed before he could be prevailed on by the police to pronounce his patient cured, and then he had to break it to George that he must pass from the hospital to the jail. George himself led up to the disclosure by a casual remark upon the loss of his pencil-case. He and the Doctor had long since discovered that they had a hobby in common—entomology—and as George one day had to borrow the Doctor's pencil-case to sketch a rare specimen of the *Cteniza nidulans*, he mentioned, casually, the loss of his own pencil-case and of his pocket-book.

'They're safe enough,' said the Doctor. 'They're in the hands of the police.'

'Of whom?'

'Of the police. When you fainted they picked you up, and picked your pockets, and found a fine mare's nest in them. They think you're mixed up in some way with that parson's case.'

'What case?'

'That parson that was robbed and murdered—Kneeshaw.'

'What! Do they think *I* murdered him?' asked George, laughing heartily at this irresistibly humorous notion.

If the Doctor had had the slightest suspicion of George's guilt, this laugh would have dissipated it.

'By George! though,' said George, with a sudden seriousness, 'the pencil-case had his name on it.'

'And the letters in the pocket-book were his. You'll only have to account for how you came by them, you know.'

'But I can't,' said George, looking perplexed; then, catching a look of perplexity in the Doctor's face also, he added, laughing, with a sudden impulse to confide in so confiding a friend, 'At most they can't make it more than *felo de se*, Doctor.'

The Doctor looked puzzled for a second, and then whistled: 'Phew! A case of mistaken identity! I thought so till you told me your name was Barrington.'

'It was my mother's maiden name. I was glad to be clean forgotten as a dead man out of mind,' said George sadly.

'But it must all come out now,' said the Doctor.

George mused for a moment. 'I don't think it need, Doctor. It will be enough if I prove an *alibi*. Shackleton, with whom I was when the murder was committed, can prove I was two hundred miles off at the time, without identifying me by name.'

'You'd better write at once to him. I wish I had told you of this before, but I was afraid it would throw you back. How long will it take him to turn up?'

'Only a day or two; or a week at most.'

'You must write at once. These confounded fools!'—the Doctor, being an impatient little man, had been horribly exasperated by the pompous officiousness of the police—'these confounded fools have made such a cackle over this rotten egg that you've got into every paper in England by this.'

'What! As a murderer! By Jove!' said George, sitting on the bed to laugh. 'First I go the round of the world as the subject of an atrocious murder, then as an atrocious murderer; the next thing will be my impalement alive at a cross-road as a suicide.'

The Doctor also laughed. It was certainly a series of grotesque police blunders, and there was no blunder of which the police were not capable, to the Doctor's thinking.

'I say, though,' said the Doctor, relapsing into seriousness, 'I wish I hadn't told them you were well, or that I had told you of this in time to have your witness here. I really don't think they'll bail you, they're so cock-sure of their discovery.'

'It will be only for a day or two, Doctor, and it will be rather a convenience to me to have a roof over my head till I see Shackleton,' said George, with rather a forced and affected cheerfulness.

But it was a much more serious business than either George or the Doctor expected. Shackleton had gone to San Francisco, and his hands were dispersed no one knew whither, pending the disposal of his land, &c., by auction. George's letter therefore never reached him, and when the time George had asked to be remanded had expired, there was no one to prove the promised *alibi*, and he therefore was committed for trial. The evidence against him was very slight, after all, certainly not sufficient to hang any man in any country; but as he could or would give no account of how he came by the articles in his possession, there was nothing for it but to commit him on the charge either of being principal or accessory before or after the fact in the now famous robbery and murder of the Rev. George Kneeshaw. It was a dull time for the newspapers, and the case was a godsend to them of which they made the most. They did not mean to be unfair, but it was impossible not to pander to the popular view, which was, of course, the hopeful view—that George would most certainly be hanged. This view took a deep hold of one, at least, of their readers—no other than Hodson, who convoked the court-martial that sentenced Spaight to death. He had no compunction for his share in Spaight's execution, but he was miserable in the thought that an innocent man might be hanged for the murder. He couldn't rest with it on his mind, till at last, with some difficulty, he got permission to see George in jail, and dashed headlong into the confession he had resolved on.

'This is all a muddle,' he said, without preface or preparation of any kind. 'It was a fellow named Spaight who was shot, and I shot him.'

'Spaight!' cried George, a new light upon the whole business breaking in upon him in a moment.

'Yes, Spaight.'

Hodson then gave an account of Spaight's crimes, trial, and execution, and wound up with a brave and sincere resolution to take George’s place on the scaffold, if the worst came to the worst. Hodson’s confession convinced George that Spaight had robbed and murdered Shortland. He was not so shocked, perhaps, as he ought to have been at Hodson’s part in the lynching of such a scoundrel, and he was touched by his offer to take his place on the scaffold—made, though it was, rather melodramatically. George assured him of his own perfect security against such a fate—assured him that, in fact, only the day before he had heard that four witnesses would be forthcoming at the trial to prove an *alibi*. These witnesses, who had worked with George under Shackleton, had been hunted up by the unwearied kindness and energy of Dr. Garstang, and on their evidence George was acquitted without being identified by name. Indeed, George, by reason of his irrepressible entomological mania, had gone among the men by the nickname of ‘The Kerrogue,’ itself a nickname for a creature that lived on insects.

His confinement in prison just at the critical time of convalescence, told sadly on

George, and upon his acquittal he left Melbourne to go again up country; broken in health and spirits, with no means and no prospects, alone and lonely, miserable memories and anxieties his only companions.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BAD NEWS.

We shall now follow the flight of the flock of George's thoughts in his wretchedness, thoughts which in a continuous and incessant stream crossed the ocean to Mabel—like swans driven south by desolating winter.

Lawley happened to be in the Wefton Church Institute on the morning when the *Times* containing the news of George's murder was brought in. His eye soon caught the paragraph, which he read and re-read, as George himself did some weeks later, without taking it thoroughly in for a moment. He was stupefied and even horrified by the news, but soon recovering himself, he hurried from the Institute, took a hansom, and told the man to drive to St. George's Schools. Miss Masters must not come as suddenly as himself upon this horrible story. But how break it to her?

If there was an hour to spare, he might have got Miss Tubbs or Lady Saddlethwaite to do a duty which required all a woman's tact and tenderness and sympathy, and which, besides, he felt least fit of all men to undertake. But there was not an hour to spare, and indeed, if there had been, he was not sure if either Lady Saddlethwaite or Miss Tubbs knew of Mabel's engagement. No; he must do this thing himself, as he could. He tried to think of some delicate and deliberate mode of breaking the news to her, but his own part in this trouble was great enough to disorder his thoughts. His mind was still confused when he stood face to face with Mabel in the school-room.

'Mr. Lawley! You've come to in—— There's something wrong!' seeing legible trouble in Lawley's face, and thinking at once of George.

'Yes; there's something wrong, Miss Masters. Could I see you at home for a moment? It mayn't be anything, or may be untrue,' he hurried to say, seeing Mabel growing white. Certainly he wasn't the best man or in the best mood to break bad news.

'In a moment,' said Mabel, putting her

things on with trembling fingers. George was certainly ill or——. As she put her things on she rather felt than thought, ‘if he had been ill only, I should have been the first to hear of it myself; it must be worse.’ When she got outside the school she felt quite dizzy, and took Lawley’s arm without a word, and as naturally as if he had been her brother. Lawley felt, and was ashamed at such a moment to feel, a thrill of pleasure as her arm rested on his. When they got into the cottage, which was beside the school, Mabel sank into a chair.

‘Pray sit down, Mr. Lawley; what is it?’ looking up appealingly into his face.

‘It’s only a report,’ stammered Lawley, still standing, ‘which I was afraid you might chance to hear, and think more about than perhaps it’s worth.’ Here he paused, perplexed, for a moment.

‘What is it, Mr. Lawley?’ in a voice that tried to be calm and firm, but which trembled and had a piteous ring in it. What would not Lawley have done or given to spare her the anguish he was forced to inflict! Mabel read in his face a yearning sympathy for which she felt the deepest gratitude, but from which she augured the worst.

‘It’s a report from Australia—only a report,’ seeing reflected in her face the fatal news he was clumsily trying to break to her; ‘that Mr. Kneeshaw has been attacked and robbed.’

Mabel sat silent, looking up into Lawley’s face without seeing it or anything. There was no doubt now that Lawley had come to tell her George was killed—murdered. The news of his death was in Lawley’s face from the first. She read her doom in it as the prisoner reads his doom in the judge’s donning the black cap before he pronounces sentence. Still the prisoner listens for the sentence with a hopeless hope. Even yet Lawley had not told all in words. He had stopped short at the word ‘robbed,’ and left the horrible rest unspoken except by looks. Mabel read it in his looks, clear as speech, and yet she waited and wished to hear it, wished and abhorred to hear it, but *could* not ask to hear it. She sat silent, with eyes that seemed to look through Lawley at some ghastly apparition beyond. Lawley saw that if he had thrust the *Times* under her eyes he could not have conveyed the news to her more clearly or certainly. He mentally cursed his clumsiness, and groaned over his helplessness to help her in any way. There was nothing he would not have done to spare or soothe her, but what could he do? He took Mabel's cold hand in his as by an irresistible impulse, and spoke his silent sympathy in this way and through the deep trouble in his eyes. Mabel, recalled to herself by the touch of his hand, and seeing in his face inexpressible sympathy, and even tenderness, tried to speak--to ask the horrible question she knew there was no need to ask. But her voice broke into a sob. Tears were a rare relief with Mabel, which only the exceeding depth of sympathy expressed silently by Lawley could have called forth in this first stupefying stage of her trouble. Lawley felt it was best to leave her, and yet cruel to leave her to herself.

'I am going to telegraph to Melbourne to ask if there is any truth in this report. Will you let me send any one to you you would like to have with you?'

'There's no one,' said Mabel, desolately. 'Was it in the newspapers?'

'Yes; I saw it in one of the papers. But it's only a report'—falling feebly back on this frail comfort.

'In what paper?'

'It was in one of the papers in the Church Institute,' said Lawley evasively. 'I can get you the paper after I hear from Melbourne. I shall probably hear this evening. I shall come up at once.'

'Mr. Lawley,' said Mabel, in a broken voice, 'I cannot thank you now. I shall never forget your kindness.' Here she broke down, and Lawley, having pressed her hand in both of his, stole from the room.

After Lawley left, Mabel relapsed into a tearless, stony, stunned state. She could not open her eyes to look again at this ghastly spectre, but its presence was felt like the horror of a great darkness. She was in the state of a man in the first moment of his waking on the morning after a crushing disaster. He feels that a terrible thing has happened to him, but what it is he does not yet know clearly. This stupefaction is Nature's chloroform. When Livingstone was being worried by a lion he felt no pain, and only a dull and distant interest, no keener than curiosity, in the laceration of his arm; next day, and for weeks, he was in agony. So the heart at the moment of its being lacerated is only semi-conscious—its suffering is distributed over years.

Mabel was roused at last from this stupefied state by the casual entrance of Jane, who did not know but that her mistress had left the house with Lawley. Jane had a good deal of affection over and above that she gave her policeman, and the whole surplus was made over to Mabel. When she came suddenly upon her mistress, lying with closed eyes, white and still as death, she could not repress a cry: 'Miss Mabel!'

Mabel thought it was more bad news, or rather the confirmation and the details of what she had heard already, and which, like some horror hid in darkness, was still rather felt than seen.

'What is it, Jane?' startled from her stupor.

'Eh! Miss Mabel, I thought—I thought —— You're the picture of death, Miss! What ever is the matter?' Jane was chafing her mistress's cold hands by this, as if she had been in a fit or faint.

'I'm not very well, Jane.'

'I'll fetch doctor, Miss.'

'Don't fuss, there's a good girl,' taking and holding in her own the hand of her devoted friend. 'I've just heard some bad news, which has upset me; that's all. Put your bonnet on and tell Miss Birdwhistle'—the assistant mistress—'that I shall not be in school to-day; and then go into town and get me all the London newspapers. No; I'm not really ill'—in answer to a doubtful and anxious look of Jane's.

'I'll go, miss, when I've got you to bed,' said Jane, with a dogged determination which she showed only when Mabel was either sacrificing or neglecting herself beyond human endurance.

'Yes; I think I should like to lie down for an hour without undressing, Jane,' admitted Mabel, knowing that resistance would cost her more than concession, and feeling besides that she would be best in her room, safe from intrusion. Jane was fain to be content with this concession, and with the permission to make her some strong tea—Jane's panacea for everything and every one. The length of time she lingered about her ministrations and her mistress was a really extraordinary proof of extraordinary devotion; for if ever there was a curious handmaiden in this world it was Jane, and her curiosity was at fever pitch about the news in the London papers which had so prostrated her mistress. She felt all but certain it must be about Mr. Kneeshaw, for if it had been about any one else, wouldn't her mistress have confided it to her? And, indeed, she hadn't got far into Wefton before she heard Kneeshaw's name shrilled out by a newsboy anxious to dispose of the second edition of the *Wefton Witness*: 'Murder in Melbourne of the Rev. George Kneeshaw, late curate of the parish church, Wefton!' proclaimed the boy at the top of his shrill voice. Jane was so much agitated that she leant against a shop window for support, and let the boy pass, without the power to ask for a paper. Mr. Kneeshaw had not only been generous to her always, but always courteous, and so she had her own share in this trouble. But her mistress's share! The girl really felt quite faint and ill, and grasped for support the bar in front of the shop window. It took her some time to recover the sudden shock and to overtake the boy, from whom she bought a copy of the paper. Now what was she to do? Take it to her mistress? Impossible! While she stood wavering in pitiable perplexity, Lady Saddlethwaite's carriage pulled up at a shop near. Jane hurried to the carriage door as the footman opened it.

'Oh, please, ma'am, your ladyship, could I speak to you for one moment?'

'Why, it's Miss Masters' maid, isn't it? Is there something wrong?' for Jane's distress was deep and unmistakable.

'Oh, yes, ma'am. If I could speak to you for a moment!'

'Is she ill? Come in. George, tell Roger to drive to Miss Masters'. Is she ill?' They were now seated in the close carriage.

'No, your ladyship; that is, not to say ill, your ladyship, but in great trouble.'

Here Jane paused. She didn't think Lady Saddlethwaite knew of Mabel's engagement, and that she should hear of it from a servant didn't seem a proper thing to the proper Jane even in the present circumstances.

‘Is her father dead?’

‘No, your ladyship, but there’s been awful news from—from Australia.’

‘What! About Mr. Kneeshaw? Has anything happened to him?’

‘He’s murdered, ma’am!’ said Jane, in a burst of tears, handing Lady Saddlethwaite the paper. Lady Saddlethwaite was deeply shocked. She was Mabel’s only confidante, and she knew it, and this seemed to give her a peculiar interest in the news. She took the paper and found the paragraph copied from the *Times*, and read it with the deepest pity in her heart for the friendless girl, from whom trouble seemed inseparable as her shadow.

‘Has she seen this?

‘No, your ladyship. Mr. Lawley was with her this morning, and I think he must have told her about it, for when I came into the room afterwards she was lying back in the chair like death. Eh! I thought she was dead,’ exclaimed Jane with another interruption of tears. ‘And when she come to, your ladyship, she sent me to get her all the London newspapers, and as I was a going to get them I hears the boys a-crying of it all over the town as if he was a stranger, and him always that good to children!'—indignantly. This lack of sensibility in the Wefton newsboys seemed nearly as shocking as their news to Jane.

'Well, Mary—it's Mary, isn't it?'

'Jane, please your ladyship.'

'Well, Jane, you mustn't show her this paper.'

'No, your ladyship; that's why I made so free as to speak to your ladyship. The news came upon me that sudden I didn't know what to do; and Miss Mabel has no friends, only them as has no friends themselves'—with renewed tears.

Lady Saddlethwaite was very much pleased at the feeling shown by Jane, not through her tears merely, but through her pale face and trembling hands. She drew her out on the subject of Mabel, and heard such accounts of her kindness to the sick children of the poor, and of her unwearied devotion to her morose, irritable, and exacting father, as increased even her esteem for her *protégée*. Lady Saddlethwaite had, besides, another object—very characteristic and creditable to her—in drawing out Jane on this subject—she wished to relieve the girl's pent-up feelings. This extremely proud woman, with her heart full of Mabel's sorrow and of her own sorrow for Mabel, could yet feel for the distress of a maid-servant whom she hardly knew by sight. When they reached the cottage, Lady Saddlethwaite sent Jane up to ask if Mabel would see her.

'Lady Saddlethwaite! But where are the papers, Jane?'

'There weren't none, Miss. They was all sold,' said Jane, without the slightest hesitation. But Jane's face was more truthful than her tongue. Mabel saw in a moment, as, indeed, she couldn't but see, that Jane had learned the news, probably from a newspaper she dared not show. Mabel dared not press for it. Her heart failed her at sight of Jane's face. But Lady Saddlethwaite's visit was a gleam of comfort. She was the one person in the world Mabel longed to see—the only person, except Lawley, she could bear to see.

'Tell Lady Saddlethwaite I shall be down in a moment, Jane.'

She says you're on no account to be disturbed, Miss. She wants to come up and sit with you a bit. Eh, Miss Mabel!' cried Jane, no longer able to contain herself at the sight of Mabel's misery and at the thought of its cause; 'eh, my poor dear!' seizing Mabel's hand, pressing it to her lips, and wetting it with her tears.

'Don't, Jane,' said Mabel, in a soothing tone, as though Jane's trouble were more in her thoughts for the moment than her own, of which it was but the reflection. 'Your affection is a great comfort to me. There! dry your eyes, and run down and tell Lady Saddlethwaite I shall be with her in a moment,' patting Jane on the cheek as though she were a child. Jane dried her eyes on her apron, and finding her mistress bent on going down, she contented herself with expressing her feelings through a few caressing touches by which she smoothed Mabel's disordered hair and crumpled dress. Then Mabel and she went downstairs together, and while Mabel hurried in to see Lady Saddlethwaite, Jane hurried to the kitchen to sup full with the horrors of the account of the murder. Horrors are the dearest of the rare enjoyments of the uneducated poor, especially of the gentler sex, and the widow of a murdered or self-murdered man derives no little consolation in hearing or in telling the ghastly details of the crime—of course after she has recovered from the first shock of the news. If Jane's own policeman had been kicked to death in Knackers' Alley, she could not for her life have withstood the temptation to read the account of the murder in the *Witness*, though its horrors, she knew, would haunt her for many a sleepless night.

'I'm sorry you've come down, dear,' said Lady Saddlethwaite, kissing Mabel with a mother's tenderness. 'Jane told me you had been lying down with a bad headache, and I wanted you to let me sit by you a bit.'

'I'm so glad to see you. I think you were sent to me, though I couldn't pray. Oh, I couldn't pray. It is hard. All that was left me in the world! It *can't* be true. It isn't true?' looking with an appealing wistfulness into her friend's face.

Mabel's mind, which had, as it were, fainted under the blow, was now coming back to full consciousness. A breath of sympathy revived it. Lady Saddlethwaite made no reply in words. She led Mabel to the sofa, made her lie down, sat by her, smoothed back the silken hair from the hot brow, stooped and kissed her on the forehead, and dropped a tear upon it as she stooped. It was deep calling unto deep. When the heart is frozen, 'hid as with a stone,' sympathy melts it like sunshine, breaks up the chill crust, and sets free the pent-up and imprisoned sorrow. Mabel hid her face, and wept till her whole frame was shaken with sobs. Lady Saddlethwaite sat in silence by her, holding one of her hands, and pressing it now and then in mute sympathy, till the paroxysm passed away. Lady Saddlethwaite was childless, but had once had a daughter who died just at the opening of womanhood. It had been as sore a sorrow to her as her husband's death seven years before, and it was a sorrow that not only taught her sympathy with Mabel, but drew the childless mother towards this motherless and friendless child. She remembered too well how vain, wearying, almost worrying, were the words and commonplaces of sympathy every one thought it right to offer her in her trouble. So she said nothing for some time to Mabel, but sat with her hand in hers in that kind of silence which is the speech of feelings too deep for words :—

Sacred silence ! Thou that art
Floodgate of the deeper heart,
Offspring of a heavenly kind ;
Frost o' the mouth and thaw o' the mind.

When she did say anything beyond words of endearment, she spoke only to draw Mabel out upon her great love and loss, and so got the poor girl to pour out her whole heart to her as to a mother. The relief was immense and immediate, and certainly saved Mabel from illness. Then Lady Saddlethwaite would have carried her off with her then and there, if it was not that Lawley was momently expected with the reply to his telegram.

Meantime Roger was forgotten ! But Roger was not a man to be forgotten long. He sent George to ask Jane to ask his mistress 'if he was to put up anywheres ?'—a bitterly ironical question, to which he got the astounding answer, 'Yes ; he might put up for an hour and a half somewhere.' Roger abhorred putting up anywhere, not merely because the beds for his massy steeds were sure to be damp, but because, like Archbishop Leighton, he felt that an inn was no place for repose—

For there,
Men call and storm and drink and swear.

There was no help for it, however, and after a minute of amazement he made for the 'Queen.'

Before Roger returned Lawley called. He was self-forgetful enough to be glad to see Lady Saddlethwaite with Mabel, though her sympathy robbed him of Mabel's sole and sweet reliance on himself.

'I've got no answer, and cannot hope for one before to-morrow, Miss Masters.'

Mabel was now so certain of the terrible certainty as to be glad of the suspense, if we may speak, as the mind of the most logical often thinks, *more Hibernico.*

'Then, dear, there's nothing to prevent your coming with me to-night.'

'But, Lady Saddlethwaite——'

'There, my dear, it's settled,' interrupted Lady Saddlethwaite decisively, ringing for Jane. 'I'm sure, Mr. Lawley, you will be kind enough to come out to Hollyhurst with the answer to-morrow, and perhaps stay over-night. We shall be very glad if your engagements will permit—[Jane, pack Miss Masters' things. She is going to stay with me for a few days]—We shall be very glad if you can dine and stay overnight, Mr. Lawley.'

Lady Saddlethwaite had heard of all, and more than all, Lawley's virtues from Mabel, and thought he would be a help to her in diverting Mabel's thoughts. The invitation, which Lawley couldn't resist, led to another, made to him in the following week, that he should accompany Lady Saddlethwaite and Mabel in a projected Continental tour. It came out casually that Lawley knew the Continent thoroughly, and he made such way in Lady Saddlethwaite's good graces that she devised this scheme with—must we confess it? —a matchmaking object. She saw, as she could not help seeing, that Lawley was desperately in love with Mabel, and she hoped—but here she was not at first very sanguine—that Mabel might come in time to return his love. Accordingly, six weeks later, in Mabel's holidays, she, Lady Saddlethwaite, and Lawley were *en route* to Italy. In those six weeks Lawley had become a still more eligible *parti* in Lady Saddlethwaite's eyes, not merely or mostly because he had succeeded to his uncle's property, but because she found that this uncle was a man of good family, and even a remote connection of her own. Mabel had less regret in leaving her father in the charge of Margaret and Jane, since he showed the most violent aversion to her latterly—probably because, as his former reader, she reminded him of the failure of his powers.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LORD CHARLECOTE.

Lady Saddlethwaite of course did not expect that the match she planned for the far future would be directly advanced during their continental tour. She would be the last person to credit any girl with such callous inconstancy, Mabel least of all. But she did think, and had every right to think, that a heart so harrowed as hers, like a soil in which every green thing has been torn up by the plough, was in the best state for the sowing of the seed of future love. It could not remain for ever in bare, black and bleak desolation, and the first seed sown now in this cleared, softened, and impressionable soil, would have the best chance of ripening hereafter. Nor, again, did she think it to Lawley's disadvantage that he should be associated inseparably with George in the mind of Mabel; with his death as well as with his life. It is true that—

> The first bringer of unwelcome news
> Hath but a losing office, and his tongue
> Sounds ever after as a sullen bell,
> Remembered tolling a departed friend—

that is, when this unwelcome news is our sole association with its herald. But when the herald shares the sorrow he announces, and helps by sympathy to heal the wound he makes, his image is more likely to be associated with love than grief.

On the whole, we think Lady Saddlethwaite showed some knowledge of human nature, and of woman's nature, in considering that when Mabel's 'heart in the midst of her body was even like melting wax,' it was in the fittest state for a fresh impression.

On the other hand, it must be said that neither Mabel nor her love was of an ordinary type. Both her character and bringing up, her reserved nature and her lonely childhood, disposed her to love altogether and intensely where she loved at all. She had so loved George. When he was taken so suddenly and terribly from her, her heart was not merely as a bed from which a plant has been wrenched up by the roots, and which lies torn and tossed and in wild confusion, but as a bed from which, not the plant only, but the soil itself in which it grew, has been taken. She seemed to have no heart left to love with. There was hardly a day in which she did not take herself to task for the ungrateful apathy with which she met Lady Saddlethwaite's kindness and Lawley's devotion. When Lady Saddlethwaite pressed this continental trip upon her, urged it, forced it upon her, she seemed to have the spirit neither to decline nor accept it whole-heartedly. She simply submitted to be petted with the listless languor of a spoiled child in the first stage of convalescence. But this ungracious apathy was most unnatural to her, and at times she woke from it overpowered with self-reproach, and would pain Lady Saddlethwaite by the depth of her penitence. For Lady Saddlethwaite understood her, and loved and admired her more in her bereavement than ever. No vain beauty could delight more in the reflection of her loveliness in the glass than Lady Saddlethwaite delighted to see her kindness reflected in smiles from every face about her; but she made allowance for the glass in Mabel's case being dimmed with tears, and set herself to do all she could to bring back something of its old brightness.

As for Lawley, he looked for no acknowledgment. He was content to be allowed to devote himself to her without hope or thought of a return—at least in these first days of her trouble. She had, as it were, taken the veil of sorrow, and her vestal dedication to it was to be respected. So Lawley fancied his feeling towards her was best expressed in lines of his favourite Shelley he was ever repeating to himself—

The worship the heart lifts above,
And the heavens reject not;
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow;
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.

But, in truth, he was wildly, passionately, hopelessly in love, and little likely to be reconciled for long to this cold comfort—

In her bright radiance and collateral light
Must I be comforted, not in her sphere.

For the present, however, in the first few months of her sorrow, it was the utmost he did or could look for. As for Mabel, she soon fell into the way of looking to him and relying on him always and for everything, except conversing with the natives. Lawley either couldn't or wouldn't speak French. He acknowledged to being able to read it, but speak it he wouldn't. Lady Saddlethwaite couldn't. Mabel, therefore, had a chance of turning Miss Murdoch's lessons to advantage.

'But I only know words with a "U" in them,' said Mabel, with a flash of her old fun, as they stepped off the steamer at Calais. 'My aunt, who taught me, discovered that the great secret of the French language was the pronunciation of the vowel "U"; so she picked out of the dictionary all the words with a "U" in them, and made me string them together in sentences. "U," she said, was everything in French.'

'In England "I" is the all-important vowel, which accounts for the difference in the manners of the two countries,' said Lawley.

'I hope there's a "U" in soda-water,' said Lady Saddlethwaite, who, though the sea had been as glass, felt slightly qualmish.

'Oh, here they all speak English—of a sort. I think they must have been taught it by their aunts, for they only know words with a "V" in them. "Vee vill 'ave soda-vater" will fetch them.'

'Not from their aunts. Their aunts would not have taught them such a Cockney pronunciation, Mr. Lawley.'

'Then they must have learned it from the exclamation on landing of the qualmish passengers, "O de V!"'

This certainly was a wild joke, but Lawley was in wild spirits at finding that the bustle and strangeness and excitement were rousing Mabel out of her listlessness. It was, indeed, for this reason he insisted on her being interpreter, as it was something for her to do, and for them to laugh at. Not that her French was bad—it was singularly, though rather pedantically, good. Nor that her accent was detestable—as, though it truly was, they didn't know it—but that she *would* speak every syllable with staccato distinctness, as if she were shouting through an ear-trumpet.

This joke, mild as it was, was a joy for ever, as Mabel was almost incorrigible through her childish association of French with deaf Miss Murdoch; while there was, of course, besides, the natural tendency to shout to a foreigner through confounding unconsciously dulness of intelligence with dulness of hearing.

During their tour nothing so pleased Lady Saddlethwaite—not cities, scenery, statues, paintings—so much as the sensation Mabel created wherever she appeared. In Wefton and its neighbourhood Mabel was admired, but not enthusiastically admired; not so much admired as Miss Smithers, who might have won a prize at a cattle-show. The taste of the people in beauty, like their taste in everything else, was coarse. They liked it as they liked their wine, 'full-bodied.' But in Rome, the foster-mother of the art of the world, Mabel distracted the attention of the artists in the Pinacotheca of the Vatican, and in the galleries of the Pamfili-Doria palace and of the Capitol. It was not so much the beauty of her face which attracted them, as its expression, madonna-like in its sad sweetness and in its utter lack of self-consciousness. Mabel was never given to self-consciousness, and her sorrow had taken her out of herself more than ever, and she walked through the galleries as unconscious of admiration as the pictures and statues themselves.

Lady Saddlethwaite cared very little for pictures and statues, and yet she endured them for the pure pleasure of watching the admiration Mabel excited. All eyes seemed to follow her as sunflowers the sun. Lady Saddlethwaite felt something of the pride and pleasure of a virtuoso who exhumes a gem by an old master from the rubbish of a garret, and exhibits his discovery to appreciative connoisseurs. She was especially pleased when these connoisseurs happened to be English (for foreigners are but foreigners at best), most of all when they were unexceptionable English of her own sacred set. For no grocer or college don could have a more superstitious veneration for blue blood than some in whose veins it flows. As for Lady Saddlethwaite, she believed in the immaculate conception of the well-born, and in the papal infallibility of their opinions on social subjects —when they agreed with her. Lord Charlecote, for instance, whom she chanced upon in a corridor of the Vatican—a young gentleman much given to the turf, who canted cynicism in opposition to his companion Clifford's cant of sentiment—was consecrated as an oracle because of his enthusiastic admiration of Mabel.

'Lady Saddlethwaite! *You* here? Every one's here, I think,' with a slight querulousness. 'But, I say, who's that girl that goes walking in her sleep—do you know? There, looking at that old saint with a crick in his neck, with the grey thingamyjig on.'

'You'd better mind what you say of her, my lord; she's in my charge.'

'Is she, though?' with a new interest in Lady Saddlethwaite. 'No harm in saying she's the loveliest girl in Rome, bar none, eh? Who is she?'

'She's a Miss Masters. Shall I wake her and introduce you?'

'If you would. But, I say, Lady Saddlethwaite, can she talk? I can't make the running with these things, you know,' pointing to the pictures. 'Does she hunt, or that?'

'Oh, she can talk on any subject when she's awake. Mabel!'

Lady Saddlethwaite was as proud of Mabel's conversational powers as of her beauty, and seized every opportunity to show them off.

Mabel came at call, and was introduced to Lord Charlecote.

'Lord Charlecote thought you were walking in your sleep, Mabel, and wished me to wake you before you fell downstairs,' said Lady Saddlethwaite mischievously, and not in the best taste; but she wished to rouse Mabel, that she might show to advantage in the eyes of a person of Lord Charlecote's exquisite discrimination.

'Oh, I say, you know, Lady Saddlethwaite, I meant that Miss Masters was like La Sonnambula,' said his lordship, with great presence of mind. 'Patti, you know.'

'But it *is* like a dream to me being here,' said Mabel.

'Like a nightmare, by George; there's no end to it. I thought I was through, but there's all this yet,' looking ruefully at his catalogue.

'I think, if I were you, my lord, I should go by Murray. He skips most of it,' said Mabel.

'Happy thought! This beastly thing skips nothing. It expects you to do the ceilings, even,' with a bitter remembrance of the Sistine Chapel.

'Lady Saddlethwaite has a Murray with two leaves missed out in the binding. It has been a great comfort to her,' said Mabel with perfect truth.

'I'll borrow it, by George!'

'But I'm afraid those are the leaves you have done if you've got to here.'

Lord Charlecote groaned. Dare we to confess that our heroine to some extent sympathised with him? She could appreciate about one-tenth of all the wonders she had shown her, but her appreciation even of it was blunted by the weariness of having gone through the other nine-tenths.

'I have a lot of old masters and that sort of thing at home, and the public are admitted to do them on certain days; but when I get back I'll put a stop to it. I never thought it was like this,' said Lord Charlecote, remorsefully. It was the remorse of Lear exposed to the pelting of the pitiless storm, and so reminded of the houseless heads of the poor—

> O, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel.

Mabel laughed at this instance of sympathy learned through suffering, and turned to tell it to Lady Saddlethwaite and Lawley, who were walking behind them.

'Let us give it up for to-day,' cried Lady Saddlethwaite eagerly.

'For ever and a day—unless *you* are coming again,' said Lord Charlecote, speaking to Lady Saddlethwaite, but looking at Mabel.

Mabel was looking at Lawley, to whom she had already confessed her Philistinism, but of whose judgment she stood in awe. Alas for Lawley! he had no judgment in her presence, no thought, no taste, no eyes, no admiration but for her only—only her. The fierce fire of love consumed him utterly, burning now with the green flame of jealousy. Lord Charlecote's admiration was clear, and that he should win even a laugh from Mabel was bitter. It is natural that 'love strong as death' should be joined in the same verse with 'jealousy cruel as the grave.'

'Let's go to the circus.'

'The what?'

'The Coliseum,' replied his lordship unabashed. 'It's the best value in the place. Clifford tells me there used to be races there, but I can't for the life of me see how they managed it. It's a grand stand anyhow.' Accordingly it was agreed that they should drive to the Coliseum, for his lordship to look a little more into this mystery.

'It's a mouldy old place, isn't it?' he said to Mabel as they drove through Rome. 'It always reminds me of an old cemetery; all chapels, statues, monuments, broken pillars half buried in clay. It gives me the shivers, by George! I'd have gone a week ago but for Clifford. He hasn't my feeling about it at all. I tell him he's no imagination.'

Mabel was quick enough to gather from his manner that Mr. Clifford was, or fancied himself, a very imaginative person, who probably took his friend's facetious irony seriously and ill.

'Rome is a dangerous place for any one with a quick imagination. It runs away with one so soon.'

'To Naples? that's where mine would have taken me. Glad it didn't though, or I should have missed you, Lady Saddlethwaite.'

His lordship's compliment was, of course, meant for Mabel, whom, because she understood his wit, he began to think witty. A little wit goes a long way from the lips of either rank or beauty, probably for the reason mentioned by Barrow in his definition of wit: 'It procureth delight as monsters do, not for their beauty, but for their rarity.' Mabel, though she indulged sometimes in the luxury of silence and sorrow in Lawley's or Lady Saddlethwaite's company, always exerted herself when with strangers; and to-day the whole burden of entertaining Lord Charlecote seemed to fall upon her. Lawley was gloomily silent, while Lady Saddlethwaite was tired and half asleep.

'Here's the circus!' Mabel exclaimed, as they drew near the Coliseum. 'Your imagination doesn't always take a gloomy flight, my lord. Girls on piebald horses leaping through hoops is a cheerful exchange for the dying gladiator and the Christian martyrs,' said Mabel with a smile, to show she saw through his affectation of Philistinism.

'Why, what-you-call-him, Byron, calls it a circus, doesn't he?

> Such was the bloody circus' genial laws.
>
> . . . .
>
> But the gladiator's bloody circus stands
> A noble wreck in ruinous perfection.

Not but that you may be quite right, you know, Miss Masters,' he hastened to say with a face of perfect seriousness. 'Dare say Byron was thinking of girls in spangles on piebald horses leaping through hoops when he called it a circus.'

Certainly Mabel had caught a Tartar in this sleepy-looking young nobleman.

'When he called it a *gladiator's* circus he was probably thinking of gladiators, not of a grand stand,' said Mabel archly.

'Well, but it *is* a grand stand for looking down at the race of ideas, religions, empires, &c. Will that do?'

Lord Charlecote was amazed to meet a beauty with brains, who was neither *gauche* nor *blasée*, and could say something besides 'Yes,' 'No,' 'awfully,' 'nice,' 'tiresome.' He paid her the compliment, as they walked together within the Coliseum, in front of Lady Saddlethwaite and Lawley, of unmasking the really strong, if not deep, feeling that underlay his assumed cynicism.

In truth his lordship was a most poetic and impressionable person, and 'protested too much' through his assumption of cynicism.

Mabel also became confidential, and confessed to her imagination being overpowered and oppressed by all that was suggested to her, and to her feeling, as she had often felt in trying to master the full meaning of a grand poem or piece of music, wearied and confused.

'You've been doing too much. It's a fit of mental dyspepsia. No mind could digest all that you've been trying to digest in a week. You should have taken a month to it.'

'But I hadn't a month to take.'

'What on earth have you to do? I never knew a young lady have anything to do.'

'You never knew a young lady who was a national schoolmistress, then, my lord.'

'A national—— What in the name of fortune made you take up that craze?'

'Necessity. I couldn't help myself.'

He was silent for a second or two from sheer surprise, but soon recovering himself, he showed the truest tact in continuing, instead of turning, the conversation.

'Don't you find it very dreary, Miss Masters?'

'Oh, I find everything dreary sometimes,' with a dreary sigh, 'even the old masters,' pulling her wandering thoughts together again with a smile.

Lord Charlecote, as we have said, was a most poetic and impressionable person, and had his original admiration for Mabel immensely increased by this discovery of her fallen fortunes. That the fall had been extraordinary he had no doubt at all, as Mabel had the bearing of a princess. When he had returned with them to their hotel, he found an opportunity to rave about her to Lady Saddlethwaite.

'Well, do you know what she is, my lord?'

'She told me—she wasn't bragging of it, you know. It came out casually.'

'Bragging of it!'

'Any other girl would either hide it or brag of it.'

'I think I'd better warn you that there's no use falling in love with her, my lord.'

'Engaged to the parson?'

'No, but she was engaged to another of the cloth, who was murdered in Australia.'

'Murdered! That was the sleep-walking look. Poor girl! she's had it hard.'

'Yes, she has had it hard, and yet she's of good family.' Perplexing paradox to Lady

Saddlethwaite. 'At least her father has good blood in his veins. He's a Colonel Masters, and lost all in that Caledonian Bank. The shock struck him down with paralysis, and she had to take to teaching to support herself and him. Then came this other trouble, poor child!'

'She might get over it in time,' said his lordship, with a meaning Lady Saddlethwaite read and answered.

'My dear Lord Charlecote, by the time she has got over it you will have been in and out of love with twenty others.'

Lord Charlecote laughed. It was a true bill. He was as impressionable and as unstable as water, and was in and out of love once a month on an average.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LOVE STRONG AS DEATH.

Lord Charlecote was devoted in his attentions to Mabel, not only for the few remaining days of her stay in Rome, but also throughout her tour. He deserted his friend Clifford, the warmth of whose æsthetic enthusiasm had soured him to cynicism, and had become at last too oppressive, and begged Lady Saddlethwaite's permission to join her party. Lady Saddlethwaite could not, of course, have done otherwise than have conceded the permission, even if the concession had been distasteful. But it was not distasteful. Lord Charlecote was a personage of very considerable importance in her mind and world, and his admiration of Mabel was admiration of Lady Saddlethwaite's taste. As for Lawley's chagrin at the arrangement, it, too, was a good thing. Love, like light, was doubled by reflection, and Lawley's worship, like all worship, would be quickened by being shared. It was shared. Lord Charlecote fell, as far as he could fall, in love with Mabel. He did not mean to do so, of course, at first, but 'in the matter of love,' says the Spanish proverb, 'you begin when you like and leave off when you can.' It was not, to tell the truth, a very brilliant conquest of Mabel's. In the first place, his lordship was always in love with some one or other; in the second place he felt safe with Mabel, for the ignoble reason that Lady Saddlethwaite had guaranteed her to be love-proof, and there was therefore no fear of a serious entanglement; and in the third place his love, such as it was, was due less to Mabel's being lovely and lovable than to this very fact, that she was love-proof. For we may say that what is true generally of all the children of men, is universally true of all spoiled children—upgrown or other—a thing needs but to be beyond their reach to be longed for. Lord Charlecote had been a spoiled child from his birth, and had learned what it was to be happy in everything but happiness—

> Happy thou art not;
> For what thou hast not, still thou strivest to get,
> And what thou hast, forget'st.

And this he found true specially in affairs of love. Here, too, he was a spoiled child, and had grown from being petted to being as pettish as the sex he pursued—

> Ubi velis nolunt; ubi nolis volunt ultro;
> Concessâ pudet ire viâ—

as Lucan has it; or, as it is put prettily in French, 'Une femme est comme votre ombre: courez après, elle vous fuit; fuyez-la, elle court après vous.' His lordship's success with the sex had made him wayward as they in this, and Mabel's absolute indifference to him became her chief charm in his eyes. Her conquest, then, was not very brilliant.

May we say here, that if we seem to make all men fall in love with our heroine, it is because we have to do only with those who did fall in love with her? There were a vast number of golden youth in Wefton and its neighbourhood who saw nothing in her; but just for that reason we have not to do with them. 'See,' said some one to Diogenes, pointing in Neptune's temple to the pictures of those who had escaped shipwreck; 'see the wonderful power of the god!' 'But where are they painted who were drowned?' asked the cynic. So we paint only those who attest the power of our goddess; the multitude who did not attest her power are for that reason unrepresented. What really needs explanation is the fewness of her suitors, and this is explicable only by her living all her life in Wefton. As a rule, indeed, we believe that girls have more choice of suitors than we men imagine. We know of those who have proposed and been accepted, but of those who have proposed and been refused we never hear, and so we get to speak, and perhaps think, as if most girls took, or would take, the first man that offered. It is only fair to us to say, however, that for this vulgarity of thought and speech match-makers and women generally are chiefly responsible. 'Why don't you marry So-and-so?' they'll say, speaking to the meanest of our sex of the fairest of theirs. And, indeed, women owe it all to their own valuation of themselves that men think less of them than they deserve. A misogynist might say of them what Johnson said of the Irish: 'The Irish are not in a conspiracy to cheat the world by false representations of the merits of their countrymen. No, sir, the Irish are a *fair* people,—they never speak well of one another.'

Mabel then, as we said, won Lord Charlecote's facile and fickle affections, but won them quite unconsciously. She was in no mood to be on the look-out for such a conquest; while besides, Lady Saddlethwaite had more than once alluded casually to his lordship's multitudinous attachments. Mabel, therefore, took his devotion as due, in part, to his gallantry, but in chief to his compassion; because the deference of his manner had evidently deepened since he came to know of her position in life. She felt very grateful to him on this account, and exerted herself to entertain him—an exertion which did herself as much good as the excitement of ever-changing scenes—for she was thereby roused out of herself, and could not indulge in those long lapses of silence and sorrow she sometimes gave way to when with Lady Saddlethwaite and Lawley.

'What shall we do to-day?' asked Lord Charlecote on the second morning after their arrival in Genoa.

'Oh, nothing,' sighed Lady Saddlethwaite wearily; 'it's the only thing we haven't done, except the Palazzo Doria.'

'And it should be done as being a great Italian work of art, *dolce far niente*,' said Mabel.

'Let's do it on the sea, then,' said Lord Charlecote. 'There's no seeing Genoa in Genoa. One cannot see the wood for the trees, the streets are so narrow.'

Lady Saddlethwaite felt qualmish at the mere mention of the sea. 'The very sight of the sea makes me dizzy,' she said.

'Why, it's like glass.'

'It's like Genoa—looks best in the distance,' with a shake of the head. 'But you'll all go. I shall be glad to be rid of you to get an hour or two's rest.'

'I shall stay with you, Lady Saddlethwaite, if you'll allow me.'

'You shall do no such thing, child. I'm going to bed. If that's the only way to see the place, you must see it in that way. I can't pay the price. It isn't "see Genoa and *die*," you know, and I'm not called to martyr myself.'

Lady Saddlethwaite's old-fashioned notion of the propriety of chaperoning Mabel always and everywhere got worn out as she got worn out herself; and, indeed, even a more particular chaperon would have felt there was something almost ludicrous in safeguarding such a girl as Mabel.

Mabel went to get ready, and soon returned looking her loveliest, as Lady Saddlethwaite thought, and as Lord Charlecote thought, and as, most of all, Lawley thought, and the three set out together for the port. They chartered a boat—not over clean, but the cleanest procurable—provided with a pair of oars and a light sail which they could rig up if there was a breath of wind outside the harbour. But there wasn't: so they pulled and rested at intervals, chatting the while. There are few more superb views than that of Genoa from the sea, as even Lord Charlecote—who still affected cynicism in general conversation—was forced to admit.

'But the place looks in pawn while you're in it,' he said, 'with such frowsy tenants in its palaces—like jewels in the hands of a Jew pawnbroker.'

'They may be redeemed one day,' said Lawley dreamily.

‘Not they,’ said Lord Charlecote decidedly; ‘commerce, like the sea it sails on, floods one coast and leaves another high and dry.’

‘Everything goes,’ said Mabel, with a sadness born of her own trouble.

‘*Ça ira!* It’s the tune time marches to,’ said Lord Charlecote, humming it. ‘It’s a provision of nature for Englishmen; for you see, if there were no ruins there would be no picturesqueness, and if there were no picturesqueness there would be no Cook’s personally-conducted tours.’

‘I wonder why ruin makes everything picturesque,’ said Mabel.

‘Its associations with death, I think,’ said Lawley. ‘The shadow of death, like night, makes the most commonplace thing impressive. Every ruin is a shadow of the coming event, and it’s the presentiment that unconsciously fascinates us.’

This was rather a dreary topic, and Lord Charlecote changed it. ‘I don’t think it was ever much of a place to live in, or that they were ever much of a people,’ he said cynically, referring to Genoa la Superba. ‘The view you get from history is like the view you get from here—a distant view. You see only what was splendid, as we see from here only palaces and churches. What was sordid and narrow and frowsy is out of sight. They were a commercial people,' he added contemptuously, 'and commerce is always mean. It's the dry rot of a nation. "Honour sinks where commerce long prevails."'

'Isn't it Bacon who says that in the infancy of states arms flourish, in their middle age arts, and in their declining years commerce? Under its other name of avarice, it is the usual characteristic of old age.

> That meanest rage
> And latest folly of man's sinking age,
> Which rarely venturing in the van of life,
> While nobler passions wage their heated strife,
> Comes skulking last, with selfishness and fear,
> And dies, collecting lumber in the rear.

Both gentlemen were thinking of another people than the Genoese, Lawley with good reason, having lived so long in the West Riding. It was rather a stiff conversation for a sultry day, when any kind of effort, physical or mental, was exhausting, but they drifted into the subject, and were stimulated by the presence of Mabel to talk their best upon it. They sang as the thrushes sing in spring—in rivalry. The languor of the day, however, had the effect of making their talk discursive. It passed from Genoa and its siege in 1799, when twenty thousand of its inhabitants perished by famine, on to deaths of different kinds, and to that by drowning as the easiest. Lord Charlecote quoted a great London doctor, who told him of two men he had attended at different times in hospital, both of whom had been all but drowned, while both, upon their recovery, described their latest sensations before absolute unconsciousness as delicious. Lawley, by a double association, was reminded of his favourite Shelley, drowned in this sea, and quoted one of the stanzas 'Written in Dejection near Naples':—

Yet now despair itself is mild,
  Even as the winds and waters are;
I could lie down like a tired child,
  And weep away the life of care
Which I have borne, and yet must bear,
  Till death like sleep might steal on me,
And I might feel in the warm air
  My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea
Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony.

Mabel, looking down through the still clear water at

The deep's untrampled floor,
With green and purple seaweeds strown,

felt that the lines Lawley quoted exquisitely expressed her own deepest longing. Suddenly the glass through which she looked became dim and broken. A breeze had sprung up and ruffled the still surface.

'A breeze at last!' cried Lord Charlecote; 'let us hoist the sail.'

While they stepped the mast, the boat swung round broadside to the rising waves, which, though not very formidable, tossed the cockleshell of a craft up and down like a shuttlecock. The mast being fixed, Lord Charlecote stood on the seat for a moment to secure the tackle of the sail above; Lawley, standing also, unfurled it below. While the crazy little craft was thus top-heavy, with the weight so much to leeward as to bring her gunwale level with the water, a sudden gust and a strong wave from the swell of a passing steamer sent her over. She went down like lead. Such was the intensity of Lawley's love that his first thought, when he could think, was of Mabel. As he struggled up to the surface, it was of her life he was thinking, not of his own. They rose almost together; he swam towards her and caught her just as she was about to sink the second time. She clutched his coat convulsively, but he slipped out of it, left it in her hands, and swam shorewards, pushing her before him. He was a strong swimmer, but it was a long swim. He had not struggled through half the distance before his strength began to give out. Mabel, who had now recovered consciousness and comparative calmness, felt it was giving out.

'Let me go!' she cried, trying to disengage herself.

Lawley silently held firm, with an effort that cost him much of his fast-going strength.

'You could have saved yourself. It is too late now!' she cried again despairingly.

Yes, it was too late now. Even if Lawley had let her go, he could not have struggled on very much further.

'Mabel!' he gasped, 'I love you—one kiss!'

Even at that awful moment the revelation came with a kind of shock to her. She turned her face to his; their lips met, ere they sank together with a cry to the mercy of God.

CHAPTER XL.

CHANGED RELATIONS.

The wave that helped to swamp the boat was itself helped by the swell of a large steamer, which was much nearer Lawley, if he had known it, than the shore. But he did not know it. Mabel rose between him and the shore, and he swam towards her with the steamer behind him. Lord Charlecote, however, rose with his face to the steamer, and made for it with no thought at the moment of any one but himself. He had been taught all his life to think only of himself, and it was not to be expected that he should forget the lesson when life itself was at stake. He, too, was a good swimmer, even better than Lawley, had only himself to save, and only a short distance to cover, since a boat from the steamer put out to meet him. Safe in the boat he had thought to spare to Mabel and Lawley. He directed the men to pull towards where the boat went down, while he himself looked anxiously in all directions for any appearance of his companions. At last he saw them together making for the shore. He felt a twinge of shame, remorse, and jealousy at the sight of Mabel being saved by his rival. He pointed to where they were, pulled out his purse, poured a heap of sovereigns into his hand, and by these signs stimulated the men (who spoke only Italian, of which he did not know a word) to the utmost exertions. While, however, they were still a good way off, Mabel and Lawley disappeared. Lord Charlecote shouted, pointed, urged the men by excited gestures till they pulled as if their own lives were in the balance. As they shot over the spot where the two had disappeared, Mabel and Lawley, still clinging together, rose for the second time to the surface, and before they could sink again Lord Charlecote had leapt out, swum to them, and supported them until the boat put back and took them in. Mabel was still alive, but Lawley was to all appearance dead.

The boat then made for the harbour, to which the steamer had already preceded them.

It was the nearest refuge where they were sure to find a doctor. Lord Charlecote's assumed impassiveness was submerged beneath a wave of impulsive feeling. He felt Mabel's faint pulse, chafed her hands, rose and sat down again a dozen times in extreme excitement, gesticulating unintelligible directions to the men, and bending forward over the bulwarks as if that would hasten by a handbreadth her speed. At last they rounded the harbour pier, and passed ship after ship, whose crews looked down over the bulwarks on their ghastly burden. They hailed each as they passed, asking if there were a doctor on board. No. Lord Charlecote, in a frenzy of passionate impatience at each vain stoppage, was trying to intimate to the men that they must go straight to shore without slackening to ask again this hopeless question, when a small boat with an Englishman in it, making for the harbour mouth, pulled up alongside.

'You ask for a doctor?' asked the Englishman in execrable Italian.

'Are you a doctor?' asked Lord Charlecote simultaneously.

The stranger made the sole reply of stepping into the boat and altering at once the posture of the two bodies, which he saw only when he came alongside. He then gave directions to both the men in his own boat and to those with Lord Charlecote, and turned again to examine the lifeless bodies.

'She's not dead?' cried Lord Charlecote eagerly.

'No, she's not dead,' replied the doctor after an intolerably deliberate delay; 'she'll be all right in a few days, I should say.'

'And he?'

The doctor took some time before he answered by shaking his head. 'How long has he been under water?'

'Not five minutes.'

'Five minutes!'

'But he had a long swim first, holding her up.'

'He must have been nearly dead before he sank.' Which indeed was true, as Lawley had a spirit much stronger than his strength.

'He's dead, then?'

The doctor again proceeded to examine Lawley carefully and exhaustively, trying the while to stimulate artificial respiration, but was interrupted by the boat's touching the landing-place. The doctor's boat, being much the lighter and swifter, had beaten them by time enough to have a conveyance in waiting, and in a few minutes he and his patients and Lord Charlecote were in the nearest hotel. Lord Charlecote waited to be assured that Mabel was restored and out of danger, before he hurried off to be the first to tell Lady Saddlethwaite of the accident.

When he appeared before her, drenched and dripping, alone and with trouble in his face, Lady Saddlethwaite realised her love for Mabel.

'Where's—where's Mabel?' she asked in a tone of great agitation.

'She's all right, thank God. We had an upset, but we were picked up, and she has been some time coming to. The doctor says she'll be all right in a day or so.'

'But where is she?' still anxiously.

'She's at some hotel near the harbour. I forgot to ask its name; but I've kept the cab.'

'I shall not be a minute,' said Lady Saddlethwaite, hurrying towards the door, but pausing as she reached it to turn and ask, 'And Mr. Lawley?'

Lord Charlecote shook his head.

'Drowned!'

'The doctor says there's no hope, but he's doing all he can to restore him.'

Lady Saddlethwaite stood transfixed at the door.

'He has lost his life—if he has lost it—in trying to save Miss Masters,' continued Lord Charlecote, finding a relief in giving expression to his self-reproach. 'I took care of myself, but he held her up to his last breath. The doctor says he must have been all but dead before they sank.'

Lady Saddlethwaite was much moved. 'Is there no hope?'

Lord Charlecote again shook his head. Lady Saddlethwaite hurried off to get ready, and having given some confusing instructions to Parker about following her—where and with what she did not say—she entered the cab—without waiting for Lord Charlecote, who had to change his soaking clothes—and was soon by Mabel's bedside.

Mabel was restored and conscious, but weak and confused. She recognised Lady Saddlethwaite, who stooped to kiss her with a mother's tenderness, and smiled faintly in acknowledgment of the caress.

'Where's George?' she asked in a voice barely audible. George and Lawley had got confused together in her drowning delirium, and she had not yet come to distinguish them.

'Who, dear?'

Mabel felt she had used the wrong name, but could not think of the right one. She lay silent for a little, trying to collect and concentrate her scattered thoughts.

'You mustn't trouble yourself about anything but getting better, dear. Try to go asleep.'

'He's drowned!' with a kind of terror in her wide and wistful eyes.

'He's nothing of the sort. You're only dreaming, and you had much better dream asleep. There, be a good child and go asleep when you're told,' patting her pale cheek.

Mabel smiled again faintly and closed her eyes.

Lady Saddlethwaite could say with a safe conscience that Lawley wasn't drowned, but it was all she could say, or the doctor either. The flame of life flickered faintly in his breast, but there was no fuel for it to feed on, and it threatened every moment to go out altogether. In fact Lawley was like to die of exhaustion. He found, however, what he needed most in Dr. Pardoe, not a very brilliant, but an extremely painstaking physician, who not only doctored but nursed him. He was very much interested, not in the man but in the patient; and death, when he seemed to have it all his own way, found he had the battle to fight all over again with a plucky and tough antagonist. Dr. Pardoe had that blind and dogged English courage of which the French prince in 'Henry V.' complained—'If the English had any apprehension, they would run away.' He would, perhaps, have despaired if he had seen clearly the desperation of the case. But he didn't, and he fought death to the death with stolid and stubborn hardihood. It was a long and doubtful battle. When Mabel was quite well, as she was in a few days, Lawley lay still in the shadow of death—in a twilight, whether of life's dawn or setting no one could say. Mabel, if she could, would freely have given her life for his. It was all she had to give, for her love was buried in George's grave. The girl was utterly miserable. If Lawley died, his death was at her door; if he lived, at her door, too, would be his unhappiness. For she knew enough of him to feel that his love would be life-long and life-absorbing. Here was the greatest of all the debts she owed him—his love—greater even than the debt of her life, and she could make him no return for it. For such love as she could give was as different from that he gave and that he asked as moonlight is from sunlight—different not in degree only, but in kind. She was most miserable.

Lady Saddlethwaite put her extreme dejection down to her despair of a life which was given for her own, and was doubly rejoiced to be at least able to say on the authority of the exasperatingly cautious doctor, that Lawley was out of danger. A great weight was lifted off Mabel's heart, but a trouble almost as deep remained. Lady Saddlethwaite was perplexed to find she had given so much less relief than she expected.

'Why, you're as miserable as ever, child!'

'It's a great debt to owe,' said Mabel,

thinking as much of Lawley's love as of his life.

'That's not like you, Mabel. I thought you were generous enough to forgive a debt you couldn't pay. You should think what a happiness it is to him to have done you this service. It's a debt that pays itself.'

'All my debts have to pay themselves,' said Mabel drearily. 'You don't know what it is, Lady Saddlethwaite, to owe what you never can pay. You are always doing kindnesses that can never be repaid.'

'Tut, my dear. I know there's no greater pleasure than doing *you* a kindness, and I know that Mr. Lawley thinks so too. It was you he asked after the moment he became conscious.'

Lady Saddlethwaite began to suspect that Mabel had at last discerned Lawley's love, and shot this arrow at a venture. It was a palpable hit. Mabel coloured and looked distressed, and Lady Saddlethwaite, perfectly satisfied, turned the embarrassing conversation.

Meantime, the accident which revealed Lawley's love to Mabel, revealed Lord

Charlecote's love to himself, not directly so much as indirectly. He got a long letter from his mother, asking for an immediate, explicit, and positive contradiction of a scandalous paragraph in the *Times* which had been copied from *Galignani*. In this paragraph the accident was reported at some length, and with many new and interesting particulars. It seems the boat was Lord Charlecote's private yacht, Mabel was his *fiancée*, and Lawley was Mabel's guardian, and that Lord Charlecote, by the most heroic and all but impossible exertions, swam to the steamer, holding up Mabel with one hand and Lawley with the other. Upon the text of this paragraph the Dowager Lady Charlecote held forth—very furiously after her manner. Some gases liquefy under tremendous pressure, and Lord Charlecote's love, which was of a volatile and gaseous nature, needed some such opposing pressure to condense it to anything substantial. Mabel's indifference and Lawley's rivalry did something in this direction, but his mother's furious letter did much more. Like many another woman this good lady seemed to think that a match was best kept from lighting by friction. The result of her intervention was that Lord Charlecote not only did what he could to overtake and suppress this absurd newspaper report, but also did what he could to make that part of it true which connected his name with Mabel's.

The accident also affected indirectly the relation of George to Mabel. The original version of it was copied into a Melbourne paper, and there caught George's eye more than a year after the accident it referred to occurred. He read it on a scrap of waste paper which contained specimens of wheat that had lain aside for months in a drawer.

CHAPTER XLI.

THREE CONFESSIONS.

The first meeting of Mabel and Lawley after their farewell kiss was a sad one. Lawley was miserable in the thought that his secret should have been wrung from him even in the agony of death, and in the thought that its untimely disclosure destroyed what little chance he had of her hand. He could make her but one reparation, to renounce what had become the happiness of his life—her society. If he had done her no service, he might—notwithstanding his dying declaration—have allowed himself this happiness; but now he would seem to her, when they met, not only an unwelcome suitor, but a suitor who sued, not *in formâ pauperis*, but as a sordid creditor. For he knew she would take an exaggerated view of his effort to save her. Yes; he must do her now the infinitely harder service of the sacrifice of his happiness to hers.

On the other hand Mabel certainly did feel overwhelmed with her debt to Lawley, but it was the debt of his love, not of her life, which weighed most upon her. It was not, we need hardly say, that she thought little of his saving her, but that she thought so much of his loving her. She thought Lawley utterly despised her sex; and perhaps, woman fashion, she respected him the more for his contempt; the compliment of his love, therefore, was all the greater and more surprising and more distressing. For what could she do? Like Bassanio, she would give him anything in all the world but the worthless thing he asked.

'Mr. Lawley is coming down to-day, Mabel,' said Lady Saddlethwaite. They had all migrated to the hotel to which Mabel and Lawley had been carried. 'I've just looked in at him and said something about your anxiety to see and thank him, and all that, and he seemed quite distressed. He begged me most earnestly to ask you to think and say nothing about it, and I promised you wouldn't. I think proud people never like being thanked. They prefer to keep every one in their debt, perhaps.'

'I don't think Mr. Lawley is proud,' said Mabel, thinking with a deep blush of his love for her. Lady Saddlethwaite put a most favourable interpretation upon the blush, and began to be more hopeful than ever about her matchmaking scheme. Not that she imagined for a moment that Mabel had any heart yet to give away. But she would have in time, and it was enough now for her to know, as she plainly did, that Lawley loved her. Lady Saddlethwaite was not in the least driven to speculate as to how Mabel came by her knowledge of Lawley's feelings towards her, since the only wonder was that she hadn't divined them long since.

When, however, Lawley entered the room, Lady Saddlethwaite saw in a moment from their mutual embarrassment that something definite must have passed between them. Mabel rose and advanced to meet him with the pained and wistful expression of one who had done him some deep wrong and deeply repented of it; while Lawley also, on his side, looked more conscious of having embittered than of having preserved her life.

'You're better?' asked Mabel, as their hands met, in a voice she couldn't quite steady.

'Oh, I'm all right again, thank you,' he replied, with his last words and the kiss which sealed them vividly in his thoughts and in his eyes. What a bathos was this conventional meeting as a sequel to that scene!

'You look all right!' exclaimed Lady Saddlethwaite, who saw that she must create a diversion; 'you're as white as a ghost. You must lie down on the sofa here, and submit to be nursed and made much of.' Mabel stepped to the sofa and arranged the pillows with the deftness of a skilled nurse—as she was. Lawley, who was about to scorn the sofa, became suddenly glad of it.

'I've just been telling Mabel,' said Lady Saddlethwaite, thinking it better to have this business of Mabel's thanks settled; 'I've just been telling Mabel that you won't hear of being thanked for saving her life, Mr. Lawley.'

'One doesn't like being thanked for what one didn't do, Lady Saddlethwaite. "Praise undeserved," you know. In fact, it was Lord Charlecote saved us both.'

'Mabel would have been drowned many times over if she'd had the politeness to wait for Lord Charlecote to save her. But, as I was saying to her before you came in, proud people never like being thanked.'

'Then I must forego my thanks to you, Lady Saddlethwaite, for all your kindness. I meant to have made you a long speech of acknowledgment before we parted to-morrow.'

'To-morrow?'

'Yes; I find I must get home sooner than I expected.'

'But we, too, must get back before the twelfth. We may as well keep together. It will make only two days' difference. Besides, you are certainly not strong enough to undertake such a journey at once and alone.'

'But I wasn't thinking of returning by rail. Dr. Pardoe says a sea-voyage would set me up.'

'By sea; ugh! I didn't know Dr. Pardoe was a homœopathist. I should have thought you'd had enough of the sea.'

'I hope to have only a homœopathic dose of it this time. I should not have taken the prescription, Lady Saddlethwaite, if you'd not had Lord Charlecote to take care of you.'

'To take care of us! Who's to take care of *you?*'

'Why, I shall have nothing to do but lie on deck all day and smoke.'

'Well, it's a very ungracious way of thanking you for your escort, Mr. Lawley, to get into a pet about your leaving us, but we couldn't pay you a higher compliment, you know. We may as well leave to-morrow, too, Mabel, if it suits Lord Charlecote. What do you say, dear?'

Mabel assented absently. She knew perfectly well that Lawley was leaving them for another reason than that of health, as, indeed, did Lady Saddlethwaite. That kindly old lady was distressed by their estrangement, and began to think they would come to a better understanding if left to themselves. Accordingly she rose in the most natural way in the world, and left the room to see Parker about packing. Then there was silence that might be felt for half a minute, broken at last and desperately by Mabel.

'I haven't thanked you because I couldn't thank you, Mr. Lawley,' speaking hurriedly and tremulously.

'I ask you only to forgive me,' Lawley answered in a low voice.

'Forgive you? It was not of my life only I was thinking when I said I couldn't thank you.' Here she paused for a moment, and then went on as if with a brave effort, 'I was thinking of another and dearer debt which is worth more than my life, and which I value more, but which I cannot pay—I've nothing to pay with,' with a kind of piteous appeal in her voice.

'I never thought I was anything to you. I never hoped it. How could I hope it?' exclaimed Lawley, rising impetuously, standing before her and looking down upon her. 'But it sweetened death to me to speak.'

'You are more to me than any one left to me, than any one ever can be to me again; but no one can ever be to me again what—what you wish. And now I've lost you, too!' she added, following her thoughts more closely than her words, and looking up at Lawley with the deepest, sweetest distress in her face.

It was impossible for any man, even for Lawley, not to gather some hope from these hopeless words and joy from this set sad face. Mabel was as certain of her constancy as of her life, and expected others to be as convinced of it; but even Lawley was little likely to think it absolutely proof against time, or to despair upon being told with the simplest and sweetest sincerity, 'You are more to me than anyone left to me—than any one ever can be to me again.' At the same time this ingenuous assurance, of course, only confirmed his resolve to spare her the embarrassment of his presence in these first months of her bereavement. Loverlike, he was more depressed by the imminent separation than chéered by the hope her words conveyed. For love is well painted a boy and blind, that is, impatient and improvident. He was still standing before her as she looked up at him with such sweet and simple sadness in her face. As he looked down upon it he would have

Given all earthly bliss,
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in a kiss
Upon her perfect lips.

The yearning so expressed itself through his dark eyes that Mabel blushed under their gaze, and thereby brought him back to himself. He took her hand in his. ‘Mabel, I loved you so that I should never have told my love if death had not wrung the secret from me. Now I can only help you to forget it and me.’

‘But you will forget it, and we shall be again as we were.’

‘As we were? I have always loved you, I think, from the first day I saw you, and I always shall, always—always.’ He repeated the word with ineffable tenderness, and its plaintive echo lingered in Mabel’s memory, and long afterwards recalled the whole scene daily, and often many times a day, and pleaded for him piteously and powerfully. There was a moment’s silence, during which he still held her hand, while she looked up helplessly at him with eyes now larger and brighter through tears. This was an effective way to make her forget him and his love!

‘I thought our last good-bye was the very last,’ he said, ‘but there is this one more.’ Mabel could not speak just then, but the trembling tears welled over and spoke for her.

'Good-bye!' he said. Did he expect her once again to bid him a lover's good-bye with speechless lips? He did not know what he expected. He was delirious with love. Mabel still could answer only with her now fast-falling tears. He stooped and pressed a passionate kiss on her quivering lips and was gone.

He was wise enough and strong enough to keep to his resolve that this should be their good-bye. He kept his room till the hour came next day for him to embark, having in the meantime made a clean breast of the whole business to Lady Saddlethwaite. It was as well he did so, for otherwise the kind old lady might have taken ill Mabel's persistent keeping of a secret which was not her own, while Mabel would not have had the inexpressible relief of her sympathy. Lawley himself, however, was the chief gainer by his confession.

'While you were drowning!' exclaimed Lady Saddlethwaite in answer to Lawley's rather bald account of the business. He had said nothing, and could not bring himself to say anything, of the clinging kiss which was their last farewell, but of this, too, Lady

Saddlethwaite heard later from the lips that suffered it.

‘While you were drowning! I never heard anything so romantic. What did she say?’

‘We weren’t sitting together in a drawing-room, you know, Lady Saddlethwaite,’ answered Lawley with a short laugh. ‘It was hardly to be expected that she should blush and hesitate and hang down her head, or that she should draw herself up to her full height and cry “Unhand me, sirrah.” She said nothing. It’s not easy to say anything when you’re drowning.’

‘Yet you managed to do it to some purpose,’ said Lady Saddlethwaite, laughing also. ‘But you’ve been sitting together in a drawing-room since. Was it “Unhand me, sirrah,” this morning?’

‘In a mild form. She said “I was more to her than any one could ever be to her again, but no one could be to her again what I asked to be.”’

‘A very mild form! With any other girl in the world but Mabel that would be an acceptance: but she meant it.’

'Yes, she meant it,' despondently.

'She meant it, but how long will she mean it? My dear Mr. Lawley, you don't suppose a young girl barely out of her teens can be crushed for life under any blow? In spring a rose can stand any storm and raise its head after it and smell all the sweeter for it; it's only in autumn there's no recovery,' said Lady Saddlethwaite sadly, thinking, as she thought daily, of her dead daughter.

'Recovery will be very slow with her.'

'Of course it will be slow with her. Would you have it quick? What would you think of a girl who could listen to the suit of a second lover three months after she had heard of the murder of the first? And Mabel of all girls!'

'I didn't think we had a minute to live,' he said apologetically, thinking Lady Saddlethwaite was echoing his own self-reproach for the avowal of love which death had surprised him out of.

'Why, you don't think I blame you, or she blames you?' exclaimed Lady Saddlethwaite, expressing her surprise by articulating each word with staccato distinctness. 'To think of her in death, to forget death in the thought of her! It was magnificent!'

'But not war?' added Lawley, smiling, highly gratified at his honourable acquittal by so competent a judge as Lady Saddlethwaite.

'Yes, and war too. You've won her heart by it—at least the reversion of her heart. But you must wait. Such a girl is worth ten years' siege.'

'She's worth a life's siege!' he cried enthusiastically; 'but a month without her is ten years,' he added with a sigh.

'You must make your mind up to be many months without her. Your absence and its cause will plead for you better than anything else in the world. You are quite right to leave us at once. She will think of you more, and think more of you, than if she saw you every day. You must make the most of your last interview with her.'

'It's over,' he said with something like a groan.

'Over! Was it——? No; it's too sacred to talk about,' with a kind and approving smile. She understood and honoured Lawley's reticence on a subject that really was sacred to him, and she knew besides that she would now hear from Mabel—as of her own sex—what Lawley could not have brought himself to confide to her. She rose and left him with the promise that she would do all she could for him, and would write from time to time to him letters of which Mabel would be the burden.

Notwithstanding the comfort and encouragement Lady Saddlethwaite gave him, Lawley relapsed into depression—due in part to his weakness—and after a sleepless night was in such a state that his cautious Scotch doctor declined to answer for his life if he embarked—which gave him, of course, a gloomy satisfaction in embarking. Dr. Pardoe was very much annoyed. He would have regarded Lawley's death as vexatious. It would have been to him as the loss of a forty-pound salmon to an angler who had played him for hours with consummate skill and patience, and saw him break away on the brink of being landed. Lawley, however, did not 'go off the hooks,' and the doctor was appeased.

Meantime he had Mabel again on hands. The girl was completely prostrated after the distressing scene with Lawley. Her worst fears as to his love were realised. It was the love of a strong man, which is as his strength, and would last and mar his life. That he would ever cease to love her was unlikely, that she should ever come to love him was impossible. She had no heart to give him or anyone, and never would have if she lived to old age. Of this Mabel was as certain as any girl of her age in her circumstances would be, and with much more reason than most. She was hardly less certain of Lawley's constancy. He would not forget her. Would she have had him forget her? Well, not forget her, but—but—No; she could not sincerely wish that he should cease to love her! She could not love him, yet she could not resign his love. It was as a caged bird which she prized so dearly that she could not bear to free it from the restless misery of its imprisonment. The most she could sincerely wish was expressed in an exquisite poem she knew by heart before she had reason to take to heart its last sigh, or sob rather, of farewell:

Should my shadow cross thy thoughts
Too sadly for their peace, remand it thou

For calmer hours to memory's darkest hold,
If not to be forgotten—not at once—
Not all forgotten.

But if Mabel could not bring herself to wish that Lawley should forget her, or even that he should altogether cease to love her, she took herself cruelly to task for her selfishness; and was, perhaps, the more wretched of the two. For while Lawley had some hope, and at times good hope, inspired by Lady Saddlethwaite, of Mabel's coming at last to love him, Mabel, of course, believed her love could no more be brought back to life than her murdered lover. She was, then, intensely wretched, and her wretchedness told on her strength, not yet re-established, and returned her, as we have said, upon the doctor's hands.

The doctor did and could do little for her, but Lady Saddlethwaite did much. She told Mabel of Mr. Lawley's parting confidence, and so set free the floodgates of her heart. It was a profound relief to Mabel to pour out self-reproaches and praises of Lawley mingled rather incoherently.

'He'll get over it, my dear,' said Lady Saddlethwaite cheerily. She was using, so to speak, a stethoscope, to hear how Mabel's heart beat.

'Do you think he will?' asked Mabel, not as happily as might be expected.

'Of course he will. Men always do.'

'But I think Mr. Lawley is different.'

'He's a man like the rest. Men don't hold by one anchor, my dear, as we do. They've so many more things to think of.'

'If I was sure he would forget me,' said Mabel, speaking very slowly, 'I should——'

'Be very much disappointed? Of course you would.'

'Yes, I should. I couldn't bear that he should forget me altogether,' she confessed honestly with a wan smile. 'He has been so much to me, Lady Saddlethwaite. But if he would only come to like me as I like him!'

'I've no doubt, dear, in time you will come to have the same kind of feeling for each other.'

'Do you think so?' cried Mabel eagerly, not for a moment suspecting Lady Saddlethwaite's *double entente.* Indeed, Lady Saddlethwaite would not have risked it if she had not been perfectly certain of Mabel's being above such a suspicion.

'I've no doubt at all about it,' replied her ladyship decidedly. And she hadn't. She felt as certain that Mabel would come in time to return Lawley's love as that she didn't and couldn't return it now. Well; time will tell if she was right, and we shall leave our heroine to its influence for a year before we return to her. Meantime by a change of scene we hope to help our readers' imagination over the interval. It may, perhaps, have occurred to some of them to wonder where all this time was Mabel's faithful factotum, Mr. Robert Sagar. Mabel didn't know. No one knew. It was a great mystery. We shall proceed now to unravel it. Mr. Sagar had fled a second time in a panic from Wefton, not now, like St. Kevin, shunning the shafts of 'eyes of most unholy blue,' but a more insidious and pertinacious foe even than Miss Masters or any of her sex.

CHAPTER XLII.

BOB AS A REFORMER.

Mr. Sagar, like everyone who has nothing to do, was a very busy person. There was hardly any kind of work which he did not touch, and he touched nothing of which he did not tire. His work was like his life, a perpetual spring —'the eternal boyhood of an Irishman,' of which somebody speaks—beautiful and numberless beginnings, which, like an Irishman's promises, were leafy and luxuriant, but unfruitful. Leafy and luxuriant promises generally are. Now, though Mr. Sagar kept his own promises, his designs didn't. His life was like an artist's studio—all sketches. Bob was not without brains, but he had no staying power, and was thus outrun in the race of life by men who were as dull and dogged as a mill-horse. However, he returned from India with a good pension, and plenty of time to begin a thousand things. Not that *all* his beginnings were aborted. Anything that could be begun and ended in a day was done. Hence his *opus magnum*, the inventory of the goods of the Grange. Bob threw himself into anything with a terrific force and fury for the first few hours, and if in that time it could be carried by assault, he carried it, not without the beat of drums and blare of trumpets. But there are not many things worth doing which can be so done, and Bob therefore did not do many things worth doing. On the other hand there are few things which cannot be undone in a day, and Bob therefore was great at destruction—destruction, of course, as the first step to reconstruction. Mabel's cottage, for instance, was, within, in a state of the most perfect preparation for the introduction of every modern improvement. Under Bob's busy hands, the old order changed to yield place to the new, but unfortunately all things remained in this transitional state. Now all intermediate states, not excepting Purgatory, are uncomfortable, and it was so with Mabel's cottage. It was not comfortable. Bob was struck with the convenience of electric bells and clocks in the vast hotels where he stayed, and saw at a glance the advantage of their introduction into Mabel's cottage, where the ticking of a clock in one room could be heard in the other three—the doors being open. Bob accordingly tore down the bells, disembowelled the kitchen clock, and introduced for experiment three different kinds of batteries, one of which, being charged with nitric and sulphuric acid, filled the little place with the foulest fumes, and cost Bob a suit of clothes for himself, and a gown for the discreet Jane, his assistant. Everything, in fact, was in hushed preparation for the great improvement.

But it never came to birth. In truth, Bob was as sick as Jane of it in a day, and was glad to consign bells, batteries, and clock-bowels to the cellar 'until he had a little more time.' He hadn't a moment to spare at present from the pursuit of a rat which Jane had seen in the cellar and which besieged the house. At night, at least, no one dared hardly move from room to room, and as for the cellar and the beer, they were unapproachable. Bob, however, stormed the stronghold with extraordinary spirit. Armed simply with a pickaxe and a crowbar, he went down into the cellar, and in a few short hours had uprooted half its flags. Having assured himself by this simple means that he was on the wrong tack, he retired, leaving the cellar in this picturesque condition —as if it had been blown up with dynamite— and after a little consideration hit upon a happy and infallible ratsbane. He would purchase a couple of rats, tar them, and let them loose in the cellar, and so kill two birds with one stone. For he would not only banish the rats—since it was well known that these creatures could not bear the smell of tar—but he would, by the track of the tar, trace their route, block it up, and secure the cellar for all time against their return.

Jane objected strongly to this homœopathic remedy, but Bob chucked her under the chin, told her she was a goose, and, by comparing a tarred rat to a policeman, brought the conscious blush to her cheek and silenced her remonstrances. When, however, the rats had been bought, tarred, and let loose in the cellar, matters were not much mended. One of them, which Bob had chosen for its great size and the vast tarable surface it presented, proved to be of the interesting sex, and in an interesting condition; and the cellar soon swarmed with rats and ratlings, who made themselves at once at home, burrowing easily under the unflagged surface Bob had prepared for them at some pains. Then Bob began, as usual, to tire of the enterprise, and made it over to the ratcatcher from whom he had bought the beasts. This professional gentleman proceeded as a preliminary to empty the beer barrel, probably under the impression that the rats had taken refuge there, and was reduced to a state of such stormy intoxication that he was nearly as hard to get rid of as the rats. Bob then advised the introduction of a cat, a suggestion which, though brilliant, was not original, as Jane had had many battles upon this subject with Margaret, who had an instinctive and intense antipathy to cats. However, a cat was borrowed, introduced surreptitiously, and shut in the cellar with the best results, for which Bob took much credit to himself.

Meantime he was not idle, but made himself useful in many other ways in the house. In one room he took the lock off a door to free the bolt; in another he took the door off its hinges to cure a draught; he took down the gasalier in the drawing-room to ascertain if it was supplied with water, and he took Mabel's sewing-machine to pieces to silence an irritating squeak it made at each revolution. It is true that things were left long in the state of chaos which precedes creation—the door without its lock, the room without its door, the drawing-room in darkness, and the sewing-machine in bits; but eventually everything was set right by the British workman whom Bob had at last to call in to put the finishing touch to his work. For Bob spoke of the reconstructive work of these hirelings as a Stephenson might speak of the work of navvies in the employ of his contractor.

'Rather an improvement, eh?' he would say, with the utmost self-complacency, of something which had at last been put back into the state in which it was before he had meddled with it.

Fortunately for the tormented house, however, Bob found a new field for reform—no other, indeed, than political reform, for which, perhaps, his cutting down of domestic upas-trees was the best possible training.

Besides, Bob was as choke-full of grievances as any other old Indian. In India grievances—like livers—are forced as in a hot-house, in a rank soil of idleness and luxury, and under a blazing sun. And Bob's grievances were the more grievous from being driven inward, so to speak, and suppressed, since the full and free expression of them would have made matters tenfold worse. Therefore Bob's wrath was like the wrath of the dumb, intemperate because inarticulate. But now there came to him in Wefton, in the shape of a general election, a golden chance of lifting the lever and letting off the pent-up pressure of years. For who should come down to seek the suffrages of the electors of Wefton but an old friend of Bob's, Bindon Crowe, Esq., barrister-at-law. Bindon was a clever compatriot of Bob's, who had gone to India, realised there a rapid fortune at the bar, and then hurried back to England to get his foot on the first step of the lawyer's ladder of promotion, a seat in the House. Bindon was not what you would call a well-principled man; in fact he had to apply for principles to his agent, a first-class Wefton solicitor, John Coates, of the firm of Coates, Jingle, and Candy.

Bindon, being under the impression that Pickles was still a Liberal, had composed speeches, which almost convinced himself, against the suicidal policy of Disintegration ; *i.e.* the separation of Church and State, of England and Ireland, of Great Britain and the Colonies, of the Empire and the sun, which would soon set upon it if the Socialist, Liberationist, Home Ruler, and Cosmopolitan had their way.

'But Pickles has turned Tory,' objected the practical Mr. Coates, to whom Bindon was delivering an epitome of his speech with much fluency and fervour. Bindon looked blank for a moment, but quickly recovered himself.

'You should hear me out, Mr. Coates ; I'm at the same time in favour of Home Rule in the best and broadest sense. I'm not against the Church being allowed to rule herself without being hobbled and hampered by the State, and I think England had much better rule herself and attend to domestic reforms than attempt to rule Europe. I don't believe in having a finger in every pie, you know, and I don't see what business we have to interfere with the Home Rulers of Afghanistan or Zululand. As for the Colonies and Ireland, they ought to know best where the shoe pinches. We English are too much like the shoemaker in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," who insisted that he knew better than M. Jourdain whether the shoes he made for him hurt or no. Faith,' said Bindon, beginning now to fall in love with his new programme, or rather with his own setting of it; 'faith! it wouldn't be a bad cry, Mr. Coates, "True Home Rule!"—Home Rule at home and abroad; in Church and State; in England and Ireland, Canada, Australia, Zululand, and Afghanistan. Mind your own business; sweep before your own door. That would fetch them, eh?'

'You've got the right principle, my dear sir, but you must push it a step farther. The people of Wefton are Home Rulers to a man—to a man. They mind their own business, as you say, Mr. Crowe, and don't concern themselves with these imperial questions at all. They don't want to interfere in other folks' affairs, but they don't want other folks to interfere in their affairs either. There's vaccination, for instance, my dear sir; they don't want compulsory vaccination. Then there's flogging in the army and navy; there are some Wefton men in Her Majesty's uniform, and that a Wefton man should be liable to be flogged, sir, is monstrous. Then, sir, there's Local Option; that's a Home Rule measure, if you like, Local Option; a most popular measure. Then there's the Burials Bill. The Wefton folk are so independent, my dear sir, that they can't bear to be oppressed even in death. They must be buried when and where and how they like. Then there's—let me see,' said Mr. Coates, counting off upon his fingers the subjects of any political interest to the Weftonians; 'the Burials Bill, Local Option, Vaccination, Flogging in the Army and Navy—Flogging in the Army and Navy—ah, yes, the Buzzers Bill.'

'The Buzzers Bill; what the deuce is that?'

'It's a bill against the use of steam-whistles in factories, which has, my dear sir, done more to alienate the loyalty of the working folk of Wefton than any measure of our time—any measure of our time—a most vexatious measure, which must be repealed, Mr. Crowe, before the discontent grows to a dangerous head.'

'Am I to say nothing on home or foreign

politics?' asked Bindon petulantly, for he could talk endlessly on either subject and on either side of either.

'I should fill in with them, Mr. Crowe, for the newspapers. But the main questions are those I have mentioned—and trade. Trade has been very bad; harvests have been bad for years, very bad. You must make the most of that, Mr. Crowe.'

'We must change all that,' said Bindon, laughing. 'What would you suggest, Mr. Coates? Bring in a ten hours' bill for the sun, eh?'

'My dear sir, you must show that the sun had nothing to do with it, or if it had, that the sun is on the Liberal side. "The stars in their courses," you know. You must point out to them that the years of famine are always the years of Tory rule, and the years of plenty the years of Liberal rule. You must bring in the Corn Laws and Free Trade, and so on. But the things of real interest and importance to the people at large are Compulsory Vaccination, the Buzzers, the Burials Bill, Flogging in the Services, Local Option, and bad trade. Stick to them, and the thing is done.'

‘But how about the publicans?’

‘We must take every important public-house for our committees, my dear sir, and you must explain to each how greatly he will benefit by Local Option.’

‘Benefit?’

‘To be sure. If his house is shut up, he must receive four times its value for compulsory expropriation; if it is not shut up, he gets all the custom of his neighbour's house, which is.’

‘So he does, by Jove!’ exclaimed Bindon, delighted at the prospect of hauling in publicans and teetotallers in the same net. ‘But,’ he suggested after a short pause, ‘there are the Home Rulers. They are awkward customers to meddle with, one way or another.’

‘Not they, my dear sir. If you call it “Home Rule,” we shall lose two votes for every one we gain: but call it “Justice to Ireland,” which means just as much or as little, and we have the Irish without losing the English vote. What the Liberal party want, Mr. Crowe, at this crisis, is a man who will divide them least, and to do that you must be vague. Give them a blank cheque, you know, Retrenchment, Reform, Religious Equality, Justice to Ireland; a great word, like a great-coat, will fit anyone.'

> 'My head is twice as big as yours,
> They therefore needs must fit,'

quoted Bindon.

'John Gilpin? Ay, and he dropped them on the road—for why? they were too big,' responded Mr. Coates, looking slily and suggestively at his client. 'What a good many of you gentlemen do on the road to St. Stephen's, Mr. Crowe, drop your pledges—for why? they were too big—ha, ha, ha!' with a laugh which would have revolted a righteous Radical, but in which, we regret to say, Mr. Bindon Crowe joined. Mr. Coates, thus encouraged, continued his sage instructions.

'There's another cue we might take from our Liberal leaders, Mr. Crowe. It's not only a good thing to have pledges wide enough to fit anyone, but it's not a bad thing to have two sets of pledges, one set for the Radical and another set for the Whig. I don't mean of course—of course not—that you should promise one thing to a Whig and another thing to a Radical, but that you should put your pledges differently—give them neat to the Radical, and water them down a bit for the Whig. A great deal depends upon the light you put things in, my dear sir; what looks blue by daylight looks green by candle-light, and the same political colour looks different in different lights. There are our leaders, for instance, Mr. G—— and Lord H——. There are not two honester men in England, I should say—not in England. Yet you see, while Lord H—— roars as gently as any sucking dove for the stalls, Mr. G—— roars till it would do any man's heart good to hear him for the gallery.'

'Ay, begad, they're like Face and Subtle in the *Alchemist*,' chuckled Bindon, whose political leanings, such as they were, inclined to Conservatism. Mr. Coates knew not the *Alchemist.*

'Well, my dear sir, in choosing canvassers we must take a leaf out of their book, and employ Home Rulers for the Irish, Whigs for men of position and education, and Radicals for the Dissenters and proletariat. Then your views will get to be thoroughly interpreted, thoroughly interpreted, my dear sir.'

Now it was to this piece of golden counsel that Bob was indebted for his political employment. Mr. Bindon Crowe, on the day of his receiving it, came upon Bob in the coffee-room of the 'Queen,' to his amazement.

'Bob Sagar!'

'Bindon!'

'What wind has blown you here of all places?' asked Bindon, with a moment's misgiving that Bob had come upon the same errand as himself.

'I came to see a friend, and I've found two, my boy. And what's brought you here, of all places?'

'I came to woo, Bob.'

'To woo? Have you seen Dick Burkitt lately, Bindon?' Bob asked solemnly.

'Burkitt? No.'

'Faith, then, Bindon, I'd go see him if I were you before I committed myself,' said Bob, with a nod.

'What! Is Dick married? Poor devil! he was always unlucky. Do you remember his falling into Bastable's clutches?'

'Ay, begad, and his being pulled up by old McClintock. He had a squeak for it then, but he's run in now, and no mistake. He goes about in the clubs like a scarecrow, and frightens all the fellows out of the noose. You go and see him, my boy; take my advice.'

'Too late, Bob.'

'You're engaged?'

'I'm married, old boy, and a father. I've a stake in the country, now, Bob, and I must look after its interests. It's the constituency I've come to woo and to win. Member for Wefton, Solicitor-General, Attorney-General, Lord High Chancellor of England!'

Bob listened breathless to this modest programme.

'You'll do it, too!' he cried, with extorted admiration, given rather to the brass than the brains of his old school, college, and Indian chum.

'Of course I'll do it, with your help, my boy. I remember how you used to fire away at the Historical.' And indeed, Bob, in those old Dublin days, had been 'the Rupert of debate,' first in the Philosophical, and afterwards in the Historical Society, answering to the Union in Oxford and Cambridge. In those dim days of old he far outshone the sucking Lord Chancellor who had since far outstripped him.

‘Ah, that tap’s run out, Bindon, long ago,’ sighed Bob.

‘Not it. You’re like an old pump; you only want priming to spout as well as ever. And it’s the old liquor too, my boy, Kinahan’s LL Genuine Irish Whisky. Home Rule—Ireland for the Irish—“Who fears to speak of ’98?” Only we must let it down a bit for English consumption.’

‘Why, you used to be an Orangeman, and pitch into me as a snake that stung the bosom of my Alma Mater in which I was warmed, and invoke another St. Patrick to banish such pestilent vermin from the country they cursed.’

‘I’ve learnt the error of my ways, Bob. Not too late, I hope,’ pleaded this exemplary penitent, who then proceeded to put his programme before Bob, not with Mr. Coates’ cynical frankness, for Bob, among his other weaknesses, held fast by his political principles.

‘We’ll do it,’ cried Bob enthusiastically.

‘Of course we’ll do it,’ reiterated Bindon.

CHAPTER XLIII.

BOB AS AN ORATOR.

We are still some way off the reason for Mr. Sagar's most mysterious disappearance from Wefton, but we are making for it as fast as the importance of the matter will permit us. Corporal Trim could not have been more eager to tell the story of 'the King of Bohemia and his Seven Castles.' Besides, we have to fill the stage with a divertisement some time while the carpenter is preparing the next scene. The interval of a year takes some time to fill in.

By a lucky chance Tarbutt, who was to have opposed Josiah Pickles at the approaching election, gave offence to the Liberal caucus. This caucus, composed of Dissenters, who were accustomed to choose their ministers by a competitive examination in preaching and to keep them up to the mark afterwards by a criticism which was frank to brutality, had stretched poor Tarbutt on the same bed of Procrustes. Tarbutt was not thin-skinned by any means, and stood all the heckling and hectoring without wincing, but could not succeed in satisfying the Tooley Street tailors. On the contrary, he succeeded in giving offence to the most influential, that is, the most wealthy, of their number, a man named Jagger, a machine-maker, a self-made man, whose education just enabled him to write and spell his name correctly. Mr. Tarbutt, upon being brutally bullied at a meeting by Mr. Jagger, ventured in reply to object to 'the pragmatical dogma of Mr. Jagger.' Mr. Tarbutt, being half-educated and of Scotch extraction, always used the very longest and hardest words at his command Mr. Jagger jumped up and appealed to the chairman for protection, at least from 'such blackguard language as that.' Mr. Tarbutt mildly defended the words as innocent in themselves and innocently meant. The chairman, an oil and colour merchant, ruled that the words were no doubt very offensive, but that they had probably slipped from Mr. Tarbutt in the heat of debate. Mr. Tarbutt instead of apologising laughed, and the laugh exasperated

Mr. Jagger to use language so outrageous as to rouse Mr. Tarbutt to a retort which cost him his candidature.

Thus the caucus, with the election close upon them, were at sea for a candidate. Local jealousies prevented the choice of one of their own number, and there was no time to look abroad for a suitable man. At this juncture Bindon Crowe turned up, a man of brains and 'brass,' not only in Bob Sagar's sense, but in the Yorkshire sense of the word. For Bindon had both made and married a fortune. Thus Bindon stepped at once into Mr. Tarbutt's shoes. He rather overdid his part, but that was a fault on the right side; the only difficulty the caucus had with him was to cool and control him. It was with extreme reluctance he could be dissuaded from going in for the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church, and reducing the Bishops to be doorkeepers in the House of Lords. This, the caucus considered, was not yet within the range of practical politics, and Bindon therefore had to bow to their decision with as good a grace as he could. For the rest, they approved of his principles, but suggested that he should moderate his expression of them, which indeed was a little too, too strong.

Thus Bindon's chances were good, and were bettered beyond all expectation by Bob. He was told off to secure the Irish vote, which was strong and solid, and was so successful not merely as a canvasser but as an orator, that his compatriots plumped like one man for his friend. Bob carried them away with eloquence which was after their own heart, fluent, fiery, and imaginative, full of daring illustrations and exaggerations, and relieved by ready, racy, and rollicking bursts of humour. He painted piteous pictures of Ireland, describing her as not unlike the Hall of Eblis in 'Vathek,' in herself glorious as the mind of man could conceive, with everything the eye loves to see, or the ear to hear, or the hand to handle, or the senses to enjoy, but there was no enjoyment. The unhappy inhabitants, like the doomed multitude in the Hall of Eblis, whose right hands hid hearts on fire for ever, were plunged in restless and ceaseless misery, which they had to hide, since their tyrants held it to be treason even to disclose it. Then Bob would paint the millennium which the return of his friend Bindon was to hasten, when the accursed Saxon would have to take his iron heel from Erin's neck, and the rapacious landlord would have to withdraw his griping hand from her pocket; when her daughters would once more smile like her lovely plains, and her sons again stand erect and strong as her towering hills; when plenty, like her rivers, would flow everywhere and for ever; when, to put all in one word, the tenant would own the land he tilled, and the landlord would have to till what little land he was allowed to own. (Frantic applause.) Bob's eloquence always got out of hand towards the end of a speech, and hurried him into the rankest and rottenest socialism.

There was, too, another contrast on which Bob was eloquent besides that between the Ireland of to-day and of to-morrow, the contrast between the two candidates, Mr. Bindon Crowe and Mr. Pickles. He described Mr. Crowe's brilliant university career (Mr. Crowe had carried off one prize, that for putting the weight at the university athletic sports), and the rich rewards which Ireland, England, and the three learned professions had held out to him if he would stay at home. But no; Mr. Crowe's heart had been stirred to its depths by the tales of Saxon oppression brought by every mail from that Ireland of the East—India. Thither he would go and devote the best years of his life in a foreign and far-off land, and in a deadly climate, to the defence of those defenceless and down-trodden millions—aliens to him in race, in creed, in colour, bound to him only by the bond of a common oppression and a common oppressor. It is true that Mr. Crowe had come back from India. Was it merely because his health was shattered in that cruel climate, and his energies impaired by an unequal struggle of twenty years with bayonet-backed tyranny? No; though those twenty years had left their mark upon his body, had silvered his hair, bowed his frame, brought down his strength in his journey, and shortened his days, his spirit they could not blanch, or bow, or break; it was still what it was and where it was, foot to foot with the foe; and he came back to England to give him battle in a better field, to stem the torrent of these terrible abuses, not at their mouth in India, but at their source in the British House of Commons. He came back to plead the common cause of India and Ireland in that stern Star Chamber. But how was he to enter it? He thought of his native town, Ennis, that 'pole star of the south,' as its greatest poet, Dan Dermody, had called it with exquisite propriety, but he knew too well that no representative of an Irish constituency had a chance of a hearing in an alien and intolerant assembly. He must seek this honour from—might he not say, confer this honour on?—an English constituency; but an English constituency in which the dear old country was weightily and worthily represented. He had chosen Wefton, and he had chosen well. (Wild cheering.) He had come to Wefton as he had gone to India, to defend the defenceless and represent the unrepresented. For who represented the Irishmen of Wefton? Mr. Pickles? Yes, as the cuckoo represents the sparrows she smothers in their own nest. He had got into the nest under false pretences, and now that he was big enough he showed his true colours. His true colours? Were they his true colours? Bedad, nobody knew. He read in the *Wefton Witness* that morning a list of the Liberal candidates in the Parliament just dissolved in which Mr. Pickles' name did not appear; but at the foot of the list was a note explaining the omission. The editor had no return of Mr. Pickles' politics later than the day before yesterday, so he couldn't safely count him. Faith, the poor editor was like Paddy Burke, the omedhaun of Clonakilty.

'Paudheen,' said his master, 'did ye count the litter of pigs?'

'I did, yere honour, barring one little one, and he ran about so I couldn't count him at all at all.'

But if there was some doubt as to whom Mr. Pickles represented, there was no doubt at all as to whom he did *not* represent. He did not represent the Irishmen of Wefton. The Irish in Wefton had no more bitter enemy. Was there a single Irishman in his works? Was there a single Irishman in his service? Was there an Irishman tolerated even in his Institute? cried Bob, drawing a bold bow at a venture. Nay, it was well known that 'no Irish need apply' to him even for justice on the bench. And this man, who treats you as outlaws, asks you for your vote. (Three groans for Josh, given with heart-shaking savageness.) Then there was a surging towards the platform, by which a woman had her baby nearly crushed. Bob, with great presence of mind, stooped over and had the baby handed up to him, to the frantic delight of the audience. It was a great stroke for Bob, though not, perhaps, for the baby, which he held by the neck and heels as if he was measuring it, and which howled thereat like a demon. 'Give it the breast, sir. Lord bless you, sir, give it the breast,' shouted a facetious youth in the gallery in an accent of life and death earnestness. (Roars of laughter, during which the mother was hoisted on to the platform, and received the racked infant with a grateful curtsey.) I'm not a mother myself, resumed Bob in a plaintive tone, but faith, I'm as fit to nurse a baby as Mr. Pickles is to nurse a constituency. He gives it the bottle instead of the milk of human kindness. (This allusion to Mr. Pickles being a brewer was taken up in a moment and uproariously received.) 'And I tell you what, boys, I'd rather send that baby to Parliament as your representative than Mr. Josiah Pickles. It would make a deal more noise there, and if it did do little good, it 'ud do no mischief. Yes, by George, if you had to choose between

Josh and the baby, I'd say, "plump for the baby," for the same reason that Mick Molloy told me yesterday he stuck an old hat in his broken window, not to let in the light, but to keep out the rain.' Then he proceeded to describe the millennium which the baby would live to see, and of which they were now to lay the foundation stone by the election of Mr. Crowe.

We've given but a meagre epitome of one of Bob's speeches, all of which, by the way, owed their success rather to the manner than the matter at the command of the orator. Bob's jovial, genial manner, rolling voice, and rich Clare brogue, put on double strong for the occasion, were irresistible with an Irish audience. And not the Irish only, but the English Radicals, flocked to hear him as his fame spread, and Bob for the nonce became the most popular man in Wefton with his own party. To the other side he was, of course, proportionately detestable. Now if the Radicals had the best speakers—as truly they had—on their side, the Tories had the best caricaturists, and poor Bob therefore was gibbeted in every shop-window in Wefton.

He and Bindon were sometimes represented as 'carpet-baggers,' Bindon as thin as a lath, and Bob as fat as Falstaff. Indeed, Falstaff was the usual character in which Bob figured when he was not represented as a carpet-bagger or as a wild Irishman. In one cartoon as Falstaff one of his wild exaggerations streamed out of his mouth, while underneath was the quotation, 'These lies are like their father that begets them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable.' In another a piece of sleuthering blarney was on his lips, and underneath the quotation, 'Didst thou never see Titan kiss a dish of butter?' In another he was represented as spouting a high-falutin panegyric on Erin to an audience wholly hidden from him under his enormous paunch, and underneath, 'How now, my sweet creature of bombast! How long is't ago, Bob, since thou sawest thine own knee?' till poor Bob, like Warren Hastings, began to believe himself the monster his enemies painted him. He went privately and got himself weighed—232 lbs. It wasn't so monstrous. But perhaps his stomach was disproportionately prominent. He looked at it in and out of the glass twenty times a day from every point of view except that of which his audience in the cartoon (sitting as it were under the shadow of a great rock) had the command. He yearned to ask an impartial opinion on the point, but it was a difficult and delicate subject to broach, even to a friend. Besides, the only friend he could broach it to, Bindon, was as jocose on the subject as the cartoons themselves. To him Bob was always 'Sweet Jack,' 'Plump Jack,' or 'Sir John Sack and Sugar;' and Bob's occasional melancholy meditations upon this infirmity of the flesh, were mocked by the advice, 'A plague of sighing and grief, it blows a man up like a bladder.' Thus Bob's trouble, like all incommunicable miseries, was consuming. For the present, however, the excitement of the contest and the opportunities of revenge it gave him on the enemy kept him from brooding over it. If the windows abused him, the walls flattered him, for 'Mr. Robert Sagar will address, &c.' appeared on every dead wall in letters large as those announcing the appearances of the candidates themselves. And if a new caricature of him appeared every morning, a new oratorical triumph consoled him every evening. For Bob never tired of speaking, and his audiences never tired of hearing him. They would have thought themselves repaid for being packed like herrings in a barrel, if they had only seen Bob come rolling on to the front of the platform, with a face like the welcome of an Irish hearth, frank, free-and-easy, glowing, and generous, and heard him take his revenge, as he always did in the first few sentences. 'Well, boys,' he would say, in a brogue round and rich as a roll of Cork butter; 'well, boys, what's the news with ye to-night? Have ye seen my new portrait?' Then, with a startling change of manner, 'Isn't it disgraceful? For what do you think they call me now?' half a minute's pause, during which you might have heard a pin drop, for Bob's rage seemed so savage that everyone expected the announcement of a new and abominable cartoon. *They call me* AN IRISHMAN.' At this unexpected calumny there was of course a roar of laughter, all the more hearty for the preceding suspense. 'Ay, ye may laugh,' continued Bob, without the least relaxation of muscle or manner, 'but a man had better be called a thief than an Irishman in this country; and Josh knows that, and takes advantage of it, and thinks he'll win the election by it, and blackguards me and you and our country in every window in Wefton, and then—asks you for your vote,' with a sudden drop of the voice which was very effective. 'Ye'll give it to him, won't ye? Ye'll go to him, and ye'll say to him, "Mr. Pickles, yere honour, don't be too hard on us. You shut us out from your Institute, you shut us out from your works, you shut us out from justice when you're on the bench, you'd shut us out from Wefton if you could, ay, and from England if you could. But ye'll not shut us out from the polling-booths, yere honour, will ye? Ye'll allow us to vote for ye? God bless yere honour, *do* now." Maybe he'll let ye. If not, ye'll have to put up with Mr. Bindon Crowe, who is only one of yourselves, only an Irishman, who is not ashamed of his country, and not ashamed of his family' (here a significant pause to let the audience take in the allusion to Mr. Pickles' neglect of his niece, which was taken in accordingly with intense gusto); 'and not ashamed of his colours. He doesn't change his colours like the chameleon to suit the prevailing hue—yellow when yellow is at the top, blue when blue. No, he's not ashamed of his colour, though it's not blue, and it's not yellow, but green. That's his colour, boys, and to that he'll stick, as nature sticks to it, for the blue goes with the spring, and the yellow with the autumn, but green lives and lasts all the year round.

'When laws can stop the blades of grass
From growing as they grow;
And when the leaves in summer time
Their colour dare not show;
Then he'll change that colour too
He wears in his caubeen,
But till that day, please God, he'll stick
To the wearing of the green.'

Bob might have been giving out a hymn, for the audience rose like one man, and sang the truly spirit-stirring song, 'The Wearing of the Green,' amid the wildest excitement.

From the foregoing specimen it will be seen that Bob's eloquence was dramatic, and gave scope for good acting, and to this it owed its success, for Bob was a born actor. As with every successful speaker, it was not what he said but how he said it, that told, and an extract from his speeches gives no better idea of their effect than the mere reading of 'The Wearing of the Green' gives an idea of its effect when sung by a crowd of excited Irishmen.

Anyhow, Bob's eloquence, such as it was, answered its purpose. Every Irishman in Wefton, out of jail or a sick bed, went to the poll and voted for Bindon, and the Irish vote turned the election.

Bindon Crowe, Esq. .	7,341
Josiah Pickles, Esq. .	6,212
Majority for Crowe .	1,129

It was a glorious triumph, of which Bob deserved much of the credit and assumed it all. The poll was no sooner declared late on Thursday night than Bob anticipated the candidates by starting up and in stentorian tones thanking the electors. It was Bob, too, not Bindon, who was chaired, a really stupendous honour when his weight is considered. Of course, two days later he appeared in a cartoon as Falstaff in the buck-basket, coiled in it like a colossal snake, covered with filthy Irish rags, and carried by twenty staggering men to be pitched into the Irish Channel. This cartoon Bob never saw. He had disappeared from Wefton. Instead of waiting to enjoy (and no man would have enjoyed them more) the golden opinions bought from all sorts of people to be worn now in their newest gloss, he had fled, no man knew why or whither. He might have been burked by the janissaries of the furious Pickles for all anyone knew, but Mabel and Mabel only knew that some awful and ineffable business summoned him away. Speculation was rife about this grave mystery. His political friends hinted that he was hurried off by telegram to Ireland to advise Mr. Parnell. His foes gave out that he was hurried off to jail to join the Claimant on a kindred charge of forgery. Bindon believed he had gone to pick up a seat somewhere for himself, for Bob had more than once bragged to him of this being in his power. Mabel imagined from his sad and solemn and mysterious leave-taking that he had been summoned to help some old friend out of a horrible scrape. He had told her (the day after the election and two days before she heard from Lawley of George's fate) that he had to leave Wefton at once on very private and pressing business, but what it was, where it took him, and how long it would keep him, he had not hinted. The truth was, Bob had become an Omphalopsychyte. Those thrice accursed cartoons had brought on stomach on the brain. An advertisement of a famous medicine with the attractive heading 'No more Stomachs' caught his eye in the *Wefton Witness*. The advertisement referred to an article in the *Lancet*. The article in the *Lancet* said it was either double or quits, but that whether the medicine aggravated or abated the stomach, the patient must take it in retirement. Double or quits! It was an awful risk. He would risk it. He did. In three weeks he left his lonely cottage in Wales to get to the nearest scales. He was 263 lbs.!

CHAPTER XLIV.

TWO MORE PROPOSALS.

During the year which has elapsed since we last saw Mabel, Lady Saddlethwaite contrived that she should meet Lawley occasionally and hear of him continually; and all that she saw and heard of him forced her to feel that he was more deeply and wretchedly in love with her than ever. And, indeed, Lawley was not happy about his prospects. Lady Saddlethwaite admitted that the only symptom she could see of the softening of Mabel's sorrow was her willingness, or rather eagerness, to talk about George and his fate—a subject from which she shrank in the first weeks of her bereavement. On the other hand, it is true, Lawley's love for her was certainly the next thing in her thoughts and among her troubles. Lady Saddlethwaite had not the least doubt in the world that Mabel's yielding was only a question of time, though of a longer time than she had anticipated; but Lawley was not sanguine. He had all a lover's impatience, without a lover's hopefulness.

'I am crying for the moon, Lady Saddlethwaite.'

'I don't think she's quite so changeable as that,' she answered smiling, 'but she'll change.'

'There's not much sign of it.'

'There's every sign of it. She thinks about you almost as much as about him.'

'Yes, but very differently. She thinks of me as a creditor to whom she owes what she can't pay. It's not so, but I can see she thinks it is so and that's against me. A woman likes to give her love, not pay it, Lady Saddlethwaite.'

'I thought we were supposed to pay it. You first give us your love and we return it; isn't it so? And that's the debt which is on Mabel's mind, Mr. Lawley. Not her life, which she owes you also, but your love, which she thinks a great deal more of, and whicn she is bound to pay you back one day.'

'Do you think so?' eagerly.

'Of course I think so, and you know that I think so. What else have I been saying for a year?'

'For a year!' he echoed with a sigh.

'Yes; a year. What would you have? Would you have the funeral baked meats furnish the marriage tables?'

'But it seems no nearer now than a year ago,' with another and profounder sigh.

'It's a year nearer; that's all. It looks the same on the surface, but her heart is being slowly undermined.'

'Lady Saddlethwaite, I'd give all I have in the world to think so.'

'That's why you don't think so. The wish is not always father to the thought, Mr. Lawley, not when the wish is a passion. But it's not in human nature that she should hold out much longer. A girl who is always thinking and talking of you, and is almost as miserable about it as you are!'

It was quite true, and Lady Saddlethwaite had taken good care to make it so. In spite of her love, or rather because of her love for Mabel, she kept her wretched by dwelling continually on Lawley's wretchedness.

'Mr. Lawley has been here again this

morning, Mabel, and has been making love to me as usual.'

'I think I should accept him if I were you, Lady Saddlethwaite,' with an assumption of gaiety.

'I am glad to hear you say so, dear, for you are me in this case. I'm only the Talking Oak, and you're Olivia.'

'What would you have me do, Lady Saddlethwaite?' in a distressed voice.

'I'd have you keep him as long as Rachel kept Jacob; seven years, or fourteen, was it? if he wasn't such a bore to me. But, to tell you the truth, dear, one year of him is enough for me. You know how I hate to have unhappy faces about me, and to have this knight of the rueful countenance come every other day, and sit, and speak, and look like a lost soul glaring through the gates of Paradise, is too much, really. I can't well tell him to go about his business, you know. But you could, and you ought, too, if you don't care for him.'

'But I do care for him—only not as he wishes, not as he deserves.'

'Oh, if you are only anxious about what he wishes, I have no doubt he will be satisfied with what you can give him. But, speaking seriously, Mabel, dear, it makes me wretched to see how unhappy he is about you; more unhappy, I think, every time I see him. You should put him out of pain; you should indeed, dear. If you feel you do not and cannot care for him, tell him so once for all. It will be best for both. It couldn't make him more wretched than he is, and you will be easier when you are no more reminded of his misery. For of course he will leave the neighbourhood—leave the country, probably. He is so chivalrous that he will do what he can to help you to forget him, if he is persuaded that the thought of him gives you pain.'

Mabel sat silent, looking straight before her, her hands lying palm upwards in her lap, with the fingers intertwined and pressed convulsively together. She looked a piteous picture of distress, and moved Lady Saddlethwaite with remorse for the pain she had given and had meant to give for her good.

'It's not your fault, dear, if you can't care for him,' she said, standing over Mabel and smoothing back her hair with her hand soothingly.

‘You mean love him—love him as I loved—as I loved—— My love died with him. I cannot bring it back to life. What shall I do, Lady Saddlethwaite?’ looking up helplessly and appealingly into the kind face above her.

‘Do you think he would make you happy, Mabel?’

‘It’s not that; but should I make him happy?’

‘It’s the same thing, dear. He’ll never be happy without you in this world; I know that, and it will always be a trouble to you to think so.’

‘But could he be happy with me? How could he be happy? He’s too noble to be happy without love, Lady Saddlethwaite.’

‘But I think you do love him, child. How could you help it?’

‘Not as I ought to love him, and he ought to be loved. I love him as well as I shall ever love anyone again; but the love he asks for I haven’t it to give anyone—it’s gone from me for ever.’

‘If you love him as well as you can love anyone, there is no more to be said. It would be wrong and cruel, too, and not like you, dear, to keep him wretched an hour longer.'

'To make him wretched for life! Dear Lady Saddlethwaite, it would come to that.'

'Indeed, my dear, it would come to nothing of the sort. You've love enough left in your heart to make any man happy.'

Mabel was silent for a moment.

'I might have thought so if I hadn't loved,' she said at last in a low voice.

'But Mr. Lawley thinks so, and he is the best judge of his own happiness, Mabel. He doesn't want finer bread than can be made of wheat. He is starving while you are hesitating whether what you can give him is choice enough.'

'Hesitating whether I should give him a stone when he asks for bread, Lady Saddlethwaite.'

'My dear child, the love you can give him is not wedding-cake, but it's just such good plain wholesome bread as all married couples have to come down to when the honeymoon is over.'

Mabel was silenced, or silent at least. Lady Saddlethwaite resumed after a pause. 'I know you and Mr. Lawley, Mabel, better than you know each other, perhaps better than you know yourselves, and I'm sure of this, that no two people in the world would be more happy together or more unhappy apart. At least I can answer for his unhappiness ; it will last his life and mar all his usefulness. I speak most of his happiness, dear, because I know that is most in your mind ; but it is of your happiness that I am thinking most. If you had been my daughter—and I think you were sent to me, Mabel, in place of my dead daughter——' Here Lady Saddlethwaite paused in some agitation, stroking Mabel's hair with a trembling hand the while. But soon mastering her emotion, she continued—' If you were my own daughter, dear, I would urge and press his suit on you even more earnestly than I venture to do now ; I should be so certain of his making you happy. When Lord Charlecote proposed to you last autumn I said nothing in his favour, did I? though he was one of the best matches and of one of the best families in Yorkshire. But I knew you would be happier with Mr. Lawley, happier with him than with anyone else in the world ; and you will make him so happy, and me too, Mabel.' Who could resist such pressure? Lady Saddlethwaite pleading so for Archer Lawley—the two people dearest to her in the world! It was irresistible. As for Lord Charlecote, it was quite true that Lady Saddlethwaite had not urged Mabel to accept him, probably because she, no more than Mabel, was prepared for his proposal. His lordship had rushed down from London on one of his mad and sudden impulses, bent upon carrying Mabel by storm. It was four months since he had met her in Rome, and he might almost have forgotten her, after his manner, by this, if his mother had not judiciously kept her name and image ever before him by twitting him thereabout perpetually. He had rushed off to Wefton, then, after his impulsive manner, one morning upon the receipt of a letter from Lady Saddlethwaite in which Mabel was casually mentioned; and he was in St. George's Girls' School the same afternoon at 3.30. Mr. Gant was just about to begin his religious lecture to the children, but was struck speechless by hearing Mabel address the intruder as 'Lord Charlecote.' Lord Charlecote, was a great name in the West Riding.

‘Lord Charlecote!’ she exclaimed.

‘Had you heard I was dead?’ in answer to Mabel’s look of amazement.

‘No; but it’s a surprise to see you here, my lord. Some way, I always think of you as in Italy.’

‘It’s a pleasant association. I, too, think of you always;’ here he paused intentionally or unintentionally and changed the subject. They were standing together near the class-room door, out of earshot of the children, the teachers, and even of Mr. Gant, who had retired in dudgeon to the far end of the room because Mabel had not introduced him. Still it is difficult, off the stage, to be sentimental with two hundred pairs of eyes fastened on you. ‘And so this is a national school,’ said his lordship, changing the subject, and looking round at the children with such an expression of scientific interest in these strange creatures as made Mabel say—

‘You should see them under a microscope, my lord. They’re very interesting.’

Lord Charlecote laughed. ‘Can you tear yourself away from them? I should like, if you will kindly accompany me, to call upon Colonel Masters.'

'He's too ill, my lord, thank you. He knows no one now, not me even.'

'I am very sorry.'

'But you'll come in for a moment?'

'Thank you.'

Having said a word to Mr. Gant and the assistant-mistress, and put her things on, Mabel accompanied Lord Charlecote to the cottage. She was gratified and even grateful for his attention, which she had not the least idea of construing into 'attentions.' He had, indeed, all but proposed to her before they parted in Italy, but Lady Saddlethwaite had warned her to consider his attentions as of the value of Gratiano's conversation—two grains of wheat to a bushel of chaff. It was only 'his way' with every attractive woman he met. Mabel, therefore, not being given to fancy everyone in love with her, was duly fortified against what she considered to be only a brisk discharge of blank cartridge. Lord Charlecote, on the other hand, was perhaps as deeply in love with her as he could be with anyone except himself. She was the only woman he remembered a month after she was out of his sight; and, while she was an ideal Cinderella, there was no part he would better like to play than that of the magnanimous prince—King Cophetua in fact. It was a startling and eccentric part, would set everyone talking in amazement, first at the unworthiness, and afterwards (when he exhibited his prize) at the worthiness of his choice. But somehow when the time came for him to put out his hand and raise the beggar-maid from the dust and offer her a coronet, he was nervous and embarrassed, and began to doubt how the beggar-maid would take it. Mabel, although a national schoolmistress, was a stately personage, and he was constrained in her presence rather to look up to her than down upon her. In fact, when he sat face to face with her in the cottage sitting-room, all the beggar-maid series of scenes which had filled his mind while coming down in the train seemed absurdly inappropriate, and King Cophetua was fain to become 'the fated fairy prince.' While he was accommodating his mind to the new *rôle* they talked together, of course, of Italy.

'I am glad,' he said at last, nerving himself for the spring, 'I am glad you associate me with

Italy. I always associate Italy with you.' A graceful turn to the compliment, making all the charms of Italy but the background to hers.

'It's a doubtful compliment from you, my lord.'

'What? to be associated with Italy?'

'With the old masters, and other dreary things you had to do.'

'With the happiest hours of my life,' he said, speaking hurriedly and nervously. 'I never was so happy before, and I've not had a happy moment since we parted—Miss Masters—Mabel——'

There could be no doubt now of what was coming, and Mabel, amazed and confounded as she was, hurried to interrupt, and save him from the humiliation of a refusal.

'They would have been very happy hours to me, too, my lord, but that I've had a great sorrow—a great sorrow which has left me no heart for anything.' They were both standing: he having risen to make, and she to meet and ward off his proposal. There was no mistaking her meaning, and he, though a good deal taken aback, didn't mistake it. It was not their words but their manner that made the meaning of each so unmistakable to the other.

'I ought not to have intruded on your trouble. I hope you'll forgive me, and in time —perhaps in time——,' pleadingly taking and pressing her hand. Mabel did not withdraw it, but again interrupting him, said very gently, but very firmly—

'I have no hope, my lord, that I shall ever feel differently about it than I do now; but your—your sympathy has touched me deeply —more than I can express to you.' There was a pleading look in the pained face raised to his that said more eloquently than words, 'Do not urge it,' and Lord Charlecote saw that to urge it would be cruel and useless.

'You will forgive me,' he said again.

'I can never forget your kindness, my lord.'

So they parted; Lord Charlecote, of course, more in love than ever, and Mabel taking herself sternly to task for the unfeeling and unbecoming levity which could alone have encouraged so true a gentleman as Lord Charlecote to think her heart free.

It was to this proposal Lady Saddlethwaite alluded—of a second, which Lord Charlecote five months later made to Mabel by letter, she had never heard; but of the first she had heard from his own lips. He had gone direct from Mabel's house to Hollyhurst, to pour all his love and loss into her sympathetic ears.

Lady Saddlethwaite, therefore, didn't deserve the credit she claimed of not pressing upon Mabel a suit which had been rejected before she heard of it. But she did deserve much credit for referring to Lord Charlecote's brilliant birth and position not more than once or twice each time she met Mabel, and for throwing the weight of her influence into Lawley's scale. It is true it was the scale in which alone it had the least chance of telling. It told, as we have suggested above, and Lady Saddlethwaite lost not a moment in letting Lawley know of her success. It was Friday evening when Mabel appeared to capitulate, and Lady Saddlethwaite, when she went upstairs to dress for dinner, scrawled a hasty pencilled note to Lawley, bidding him be at Hollyhurst the next morning at a certain hour, when he would find Mabel alone in the library—(if Lady Saddlethwaite could so contrive it)—and might press his suit at last *with some hope of success.* Having committed this happy despatch to Parker, to be sent at once to the post Lady Saddlethwaite joined Mabel in the drawing-room, with a face dressed in such innocent smiles as might have aroused the girl's suspicions if she had been suspicious. But she wasn't, and she fell into the trap (the library) set for her, and was duly caught therein the next morning by Mr. Archer Lawley.

She was standing on an improvised ladder of two hassocks, on a chair, her back to the door, her right hand raised above her head, to reach down a book from the bookcase—an attitude which showed her perfect figure to advantage. She didn't turn round upon hearing the door opened—by Lady Saddlethwaite as she supposed.

'I have found "Cœlebs," Lady Saddlethwaite.' For, indeed, Lady Saddlethwaite had told her facetiously to look out for 'Cœlebs in Search of a Wife.' It wasn't the most refined or exquisite of jokes, but Lady Saddlethwaite had to express her irrepressible triumph in some veiled form or other.

'It's I, Miss Masters.' In a moment Mabel saw the trap which had been set for her, and the dull point of the poor joke Lady Saddlethwaite condescended to in the exuberance of her triumph. It was not in human nature to feel no annoyance at being so betrayed, and even Mabel was a little annoyed even with Lady Saddlethwaite, and expressed the feeling in the tone of her greeting to Lawley.

'Mr. Lawley!' with a little vexation as well as surprise in the tone of the exclamation, and in the expression of the flushed face she turned towards him. Lawley's heart sank within him. It was not encouraging, and he was easily discouraged.

'I should apologise for intruding,' he said hesitatingly, without advancing. Mabel was ashamed of her pettishness, and touched to the quick by the dejection expressed in his face.

'For startling me, you mean, Mr. Lawley. You couldn't think a visit from you an intrusion. At the same time you could hardly expect me to be grateful to you for surprising me perched up here, could you? However, if you'll help me down I'll forgive you.' Lawley was not slow to earn his forgiveness.

'Thank you. Have you seen Lady Saddlethwaite? 'She doesn't know you are here, perhaps,' going towards the bell. She would have done or given anything to put off the decision which she felt must be made in a moment.

'No. Don't ring. I came to see *you*,' in short, quick, agitated gasps, which, coming from Lawley, suggested a volcanic force and fire of feeling that awed and arrested Mabel. 'Mabel, I bade you good-bye at Genoa, but I didn't mean it. I couldn't mean it. I hoped you would come one day to feel differently, and the hope has been my life—*my life*. I cannot live without it.' The words were strong; but, like the escape of steam at a tremendous pressure, they rather indicated than fully expressed the force which underlay them. But the very greatness of his love only made Mabel falter. What had she to give in exchange for this Titanic passion? Such a return as the cold pale light of the moon makes to the glow and glory of the sun it reflects. There was a kind of childlike awe in her heart and in her face as she looked up at the intense light of love that shone down upon her out of Lawley's dark eyes.

'What shall I say?' in a voice that trembled and seemed to plead for forgiveness. 'I have no love like yours to give. I like you, and shall like you always, better than anyone else, but that is not enough.'

'It is enough and more than enough,' cried Lawley, with an impetuosity which was startling from him, seizing and imprisoning both her hands in his. 'Only take my love. Do not reject it. It is all I ask.'

'But you will want more. You will not be happy; it is of your happiness I think.'

'My happiness!' He drew her to him and passionately kissed her on the brow, cheeks, and lips, rebuked only by her burning blushes. Yet Mabel's heart rebelled. These kisses recalled the dead to her, and accused her of unfaithfulness to his memory. Besides, the wild, devouring passion they expressed only made her realise more miserably the difference between the love she was given and the liking she had to give. A love which was a mere liking, though the strongest of likings, was not what he asked or gave, or what she must vow to him at the altar. On the other hand, she had been so used all her life to find her happiness in the happiness of others, that Lawley's perfect joy was sweet to her. Not as the sweetest of flattery only, but as something she had given him for all he had been, and done, and suffered for her sake.

On the whole, the probabilities were all on Lady Saddlethwaite's side when she said that night to Mabel, 'I thank you now, my dear, but the time will come when you will thank me for praying you, like an Italian beggar, to "do good to yourself."'

CHAPTER XLV.

PUSHED FROM HIS STOOL.

Lawley stayed over Sunday at Hollyhurst. The large fortune left him by his uncle enabled him to keep, among other luxuries, a curate, whom he overwhelmed by a telegram asking him to take all the duty of the day following. One sermon was nearly as grievous a burden to the newly-ordained curate as to his hearers, and two were crushing, especially when ordered late on Saturday afternoon; but, though Lawley knew this, and felt for his wretched victim, he could not tear himself away from Mabel. She had no need to be concerned for his happiness if these first hours of their engagement were any augury of the future. 'Usually in love,' says the cynical Frenchman, 'one loves and the other submits to be loved;' and again, 'In love, to love a little is the surest way to be loved much.' Whatever truth there is in these maxims—and no doubt there is some truth in them—helps to explain the intensity of Lawley's love and happiness. It was enough for him that Mabel accepted his love and his life. Mabel took these great gifts with awe and exceeding diffidence, and found them even greater than she had imagined. Lawley disclosed to her a depth of tenderness of which she had no conception. Even when Lady Saddlethwaite was present all his cynicism was sheathed. Out of the depths sprung up a fountain of kindly humour as a fountain of sweet water sometimes springs out from the depths of the ocean, in strange contrast to the acrid cynicism he was given to. But when Mabel and he were *tête-à-tête*, and he opened his whole heart to her, she found in it, as we say, a depth of womanly tenderness which amazed and touched and drew her to him irresistibly. He told her frankly of the source of his cynicism and misogyny—the treachery of his first love, a young lady who jilted him for his elder brother—now dead—and to whom he allowed no small proportion of his income. About her, we need hardly say, Mabel was extremely curious. Lawley, however, was much more anxious to speak of his present love, and could hardly be got off this fascinating subject. He had the tact, too, scarcely to be looked for from a lunatic or a lover, to dwell upon the amount of good Mabel could do as a clergyman's wife among the poor and in the schools, and to himself. For, he gave her to understand with perfect truth, that since he was lost in love he had no heart for sacred or secular work, or anything but her. Mabel archly suggested that this great work of reclamation put at such length before her might have been tersely expressed in one word—'the MacGucken;' that she was chosen as the less of two evils, on the same principle as that by which a special fiery sherry was tried by the late Lord Derby to expel the gout, and with probably as unsatisfactory a result, for his lordship, upon trial of both, preferred the gout. But, indeed, Mr. Lawley had hit upon a happy plan for ridding himself of the MacGucken, or rather, for ridding the MacGucken of himself. He would build a vicarage, leaving the ould house as a hospital in her charge. He intended to make the church some present, and might as well put it in a form which would benefit at the same time his parish and himself. But while the vicarage was being built he meant to go abroad—with Mabel. In other words, he meant that they should be married at once and spend a long honeymoon in those places—treasured carefully in his memory—which he had heard Mabel at different times express a wish to see. Mabel, thus startled into realising her betrothal, recoiled from an immediate marriage, and was with difficulty wearied into consenting to its taking place three months hence. With this hardly-wrung concession Lawley was fain to be content, and for the rest was absolutely and supremely happy, too happy, fey. As he drove into the school with Mabel on Monday morning he dwelt on the happiness she had given him in terms which almost terrified her. Even if she loved him with her whole heart she could not have made him half as happy as he hoped, but as it was—her heart sank within her. But he—he had no misgivings. He was in wild spirits, intoxicated with that true *vino Dœmonum*, day dreams, and little thought that the passionate kiss he pressed upon her lips as they neared the school was his last.

Two hours after they parted at the school door he was again at Hollyhurst, wild and bewildered with an unopened letter in his hand.

'Mr. Lawley! what has happened?'

He handed Lady Saddlethwaite the unopened letter, whose address, however, told her no story.

'From him,' he said, sinking into a chair, and looking wildly up at her. Lady Saddlethwaite began to think his brain was affected.

'From him? From whom?'

'Kneeshaw!'

'The murdered man?'

Lawley nodded.

'Nonsense! Impossible! You haven't opened it.' She still thought his head turned.

'I can't,' he said hoarsely, starting up and striding to the mantelpiece, and leaning his face upon his folded arms.

'You open it.'

Lady Saddlethwaite tore open the envelope and looked at the signature of the letter. 'George B. Kneeshaw.' She looked back to the address and date, in the hope which Lawley had been too stunned to think of, that the letter was an old one. No, it was dated seven weeks since. She sat down, stunned also. Presently he faced round, white, haggard, looking ten years older than he looked two hours since.

‘What does he say?’

‘I haven’t read it, but it’s from him.’

‘Yes, it’s from him. He was my dearest friend, yet I wished him dead. God! how I love that girl!’

He turned from her again and buried his face in his hands. Lady Saddlethwaite looked on in helpless pity. At last she said,

‘He cares nothing for her. Why didn’t he write to her all this time? He has forgotten her. I should let her forget him.’

‘Does he say nothing of her?’ he cried with sudden hope, turning once more, and taking the letter from her hand. Its very first words had an application little intended by the writer.

‘My dear Lawley,

> The times have been,
> That, when the brains were out the man would die
> And there an end, but now they rise again,
> With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
> And push us from our stools.

(‘Ay “push us from our stools,”’ repeated Lawley bitterly.)

‘You at least will rejoice to hear that I am alive; and yet I left you all this time in the belief that I was murdered; and I should not have written even now even to you if it was not for the horrible news of her engagement, which I came upon by an accident in a scrap of an old newspaper. I’ve gone through terrible sufferings since we parted, but I never knew what agony was till then. I thought I could write calmly; I cannot——’

Here the letter broke off and resumed under a new date a day later.

‘I allowed her to think me dead that she might be free to do as she has done; but I did not realise what it would be to me, or I could not have done it. Poor as I was, broken in fortune and health, a beggar and on the brink of starvation, I should have kept her to her miserable engagement sooner than suffer this if I had known what torture it would be to me. I did try to keep her to it when too late, when it would only have made her wretched without lightening my wretchedness. When I read the news I started for Castlemaine as I was, in workman's clothes, meaning to telegraph both to her and you. But when I reached the town I had no money, and could get none, and had to go home, two days' journey, and so had time to come to myself, and to come to thank God that I was saved from doing a cruel and dastardly thing. But I was mad in those first moments, and am mad, or at least, not sane, at times now. That she should engage herself, within two months was it? of the news of my murder! It is maddening. Who was this Lord Charlecote? She was the last girl in the world I should have thought——. Lawley, you can never know how I loved that girl. I could have died for her. It would have been easier and better for me to have died for her than to have allowed her to think me dead that she might be free to forget me—in two months! Yet since the day we parted there has not been one waking hour in which she was out of my thoughts. It was my own fault, you will say. I should have written and prevented or contradicted the report of my murder. You will not say so when you hear my story.'

The letter then proceeded to give in out-line the story we have already told of George's fortunes, carrying it on to the day when he came upon the news of Mabel's engagement to Lord Charlecote. Just before he chanced upon it, a wool speculation had turned out so extraordinarily well that he had made his mind up to write home and break the news of his being alive and prosperous, through Lawley, to Mabel, if she still were free.

George's letter closed with a short, simple, and touching allusion to their friendship, the only thing now left to him in the world.

The letter touched Lawley with remorse, and brought him back to his stronger and better self. Nothing showed the intensity and almost insanity of his passion more than the breakdown of his strength of mind. That he, of all men, should not have had the courage to open the letter, or the fortitude to bear the bitterness of the blow alone. He must forsooth rush off to Lady Saddlethwaite, like a hurt child, and hand her the unopened letter. And what was this horrible news which he could not read himself, or bear alone? That his dearest friend, whose murder had been horrible news to him, was alive! But the letter recalled him to himself. He was shocked with himself, ashamed, and humiliated.

'You must break it to her,' he said, handing Lady Saddlethwaite the letter, which, to tell the truth, she would have liked to put in the fire.

'And you?' she asked, with the deepest sympathy in her voice.

'Oh, I'm *de trop*. It's my turn to go to Australia now,' he answered bitterly, rising to take leave.

'Don't go,' she said entreatingly, 'wait till I come back. There will be some message.'

Lawley shook his head. 'She will not have a thought to spare to me. I must go, Lady Saddlethwaite, I am better alone.'

After Lawley had gone, Lady Saddlethwaite sat with the letter in her lap, enraged at heart. Who was this man that came in to upset her plans at the moment of their success, to disturb and destroy the happiness of the two people in whom she was most interested? This dog in the manger who showed a fine indifference to Mabel when no one else wanted her, but began to whine when she was won by another. And who showed this fine indifference not to his own feelings only, but to hers, since a telegram would have saved her all the cruel and crushing anguish she had gone through for him. Lady Saddlethwaite hadn't taken in what, however, was plainly put in the letter, that the news of his murder did not reach George until months after it had reached Mabel. Indeed, she was too thorough a woman to be just, and was really enraged with George because he wasn't Lawley. However, there was no help for it, she must herself be the instrument to unravel all the work she had painfully knit up in the last year. She must at once see Mabel, and break this thing to her, and let her be happy in her own perverse way. There was at least the consolation that the girl would be happy. Still Lady Saddlethwaite set forth on her joyous mission in not much better heart than she had gone on her mission of consolation more than a year since.

As it was past twelve before Lady Saddlethwaite reached Wefton Mabel was at home, and on seeing the carriage stop she hastened in some disquietude to meet her kind friend at the door. What could have happened to bring her in little more than three hours after they had parted? Mabel was—what with her was most unusual—nervous and unstrung, in the mood for imagining evils of all kinds. Lawley's wild raptures had frightened her. Such a love must be exacting, and what had she to pay? It was wrong to marry him—wrong to him, wrong to herself, wrong to God. And to the memory of George what was it! She read his letters over, and looked over all the relics of him she had treasured until her sorrow came upon her almost fresh as the first day, and flooded her heart till it overflowed in unusual tears. Traces of her trouble on her face made Lady Saddlethwaite ask the question which, at the same moment, was on the lips of Mabel.

'Has anything happened, dear?'

'No, nothing. Had you heard that something had happened to me, Lady Saddlethwaite?' asked Mabel, surprised and perplexed.

'No, dear, but you have trouble in your face. The old trouble?'

Mabel was silent. She felt that Lady Saddlethwaite would almost resent her relapse into mourning for George at the very moment of her engagement to Lawley. She was relieved when Lady Saddlethwaite said pleasantly,

'You're incorrigible, my dear; but I suppose I must let you be happy in your own way,' which Mabel of course construed to mean, 'if fretting is a relief to you, I mustn't scold you for it.'

'You're already regretting your engagement, child?' interrogatively.

'Dear Lady Saddlethwaite, I'm regretting only my ingratitude and heartlessness. He gives me so much for—for nothing.'

'You don't know how generous he is, Mabel,' cried Lady Saddlethwaite impetuously. And then, after a pause, 'He's been with me since we parted this morning, and asked me to come to see you.' Another pause, during which Mabel was plunged in perplexity.

'He's had news from Australia, dear. Good news,' she hastened to add, for the girl looked aghast at the mere name.

'Good news!'

Mabel sat, white as marble, with wide eyes and parted lips, as though she saw a spirit—George's spirit. Lady Saddlethwaite rose alarmed to ring for some wine, but Mabel clutched her dress with a convulsive grasp.

'He's not dead!' she gasped.

Lady Saddlethwaite was distressed and disgusted with her own clumsiness.

'There's a report, dear,' she began hesitatingly.

'Only a report! You wouldn't bring me only a report. He's not dead!' she cried breathlessly, with a desperate intensity in her look which frightened Lady Saddlethwaite.

'No, he's not dead!' she said bluntly, thinking the shock of the truth better than the strain of the suspense. Mabel's hand relaxed its hold of Lady Saddlethwaite's dress as she fell back—not fainting—conscious, but helpless as in a dream. Lady Saddlethwaite rung the bell, and Mabel followed her movements with her eyes with the listless curiosity of a convalescent who cannot collect or concentrate his thoughts. The shock had, so to speak, knocked reason off the box, and the scattered team of her faculties wandered at will without direction or control. Jane brought in wine, which Lady Saddlethwaite administered like a medicine to her patient, and so woke her up as from sleep.

'It is true?' she asked, seizing Lady Saddlethwaite's hand, and looking up appealingly as for life into her face.

'Now, Mabel, I shall tell you nothing till you are calmer,' Lady Saddlethwaite answered with calculated severity. 'Let me help you to the sofa, and lie down a bit till you are more composed.'

'I think I can manage that without help, dear Lady Saddlethwaite,' she said, rising with an assumption of composed strength, but she had to sit down again, her head swimming, and her limbs trembling and failing her. Lady Saddlethwaite made her finish the glass of sherry and then helped her to the sofa. Mabel, laid on the sofa, did not trust herself again to speak, lest the unsteadiness of her voice would belie any assurance of calmness, but she expressed her yearning more eloquently through the pressure of Lady Saddlethwaite's hand, through her parted lips and her eyes feverishly bright fastened on her friend's face with a devouring eagerness.

'Yes, he's alive, dear,' said Lady Saddlethwaite in a voice that would have suited better with an announcement of death, for she could not forgive George his unconscionable resurrection. 'Mr. Lawley brought the news this morning, and asked me to break it to you. There was no one to break it to him,' she continued, thinking it both wise and just to divert to her displaced lover Mabel's strained attention. 'I never felt so much for anyone—not even for you, dear—as I felt for him this morning. I hardly knew him, he looked so wild and haggard. He scarcely knew what he did or what he said, and could not bring himself to open the letter.'

'A letter from George!' exclaimed Mabel. Alas, for Lawley! All his love and grief could not secure him now a higher interest than that of a postman. Love is as jealous and cruel as an eastern despot who slays all his kindred that he may reign in secure loneliness. Lady Saddlethwaite resented, as well she might, this insensibility to the sufferings of her ill-used *protégé*.

'Yes; a letter from Mr. Kneeshaw. He wrote in good time,' she said bitterly.

Mabel heard without heeding the sarcasm.

'But why didn't he write to—— why didn't he write before?'

'Why, indeed!' cried Lady Saddlethwaite, more and more embittered.

'Doesn't the letter explain?' a kind of terror in her tremulous voice. A horrible heart-sickness seized her. Was he faithless? Lady Saddlethwaite's sympathies deserted at once to her side.

'It's your letter, dear. It's all about you. You'd better read it. It can't upset you more than my bungling.' She drew the letter from her pocket and handed it to Mabel. Mabel held it in her shaking hands and tried to read it, but a mist dimmed her eyes and the letters ran together. She could not read a word.

'I cannot read it,' she said helplessly. 'Will you read it for me, Lady Saddlethwaite?'

'There's nothing but good news in it, child. He loves you still to distraction; but he's been ill and unfortunate, and did not think it fair to keep you to a hopeless engagement.'

'Oh, it was cruel,' cried Mabel, trying again to read it in vain. 'Please read it for me, Lady Saddlethwaite.'

Lady Saddlethwaite read the first few lines.

'What engagement?' cried Mabel, starting up into a sitting posture.

'Oh, it was some story of your engagement to Lord Charlecote that got into *Galignani* and was copied into an Australian paper.' Mabel stood up strong with excitement.

'I must telegraph. Will you kindly drive me down to the office?'

'That's a very good idea, dear,' said Lady Saddlethwaite, knowing that nothing would give such relief to Mabel as immediate action. 'I shall just finish the letter and take you down with me. There, sit down, child. It won't take many minutes to read it through.'

Mabel sat down and heard the long letter to the end. But when Lady Saddlethwaite had finished it, and Mabel attempted to rise, she trembled so that she could hardly stand, and was fain to sit down again.

'You will go; you will send it,' she sobbed, a kind of tearless sob.

'I shall send Jane with it at once. There, lie down, dear. I shall stay with you, and Jane will take it at once.' She rose and went to the table to write it.

'Tell him to come home, Lady Saddlethwaite.'

'I have told him, child. He'll get it in a few hours and be here in a few weeks.'

She rang and gave Jane due instructions, and nearly sent her also into hysterics with the news. But as Lacy Saddlethwaite told her she must not lose a moment, the discreet Jane suppressed her feelings for the present. In a short time she came back breathless.

'Please, my lady, the post-office man wouldn't send it at first. He said there must be some mistake, for he had sent it off half-an-hour ago.'

'Mr. Lawley!' exclaimed Lady Saddlethwaite.

'Yes, my lady; he asked me if I wasn't Mr. Lawley's servant, but when I told him it was from your ladyship he sent it.'

Yet Mabel had forgotten him.

'She will not have a thought to spare to me,' he had said, and said truly.

CHAPTER XLVI.

‘THE BRATTLE.’

Lawley had an eccentric habit which had done most—next to his carelessness about money—to get him the character of being ‘a bit touched’ among the shrewder folk of Fenton. When he couldn’t sleep, either from over-smoking or over-working his brain, he would get up and go out at all hours of the night or early morning to take an exhausting walk, and so force on sleep by means of bodily fatigue. But now sleep seemed to have gone from him altogether, and beyond recall. For two nights after the receipt of George’s letter he had not closed his eyes. On the third he went to bed late—or early, rather—at about two in the morning; and, after tossing miserably for three hours, got up and went out to walk himself weary. On starting he took bye-paths, out of the track of men on the way to the mine, and girls to the factory ; but as these streams ceased to flow at six o'clock, he ventured to return home by the highway, and was thereby caught in a torrent he little expected. A crowd of women, not girls, but matrons, breathless, frenzied, flying as for life, overtook him at a crossing, and swept him on with them. They were colliers' wives and mothers, and he knew at once that there had been a pit accident.

'An accident ?'

'Aye.'

'Where ?'

'Garthoyles.'

'How many down ?'

'Four.'

Four, indeed, was the number that this poor woman had in the pit—a husband and three sons, and she had no room in her mind for the sixty-three others who were down also. A railway accident in which twenty are killed creates a greater sensation than a pit accident in which three hundred lives are lost, because everyone travels by rail, but only the poorest work in a pit. For this very reason, however, a pit accident is the most deplorable possible, since all the killed are poor, and all breadwinners; and the lighting of a pipe or the opening of a lamp desolates a whole village like an earthquake. In this case, however, it was not the recklessness of any of the sufferers, but the carelessness of the engine tenter that caused the accident. The man was bemused from the effects of a drunken debauch, and overwound a heavy corve of coal which, carried over the top gearing, broke loose, thundered back down the shaft, and, crashing against some massive oaken beams more than two-thirds of the way down, shivered them to matchwood, and wrecked the lower part of the double shaft of which they were the support. More than 100 tons of earth, rock, and timber fell in and choked the shaft, cutting off not only the escape of the miners, but their air supply also, since the air trunks were wrecked. There were sixty-seven men and boys down at the time, fifty-four of them in the better-bed seam, which was forty yards below the black-bed, and was connected with it by a small shaft. Their case was desperate. Only three men would have had room to work at removing the rubbish, and these could work only at the risk of their lives, since earth and stones fell at intervals from the shattered sides of the shaft. Long before so few men, working under such difficulties, could have cleared the shaft, the imprisoned pitmen would have been starved to death; and long before they could have been starved, they would have been suffocated, for the ventilating shaft, which was divided only by a partition from the main shaft, was choked with its ruins.

It was hopeless to attempt anything, and nothing was attempted. A few men stood silent and paralysed, looking down the mouth of the shaft; round them was a crowd of women, the wives and mothers of the doomed miners—some still, as though turned to stone, others shrieking piteously; a few besieging the engine-house and clamouring savagely for the engine tenter, while those nearest the inner circle of men clutched and clung to them, asking the same question in the same words a hundred times over. A sudden and a moment's silence stilled them all when Lawley appeared. It was a touching tribute to the character he had earned for helping the helpless. There was hardly a man or woman there whom he had not helped at some time and in some way, and who had not a vague hope of help from him now. In another moment, and as they made way for him to approach the pit's mouth, the silence was broken, the women appealing to him in heart-rending tones for the lives of their sons and husbands, as if he held them in his hand.

'It's awr Tom; he taiched i' t' Sunday schooil.'

Another, pushing her roughly aside and clutching his arm with the grip of a vice, cried in a fierce hoarse voice, 'Think on, aw've nowt aboon ground nah. Aw've five dahn, do ye hear, five!'

Another, with an insane look in her eyes, pressed upon him a basket with her husband and boy's 'drinking' in it, which, upon hearing of the accident, she had set to deliberately and packed. 'Tak' it to 'em, wilt ta? Shoo says,' nodding towards a neighbour, 'they'll niver coom up agin no more.'

Lawley made his way through all this misery to the pit's mouth.

'How was it?'

The pit steward told him.

'Have you been down?'

'We've lowered the bucket, sir, and it won't go much more than half-way!'

Lawley stepped into the bucket, taking a safety-lamp from one of the men. 'Lower away!' he cried.

The voices of these poor women in his ears drove him upon action of some kind.

'The sides are falling in, sir!'

'Lower away!' he cried again, impatiently.

'For God's sake, Mr. Lawley——'

'I shall not stay down more than a minute, Cook. Lower quickly, and draw up quickly, when I pull the rope.'

The men lowered him at first slowly, but very fast as the bucket neared the wreck. It stopped, and while it stayed below the men, as they stooped over, could hear another fall of débris. Then the rope was chucked, and they hauled up the bucket swiftly, and Lawley soon reappeared with a very ugly gash in his forehead, from which the blood streamed down his pale face, giving him the ghastly look of a messenger of death. A groan burst from the wretched women at his appearance, from which they augured the worst.

'It's a terrible business,' he said, as he reached the top.

'You're badly hurt, sir.'

'No; it's nothing, thank you. How deep was the shaft?'

'Thirty yards to the black-bed, sir. Let me tie your handkerchief round it.'

'Thank you. It would take ten days to clear!'

'Ten days, sir! It wouldn't be cleared in three weeks if men could go to work at it at once. But they'd have to repair the sides first before they dared put a spade into it.'

Lawley sat on the bucket turned bottom upward, while Cook bound the handkerchief about his forehead. Suddenly he sprang up, dislodging the bandage and reopening the wound.

'Where does it drain into?'

'By Gow!' cried one of the men, 'I believe there's a water hoile into "the Brattle."'

'The Brattle' was an old pit which had been worked out years ago.

Just at this moment Mr. Murgatroyd, the manager, drove up, leaped out of the dog-cart, and joined them. Cook explained the accident to him, while one of the men rebound the bandage about Lawley's forehead.

'Mr. Lawley has been down, and got badly hurt, as you see, and it's a wonder he wasn't killed. There's another!' as a sound like distant thunder came up through the shaft.

'Does it drain into the Brattle, Mr. Murgatroyd?' asked Lawley.

'Yes; but that won't help us much, the Brattle's foul as a cesspool. It hasn't been worked this twenty years.'

'Does the drain come out near the shaft?'

'I can't say. It was before my time.'

'Who knows anything about the Brattle?' asked Lawley of Cook. He was irritated at the calculating coolness of Mr. Murgatroyd, who, to tell the truth, was thinking more of the blame that might attach to him for the accident than of the lives of the miners.

'Bob o' Ben's has worked in it. Him that's watchman at the coal stays.'

'Mr. Murgatroyd,' cried Lawley excitedly, 'will you order a corve and windlass to be taken to the mouth of the Brattle, and let us pick up Bob o' Ben's and drive there at once?'

'What's the use? Who'll go down when we get there?'

'I'll go.'

'It's all nonsense,' began the manager,

piqued at the management being taken out of his hands in this way.

Lawley was a very decided person when he chose, and now life and death seemed to hang upon his decision.

'Cook,' he said imperiously, 'take that rope and bucket to the dog-cart. We haven't a moment to lose, Mr. Murgatroyd.'

The manager, seeing that the responsibility he dreaded would be crushing if he was the means of shutting off this last chance, such as it was, followed Lawley sulkily to the dog-cart. While they were waiting for Cook to join them with the rope and bucket, Lawley again suggested that a corve and windlass be sent on at once to the Brattle, and the manager rather sullenly gave the necessary order. Then Cook joined them with the rope and bucket, and got up behind as they drove off first to pick up Bob o' Ben's. On the way, Lawley took out his pocket-book, wrote in it for a few minutes, and then asked the manager and Cook to attest their signatures. 'It's my will,' he said, 'in case anything happens me.' Whereupon the manager became amiable, reflecting that, after all, he who paid the piper might well call the tune, and that the parson was certainly paying the piper in this case. From Bob o' Ben's they gleaned (out of an immense mass of valuable but irrelevant information about his experiences, man and boy, in the coalpits) that the water-course came out close to the bottom of the Brattle shaft in a direction which he made plain enough to Lawley, who had been down a pit many times before. Bob o' Ben's was of opinion that the air at the bottom of the Brattle's shaft might be pure enough for anyone else to go down, but he didn't care himself to have to do with the adventure, 'He warn't paid for it,' he said.

But when you did get down, Bob o' Ben's believed the next thing you would have to do would be to come up again, for the drain was sure to be too narrow, and pretty sure to be too foul, for anyone to crawl along it. With which view both Cook and the manager were disposed to agree.

'But is there any other chance for the men?' asked Lawley.

'Well, no; I can't say there is.'

'And it *is* a chance?'

'Yes, it's a chance. Do you think, Cook, any of the men themselves are likely to know of the passage?' asked the manager of the steward.

Cook shook his head, while Bob o' Ben's was even more positive as to their ignorance. Indeed, he seemed to think no one knew anything but himself. By this time they had reached the bye-path leading to the Brattle, and leaving the horse in charge of Bob o' Ben's, they hurried to the pit mouth, which was covered in with planks. There was already a large crowd about it, but the corve and windlass had not yet come.

'There's not a moment to lose,' cried Lawley.

'Come, my lads,' said the manager, 'which of you will go down?' He hoped some unmarried collier would volunteer, since his life was worth less and his experience more than Lawley's. No one spoke.

'It's all right,' said Lawley, who had already taken off his coat and waistcoat and put them and his pocket-book (in which his will was) into the manager's hands. 'It's all right. If it's a fool's errand I ought to go on it myself.'

In a few minutes the planks were torn up, and Cook and two other men brought the rope and bucket and safety-lamp from the dog-cart. Lawley stepped into the bucket, took the safety-lamp, and was just about to be lowered into the shaft, when a gigantic miner stepped forward, took his hand, gripped it till the blood left it and the tears came, and said—probably to encourage him—'Good-bye, sir.'

It wasn't encouraging, but it was affecting, and affected many of the men. Certainly Lawley was not a cheerful picture, with the soaking bandage, like a coronet of blood, round his forehead, and his pale face all the paler for its crimson stains.

'Not "Good-bye," I hope, Mathew, but, "God be with you." God bless you all!'

Those who could trust themselves to answer said, 'God bless you, sir!' huskily, some of them; others were silent, but looked the blessing through tears. It was not this single act of self-devotion that so moved and unmanned them, but the life lived for others of which this act was the crown.

'Lower away, my men.'

In another moment he had disappeared, and there was the silence of death while the rope was being paid out, when the bucket at last bumped the bottom, and for the first five minutes after, while they waited for the signal to draw up which most of them expected. It did not come. Whether he would not or could not give it, no one could say. He might be lying dead, suffocated, at the pit bottom, or he might be making his painful way along the drain. In the hurry of the moment they had forgotten to pre-arrange a signal to assure them of his safety up to the mouth of the drain. The suspense was great, and grew. It became intense and all but intolerable as the crowd about the pit increased enormously, and was leavened and infected by the agony of the wives and mothers of the imprisoned miners. It was nearly nine o'clock when Lawley was lowered down the shaft. An hour later two men volunteered to go down and search for him, as far, at least, as the mouth of the drain. They had first, however, satisfied themselves as to the purity of the air by lowering a naked lamp and leaving it for some minutes at the bottom. It came up still alight. Then the two volunteers were lowered, remained some minutes at the bottom, and were drawn up again. They reported that the bottom of the shaft was pure enough, but that the air of the drain was very foul. They had no doubt at all that Lawley lay dead in it, and that it would have been death to them to have searched for his body. The sensation this news created was indescribable. It was as though the vast crowd had heard of the accident then for the first time. Something between a sob and groan broke simultaneously from the men, while the women uttered shriek upon shriek.

'Silence!' cried a stentorian voice.

In a moment there was the silence that might be felt. The speaker—the gigantic miner, Mathew—lay on the ground, stooping over the pit. Suddenly he sprang up like a madman and shouted, 'Hurrah! I hear them! Stop! Listen!' Everyone held his breath, and everyone heard the faint shout from below. 'Answer it, boys!' shouted Mathew, standing on the bottom of the upturned bucket, and acting as fugleman. 'Hip, hip, hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!' The shout might have been heard at Wefton. Meanwhile the corve was being lowered, quick as the windlass could be unwound. It reached the bottom. The rope was chucked. It was hauled up. There were eight in it, looking as though they had come back from the grave—as, indeed, they had. White and exhausted, they could tell their story only by gasps. They had given up all hope of life as the air was fouling fast, and had all gathered together in the black-bed, or upper pit, where the air was purest, and had just knelt down to pray at the suggestion of a mere lad, one of Lawley's teachers, when the boy shrieked, and fell back almost fainting. All looked round and cried out in terror, for if ever a man looked like a spectre Lawley did, in the dim light of their failing lamps, as he came towards them, all white, in his shirt and drawers, his face like marble where it was not blood-stained. He soon reassured them, and hurrying them to the mouth of the drain, sent them all before him—the boys first and then the men. The drain was not so narrow as had been supposed, but was very long and very foul—fouler than the foulest part of the pit they had left—and seemed to strangle their strength so that they made slow way through it. They had got through, however, thank God, and here they were. By the time the first batch (who were all boys) had told their story piecemeal and incoherently, the last batch were being expected with breathless eagerness, for Lawley would be with them. The very women, with their sons and husbands just restored to them, and standing by them, had their eyes turned still towards the pit mouth.

There was some delay, or there seemed some in the deep silence and suspense. At last the signal came, and the crowd drew a long breath of relief at sight of the first wind of the windlass. There were only four to come—three miners and Lawley, and the windlass went round quickly with its light load. It was lighter even than they looked for, as there were but three in it when it came to bank—the three miners only. Lawley had not followed them out of the drain. They had shouted, but he had not answered, and could answer to no shout henceforth but the voice of the Archangel at the Resurrection. He lay dead midway in the watercourse. He had been very weak from want of food and sleep to begin with, and had been still further weakened by loss of blood, and so fell an easy prey to the breath of death in the foulest part of the drain.

There was a rush of volunteers to the corve, which, filled in a moment with seven miners and a doctor, was lowered away swiftly. Then, for half-an-hour, there was a kind of religious hush, in which those who spoke spoke under their breath. It was now as though, not a few women only, but the whole crowd had each a life dear to him at stake. All Lawley's kindnesses—and his life had been all kindnesses—came back to them vividly as the day they were done, and all looked and felt as though they stood in a sick-room where the life and death of one near to them trembled in the balance. When little more than half-an-hour had passed, the windlass was again seen to turn, very slowly this time, as doubtful what its burden would be. When it reached the top there was a wild shout of joy from those who saw Lawley, as it seemed, standing upright (for he had to be held upright to be drawn up), but in another moment the body was seen to be borne as they bear the dead. Mathew, mounting his modest pulpit, amid a hush in which every breath was held, tried to speak, but his voice broke into a sob which told his story better than words. There was an overpowering revulsion of feeling. Strong men broke down and cried like children. For hours there had been a terrible strain on the nerves of suspense, excitement, and the alternations of joy, agony, hope, and despair, and this in a vast crowd where every beat of the heart is, so to say, reverberated and magnified a hundred-fold through sympathy. The effect, therefore, of this crushing blow on nerves already strained to their utmost tension was almost hysterical. The men in the inner ring, looking down on the peaceful face, which seemed asleep with its eyes open, wept without disguise or sense of shame, or self-consciousness, or consciousness of anything or anyone but the dead. They were quite unnerved and helpless, and could do nothing and think of nothing; and it was a woman, strangely enough, who, with a coolness that seemed cruel, ordered the arrangements for the removal of the body. She had it laid on a door brought from a cottage near, she shrouded it with her shawl, and ordered the least exhausted of the rescued miners to bear it home, and marshalled the rest with their wives and mothers as chief mourners. The vast crowd followed silent and bareheaded. As they were passing through the little village which was the home of most of the rescued miners, the bearers stood still—broke down, indeed. The same thought at the same moment was in all their minds—that he had taken their place; that, but for the dead, there would not have been a house here without its dead. So the eight bearers, weak to begin with, broke down altogether and had to be replaced, and then the procession moved on, increasing as it went, till it reached his home—that home where, too, his only mourners were strangers he had been kind to—the little children of his hospital.

No one should judge West Riding poor on the surface, or at sight, or by a conventional standard. The woman who showed this hard presence of mind preserved the shawl like a relic, and twenty-four years later, on her death-bed, desired that it should be her shroud.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FENTON GRAVEYARD.

LAWLEY'S will was not characteristic of a misogynist. Having no near relations he divided the bulk of his property between the two women who had wrecked his life—his brother's widow and Mabel. Mabel's portion, indeed, was left to her delicately under cover to George, but it was love, not friendship, which inspired the bequest. Still more eccentric was his choice of an executor, which fell upon Robert Sagar, Esq. Lawley himself was the worst business man in the world, which will account for his idea (got from Mr. Sagar) that Bob was the best. Besides, Bob, as a kind of guardian of Mabel's, naturally occurred to a mind filled with Mabel.

It was a fortunate choice for Bob, and brought him, as we shall see, the happiness of his life.

Bob was not at the ‘Queen’s’ when Mr. Murgatroyd—who took the liberty to read the will an hour after Lawley’s death—sought him up there. However, Bob was easy to trace in Weston, where he had attained the celebrity of Lucian’s *Οὗτος’ Ἐκεῖνος*! Men stopped to look at the stupendous figure as it rolled through the streets, women (Irishwomen) curtsied to him, and the street boys cock-a-doodle-dooed after him—for this had been the war-whoop of the Crowe faction during the election. Bob took it all in good and gracious part, smiling like Malvolio, unless when some miscreant made a derisive allusion to his corpulence, now —thanks to ‘No more Stomachs’—truly portentous. Then, indeed, Bob had to console himself with the reflection that the greatness he had achieved had its penalties no less than its privileges. But, these brutalities notwithstanding, Bob felt justified in thinking himself the most popular man in Weston, so he walked its streets as a captain walks his quarterdeck, with an authoritative roll. Therefore Mr. Murgatroyd had no difficulty in tracking the village Hampden from the ‘Queen’s’ to Mabel’s, where, indeed, Bob was busy adjusting a new kind of window-blind, which was to have gone up and down with a spring, but which could never be got henceforth to go either up or down at all.

Fortunately, Mabel was not in when Mr. Murgatroyd told his news. Bob was so horrified at it, and at Mabel's share in it, that he had no room in his heart for even an under thought of pleasure at the compliment paid to his business capacity—the highest possible compliment that could be paid him. He could think for the moment only of Mabel and of the best way to break the shock of the news to her. It was a kind of business for which poor Bob had the least fitness or fancy of anyone in the world; and therefore, after some perturbed thought, he rushed off, first of all, to telegraph to Lady Saddlethwaite. Then he hurried back to keep Mabel on her return from hearing the news from any less considerate friend. But when Mabel, on her return, met Bob at the door with his kind-hearted face overcast, and as indicative of news of death as an envelope an inch deep in black, she faltered out at once, 'Who is it, Mr. Sagar?' Of course she thought it was George.

'It isn't anyone,' cried Bob, confused by the failure of his frank face to keep a secret for a moment. 'It's Lady Saddlethwaite. I mean she's coming to see you. There; come in and sit down. It's not from Australia—it isn't, indeed,' taking Mabel's hand and leading her into the room and to a chair.

'It's Mr. Lawley?' looking up into Bob's troubled face with the hopeless yet appealing look of one who pleads against a sentence he knows to be inevitable. It was a relief to be assured of George's safety, but even that relief gave place in a moment to this other and only less poignant anxiety.

'I believe he's badly hurt,' said Bob helplessly; 'there's been a pit accident, and he went down and saved all the men, and got cut about the head a bit, and caught by the choke-damp.'

'I must go to him,' cried Mabel, rising with the sudden strength of excitement and of a fixed resolution. In her mind at the moment was a letter she had written him the day after she had heard of George's being alive, a letter which soothed even Lawley's wounded spirit. It seemed to come, as it had come, hot from her heart. It was full of all he had been to her, and of all he would be ever to her, and of her own unhappiness in having so little to give in return for it all. There could not have been a more simple, touching, and complete expression of a love which was everything but what Lawley asked, and of a regret, which was all but a remorse, that it stopped short only of this. This letter was in her mind as she sprang up; its coldness, its thanklessness, its heartlessness. And now he was dying, perhaps! might die before she could see him and bare her whole heart to him, its love, and its longing to give her life for his.

There was a good deal of selfishness in these thoughts, alloying what was unselfish in them? It is true, but this is only to say that Mabel was human.

'You will come with me, Mr. Sagar?'

'He's too ill to see anyone, Mabel. He's unconscious, and the doctors are very doubtful. Now, do sit down, dear; it's no use; and Lady Saddlethwaite will be here soon,' floundered Bob, more and more helplessly.

'He's dead!' cried Mabel with a wild look, as though she saw him as he lay that moment, white, still, and cold. She sat down again with this fixed, wild look still in her eyes, certain and silent—poor Bob silent also.

'If I had only seen him—only once,' she moaned piteously after a while, 'but he'll never know now.' And, indeed, this, which was her first thought, was her last thought. To the end of her life the thought of what she would consider the coldness of her last letter (and she often thought of it) ached in her heart like an old wound. Now the shock of this terrible news broke her down completely, and she lay prostrate for weeks ill of what the doctor called a low fever.

Bob, leaving Mabel in Lady Saddlethwaite's charge, thought it incumbent upon him as executor to set out in the evening for Fenton. He was really as sorry for Mabel's sorrow, and for his friend Lawley too, as any kind-hearted man could be; and yet for his life he couldn't help feeling a sense of pride and importance in his executorship stir within him when he had got over the first shock of the news; for there was nothing of which Bob had become so proud as of his business ability. He was not the first great man who thought nature meant him to walk on his head, so to speak—'*Optat ephippia bos, piger optat arare caballus.*'

Bob then, we say, hurried off to Fenton Vicarage to look after his duties and make all the necessary arrangements for the funeral. As, however, he passed through the village and saw all the blinds down, and groups of women about the doors, and men at street corners talking together with sad face and subdued voice, he again forgot his business character and thought only of Mabel's loss and his own.

At the vicarage the MacGucken met him at the door. She was a kind-hearted woman and truly attached to Lawley, but much of her grief was swallowed up by the immense consolation of the remembrance of all she had been to him and done for him, and by her indignation at the state of dirt in which the crowd had left the house.

'Coming and going as if it was a pothouse, and making no more of one than if aw war the muck under their feet. And muck enough they made, Mr. Sagar, sir, if you will me believe, and him lying dead above that couldn't bide to see a speck or spot on tile or table;

and little had he seen for up aw allus war late and early, a-rubbing, and a-scrubbing, and a-tubbing, and a-sweeping, and a-polishing till my knees war that sore aw couldn't bide to say my prayers on 'em ; aw couldn't. But prayers is for them as has nowt else to think on but theirsen, not for sich as has childre to follow, and a haase to tidy, and a master to do for as aw hev done for him. Niver a man in this warld was better done for, that aw can say, and nobbody could say nowt else, and aw only hope he'll be as weel done for where he's goan'—a hope expressed despondently and with doubtful tears. Bob's kind heart was too much moved by the darkened house, and what its darkness symbolised and helped him to realise, for him to smile at the MacGucken's doubt of Heaven being Heaven to Lawley without her.

When he had at last got rid of her, he sat sad in the still study, thinking of the last time—not so long since—he had sat there listening and learning many things from Lawley's brilliant talk. At last he rose, moved by a sudden impulse, to go and see the dead. He stole upstairs noiselessly, partly in reverence and partly to elude the MacGucken's vigilance, and went on tiptoe along the corridor to Lawley's room. The door was wide open and he paused at it for a moment, fearing the MacGucken was within, but all seeming still, he entered.

It was night, the room dim, the gas down, and Bob, unused to death, stood in nervous hesitation inside the door. He could hear his heart beat, and he could hear—he was sure he could hear—in the frozen silence, from the bed where the body lay shrouded within curtains, the sound of a sleeper's regular breathing. It took him a little time to summon up courage to advance to the gas and turn it up, and then, after another hesitation, to steal to the foot of the bed. Here he was startled in a way very different from that he half expected. Lawley lay sleeping the breathless sleep; but, beside him, sharing his pillow, her face flushed in sleep, all but touching his, and making it by contrast more ghastly, lay a little girl, between three and four years of age, fast asleep, her long eyelashes wet with tears, and her bosom heaving still in sleep with the swell of a storm of sobs. One word, in passing, to this little chief mourner, who was to be all the world to Bob.

She had been brought to the hospital nearly a year ago, ill mainly of starvation and neglect, from which she soon recovered. As, however, her mother was dead and her father was an irreclaimable drunkard, Lawley had not the heart to send back the bright, pretty, engaging child to misery and degradation. Even the MacGucken was moved by her winning face and ways to tolerate her. She had fast grown to be such a pet with Lawley in his loneliness, that when she could elude the MacGucken she would steal, sure of a welcome, into his bedroom before he was up in the morning, and in the evening, before her bed-time, into his study. The child had much of her dead mother in her —a refined and affectionate woman—and Lawley had resolved to bring the little one up to be, what nature had meant her to be, a lady. As for Amy, Lawley was father, mother, sister, brother, all to her. When Sarah Jane, eager to find anyone who had not heard the news, rushed up to tell the sick children that Mr. Lawley was dead, Amy took her to mean that he was very ill. She was but a year old when her mother died, and knew not yet of death, imagining it to be simply the superlative of illness—an impression confirmed by Sarah Jane's tears.

Illness Amy knew too well, and that he should be *very ill* was terrible to her. In the confusion no one heeded her or her timid questions, and she was kept strictly confined to the hospital end of the house all that day. At night, however, when she could not sleep through thinking of this trouble, she stole out of bed and along the corridor to Lawley's room. She pushed open the door, which was ajar, crept to the bed, climbed up upon it by means of a chair, and saw by Lawley's ghastly face and closed eyes that he was very ill and asleep, and not to be disturbed. She would wait till he waked, as she had done many a morning, and while waiting and sobbing piteously over the terrible change in the face that was as the only face in the world to her, she fell asleep at last from exhaustion.

So it came about that Bob found the little flushed face, whose troubles were beginning, nestling in the shadow of the still, set, marble face, whose troubles were over. A harder-hearted man than Bob would have been touched by the picture, and by its suggestions of love and sorrow, and of all that is best in our nature and worst in our lot, and Bob was touched by it.

While he stood looking on it, hesitating to disturb the child, hesitating to leave her there, she woke from her troubled sleep, roused either by the glare of the gas or by Bob's concentrated gaze.

After a hurried look at the stranger, whom she took for a doctor, she turned at once to see if Lawley was yet awake.

'I didn't wake him,' she said in a guilty voice to Bob.

'No, dear,' said Bob, not steadily. 'Let me carry you back to bed.'

Amy looked back wistfully at the still face with half a hope that their talking might have waked him, and that she might get a reprieve, or at least a word, a touch, a look from him before she was taken away. While looking for some sign of waking she forgot Bob altogether, for the gash in the forehead, seen now in the full glare of the gaslight, had a horrible fascination for her. She sat up transfixed, a piteous picture of horror, till Bob broke the spell.

'Come, dear,' taking her up in his arms.

'I may come when he wakes. I may come in the morning. He lets me come in the morning when he wakes,' beseechingly.

'Ay, dear; you may come when he wakes.'

All Bob's kind heart was in his face and in his voice, so that Amy, though a shy and shrinking child, put both her arms round his neck as he carried her first to the gaslight to lower it, and then from the room—her head being turned over his shoulder towards the bed and its burden to the last.

She guided him to her room, and Bob, having put her back to bed, sat by her till she should fall asleep. But she did not soon fall asleep. She lay long wide awake, though still; the pale face with that terrible gash in the forehead looking down upon her distinctly out of the darkness. Bob, hearing that she was crying quietly by an occasional sob, soothed her now and then as he could by caresses and caressing words, till at length 'Nature's soft nurse, balm of hurt minds,' came to relieve him.

We have dwelt upon Bob's finding of Amy because it was a fortunate accident for him.

The impression she made upon him that night was more than confirmed in the next few days of her utter desolation when he had at last to make clear to her the meaning of death. Of all the bitter tears dropped on Lawley's grave, the most bitter were those shed by this little chief mourner as she looked down upon it from Bob's arms. There is no sorrow like a child's sorrow, for in its intensity it is eternal, without hope of end, break, or morrow to it. And Amy's wretchedness so wrung Bob's heart that he begged her from George (to whose care Lawley had bequeathed her) and adopted her. No kind act was ever better rewarded. Amy, as a child, girl, and woman was henceforth the happiness of Bob's life, more to him even than his world-wide political fame as member for Bally-Banagher and leader in the House of Commons of one of the seven sections into which the union of Irish patriots of all ranks and creeds against the tyranny of the Saxon resolved itself in a single session.

Nor, in taking a kindly leave of our kind old friend, should we omit to mention a third source of his happiness, his discovery of the genuine 'No more Stomachs' receipt—a sleepless attendance on the Speaker's eye in that august House:—

> Where prosy speakers painful vigils keep,
> Sleepless themselves to give their hearers sleep.

If Bob's vigils did not quite reduce him to 'an eagle's talon in the waist,' at least they relieved him of the scurrilous notice of the street boys.

A graveyard is an appropriate place for partings. There, late or soon, we part from all, or all from us. Here, then, at Lawley's grave, we take leave of others besides Bob, of Dr. Clancy, who, for his knowledge of Greek, was made a missionary bishop of the South Sea Islands; of Mr. Gant, who obtained at last the pinnacle of his ambition, persecution in its most fiery form—a prosecution for ritualistic practices; of Josiah Pickles—we beg his pardon—Sir Josiah Pickles, for his large contributions to the Carlton electioneering funds was rewarded with knighthood; and of Clarence, who married a poor but highly accomplished girl, who with one set of toes on the boards and the other set on a level with her head could spin round like a top for two minutes together.

To come lower down, for we are getting

dizzy at this height, here too we take leave of Barney McGrath, who had his own good reason for the tears he was not ashamed to shed at the grave. We should have said something of the prominent part Barney took against his old enemy, Josiah Pickles, during the election, but that poor Barney was not presentable for the greater part of that time. He threw his whole soul into the work, and did Bob yeoman's service for the first few days of the canvass, but before the close of the week he was tempted into breaking the pledge. His pledge once broken he drank furiously to drown remembrance of the breach, and fell into the hands of the police—this time most justly. It would have gone hard with Barney if Lawley had not overtaken him in his carriage while he was being hauled off to the station. Lawley, recognising Mabel's *protégé*, stopped, and by a generous tip induced the police to commit Barney to his charge. Barney was shoved into the carriage, driven to Fenton Vicarage, and next morning, while overwhelmed with shame, remorse, and gratitude, was reconverted to temperance. Henceforth Barney worshipped him with Celtic fervour, and now lamented him with Celtic demonstrativeness. Nor did he again relapse. He prospered exceedingly as a nurseryman, and for the seventeen years of life that remained to him kept Lawley's grave beautiful with the choicest flowers the smoke of Fenton would allow to live.

At the grave-side also we take leave of the MacGucken, her eyes not so blinded by tears as to prevent her noticing that the sexton blurred with three handfuls of earth the coffin plate she had burnished like a mirror. She married a scavenger, a widower, with seven children, and a temper, whom it took her ten years to bury.

At the grave-side too we take leave of the Fenton folk, as warm-hearted a people as ever lived. For that day the factory was still, the mine empty, the school closed, and only the bedridden left in the houses. All men, women, and little children were in the church, the churchyard and its approaches, all in black, and nearly all in tears. A hymn was to have been sung at the grave-side, but the singers broke down before they had got through the first verse, and all the crowd round the grave seemed as at a given signal to break down with them. It was such a scene as no one present ever remembered or ever forgot.

Lastly, at Lawley's grave, we take leave of Lady Saddlethwaite, Mabel and George. Two days after George's return from Australia the three drove together on a pilgrimage to the grave, marked now by a cross of white marble, erected to his memory by the miners he had saved.

It was a silent drive, for even George was thinking of something else besides Mabel. As they approached the grave, three colliers (one with his hat off), who had been painfully spelling out the inscription, gave place to them.

It was a long inscription, loosely worded, but with this striking line at its close, 'Erected to his memory by those for whom he lived and died.'

'There's no finer epitaph in Westminster Abbey,' said Lady Saddlethwaite as she read out the line, and then, after a pause, she added, 'An heroic death is, after all, an easy thing compared with an heroic life, and there's no life more heroic than to choose to be unheroic and obscure for the sake of obscure and unheroic people.'

'It's the life of many a clergyman,' said George.

'It's the loveliest of all lives,' said Lady Saddlethwaite emphatically.

Mabel said nothing, but looked through tears a hope which lay still deep in her heart—the hope, or rather the faith, for it has a higher source and sustenance than hope, that he will,

> Perplext in faith, but pure in deeds,
> Beat at last his music out,

and find there is an honest place for him in a Church which is wide enough to comprehend a Clancy, a Gant, and a Lawley.

THE END.

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