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#96 in our series by Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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This eBook was produced by David Widger, widger@cecomet.net

BOOK X.

CHAPTER I.

BRUTE-FORCE.

We left Jasper Losely resting for the night at the small town near Fawley. The next morning he walked on to the old Manor-house. It was the same morning in which Lady Montfort had held her painful interview with Darrell; and just when Losely neared the gate that led into the small park, he saw her re-enter the hired vehicle in waiting for her. As the carriage rapidly drove past the miscreant, Lady Montfort looked forth from the window to snatch a last look at the scenes still so clear to her, through eyes blinded by despairing tears. Jasper thus caught sight of her countenance, and recognised her, though she did not even notice him. Surprised at the sight, he halted by the palings. What could have brought Lady Montfort there? Could the intimacy his fraud had broken off so many years ago be renewed? If so, why the extreme sadness on the face of which he had caught but a hurried, rapid glance? Be that as it might, it was no longer of the interest to him it had once been; and after pondering on the circumstance a minute or two, he advanced to the gate. But while his hand was on the latch, he again paused; how should he obtain admission to Darrell?--how announce himself? If in his own name, would not exclusion be certain?--if as a stranger on business, would Darrell be sure to receive him? As he was thus cogitating, his ear, which, with all his other organs of sense, was constitutionally fine as a savage's, caught sound of a faint rustle among the boughs of a thick copse which covered a part of the little park, terminating at its pales. The rustle came nearer and nearer; the branches were rudely displaced; and in a few moments more Guy Darrell himself came out from the copse, close by the gate, and opening it quickly, stood face to face with his abhorrent son-in-law. Jasper was startled, but the opportunity was not to be lost. "Mr. Darrell," he said, "I come here again to see you; vouchsafe me, this time, a calmer hearing." So changed was Losely, so absorbed in his own emotions Darrell, that the words did not at once waken up remembrance. "Another time," said Darrell, hastily moving on into the road; "I am not at leisure now." "Pardon me, NOW," said Losely, unconsciously bringing himself back to the tones and bearing of his earlier and more civilised years. "You do not remember me, sir; no wonder. But my name is Jasper Losely."

Darrell halted; then, as if spellbound, looked fixedly at the broad-shouldered burly frame before him, cased in its coarse pea-jacket, and in that rude form, and that defeated, bloated face, detected, though with strong effort, the wrecks of the masculine beauty which had ensnared his deceitful daughter. Jasper could not have selected a more unpropitious moment for his cause. Darrell was still too much under the influence of recent excitement and immense sorrow for that supremacy of prudence over passion which could alone have made him a willing listener to overtures from Jasper Losely. And about the man whose connection with himself was a thought of such bitter shame, there was now so unmistakably the air of settled degradation, that all Darrell's instincts of gentleman were

revolted--just at the very time, too, when his pride had been most chafed and assailed by the obtrusion of all that rendered most galling to him the very name of Jasper Losely. What! Was it that man's asserted child whom Lionel Haughton desired as a wife?--was the alliance with that man to be thus renewed and strengthened?--that man have another claim to him and his in right of parentage to the bride of his nearest kinsman? What! was it that man's child whom he was asked to recognise as of his own flesh and blood?--the last representative of his line? That man!--that! A flash shot from his bright eye, deepening its grey into dark; and, turning on his heel, Darrell said, through his compressed lips--

"You have heard, sir, I believe, through Colonel Morley, that only on condition of your permanent settlement in one of our distant colonies, or America if you prefer it, would I consent to assist you. I am of the same mind still. I can not parley with you myself. Colonel Morley is abroad, I believe. I refer you to my solicitor; you have seen him years ago; you know his address. No more, sir."

"This will not do, Mr. Darrell," said Losely, doggedly; and, planting himself right before Darrell's way, "I have come here on purpose to have all differences out with you, face to face--and I will--"

"You will!" said Darrell, pale with haughty anger, and with the impulse of his passion, his hand clenched. In the bravery of his nature, and the warmth of a temper constitutionally quick, he thought nothing of the strength and bulk of the insolent obtruder--nothing of the peril of odds so unequal in a personal encounter. But the dignity which pervaded all his habits, and often supplied to him the place of discretion, came, happily for himself, to his aid now. He strike a man whom he so despised!--he raise that man to his own level by the honour of a blow from his hand! Impossible! "You will!" he said. "Well, be it so. Are you come again to tell me that a child of my daughter lives, and that you won my daughter's fortune by a deliberate lie?"

"I am not come to speak of that girl, but of myself. I say that I have a claim on you, Mr. Darrell; I say that turn and twist the truth as you will, you are still my father-in-law, and that it is intolerable that I should be wanting bread, or driven into actual robbery, while my wife's father is a man of countless wealth, and has no heir except--but I will not now urge that child's cause; I am content to abandon it if so obnoxious to you. Do you wish me to cut a throat, and to be hanged, and all the world to hear the last dying speech and confession of Guy Darrell's son-in-law? Answer me, sir?"

"I answer you briefly and plainly. It is simply because I would not have that last disgrace on Guy Darrell's name that I offer you a subsistence in lands where you will be less exposed to those temptations which induced you to invest the sums that, by your own tale, had been obtained from me on false pretences, in the sink of a Paris gambling house. A subsistence that, if it does not pamper vice, at least places you beyond the necessity of crime, is at your option. Choose it or reject it as you will."

"Look you, Mr. Darrell," said Jasper, whose temper was fast giving way beneath the cold and galling scorn with which he was thus cast aside, "I am in a state so desperate, that, rather than starve, I may take what you so contemptuously fling to--your daughter's husband; but--"

"Knavel!" cried Darrell, interrupting him, "do you again and again urge it as a claim upon me, that you decyed from her home, under a false name, my only child; that she died in a foreign land--broken-hearted, if I have rightly heard is that a claim upon your duped victim's father?"

"It seems so, since your pride is compelled to own that the world would deem it one, if the jail chaplain took down the last words of your son-in-law! But, /basta, basta!/ hear me out, and spare hard names; for the blood is mounting into my brain, and I may become dangerous. Had any other man eyed, and scoffed, and railed at me as you have done, he would be lying dead and dumb as this stone at my foot; but you--are my father-in-law! Now, I care not to bargain with you what be the precise amount of my stipend if I obey your wish, and settle miserably in one of those raw, comfortless corners into which they who burthen this Old World are thrust out of sight. I would rather live my time out in this country--live it out in peace and for half what you may agree to give in transporting me. If you are to do anything for me, you had better do it so as to make me contented on easy terms to your own pockets, rather than to leave me dissatisfied, and willing to annoy you, which I could do somehow or other, even on the far side of the Herring Pond. I might keep to the letter of a bargain, live in Melbourne or Sydney, and take your money, and yet molest and trouble you by deputy. That girl, for instance--your grandchild; well, well, disown her if you please; but if I find out where she is, which I own I have not done yet, I might contrive to render her the plague of your life, even though I were in Australia."

"Ay," said Darrell, murmuring--"ay, ay; but"--(suddenly gathering himself up)--"No! Man, if she were my grandchild, your own child, could you talk of her thus? make her the object of so base a traffic, and such miserable threats? Wicked though you be, this were against nature! even in nature's wickedness--even in the son of a felon, and in the sharper of a hell. Pooh! I despise your malice. I will listen to you no longer. Out of my path."

"No!"

"No?"

"No, Guy Darrell, I have not yet done; you shall hear my terms, and accept them--a moderate sum down; say a few hundreds, and two hundred a-year to spend in London as I will--but out of your beat, out of your sight and hearing. Grant this, and I will never cross you again--never attempt to find, and, if I find by chance, never claim as my child by your daughter that wandering girl. I will never shame you by naming our connection. I will not offend the law, nor die by the hangman; yet I shall not live long, for I suffer much, and I drink hard."

The last words were spoken gloomily, not altogether without a strange

dreary pathos. And amidst all his just scorn and anger, the large human heart of Guy Darrell was for the moment touched. He was silent--his mind hesitated; would it not be well--would it not be just as safe to his own peace, and to that of the poor child, whom, no matter what her parentage, Darrell could not but desire to free from the claim set up by so bold a ruffian, to gratify Losely's wish, and let him remain in England, upon an allowance that would suffice for his subsistence? Unluckily for Jasper, it was while this doubt passed through Darrell's relenting mind, that the miscreant, who was shrewd enough to see that he had gained ground, but too coarse of apprehension to ascribe his advantage to its right cause, thought to strengthen his case by additional arguments. "You see, sir," resumed Jasper, in almost familiar accents, "that there is no dog so toothless but what he can bite, and no dog so savage but what, if you give him plenty to eat, he will serve you."

Darrell looked up, and his brow darkened.

Jasper continued: "I have hinted how I might plague you; perhaps, on the other hand, I might do you a good turn with that handsome lady who drove from your park-gate as I came up. Ah! you were once to have been married to her. I read in the newspapers that she has become a widow; you may marry her yet. There was a story against you once; her mother made use of it, and broke off an old engagement. I can set that story right."

"You can," said Darrell, with that exceeding calmness which comes from exceeding wrath; "and perhaps, sir, that story, whatever it might be, you invented. No dog so toothless as not to bite--eh, sir?"

"Well," returned Jasper, mistaking Darrell's composure, "at that time certainly it seemed my interest that you should not marry again; but /basta! basta! enough of bygones. If I bit once, I will serve now. Come, sir, you are a man of the world, let us close the bargain."

All Darrell's soul was now up in arms. What, then! this infamous wretch was the author of the tale by which the woman he had loved, as woman never was loved before, had excused her breach of faith, and been lost to him forever? And he learned this, while yet fresh from her presence--fresh from the agonising conviction that his heart loved still, but could not pardon. With a spring so sudden that it took Losely utterly by surprise, he leaped on the bravo, swung aside that huge bulk which Jasper had boasted four draymen could not stir against its will, cleared his way; and turning back before Losely had recovered his amaze, cried out: "Execrable villain! I revoke every offer to aid a life that has existed but to darken and desolate those it was permitted to approach. Starve or rob! perish miserably! And if I pour not on your head my parting curse, it is only because I know that man has no right to curse; and casting you back on your own evil self is the sole revenge which my belief in Heaven permits me."

Thus saying, Darrell strode on--swiftly, but not as one who flies. Jasper made three long bounds, and was almost at his side, when he was startled by the explosion of a gun. A pheasant fell dead on the road, and Darrell's gamekeeper, gun in hand, came through a gap in the hedge

opposite the park-pales, and, seeing his master close before him, approached to apologise for the suddenness of the shot.

Whatever Losely's intention in hastening after Darrell, he had no option now but to relinquish it, and drop back. The village itself was not many hundred yards distant; and, after all, what good in violence, except the gratified rage of the moment? Violence would not give to Jasper Losely the income that had just been within his grasp, and had so unexpectedly eluded it. He remained, therefore, in the lane, standing still, and seeing Darrell turn quietly into his park through another gate close to the Manor-house. The gamekeeper, meanwhile, picked up his bird, reloaded his gun, and eyed Jasper suspiciously askant. The baffled gladiator at length turned and walked slowly back to the town he had left. It was late in the afternoon when he once more gained his corner in the coffee-room of his commercial inn; and, to his annoyance, the room was crowded--it was market-day. Farmers, their business over, came in and out in quick succession; those who did not dine at the ordinaries taking their hasty snack, or stirrup-cup, while their horses were being saddled; others to look at the newspaper, or exchange a word on the state of markets and the nation. Jasper, wearied and sullen, had to wait for the refreshments he ordered, and meanwhile fell into a sort of half-doze, as was not now unusual in him in the intervals between food and mischief. From this creeping torpor he was suddenly roused by the sound of Darrell's name. Three farmers standing close beside him, their backs to the fire, were tenants to Darrell--two of them on the lands that Darrell had purchased in the years of his territorial ambition; the third resided in the hamlet of Fawley, and rented the larger portion of the comparatively barren acres to which the old patrimonial estate was circumscribed. These farmers were talking of their Squire's return to the county--of his sequestered mode of life--of his peculiar habits--of the great unfinished house which was left to rot. The Fawley tenant then said that it might not, be left to rot after all, and that the village workmen had been lately employed, and still were, in getting some of the rooms into rough order; and then he spoke of the long gallery in which the Squire had been arranging his fine pictures, and how he had run up a passage between that gallery and his own room, and how he would spend hours at day, and night too, in that awful long room as lone as a churchyard; and that Mr. Mills had said that his master now lived almost entirely either in that gallery or in the room in the roof of the old house--quite cut off, as you might say, except from the eyes of those dead pictures, or the rats, which had grown so excited at having their quarters in the new building invaded, that if you peeped in at the windows in moonlit nights you might see them in dozens, sitting on their haunches, as if holding council, or peering at the curious old things which lay beside the crates out of which they had been taken. Then the rustic gossips went on to talk of the rent-day which was at hand--of the audit feast, which, according to immemorial custom, was given at the old Manor-house on that same rent-day--supposed that Mr. Fairthorn would preside--that the Squire himself would not appear--made some incidental observations on their respective rents and wheat-crops--remarked that they should have a good moonlight for their ride back from the audit feast--cautioned each other, laughing, not to drink too much of Mr. Fairthorn's punch--and finally went their way, leaving on the mind of Jasper Losely

--who, leaning his scheming head on his powerful hand, had appeared in dull sleep all the while--these two facts: 1st, That on the third day from that which was then declining, sums amounting to thousands would find their way into Fawley Manor-house; and, 2ndly, That a communication existed between the unfinished, uninhabited building, and Darrell's own solitary chamber. As soon as he had fortified himself by food and drink, Jasper rose, paid for his refreshments and walked forth. Noiseless and rapid, skirting the hedgerows by the lane that led to Fawley, and scarcely distinguishable under their shadow, the human wild-beast strided on in scent of its quarry. It was night when Jasper once more reached the moss-grown pales round the demesnes of the old Manor-house. In a few minutes he was standing under the black shadow of the buttresses to the unfinished pile. His object was not, then, to assault, but to reconnoitre. He prowled round the irregular walls, guided in his survey, now and then, faintly by the stars--more constantly and clearly by the lights from the contiguous Manor-house--especially the light from that high chamber in the gable, close by which ran the thin framework of wood which linked the two buildings of stone, just as any frail scheme links together the Past which man has not enjoyed, with the Future he will not complete. Jasper came to a large bay unglazed window, its sill but a few feet from the ground, from which the boards, nailed across the mullions, had been removed by the workmen whom Darrell had employed on the interior, and were replaced but by a loose tarpaulin. Pulling aside this slight obstacle, Jasper had no difficulty in entering through the wide mullions into the dreary edifice. Finding himself in profound darkness, he had recourse to a lucifer-box which he had about him, and the waste of a dozen matches sufficed him to examine the ground. He was in a space intended by the architect for the principal staircase; a tall ladder, used by the recent workmen, was still left standing against the wall, the top of it resting on a landing-place opposite a doorway, that, from the richness of its half-finished architrave, obviously led to what had been designed for the state apartments; between the pediments was a slight temporary door of rough deal planks. Satisfied with his reconnoitre, Losely quitted the skeleton pile, and retraced his steps to the inn he had left. His musings by the way suggested to him the expediency, nay, the necessity, of an accomplice. Implements might be needed--disguises would be required--swift horses for flight to be hired--and, should the robbery succeed, the bulk of the spoil would be no doubt in bank-notes, which it would need some other hand than his own to dispose of, either at the bank next morning at the earliest hour, or by transmission abroad. For help in all this Jasper knew no one to compare to Cutts; nor did he suspect his old ally of any share in the conspiracy against him, of which he had been warned by Mrs. Crane. Resolving, therefore, to admit that long-trying friend into his confidence, and a share of the spoils, he quickened his pace, arrived at the railway-station in time for a late train to London, and, disdainful of the dangers by which he was threatened in return to any of the haunts of his late associates, gained the dark court wherein he had effected a lodgment on the night of his return to London, and roused Cutts from his slumbers with tales of an enterprise so promising, that the small man began to recover his ancient admiration for the genius to which he had bowed at Paris, but which had fallen into his contempt in London.

Mr. Cutts held a very peculiar position in that section of the great world to which he belonged. He possessed the advantage of an education superior to that of the generality of his companions, having been originally a clerk to an Old Bailey attorney, and having since that early day accomplished his natural shrewdness by a variety of speculative enterprises both at home and abroad. In these adventures he had not only contrived to make money, but, what is very rare with the foes of law, to save it. Being a bachelor, he was at small expenses, but besides his bachelor's lodging in the dark court, he had an establishment in the heart of the City, near the Thames, which was intrusted to the care of a maiden sister, as covetous and as crafty as himself. At this establishment, ostensibly a pawnbroker's, were received the goods which Cutts knew at his residence in the court were to be sold a bargain, having been obtained for nothing. It was chiefly by this business that the man enriched himself. But his net was one that took in fishes of all kinds. He was a general adviser to the invaders of law. If he shared in the schemes he advised, they were so sure to be successful, that he enjoyed the highest reputation for luck. It was but seldom that he did actively share in those schemes--lucky in what he shunned as in what he performed. He had made no untruthful boast to Mrs. Crane of the skill with which he had kept himself out of the fangs of justice. With a certain portion of the police he was indeed rather a favourite; for was anything mysteriously "lost," for which the owner would give a reward equal to its value in legal markets, Cutts was the man who would get it back. Of violence he had a wholesome dislike; not that he did not admire force in others--not that he was physically a coward--but that caution was his predominant characteristic. He employed force when required--set a just value on it--would plan a burglary, and dispose of the spoils; but it was only where the prize was great and the danger small, that he lent his hand to the work that his brain approved. When Losely proposed to him the robbery of a lone country-house, in which Jasper, making light of all perils, brought prominently forward the images of some thousands of pounds in gold and notes, guarded by an elderly gentleman, and to be approached with ease through an uninhabited building--Cutts thought it well worth personal investigation. Nor did he consider himself bound, by his general engagement to Mrs. Crane, to lose the chance of a sum so immeasurably greater than he could expect to obtain from her by revealing the plot and taking measures to frustrate it. Cutts was a most faithful and intelligent agent when he was properly paid, and had proved himself so to Mrs. Crane on various occasions. But then, to be paid properly meant a gain greater in serving than he could get in not serving. Hitherto it had been extremely lucrative to obey Mrs. Crane in saving Jasper from crime and danger. In this instance the lucre seemed all the other way. Accordingly, the next morning, having filled a saddle-bag with sundry necessaries, such as files, picklocks, masks--to which he added a choice selection of political tracts and newspapers--he and Jasper set out on two hired but strong and fleet hackneys to the neighbourhood of Fawley. They put up at a town on the other side of the Manor-house from that by which Jasper had approached it, and at about the same distance. After baiting their steeds, they proceeded to Fawley by the silent guide of a finger-post, gained the vicinity of the park, and Cutts, dismounting, flitted across the turf, and plunged himself into the hollows of the unfinished mansion while Jasper took charge of the horses

in a corner of the wooded lane. Cutts, pleased by the survey of the forlorn interior, ventured, in the stillness that reigned around, to mount the ladder, to apply a picklock to the door above, and, opening this with ease, crept into the long gallery, its walls covered with pictures. Through the crevices in another door at the extreme end gleamed a faint light. Cutts applied his eye to the chinks and keyhole, and saw that the light came from a room on the other side the narrow passage which connected the new house with the old. The door of that room was open, candles were on the table, and beside the table Cutts could distinguish the outline of a man's form seated--doubtless the owner; but the form did not seem "elderly." If inferior to Jasper's in physical power, it still was that of vigorous and unbroken manhood. Cutts did not like the appearance of that form, and he retreated to outer air with some misgivings. However, on rejoining Losely, he said: "As yet things look promising--place still as death--only one door locked, and that the common country lock, which a schoolboy might pick with his knife."

"Or a crooked nail," said Jasper.

"Ay, no better picklock in good hands. But there are other things besides locks to think of."

Cutts then hurried on to suggest that it was just the hour when some of the workmen employed on the premises might be found in the Fawley public-house; that he should ride on, dismount there, and take his chance of picking up details of useful information as to localities and household. He should represent himself as a commercial traveller on his road to the town they had quitted; he should take out his cheap newspapers and tracts; he should talk politics--all workmen love politics, especially the politics of cheap newspapers and tracts. He would rejoin Losely in an hour or so.

The bravo waited--his horse grazed--the moon came forth, stealing through the trees, bringing into fantastic light the melancholy old dwelling-house--the yet more melancholy new pile. Jasper was not, as we have seen, without certain superstitious fancies, and they had grown on him more of late as his brain had become chronically heated and his nerves relaxed by pain. He began to feel the awe of the silence and the moonlight; and some vague remembrances of earlier guiltless days--of a father's genial love--of joyous sensations in the priceless possession of youth and vigour--of the admiring smiles and cordial hands which his beauty, his daring, and high spirits had attracted towards him--of the all that he had been, mixed with the consciousness of what he was, and an uneasy conjecture of the probable depth of the final fall--came dimly over his thoughts, and seemed like the whispers of remorse. But it is rarely that man continues to lay blame on himself; and Jasper hastened to do, as many a better person does without a blush for his folly--viz., shift upon the innocent shoulders of fellow-men, or on the hazy outlines of that clouded form which ancient schools and modern plagiarists call sometimes "Circumstance," sometimes "Chance," sometimes "Fate," all the guilt due to his own wilful abuse of irrevocable hours.

With this consolatory creed came, of necessity--the devil's grand luxury, Revenge. Say to yourself, "For what I suffer I condemn another man, or I accuse the Arch-Invisible, be it a Destiny, be it a Maker!" and the logical sequel is to add evil to evil, folly to folly--to retort on the man who so wrongs, or on the Arch-Invisible who so afflicts you. Of all our passions, is not Revenge the one into which enters with the most zest a devil? For what is a devil?--A being whose sole work on earth is some revenge on God!

Jasper Losely was not by temperament vindictive; he was irascible, as the vain are--combative, aggressive, turbulent, by the impulse of animal spirits; but the premeditation of vengeance was foreign to a levity and egotism which abjured the self-sacrifice that is equally necessary to hatred as to love. But Guy Darrell had forced into his moral system a passion not native to it. Jasper had expected so much from his marriage with the great man's daughter--counted so thoroughly on her power to obtain pardon and confer wealth--and his disappointment had been so keen --been accompanied with such mortification--that he regarded the man whom he had most injured as the man who had most injured him. But not till now did his angry feelings assume the shape of a definite vengeance. So long as there was a chance that he could extort from Darrell the money that was the essential necessary to his life, he checked his thoughts whenever they suggested a profitless gratification of rage. But now that Darrell had so scornfully and so inexorably spurned all concession--now that nothing was to be wrung from him except by force--force and vengeance came together in his projects. And yet even in the daring outrage he was meditating, murder itself did not stand out as a thought accepted--no; what pleased his wild and turbid imagination was the idea of humiliating by terror the man who had humbled him. To penetrate into the home of this haughty scorner--to confront him in his own chamber at the dead of night, man to man, force to force; to say to him, "None now can deliver you from me--I come no more as a suppliant--I command you to accept my terms"; to gloat over the fears which, the strong man felt assured, would bow the rich man to beg for mercy at his feet;--this was the picture which Jasper Losely conjured up; and even the spoil to be won by violence smiled on him less than the grand position which the violence itself would bestow. Are not nine murders out of ten fashioned thus from conception into deed? "Oh that my enemy were but before me face to face --none to part us!" says the vindictive dreamer. Well, and what then? There, his imagination halts--there he drops the sable curtain; he goes not on to say, "Why, then another murder will be added to the long catalogue from Cain." He palters with his deadly wish, and mutters, perhaps, at most, "Why, then--come what may!"

Losely continued to gaze on the pale walls gleaming through the wintry boughs, as the moon rose high and higher. And now out broke the light from Darrell's lofty casement, and Losely smiled fiercely, and muttered --hark! the very words--"And then! come what may!"

Hoofs are now heard on the hard road, and Jasper is joined by his accomplice.

"Well!" said Jasper.

"Mount!" returned Cutts; "I have much to say as we ride."

"This will not do," resumed Cutts, as they sped fast down the lane; "why, you never told me all the drawbacks. There are no less than four men in the house--two servants besides the master and his secretary; and one of those servants, the butler or valet, has firearms, and knows how to use them."

"Pshaw!" said Jasper scoffingly; "is that all? Am I not a match for four?"

"No, it is not all; you told me the master of the house was a retired elderly man, and you mentioned his name. But you never told me that your Mr. Darrell was the famous lawyer and Parliament man--a man about whom the newspapers have been writing the last six months."

"What does that signify?"

"Signify! Just this, that there will be ten times more row about the affair you propose than there would be if it concerned only a stupid old country squire, and therefore ten times as much danger. Besides, on principle I don't like to have anything to do with lawyers--a cantankerous, spiteful set of fellows. And this Guy Darrell! Why, General Jas., I have seen the man. He cross-examined me once when I was a witness on a case of fraud, and turned me inside out with as much ease as if I had been an old pincushion stuffed with bran. I think I see his eye now, and I would as lief have a loaded pistol at my head as that eye again fixed on mine."

"Pooh! You have brought a mask; and, besides, YOU need not see him; I can face him alone."

"No, no; there might be murder! I never mix myself with things of that kind, on principle; your plan will not do. There might be a much safer chance of more swag in a very different sort of scheme. I hear that the pictures in that ghostly long room I crept through are worth a mint of money. Now, pictures of great value are well known, and there are collectors abroad who would pay almost any price for some pictures, and never ask where they came from; hide them for some years perhaps, and not bring them forth till any tales that would hurt us had died away. This would be safe, I say. If the pictures are small, no one in the old house need be disturbed. I can learn from some of the trade what pictures Darrell really has that would fetch a high price, and then look out for customers abroad. This will take a little time, but be worth waiting for."

"I will not wait," said Jasper, fiercely; "and you are a coward. I have resolved that to-morrow night I will be in that man's room, and that man shall be on his knees before me."

Cutts turned sharply round on his saddle, and by the aid of the moonlight surveyed Losely's countenance. "Oh, I see," he said, "there is more than

robbery in your mind. You have some feeling of hate--of vengeance; the man has injured you?"

"He has treated me as if I were a dog," said Jasper; "and a dog can bite."

Cutts mused a few moments. "I have heard you talk at times about some rich relation or connection on whom you had claims; Darrell is the man, I suppose?"

"He is; and hark ye, Cutts, if you try to balk me here, I will wring your neck off. And since I have told you so much, I will tell you this much more--that I don't think there is the danger you count on; for I don't mean to take Darrell's blood, and I believe he would not take mine."

"But there may be a struggle--and then?"

"Ay, if so, and then--man to man," replied Jasper, mutteringly.

Nothing more was said, but both spurred on their horses to a quicker pace. The sparks flashed from the hoofs. Now through the moonlight, now under shade of the boughs, scoured on the riders--Losely's broad chest and marked countenance, once beautiful, now fearful, formidably defined even under the shadows--his comrade's unsubstantial figure and goblin features flitting vague even under the moonlight.

The town they had left came in sight, and by this time Cutts had resolved on the course his prudence suggested to him. The discovery that, in the proposed enterprise, Losely had a personal feeling of revenge to satisfy had sufficed to decide the accomplice peremptorily to have nothing to do with the affair. It was his rule to abstain from all transactions in which fierce passions were engaged. And the quarrels between relations or connections were especially those which his experience of human nature told him brought risk upon all intermeddlers. But he saw that Jasper was desperate; that the rage of the bravo might be easily turned on himself; and therefore, since it was no use to argue, it would be discreet to dissimulate. Accordingly, when they reached their inn, and were seated over their brandy-and-water, Cutts resumed the conversation, appeared gradually to yield to Jasper's reasonings, concerted with him the whole plan for the next night's operations, and took care meanwhile to pass the brandy. The day had scarcely broken before Cutts was off, with his bag of implements and tracts. He would have fain carried off also both the horses; but the ostler, surly at being knocked up at so early an hour, might not have surrendered the one ridden by Jasper, without Jasper's own order to do so. Cutts, however, bade the ostler be sure and tell the gentleman, before going away, that he, Cutts, strongly advised him "to have nothing to do with the bullocks."

Cutts, on arriving in London, went straight to Mrs. Crane's old lodging opposite to Jasper's. But she had now removed to Podden Place, and left no address. On reaching his own home, Cutts, however, found a note from her, stating that she should be at her old lodging that evening, if he would call at half-past nine o'clock; for, indeed, she had been expecting

Jasper's promised visit--had learned that he had left his lodgings, and was naturally anxious to learn from Cutts what had become of him. When Cutts called at the appointed hour and told his story, Arabella Crane immediately recognised all the danger which her informant had so prudently shunned. Nor was she comforted by Cutts's assurance that Jasper, on finding himself deserted, would have no option but to abandon, or at least postpone, an enterprise that, undertaken singly, would be too rash even for his reckless temerity. As it had become the object of her life to save Losely from justice, so she now shrunk from denouncing to justice his meditated crime; and the idea of recurring to Colonel Morley happily flashed upon her.

Having thus explained to the reader these antecedents in the narrative, we return to Jasper. He did not rise till late at noon; and as he was generally somewhat stupefied on rising by the drink he had taken the night before, and by the congested brain which the heaviness of such sleep produced, he could not at first believe that Cutts had altogether abandoned the enterprise--rather thought that, with his habitual wariness, that Ulysses of the Profession had gone forth to collect further information in the neighbourhood of the proposed scene of action. He was not fully undeceived in this belief till somewhat late in the day, when, strolling into the stable-yard, the ostler, concluding from the gentleman's goodly thews and size that he was a north-country grazier, delivered Cutts's allegorical caution against the bullocks.

Thus abandoned, Jasper's desperate project only acquired a still more concentrated purpose and a ruder simplicity of action. His original idea, on first conceiving the plan of robbery, had been to enter into Darrell's presence disguised and masked. Even, however, before Cutts deserted him; the mere hope of plunder had become subordinate to the desire of a personal triumph; and now that Cutts had left him to himself, and carried away the means of disguise, Jasper felt rather pleased than otherwise at the thought that his design should have none of the characteristics of a vulgar burglary. No mask now; his front should be as open as his demand. Cutts's report of the facility of penetrating into Darrell's very room also lessened the uses of an accomplice. And in the remodification of his first hasty plan of common place midnight stealthy robbery, he would no longer even require an assistant to dispose of the plunder he might gain.

Darrell should now yield to his exactions, as a garrison surprised accepts the terms of its conqueror. There would be no flight, no hiding, no fear of notes stopped at banks. He would march out, hand on haunch, with those immunities of booty that belong to the honours of war. Pleasing his self-conceit with so gallant a view of his meditated exploit, Jasper sauntered at dark into the town, bought a few long narrow nails and a small hammer, and returning to his room, by the aid of the fire, the tongs, and the hammer, he fashioned these nails, with an ease and quickness which showed an expert practitioner, into instruments that would readily move the wards of any common country-made lock. He did not care for weapons. He trusted at need to his own powerful hands. It was no longer, too, the affair of a robber unknown, unguessed, who might have to fight his way out of an alarmed household. It was but the visit which

he, Jasper Losely, Esquire, thought fit to pay, however unceremoniously and unseasonably, to the house of a father-in-law! At the worst, should he fail in finding Darrell, or securing an unwitnessed interview--should he, instead, alarm the household, it would be a proof of the integrity of his intentions that he had no weapons save those which Nature bestows on the wild man as the mightiest of her wild beasts. At night he mounted his horse, but went out of his way, keeping the high-road for an hour or two, in order to allow ample time for the farmers to have quitted the rent-feast, and the old Manor-house to be hushed in sleep. At last, when he judged the coast clear and the hour ripe, he wound back into the lane towards Fawley; and when the spire of its hamlet-church came in sight through the frosty starlit air, he dismounted--led the horse into one of the thick beech-woods that make the prevailing characteristic of the wild country round that sequestered dwelling-place--fastened the animal to a tree, and stalked towards the park-pales on foot. Lightly, as a wolf enters a sheepfold, he swung himself over the moss-grown fence; he gained the buttresses of the great raw pile; high and clear above, from Darrell's chamber, streamed the light; all the rest of the old house was closed and dark, buried no doubt in slumber.

He is now in the hollows of the skeleton pile; he mounts the ladder; the lock of the door before him yields to his rude implements but artful hand. He is in the long gallery; the moonlight comes broad and clear through the large casements. What wealth of art is on the walls! but how profitless to the robber's greed. There, through the very halls which the master had built in the day of his ambition, saying to himself, "These are for far posterity," the step of Violence, it may be of Murder, takes its stealthy way to the room of the childless man! Through the uncompleted pile, towards the uncompleted life, strides the terrible step.

The last door yields noiselessly. The small wooden corridor, narrow as the drawbridge which in ancient fortresses was swung between the commandant's room in the topmost story and some opposing wall, is before him. And Darrell's own door is half open; lights on the table--logs burning bright on the hearth. Cautiously Losely looked through the aperture. Darrell was not there; the place was solitary; but the opposite door was open also. Losely's fine ear caught the sound of a slight movement of a footstep in the room just below, to which that opposite door admitted. In an instant the robber glided within the chamber--closed and locked the door by which he had entered, retaining the key about his person. The next stride brought him to the hearth. Beside it hung the bell-rope common in old-fashioned houses. Losely looked round; on the table, by the writing implements, lay a pen-knife. In another moment the rope was cut, high out of Darrell's reach, and flung aside. The hearth, being adapted but for logwood fires, furnished not those implements in which, at a moment of need, the owner may find an available weapon--only a slight pair of brass wood-pincers, and a shovel equally frail. Such as they were, however, Jasper quietly removed and hid them behind a heavy old bureau. Steps were now heard mounting the stair that led into the chamber; Losely shrunk back into the recess beside the mantelpiece. Darrell entered, with a book in his hand, for which he had indeed quitted his chamber--a volume containing the last Act

of Parliament relating to Public Trusts, which had been sent to him by his solicitor; for he is creating a deed of trust, to insure to the nation the Darrell antiquities, in the name of his father, the antiquarian.

Darrell advanced to the writing-table, which stood in the centre of the room; laid down the book, and sighed--the short, quick, impatient sigh which had become one of his peculiar habits. The robber stole from the recess, and, gliding round to the door by which Darrell had entered, while the back of the master was still towards him, set fast the lock, and appropriated the key as he had done at the door which had admitted himself. Though the noise in that operation was but slight, it roused Darrell from his abstracted thoughts. He turned quickly, and at the same moment Losely advanced towards him.

At once Darrell comprehended his danger. His rapid glance took in all the precautions by which the intruder proclaimed his lawless purpose--the closed door, the bell rope cut off. There, between those four secret walls, must pass the interview between himself and the desperado. He was unarmed, but he was not daunted. It was but man to man. Losely had for him his vast physical strength, his penury, despair, and vindictive purpose. Darrell had in his favour the intellect which gives presence of mind; the energy of nerve, which is no more to be seen in the sinew and bone than the fluid which fells can be seen in the jars and the wires; and that superb kind of pride, which, if terror be felt, makes its action impossible, because a disgrace, and bravery a matter of course, simply because it is honour.

As the bravo approached, by a calm and slight movement Darrell drew to the other side of the table, placing that obstacle between himself and Losely, and, extending his arm, said: "Hold, sir; I forbid you to advance another step. You are here, no matter how, to re-urge your claims on me. Be seated; I will listen to you."

Darrell's composure took Losely so by surprise that mechanically he obeyed the command thus tranquilly laid upon him, and sunk into a chair--facing Darrell with a sinister under-look from his sullen brow. "Ah!" he said, "you will listen to me now; but my terms have risen."

Darrell, who had also seated himself, made no answer; but his face was resolute and his eye watchful. The ruffian resumed, in a gruffer tone: "My terms have risen, Mr. Darrell."

"Have they, sir? and why?"

"Why! Because no one can come to your aid here; because here you cannot escape; because here you are in my power!"

"Rather, sir, I listen to you because here you are under my roof-tree; and it is you who are in my power!"

"Yours! Look round; the doors are locked on you. Perhaps you think your shouts, your cries might bring aid to you. Attempt it--raise your voice

--and I strangle you with these hands."

"If I do not raise my voice, it is, first, because I should be ashamed of myself if I required aid against one man; and, secondly, because I would not expose to my dependents a would-be assassin in him whom my lost child called husband. Hush, sir, hush, or your own voice will alarm those who sleep below. And now, what is it you ask? Be plain, sir, and be brief."

"Well, if you like to take matters coolly, I have no objection. These are my terms. You have received large sums this day; those sums are in your house, probably in that bureau; and your life is at my will."

"You ask the monies paid for rent to-day. True, they are in the house; but they are not in my apartments. They were received by another; they are kept by another. In vain, through the windings and passages of this old house, would you seek to find the room in which he stores them. In doing so you will pass by the door of a servant who sleeps so lightly that the chances are that he will hear you; he is armed with a blunderbuss, and with pistols. You say to me, 'Your money or your life.' I say to you, in reply, 'Neither: attempt to seize the money, and your own life is lost.'"

"Miser! I don't believe that sums so large are not in your own keeping. And even if they are not, you shall show me where they are; you shall lead me through those windings and passages of which you so tenderly warn me, my hand on your throat. And if servants wake, or danger threaten me, it is you who shall save me, or die! Ha! you do not fear me--eh, Mr. Darrell!" And Losely rose.

"I do not fear you," replied Darrell, still seated. "I cannot conceive that you are here with no other design than a profitless murder. You are here, you say, to make terms; it will be time enough to see whose life is endangered when all your propositions have been stated. As yet you have only suggested a robbery, to which you ask me to assist you. Impossible! Grant even that you were able to murder me, you would be just as far off from your booty. And yet you say your terms have risen! To me they seem fallen to nothing! Have you anything else to say?"

The calmness of Darrell, so supremely displayed in this irony, began to tell upon the ruffian--the magnetism of the great man's eye and voice, and steadfast courage, gradually gaining power over the wild, inferior animal. Trying to recover his constitutional audacity, Jasper said, with a tone of the old rollicking voice: "Well, Mr. Darrell, it is all one to me how I wring from you, in your own house, what you refused me when I was a suppliant on the road. Fair means are pleasanter than foul. I am a gentleman--the grandson of Sir Julian Losely, of Losely Hall; I am your son-in-law; and I am starving. This must not be; write me a cheque."

Darrell dipped his pen in the ink, and drew the paper towards him.

"Oho! you don't fear me, eh? This is not done from fear, mind--all out of pure love and compassion, my kind father-in-law. You will write me a cheque for five thousand pounds--come, I am moderate--your life is worth

a precious deal more than that. Hand me the cheque--I will trust to your honour to give me no trouble in cashing it, and bid you good-night-my father-in-law."

As Losely ceased with a mocking laugh, Darrell sprang up quickly, threw open the small casement which was within his reach, and flung from it the paper on which he had been writing, and which he wrapt round the heavy armorial seal that lay on the table.

Losely bounded towards him. "What means that? What have you done?"

"Saved your life and mine, Jasper Losely," said Darrell, solemnly, and catching the arm that was raised against him. "We are now upon equal terms."

"I understand," growled the tiger, as the slaver gathered to his lips--
"you think by that paper to summon some one to your aid."

"Not so--that paper is useless while I live. Look forth--the moonlight is on the roofs below--can you see where that paper has fallen? On the ledge of a parapet that your foot could not reach. It faces the window of a room in which one of my household sleeps; it will meet his eye in the morning when the shutters are unbarred; and on that paper are writ these words: 'If I am this night murdered, the murderer is Jasper Losely,' and the paper is signed by my name. Back, sir--would you doom yourself to the gibbet?"

Darrell released the dread arm he had arrested, and Losely stared at him, amazed, bewildered.

Darrell resumed: "And now I tell you plainly that I can accede to no terms put to me thus. I can sign my hand to no order that you may dictate, because that would be to sign myself a coward--and my name is Darrell!"

"Down on your knees, proud man--sign you shall, and on your knees! I care not now for gold--I care not now a rush for my life. I came here to humble the man who from first to last has so scornfully humbled me. --And I will, I will! On your knees--on your knees!"

The robber flung himself forward; but Darrell, whose eye had never quitted the foe, was prepared for and eluded the rush. Losely, missing his object, lost his balance, struck against the edge of the table which partially interposed between himself and his prey, and was only saved from falling by the close neighbourhood of the wall, on which he came with a shock that for the moment well-nigh stunned him. Meanwhile Darrell had gained the hearth, and snatched from it a large log half-burning. Jasper, recovering himself, dashed the long matted hair from his eyes, and, seeing undismayed the formidable weapon with which he was menaced, cowered for a second and deadlier spring.

"Stay, stay, stay, parricide and madman!" cried Darrell, his eye flashing brighter than the brand. "It is not my life I plead for--it is yours.

Remember, if I fall by your hand, no hope and no refuge are left to you! In the name of my dead child, and under the eye of avenging Heaven, I strike down the fury that blinds you, and I scare back your soul from the abyss!"

So ineffably grand were the man's look and gesture--so full of sonorous terror the swell of his matchless all-conquering voice, that Losely, in his midmost rage, stood awed and spellbound. His breast heaved, his eye fell, his frame collapsed, even his very tongue seemed to cleave to the parched roof of his mouth. Whether the effect so suddenly produced might have continued, or whether the startled miscreant might not have lashed himself into renewed wrath and inexpiable crime, passes out of conjecture. At that instant simultaneously were heard hurried footsteps in the corridor without, violent blows on the door, and voices exclaiming, "Open, open!--Darrell, Darrell!--" while the bell at the portals of the old house rang fast and shrill.

"Ho--is it so?" growled Losely, recovering himself at those unwelcome sounds. "But do not think that I will be caught thus, like a rat in a trap. No--I will--"

"Hist!" interrupted Darrell, dropping the brand, and advancing quickly on the ruffian--" Hist!--let no one know that my daughter's husband came here with a felon's purpose. Sit down--down I say; it is for my house's honour that you should be safe." And suddenly placing both hands on Losely's broad shoulder, he forced him into a seat. During these few hurried words, the strokes at the door and the shouts without had been continued, and the door shook on its yielding hinges.

"The key--the key!" whispered Darrell.

But the bravo was stupefied by the suddenness with which his rage had been cowed, his design baffled, his position changed from the man dictating laws and threatening life, to the man protected by his intended victim. And he was so slow in even comprehending the meaning of Darrell's order, that Darrell had scarcely snatched the keys less from his hand than from the pouch to which he at last mechanically pointed, when the door was burst open, and Lionel Haughton, Alban Morley, and the Colonel's servant were in the room. Not one of them, at the first glance, perceived the inmates of the chamber, who were at the right of their entrance, by the angle of the wall and in shadow. But out came Darrell's calm voice:

"Alban! Lionel!--welcome always; but what brings you hither at such an hour, with such clamour? Armed too!"

The three men stood petrified. There sat, peaceably enough, a large dark form, its hands on its knees, its head bent down, so that the features were not, distinguishable; and over the chair in which this bending figure was thus confusedly gathered up leant Guy Darrell, with quiet ease--no trace of fear nor of past danger in his face, which, though very pale, was serene, with a slight smile on the firm lips.

"Well," muttered Alban Morley, slowly lowering his pistol--"well, I am surprised!--yes, for the first time in twenty years, I am surprised!"

"Surprised perhaps to find me at this hour still up, and with a person upon business--the door locked. However, mutual explanations later. Of course you stay here to night. My business with this--this visitor, is now over. Lionel, open that door--here is the key.--Sir"--(he touched Losely by the shoulder, and whispered in his ear, "Rise and speak not,") --(aloud) "Sir, I need not detain you longer. Allow me to show you the way out of this rambling old house."

Jasper rose like one half asleep, and, still bending his form and hiding his face, followed Darrell down the private stair, through the study, the library, into the hall, the Colonel's servant lighting the way; and Lionel and Morley, still too amazed for words, bringing up the rear. The servant drew the heavy bolts from the front door; and now the household had caught alarm. Mills first appeared with the blunderbuss, then the footman, then Fairthorn.

"Stand back, there!" cried Darrell, and he opened the door himself to Losely. "Sir," said he then, as they stood in the moonlight, "mark that I told you truly--you were in my power; and if the events of this night can lead you to acknowledge a watchful Providence, and recall with a shudder the crime from which you have been saved, why, then, I too, out of gratitude to Heaven, may think of means by which to free others from the peril of your despair."

Losely made no answer, but slunk off with a fast, furtive stride, hastening out of the moonlit sward into the gloom of the leafless trees.

CHAPTER II.

IF THE LION EVER WEAR THE FOX'S HIDE, STILL HE WEARS IT AS THE LION.

When Darrell was alone with Lionel and Alban Morley, the calm with which he had before startled them vanished. He poured out his thanks with deep emotion. "Forgive me; not in the presence of a servant could I say, 'You have saved me from an unnatural strife, and my daughter's husband from a murderer's end.' But by what wondrous mercy did you learn my danger? Were you sent to my aid?"

Alban briefly explained. "You may judge," he said in conclusion, "how great was our anxiety, when, following the instructions of our guide, while our driver rang his alarum at the front portals, we made our entrance into yon ribs of stone, found the doors already opened, and feared we might be too late. But, meanwhile, the poor woman waits without in the carriage that brought us from the station. I must go and relieve her mind."

"And bring her hither," cried Darrell, "to receive my gratitude. Stay,

Alban; while you leave me with her, you will speak aside to Mills; tell him that you heard there was an attempt to be made on the house, and came to frustrate it, but that your fears were exaggerated; the man was more a half-insane mendicant than a robber. Be sure, at least, that his identity with Losely be not surmised, and bid Mills treat the affair lightly. Public men are exposed, you know, to assaults from crackbrained enthusiasts; or stay--I once was a lawyer, and" (continued Darrell, whose irony had become so integral an attribute of his mind as to be proof against all trial) "there are men so out of their wits as to fancy a lawyer has ruined them! Lionel, tell poor Dick Fairthorn to come to me." When the musician entered, Darrell whispered to him: "Go back to your room--open your casement--step out on to the parapet--you will see something white; it is a scrap of paper wrapped round my old armorial seal. Bring it to me just as it is, Dick. That poor young Lionel, we must keep him here a day or two; mind, no prickles for him, Dick."

CHAPTER III.

ARABELLA CRANE VERSUS GUY DARRELL; OR, WOMAN VERSUS LAWYER. IN THE COURTS, LAWYER WOULD WIN; BUT IN A PRIVATE PARLOUR, FOOT TO FOOT, AND TONGUE TO TONGUE, LAWYER HAS NOT A CHANCE.

Arabella Crane entered the room: Darrell hesitated--the remembrances attached to her were so painful and repugnant. But did he not now owe to her perhaps his very life? He passed his hand rapidly over his brow, as if to sweep away all earlier recollections, and, advancing quickly, extended that hand to her. The stern woman shook her head, and rejected the proffered greeting.

"You owe me no thanks," she said, in her harsh, ungracious accents; "I sought to save not you, but him."

"How!" said Darrell, startled; "you feel no resentment against the man who injured and betrayed you?"

"What my feelings may be towards him are not for you to conjecture; man could not conjecture them; I am woman. What they once were I might blush for; what they are now, I could own without shame. But you, Mr. Darrell,--you, in the hour of my uttermost anguish, when all my future was laid desolate, and the world lay crushed at my feet--you--man, chivalrous man!--you had for me no human compassion--you thrust me in scorn from your doors--you saw in my woe nothing but my error--you sent me forth, stripped of reputation, branded by your contempt, to famine or to suicide. And you wonder that I feel less resentment against him who wronged me than against you, who, knowing me wronged, only disdained my grief. The answer is plain--the scorn of the man she only revered leaves to a woman no memory to mitigate its bitterness and gall. The wrongs inflicted by the man she loved may leave, what they have left to me, an undying sense of a past existence--radiant, joyous, hopeful; of a time when the earth seemed covered with blossoms, just ready to burst

into bloom; when the skies through their haze took the rose-hues as the sun seemed about to rise. The memory that I once was happy, at least then, I owe to him who injured and betrayed me. To you, when happiness was lost to me forever, what do I owe? Tell me."

Struck by her words, more by her impressive manner, though not recognising the plea by which the defendant thus raised herself into the accuser, Darrell answered gently "Pardon me; this is no moment to revive recollections of anger on my part; but reflect, I entreat you, and you will feel that I was not too harsh. In the same position any other man would not have been less severe."

"Any other man!" she exclaimed; "ay, possibly! but would the scorn of any other man so have crushed self-esteem? The injuries of the wicked do not sour us against the good; but the scoff of the good leaves us malignant against virtue itself. Any other man! Tut! Genius is bound to be indulgent. It should know human errors so well--has, with its large luminous forces, such errors itself when it deigns to be human, that, where others may scorn, genius should only pity." She paused a moment, and then slowly resumed. "And pity was my due. Had you, or had any one lofty as yourself in reputed honour, but said to me, 'Thou hast sinned, thou must suffer; but sin itself needs compassion, and compassion forbids thee to despair,' why, then, I might have been gentler to the things of earth, and less steeled against the influences of Heaven than I have been. That is all no matter now. Mr. Darrell, I would not part from you with angry and bitter sentiments. Colonel Morley tells me that you have not only let the man, whom we need not name, go free, but that you have guarded the secret of his designs. For this I thank you. I thank you, because what is left of that blasted and deformed existence I have taken into mine. And I would save that man from his own devices as I would save my soul from its own temptations. Are you large-hearted enough to comprehend me? Look in my face--you have seen his; all earthly love is erased and blotted out of both."

Guy Darrell bowed his head in respect that partook of awe.

"You, too," said the grim woman, after a pause, and approaching him nearer--"you, too, have loved, I am told, and you, too, were forsaken."

He recoiled and--shuddered.

"What is left to your heart of its ancient folly? I should like to know! I am curious to learn if there be a man who can feel as woman! Have you only resentment? have you only disdain? have you only vengeance? have you pity? or have you the jealous absorbing desire, surviving the affection from which it sprang, that still the life wrenched from you shall owe, despite itself, a melancholy allegiance to your own?"

Darrell impatiently waved his hand to forbid further questions; and it needed all his sense of the service this woman had just rendered him to repress his haughty displeasure at so close an approach to his torturing secrets.

Arabella's dark bright eyes rested on his knitted brow, for a moment, wistfully, musingly. Then she said: "I see! man's inflexible pride--no pardon there! But own, at least, that you have suffered."

"Suffered!" groaned Darrell involuntarily, and pressing his hand to his heart.

"You have!--and you own it! Fellow-sufferer, I have no more anger against you. Neither should pity, but let each respect the other. A few words more,--this child!"

"Ay--ay--this child! you will be truthful. You will not seek to deceive me--you know that she--she--claimed by that assassin, reared by his convict father--she is no daughter of my line!"

"What! would it then be no joy to know that your line did not close with yourself--that your child might--"

"Cease, madam, cease--it matters not to a man nor to a race when it perish, so that it perish at last with honour. Who would have either himself or his lineage live on into a day when the escutcheon is blotted and the name disgraced? No; if that be Matilda's child, tell me, and I will bear, as man may do, the last calamity which the will of Heaven may inflict. If, as I have all reason to think, the tale be an imposture, speak and give me the sole comfort to which I would cling amidst the ruin of all other hopes."

"Verily," said Arabella, with a kind of musing wonder in the tone of her softened voice; "verily, has a man's heart the same throb and fibre as a woman's? Had I a child like that blue-eyed wanderer with the frail form needing protection, and the brave spirit that ennoble softness, what would be my pride! my bliss! Talk of shame--disgrace! Fie--fie--the more the evil of others darkened one so innocent, the more cause to love and shelter her. But--I--am childless! Shall I tell you that the offence which lies heaviest on my conscience has been my cruelty to that girl? She was given an infant to my care. I saw in her the daughter of that false, false, mean, deceiving friend, who had taken my confidence, and bought, with her supposed heritage, the man sworn by all oaths to me. I saw in her, too, your descendant, your rightful heiress. I rejoiced in a revenge on your daughter and yourself. Think not I would have foisted her on your notice! No. I would have kept her without culture, without consciousness of a higher lot; and when I gave her up to her grandsire, the convict, it was a triumph to think that Matilda's child would be an outcast. Terrible thought! but I was mad then. But that poor convict whom you, in your worldly arrogance, so loftily despise--he took to his breast what was flung away as a worthless weed. And if the flower keep the promise of the bud, never flower so fair bloomed from your vaunted stem! And yet you would bless me if I said, 'Pass on, childless man; she is nothing to you!'"

"Madam, let us not argue. As you yourself justly imply, man's heart and woman's must each know throbs that never are, and never should be, familiar to the other. I repeat my question, and again I implore your

answer."

"I cannot answer for certain; and I am fearful of answering at all, lest on a point so important I should mislead you. Matilda's child? Jasper affirmed it to me. His father believed him--I believed him. I never had the shadow of a doubt till--"

"Till what? For Heaven's sake speak."

"Till about five years ago, or somewhat more, I saw a letter from Gabrielle Desmaret's, and--"

"Ah! which made you suspect, as I do, that the child is Gabrielle Desmaret's daughter."

Arabella reared her crest as a serpent before it strikes. "Gabrielle's daughter! You think so. Her child that I sheltered! Her child for whom I have just pleaded to you! Hers!" She suddenly became silent. Evidently that idea had never before struck her; evidently it now shocked her; evidently something was passing through her mind which did not allow that idea to be dismissed. As Darrell was about to address her, she exclaimed abruptly: "No! say no more now. You may hear from me again should I learn what may decide at least this doubt one way or the other. Farewell, sir."

"Not yet. Permit me to remind you that you have saved the life of a man whose wealth is immense."

"Mr. Darrell, my wealth in relation to my wants is perhaps immense as yours, for I do not spend what I possess."

"But this unhappy outlaw, whom you would save from himself, can henceforth be to you but a burthen and a charge. After what has passed to-night, I do tremble to think that penury may whisper other houses to rob, other lives to menace. Let me, then, place at your disposal, to be employed in such mode as you deem the best, a sum that may suffice to secure an object which we have in common."

"No, Mr. Darrell," said Arabella, fiercely; "whatever he be, never with my consent shall Jasper Losely be beholden to you for alms. If money can save him from shame and a dreadful death, that money shall be mine. I have said it. And, hark you, Mr. Darrell, what is repentance without atonement? I say not that I repent; but I do know that I seek to atone."

The iron-grey robe fluttered an instant, and then vanished from the room.

When Alban Morley returned to the library, he saw Darrell at the farther corner of the room, on his knees. Well might Guy Darrell thank Heaven for the mercies vouchsafed to him that night. Life preserved? Is that all? Might life yet be bettered and gladdened? Was there aught in the grim woman's words that might bequeath thoughts which reflection would ripen into influences over action?--aught that might suggest the cases in which, not ignobly, Pity might subjugate Scorn? In the royal abode of

that Soul, does Pride only fortify Honour?--is it but the mild king, not the imperial despot? Would it blind, as its rival, the Reason? Would it chain, as a rebel, the Heart? Would it man the dominions, that might be serene, by the treasures it wastes--by the wars it provokes? Self-knowledge! self-knowledge! From Heaven, indeed, descends the precept, "KNOW THYSELF." That truth was told to us by the old heathen oracle. But what old heathen oracle has told us how to know?

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN-EATER HUMILIATED. HE ENCOUNTERS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE IN A TRAVELLER, WHO, LIKE SHAKESPEARE'S JAQUES, IS "A MELANCHOLY FELLOW"; WHO ALSO, LIKE JAQUES, HATH "GREAT REASON TO BE BAD"; AND WHO, STILL LIKE JAQUES, IS "FULL OF MATTER."

Jasper Losely rode slowly on through the clear frosty night; not back to the country town which he had left on his hateful errand, nor into the broad road to London. With a strange desire to avoid the haunts of men, he selected--at each choice of way in the many paths branching right and left, between waste and woodland--the lane that seemed the narrowest and the dimmest. It was not remorse that gnawed him, neither was it mere mercenary disappointment, nor even the pang of baffled vengeance--it was the profound humiliation of diseased self-love--the conviction that, with all his brute power, he had been powerless in the very time and scene in which he had pictured to himself so complete a triumph. Even the quiet with which he had escaped was a mortifying recollection. Capture itself would have been preferable, if capture had been preceded by brawl and strife--the exhibition of his hardihood and prowess. Gloomily bending over his horse's neck, he cursed himself as fool and coward. What would he have had!--a new crime on his soul? Perhaps he would have answered, "Anything rather than this humiliating failure." He did not rack his brains with conjecturing if Cutts had betrayed him, or by what other mode assistance had been sent in such time of need to Darrell. Nor did he feel that hunger for vengeance, whether on Darrell or on his accomplice (should that accomplice have played the traitor), which might have been expected from his characteristic ferocity. On the contrary, the thought of violence and its excitements had in it a sickness as of shame. Darrell at that hour might have ridden by him scathless. Cutts might have jeered and said, "I blabbed your secret, and sent the aid that foiled it"; and Losely would have continued to hang his head, nor lifted the herculean hand that lay nerveless on the horse's mane. Is it not commonly so in all reaction from excitements in which self-love has been keenly galled? Does not vanity enter into the lust of crime as into the desire of fame?

At sunrise Losely found himself on the high-road into which a labyrinth of lanes had led him, and opposite to a milestone, by which he learned that he had been long turning his back on the metropolis, and that he was about ten miles distant from the provincial city of Ouzelford. By this time his horse was knocked up, and his own chronic pains began to make

themselves acutely felt; so that, when, a little farther on, he came to a wayside inn, he was glad to halt; and after a strong drain, which had the effect of an opiate, he betook himself to bed, and slept till the noon was far advanced.

When Losely came down-stairs, the common room of the inn was occupied by a meeting of the trustees of the highroads; and, on demanding breakfast, he was shown into a small sanded parlour adjoining the kitchen. Two other occupants--a man and a woman--were there already, seated at a table by the fireside, over a pint of half-and-half. Losely, warming himself at the hearth, scarcely noticed these humble revellers by a glance. And they, after a displeased stare at the stalwart frame which obscured the cheering glow they had hitherto monopolised, resumed a muttered conversation; of which, as well as of the vile modicum that refreshed their lips, the man took the lion's share. Shabbily forlorn were that man's habiliments--turned and re-turned, patched, darned, weather-stained, grease-stained--but still retaining that kind of mouldy, grandiose, bastard gentility, which implies that the wearer has known better days; and, in the downward progress of fortunes when they once fall, may probably know still worse.

The woman was some years older than her companion, and still more forlornly shabby. Her garments seemed literally composed of particles of dust glued together, while her face might have insured her condemnation as a witch before any honest jury in the reign of King James the First. His breakfast, and the brandy-bottle that flanked the loaf, were now placed before Losely; and, as distastefully he forced himself to eat, his eye once more glanced towards, and this time rested on, the shabby man, in the sort of interest with which one knave out of elbows regards another. As Jasper thus looked, gradually there stole on him a reminiscence of those coarse large features--that rusty disreputable wig. The recognition, however, was not mutual; and presently, after a whisper interchanged between the man and the woman, the latter rose, and approaching Losely, dropped a curtsey, and said, in a weird, under voice: "Stranger! luck's in store for you. Tell your fortune!" As she spoke, from some dust-hole in her garments she produced a pack of cards, on whose half-obliterated faces seemed incrustated the dirt of ages. Thrusting these antiquities under Jasper's nose, she added, "Wish and cut."

"Yshaw," said Jasper, who, though sufficiently superstitious in some matters and in regard to some persons, was not so completely under the influence of that imaginative infirmity as to take the creature before him for a sibyl. "Get away; you turn my stomach. Your cards smell; so do you!"

"Forgive her, worthy sir," said the man, leaning forward. "The hag may be unsavoury, but she is wise. The Three Sisters who accosted the Scottish Thane, sir (Macbeth--you have seen it on the stage?) were not savoury. Withered, and wild in their attire, sir, but they knew a thing or two! She sees luck in your face. Cross her hand and give it vent!"

"Fiddledee," said the irreverent Losely. "Take her off, or I shall scald

her," and he seized the kettle.

The hag retreated grumbling; and Losely, soon despatching his meal, placed his feet 'on the hobs, and began to meditate what course to adopt for a temporary subsistence. He had broken into the last pound left of the money which he had extracted from Mrs. Crane's purse some days before. He recoiled with terror from the thought of returning to town and placing himself at her mercy. Yet what option had he? While thus musing, he turned impatiently round, and saw that the shabby man and the dusty hag were engaged in an amicable game of ecarte, with those very cards which had so offended his olfactory organs. At that sight the old instinct of the gambler struggled back; and, raising himself up, he looked over the cards of the players. The miserable wretches were, of course, playing for nothing; and Losely saw at a glance that the man was, nevertheless, trying to cheat the woman! Positively he took that man into more respect; and that man, noticing the interest with which Losely surveyed the game, looked up, and said:

"While the time, sir? What say you? A game or two? I can stake my pistoles--that is, sir, so far as a fourpenny bit goes. If ignorant of this French game, sir, cribbage or all fours?"

"No," said Losely, mournfully; "there is nothing to be got out of you; otherwise"--he stopped and sighed. "But I have seen you under other circumstances. What has become of your Theatrical Exhibition? Gambled it away? Yet, from what I see of your play, I think you ought not to have lost, Mr. Rugge."

The ex-manager started.

"What! You knew me before the Storm?--before the lightning struck me, as I may say, sir--and falling into difficulties, I became--a wreck? You knew me?--not of the Company?--a spectator?"

"As you say--a spectator. You had once in your employ an actor--clever old fellow. Waife, I think, he was called."

"Ah! hold! At that name, sir, my wounds bleed afresh. From that execrable name, sir, there hangs a tale!"

"Indeed! Then it will be a relief to you to tell it," said Losely, resettling his feet on the hob, and snatching at any diversion from his own reflections.

"Sir, when a gentleman, who is a gentleman, asks as a favour a specimen of my powers of recital, not professionally, and has before him the sparkling goblet, which he does not invite me to share, he insults my fallen fortunes. Sir, I am poor--I own it; I have fallen into the sere and yellow leaf, sir; but I have still in this withered bosom the heart of a Briton!"

"Warm it, Mr. Rugge. Help yourself to the brandy--and the lady too."

"Sir, you are a gentleman; sir, your health. Hag, drink better days to us both. That woman, sir, is a hag, but she is an honour to her sex-faithful!"

"It is astonishing how faithful ladies are when not what is called beautiful. I speak from painful experience," said Losely, growing debonnaire as the liquor relaxed his gloom, and regaining that levity of tongue which sometimes strayed into wit, and which--springing originally from animal spirits and redundant health--still came to him mechanically whenever roused by companionship from alternate intervals of lethargy and pain. "But, now, Mr. Ruge, I am all ears; perhaps you will be kind enough to be all tale."

With tragic aspect, unrelaxed by that /jeu de mots/, and still wholly unrecognising in the massive form and discoloured swollen countenance of the rough-clad stranger, the elegant proportions, the healthful, blooming, showy face, and elaborate fopperies of the Jasper Losely who had sold to him a Phenomenon which proved so evanishing, Ruge entered into a prolix history of his wrongs at the hands of Waife, of Losely, of Sophy. Only of Mrs. Crane did he speak with respect; and Jasper then for the first time learned--and rather with anger for the interference than gratitude for the generosity--that she had repaid the L100, and thereby cancelled Ruge's claim upon the child. The ex-manager then proceeded to the narrative of his subsequent misfortunes--all of which he laid to the charge of Waife and the Phenomenon. "Sir," said he, "I was ambitious. From my childhood's hour I dreamed of the great York Theatre--dreamed of it literally thrice. Fatal Vision! But like other dreams, that dream would have faded--been forgotten in the workday world--and I should not have fallen into the sere and yellow, but have had, as formerly, troops of friends, and not been reduced to the horrors of poverty and a faithful Hag. But, sir, when I first took to my bosom that fiend William Waife, he exhibited a genius, sir, that Downton (you have seen Downton?--grand) was a stick as compared with. Then my ambition, sir, blazed and flared up--obstreperous, and my childhood's dream haunted me; and I went about musing [Hag, you recollect!]-and muttering 'The Royal Theatre at York.' But, incredible though it seem, the ungrateful scorpion left me with a treacherous design to exhibit the parts I had fostered on the London boards; and even-handed Justice, sir, returned the poisoned chalice to his lips, causing him to lose an eye and to hobble--besides splitting up his voice--which served him right. And again I took the scorpion for the sake of the Phenomenon. I had a babe myself once, sir, though you may not think it. Gormerick (that is this faithful Hag) gave the babe Daffy's Elixir, in teething; but it died--convulsions. I comforted myself when that Phenomenon came out on my stage--in pink satin and pearls. 'Ha,' I said, 'the great York Theatre shall yet be mine!' The haunting idea became a Mania, sir. The learned say that there is a Mania called Money Mania--[Monomania?]-when one can think but of the one thing needful--as the gilty Thane saw the dagger, sir--you understand. And when the Phenomenon had vanished and gone, as I was told, to America, where I now wish I was myself, acting Rolla at New York or elsewhere, to a free and enlightened people--then, sir, the Mania grew on me still stronger and stronger. There was a pride in it, sir, a British pride.

"I said to this faithful Hag: 'What--shall I not have the York because that false child has deserted me? Am I not able to realise a Briton's ambition without being beholden to a Phenomenon in spangles?' Sir, I took the York! Alone I did it!"

"And," said Losely, feeling a sort of dreary satisfaction in listening to the grotesque sorrows of one whose condition seemed to him yet more abject than his own--"And the York Theatre alone perhaps did you."

"Right, sir," said Rugge--half-dolorously, half-exultingly. "It was a Grand Concern, and might have done for the Bank of England! It swallowed up my capital with as much ease, sir, as I could swallow an oyster if there were one upon that plate! I saw how it would be, the very first week--when I came out myself, strong--Kean's own part in the Iron Chest--Mortimer, sir; there warn't three pounds ten in the house--packed audience, sir, and they had the face to hiss me. 'Hag,' said I to Mrs. Gormerick, 'this Theatre is a howling wilderness.' But there is a fascination in a Grand Concern, of which one is the head--one goes on and on. All the savings of a life devoted to the British Drama and the production of native genius went in what I may call--a jiffey! But it was no common object, sir, to your sight displayed--but what with pleasure, sir (I appeal to the Hag), Heaven itself surveyed!--a great man struggling, sir, with the storms of fate, and greatly falling, sir, with--a sensation! York remembers it to this day! I took the benefit of the Act--it was the only benefit I did take--and nobody was the better for it. But I don't repine--I realised my dream: that is more than all can say. Since then I have had many downs, and no ups. I have been a messenger, sir--a prompter, sir, in my own Exhibition, to which my own clown, having married into the tragic line, succeeded, sir, as proprietor; buying of me when I took the York, the theatre, scenery, and properties, sir, with the right still to call himself 'Rugge's Grand Theatrical Exhibition,' for an old song, sir--Melancholy. Tyrannised over, sir--snubbed and bullied by a creature dressed in a little brief authority; and my own tights--scarlet--as worn by me in my own applauded part of 'The Remorseless Baron.' At last, with this one faithful creature, I resolved to burst the chains--to be free as air--in short, a chartered libertine, sir. We have not much, but thank the immortal gods, we are independent, sir--the Hag and I--chartered libertines! And we are alive still--at which, in strict confidence, I may own to you that I am astonished."

"Yes! you do live," said Jasper, much interested--for how to live at all was at that moment a matter of considerable doubt to himself; "you do live--it is amazing! How?"

"The Faithful tells fortunes; and sometimes we pick up windfalls--widows and elderly single ladies--but it is dangerous. Labour is sweet, sir: but not hard labour in the dungeons of a Bridewell. She has known that labour, sir; and in those intervals I missed her much, Don't cry, Hag; "I repeat, I live!"

"I understand now; you live upon her! They are the best of creatures, these hags, as you call them, certainly. Well, well, no saying what a

man may come to! I suppose you have never seen Waife, nor that fellow you say was so well-dressed and good-looking, and who sold you the Phenomenon, nor the Phenomenon herself--Eh?" added Losely, stretching himself, and yawning, as he saw the brandybottle was finished.

"I have seen Waife--the one-eyed monster! Aha!--I have seen him!--and yesterday too; and a great comfort it was to me too!"

"You saw Waife yesterday--where?"

"At Ouzelford, which I and the Faithful left this morning."

"And what was he doing?" said Losely, with well-simulated indifference.

"Begging, breaking stones, or what?"

"No," said Rugge, dejectedly; "I can't say it was what, in farcical composition, I should call such nuts to me as that, sir. Still, he was in a low way--seemed a pedlar or a hawker, selling out of a pannier on the Rialto--I mean the Cornmarket, sir--not even a hag by his side, only a great dog--French. A British dog would have scorned such fellowship. And he did not look merry as he used to do when in my troop. Did he, Hag?"

"His conscience smites him," said the Hag, solemnly.

"Did you speak to him?"

"Why, no. I should have liked it, but we could not at that moment, seeing that we were not in our usual state of independence. This faithful creature was being led before the magistrates, and I too--charge of cheating a cook-maid, to whom the Hag had only said, 'that if the cards spoke true, she would ride in her carriage.' The charge broke down; but we were placed for the night in the Cells of the Inquisition, remanded, and this morning banished from the city, and are now on our way to--any other city;--eh, Hag?"

"And the old man was not with the Phenomenon? What has become of her, then?"

"Perhaps she may be with him at his house, if he has one; only, she was not with him on the Rialto or Cornmarket. She was with him two years ago, I know; and he and she were better off then than he is now, I suspect. And that is why it did me good, sir, to see him a pedlar--a common pedlar--fallen into the sere, like the man he abandoned!"

"Humph--where were they two years ago?"

"At a village not far from Humberston. He had a pretty house, sir, and sold baskets; and the girl was there too, favoured by a great lady--a Marchioness, sir! Gods!"

"Marchioness?--near Humberston? The Marchioness of Montfort, I suppose?"

"Likely enough; I don't remember. All I know is, that two years ago my old Clown was my tyrannical manager; and being in that capacity, and this world being made for Caesar, which is a shame, sir, he said to me, with a sneer, 'Old Gentleman Waife, whom you used to bully, and his Juliet Araminta, are in clover!' And the mocking varlet went on to unfold a tale to the effect, that when he had last visited Humberston, in the race-week, a young tradesman, who was courting the Columbine, whose young idea I myself taught to shoot on the light fantastic toe, treated that Columbine, and one of her sister train (being, indeed, her aunt, who has since come out at the Surrey in Desdemona) to a picnic in a fine park. (That's discipline!--ha, ha!) And there, sir, Columbine and her aunt saw Waife on the other side of a stream by which they sate carousing."

"The Clown perhaps said it to spite you."

"Columbine herself confirmed his tale, and said that on returning to the Village Inn for the Triumphal Car (or bus) which brought them, she asked if a Mr. Waife dwelt thereabouts, and was told, 'Yes, with his grand-daughter.' And she went on asking, till all came out as the Clown reported. And Columbine had not even the gratitude, the justice, to expose that villain--not even to say he had been my perfidious servant! She had the face to tell me 'she thought it might harm him, and he was a kind old soul.' Sir, a Columbine whose toes I had rapped scores of times before they could be turned out, was below contempt! but when my own Clown thus triumphed over me, in parading before my vision the bloated prosperity of mine enemy, it went to my heart like a knife; and we had words on it, sir, and--I left him to his fate. But a pedlar! Gentleman Waife has come to that! The heavens are just, sir, and of our pleasant vices, sir, make instruments that--that--"

"Scourge us," prompted the Hag, severely.

Losely rang the bell; the maid-servant appeared. "My horse and bill. Well, Mr. Rugge, I must quit your agreeable society. I am not overflowing with wealth at this moment, or I would request your acceptance of--"

"The smallest trifle," interrupted the Hag, with her habitual solemnity of aspect.

Losely, who, in his small way, had all the liberality of a Catiline, *"/alieni appetens, sui profusus/"* drew forth the few silver coins yet remaining to him; and though he must have calculated that, after paying his bill, there could scarcely be three shillings left, he chucked two of them towards the Hag, who, clutching them with a profound curtsy, then handed them to the fallen monarch by her side, with a loyal tear and a quick sob that might have touched the most cynical republican.

In a few minutes more, Losely was again on horseback; and as he rode towards Ouzelford, Rugge and his dusty Faithful shambled on in the opposite direction--shambled on, footsore and limping, along the wide, waste, wintry thoroughfare--vanishing from the eye, as their fates henceforth from this story. There they go by the white hard milestone;

farther on, by the trunk of the hedgerow-tree, which lies lopped and leafless--cumbersome the wayside, till the time come to cast it off to the thronged, dull stackyard. Farther yet, where the ditch widens into yon stagnant pool, with the great dung-heap by its side. There the road turns aslant; the dung-heap hides them. Gone! and not a speck on the Immemorial, Universal Thoroughfare.

CHAPTER V.

NO WIND SO CUTTING AS THAT WHICH SETS IN THE QUARTER FROM WHICH THE SUN RISES.

The town to which I lend the disguising name of Ouzelford, which, in years bygone, was represented by Guy Darrell, and which, in years to come, may preserve in its municipal hall his effigies in canvas or stone, is one of the handsomest in England. As you approach its suburbs from the London Road, it rises clear and wide upon your eye, crowning the elevated table-land upon which it is built;--a noble range of prospect on either side, rich with hedgerows not yet sacrificed to the stern demands of modern agriculture--venerable woodlands, and the green pastures round many a rural thane's frank, hospitable hall;--no one Great House banishing from leagues of landscape the abodes of knight and squire, nor menacing, with "the legitimate influence of property," the votes of rebellious burghers. Everywhere, like finger-posts to heaven, you may perceive the church-towers of rural hamlets embosomed in pleasant valleys, or climbing up gentle slopes. At the horizon, the blue fantastic outline of girdling hills mingles with the clouds. A famous old cathedral, neighbored by the romantic ivy-grown walls of a ruined castle, soars up from the centre of the town, and dominates the whole survey--calm, as with conscious power. Nearing the town, the villas of merchants and traders, released perhaps from business, skirt the road, with trim gardens and shaven lawns. Now the small river, or rather rivulet, of Ouzel, from which the town takes its name, steals out from deep banks covered with brushwood or aged trees, and widening into brief importance, glides under the arches of an ancient bridge; runs on, clear and shallow, to refresh low fertile dairy-meadows, dotted with kine; and finally quits the view, as brake and copse close round its narrowing, winding way; and that which, under the city bridge, was an imposing noiseless stream, becomes, amidst rustic solitudes, an insignificant babbling brook.

From one of the largest villas in these charming suburbs came forth a gentleman, middle-aged, and of a very mild and prepossessing countenance. A young lady without a bonnet, but a kerchief thrown over her sleek dark hair, accompanied him to the garden-gate, twining both hands affectionately round his arm, and entreating him not to stand in thorough draughts and catch cold, nor to step into puddles and wet his feet, and to be sure to be back before dark, as there were such shocking accounts in the newspapers of persons robbed and garotted even in the most populous highways; and, above all, not to listen to the beggars in the

street, and allow himself to be taken in; and before finally releasing him at the gate, she buttoned his greatcoat up to his chin, thrust two pellets of cotton into his ears, and gave him a parting kiss. Then she watched him tenderly for a minute or so as he strode on with the step of a man who needed not all those fostering admonitions and coddling cares.

As soon as he was out of sight of the lady and the windows of the villa, the gentleman cautiously unbuttoned his greatcoat, and removed the cotton from his ears. "She takes much after her mother, does Anna Maria," muttered the gentleman; "and I am very glad she is so well married."

He had not advanced many paces when, from a branchroad to the right that led to the railway station, another gentleman, much younger, and whose dress unequivocally bespoke him a minister of our Church, came suddenly upon him. Each with surprise recognised the other.

"What!--Mr. George Morley!"

"Mr. Hartopp!--How are you, my dear sir?--What brings you so far from home?"

"I am on a visit to my daughter, Anna Maria. She has not been long married--to young Jessop. Old Jessop is one of the principal merchants at Ouzelford--very respectable worthy family. The young couple are happily settled in a remarkably snug villa--that is it with the portico, not a hundred yards behind us, to the right. Very handsome town, Ouzelford; you are bound to it, of course?--we can walk together. I am going to look at the papers in the City Rooms--very fine rooms they are. But you are straight from London, perhaps, and have seen the day's journals? Any report of the meeting in aid of the Ragged Schools?"

"Not that I know of. I have not come from London this morning, nor seen the papers."

"Oh!--there's a strange-looking fellow following us; but perhaps he is your servant?"

"Not so, but my travelling companion--indeed my guide. In fact, I come to Ouzelford in the faint hope of discovering there a poor old friend of mine, of whom I have long been in search."

"Perhaps the Jessops can help you; they know everybody at Ouzelford. But now I meet you thus by surprise, Mr. George, I should very much like to ask your advice on a matter which has been much on my mind the last twenty-four hours, and which concerns a person I contrived to discover at Ouzelford, though I certainly was not in search of him--a person about whom you and I had a conversation a few years ago, when you were staying with your worthy father."

"Eh?" said George, quickly; "whom do you speak of?" "That singular vagabond who took me in, you remember--called himself Chapman--real name William Losely, a returned convict. You would have it that he was innocent, though the man himself had pleaded guilty on his trial."

"His whole character belied his lips then. Oh, Mr. Hartopp, that man commit the crime imputed to him!--a planned, deliberate robbery--an ungrateful, infamous breach of trust! That man--that! he who rejects the money he does not earn, even when pressed on him by anxious imploring friends---he who has now gone voluntarily forth, aged and lonely, to wring his bread from the humblest calling rather than incur the risk of injuring the child with whose existence he had charged himself!--the dark midnight thief! Believe him not, though his voice may say it. To screen, perhaps, some other man, he is telling you a noble lie. But what of him? Have you really seen him, and at Ouzelford?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Yesterday. I was in the City Reading-Room, looking out of the window. I saw a great white dog in the street below; I knew the dog at once, sir, though he is disguised by restoration to his natural coat, and his hair is as long as a Peruvian lama's. 'Tis Sir Isaac,' said I to myself; and behind Sir Isaac I saw Chapman, so to call him, carrying a basket with pedlar's wares, and, to my surprise, Old Jessop, who is a formal man, with a great deal of reserve and dignity, pompous indeed (but don't let that go further), talking to Chapman quite affably, and actually buying something out of the basket. Presently Chapman went away, and was soon lost to sight. Jessop comes into the Reading-Room. 'I saw you,' said I, 'talking to an old fellow with a French dog.' 'Such a good old fellow,' said Jessop; 'has a way about him that gets into your very heart while he is talking. I should like to make you acquainted with him.' 'Thank you for nothing,' said I; 'I should be-taken in.' 'Never fear,' says Jessop, 'he would not take in a fly--the simplest creature.' I own I chuckled at that, Mr. George. 'And does he live here,' said I, 'or is he merely a wandering pedlar?' Then Jessop told me that he had seen him for the first time two or three weeks ago, and accosted him rudely, looking on him as a mere tramp; but Chapman answered so well, and showed so many pretty things in his basket, that Jessop soon found himself buying a pair of habit-cuffs for Anna Maria, and in the course of talk it came out, I suppose by a sign, that Chapman was a Freemason, and Jessop is an enthusiast in that sort of nonsense, master of a lodge or something, and that was a new attraction. In short, Jessop took a great fancy to him--patronised him, promised him protection, and actually recommended him to a lodging in the cottage of all old widow who lives in the outskirts of the town, and had once been a nurse in the Jessop family. And what do you think Jessop had just bought of this simple creature! A pair of worsted inittens as a present for me, and what is more, I have got them on this moment--look! neat, I think, and monstrous warm. Now, I have hitherto kept my own counsel. I have not said to Jessop, 'Beware--that is the man who took me in.' But this concealment is a little on my conscience. On the one hand, it seems very cruel, even if the man did once commit a crime, in spite of your charitable convictions to the contrary, that I should be blabbing out his disgrace, and destroying perhaps his livelihood. On the other hand, if he should still be really a rogue, a robber, perhaps dangerous, ought I--ought I--in short--you are

a clergyman and a fine scholar, sir-what ought I to do?"

"My dear Mr. Hartopp, do not vex yourself with this very honourable dilemma of conscience. Let me only find my poor old friend, my benefactor I may call him, and I hope to persuade him, if not to return to the home that waits him, at least to be my guest, or put himself under my care. Do you know the name of the widow with whom he lodges?"

"Yes--Halse; and I know the town well enough to conduct you, if not to the house itself, still to its immediate neighbourhood. Pray allow me to accompany you; I should like it very much--for, though you may not think it, from the light way I have been talking of Chapman, I never was so interested in any man, never so charmed by any man; and it has often haunted me at night, thinking that I behaved too harshly to him, and that he was about on the wide world, an outcast, deprived of his little girl, whom he had trusted to me. And I should have run after him yesterday, or called on him this morning, and said, 'Let me serve you,' if it had not been for the severity with which he and his son were spoken of, and I myself rebuked for mentioning their very names, by a man whose opinion I, and indeed all the country, must hold in the highest respect--a man of the finest honour, the weightiest character--I mean Guy Darrell, the great Darrell."

George Morley sighed. "I believe Darrell knows nothing of the elder Losely, and is prejudiced against him by the misdeeds of the younger, to whose care you (and I cannot blame you, for I also was instrumental to the same transfer which might have proved calamitously fatal) surrendered the poor motherless girl."

"She is not with her grandfather now! She lives still, I hope! She was very delicate."

"She lives--she is safe. Ha--take care!"

These last words were spoken as a horseman, riding fast along the road towards the bridge that was now close at hand, came, without warning or heed, so close upon our two pedestrians, that George Morley had but just time to pluck Hartopp aside from the horse's hoofs.

"An impudent, careless, ruffianly fellow, indeed!" said the mild Hartopp, indignantly, as he brushed from his sleeve the splash of dirt which the horseman bequeathed to it. "He must be drunk!"

The rider, gaining the bridge, was there detained at the toll-bar by some carts and waggons, and the two gentlemen passed him on the bridge, looking with some attention at his gloomy, unobservant countenance, and the powerful frame, in which, despite coarse garments and the change wrought by years of intemperate excess, was still visible the trace of that felicitous symmetry once so admirably combining herculean strength with elastic elegance. Entering the town, the rider turned into the yard of the nearest inn. George Morley and Hartopp, followed at a little distance by Morley's travelling companion, Merle, passed on towards the other extremity of the town, and, after one or two inquiries for "Widow

Halse, Prospect Row," they came to a few detached cottages, very prettily situated on a gentle hill, commanding in front the roofs of the city and the gleaming windows of the great cathedral, with somewhat large gardens in the rear. Mrs. Halse's dwelling was at the extreme end of this Row. The house, however, was shut up; and a woman, who was standing at the door of the neighbouring cottage, plaiting straw, informed the visitors that Mrs. Halse was gone out "charing" for the day, and that her lodger, who had his own key, seldom returned before dark, but that at that hour he was pretty sure to be found in the Cornmarket or the streets in its vicinity, and offered to send her little boy to discover and "fetch" him.

George consulted apart with Merle, and decided on despatching the cobbler, with the boy for his guide, in quest of the pedlar, Merle being of course instructed not to let out by whom he was accompanied, lest Waife, in his obstinacy, should rather abscond than encounter the friends from whom he had fled. Merle, and a curly-headed urchin, who seemed delighted at the idea of hunting up Sir Isaac and Sir Isaac's master, set forth, and! were soon out of sight. Hartopp and George opened the little garden-gate, and strolled into the garden at the back of the cottage, to seat themselves patiently on a bench beneath an old appletree. Here they waited and conversed some minutes, till George observed that one of the casements on that side of the cottage was left open, and, involuntarily rising, he looked in; surveying with interest the room, which he felt sure, at the first glance, must be that occupied by his self-exiled friend; a neat pleasant little room—a bullfinch in a wicker cage on a ledge within the casement—a flower-pot beside it. Doubtless the window, which faced the southern sun, had been left open by the kind old man in order to cheer the bird and to gladden the plant. Waife's well-known pipe, and a tobacco-pouch worked for him by Sophys fairy fingers, lay on a table near the fireplace, between casement and door; and George saw with emotion the Bible which he himself had given to the wanderer lying also on the table, with the magnifying-glass which Waife had of late been obliged to employ in reading. Waife's habitual neatness was visible in the aspect of the room. To George it was evident that the very chairs had been arranged by his hand; that his hand had courteously given that fresh coat of varnish to the wretched portrait of a man in blue coat and buff waistcoat, representing, no doubt, the lamented spouse of the hospitable widow. George beckoned to Hartopp to come also and look within; and as the worthy trader peeped over his shoulder, the clergyman said, whisperingly, "Is there not something about a man's home which attests his character?—No 'pleading guilty' here."

Hartopp was about to answer, when they heard the key turn sharply in the outer door, and had scarcely time to draw somewhat back from the casement when Waife came hurriedly into the room, followed, not by Merle, but by the tall rough-looking horseman whom they had encountered on the road. "Thank Heaven," cried Waife, sinking on a chair, "out of sight, out of hearing now! Now you may speak; now I can listen! O wretched son of my lost angel, whom I so vainly sought to save by the sacrifice of all my claims to the respect of men, for what purpose do you seek me? I have nothing left that you can take away! Is it the child again? See--see--look round--search the house if you will--she is not here."

"Bear with me, if you can, sir," said Jasper, in tones that were almost meek; "you, at least, can say nothing that I will not bear. But I am in my right when I ask you to tell me, without equivocation or reserve, if Sophy, though not actually within these walls, be near you, in this town or its neighbourhood?--in short, still under your protection?"

"Not in this town--not near it--not under my protection; I swear."

"Do not swear, father; I have no belief in other men's oaths. I believe your simple word. Now comes my second question--remember I am still strictly in my right--where is she?--and under whose care?"

"I will not say. One reason why I have abandoned the very air she breathes was, that you might not trace her in tracing me. But she is out of your power again to kidnap and to sell. You might molest, harass, shame her, by proclaiming yourself her father; but regain her into your keeping, cast her to infamy and vice--never, never! She is now with no powerless, miserable convict, for whom Law has no respect. She is now no helpless infant without a choice, without a will. She is safe from all, save the wanton, unprofitable effort to disgrace her. O Jasper, Jasper, be human--she is so delicate of frame--she is so sensitive to reproach, so tremulously alive to honour--I am not fit to be near her now. I have been a tricksome, shifty vagrant, and, innocent though I be, the felon's brand is on me! But you, you too, who never loved her, who cannot miss her, whose heart is not breaking at her loss as mine is now--you, you--to rise up from the reeking pesthouse in which you have dwelt by choice, and say, 'Descend from God's day with me'--Jasper, Jasper, you will not--you cannot; it would be the malignity of a devil!"

"Father, hold!" cried Jasper, writhing and livid; "I owe to you more than I do to that thing of pink and white. I know better than you the trumpery of all those waxen dolls of whom dupes make idols. At each turn of the street you may find them in basketfuls--blue-eyed or black-eyed, just the same worthless frippery or senseless toys; but every man dandling his own doll, whether he call it sweetheart or daughter, makes the same puling boast that he has an angel of purity in his puppet of wax. Nay, hear me! to that girl I owe nothing. You know what I owe to you. You bid me not seek her, and say, 'I am your father.' Do you think it does not misbecome me more, and can it wound you less, when I come to you, and remind you that I am your son!"

"Jasper!" faltered the old man, turning his face aside, for the touch of feeling towards himself, contrasting the cynicism with which Jasper spoke of other ties not less sacred, took the father by surprise.

"And," continued Jasper, "remembering how you once loved me--with what self-sacrifice you proved that love--it is with a bitter grudge against that girl that I see her thus take that place in your affection which was mine,--and you so indignant against me if I even presume to approach her. What! I have the malignity of a devil because I would not quietly lie down in yonder kennels to starve, or sink into the grade of those whom your daintier thief disclaims; spies into unguarded areas, or cowardly skulkers by blind walls; while in the paltry girl, who you say is so well

provided for, I see the last and sole resource which may prevent you from being still more degraded, still more afflicted by your son."

"What is it you want? Even if Sophy were in your power, Darrell would not be more disposed to enrich or relieve you. He will never believe your tale, nor deign even to look into its proofs."

"He might at last," said Jasper, evasively. "Surely with all that wealth, no nearer heir than a remote kinsman in the son of a beggared spendthrift by a linendraper's daughter--he should need a grandchild more than you do; yet the proofs you speak of convinced yourself; you believe my tale."

"Believe--yes, for that belief was everything in the world, to me! Ah, remember how joyously, when my term of sentence expired, I hastened to seek you at Paris, deceived by the rare letters with which you had deigned to cheer me--fondly dreaming that, in expiating your crime, I should have my reward in your redemption--should live to see you honoured, honest, good--live to think your mother watched us from heaven with a smile on both--and that we should both join her at last--you purified by my atonement! Oh, and when I saw you so sunken, so hardened, exulting in vice as in a glory--bravo and partner in a gambler's hell--or, worse still, living on the plunder of miserable women, even the almsman of that vile Desmarests--my son, my son, my lost Lizzy's son blotted out of my world for ever!--then, then I should have died if you had not said, boasting of the lie which had wrung the gold from Darrell, 'But the child lives still.' Believe you--oh, yes, yes--for in that belief something was still left to me to cherish, to love, to live for!"

Here the old man's hurried voice died away in a passionate sob; and the direful son, all reprobate though he was, slid from his chair, and bowed himself at his father's knee, covering his face with fell hands that trembled. "Sir, sir," he said, in broken reverential accents, "do not let me see you weep. You cannot believe me, but I say solemnly that, if there be in me a single remnant of affection for any human being, it is for you. When I consented to leave you to bear the sentence which should have fallen on myself, sure I am that I was less basely selfish than absurdly vain. I fancied myself so born to good fortune!--so formed to captivate some rich girl!--and that you would return to share wealth with me; that the evening of your days would be happy; that you would be repaid by my splendour for your own disgrace! And when I did marry, and did ultimately get from the father-in-law who spurned me the capital of his daughter's fortune, pitifully small though it was compared to my expectations, my first idea was to send half of that sum to you. But--but--I was living with those who thought nothing so silly as a good intention--nothing so bad as a good action. That mocking she-devil, Gabrielle, too! Then the witch's spell of that d----d green-table! Luck against one--wait! double the capital ere you send the half. Luck with one--how balk the tide? how fritter the capital just at the turn of doubling? Soon it grew irksome even to think of you; yet still when I did, I said, 'Life is long, I shall win riches; he shall share them some day or other!'--/Basta, basta!--what idle twaddle or hollow brag all this must seem to you!"

"No," said Wife, feebly, and his hand drooped till it touched Jasper's bended shoulder, but at the touch recoiled as with an electric spasm.

"So, as you say, you found me at Paris. I told you where I had placed the child, not conceiving that Arabella would part with her, or you desire to hamper yourself with an encumbrance--nay, I took for granted that you would find a home as before with some old friend or country cousin:--but fancying that your occasional visits to her might comfort you, since it seemed to please you so much when I said she lived. Thus we parted,--you, it seems, only anxious to save that child from ever falling into my hands, or those of Gabrielle Desmarets; I hastening to forget all but the riotous life around me till--"

"Till you came back to England to rob from me the smile of the only face that I knew would never wear contempt, and to tell the good man with whom I thought she had so safe a shelter that I was a convicted robber, by whose very love her infancy was sullied. O Jasper! Jasper!"

"I never said that--never thought of saying it. Arabella Crane did so, with the reckless woman-will to gain her object. But I did take the child from you. Why? Partly because I needed money so much that I would have sold a hecatomb of children for half what I was offered to bind the girl to a service that could not be very dreadful, since yourself had first placed her there;--and partly because you had shrunk, it seems, from appealing to old friends: you were living, like myself, from hand to mouth; what could that child be to you but a drag and a bother?"

"And you will tell me, I suppose," said Waife, with an incredulous, bitter irony, that seemed to wither himself in venting it, so did his whole frame recoil and shrink--"you will tell me that it was from the same considerate tenderness that you would have again filched her from me some months later, to place her with that 'she-devil' who was once more by your side; to be reared and sold to--O horror!--horror!--unimaginable horror!--that pure helpless infant!--you, armed with the name of father! --you, strong in that mighty form of man!"

"What do you mean? Oh, I remember now! When Gabrielle was in London, and I had seen you on the bridge? Who could have told you that I meant to get the child from you at that time?"

Waife was silent. He could not betray Arabella Crane; and Jasper looked perplexed and thoughtful. Then gradually the dreadful nature of his father's accusing words seemed to become more clear to him; and he cried, with a fierce start and a swarthy flush: "But whoever told you that I harboured the design that it whitens your lip to hint at, lied, and foully. Harkye, sir, many years ago Gabrielle had made acquaintance with Darrell, under another name, as Matilda's friend (long story now--not worth telling); he had never, I believe, discovered the imposture. Just at the time you refer to, I heard that Darrell had been to France, inquiring himself into facts connected with my former story, that Matilda's child was dead. That very inquiry seemed to show that he had not been so incredulous of my assertions of Sophy's claims on him as he

had affected to be when I urged them. He then went on into Italy. Talking this over with Gabrielle, she suggested that, if the child could be got into her possession, she would go with her in search of Darrell, resuming the name in which she had before known him--resuming the title and privilege of Matilda's friend. In that character he might listen to her, when he would not to me. She might confirm my statement--melt his heart--coax him into terms. She was the cleverest creature! I should have sold Sophy, it is true. For what? A provision to place me above want and crime. Sold her to whom? To the man who would see in her his daughter's child, rear her to inherit his wealth--guard her as his own honour. What! was this the design that so shocks you? /Basta, Basta!/ Again, I say, Enough. I never thought I should be so soft as to mutter excuses for what I have done. And if I do so now, the words seem forced from me against my will--forced from me, as if in seeing you I was again but a wild, lawless, wilful boy, who grieved to see you saddened by his faults, though he forgot his grief the moment you were out of sight."

"Oh, Jasper," cried Waife, now fairly placing his hand on Jasper's guilty head, and fixing his bright soft eye, swimming in tears, on that downcast gloomy face. "You repent!--you repent! Yes; call back your BOYHOOD--call it back! Let it stand before you, now, visible, palpable! Lo! I see it! Do not you? Fearless, joyous Image! Wild, lawless, wilful, as you say. Wild from exuberant life; lawless as a bird is free, because air is boundless to untried exulting wings; wilful from the ease with which the bravery and beauty of Nature's radiant Darling forced way for each jocund whim through our yielding hearts! Silence! It is there! I see it, as I saw it rise in the empty air when guilt and ignominy first darkened round you; and my heart cried aloud, 'Not on him, not on him, not on that glorious shape of hope and promise--on me, whose life, useless hitherto, has lost all promise now--on me let fall the shame.' And my lips obeyed my heart, and I said--'Let the Laws' will be done--I am the guilty man.' Cruel, cruel one! Was that sunny Boyhood then so long departed from you? On the verge of youth, and such maturity in craft and fraud--that when you stole into my room that dark winter eve, threw yourself at my feet, spoke but of thoughtless debts, and the fear that you should be thrust from an industrious honest calling, and I--I said, 'No, no; fear not; the head of your firm likes you; he has written to me; I am trying already to raise the money you need; it shall be raised, no matter what it cost me; you shall be saved; my Lizzie's son shall never know the soil of a prison; shun temptation henceforth: be but honest, and I shall be repaid!'--what, even then, you were coldly meditating the crime that will make my very grave dishonoured!"

"Meditating--not so! How could I be? Not till after what had thus passed between us, when you spoke with such indulgent kindness, did I even know that I might more than save myself--by monies--not raised at risk and loss to you! Remember, you had left me in the inner room, while you went forth to speak with Gunston. There I overheard him talk of notes he had never counted, and might never miss; describe the very place where they were kept; and then the idea came to me irresistibly, 'better rob him than despoil my own generous father.' Sir, I am not pretending to be better than I was. I was not quite the novice you supposed. Coveting pleasures or shows not within my reach, I had shrunk from

draining you to supply the means; I had not had the same forbearance for the superfluous wealth of others. I had learned with what simple tools old locks may fly open; and none had ever suspected me, so I had no fear of danger, small need of premeditation: a nail on your mantelpiece, the cloven end of the hammer lying beside, to crook it when hot from the fire that blazed before me! I say this to show you that I did not come provided; nothing was planned beforehand; all was the project and work of the moment. Such was my haste, I burnt myself to the bone with the red iron--feeling no pain, or rather, at that age, bearing all pain without wincing. Before Gunston left you, my whole plan was then arranged--my sole instrument fashioned. You groan. But how could I fancy that there would be detection? How imagine that even if monies, never counted, were missed, suspicion could fall on you--better gentleman than he whom you served? And had it not been for that accursed cloak which you so fondly wrapped round me when I set off to catch the night train back to--; if it had not been, I say, for that cloak, there could have been no evidence to criminate either you or me--except that unlucky L5 note, which I pressed on you when we met at ----, where I was to hide till you had settled with my duns. And why did I press it on you?--because you had asked me if I had wherewithal about me on which to live meanwhile; and I, to save you from emptying your own purse, said, 'Yes'; showed you some gold, and pressed on you the bank-note, which I said I could not want--to go, in small part, towards my debts; it was a childish, inconsistent wish to please you: and you seemed so pleased to take it as a proof that I cared for you."

"For me!--no, no; for honour--for honour--for honour! I thought you cared for honour; and the proof of that care was, thrusting into these credulous hands the share of your midnight plunder!"

"Sir," resumed Jasper, persisting in the same startling combination of feeling, gentler and more reverential than could have been supposed to linger in his breast, and of the moral obtuseness that could not, save by vanishing glimpses, distinguish between crime and its consequences--between dishonour and detection--" Sir, I declare that I never conceived that I was exposing you to danger; nay, I meant, out of the money I had taken, to replace to you what you were about to raise, as soon as I could invent some plausible story of having earned it honestly. Stupid notions and clumsy schemes, as I now look back on them; but, as you say, I had not long left boyhood, and, fancying myself deep and knowing, was raw in the craft I had practised. /Basta, basta, basta!"

Jasper, who had risen from his knees while speaking, here stamped heavily on the floor, as if with anger at the heart-stricken aspect of his silenced father; and continued with a voice that seemed struggling to regain its old imperious, rollicking, burly swell.

"What is done cannot be undone. Fling it aside, sir--look to the future; you with your pedlar's pack, I with my empty pockets! What can save you from the workhouse--me from the hulks or gibbet? I know not, unless the persons sheltering that girl will buy me off by some provision which may be shared between us. Tell me, then, where she is; leave me to deal in the business as I best may. Pooh! why so scared? I will neither terrify

nor kidnap her. I will shuffle off the crust of blackguard that has hardened round me. I will be sleek and smooth, as if I were still the exquisite Lothario--copied by would-be rufflers, and spoiled by willing beauties. Oh, I can still play the gentleman, at least for an hour or two, if it be worth my while. Come, sir, come; trust me; out with the secret of this hidden maiden, whose interests should surely weigh not more with you than those of a starving son. What, you will not? Be it so. I suspect that I know where to look for her--on what noble thresholds to set my daring foot; what fair lady, mindful of former days --of girlish friendship--of virgin love--wraps in compassionate luxury Guy Darrell's rejected heiress? Ah, your looks tell me that I am hot on the scent. That fair lady I knew of old; she is rich--I helped to make her so. She owes me something. I will call and remind her of it. And --tut, sir, tut--you shall not go to the workhouse, nor I to the hulks."

Here the old man, hitherto seated, rose--slowly, with feebleness and effort, till he gained his full height; then age, infirmity, and weakness seemed to vanish. In the erect head, the broad massive chest, in the whole presence, there was dignity--there was power.

"Hark to me, unhappy reprobate, and heed me well! To save that child from the breath of disgrace--to place her in what you yourself assured me where her rights amidst those in whose dwellings I lost the privilege to dwell when I took to myself your awful burthen--I thought to resign her charge for ever in this world. Think not that I will fly her now, when you invade. No--since my prayers will not move you--since my sacrifice to you has been so fruitless--since my absence from herself does not attain its end there, where you find her, shall you again meet me! And if there we meet, and you come with the intent to destroy her peace and blast her fortune, then I, William Losely, am no more the felon. In the face of day I will proclaim the truth, and say, 'Robber, change place in earth's scorn with me; stand in the dock, where thy father stood in vain to save thee!'"

"Bah, sir--too late now; who would listen to you?"

"All who have once known me--all will listen. Friends of power and station will take up my cause. There will be fresh inquiry into facts that I held back--evidence that, in pleading guilty, I suppressed--ungrateful one--to ward away suspicion from you."

"Say what you will," said Jasper swaying his massive form to and fro, with a rolling gesture which spoke of cold defiance, "I am no hypocrite in fair repute whom such threats would frighten. If you choose to thwart me in what I always held my last resource for meat and drink, I must stand in the dock even, perhaps, on a heavier charge than one so stale. Each for himself; do your worst--what does it matter?"

"What does it matter that a father should accuse his son! No, no--son, son, son--this must not be;--let it not be!--let me complete my martyrdom! I ask no reversal of man's decree, except before the Divine Tribunal. Jasper, Jasper--child of my love, spare the sole thing left to fill up the chasms in the heart that you laid waste. Speak not of

starving, or of fresh crime. Stay--share this refuge! I WILL WORK FOR BOTH!"

Once more, and this time thoroughly, Jasper's hideous levity and coarse bravado gave way before the lingering human sentiment knitting him back to childhood, which the sight and voice of his injured father had called forth with spasms and throes, as a seer calls the long-buried from a grave. And as the old man extended his arms pleadingly towards him, Jasper, with a gasping sound--half groan, half sob--sprang forward, caught both the hands in his own strong grasp, lifted them to his lips, kissed them, and then, gaining the door with a rapid stride, said, in hoarse broken tones: "Share your refuge! no--no--I should break your heart downright did you see me daily--hourly as I am! You work for both!--you --you!" His voice stopped, choked for a brief moment, and then hurried on: "As for that girl--you--you--you are--but no matter, I will try to obey you--will try to wrestle against hunger, despair, and thoughts that whisper sinking men with devils' tongues. I will try--I will try; if I succeed not, keep your threat--accuse me--give me up to justice--clear yourself; but if you would crush me more than by the heaviest curse, never again speak to me with such dreadful tenderness! Cling not to me, old man; release me, I say;--there--there; off. Ah! I did not hurt you? Brute that I am--you bless me--you--you! And I dare not bless again! Let me go--let me go--let me go!" He wrenched himself away from his father's clasp--drowning with loud tone his father's pathetic soothings--out of the house--down the hill--lost to sight in the shades of the falling eve.

CHAPTER VI.

GENTLEMAN WAIFE DOES NOT FORGET AN OLD FRIEND. THE OLD FRIEND RECONCILES ASTROLOGY TO PRUDENCE, AND IS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF BENEFICE. MR. HARTOPP HAT IN HAND TO GENTLEMAN WAIFE.

Waife fell on the floor of his threshold, exclaiming, sobbing, moaning, as voice itself gradually died away. The dog, who had been shut out from the house, and remained, ears erect, head drooping, close at the door, rushed in as Jasper burst forth. The two listeners at the open casement now stole round; there was the dog, its paw on the old man's shoulder, trying to attract his notice, and whining low.

Tenderly--reverentially, they lift the poor martyr--evermore cleared in their eyes from stain, from question; the dishonouring brand transmuted into the hallowing cross! And when the old man at length recovered consciousness, his head was pillowed on the breast of the spotless, noble Preacher; and the decorous English Trader, with instinctive deference for repute and respect for law, was kneeling by his side, clasping his hand; and as Wife glanced down, confusedly wondering, Hartopp exclaimed, half sobbing: "Forgive me; you said I should repent, if I knew all! I do repent! I do! Forgive me--I shall never forgive myself."

"Have I been dreaming? What is all this? You here, too, Mr. George! But--but there was ANOTHER. Gone! ah--gone--gone! lost, lost! Ha! Did you overhear us?"

"We overheard you--at that window! See, spite of yourself, Heaven lets your innocence be known, and, in that innocence, your sublime self-sacrifice."

"Hush! you will never betray me, either of you--never. A father turn against his son!--horrible!"

Again he seemed on the point of swooning. In a few moments more, his mind began evidently to wander somewhat; and just as Merle (who, with his urchin-guide, had wandered vainly over the old town in search of the pedlar, until told that he had been seen in a by-street, stopped and accosted by a tall man in a rough great-coat, and then hurrying off, followed by the stranger) came back to report his ill-success, Hartopp and George had led Waife up-stairs into his sleeping-room, laid him down on his bed, and were standing beside him watching his troubled face, and whispering to each other in alarm.

Waife overheard Hartopp proposing to go in search of medical assistance, and exclaimed piteously: "No, that would scare me to death. No doctors--no eavesdroppers. Leave me to myself--quiet and darkness; I shall be well tomorrow."

George drew the curtains round the bed, and Waife caught him by the arm. "You will not let out what you heard, I know; you understand how little I can now care for men's judgments; but how dreadful it would be to undo all I have done--I to be witness against my Lizzy's child! I--I! I trust you--dear, dear Mr. Morley; make Mr. Hartopp sensible that, if he would not drive me mad, not a syllable of what he heard must go forth--'twould be base in him."

"Nay!" said Hartopp, whispering also through the darkness, "don't fear me; I will hold my peace, though 'tis very hard not to tell Williams at least that you did not take me in. But you shall be obeyed."

They drew away Merle, who was wondering what the whispered talk was about, catching a word or two here and there, and left the old man not quite to solitude,--Waife's hand, in quitting George's grasp, dropped on the dog's head.

Hartopp went back to his daughter's home in a state of great excitement, drinking more wine than usual at dinner, talking more magisterially than he had ever been known to talk, railing quite misanthropically against the world; observing, that Williams had become unsufferably overbearing, and should be pensioned off: in short, casting the whole family into the greatest perplexity to guess what had come to the mild man. Merle found himself a lodging, and cast a horary scheme as to what would happen to Waife and himself for the next three months, and found all the aspects so perversely contradictory, that he owned he was no wiser as to the future than he was before the scheme was cast. George Morley remained in the

cottage, stealing up, from time to time, to Waife's room, but not fatiguing him with talk. Before midnight, the old man slept, but his slumber was much perturbed, as if by fearful dreams. However, he rose early, very weak, but free from fever, and in full possession of his reason. To George's delight, Waife's first words to him then were expressive of a wish to return to Sophy. "He had dreamed," he said, "that he had heard her voice calling out to him to come to her help." He would not revert to the scene with Jasper. George once ventured to touch on that reminiscence, but the old man's look became so imploring that he desisted. Nevertheless, it was evident to the Pastor, that Waife's desire to return was induced by his belief that he had become necessary to Sophy's protection. Jasper, whose remorse would probably be very short-lived, had clearly discovered Sophy's residence, and as clearly Waife, and Waife alone, still retained some hold over his rugged breast. Perhaps, too, the old man had no longer the same dread of encountering Jasper; rather, perhaps, a faint hope that, in another meeting, he might more availingly soften his son's heart. He was not only willing, then--he was eager to depart, and either regained or assumed much of his old cheerfulness in settling with his hostess, and parting with Merle, on whom he forced his latest savings and the tasteful contents of his pannier. Then he took aside George, and whispered in his ear: "A very honest, kind-hearted man, sir; can you deliver him from the Planets?--they bring him into sad trouble. Is there no opening for a cobbler at Humberston?"

George nodded, and went back to Merle, who was wiping his eyes with his coat-sleeve. "My good friend," said the scholar, "do me two favours, besides the greater one you have already bestowed in conducting me back to a revered friend. First, let me buy of you the contents of that basket; I have children amongst whom I would divide them as heirlooms; next, as we were travelling hither, you told me that, in your younger days, ere you took to a craft which does not seem to have prospered, you were brought up to country pursuits, and knew all about cows and sheep, their care and their maladies. Well, I have a few acres of glebe-land on my own hands, not enough for a bailiff--too much for my gardener--and a pretty cottage, which once belonged to a schoolmaster, but we have built him a larger one; it is now vacant, and at your service. Come and take all trouble of land and stock off my hands; we shall not quarrel about the salary. But harkye, my friend--on one proviso--give up the Crystal, and leave the Stars to mind their own business."

"Please your Reverence," said Merle, who, at the earlier part of the address, had evinced the most grateful emotion, but who, at the proviso which closed it, jerked himself lip, dignified and displeased--"Please your Reverence, no! Kit Merle is not so unnatural as to swop away his Significator at Birth for a mess of porritch! There was that forrin chap, Gally-Leo--he stuck to the stars, or the sun, which is the same thing--and the stars stuck by him, and brought him honour and glory, though the Parsons war dead agin him. He had Malefics in his Ninth House, which belongs to Parsons."

"Can't the matter be compromised, dear Mr. George?" said Waife, persuasively. "Suppose Merle promises to keep his crystal and

astrological schemes to himself, or at least only talk of them to you;-- they can't hurt you, I should think, sir? And science is a sacred thing, Merle; and the Chaldees, who were the great star-gazers, never degraded themselves by showing off to the vulgar. Mr. George, who is a scholar, will convince you of that fact."

"Content," said George. "So long as Mr. Merle will leave my children and servants, and the parish generally, in happy ignorance of the future, I give him the fullest leave to discuss his science with myself whenever we chat together on summer moons or in winter evenings; and perhaps I may--"

"Be converted?" said Waife, with a twinkling gleam of the playful Humour which had ever sported along his thorny way by the side of Sorrow.

"I did not mean that," said the Parson, smiling; "rather the contrary. What say you, Merle? Is it not a bargain?"

"Sir--God bless you!" cried Merle, simply; "I see you won't let me stand in my own light. And what Gentleman Waife says as to the vulgar, is uncommon true."

This matter settled, and Merle's future secured in a way that his stars, or his version of their language, had not foretold to him, George and Waife walked on to the station, Merle following with the Parson's small carpet-bag, and Sir Isaac charged with Waife's bundle. They had not gone many yards before they met Hartopp, who was indeed on his way to Prospect Row. He was vexed at learning Waife was about to leave so abruptly; he had set his heart on coaxing him to return to Gatesboro' with himself--astounding Williams and Mrs. H., and proclaiming to Market Place and High Street, that, in deeming Mr. Chapman a good and a great man disguised, he, Josiah Hartopp, had not been taken in. He consoled himself a little for Waife's refusal of this kind invitation and unexpected departure, by walking proudly beside him to the station, finding it thronged with passengers--some of them great burgesses of Ouzelford--in whose presence he kept bowing his head to Waife with every word he uttered; and, calling the guard--who was no stranger to his own name and importance--he told him pompously to be particularly attentive to that elderly gentleman, and see that he and his companion had a carriage to themselves all the way, and that Sir Isaac had a particularly comfortable box. "A very great man," he said, with his finger to his lip, "only he will not have it known--just at present." The guard stares, and promises all deference--opens the door of a central first-class carriage--assures Waife that he and his friend shall not be disturbed by other passengers. The train heaves into movement--Hartopp runs on by its side along the stand--his hat off-kissing his hand; then, as the convoy shoots under yon dark tunnel, and is lost to sight, he turns back, and seeing Merle, says to him, "You know that gentleman--the old one?"

"Yes, a many year."

"Ever heard anything against him?"

"Yes, once--at Gatesboro'."

"At Gatesboro'!--ah! and you did not believe it?"

"Only jist for a moment, transiting."

"I envy you," said Hartopp; and he went off with a sigh.

CHAPTER VII.

JASPER LOSELY IN HIS ELEMENT. O YOUNG READER, WHOMSOEVER THOU ART, ON WHOM NATURE HAS BESTOWED HER MAGNIFICENT GIFT OF PHYSICAL POWER WITH THE JOYS IT COMMANDS, WITH THE DARING THAT SPRINGS FROM IT--ON CLOSING THIS CHAPTER, PAUSE A MOMENT, AND THINK "WHAT WILT THOU DO WITH IT?" SHALL IT BE BRUTE-LIKE OR GOD-LIKE? WITH WHAT ADVANTAGE FOR LIFE--ITS DELIGHTS OR ITS PERILS-TOILS BORNE WITH EASE, AND GLORIES CHEAP-BOUGHT--DOST THOU START AT LIFE'S ONSET? GIVE THY SINEWS A MIND THAT CONCEIVES THE HEROIC, AND WHAT NOBLE THINGS THOU MAYST DO, BUT VALUE THY SINEWS FOR RUDE STRENGTH ALONE, AND THAT STRENGTH MAY BE TURNED TO THY SHAME AND THY TORTURE. THE WEALTH OF THY LIFE WILL BUT TEMPT TO ITS WASTE. ABUSE, AT FIRST FELT NOT, WILL POISON THE USES OF SENSE. WILD BULLS GORE AND TRAMPLE THEIR FOES. THOU HAST SOUL! WILT THOU TRAMPLE AND GORE IT?

Jasper Losely, on quitting his father, spent his last coins in payment for his horse's food, and in fiery drink for himself. In haste he mounted--in haste he spurred on to London; not even pence for the toll-bars. Where he found the gates open, he dashed through them headlong; where closed, as the night advanced, he forced his horse across the fields over hedge and ditch--more than once the animal falling with him--more than once thrown from the saddle; for, while a most daring, he was not a very practised rider; but it was not easy to break bones so strong, and though bruised and dizzy, he continued his fierce way. At morning his horse was thoroughly exhausted, and at the first village he reached after sunrise he left the poor beast at an inn, and succeeded in borrowing of the landlord L1 on the pawn of the horse thus left as hostage. Resolved to husband this sum, he performed the rest of his journey on foot. He reached London at night, and went straight to Cutts' lodgings. Cutts was, however, in the club-room of those dark associates against whom Losely had been warned. Oblivious of his solemn promise to Arabella, Jasper startled the revellers as he stalked into the room, and towards the chair of honour at the far end of it, on which he had been accustomed to lord it over the fell groups he had treated out of Poole's purse. One of the biggest and most redoubted of the Black Family was now in that seat of dignity, and refusing surlily to yield it at Jasper's rude summons, was seized by the scruff of the neck, and literally hurled on the table in front, coming down with clatter and clash amongst mugs and glasses. Jasper seated himself coolly, while the hubbub began to swell--and roared for drink. An old man, who served as drawer to these cavaliers, went out to obey the order; and when he was gone, those near the door swung across it a heavy bar. Wrath against the domineering

intruder was gathering, and waited but the moment to explode. Jasper, turning round his bloodshot eyes; saw Cutts within a few chairs of him, seeking to shrink out of sight.

"Cutts, come hither," cried he, imperiously. Cutts did not stir.

"Throw me that cur this way--you, who sit next him."

"Don't, don't; his mad fit is on him; he will murder me--murder me, who have helped and saved you all so often. Stand by me."

"We will," said both his neighbours, the one groping for his case-knife, the other for his revolver.

"Do you fear I should lop your ears, dog," cried Jasper, for shrinking from my side with your tail between your legs! Pooh! I scorn to waste force on a thing so small. After all, I am glad you left me; I did not want you. You will find your horse at an inn in the village of -----.

I will pay for its hire whenever we meet again. Meanwhile, find another master--I discharge you. /Mille tonnerres!/ why does that weasel-faced snail not bring me the brandy! By your leave,"--and he appropriated to himself the brimming glass of his next neighbour. Thus refreshed, he glanced round through the reek of tobacco smoke; saw the man he had dislodged, and who, rather amazed than stunned by his fall, had kept silence on rising, and was now ominously interchanging muttered words with two of his comrades, who were also on their legs. Jasper turned from him contemptuously;--with increasing contempt in his hard fierce sneer, noted the lowering frowns on either side the Pandemonium; and it was only with an angry flash from his eyes that he marked, on closing his survey, the bar dropped across the door, and two forms, knife in hand, stationed at the threshold.

"Aha! my jolly companions," said he then, "you do right to bar the door. Prudent families can't settle their quarrels too snugly amongst themselves. I am come here on purpose to give you all a proper scolding, and if some of you don't hang your heads for shame before I have done, you'll die more game than I think for, whenever you come to the last Drop."

He rose as he thus spoke, folding his sinewy arms across his wide chest. Most of the men had risen too--some, however, remained seated; there might be eighteen or twenty in all. Every eye was fixed on him, and many a hand was on a deadly weapon.

"Scum of the earth!" burst forth Jasper, with voice like a roll of thunder, "I stooped to come amongst you--I shared amongst you my money. Was any one of you too poor to pay up his club fee--to buy a draught of Forgetfulness--I said, 'Brother, take!' Did brawl break out in your jollities--were knives drawn--a throat in danger--this right band struck down the uproar, crushed back the coward murder. If I did not join in your rogueries, it was because they were sneaking and pitiful. I came as your Patron, not as your Pal; I did not meddle with your secrets--did not touch your plunder. I owed you nothing. Offal that you are! to me you

owed drink, and meat, and good fellowship. I gave you mirth, and I gave you Law; and in return ye laid a plot amongst you to get rid of me;--how, ye white-livered scoundrels? Oho! not by those fists, and knives, and bludgeons. All your pigeon breasts clubbed together had not manhood for that. But to palm off upon me some dastardly deed of your own; by snares and scraps of false evidence--false oaths, too, no doubt--to smuggle me off to the hangman. That was your precious contrivance. Once again I am here; but this once only. What for?--why, to laugh at, and spit at, and spurn you. And if one man amongst you has in him an ounce of man's blood, let him show me the traitors who planned that pitiful project, and be they a dozen, they shall carry the mark of this hand till their carcasses go to the surgeon's scalpel."

He ceased. Though each was now hustling the other towards him, and the whole pack of miscreants was closing up, like hounds round a wild boar at bay, the only one who gave audible tongue was that thin splinter of life called Cutts!

"Look you, General Jas., it was all a mistake your ever coining here. You were a fine fellow once, particularly in the French way of doing business--large prizes and lots of row. That don't suit us; we are quiet Englishmen. You brag of beating and bullying the gentlemen who admit you amongst them, and of not sharing their plans or risks; but that sort of thing is quite out of order--no precedent for it. How do we know that you are not a spy, or could not be made one, since you say you owe us nothing, and hold us in such scorn? Truth is, we are all sick of you. You say you only come this once: very well, you have spun your yarn--now go. That's all we want; go in peace, and never trouble us again. Gentlemen, I move that General Jas. be expelled this club, and requested to withdraw."

"I second it," said the man whom Jasper had flung on the table.

"Those who are in favour of the resolution, hold up their hands;--all--carried unanimously. General Jas. is expelled."

"Expel me!" said Jasper, who in the mean while, swaying to and fro his brawny bulk, had cleared the space round him, and stood resting his hands on the heavy armchair from which he had risen.

A hostile and simultaneous movement of the group brought four or five of the foremost on him. Up rose the chair on which Jasper had leaved--up it rose in his right hand, and two of the assailants fell as falls an ox to the butcher's blow. With his left hand he wrenched a knife from a third of the foes, and thus armed with blade and buckler, he sprang on the table, towering over all. Before him was the man with the revolver, a genteeler outlaw than the resttucket-of-leave man, who had been transported for forgery. "Shall I shoot him?" whispered this knave to Cutts. Cutts drew back the hesitating arm. "No; the noise! bludgeons safer." Pounce, as Cutts whispered--pounce as a hawk on its quarry, darted Jasper's swoop on the Forger, and the next moment, flinging the chair in the faces of those who were now swarming up the table, Jasper was armed with the revolver, which he had clutched from its startled

owner, and its six barrels threatened death, right and left, beside and before and around him, as he turned from face to face. Instantly there fell a hush--instantly the assault paused. Every one felt that there no faltering would make the hand tremble or the ball swerve. Wherever Jasper turned the foes recoiled. He laughed with audacious mockery as he surveyed the recreants.

"Down with your arms, each of you--down that knife, down that bludgeon. That's well. Down yours--there; yours--yours. What, all down! Pile them here on the table at my feet. Dogs, what do you fear?-death. The first who refuses dies."

Mute and servile as a repentant Legion to a Caesar's order, the knaves piled their weapons.

"Unbar the door, you two. You, orator Cutts, go in front; light a candle--open the street-door. So-so-so. Who will treat me with a parting cup--to your healths? Thank you, sir. Fall back there; stand back--along the wall--each of you. Line my way. Ho, ho!--you harm me--you daunt me--you--you! Stop--I have a resolution to propose. Hear it, and cheer. 'That this meeting rescinds the resolution for the expulsion of General Jasper, and entreats him humbly to remain, the pride and ornament of the club!' Those who are for that resolution, hold up their hands--as many as are against it, theirs. Carried unanimously. Gentlemen, I thank you--proudest day of my life--but I'll see you hanged first; and till that sight diverts me,--gentlemen, your health."

Descending from his eminence, he passed slowly down the room unscathed, unmenaced, and, with a low mocking bow at the threshold, strode along the passage to the streetdoor. There, seeing Cutts with the light in his hand, he uncocked the pistol, striking off the caps, and giving it to his quondam associate, said: "Return that to its owner, with my compliments. One word--speak truth, and fear nothing. Did you send help to Darrell?" "No; I swear it."

"I am sorry for it. I should like to have owed so trusty a friend that one favour. Go back to your pals. Understand now why I scorned to work with such rotten tools."

"A wonderful fellow, indeed!" muttered Cutts, as his eye followed the receding form of the triumphant bravo. "All London might look to itself, if he had more solid brains, and less liquid fire in them."

CHAPTER VIII.

JASPER LOSELY SLEEPS UNDER THE PORTICO FROM WHICH FALSEHOOD WAS BORNE BY BLACK HORSES. HE FORGETS A PROMISE, REWEAVES A SCHEME, VISITS A RIVER-SIDE, AND A DOOR CLOSES ON THE STRONG MAN AND THE GRIM WOMAN.

Jasper, had satisfied the wild yearnings of his wounded vanity. He had vindicated his claim to hardihood and address, which it seemed to him he had forfeited in his interview with Darrell. With crest erect and a positive sense of elation, of animal joy that predominated over hunger, fatigue, remorse, he strided on--he knew not whither. He would not go back to his former lodgings; they were too familiarly known to the set which he had just flung from him, with a vague resolve to abjure henceforth all accomplices, and trust to himself alone. The hour was now late--the streets deserted--the air biting cold. Must he at last resign himself to the loathed dictation of Arabella Cram? Well, he now preferred even that to humbling himself to Darrell, after what had passed. Darrell's parting words had certainly implied that he would not be as obdurate to entreaty as he had shown himself to threats. But Jasper was in no humour to entreat. Mechanically he continued to stride on towards the solitary district in which Arabella held her home; but the night was now so far advanced that he shrunk from disturbing the grim woman at that hour--almost as respectfully afraid of her dark eye and stern voice as the outlaws he had quitted were of his own crushing hand and levelled pistol. So finding himself in one of the large squares of Bloomsbury, he gathered himself up under the sheltering porch of a spacious mansion, unconscious that it was the very residence which Darrell had once occupied, and that from that portico the Black Horses had borne away the mother of his wife. In a few minutes he was fast asleep--sleeping with such heavy deathlike soundness, that the policeman passing him on his beat, after one or two vain attempts to rouse him, was seized with a rare compassion, and suffered the weary outcast to slumber on.

When Jasper woke at last in the grey dawn, he felt a strange numbness in his limbs; it was even with difficulty that he could lift himself up. This sensation gradually wearing off, was followed by a quick tingling down the arms to the tips of the fingers. A gloomy noise rang in his ears, like the boom of funeral church-bells; and the pavement seemed to be sliding from under him. Little heeding these symptoms, which he ascribed to cold and want of food, and rather agreeably surprised not to feel the gnaw of his accustomed pains, Jasper now betook himself to Podden Place. The house was still unclosed; and it was not till Jasper's knock had been pretty often repeated, that the bolts were withdrawn from the door, and Bridgett Greggs appeared. "Oh, it is you, Mr. Losely," she said, with much sullenness, but with no apparent surprise. "Mistress thought you would come while she was away, and I'm to get you the bedroom you had, over the stationer's, six years ago, if you like it. You are to take your meals here, and have the best of everything; that's mistress's orders."

"Oh, Mrs. Crane is out of town," said Jasper, much relieved; "where has she gone?"

"I don't know."

"When will she be back?"

"In a few days; so she told me. Will you walk in, and have breakfast?"

Mistress said there was to be always plenty in the house--you might come any moment. Please scrape your feet."

Jasper heavily mounted into the drawing-room, and impatiently awaited the substantial refreshments, which were soon placed before him. The room looked unaltered, as if he had left it but the day before--the prim book-shelves--the empty birdcage--the broken lute--the patent easy-chair--the footstool--the sofa, which had been added to the original furniture for his express comfort, in the days when he was first adopted as a son--nay, on the hearth-rug the very slippers, on the back of the chair the very dressing-gown, graciously worn by him while yet the fairness of his form justified his fond respect for it.

For that day he was contented with the negative luxury of complete repose; the more so as, in every attempt to move, he felt the same numbness of limb as that with which he had woken, accompanied by a kind of painful weight at the back of the head, and at the junction which the great seat of intelligence forms at the spine with the great mainspring of force; and, withal, a reluctance to stir, and a more than usual inclination to doze. But the next day, though these unpleasant sensations continued, his impatience of thought and hate of solitude made him anxious to go forth and seek some distraction. No distraction left to him but the gaming-table--no companions but fellow-victims in that sucking whirlpool. Well, he knew a low gaming-house, open all day as all night. Wishing to add somewhat to the miserable remains of the L1 borrowed on the horse, that made all his capital, he asked Bridgett, indifferently, to oblige him with two or three sovereigns; if she had them not, she might borrow them in the neighbourhood till her mistress returned. Bridgett answered, with ill-simulated glee, that her mistress had given positive orders that Mr. Losely was to have everything he called for, except--money. Jasper coloured with wrath and shame; but he said no more--whistled--took his hat--went out--repaired to the gaming-house--lost his last shilling, and returned moodily to dine in Podden Place. The austerity of the room, the loneliness of the evening, began now to inspire him with unmitigated disgust, which was added in fresh account to his old score of repugnance for the absent Arabella. The affront put upon him in the orders which Bridgett had so faithfully repeated made him yet more distastefully contemplate the dire necessity of falling under the rigid despotism of this determined guardian: it was like going back to a preparatory school, to be mulcted of pocket-money, and set in a dark corner! But what other resource? None but appeal to Darrell--still more intolerable; except--he paused in his cogitation, shook his head, muttered "No, no." But that "except" would return!--except to forget his father's prayer and his own promise--except to hunt out Sophy, and extract from the generosity, compassion, or fear of her protectress, some such conditions as he would have wrung from Darrell. He had no doubt now that the girl was with Lady Montfort; he felt that, if she really loved Sophy, and were sheltering her in tender recollection, whether of Matilda or of Darrell himself, he might much more easily work on the delicate nerves of a woman, shrinking from all noise and scandal, than he could on the stubborn pride of his resolute father-in-law. Perhaps it was on account of Sophy--perhaps to plead for her--that Lady Montfort had gone to Fawley; perhaps the grief visible on

that lady's countenance, as he caught so hasty a glimpse of it, might be occasioned by the failure of her mission. If so, there might be now some breach or dissension between her and Darrell, which might render the Marchioness still more accessible to his demands. As for his father--if Jasper played his cards well and luckily, his father might never know of his disobedience; he might coax or frighten Lady Montfort into secrecy. It might be quite unnecessary for him even to see Sophy; if she caught sight of him, she would surely no more recognise his altered features than Rugge had done. These thoughts gathered on him stronger and stronger all the evening, and grew into resolves with the next morning. He sallied out after breakfast--the same numbness; but he walked it off. Easy enough to find the address of the Marchioness of Montfort. He asked it boldly of the porter at the well-known house of the present Lord, and, on learning it, proceeded at once to Richmond--on foot, and thence to the small, scattered hamlet immediately contiguous to Lady Montfort's villa. Here he found two or three idle boatmen lounging near the river-side; and entering into conversation with them about their craft, which was sufficiently familiar to him, for he had plied the strongest oar on that tide in the holidays of his youth, he proceeded to inquiries, which were readily and unsuspectingly answered. "Yes, there was a young lady with Lady Montfort; they did not know her name. They had seen her often in the lawn--seen her too, at church. She was very pretty; yes, she had blue eyes and fair hair." Of his father he only heard that "there had been an old gentleman such as he described--lame, and with one eye--who had lived some months ago in a cottage on Lady Montfort's grounds. They heard he had gone away. He had made baskets--they did not know if for sale; if so, perhaps for a charity. They supposed he was a gentleman, for they heard he was some relation to the young lady. But Lady Montfort's head coachman lived in the village, and could, no doubt, give him all the information he required." Jasper was too wary to call on the coachman; he had learned enough for the present. Had he prosecuted his researches farther, he might only have exposed himself to questions, and to the chance of his inquiries being repeated to Lady Montfort by one of her servants, and thus setting her on her guard; for no doubt his father had cautioned her against him. It never occurred to him that the old man could already have returned; and those to whom he confined his interrogatories were quite ignorant of the fact. Jasper had no intention to intrude himself that day on Lady Montfort. His self-love shrank from presenting himself to a lady of such rank, and to whom he had been once presented on equal terms, as the bridegroom of her friend and the confidential visitor to her mother, in habiliments that bespoke so utter a fall. Better, too, on all accounts, to appear something of a gentleman; more likely to excite pity for suffering--less likely to suggest excuse for rebutting his claims, and showing him to the door. Nay, indeed, so dressed, in that villanous pea-jacket, and with all other habiliments to match, would any servant admit him?--could he get into Lady Montfort's presence? He must go back--wait for Mrs. Crane's return. Doubtless she would hail his wish--half a reform in itself--to cast off the outward signs of an accepted degradation.

Accordingly he went back to town in much better spirits, and so absorbed in his hopes, that, when he arrived at Podden Place, he did not observe that, from some obliquity of vision, or want of the normal correspondence

between will and muscle, his hand twice missed the knocker--wandering first above, then below it; and that, when actually in his clasp, he did not feel the solid iron: the sense of touch seemed suspended. Bridgett appeared. "Mistress is come back, and will see you."

Jasper did not look charmed; he winced, but screwed up his courage, and mounted the stairs--slowly--heavily. From the landing-place above glared down the dark shining eyes that had almost quailed his bold spirit nearly six years before; and almost in the same words as then, a voice as exulting, but less stern, said: "So you come at last to me, Jasper Losely--you are come." Rapidly--flittingly, with a step noiseless as a spectre's, Arabella Crane descended the stairs; but she did not, as when he first sought that house in the years before, grasp his hand or gaze into his face. Rather, it was with a shrinking avoidance of his touch--with something like a shudder--that she glided by him into the open drawing-room, beckoning him to follow. He halted a moment; he felt a longing to retreat--to fly the house; his superstitious awe of her very benefits came back to him more strongly than ever. But her help at the moment was necessary to his very hope to escape all future need of her, and, though with a vague foreboding of un conjecturable evil, he stepped into the room, and the door closed on both.

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