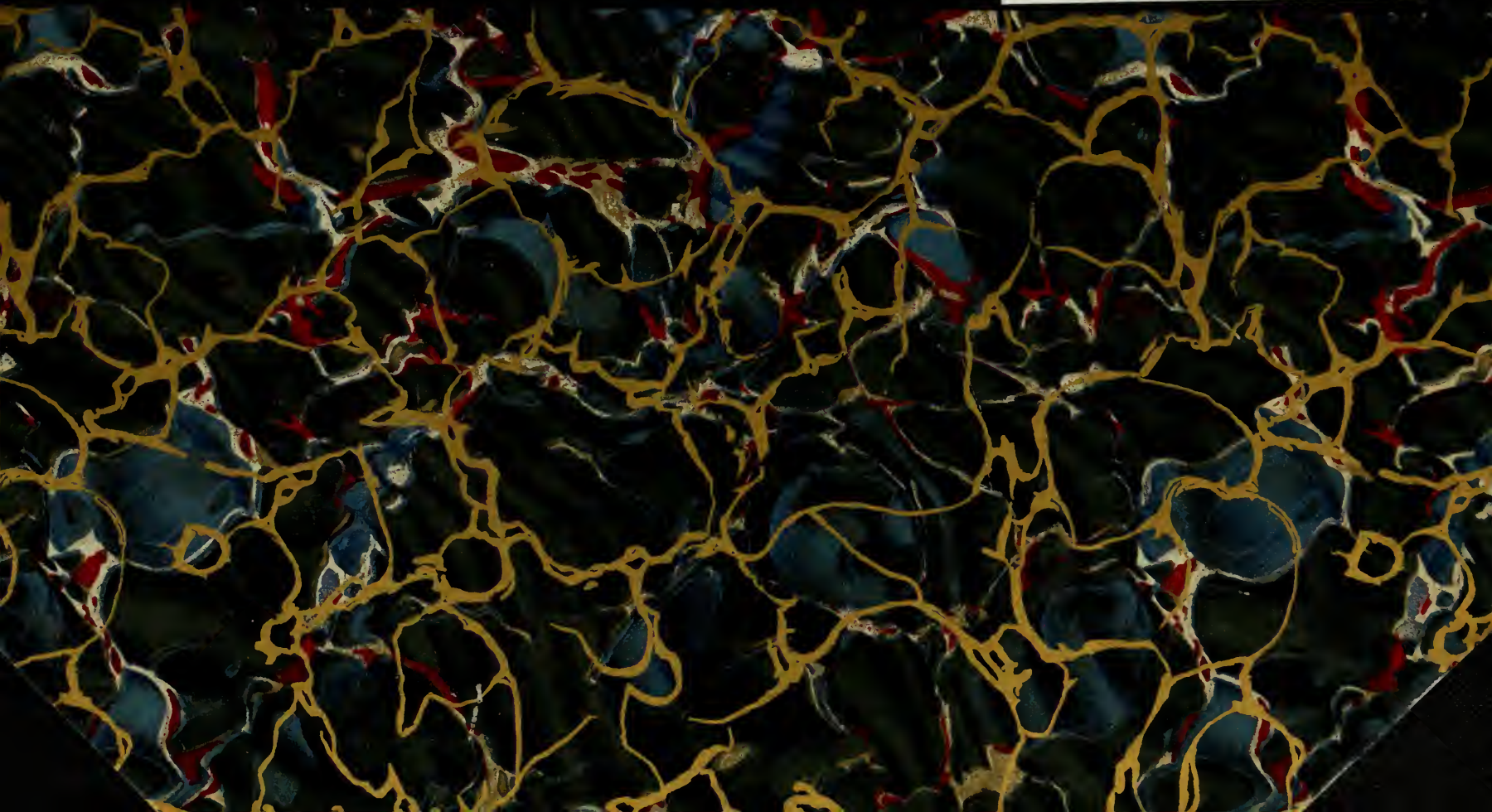

# Tales from "Blackwood"

# TALES FROM "BLACKWOOD"

Being the most Famous Series of Stories ever Published Especially Selected from that Celebrated English Publication

*Selected by*

H. CHALMERS ROBERTS



NEW YORK
Doubleday, Page & Company
1903

# CONTENTS

## VOLUME III

# TALES FROM "BLACKWOOD."

## A FRENCH SPECULATION.

BY THE HON. LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.

### CHAPTER I.

IT was a bright Sunday afternoon in the early spring, and all the little world of Blois was disporting itself on the promenade by the side of the river Loire. The scene was very gay: under the long line of trees a band of stringed instruments was labouring through an elaborate valse. The performers were amateurs: they belonged to a choral society got up by the organist of the cathedral, among the young and enterprising *bourgeoisie;* and the affair had proved a great success. As they played now, the admiring eyes of mothers, sisters, and pretty cousins were on them, and they did their best

and looked their best, as became their important position!

A little apart from the band sat groups of elder ladies, chatting among themselves, watching their portly husbands and slim daughters promenading round the musicians; among them little children trotting about, daintily dressed, and *bonnes* with large white coifs on their heads and knitting in their hands. Over all, the sunny sky of France, blue, bright, and gay, smiling through the tender green of the young foliage, and reflecting itself beauteously in the fair river.

Truly they seemed a happy and contented people these honest *bourgeois* of the old town, full of their own concerns, and apparently well satisfied to be so. Among a group of *gros papas* who stood chattering together, and leaning on the parapet, stood two men, both of whom seemed graver than the others. The elder of the two was a man of some importance in the town, the owner of a well-known and popular inn "La Pie Blanche." No one was more respected than Monsieur Auguste Benoit; he and his family were most highly considered. Monsieur Benoit was about the average height of the French *bourgeois*, a liberal five-foot five; he was stout, or rather round; his prominent waistcoat was adorned by a huge gold watch-chain; he wore a massive ring set with a carbuncle on the first finger of his right hand; his hands were fat and dimpled, and tapered to finely-

pointed fingers. Monsieur Benoit's face was good-nature and *bonhomie* itself; it was round and large, smooth shaven but for the black moustache. He was bald on the top of his head; the hair behind was black as jet, and so close cut as to throw two large thin ears into loud relief. His ample double chin rested on a black satin cravat. His dress, from that cravat to the tartan trousers in folds on the hips, and tapering to the very small high-heeled boots, was perfection. Such was Monsieur Benoit on the promenade on Sunday, but to-day the shade of gravity sat on him in an unwonted manner.

Monsieur Benoit's companion was a man who might have been any age between thirty-five and fifty. He belonged to a different type altogether from his friend: he was tall, and very thin; his hair was fair and sprinkled with grey; he wore a short, fair beard, which partly concealed the restless movements of an eager, mobile mouth; his eyebrows also were constantly moving, and his eyes restless, bright, and searching; he was, despite this unrestfulness, a handsome man, with straight features and a well-made figure. He was Monsieur Legros, formerly a highly successful *avocat*, now retired upon his laurels, with his money invested in a new and startling investment. That restlessness was the restlessness of speculation; in his little office, in old days of hard work, Legros had been a much calmer man.

That such a man as Camille Legros ever had time

or thought to spare for matrimony, was an astonishment to his acquaintance; but so it was. Affairs of importance had taken him to Blois, where he had hired a room in "La Pie Blanche." Madame Benoit herself always presided at the head of the *table d'hôte*, and on her right hand sat her daughter, Mademoiselle Blanche, so named, people said, after the celebrated "Pie." Before Monsieur Legros had dined three times at *table d'hôte* he had determined to make Blanche his wife. He was a man who, during a busy life, had hardly given a passing thought to women. He was, like most Frenchmen, a devoted son to his widowed mother; but perhaps it was his experience of her that had so completely lowered his conception of what a woman should be, that he expected in a wife a pretty nonentity—a creature not to trust or to share his confidence, but a useful housekeeper, and a credit to his taste in good looks. He was not in love with Blanche Benoit: he did not know what love was; and he demanded her from her father with a strong sense of the good match he was offering her, and that the obligation would be all on their side. Monsieur Benoit demanded a fair statement of his proposed son-in-law's finances before he would agree to the betrothal. It was given. Camille Legros was too absolutely confident in the success of his great schemes to conceal anything. Benoit was impressed by the size of the fortune, but somewhat startled by hearing that it was all invested in one vast specula-

tion, the building of a little fashionable watering-place that was to rival Dieppe, Dinard, or Etretat in its attractions.

"You are sure—you are quite sure that the situation is one that will be popular?" asked the innkeeper, anxiously.

"Sure! I am certain," cried Legros, shrugging up his shoulders and tapping the map over which they were bending with the back of his hand. "What more can one wish? The air is magnificent; an unbroken *plage* of hard sand; the view exquisite; in the neighbouring inland town advantages of education, of market, of medical attendance; the railway has agreed with me, for a consideration, to run an additional train from Paris; there are quarries close at hand, from which I draw my stone—it is well adapted to building purposes; labour is cheap just now; I have capital,—what more can one desire?"

"It sounds well," said Monsieur Benoit, musingly. He was dazzled by the talk, by the ready money, by the certainty of Legros; and after a conference with Madame Benoit—for he did not share his future son-in-law's views about women—they agreed to give him their only child.

Blanche was told, and was quite satisfied; she had not thought much of the future, leaving it with perfect confidence in her parents' hands; so she was neither surprised nor disconcerted when Monsieur Legros was presented to her as her future husband;

and she smiled a very pretty little smile, and made the set little speech her mother had taught her with so charming a grace, that Legros was enchanted. Blanche was charming: she was tall and slight; her face was a perfect oval, her complexion clear and white; her eyes very large and dark brown, fringed with thick dark lashes—as thick and long at each end of the eyelid as in the centre; her dark hair was cut short on the forehead, in the fashion of the day; the mouth beautifully shaped, tender, mobile, wondrously sweet in expression, but betraying something of childishness and immaturity, which befitted her seventeen years.

That Sunday afternoon at Blois was the day preceding the wedding, and Blanche and her mother were seated together for the last time listening to the band.

"That is Jean's violin," said Blanche, touching her mother's hand. "Listen, mamma."

They sat on a bench, Madame Benoit stout in black silk, Blanche all in white; and a violin solo was played in the orchestra.

"He plays well, the little Jean," said Madame Benoit, complacently. "Thy cousin has talent, Blanche."

Yes, he was playing well, the poor boy,—playing on his own heart-strings this evening; for was not Blanche to be married to-morrow, and what should he have to live for—he, the forlorn collegian of nine-

teen—when his fair cousin was gone? and she never guessed it. Alas, poor Jean!

The solo ended, there was applause. He fancied he could hear her little hands joining in the applause, and he stole away out of the group of musicians, and came and stood beside her wistfully.

By-and-by an evening breeze began to stir the river; it became chilly; Madame Benoit rose.

"Oh, not yet, not yet, mamma," said Blanche, regretfully. "I should like to linger yet a little while."

"Then go to papa, my child. I must go in, to be in time for the omnibus that comes from the train. I cannot neglect my possible travellers;" and she hurried away. Blanche went over to the parapet where her father stood.

"We are going to take a walk, *mignonne*," he said,—"Monsieur Legros and I."

"Perhaps Mademoiselle Blanche would wish to come with us?" said Legros, courteously.

"May I?"

"We are enchanted."

"But how about our conversation and business, *mon cher?*" said Monsieur Benoit.

"See!" cried Jean, advancing eagerly. "If these messieurs will allow it, I will walk with my cousin; we will follow you; we shall converse; we will not interrupt you; we shall be happy."

There was a pathetic ring in the last words of the boy that struck Legros. He looked at him keenly,

and then at Blanche; but he only said, briefly, "*Soit*," and they started on their walk.

On the opposite side of the river lay the little suburb of Blois, which is called Vienne. It is an insignificant little place, lying in a flat low country, intersected with open ditches. Quite across these flat fields ran a long spine, formed by a narrow road on an embankment, just sufficiently wide to allow of trees being planted on each side of it; the rank grass and thick bushes growing up the sides of the embankment shut in this little road, and made it very quiet and green. The views now and then through a gap in the trees and undergrowth were charmingly pretty, showing picturesque old Blois, with its piled-up buildings and high steps; the river below; behind, the wide country, and a low crimson streak of setting sun.

"The last time, the last time!" said Jean in a low earnest whisper, as the two followed the elder men at a short distance behind.

"No, no; not the last time. Many and many a time shall we pace this promenade again," said Blanche, gaily. Only to the boy it was the very last time.

Beautiful yellow dragon-flies flitted across their path. One alighted on Blanche's white gown, and she had leisure during one brief second to admire it. Then bright blue butterflies, brilliant as a patch of sky, flitted to and fro. A little damp and very green,

with a faint sweet smell of marshy plants below, this walk was a perfect paradise for lovely and rare insects.

Monsieur Benoit and Legros recked not of the brilliant insect-world, save when a blundering common dragon-fly in his steel-blue armour bounced against Monsieur Benoit's face, causing him to emit a hasty expression of impatience. They were deep in business. It was a subject that had been, so to speak, already talked threadbare; but this terrible Camille Legros would come back to it again and again. Blanche would have an excellent *dot* after her father's death; but till that occurred, nothing—"not one *sou*," said the good man energetically.

"But see, my good friend," urged Legros over and over again, "I am nearly as old as thee, and we are not either of us old! *Ma foi*, no! I tell you two thousand francs *now* would be of more value than twenty thousand after you are no more."

"No, no; ask me no more. After all, my friend, this grand affair of yours at St Didier, it is but a speculation; and if it fail, you will then have this snug little nest-egg of Blanche's to fall back upon. I know what I am about—*va!*"

"Less than this has broken a marriage, *mon cher*," said Legros, somewhat gloomily.

"Break it! break it! Only it must be done to-night, my friend," said Monsieur Benoit. "To-morrow it will be too late;" and he proceeded to light a fresh cigar. Legros walked on thoughtfully for a

few steps. He was afraid to show how he longed to obtain possession of some of the promised money, or how valuable it would be to him at this moment.

"A truce to joking," he said suddenly, clearing his brow. "If you are determined, there is no more to be said. Break off the marriage! *Peste!* With me it has become an affair of the heart."

"And when you have once conversed with Blanche, it will be still more so," cried her father enthusiastically. "I know it is not etiquette, but would you like to walk home with her now?"

"I should," said Legros, smiling a little. Monsieur Benoit turned round: "Jean, Jean, my boy."

Jean joined him, and he passed his arm through his and walked on. Monsieur Legros stepped back, and placed himself by the side of his young betrothed. "You are fond of flowers?" he said, observing that her hands were full of them.

"Yes, monsieur."

"There are flowers at St Didier, and I am planting them, making gardens everywhere."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Have you ever been away from Blois?"

"No, monsieur."

"Then you cannot imagine St Didier. All is new, new, new. None of those crumbling streets and mouldy buildings. All is fresh and bright, and the houses are very gay—some painted pink, and some green and white. And there is a casino, which will

be very gay when the place is full of *locataires.* See, here are the plans," and he drew a roll from his pocket. "That is the great hotel, and there is the English church with a spire, and here is an artist's studio; and on the cliffs gay villas, with gardens running down to the sea."

"It must be charming—charming, monsieur."

"What are they doing, Jean?" asked Monsieur Benoit, pressing the arm of his young cousin. "It would not be discreet for me to look, but thou—thou mayest look."

What were they doing? Jean's heart failed him, for he thought of what he himself would have been doing — whispering honeyed words, stealing loving looks from shy, downcast eyes. With hot impatience he looked back.

"Ah, bah!" he said. "You may look, monsieur, without the smallest indiscretion. He is explaining to her the plans of St Didier."

## CHAPTER II.

The courtyard of the "Pie Blanche" was very gaily decorated the next morning—scarlet cloth over the pavement, festoons of leaves and flowers all round the windows, and a magnificent motto in scarlet and white over the archway leading into the street. The bridal party had been to the Mairie at eight o'clock

in the morning, after which they returned to the hotel, to emerge in full splendour at half-past ten.

All the busy laughing and chattering ceased when the procession was formed. They went two and two, —the bride and her father at the head, Blanche dressed all in white, with her flowing veil hiding her blushing face—all the other relations arm-in-arm behind; three bride's-maids each with her cavalier; the mother leaning on an uncle; all the friends; the ladies dressed in the height of the fashion—fawn-coloured silk, cream-coloured satin and brown, Bismarck *enragé, prune de Monsieur, noir corbeau, sang de bœuf,*—all varieties of colours; their hair frizzed, their heels two inches high;—the gentlemen in full evening dress, cut-away coats, white waistcoats, and gloves, with exquisite bouquets in their button-holes.

As the last of them passed under the archway, the two old waiters who were left behind each flicked the napkin in his hand with a somewhat discontented flick.

"I wish mad'demoiselle was not going so far off, Battiste," said the younger of the two, who might be sixty. "Oh la! la! we shall miss her sweet face." "Yes," answered Battiste, ruefully. "And her monsieur is a queer sort of man, never gives one a look or a word, and sits up night after night over his accounts, like one that is not certain on which side the balance will lie."

"Umph!—well, the old 'Pie Blanche' will be something solid for mad'demoiselle to fall back upon, anyhow; we do well, *hein?*"

Up the narrow picturesque streets, up flights of stairs, mounting the hill, the procession at last reached the cathedral. With one of the bride's-maids leaning on his arm, a simpering girl in blue, came Jean, and as he walked his heart grew heavier. When they reached the great western door he could bear it no longer, he could not see Blanche given away to this stranger—it would break his heart. There was a pause at the entrance, congratulating friends pressing round, and among them Jean slipped away, leaving the aggrieved bride's-maid to do as best she might.

The cathedral stands on one height of the picturesque old town, and on another height the castle. Behind the cathedral is a dark, tree-shadowed old garden, with a parapet from which to view the lawn beneath, the flowing Loire, the great gloomy walls of the old Château de Blois. The old trees grew closely together, and even with their young spring foliage made a thick impenetrable shade. The garden of the old Evêché it is called: but when Jean went into it with his sore heart, there were no dark-robed priests pacing its alleys; it was complete solitude, the cathedral bells clanging a joyous marriage cadence which smote on his ear. He flung himself on a low stone bench, hid his face in his hands, and waited. It seemed an eternity. When it was all over, there was

a joyous movement and murmur. He emerged from the old garden, and was just in time to see them come out, bride and bridegroom first, bowing, smiling, shaking hands. His Blanche! no, she was his no longer —she belonged to Camille Legros. It was all over, all over, and he wished that he was dead.

The sun should shine on a wedding-day, it is true, and very sunny was Blanche's wedding-day; and it is equally important that it should shine on her first entry into her new home, but unfortunately it did not do so. The Legros remained for about a week at Blois—a week which seemed interminable to the bridegroom, who felt it a grievous waste of time—a week full of mingled disappointment, happiness, and grief to Blanche. She was dreadfully afraid of her husband, never sufficiently at ease with him to let him have any insight into her real character and the intelligence of her judgments and opinions. Her conversation was limited to monosyllables, her remarks to interjections. He pored over his plans all day, giving vent to such vivid descriptions of the charms of St Didier that Blanche formed a most brilliant conception of what her new home would be; and finding that that subject pleased him best, grew bold enough to ask a few flattering questions about it. Unluckily the questions were not easy to answer. For instance: "Will it not be difficult to have any privacy among all these people, monsieur?" She had yet to learn that the people were still to come. Then,

"I am glad my new gowns were made so much *à la mode*. Who sets the fashion at St Didier, monsieur?" and so on,—Monsieur Legros blustering a little, and talking of the coming "season" and the present dead time of the year.

Blanche had one of those clinging natures who cannot live without loving some one. A very few gentle words, a very little affection, from her husband in the first days of their marriage sufficed to make her love him; but it was with a timid, deprecating love, easily subdued, and very shrinking.

It was a grey, cloudy, windy day, when the bride first saw her new home. The journey was a tedious one, with many changes. Blanche had wept bitterly on leaving her home and her parents for the first time. Her head ached; she was confused by the unknown bustle of travelling, and longed, poor child, for a kiss and a kind word; but Legros was not a demonstrative man. She took refuge in the thought of the charms of the new home, and of the welcome that awaited her from Madame Berthe, her husband's mother, who lived with him, and had hitherto managed his household. They reached the station, transferred themselves and their baggage to a very shabby-looking one-horse omnibus, and were soon started on their way.

The country was flat and green, with no interesting features whatever. By-and-by, as they drove on, it grew colder and colder. A sharp north wind blowing

over the sea, there was a fresher smell and taste in the air; but Blanche was so tired that she could hardly keep awake, and her eyes closed again and again. Monsieur Legros showed her some little tenderness then. He put his arm round her, and drew a shawl over her knees, and looking at the pale, beautiful little face, which almost rested on his shoulder, felt a thrill of gratification and pride. Suddenly a tremendous jolt awoke Blanche, followed by leaps and jerks, as if they were passing over heavy ruts.

"We are arriving! look up, Blanche!" cried her husband, in an excited voice. They were passing up what seemed to be an embryo street—the road not yet made, the houses all detached from each other, and in different stages of development. They turned a corner, and now faced the sea; a sudden sweep round, and they drew up before one of a row of houses which faced the beach, and appeared more finished than the others. Monsieur Legros was eagerly gazing out of the window; with a bound he leapt out of the carriage.

"Excuse me, *ma chère amie*," he cried, suddenly. "But I see such mischief going on in that villa yonder—all the painting wrong. One moment only;" and without a moment's pause he had darted away, leaving her startled, bewildered, not knowing what to do.

"Madame had better descend," said the coachman; "I have a long way to drive back."

"Yes, yes!" cried Blanche. She got out, had her trunks removed from the roof of the carriage, and watched the man mechanically, as he rang the bell, and left her, driving off without waiting to be paid.

The young bride stood on the threshold of her new home, and the tears gathered fast in her eyes. She drew her shawl more closely round her; the wind was tearing it from her, and it was very cold.

It seemed a long time before the bell was answered. The door opened, and a little withered old woman in a loose wrapper appeared.

"Who is it?" she asked, in a shrill voice. "My *bonne* has gone off, and left no one at home. They are all alike these *bonnes;* but Rosalie is much the worst—*oui, dame,* much the worst."

"It is I, madame—Blanche Legros," said the poor little, weary, trembling bride. The old woman gave a little cry.

"Ah! Madame Camille! my boy's rich wife! Come in! come in! And where is he? where is he? When didst thou arrive?"

She held out her hands, embraced Blanche warmly, and retreated through the house, uttering shrill calls —"Rosalie! Rosalie! silly one! quick, quick, Rosalie! Madame Camille is come, and we not expecting her this hour or more."

Rosalie appeared at last, and, helped by the two ladies, drew in one of Blanche's boxes. The others being too heavy, were left outside for the present.

In a few moments they were seated in the *salon*, and Blanche had leisure to look about her. The drawing-room and dining-room were one; only divided from each other by a curtain, which was drawn back. Both were somewhat scantily furnished—a few hard-backed arm-chairs, a round centre table; a very large alabaster clock, with vases to match, on the mantelpiece. Blanche's eyes took it all in at a glance; then she stooped over the very small fire of damp, hastily kindled logs. Madame Berthe wore broad carpet-slippers; she rested the bellows on the wide square toe, and blew away at the faint sparks in the grate while she talked.

"So Camille left you at the very door! That was just like him, his whole heart he has thrown into this place with his money. *Dame, oui!* his whole heart and his whole fortune. So he saw something wrong, did he? Well, how could it be expected otherwise, when he had been away more than three weeks? All the workmen ceased to work, and idled about all day; the coachman drove out his friends in the carriage. A lady and a gentleman came and looked at villa La Rochelle, and nothing came of it. Wasted chances! wasted chances!"

Blanche hung her head, she felt guilty of this sad waste of time. Madame Berthe rubbed her hands with a little chuckle.

"But the season is coming on—the fine season," she said, "when all the world will be here, and St

Didier will be as gay as Dieppe itself—a little Paris, indeed."

Time passed on, and Camille Legros did not come in. Weary, faint, and exhausted, it seemed to Blanche as if the chuckling talk of Madame Berthe would never end. At six o'clock came dinner, but she was too tired to eat. When it was nearly over her husband came in; there was a cloud on his brow she had never seen before.

"Everything has been going wrong," he said, tucking the end of his napkin under his chin, and devouring great spoonfuls of soup. "Jean Marie has not looked after the men. The work at the *châlet* is where I left it. The walls of the villa No. 3 are not a foot above the ground. I have lost two good lets. Truly, I should never have been away."

Blanche winced again; he went on grumbling about neglect and carelessness, while Madame Berthe watched him, nodding like an old bright-eyed bird with her head on one side. After dinner he went out again,—not a moment given to sentiment, not a caress to his young wife.

When he was gone Blanche pleaded to be shown her room, and was taken up-stairs.

"Good night, sleep well," said Madame Berthe, with a friendly nod; and she went off muttering to herself.

"He has chosen well—she will look very well on the promenade; much too fine a lady to look after the

*ménage*. Yes, yes; we will go on as before, and her money will keep us all straight till the *locataires* come!"

Blanche unpacked the ivory crucifix that always hung over her bed, placed it at her head, and then lay down, too utterly weary to realise that she was not happy to-night.

The next morning Blanche was up betimes, eager to see everything, and make acquaintance with her new home. It was a great pity that the sky continued to be of one uniform dull grey colour—that the sea was restless and sullen—and the rocks and islands, which made the coast so picturesque, were half shrouded with mist; but a good night's sleep had refreshed the little bride completely, and renewed all her bright castles in the air.

Madame Berthe's welcome to her this morning was far less cordial than it had been the night before, and a little startled Blanche; but she soon forgot it in watching her husband eat his breakfast, and ministering to his wants to save time, for he said he had but five minutes to spare, and nothing must keep him waiting. Before he had swallowed his last mouthful he was off, and Blanche and her mother-in-law were left alone.

"My husband is always busy like this?" asked Blanche, timidly. Madame Berthe nodded.

"And need he should be," she said, grimly. "It will take all his energies to keep things going."

"But are they not going well?" cried Blanche, very much startled. "I thought everything promised so wonderfully."

"There is a vast difference between promise and fruition. It is a great fortune my son lays out, and we must wait, wait—*oui, dame*, we must wait to realise any profits."

She began to take away the coffee-cups as she spoke, and for the moment Blanche did not speak, —then she said, timidly—

"Will you tell me something about my husband's affairs, dear madame? I have been told nothing."

The old woman looked at her sharply, and hesitated. "I think," she said, "that if they had thought that you were to be trusted they would have told you all about it."

The tears rushed to Blanche's eyes.

"I am to be trusted," she said, pleadingly.

"Well, then, I may as well tell you. At present, Camille is embarrassed for money. Don't start and turn so pale, my dear," she said, harshly. "Of course it is only a momentary embarrassment; but he has placed his whole fortune in this affair, and of course it demands time, much time even."

"But has he no partners? does no one share the outlay and the risk?" asked Blanche, with a little of the shrewdness of her commercial birth.

"No one—no one," said his mother, her voice growing shrill. "Every Saturday he pays his wages,

two francs a-day per man, and a hundred men are working on the place now; and besides that, for the houses that are furnished there are the *menuisiers*, the *vitriers*, the *tapissiers*. Oh! the money flows night and day; and every house on the place must be let well and for long before it can do more than even pay the interest of this fortune. And you," cried the old lady, harshly,—"you, who might have helped him, have failed; and his very marriage has turned out a wasted opportunity: the poor boy has no chance!"

"What do you mean, madame?" cried Blanche, shocked beyond measure.

"I mean, of course, that when a man makes a marriage he expects to find something; not that his wife should bring him nothing, her hands empty."

"And I? have I nothing?" faltered Blanche.

"Nothing; actually not one *sou* till your good father's death. Bah! he is not five years older than Camille himself."

"And then?"

"Ah, then! but what will it avail—double, treble the *dot* then—when my Camille is a millionaire? It is now, now, now!" she shrieked; "when money is going out on every hand and none coming in. *Va! va!* thou also art a failure, *ma bru!*"

Blanche burst into tears, and fled away in grief to her own room.

In the afternoon she timidly ventured down-stairs

again, terribly afraid of meeting Madame Berthe. The door of the kitchen was wide open, and she could not help hearing some of the conversation from within. Her mother-in-law was speaking.

"Yes, yes, Rosalie—a helpless fine lady. We will go on just as we did before; we must make our economies, thou and I, just as we did; and I will teach Madame Camille to put up with them too. Yes, yes; why should she not? she brings nothing to the *pot-au-feu.*"

Blanche went boldly into the kitchen with a sudden impulse.

"I will make any economies you will," she said, sweetly; "anything to please you and to save money."

"Ah, bah!" said Madame Berthe, contemptuously. "Professions are all very well, but when it comes to actions——"

"You will not find me wanting," said Blanche, with gentle dignity; and she left the kitchen. Madame Berthe hurried after her, and catching hold of her arm, she said, eagerly—

"But see! see, *ma petite bru!* they say your father adores you. Write to him, tell him you want money; he will send it to you."

"I will. I will tell him how important it is just now for monsieur—that it will be of such service."

"You must not! you shall not!"

"But what, then, am I to do?" cried Blanche, bewildered.

"Tell him you want it for yourself; tell him you find that you must make great *toilettes* here; that you want a piano; that—that,—there, can you invent nothing?"

"No," said Blanche, quietly; "I can invent nothing. I must tell the truth, or I will not ask."

"But you will keep all our conversation secret—you are to be trusted? No, do not look offended; but if any one knew that Camille has begun to borrow for his week's wages, that would be the end of St Didier."

"Of course I will say nothing;" and Blanche drew away her arm and went out of doors.

The grey fog was still over everything, a wet sea-fog, so that the water dripped off all the houses and saturated everything. In the distance Blanche caught sight of her husband with his collar turned up round his ears, and the perpetual cigar in his mouth. She went up to him; she forced herself to smile and speak gaily as she joined him.

"Will you show me the town now, Camille?"

He was quite pleased. "Ah! you are like an Englishwoman," he said—"not afraid of the weather."

"I am generally," she said; "but not to-day, for I want so much to see St Didier."

There was a square garden facing the sea surrounded by houses, and from each corner of this square ran two boulevards of detached villas, each with a tiny little garden running down to the cliff, from which a small

flight of steps led to the beach. These houses were in all the varied stages of completion, but swarming with workmen. The newly-planted trees were struggling into leaf. All round were the commencements of buildings. The English church, which had been so prominent a feature in the plans, was just one foot out of the ground. The Casino was completed, and was gorgeous. Young gardens and a lawn-tennis ground were marked out and planted with baby-trees, all top-heavy with their large-leaved, scanty foliage, and dripping with the salt sea-fog.

"Are any of the houses taken yet?" asked Blanche, timidly.

"Yes; that house is occupied by a very rich American lady, but, oh, so exacting,—she has asked for so much, and I have given her all—everything," he cried, throwing out his hands. "It shall be said of me that no landlord ever was so amiable, or gave so much." The house he pointed out was one of the largest in the place, and looked somewhat older than the others. A very magnificent lady was standing at the window. She beckoned to Monsieur Legros.

"I must go in," he said, discontentedly. "I am sure she wants something more from me."

The lady beckoned again, and Monsieur Legros went in. Blanche waited patiently till he reappeared on the steps of the house, accompanied by the lady.

"So that is Madame Camille?" cried the latter, in

a strong foreign accent, and Blanche found her hand warmly clasped.

"Your husband is the best landlord I know, madame," she went on. "I have had much experience, and have never met with a kinder one. He has just promised me a conservatory, but it shall be worth his while."

And all the time Monsieur Legros continued making obsequious bows; but when he walked on with his wife he ground his teeth.

## CHAPTER III.

The houses sprang up — a faint smell of fresh-painted *jalousies* filled the air—the sea and sky grew blue—all the golden gorse bloomed, paled, and died—the time of lilacs passed—and two dim Judas-trees which adorned the Casino gardens burst into their leafless flower. The season ought to be beginning soon. Monsieur Legros worked harder than ever. Morning, noon, and night he was out in pursuit of his workmen. One day a tenant arrived in the shape of a weary, old, grey-headed man. He rented one room, *au-cinquième*, of the small *pension* which was just finished, and wrote up a modest little placard, announcing himself as a music-master.

"It is well to be first in the field," he said to Blanche, "in a great future success like St Didier."

And Monsieur Léon was added to the prospectuses as a famous singing and music master.

Then the moment came when the hot summer rush takes place from towns to the seaside,—Dieppe, Dinard, and Etretat began to fill rapidly. Every day the St Didier omnibuses went to meet the trains—every day Madame Berthe and Blanche stood with beating hearts to watch them come in. Often they told each other that the carriages were full—quite full; and then it would turn out that it was a picnic party from the town, or tourists who would sleep one night at the hotel.

One day Monsieur Legros said suddenly to his wife, "I suppose, in writing home to your father, you have told him all about our circumstances?"

"No, never, Camille," she answered. "I have kept your secrets. I knew that these things are important in the commerce."

Monsieur Legros bent down and kissed her.

"Then do this more for me, *m'amie*," he said. "Write to him; paint the whole thing in the brightest colours. I do not want you to say more than the truth, of course—but tell him the promise of it all; that I am said to be the best of landlords—that the place is getting on and becoming known."

"I have told him of our hopes, Camille; why should you wish me to say more?"

Monsieur Legros hesitated a moment, then he gave a little impatient stamp.

"For a *bourgeoise* you are wonderfully dull, *m'amie*. Do you not perceive that I want him to invest some portion of your future fortune in this manner?"

"Ah! but I fear that I could not advise him to do that," said Blanche, gravely. Her husband scowled at her, and she shrank away trembling. A few moments after she saw Madame Berthe catch hold of his arm with her claw-like hands and ask in a hard whisper—"But what did she say? will she do it?"

"Not to save me from prison," he answered bitterly, and her very heart ached as she heard the words.

The days passed on, and though the season had come, the gay world had not yet appeared. Everything bore a prosperous look; all the men were paid to the day; the further extravagant demands of the American lady were acceded to without a murmur; the English church was completed;—but no one as yet came to stay.

One day receiving a packet of her husband's letters from the postman, Blanche found one directed to herself. It was not a very common occurrence; her parents wrote very rarely, and her old school-friends were capricious correspondents. She turned the letter over and over again in her hands, wondering from whom it could be. Monsieur Legros caught sight of the handwriting as she did so, and started.

"Who has been writing to you, Blanche?" he said quickly.

"I do not know—I was wondering."

"Perhaps you had better give me the letter," he said quickly. Then seeing her look of astonishment, he added—"No, no; read it yourself."

She opened her letter and read; presently she looked up with a little cry.

"Camille," she said, "Jean writes to tell me that his uncle, the great *épicier* at Nantes, has died and left him a fortune of 5000 francs a-year. Ah, but that is good news!"

"Does he say any more?" asked Monsieur Legros, rather huskily.

"Yes, yes, I have not finished yet," and she went on reading. Suddenly the colour forsook her face, leaving it ashy pale, and she looked up suddenly. "Camille, you knew this; and you have asked this poor boy for his money."

"I have advised him as to its investment, certainly."

"This must be stopped," cried Blanche. "He must not be ruined; he, an orphan!"

"You do not know what you are talking about, madame," shrieked Madame Berthe, suddenly joining in the conversation.

Blanche rose to her feet; there was a dignity in her graceful figure they had not seen before; she swept her hand past, showing the rows of houses: "See," she said sadly, "are they not all empty?"

"Yes, and empty they will remain as long as you conspire to ruin us," cried Madame Berthe, nodding

her head up and down. Blanche turned piteously to her husband, but in his face was no sign of relenting; he looked dark and sullen.

"You will not ruin this poor little Jean?" she said.

"What do you wish?" he cried suddenly. "I have no power in the matter; I merely told him how in five years he can make 50 per cent on his money. If he choose to accept it, so be it; it is no affair of mine."

"It must be stopped."

"Who will stop it?" cried Legros, fiercely.

"I will." And poor Blanche could bear no more, but sank back in her chair white and gasping. Camille Legros was livid with rage, but he controlled himself with some difficulty, and did not speak. Madame Berthe, unhindered by her son, poured out a torrent of abuse and violent language. In vain Blanche turned her pathetic eyes from her angry mother-in-law to her husband—he offered her no protection, and after a moment or two he grew tired of the shrill voice and strode away.

Presently Madame Berthe changed her tone, and this was even more difficult to bear. "You will not ruin your husband, *ma petite bru?*" she whined. "He works so hard and hopes so much, and now all is ready, the great work is nearly accomplished, and only a little money—a very little money—wanted to keep all afloat till the tenants come; and it is a certainty—do you not see it is a certainty of success?

there can be no doubt whatever about it. You whom he loves so much, and whom he took without one penny in your pocket, surely you will not turn against him?"

"But see," cried poor Blanche in despair; "why do you say all this to me? Have I not as much interest in St Didier as yourself? Would not your ruin be my ruin also? But I must think of Jean—the poor little Jean who has neither father nor mother to care for him, and who has always been as a child to the 'Pie Blanche.'"

"But when Camille himself tells you that he will guarantee him eight per cent."

"Alas! alas!" sighed Blanche.

"Then you will not hinder him?" persisted Madame Berthe.

"I must! I must!"

She broke away from her mother-in-law and went out—anywhere out of the house, she thought, as she went down the steep steps down the face of the cliff to the sea. It was a wild, gusty day; the wind nearly blew her off her feet, and sand filled her eyes and mouth.

"Life is not very happy," thought poor Blanche. She hated the sea with an unacknowledged hatred—the bustle and fuss of it—the constant changes. She was not accustomed to them, and they had no charms to the little *bourgeoise* who had hitherto spent so calm and monotonous a life.

Presently she found a sheltered spot, a sort of cave hollowed out of the rock. She was out of the wind here, and she sat down and smoothed her hair and recovered her breath. The whole conversation she had just gone through was most painfully distinct upon her memory. She clasped her hands before her eyes and prayed that she might have strength to do what was right—that she might not shrink from her duty, however painful it might be to her. She must write to Jean and warn him of the difficulties St Didier was contending with—of how likely it was that a great *faillite* was at hand. She knew that she could trust her cousin, and that he would not betray her secret to any one. Then she rose up and went home comforted.

Blanche had no wish to write secretly, or to do anything underhand, but her task was more difficult than she had anticipated. Madame Berthe set herself as a sort of spy upon all her actions; she never left her for a moment except when Legros was at home, and Blanche knew that Rosalie had orders to stop any letters she might write.

She grew pale and thin from the constant anxiety, and her sleep was broken and feverish. At last she contrived to write her letter unseen, and now came the difficulty of posting it. She adopted at last the simplest mode of all. Walking home from church on her husband's arm, she quietly posted it in the letter-box.

"What letter is that?" he cried suddenly.

"My letter to Jean," almost whispered Blanche, in great terror. He almost threw her off his arm and walked off alone. Poor little Blanche stood for a moment dizzy and aghast. This seemed like an insult before the whole congregation. Two peasant-women passing nudged each other, and one or two rude boys giggled and whispered.

With burning cheeks, and eyes so full of hot tears that she could hardly see her way, Blanche went slowly home.

During the next two days her husband hardly spoke to her; and she had a sense of guiltiness towards him that she could not throw off, and that was intensely painful.

About a week later Blanche received an answer from her cousin. When her husband took the letter from among his own, her heart beat so fast that she hardly knew how to bear it. He handed it to her without a word, and she could hardly summon up courage enough to open it.

Legros watched her from under his eyebrows; but he could make nothing out from her countenance, for he did not understand its varying expression. At last she started up and handed him the letter. She stood beside him with glistening eyes and clasped hands, saying eagerly, "Oh, I am so glad —so glad!"

He read it slowly: "My dear Blanche,—I am

infinitely touched by the goodness of your letter to me, and of the frank warning you gave me against insecure investment of my little fortune; but in this matter I must have my own way, in spite of the worldly wisdom of your advice—for which I thank you with my whole heart. Of course I realise the risk; but sometimes some thousands of francs just at the right moment will turn the scale and save the whole affair. I have an impression that this will be the case at St Didier, and that before many years are past we shall all be millionaires. Present my compliments to your good husband, &c."

This was the letter. When he had read it, Legros put his arm round Blanche and kissed her. Madame Berthe was less forgiving.

"Ah, ah!" she muttered; "so you did not quite succeed in your little calumnies after all, *ma bru*."

Preparations for the tenants who were not forthcoming continued even more actively than before. Legros became almost reckless in the additions he made to the comfort of each house: curtains and sofas and chairs arrived from Paris; clocks and ornaments.

One morning the American lady was discovered to have gone—disappeared in the night; and nothing more was heard either of herself or her year's rent. Still Monsieur Legros was as sanguine as ever; but as the summer months wore on, his head became plentifully streaked with grey.

Monsieur Léon stayed on. How he kept body and soul together, perhaps Blanche could have told better than any one else; but his little rent was paid punctually to the day, and he threw himself headlong into the scheme. "It is always well to be first in the field in a grand new 'enterprise,'" he repeated, with almost as much belief in St Didier as ever. When all hopes of letting for the bathing season was over, Legros let freely to a strange set of people, without care or precaution with regard to character or even appearances. The little town soon swarmed with questionable Parisians, who enjoyed themselves beyond measure, and paid only a nominal rent.

"It is intolerable," grumbled Madame Berthe. "But at all events they air the new houses."

It was a great relief to Blanche when they went away, and all the shutters were put up, and the winter drew near again.

"I wish I could help you, Camille," said she wistfully, one day, putting her hand timidly on his arm.

"I think it must be the want of a theatre!" he cried. "I will build one."

"Oh no, no! not yet. Have a little patience."

"You always try to restrain me," he said, rather fretfully. "Don't you see that one must do one's utmost now? and we have no middle course—we must sink or swim." And the theatre was talked of, and planned out roughly that very night.

Camille began to suffer both in body and mind from the long-continued strain of anxiety and disappointment, and the winter set in. New prospectuses were sent out; the houses were offered at the most tempting prices for the winter. The price tempted one or two very poor families with many children; but when their term was up, the damage that had to be repaired encroached much on the small rent.

But with spring, courage came back, and even Blanche herself seemed to arouse suddenly.

"You will let me help you this year, *mon ami*," she said, eagerly.

"I do not see what you can do," was the gloomy answer.

"I will do my very best," she said, gaily. "But first of all, may I take a journey all by myself?"

"By yourself!"

"Of course I shall take a *bonne* with me."

"She can have Rosalie," said Madame Berthe, to whom Blanche had confided her little scheme, which was a very slender one indeed; namely, to go to Tours, and dine two or three times at the *table d'hôte* among the many English—to travel perhaps a very little from one town to another, and try to lead attention, already turning to the seaside, towards St Didier. It was a chance. Blanche reckoned on her powers of description, and on the certainty that, if she could only get the people to come, they would

stay. Madame Berthe reckoned on her daughter-in-law's beauty and winning manner, though she did not say so; and she also felt certain that to see St Didier was all that was necessary.

To Legros naturally the plan appeared entirely childish and even absurd,—this was not the way business should be carried on; however, he good-naturedly yielded to their wishes, only stipulating that Madame Berthe herself should accompany Blanche instead of Rosalie. The poor old woman prepared with many deep groans: she had taken but one journey within her life, the memorable one that brought her to St Didier, and she felt low and unhappy at the prospect of starting afresh. However, her devotion to her son's cause would have carried her through the mysteries of Isis even, so she made her preparations with praiseworthy courage.

"Tell me, Camille," said Blanche, just on the eve of starting—"tell me the sort of tenants you want."

"Look!" said Monsieur Legros, pointing through the window from one house to another. "In that blue house I want a *père de famille;* he may have from four to eight children, who require education. In the pink house, *les Rosiers*, I want a lady and two daughters. That house with the arcade is a *châlet de garçon;* the smoking-room is perfect. I want educating families especially. There," he said, ex-

ultantly, "that villa is just the one for a young *ménage*."

"I see," said Blanche, eagerly. "But I hope for most success among the large families."

"And those are the best of all," answered her husband. "But of all others a Scotch family is the best; for I hear that when they settle, many of their friends, uncles, cousins, and other relations come and settle round them."

Blanche and Madame Berthe went away with their minds full of large Scotch families.

## CHAPTER IV.

Madame Berthe and Blanche arrived at Nantes, their first destination, on the 28th of May, the evening before the *Fête Dieu*. They had taken a room in one of the best hotels, and found to their great delight that it was full of foreigners, all crowded there to see the famous *fête*.

*Table d'hôte* was at six o'clock. Now that the moment had come, Blanche was very much frightened, and clung to Madame Berthe's arm, who, very tremulous herself, managed to say sharp cross things in an undertone as they went in. Blanche found herself seated by a young girl, almost as shy as herself, and unmistakably English. In spite of many sharp little pinches from her mother-in-law, she could

not make up her mind to begin the conversation until the soup was done; then she asked the young lady very timidly whether she liked France. The answer, in very broken French, was bright and cheery; and the blue eyes of the English girl, Meta Brownlow, looked so sweet and sunshiny, that they soon became quite friendly, discussing different places, and making comparisons. Blanche found that her new acquaintance was anxious to understand all about the *fête* on the morrow, so as to enjoy it thoroughly; and it ended in an engagement to meet the English family at the cathedral at high mass the following morning.

The *Fête Dieu* at Nantes is supposed to be the most beautiful in France. The English travellers were full of admiration as they emerged into the *Place* in front of the cathedral just in time to see the great procession leave the east door. The whole thing formed one of those brilliant pictures which remain in the memory for years: the streets and houses all draped with white, scarlet, and blue, the draperies covered with hanging wreaths; triumphal arches overhead, from which hung baskets of lovely flowers; the whole streets strewn thickly with rushes: then the gorgeous procession itself filing solemnly out from the dark background of the dim old church; hundreds of little white and scarlet boys with stiff quaint rose-wreaths on their heads; girls in white, with long white floating veils; the gleaming of mili-

tary pomp, and a fine clash of martial music as the regiment slowly passed; then women in white again, and a long line of monks with bare feet and heads, and brown rough habits; then the acolytes in gorgeous dalmatics of cloth-of-gold, carrying banners, crosses, shrines,—gold, crimson, purple—the brilliant colouring growing more vivid,—till suddenly the bells all rolled out with a crashing sound. Like one man, every one in the vast crowd sank on their knees; twenty choir-boys in scarlet and white stood facing the great door, swinging incense in silver censers, their long chains flashing in the sun; then the chanting began; and out into the light came swaying the huge gold and silver canopy, and the Host, carried by the bishop, passed slowly amidst the prostrate crowd.

Blanche rose from her knees. "It was beautiful, was it not?" she cried, eagerly. She was almost breathless with the admiration and excitement she felt. The blue cloudless sky, the masses of roses, honeysuckle, and white pinks, the great red peonies, all added brilliance and sweet fragrance to the scene, and the thin blue clouds of incense dispersed very slowly in the clear air.

Blanche had won her way completely with the English family, who were delighted with all they saw and heard; but not till evening did she venture to broach the subject that lay so near her heart. Then when again seated at *table d'hôte* she began to talk about St Didier. She heard, with a throb of

her heart that was almost painful, that the Brownlows were thinking of spending the summer months at Dieppe. "If you would only try St Didier," she said, wistfully. "It would be something quite new for you; and there is such a good professor there, if you want music and singing."

Mr and Mrs Brownlow talked it over that evening. They had been at Dieppe two years running, and were quite prepared to like the prospect of a change. They talked it over also with an old Scotch lady, a Miss Macdonald, who was present with a very delicate niece. They were all sociable people, and they made a plan to go together to St Didier at the end of the week, to see whether they liked it.

Blanche threw herself into Madame Berthe's arms that night, and said, "I knew it would be so! I knew it. I prayed so hard at the 'Grande Messe' this morning."

"Do not hope too much," said the old woman in her grumbling voice; "remember how many people came and looked at St Didier and went away again."

"Ah! but they will not this time," said Blanche, hopefully; "I have prayed too much."

There was something in the sweet bright faith that shone in Blanche's lovely eyes that checked Madame Berthe, and she did not give vent to the peevish doubt which arose in her mind.

The next morning they left Nantes and went on to Tours; Blanche determining to return to St Didier

in time to prepare for the appearance of her new acquaintances. There were many English at Tours, and Blanche managed to talk of St Didier to two people: one an old gentleman who was not at all likely to want sea-bathing; the other a French lady, who drank in her description of the place eagerly, and questioned her methodically as to prices, advantages, and terms of leases, ending by promising to come and see the place during the course of the month.

The old gentleman, Dr Price, shook his head, and laughed a little over Blanche's description of the good bathing. She had repeated her little story till she almost knew it by heart, making no secret of her own deep interest in the success of the place. She told every one that it was all new, quite new; that, in fact, that was one of its advantages. After that Blanche and Madame Berthe returned home.

Monsieur Legros heard all that they had to tell with great interest; he gave Blanche *carte blanche* to promise all they asked for to the expected visitors, if only they would come and take the houses.

On one fine Thursday evening they arrived, Mr and Mrs Brownlow and Miss Macdonald; they had left all the young people behind, being very doubtful as to St Didier.

"It is probably a wild-goose chase," said Mr Brownlow, as they drove up to the hotel. "But that little woman was quite irresistible."

"How wonderfully sweet and fresh the air is!"

answered his wife. "I long to get down on to those beautiful sands."

The next morning was beautiful, the sky cloudlessly blue, the sea almost purple, bounded by the band of snow-white foam which outlined the grand rocks; the pink, and blue, and green houses looked gay and sunshiny; and Blanche, looking very dainty and pretty, did the honours of the houses one after another. They looked at so many that her large eyes began to look wistful and startled. Was it to be a failure after all?

That day passed and the night came. Nothing was said. The difficulty was Miss Macdonald, who could not make up her mind as to the exposed situation of the place being good for her invalid niece.

The omnibus that evening brought a new visitor to the hotel, Dr Price himself. He merely ordered his portmanteau to be taken in, and immediately walked off down to the sands. The whole party met at *table d'hôte*, and Miss Macdonald was seated next to the doctor.

In answer to her hesitating question of what he thought of the place, his answer was enthusiastic.

"Why, ma'am, it fulfils every sanatory condition! The right aspect,—everything! I do not see what any one could wish for more."

After another long consultation two notes were despatched directed to Monsieur Legros by Mr Brownlow and Miss Macdonald.

Blanche watched her husband as he read them, and read the answer in his face.

"We have begun at last," he said, and for a moment covered his face with his hands.

"It is all right?" she whispered, for her voice seemed to go.

"It is all right; they wish to take the blue house, and the English Miss Macdonald 'les Rosiers.'"

The next morning Dr Price called on Monsieur Legros and engaged the little house with the arcades, not for the summer, but for a year. He then asked for the refusal of two or three other houses pending letters from England.

"I have long been looking for just such a place as this for my patients," he said, pompously.

In a few weeks St Didier was all alive. The Scotch tradition proved true: a large family of brothers and sisters followed Miss Macdonald; they brought friends of their own; the place began to be talked about. Dr Price proved to be the most important fish that the net of Blanche's charms had landed. He was a physician of considerable eminence, who, having made his fortune, had retired into private life, reserving to himself only a certain number of favourite patients. He seized upon St Didier and at once made it into his hobby. He recommended it, he superintended the drainage, he caused baths—douches, hot salt baths, and other invalid luxuries—to be established; he established himself there; and

before another year was over Monsieur Legros had not a single house or apartment unlet on his hands.

Then, and not till then, did Monsieur and Madame Benoit come to St Didier, accompanied by Jean—Jean, who had outgrown his first love, and who had now a moustache. He was prepared to ignore the sentiment which had made him persevere in his speculation in St Didier, and was proud of boasting that he had had the foresight to see what would really come of it.

Madame Berthe continued to be very cross, but never with Blanche now.

"Of all my Camille's speculations, thou hast turned out the best," she said once to her daughter-in-law; and there was little doubt that Legros thought so also.

They stood together one day looking down on the little crowd assembled listening to a band, all gay, bright, and *riant*, and Blanche pressed her husband's hand.

"It is a great success, *mon ami*, is it not?" she said. "And for success one must thank God."

"I will; I do," he answered, earnestly.

Legros was a kinder and a better man for the success of his Great Speculation.

# RUFUS HICKMAN OF ST BOTOLPH'S.

BY LORD WELLWOOD
(Hon. H. J. Moncreiff).

---

## I.

ON a Saturday evening in the beginning of October 1878, I was driving, or rather was being driven, along the road between Newmarket and Ely, intending to catch a train for the north at Ely. The past week had been a busy one—three days shooting and two days on Newmarket heath. It was the week of the second October meeting. On the Saturday in question I had shot until the last minute in a very high wind, and I felt pleasantly tired and drowsy. The country through which I was passing had once been familiar to me, alas! many years before, when I was at Cambridge; and there were few parts of it over which I had not ridden or shot. Lying as it does on the borders of Fenland, it cannot be called

exactly pretty; yet it has distinctive features which, aided as they were that night by pleasant recollections, to my eye redeemed its plainness. The long stretches of training ground on the Lime-kilns and Warren hill on the one side, and the monster form of Ely Cathedral rising out of the fens on the other, relieved the pervading sense of flatness; while the well-bushed fields, dotted with many a covey, were pleasantly suggestive of good sport. I always admired the effect of windmills in a landscape, and there are many there; and as I drove along, a frosty sun setting behind them added to their picturesque effect.

I was engaged in thinking over my old college days, when we reached a sleepy little town called Soham (population 5000 last census), half-way between Ely and Newmarket. I may observe parenthetically that, after full inquiry, I have failed to discover any reason why 5000 persons should reside in Soham; but that is their affair. On this occasion the inhabitants were lounging about the main street, gossiping in groups, or making purchases for Sunday. The shops were lighted, and I was admiring the combined effect of the lights of the town and the frosty sunset, when I was driven abruptly into the courtyard of an inn in the High Street. My driver said that the horse required water; but the truth was, that five days' continuous racing had awakened in the man a deathless thirst which required frequent slaking. He accordingly beckoned to an ostler, and

darted into the taproom, leaving me in the dogcart, too lazy to dismount.

Gradually half-a-dozen of the townspeople gathered round the cart, and examined it and me in silence. I closed my eyes and smoked on. Presently I *felt* that some one was looking at me,—a peculiar and uncanny sensation, which most people have at some time experienced. I opened my eyes and saw six pair of vacuous eyes fixed on me as before. I observed, however, that another dogcart had entered the yard. It was empty, the driver being no doubt employed in the same way as mine. I again closed my eyes, again felt the sensation that some one was looking at me, again opened my eyes, and this time looked behind me. What a curiously magnetic effect the human eye has! Why do you look up when some one is looking at you? Certainly not always because the looker wishes you to do so; for sometimes it is just from his intense anxiety to escape observation that he looks so hard. And so it was on this occasion; the look which attracted me should have repelled me. I saw a man walking hastily out of the yard: his eyes, which were stealthily fixed on me, told plainly that he wished to escape observation. On my turning round he at once stood still; and though he continued to look at me, his whole expression changed from eager watchfulness to stolid unconcern. To look at him now, he might be one of the peaceful inhabitants of Soham. There was noth-

ing remarkable about him at first sight, but as I felt sure that his was the eye whose influence I had felt, I examined him pretty closely. He was short and plump, and might have been any age between twenty-five and forty-five. His hair was red, fiery red, but his beard and moustache were a comely auburn. His face was tanned, by exposure to the sun, to a colour which harmonised well either with his hair or his beard. His eyes were small and pig-like; they were utterly devoid of expression, but at the same time conveyed an uncomfortable sense of concealed intelligence and observation; and this feeling was intensified by the rapidity with which they traversed their contracted orbit. He was dressed in a somewhat horsey morning suit of sober colours.

He endured my survey without winking. I felt unaccountably provoked by his stolid gaze, and turned away. As we drove out of the yard I caught his eye again; he had turned on his heels just enough to enable him to watch me as I drove up the street, and his hot little eyes remained glued to me to the last. I thought no more of him for the time, but the phantom would not be laid. In the early daylight at Newcastle station I thought I saw two pig-like eyes looking at me over the collar of a huge ulster; and at Edinburgh I caught a glimpse of a short, stout clergyman, with a beautiful auburn beard, who again reminded me of the unwelcome stranger.

Then for the first time it struck me that I had

seen the man of Soham, or some one very like him, before; who was it? Suddenly memory came to my aid. "Rufus Hickman, by all that's mysterious," I exclaimed, "revisiting the haunts of his youth!" I thereupon fell into a reverie on Rufus, which lasted till I reached Perth. The substance of my recollections of that remarkable man I shall embody in the next chapter; but I little thought, as I laughed over his memory, that the express by which I travelled would shortly deposit at Perth station the plump person and golden head of Rufus Hickman himself.

## II.

When I was at Cambridge there existed (and I believe there still exists) opposite the main gate of Trinity, a club called the Athenæum. It corresponded in some respects to the Bullingdon at Oxford, and in a social point of view was the leading club in the University. It was small and select, convivial and easy-going. The atmosphere was certainly not conducive to study, but reading was not impossible: its members passed examinations and took degrees (*sometimes* honours) like other people. Again, their way of living was expensive, but if a man wished to live economically he was allowed to do so without being sneered at. At the same time, I am bound to admit that the prevailing features of the

club were sport and conviviality. In the matter of sport our tastes varied. We had a horsey element who hunted, drove, rode with the drag, went frequently to Newmarket, and were supposed to be in the secrets of the leading stables there. The rest of us from time to time did homage to the horsey contingent, by putting into sweepstakes and going to the Cambridgeshire and Two Thousand in a body, and betting mildly on the odd and even horses. Others played tennis, rackets, and cricket. Boating alone was eschewed; it was too exacting, and required too regular and unconvivial habits. Others devoted themselves to amateur theatricals at the A.D.C. (short for the Amateur Dramatic Club), which I believe has become a permanent and celebrated institution.

As to matters convivial, we dined a good deal and supped a good deal; but we were scarcely free agents in the matter. The only legitimate burden we had was the Athenæum supper, which the members gave at their rooms in turn. But by prescriptive usage the old dining-clubs—the Beefsteak and the True Blue, as well as some more modern—were for the most part recruited from our ranks. Again, thanks to the extremely bad dinners such of us as were not noblemen or fellow-commoners were given in the college halls, and the inhuman hour, four o'clock P.M., at which we were expected to eat them, we seldom dined there; and this led to much unneces-

sary expense, for which the dons and the college cooks were directly responsible. For the bad dinners the cook was to blame in the first instance; but then the dons were bribed to silence by getting a good one, and gave us no redress. As to the hour, our theory was that the cook fixed it so as to make it impossible for us to eat even that which he set before us; and that some peculiarity in the digestive organs of the dons (whom we always regarded as more or less than human) enabled them to connive at it without discomfort. At first we attempted to dine frugally. But, alas! the dinners gradually increased in luxuriousness, and in the end, I believe, more was spent on our daily dinners than on all the other entertainments put together. Meanwhile the college cook pocketed our money and grew rich.

To this club I was elected through the good offices of some of my old schoolfellows; and one rainy day in November I was taken to the rooms to be formally introduced. I was first taken into a back room which was used as a smoking-room. It was quite empty. The reason soon appeared. I heard one loud squeal proceed from another room; it was immediately suppressed, and was succeeded by a silence broken only by an occasional murmur of satisfaction and expectation, which evidently proceeded from a considerable number of persons.

"What on earth is that?" I asked.

"Oh, they're only painting Rufus, I suppose," said my friend; "let us go and see it."

We rushed into the next room and found it crowded. On a settee or sofa in the middle of the room there lay a short, stout gentleman—not apparently of his own free will, as two members of the club were sitting on his legs and two were holding his hands,—but his features were placid, and his eyes closed; his struggles were over. A tall dark man (Langton by name, who was noted for his skill in scene-painting at the A.D.C.) was engaged in painting the victim's face. In his right hand he held a quill, the feather of which served as a paint-brush; over his left arm was thrown a handkerchief, while in his left hand was an ink-bottle containing red ink. Every now and then he darted forward and dashed in his colours over brow, nose, and cheeks, then drew back and surveyed his work; then rubbed out or smudged some of the colouring with his handkerchief; then dashed in some more colour, and finally threw his instruments away in disgust.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I do not pretend that even my art could do justice to those carrots any more than it could reproduce the auburn of that beard. But I did hope (it has, I may say, been the dream of my professional life) to produce on those there cheeks and nose, on that cold expanse of white, on that middle distance, if I may so term it, a mezzotint which, without unduly detracting from the

glorious fire of the carrots, should bring them into closer harmony with the golden hues of the beard. I have failed! With these imperfect tools success is impossible. But I do not despair. I shall attend my sitter again shortly. Now, who is for whist?"

At these words the meeting broke up. The *sitter's* legs and arms being liberated, he disappeared with the rapidity of a clown in a pantomime. Where he went, and how he removed the blotches of red ink, I know not; but in five minutes he reappeared spotless and in friendly conversation with two of his persecutors. Strangely enough, everybody seemed to ignore the recent performance, and I had some difficulty in getting information. All I learned then was that the victim was Hickman of (I may call it) St Botolph's; that he was known as Rufus, or Joe Hickman—being called Rufus on account of his hair, and Joe on account of his fatness; that he answered to Joe but objected to Rufus, and would accept the latter *sobriquet* from nothing under a peer or those of his friends who were able and willing to thrash him if he demurred. In answer to further inquiries, I was told, curtly, that "I should see enough of him soon." I had therefore to content myself with looking at Hickman. He was stout and plump. But why waste words? He was the image of the stranger who attracted my attention at Soham, except in two points: first, his hair, as distinguished from his beard, was cropped close, so as to mitigate

as far as might be its fiery hue; and secondly, his face was not sunburnt, but a very faint pink. It was this comparative pallor which offended the eye of the artist, and led to his well-meaning attempt to reconcile the conflicting colours; it was absence of pallor and length of hair in the stranger which prevented me from sooner connecting him with Hickman.

That night I went to an Athenæum supper at Magdalene. I found Rufus seated between Langton and one of the men whom I had seen sitting on his legs. Things seemed changed. No longer the butt of the party, he was engaged in singing a song of his own composition, in which various members of the club were lampooned with, it struck me, not too much good-humour. Nobody else seemed to think so at first, and the song was much applauded. In a few minutes, however, a very powerful youth named "Bull" Vernon (no doubt one of the lampooned), who had been engaged in finishing a large plate of lobster-salad, rose with great deliberation, and having provided himself with a stick and a handkerchief, abruptly withdrew the bard's chair; then darting upon him, in a few seconds, with a little assistance, which was cheerfully given, he trussed him adroitly and pushed him under the table, where for a considerable time he remained, no one paying the slightest attention to his alternate entreaties and abuse. Vernon was the Hercules of the Athenæum. He

was a man of action though of few words, and was one of those who by right of strength called Hickman Rufus.

From what I saw that day, so much was plain that Rufus was the recognised jester of the club. I soon perceived that, like some of the jesters of old, he was a fool with a purpose, although our easy-going friends did not care to see it. The truth was, he was a very shrewd fellow. He held a scholarship in his college, and while he was apparently leading a jovial life, he was reading hard at odd hours. I only found this out by accident, as he never spoke of his reading. Another thing which I found out by degrees was, that he really had scarcely a taste in common with the other members of the club. He could not, or at least did not, ride or play games; he had no head for wine; and smoke was poison to him. But for some good and sufficient reason, like the Hon. Mr Deuceace, he, to his great bodily discomfort, sacrificed his individual tastes in all these matters. The only sport in which he took the slightest interest was racing. Even as to this he seemed indifferent; but when he condescended to converse on the subject, he betrayed a marvellous acquaintance with the names of horses and the state of the odds.

He certainly managed the men he cultivated to admiration. He knew exactly when to play the fool, and (generally) whom he might attack with impunity. He also knew when to be serious. Being really a

shrewd, clever man, he could give his noble patrons excellent advice when they got into scrapes. Nor was his assistance confined to advice. If a man of sufficient consideration required a few pounds in a hurry, Rufus, although avowedly a poor man, could always help him in his difficulty; and he was known more than once to coach the same class of man for his little-go or other examination with the best results, where the legitimate coach had failed. Lastly, his manner was bluff and independent, and did not in the least convey the idea that he was a toady—but he was.

What perhaps endeared him more than anything else to the undergraduate mind was, that he had an excellent eye for a practical joke, especially at the expense of the University authorities or of the town. His was the mind, though not the hand, which removed the "whistle" signal from the Newmarket line and planted it, in the early morning, in front of the late Dr Whewell's windows. By his efforts a regular supply of geese, ducks, goats, and other creatures (on one occasion a roe-deer) was furtively introduced into college quadrangles and with difficulty expelled by the whole strength of the college. He organised what he called a commission to inquire into the condition of the smaller colleges, with special reference to the habits of the dons, the outrageously impudent proceedings of which must be left to imagination. I may state, however, that a

second visit to St Catharine's Hall having been found necessary on account of the obscurity and importance of the subject, the meeting of the commission was hurriedly broken up on account of a threatening and Zulu-like movement on the part of the men of the place, who had observed the proceedings at the first meeting with silent indignation.

He was also the founder and secretary of an antiquarian society, the object of which was to collect curious brasses and other objects of interest from the ancient town; the museum was kept, however, not in his rooms, but at Vernon's. I remember being shown a remarkably fine brass, two feet by one and a half, which was said to have been found on the door of a carver and gilder in Petty Cury, who was evidently ignorant of its value. I have also seen that curious antique, the knocker of the House of Correction, which Rufus removed with his own hand one dark night—the only occasion on which he was known to expose himself to personal risk. Having secured the knocker, he was carrying it to the museum by a string under his gown, when, happening to pass Sergeant Robinson of the police force, he was so much elated as to say, "Good-night, Bobby." At that moment the string broke and the knocker fell. With admirable presence of mind Rufus snatched it up and tore on to Parker's Piece, where he lay panting till the gallant sergeant, who had no lantern, groped his way past.

He had not the same objection to his friends getting into trouble, as I found out to my cost. And this brings me to a curious habit he had. Rufus delighted to dress himself as a cad—not as a Cambridge cad, which is a distinct species, but as a mechanic or labourer—and follow the proctors on their rounds. The disguise was complete. Dressed as a gentleman, to do him justice, he looked a gentleman. Dressed as a cad, he looked a born yokel,—a stolid, heavy, and rather respectable boor, with no more signs of intelligence than a pillar letter-box.

One night he got me proctorised, not, I believe, of malice prepense, but from sheer devilry, to see how I should look. I had been playing all day at Fenner's, and had gone to dine with one of the eleven in his rooms on King's Parade, without going home for my cap and gown. About 10 P.M. I was proceeding to my rooms in the market-place when I saw the proctor coming towards me past the door of St Mary's. I bolted round the corner of King's Parade, and should certainly have escaped if a cad who was standing at the corner had not "named" me.

"Go it, Measter Morton! old Bowling's gainin' on yer!"

The moment my name was mentioned it was all up. A cheerful voice behind said—

"You need not run, Mr Morton, I know you;" and the proctor—Young of King's, with whom I had

been playing that very afternoon—came up, proctorised me gaily, and passed on.

I turned angrily on the cad who had betrayed me, and found the small eyes of Rufus Hickman fixed upon me with an idiotic expression. I failed to see the humour of the thing, and treated myself to a handsome assault upon him on the spot;—a rash proceeding, as his uncouth yells, uttered in genuine Cambridgeshire, which I cannot reproduce, brought to his rescue a lot of cads who thought a town and gown row was going on, and I with difficulty escaped to my rooms.

Time rolled on, and Rufus's curriculum was drawing to a close. He had made several influential friends, who would have been of the greatest use to him, as I have no doubt he intended they should be, if he could only have kept his temper for three months longer. In three months he would have been safe, as you cannot paint a man or take similar liberties with him in a London club. But it was not to be. One fine October day the whole club went to see the Cambridgeshire run at Newmarket, with three exceptions, Rufus and two young fellows, the Hon. Richard du Cane and George Ashton, who had been in the club for only six months. The two gentlemen last named having been gated (that is, having been ordered to remain in their lodgings or college after a certain hour in the evening) for some breach of discipline, and

having broken their gates (that is, failed to remain in their rooms or college as required), were with special reference to the Newmarket week required to report themselves at the hours of 12 noon and 2 and 4 P.M., which made it impossible for them to go to Newmarket, and indeed out of Cambridge. They wandered about in misery all the morning, and reported themselves at noon; then they played billiards for an hour; then they lunched heavily at Lichfield's and reported themselves again. At this point, their resources being exhausted, they repaired to the Athenæum, intending to smoke the next two hours away. Unhappily, instead of going straight into the smoking-room, Du Cane, in an evil moment, looked into the reading-room. There sat a solitary man, Rufus Hickman, writing letters. Things had gone badly with him that morning, and he was in a very crusty humour. No Cambridgeshire for him. His elder brother had, by letter received that morning, flatly declined to advance a small but necessary sum. Secondly, he had just had a very angry interview with Dr Blowitz, the senior dean of his college, who had recently been made a proctor, and signalised his accession to that office by at once detecting Rufus in his rustic attire. Not content with dealing with him according to law *qua* proctor, Dr Blowitz felt he had a duty to discharge as dean; he accordingly had that morning severely reprimanded Rufus, putting the very worst construction on the disguise, and gated

him at 9 P.M. for a month. There had been very plain speaking on both sides. Lastly, his coach had told him that he could not guarantee even a second class in the approaching tripos. It was this moment, when, I believe, he would not have endured even the master-hand of Langton, that these two young fools selected for their first attempt to paint him. Here they thought was a find for a dull afternoon. With a view-halloo, Du Cane bounded into the room and seized the pen with which Rufus was writing. He was just stretching out his hand towards the red-ink bottle, and Ashton had just laid his hand on Rufus's collar, when two very unexpected things occurred: the Hon. R. du Cane was knocked down by a well-planted left-hander in the eye, and the red ink was thereafter emptied on his face; Ashton was knocked out of time by a similar blow on the nose. By the time the young men picked themselves up, Rufus had vanished.

This was the news that greeted us on our return. We did not waste much pity on the amateurs, because, as Langton explained to them, Rufus was a royal beast whom only certain privileged persons were entitled to draw or paint. We were more disturbed by the arrival of a note, addressed to the secretary of the club, in the following terms:—

"ST BOTOLPH'S, *October* 18—.

"SIR,—I beg to inform you that I do not desire to

remain any longer a member of the Athenæum Club. Be so good as to remove my name from the list of members.—I am your obedient servant,

"GEORGE HICKMAN.

"HON. RALPH DAYRELL,
"*Hon. Sec., Athenæum Club.*"

"George or Joseph or Rufus Hickman, I shall do no such thing. But, I say, what's to be done?" said Dayrell.

As the committee were all present, they at once sat on the letter. We were annoyed at what had befallen our jester, and it was resolved that next day a select sub-committee, consisting of the Earl of Braykebacke, chairman, Mr Langton, and Mr Morton (myself) should wait on Rufus and bring him to reason. Vernon begged so earnestly to be added to the number, and made so many promises of good behaviour, that against our better judgment we consented. Du Cane and Ashton good-humouredly empowered us to offer a full apology on their behalf.

At noon next day the deputation met at the Athenæum, and proceeded towards St Botolph's. We soon missed Vernon. "Where has that fellow gone?" said Langton. Vernon reappeared, coming out of a stationer's shop with a small bottle of red ink in his hand, the cork of which had been thoughtfully removed.

"Now, Vernon, we must have none of that," said our chairman. "Very well," said Vernon. We

passed Vernon's rooms; he again disappeared, but soon overtook us. We reached St Botolph's without further delay, and walked into the inner court. As we did so, we observed a red fox-like head being cautiously withdrawn from an upper window. Rufus was *chez lui;* but his outer door or "oak" was closed, which is a delicate way among university men of saying "Not at home." We knocked and shouted, but no reply was vouchsafed.

"I thought as much," said Vernon; and quietly drawing some most burglarious tools (the antiquarian museum tools, in fact) from his pocket, in an incredibly short time he forced the lock of the outer door. A skilful application of his foot to the inner door about the region of the lock opened it, and the deputation entered the room.

"Good morning, Hickman," said Braykebacke.

"Good morning, Rufus," said Langton and Vernon.

"Good morning, Joe," said I.

No answer. Rufus was seated in a corner of the room, with his back to the wall, and close to a window which looked into the court. In front of him stood a good-sized square table, covered with books. As he sat, looking silently at us, Rufus would have looked like a Roman senator waiting to have his beard plucked, had it not been that he showed signs of resistance—having securely "castled" himself behind his table, and armed himself with a very formidable wooden ruler. The deputation, other than

Vernon, sat down opposite Rufus. Vernon kept moving about the room, ostensibly looking at the pictures; but he disturbed us greatly by incessantly appealing to us by signals and production of his ink-bottle, whether the time for action had not come. Rufus never lost sight of him. After an awkward pause Rufus said to us collectively—

"Well, can't you speak? Don't sit looking at me like a pack of fools."

Braykebacke at length found his tongue. He spoke very slowly, and rather formally—this was his natural manner, and not affected.

"Do try to be civil, Hickman. The committee of the Athenæum have asked us—(now, do be quiet, Vernon)—to ask you to reconsider your resolution to leave the club. I am sure—(Vernon, I must beg you to sit down)—we should all miss you; and, ah—Du Cane and Ashton are quite ready to apologise."

The silent stare of the pig-like eyes was too much for him, and he paused.

"Now Joe, old fellow," Langton broke in, "don't be a fool. It shall never happen again. And I'll tell you what, as an inducement, I solemnly promise never to paint you again. I'll abjure my arts—

> 'I'll break my brush,
> Bury't a certain fadom in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my ink-pot.'"

"Stop that theatrical rubbish," said Rufus, not fiercely, but in a dry metallic voice, which he maintained throughout the interview. "My Lord Stickleback, Mr Sidescenes, and gentlemen,—I feel deeply the honour you have done me in breaking open my door, and visiting my humble apartments. In reply to the lucid address of the noble earl, I have only to say that I have already lost too much valuable time and money in the society of spendthrifts, fools, and toadies, to which, my lord and gentlemen, you have the honour to belong, in one capacity or another. Now, good morning."

This astounding and unlooked-for speech took our breath away. The style was in palpable mockery of Braykebacke, who was fond of making little set speeches, in preparation, it was supposed, for his duties as an hereditary legislator. "Stickleback" was an invention of the moment, but "Sidescenes" was a very cruel hit. Two years before, some one had ventured to call Langton by this name, on the strength of his scene-painting powers. He endured it apparently without objection for a week, at the end of which time he suddenly and incontinently knocked down a man for so addressing him. The name had not been heard since then. He flushed with rage to the tips of the ears, and said between his teeth, "Rufus, I shall have to punch your head."

"But for why, Sidescenes? What says your poet?—

'*Sidescenes* and *Rufus*, what should be in that *Rufus?*
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?'

Don't be ashamed of your name, old fellow."

Vernon, who was getting restive, made an aggressive movement. Rufus turned grimly on him.

"Don't do that, or I'll shy this ruler at your head. But take care, my gentle burglar and rose-water thief, my *vir trium literarum*,—a paradox, my Vernon, you being innocent of letters,—I keep a proctor. I can see old Blowitz's nut at this moment. I'll call him if you move, and show him that" (pointing to the door), "and your museum to boot; as your Horace puts it, '*illi robur et æs triplex;*' I'll show him my oak and your collection of brasses."

At this point Braykebacke, having recovered from the double shock he had sustained, said with dignity—

"If you can't behave like a gentleman, Hickman, we had better go."

But here Vernon became unmanageable, and, without uttering a word, "went for" Rufus in earnest. Down went the table, books, ink-bottle, and all; the intrenchment was stormed, and Vernon's huge hand was on Rufus's collar. But it was too late; Rufus opened the window and called out in a shrill voice—

"Blowitz! Dr Blowitz!—help, proctor! thieves!"

From a window opposite we saw a bare coot-like head shoot swiftly out, look hither and thither, up and down, and then as rapidly vanish. A panic

seized us. For good and sufficient reasons none of us were desirous of meeting the proctor. We had no time to lose, as we knew he was only looking for his cap and gown; so down-stairs we rushed with one accord, and made for the gate. As we swept past the proctor's staircase we heard the swish of his gown as he bounded down the steps three at a time. As we crossed the outer court a sheet might have covered us. Breathless and discomfited we gained the street, and returned to the club a saddened and discredited deputation.

Rufus remained obdurate, and did not return to the Athenæum. He took his degree in a few months, and left Cambridge, and disappeared so completely that I never saw or heard of him from that time until he reappeared in so questionable a shape at Soham.

## III.

From Peterborough to Perth is a tedious journey, even by the Flying Scotchman, if you cannot sleep. I reached my destination, a few miles from Perth, about eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, tired and hungry. I have not yet mentioned that I was bound on a visit to my old friend Langton, with whom I had kept up acquaintance. He had for some years rented a small shooting near Perth, and I had visited him there more than once, the last time being two

or three years before 1878. I thus knew something of the country and of the neighbours.

After I had dressed and breakfasted, Langton said—

"Charlie, I am going to take you to church this afternoon."

"Well, my dear fellow, to tell the truth——"

"Oh! I know you're tired and not inclined for it, but there is a man you really should hear; I think you'll like him."

"All right; but surely you don't mean old M'Murdo?"

"No, no; that's all changed. The laird had a deadly quarrel with him because he presumed to demand an addition to his stipend; and the result was that Mr Macdougall not only took the law of his parson, but on being worsted and cast in costs, renounced Presbyterianism, and became an Episcopalian two years ago. Nay, more, he proceeded to introduce Episcopacy into the Strath. He engaged what he calls a chaplain, and is building a chapel within his grounds. It is not finished, and service is at present held in a room, or rather a loft, in the village, to which I shall take you."

"How about this chaplain?"

"You must know that the first was a failure. He was tall and Ritualistic. Macdougall, who is stout and Low Church, objected to him on both grounds, and finally drove him forth for hinting at the feasibility of using incense in the aforesaid loft. His

canonicals belonged to the laird (so at least the laird said); of these he was stripped, and they now adorn a shorter—and quite a different sort of person."

Accordingly to the temporary chapel I was taken. After ascending a steep wooden staircase, we found ourselves in a long, low-roofed room, in which stood several benches, a reading-desk, and a harmonium. Twenty or thirty people were present. The laird's only daughter and sole heiress played a voluntary on the harmonium, at the conclusion of which we heard a heavy creaking step ascending the stair. I happened to be looking towards the door. Had I Rufus on the brain? I saw slowly rising as it were out of the earth first the top of a red head, next two pig-like eyes, then a long auburn beard, and finally, a plump body enveloped in a surplice twice too long for it. I felt little or no surprise. I merely whispered to Langton, "Rufus, isn't it?" He nodded affirmatively, and grinned with delight.

If I had experienced any doubts they would have been removed when he began to read the service. The voice was the same clear dry voice which I knew so well. I could just see his eyes over the reading-desk. They were unemotional, intelligent, and alert as ever. He did not look a day older than he did at Cambridge.

After reading the service, he preached a short but ingenious discourse. His subject was interesting,—the character of the patriarch Jacob; but his treat-

ment of it was unique. Differing from many eminent divines, he held that the patriarch's duplicity was not only not blameworthy, but laudable and necessary in the circumstances, looking to the persons with whom he had to deal. But he warned his hearers that it was not every one who was entitled to judge for himself in such a matter, and that it might be dangerous for them even to think of a line of conduct which it might safely be left to the discretion of him, their priest, to adopt or reject as he thought proper. The laird's face during the sermon was an interesting study. Pride in the talents of his *protégé* contended with strong dissent from the latter's assertions of priestly superiority.

Service over, we descended to the street, where we found the laird waiting for us. Patrick Macdougall of Castle Dougall in the county of Perth and Dougallachlan in the county of Argyll, was a stout thick-set man of about sixty years of age. He looked and was good-humoured; but his choleric temperament was surely indicated by his face and neck, which, when he was excited by argument or opposition, swelled so much and grew so purple, that you felt he must surely take a fit if you did not at once apologise and give in. One of his own jokes produced much the same effect. As became a Highland laird, he always wore the kilt when at home. He had seen a good deal of the world, but notwithstanding was in some matters extremely simple.

"How are you, Langton? Glad to see you here again, Mr Morton. Well, how did you like the sermon?—an improvement on old Joe M'Murdo, eh? He was a trifle hard on Laban—a trifle hard. Clever man, though. You nearly missed him; he only returned this morning from burying an uncle in the south."

The funeral must have been on Newmarket Heath, thought I; perhaps it is the Westminster Abbey of racing men.

"By the way," continued the laird, "he says he was at Cambridge with you and Langton."

Here the laird was seized with a fit of choking, evidently produced by the recollection of some exquisite joke. While he was recovering we moved on, Langton walking a little ahead with Miss Macdougall. I waited patiently for an explanation. At length, after many gasps, he said—

"Sad dogs you must have been in those days, you and Langton. Who would think it to look at you now? But tell me, was there really such hard drinking in your time? I'm told you were four-bottle men. I thought that sort of thing had gone out with a former generation."

"I think his reverence has been as hard on us as he was on Laban," was all I could say, struggling as I was between natural indignation and disinclination to abuse the laird's chaplain to his employer.

"My dear sir, don't think I'm blaming you

Bless you! I envy you your wonderful digestion and enormous recuperative powers. Four bottles of young, fruity, generous Cambridge port at a sitting! It's like a dream. You should have lived in the beginning of the century. But come now, joking apart, you must have had some rare fun in those days. What about the doctor's bell, eh, you dog? I have laughed by the hour at that story. Who would have thought it, to look at you?"

This was too bad. Not content with taking away my character by gross exaggerations of Beefsteak orgies, Rufus had fathered his own devilries on me as well; I suppose, in case I should attempt reprisals. I laughed uneasily. I could not trust myself to speak. After a short pause the laird drew close to me, and pointing to Langton, whispered hoarsely—

"Has he given it up yet?"

"Given up what?" I asked.

The laird made a pantomimic gesture which is popularly understood to represent private drinking.

"You know I feel bound as a father," he began to explain, mysteriously; but here Langton and Miss Macdougall, having reached the avenue gate of Castle Dougall, stopped and looked round. The laird guiltily withdrew his nose from my ear, and presently bade us good-bye, pressing us to come soon and see our old friend.

Our old friend indeed! Dreams of my childhood!

I fear it is not always unmitigated bliss to meet an old school or college friend after a long interval. Things are no longer the same. You have changed, and so has he, both physically and socially. You are introduced to a giant of six feet two, in whom you recognise your fag, whom you used to kick and order about. He could now take you up in one hand, and you feel small. Or you recognise in the puny man whom you meet the monitor who strained his prerogative, and "whopped" you for disrespectful treatment of his person at football, and he feels small; while you also feel uncomfortable on recollecting what fools your poor old father made of himself and you by writing to the 'Times' on the subject. If the change is social, so much the worse. You have nothing in common, and are both inclined to wish that the bond of old acquaintance did not exist. Now here I was doomed to be brought face to face with a man whom I used to treat with habitual disrespect, and who had evidently been avenging himself by blackening my character.

As we walked homewards Langton gave me an animated account of Rufus's arrival at Castle Dougall, which is too long to be reproduced in full. Whence he came Langton could not tell; but he met him one day at dinner at Castle Dougall, looking as if he had lived there all his life.

"How did he receive you? did he recognise you at once?" I asked.

"Confound his impudence! He held out two fingers, and said, 'How are you, Sidescenes?'"

"He's not much changed apparently. But how does he get on with old Blowitz? I thought that these were the doctor's happy grinding-grounds."

"Oh, he limed his venerable friend's twig pretty well. I had the pleasure of being present when he did so; and as I had no great love for Blowitz, I did not feel bound to interfere. I'll tell you about it if you care to listen. You remember, perhaps, that for several years Blowitz rented a cottage belonging to the laird. Last year he brought as his *alumnus* Lord Downish, the Marquis of Bottisham's eldest son, a young man of amiable disposition but decidedly ritualistic tendencies. Blowitz, as you know, is quite of a different way of thinking. I must also remind you that there are two things the mere mention of which goads the laird to the verge of explosion—poaching and ritualism. You will now be able to appreciate the following conversation between the laird and his chaplain, which took place last June in my hearing:—

"*Macdougall.* I have good news for you, Hickman; I am going to furnish you with a clerical playmate. My old friend and your old master, Dr Blowitz, is coming to me again. Of course you knew him well at St Botolph's?

"*Rufus.* Intimately—once. (The intimacy, I believe, was confined to Rufus being occasionally proc-

torised and gated by him.) But there has been a coolness between us for a year or so. I differed from him on a point of ritual, and he took it ill.

"*M.* Why, I thought you would agree down to the ground. He is very moderate, is he not?

"*R.* So moderate that he is all things in turn. His last craze was ritualism. He tried it in the college chapel last year, and the fellows had to interfere.

"*M.* (*flushing violently*). A ritualist, sir! I enjoyed the pleasure of Dr Blowitz's society for three months last year, and saw not a trace of that abominable delusion.

"*R.* Perhaps so. I was told that Downish talked him over when he was reading with him last year. But no doubt he is tired of it by this time.

"*M.* (*growing purple*). Mr Hickman, sir, if what you have said is true, I vow and declare (here followed a composite oath which the laird always used when extremely angry) that tired or not tired of it, that man shall not set foot in house of mine.

"*R.* I'm very sorry I said so much, Mr Macdougall. No doubt it was merely a passing whim. As a companion he's charming; though now that I don't shoot, I should not see much of him if he did come.

"*M.* Shoot! Blowitz shoot! Why, he never handled a gun in his life.

"*R.* Well, he was not much of a hand with the gun; he liked snaring better. But many is the good day's sport I've had with him.

"*M.* Why, he always goes out in a tall hat and tail-coat! You're taking your fun of me, sir. Have a care!

"*R.* But, my dear sir, his dress was the very thing that told. He always had a pocket classic with him, and when birds went off the land he used to drive them back by walking up and down reading Homer or whatever it was aloud to himself. When he was challenged, his dress and venerable appearance insured him respectful treatment; and his habit of trespassing was regarded merely as one of the eccentricities of genius.

"*M.* (*with forced calmness*). You said something about snaring, sir.

"*R.* Did I? Oh yes; I must tell you some day about his snaring Lord Hardwicke's silver pheasant. It would amuse you, sir. He's a great naturalist, as you know—dear old fellow! I've seen him crawl a hundred yards on his stomach to get a pot-shot at a wild duck, with Plato in one tail-pocket and a gin in the other.

"*M.* (*gasping*). Ha! humph! that accounts for the fine collection of stuffed birds the old humbug was always bragging about.

"*R.* It's not a bad collection. I've seldom seen finer birds than a pair of grouse with feathered legs, and all the rest of it, that appeared in it last winter. He said he got them on the stooks, whatever that means.

"*M. The* stooks! *My* stooks! I'll stooks him. Gentlemen, I vow and declare"—and the laird, who had hitherto spoken little, simply because he was nearly speechless and asphyxiated with rage, rose to his feet, brought his fist down smartly on the table, upset his wine-glass, and then and there pronounced on Dr Blowitz sentence of banishment from Strath-Dougall and excommunication from his fellowship for evermore; denouncing him in one breath as a pervert, a poacher, a humbug, and a low fellow.

At the conclusion of Langton's interesting tale, I said—

"I'm afraid Rufus has limed more twigs than the doctor's," and I thereupon told him the uncomfortable jokes with which the laird had entertained me on the way home.

## IV.

The reader may not unreasonably expect that we are at length approaching an interview with the Rufus pure. So we are; I feel that I should not be dealing candidly with the reader if I did not tell all the humbling truth.

In a few days we received the expected invitation to shoot at Castle Dougall. We went, and were met by the laird and his keeper and dogs. Rufus was not there; he was better employed. We lunched at a corner of a wood not far from the castle, and had

nearly finished when we heard proceeding from the wood peal after peal of merry laughter. The tones were feminine. Presently there emerged the lovely Helen Macdougall escorted by Rufus. Langton and I looked at each other. The same idea had occurred to us both that somehow the aforesaid laughter was connected with us and at our expense. Rufus, imperturbable as usual, showed no signs of merriment. Langton thought his manner to Miss Macdougall familiar and offensive. Perhaps it was; but as *I* was not in love with the lady, it rather amused me.

I rose and advanced to meet him with all the cordiality I could assume.

"Well, old fellow, who'd have thought to find you here? It's quite like old times."

"It's really quite dramatic—Rufus *redivivus*, or the red *revenant*," broke in Langton, whose love for theatrical titles still survived.

"You are Morton of Trinity, I suppose?" said Rufus, unmoved. "Shouldn't have known you. It *is* odd to find you and old Sidescenes here. But the place is quiet and the whisky good, I suppose."

"You're not a bit changed, old man," I continued, with forced *bonhomie*.

"Can't say the same of you. You've grown middle-aged and fat."

This was most offensive, and, I need not say, utterly without foundation; but I struggled on.

"I could not think what had become of you. Why, it must be—how many years?"

"Can't say. I supposed *you* were dead," said Rufus with indifference, and turned to speak to Miss Macdougall.

Thinking that the interview was over, I had resumed my lunch, when I was surprised to be addressed by Rufus.

"What have you got there, Morton? Light claret? That's not like old times."

To my fury, a broad smile of intelligence appeared on Miss Macdougall's face, and the laird at once began to choke. Between the gasps he said—

"I should have apologised, Mr Morton, but I've nothing younger than '44 port in my cellar, and that's much too old for your taste."

I could only grin; no practicable retort occurred to me. I was a guest, and my host was combustible.

In a few minutes we again took the field. Miss Macdougall and Rufus departed as they came in company, and as they retreated, we again heard peals of merry laughter proceeding from the wood. Langton ground his teeth and shot badly—all the more so, because from time to time he caught sight among the trees of a very conspicuous scarlet cloak which dimmed but did not conceal the sheen of a head which always appeared in close proximity—a very pretty "study in reds" for a jealous lover's eye.

As the laird was looking for a lost bird, Langton came up to me and hissed into my ear—

"I shall be compelled to kill Rufus if this goes on."

Up to this time I had thought little of Langton's flirtation with Miss Macdougall. He was a confirmed bachelor and a confirmed flirt, and had been in a similar condition a score of times to my knowledge and great inconvenience.

"You're not really in earnest, are you?" I asked. He assured me that he was.

"Do you think you have anything to fear from Rufus as a rival?"

"I do, indeed. He has got the laird's ear, and I feel sure that, at best, he has represented me as stage-mad and an imperfectly reclaimed drunkard. You have heard so much yourself from the laird's lips."

This was my last day in Strath-Dougall, and much as I disliked the idea of my friend marrying, I felt that something must be done at once, and that I alone could do it. I bethought me of my meeting with Rufus at Soham. I did not doubt that he had been at Newmarket on the sly, and the brilliant idea now occurred to me that by judiciously springing that mine upon him, or by insisting, to his face, on clearing the tarnished fame of Dr Blowitz, I might open the laird's eyes, or at least scare Rufus from the field.

I propounded my plan to Langton. He shook his head despondently, and said—

"It's no use, my dear fellow. The laird won't believe a word you say. But try if you like; matters can't be worse. You'll have an opportunity to-night, as we dine at the castle."

When we entered the laird's drawing-room that evening we found Rufus alone, seated at the piano playing chords and humming a song.

"So you've kept up your music," said Langton, whose irrepressible flightiness overcame his prudence. "Sing us your last composition—something Scotch, of course."

Without a moment's hesitation, Rufus carolled forth the following extraordinary mongrel to the tune of the Kate Kearney waltz:—

"Oh, sound the sad bugle
O'er Patrick Macdougall,
Whose thoughts were as proud
As his conduct was frugal.
Oh, raise the wail loud
From Kirkcaldy to Youghal.
Oh, Patrick Macdougall ochone!

How true to the bottle!
How constant his nature!
So long as there lasted
One drop of the 'cratur';
What a man to 'mak' siccar,'
To perish the liquor;
Oh, Patrick Macdougall ochone!

How reserved in the battle !
No chieftain less risky ;
At lifting the cattle,
No reiver so frisky ;
Red hand at the flaying,
Close fist at the paying.
Oh, Patrick Macdougall ochone !"

Whether the ballad proceeded to narrate the laird's glorious death with his feet to the foe, or his ignominious expulsion from existence as a detected cattle-lifter ; or whether, as I suspect, no more of it existed in the fertile brain of the minstrel, we shall never know. Because just as Rufus was drawing out the last two syllables of Macdougall into a piteous "doo—oogall," a door opened at either end of the room, and (as Langton in happier days expressed it) the heroine and heavy father entered, L. E. and R. E., and advancing to the front of the stage, struck in with the following recitative :—

*H. M.* "'Bugle,' and 'Macdougall'—why, that's about papa !"

*P. M.* (*aside*). "What the mischief are they singing about me ?"

Rufus at once ceased singing, executed a brilliant run, closed the piano, and spinning round on the music-stool, faced the heavy father with perfect calmness.

"A little thing of Langton's," he explained. "He calls it a coronach ; but to my ear it smacks of the Irish. I should hardly have thought you had Irish blood in your veins, sir."

Now the laird not only took in extremely bad part any allusion to his own demise, but abominated the Irish all the more because his grandmother was an Irishwoman. He therefore became speechless with indignation; but fortunately or unfortunately, before he could express his "vows," or Langton explain, dinner was announced. An eminently uncomfortable meal it proved to be. I took in Miss Macdougall, the only lady, and Rufus contrived to plant himself on her other side. I suppose Langton was sulky, and did not contest the point. At the foot of the table sat the laird, glaring silently at Langton; and he in turn passed the glare on to Rufus, who received it as complacently as if it had been a sunbeam. Miss Macdougall was nervous and uneasy, and kept looking anxiously at her father and Langton.

I could not have chosen a worse time for springing a mine upon Rufus; but time was short, and a triumphant twinkle in his eye at length goaded me to action.

"I'm so sorry, Miss Macdougall, not to meet my old friend Dr Blowitz here this year. What has become of him?" I asked.

She looked nervously at her father and Rufus, and did not answer.

"You had better stop him at once," said Rufus to Miss Macdougall, in an abominably confidential whisper. (I thought he added "Helen," but of this I am not certain.) She nodded assent, and said to me in a low voice—

"Please, don't speak about him, Mr Morton. I believe he behaved badly to papa, and he can't bear to hear his name mentioned."

Now one of the most trying things I know is, after having to listen to one side of a story or argument, to which you have a conclusive answer, to be adjured to hold your peace, on the pretence that the person whom you wish to confute or convince is unable, from ill-health or ill-temper, to discuss the matter with you, or, as it is usually put, has not strength to argue with you! I was loath to give in, and persevered.

"Dr Blowitz behave badly! and to Mr Macdougall. Impossible! What did he do?"

"Do be quiet, Mr Morton," said Miss Macdougall, in genuine alarm. I followed the direction of her eyes, and at once saw in the laird's face, neck, and ears symptoms which promptly reduced me to silence. With a look of artless surprise, which I fear was a failure, I had to submit, and abandon that line of attack.

Dessert was on the table before I returned to the assault. This time, also, I addressed Miss Macdougall.

"Are you fond of racing?" I asked.

Fortune favoured me; Miss Macdougall, who had been silent and absent, became animated at once. She was devoted to racing, but had as yet seen nothing more exciting than a Caledonian Hunt meeting; had often asked papa to take her to Ascot, but he

had never done so. Papa did not approve of racing, she thought; at least he said so.

"You need be at no loss for instruction," I said, looking with a meaning smile towards Rufus. "I have always regarded Hickman as a Gamaliel in turf matters."

Rufus shook his head, his face expressing much more forcibly than words could have done that I was simply joking in execrable taste.

"Come, old fellow, you can't deny that you have seen a race or two."

"I'm sorry I can't. But I have not been on a race-course since Gladiateur's year, when you and Langton preferred to travel home in the boot." (Now this was a serious anachronism. We all left Cambridge before Gladiateur's year.)

"I remember nothing about the boot——"

"I can quite believe that."

"But you're wrong, at least, about the year. We were all down by that time. Ah! you remember now, I see!" (Rufus exhibited more signs of discomfiture than I could have believed possible. I pushed eagerly on.) "I wonder you did not renew your acquaintance with the old heath when you were in the neighbourhood lately."

Rufus looked terribly solemn and severe, glanced at Miss Macdougall, and then fixed his eyes demurely on his plate.

"Oh, Mr Morton," said the lady in a loud aside, "have you not heard? Mr Hickman lost——"

"If he lost, I'm sorry I introduced the subject; but one consolation is, he had a treat last Tuesday."

"A treat, sir," said Rufus, sternly; "quite the reverse—it was a painful duty."

"Well," I said, addressing the company, "this is the first time I have heard the Cesarewitch called a painful duty!"

"On last Tuesday, sir," said Rufus with well-feigned heat, "I attended the funeral of a near relative. Well as I know you, I am astonished at your persistent bad taste."

Miss Macdougall rose abruptly and withdrew. Her departure was followed by an awkward pause. Here was a nice state of matters. My anticipated triumph had vanished in an unseemly wrangle, and my friend's cause was worse than before. No one would speak; so by a strong effort I addressed the laird on general subjects, till time was called, and Langton and I could with decency bid good-night. We departed more deeply humiliated than either of us had felt since we fled from the presence of Dr Blowitz twenty years before.

I left Strath-Dougall next morning, in the full belief that next time I heard of Rufus he would be styled Macdougall-Hickman or Hickman-Macdougall, in right of his wife. But it was destined to be otherwise. Rufus fell by his own hand, or rather by his own singular temper, which now again, on the eve of victory, brought about his fall. In the

end of last year I received the following letter from Langton :—

"GLENQUAICH, 3*d December* 1878.

"MY DEAR CHARLIE,—At length you may congratulate me. I am engaged to be married to Miss Macdougall, with the full consent of her parent. That consent would not have been obtained readily, or perhaps at all, had it not been for an auspicious event which occurred on Saturday fortnight—viz., the unexpected downfall and departure of the Reverend Rufus, who, up to that time, had flourished like a green bay tree. The precise cause of his fall is shrouded in mystery ; but the facts known are these. On that evening Helen left her father and Rufus in the dining-room, about 8.30, apparently the best of friends. About nine o'clock, old Menzies the butler, happening to pass the dining-room door, heard the laird 'vowing and declaring,' in a loud voice ; but as there was nothing unusual in this, he paid no attention. The voice soon ceased ; and in a few minutes the door opened, and his reverence came quietly out and closed the door. He told Menzies to order the dogcart at once. By the time it arrived Rufus had packed his effects and was ready to start. Having mounted the trap, he beckoned to Menzies, and told him, in a whisper, to go to his master, as he thought he was unwell. Menzies rushed to the dining-room, and found it was so. The laird was simply on the verge of a fit, if not in one. The only intelligible

words he spoke that night were, 'If it were not for your cloth, sir! if it were not for your cloth!' *My* cloth, he might have said, if he referred to Rufus's canonicals. He soon revived; but I have in vain endeavoured to discover what Rufus said to him. It must have been something personal and peculiarly to the point; but I have been warned by ominous flushings not to approach the subject again. The important matter, however, is that, with many vows, &c., he withdrew his veto to my engagement.—Ever yours sincerely, W. LANGTON.

"*P.S.*—Perhaps you will not be surprised to hear that the laird has again been received into the bosom of the Church of his fathers."

So ended my latest experience of Rufus Hickman. Will it prove to be my last? I dare not think so. Rufus is not the man to fade prematurely from the world, blighted by the consciousness of modest merit unappreciated, or crossed in hopeless love. If mutual antipathy can keep us separate I shall be safe; nay, more, if we meet only after intervals as long as the last, I can reconcile myself to meeting him *twice* (alas! it could in any view be only *twice*) again on the same terms. My present fear, however, is lest his baleful eye should light on these presents, and that "I shall be pincht to death," or otherwise punished in my person or character, for what I have written.

# HANS PRELLER: A LEGEND OF THE RHINE FALLS.

FROM THE GERMAN OF WILIBALD ALEXIS.

BY C. L. LEWES.

LONG ago, in those dark and distant ages before Switzerland had become a republic or been invaded by the British tourist, there dwelt, just at the spot where the Rhine turns a corner for the last time, a knight, Hans Preller of Lauffen—as honest a knight as ever lived within four walls. But he was as poor as he was honest. He had a true heart and upright mind, but nothing to live upon. His domain was all rock or wood; there were barely oats enough for his horses; the wine of the country was even sourer than it is now; and the river was as unnavigable, having chosen, as early as the times we speak of, to make a fall of many fathoms exactly in front of the castle of our knight.

Hence it had come to pass that a rhyme had been made upon him, in the rude language of that unpolished century, which I blush to repeat, and which

I only give to my readers lest I should be accused of keeping back from them a monument of thought and national poetry. This is the couplet which the street Arabs of that epoch used to sing after him,—

"Hans Preller of Lauffen, knight,
Has nothing whatever to sup or bite;"

which was not strictly true; for the Rhine flowed by his castle, and there was nothing to hinder his quaffing as many goblets of it as he chose. He lived chiefly on his own thoughts, and trout, for which he would fish for days together. Unfortunately, however pleasant both might be, they were hardly nourishing, and all admirers of manly knighthood and old German honesty had the sorrow of beholding one of the order lank, lean, and haggard.

Many a time would Hans stand upon his battlements, looking down the Rhine, with the heavily-laden vessels on its distant waters, and the waggons of merchandise on its highroads, and knights and horsemen lurking under lofty portals, ready to pounce down upon their prey. Then a sharp stab of pain would shoot through him; he would bite his nails; and the Evil One would whisper in his ear, "Why doest thou not likewise, Hans?"

Had not his cousin, who was still leaner than he, been appointed governor of one of those new Rhine castles by the fat Bishop of Trèves? And what had that worthy prelate rejoined when asked as to the salary appertaining to the governorship? "My loyal

vassal, to your left flows the Rhine; to your right lies the road to Frankfort!" Since then the lean cousin had grown nearly as fat as his liege of Trèves, and had huge joints daily turning on the spit in his kitchen, and wine flowing faster into his cellar than the coopers could provide vats for.

"Look what they do in Germany," the Evil One kept murmuring; "wilt thou not learn wisdom from them?"

But Hans was an honest Switzer, and shook his head. A truth-telling chronicler is compelled to add, that it would have been somewhat difficult for our knight to do as they did in Germany; because, though fat bishops, castles, horsemen, and cellars, as well as the Rhine, were to be found in Switzerland, yet there were but few rich travellers. And though those times were more prodigal of miracles than our own, such a miracle as a richly-laden vessel attempting to pass the Falls of Lauffen,[1] or of merchandise for the fairs taking the route of Lauffen Castle, could hardly be anticipated.

Thus matters had came to a sad pass with Hans Preller. Year by year his thoughts grew bitterer; whilst year by year the trout (so at least his stomach thought) grew smaller; and in the *ranz des vaches* each morning and evening he seemed to hear the doleful refrain:—

> "Hans Preller of Lauffen, knight,
> Has nothing whatever to sup or bite."

[1] Now more commonly known as the Falls of Schafthausen.

When, one night, as the moon was shining full on his solitary bed, he caught sight of his shadow—now the mere ghost of a shadow—reflected on the wall, and thinking of what his shadow had once been, he was quite overcome with emotion, and wiping away a tear, he exclaimed, "Verily, 'tis the life of a dog that I lead!"

Then stepping on to his balcony, which looked over the Falls, he began to meditate for the last time. His thoughts, put into the language of the nineteenth century, were somewhat as follows:—

"What boots it that I am of noble family, a knight, and a free Switzer? What boots it that I am a landed proprietor, with hereditary right to hang, spit, and roast what I please, if I have nothing in the larder, and cannot roast what I have, because it is all water or stone? What use is my wood? Every neighbour has as much as I. And my stone? No one paves the roads. And my water? We are not in an African desert. What good is the daylight to me? The sun only reveals my poverty. Or night? I cannot sleep away my wants, because of the bellowing waterfall which dins them in my ears. And finally, what is the use of my honesty, of never having robbed a soul, if nobody is any the wiser, and it does not procure me even an Order, let alone a dish of lentils?"

And having thus meditated for the last time, he determined to precipitate himself into the Rhine.

One foot was already over the balustrade, the other was following, and in another moment the cataract would have seized him, and it would have been all over with Hans Preller, when suddenly it seemed as if Nature had made a dead pause. The clouds stood still, the tops of the fir-trees ceased to wave, the moon-beams no longer trembled on the surface of the water, the Rhine stopped as if frozen; and Hans Preller, arrested in the act of springing down, remained sitting on the extreme edge of the balustrade, holding on by his hands. Just in the same posture as himself, there appeared suddenly a curious being on the brink of the waterfall, dangling his legs down as he balanced himself with his hands on the crest of the waves. The machinery of Nature had only to be set in motion again, and he would be shot down quicker than thought into the gulf into which the knight had been about to precipitate himself. It would be an insult to Hans Preller's understanding to suppose that he did not at once know who the old man was, with the snow-white beard and the little red eyes. It was not the Nymph of the Rhine, or the Genius of River Navigation; but was no other than the Spirit or Cobold of the Falls.

In this there was nothing remarkable; for Cobolds appearing to brave knights was quite the order of the day. What was remarkable in the phenomenon was, that the Rhine should cease to flow, the water to fall, and the wind to blow; and that it should be so silent

round about that the knight at Castle Lauffen, where at other times you could only hear the thunder of the waters, could have heard the mayor sneeze across from Schaffhausen. This was remarkable, and pointed to some reversal of the order of Nature.

That the Spirit must have been a malicious one is to be inferred from his red eyes; and that he had a design upon the soul of our knight, we know from the compact which, before the French Revolution, was still to be read in the original in the archives of Lauffen. The learned Swiss Doctors now deny the obligation Hans Preller entered into, though they do not deny the compact. But even assuming there was no design on his soul, Hans must certainly have promised something to the demon in return for such extreme exertions on his behalf. This point, however, is involved in great obscurity; and all we know with certainty is, that a scene followed fearful to witness, and fraught with great consequences for Hans Preller.

The clouds moved once more; the pine-trees waved; the Rhine flowed on; the waterfall roared; and a flock of rooks cawed over the towers where Hans Preller stood trembling, as before him appeared in gigantic form the Spectre of the Rhine. And what increased the fearfulness of the apparition was, that this spectre now rose high as a mountain, now shrank small as a dwarf; now stood close behind him, now swam on the water and let himself be hurled down

the waterfall, now cowered on a stone in the farthest thicket: but everywhere Hans Preller plainly saw his red eyes, his broad mouth, and the smiling wrinkles round it, and heard the hoarse voice saying—"This will I do for thee: I will turn thy stone into bread, and thy river into wine. I will turn thy beetles and chafers into horned cattle, thy midges into snipe and pheasants, thy nettles and thistles into cabbages; the salmon and trout shall swim up the waterfall to thee, so that thou shalt need but to stretch out thy hand; the moss on thy roof shall become spinach, and thy cellar and larder shall be always full; and thou shalt have roast joints always turning on the spit."

"But for how long?" the knight ventured to inquire, retaining in that fearful moment sufficient presence of mind to sound the Spirit on the quality of his gift, to be sure that he had got hold of no ordinary devil's gift of glittering gold which would speedily turn into chaff.

"So long as the Rhine falls over these rocks; so long as the snow on the Jungfrau sparkles in the sunlight; until the ice of the glaciers all melts away," the Spirit solemnly replied.

"And what do you want in exchange?"

"Nothing that can be of any value to thee."

"My *soul?*" cried Hans Preller, anxiously.

"Only the Innocence of thy Posterity," was the answer.

To such extremely fair conditions our knight could offer no objections, and any pricks of conscience he might have had were fully set at rest by the assurance of the Spirit that his posterity should, nevertheless, remain honest Swiss.

It was now only a question of "How?" Hans Preller seemed to think that as soon as the compact was made, the stone on which he stood ought forthwith to turn into bread, the waterfall into Burgundy, the brushwood on the face of the rocks into asparagus, and the whole air be filled with the aroma of roasted meats and wine. But it was not so. The stone remained stone; the water, water; and nature, nature. Even the rooks above the tower did not become pheasants. The Spirit, who had read his thoughts, smiled.

"A true miracle," said he, "never violates the laws of nature; and all that a Spirit who is beyond his time can do is to advance or retard that time. A Spirit quartered in flesh and blood can do this for some ten years at the outside; whereas we who live in the water and air can do it for a couple of centuries. Besides, consider how foolish it would be if everything thou possessest were all at once to be changed into what I have promised thee. For apart from the fact that I do not know even what thou wouldst do with all the snipes and cabbages, the value of gold—if all thy stone were straightway converted into it—would suddenly be depreciated. Nor will I dwell

upon the certainty that thy benighted fellow-citizens would burn thee as a sorcerer. I will only remind thee how sweet it is to owe that which we possess to our own industry, although thou wilt not understand in all its fulness the pride which swells the bosom of the man who gains his own livelihood, until I have revealed my secret to thee. This consists in inoculating thee, Hans Preller, a Knight of the Early Middle Ages, with the views and ideas of later centuries. In thy blindness, thou hast as yet no suspicion, my good knight, of what it is I am giving thee, nor how lightly it is paid by the innocence of thy descendants—a quality, moreover, that, in the ages when they will live, will be quite a superfluity. But when thou art inoculated, thou wilt wonder at my generosity, and wilt acknowledge that all the ordinary devil's gifts of gold, silver, and jewels, and worldly pleasures, are a mere *bagatelle*—or, to use the language of our own time, mere chaff and straw —compared to it. For even that story of King Midas is nothing to it. It is true he turned everything he touched into gold; but was it money? Had it any value as currency? And it is still a doubtful point whether he could change air and water into gold, a power which my secret will give you; and it will be gold that is current in every land. For a time will come when the gold of currency will have much more value than even the pure gold of King Midas."

Thus spoke the Spirit; but what further took place is unknown, for here the Chronicles of Castle Lauffen are silent. Those of Schaffhausen only announce parenthetically, under date of that year, that in the following night the Rhine made a rumbling and thundering as if the world were coming to an end. Strange lights and fearful forms were seen hovering over the castle; and from out of the depths of the deepest dungeon issued groans of pain as of a world in travail. The main tower fell in with a great crash; and it is supposed that the philanthropic Spirit performed the operation of inoculating Hans Preller with modern ideas that night—an operation which it may be supposed would be somewhat more difficult and painful than the analogous operation on an infant in arms.

The Swiss Chronicles forsake us utterly at this point. It looks as if many pages had been purposely torn out, and what now follows is taken from an old Nuremburg Chronicle.

Dreadful reports had spread far and wide of Castle Lauffen and its knight; and what enhanced the fearfulness of these reports was, that no one could make out exactly what they were.

It was about that time that a rich trader of Nuremburg, one Peter the Sabot-maker—so called because his business consisted in selling German wooden shoes to the Italians — was returning from Italy.

Nobody crossed the Alps for pleasure in those days. Besides snow and avalanches, hunger and want, the traveller was exposed to wolves, bears, and robbers, who fell upon him in the mountain-gorges, and against whom he had to defend himself as best he could, for ratepaying had not then been invented in Switzerland. And honest Father Sabot-maker was right glad when he at last reached the opener country and more hospitable shores of the Rhine with a tolerably well-filled purse. He was a stout, florid-complexioned man; and he was just about to settle himself down in a shady spot and enjoy the cool breeze, which blew across the Lake of Constance lying at his feet, when he became aware that there stood close beside him, under the nut-tree, an elderly gentleman of a goodly presence, and with a bald head.

The latter slowly wiped his forehead, drew a deep breath, and said, "I see, sir, you cannot sufficiently devour this ravishing prospect."

"Thank you; but for my part I am not hungry," replied Peter. "But if I can serve you with a bit of roast kid and goat's cheese, they are at your service."

"Who can think of eating with such a spectacle before his eyes?" said Hans Preller, the elderly gentlemen with the bald head.

"I pray your pardon, good sir; what spectacle is there before our eyes to hinder us from eating if we were hungry? There's no Constance clown here,

nor holy fathers to act us a play out of the Holy Books."

The knight smiled.

"Is that not a grand spectacle down below you?" he asked.

"In Nuremburg we should call that a lake."

Again the knight smiled.

"I mean," he pursued, "the great whole—Nature—the landscape—the harmony in the brilliant colouring—the perspective."

Peter stared at him with wide-open eyes.

"Pray excuse me; but you speak a language I don't pretend to understand. I am quite content if I can muster enough Milanese to settle accounts with my customers."

"The language I speak ought to be intelligible all over the world, even if you have not the words at your command. Does not a certain indescribable feeling take possession of you when the air comes gently sighing over the blossoming woods, and the waters of the lake reflect the deep blue of the heavens, and the distant shores float away in the soft misty heat?"

"When it is hot," returned the trader, "it's very pleasant to feel the wind blowing over the water."

"Well—and what did you think when you passed between the snow-capped mountains, by the huge glaciers, and heard the avalanches thundering down the mountain-sides?"

"Thinking again!" muttered Peter. "But if you absolutely wish to know, I thought if all the snow were flour, and the glaciers sugar, what a happy land it would be!"

"Hm, hm!" said Hans Preller, not altogether displeased. "The idea is not so bad—taken in its right sense. But did not the tears start to your eyes, were you not awed, and did it not seem impossible to find words wherein to clothe the grandeur of your thoughts?"

"Why, no! As I knew the snow wasn't to be turned by wishing into flour or sugar, I made the best of my way onwards."

"You must see the Falls of the Rhine at Schaffhausen now. That is a sight to make you pause—to astound you. There you will find the words you lack."

"But that would be terribly out of my road. Besides, it always vexes me, whenever I pass that way, to hear the river making such a noise for no use on earth. To think—not, however, that it concerns me, —but to think that ships could sail the whole way from Cologne to Constance and Lindau, and further, if it were not for that confounded fall the river makes."

Fire and fury blazed in the knight's face at these words. He looked at the trader as if he would strangle him, and cried—

"What, you barbarian! would you ruin my waterfall?" But quickly recollecting himself, he added,

"Every one must serve an apprenticeship to wisdom; nobody was ever born wise. But I perceive in you a real, earnest desire to learn to appreciate the beautiful in Nature. I beg you, therefore, to come and see me at my castle, and I can promise you sightseeing to your heart's content."

Peter politely declined the invitation; but he might as well have spoken to the winds, for Hans Preller took the refusal as a mere matter of form, which it was quite impossible to believe could be seriously meant. When, however, they both rose at last, and Hans Preller found that the other really meant to continue his own road, a dark look came over his face, and he said—

"Nobody whom I have asked has ever refused to admire my waterfall; and, as true as my name is Hans Preller, nobody ever shall. So do not persist in your refusal, which would only prove to me how uncultivated you are, and would put me in the embarrassing position of being obliged to force you to do what every man of proper feeling does of his own accord."

In vain the sabot-maker protested that he was not a man of feeling. Hans snapped his fingers: love for his fellow-beings forbade his believing such a thing. But when Peter actually began to make preparations for his departure, in full confidence that his own fists and those of his two Nuremburg servants would suffice to ward off any too eager desire to instil

a feeling for Nature into him, he learned, unfortunately, how weak is all strength that proceeds only from ourselves. Hans Preller gave a whistle, and from bush and thicket there started forth a host of sturdy Swiss, whose fists would have instilled feeling for everything imaginable into beings of a far different order from our three Nuremburgers.

Peter was a stout but irascible man. He struck out right and left; but this availed him little, and in a short time he, with his two servants, was transported in a waggon to Castle Lauffen.

Hans Preller rode beside him; and having vented his anger in some round oaths, which Peter, in spite of his sad plight, paid back with interest, he exclaimed—

"Is it not a sin and a shame that it should be necessary to constrain a man of your position and education after this fashion?"

Peter, though violent, was shrewd. He thought he should get off on the cheapest terms by letting the fellow have his way. So he lay quite still, and held his tongue until they reached the castle; and then, when Hans Preller politely invited him to alight from the waggon, he asked what he was now expected to do.

"To see my waterfall. Or if agreeable to you, we will first restore our forces with some light refreshment."

Peter declined "the light refreshment," as a vague

feeling told him that he would have to pay for it, and he wanted to despatch the business which there was no getting out of as speedily as possible. "Water," he said to himself, "costs nothing;" and consoling himself with this reflection, he advanced towards the entrance.

"I had almost forgotten," said Hans Preller, smiling, as he proceeded to open the door, "to demand the trifle from you which, according to established custom, is always paid in advance. You must pay seven batzen,[1] and then you can see as much, and look as long as you like."

"Seven batzen! What for?" cried the Nuremburger.

"For seeing the waterfall," replied the knight.

"Seven batzen for water?"

"Yes, my dear sir; the water is Nature's gift, but *I* have made the steps and galleries. And do you suppose it costs me nothing to keep them up? not to speak of the interest on the capital."

"I won't pay a copper penny," exclaimed Peter.

"But you will pay seven batzen," replied Hans in a friendly tone, and with a smile. "You surely will not refuse; you, a rich merchant of the rich city of Nuremburg, when two poor starving wretches—tailor-apprentices of your city—have just paid their batzen for the magnificent spectacle with the greatest readiness. I was really sorry to take the poor devils'

[1] Equivalent to about a shilling.

miserable savings; still it was a pleasure to see the real hearty delight with which they gave them."

"Holy St Siebald!" cried the sabot-maker. "In Nuremburg I can see everything I like—pumps and fountains—and need not pay a doit. And here, to see a common waterfall, I am to pay as much as would keep me in wine for a week. Holy St Siebald! you lighted frozen water as if it were wood-chips, that the poor people might warm themselves by the fire, and demanded nothing in return but a 'God bless you.' And here I am asked to pay seven batzen for natural water!"

"O you incorrigible shopkeeper-soul! you Nuremburg gingerbread-maker! you wooden puppet! what do you mean by comparing my great natural wonder with such toy wonders as your turner-saint, a mere tyro and bungler in the sphere of the marvellous, fabricated for your poor understandings? If St Siebald had taken a penny for his burning ice-chips, I ought to demand a ton of gold for my waterfall. Strictly speaking, you are not worthy to see it; but it is not for my sake, but for your own, that you shall see it, and pay the seven batzen."

Peter's face became the colour of a morella cherry. He rolled his eyes, clenched his fists, and ground his teeth till his mouth foamed. He could not speak for rage.

"Will you?" asked the knight, curtly.

The sabot-maker shook his head. He was prepared

for everything, even for being bound hand and foot and dragged to the falls. He knew what he should do in that case. But no.

"Far be it from me," said the knight, calmly, "to compel any one by the use of brute force to do that which he has no inclination to do. You must see the waterfall voluntarily; and till you are ready, my castle shall afford you shelter and protection, and time for meditation."

No sooner said than done. The heavy form of the Nuremburg sabot-dealer was packed as well as it would go into a small basket, a string was placed in his hand, a windlass whirred, the daylight turned into darkness, and a sudden violent blow on the part of his body that first reached the ground told him that he had arrived at the place appointed for his meditations.

As soon as he had unpacked himself, the basket was drawn up again, the trap shut, and Peter was alone with his thoughts in the dungeon of Castle Lauffen. Damp straw, chains, spiders, lizards, and salamanders —in short, everything that romance requires of a good castle-dungeon was to be found here. On the other hand, a hero of romance would not have thought first of his own fate, but of that of his companions in misfortune. Peter, however, I am obliged to confess, gave no thought to his followers, but was only exasperated that such a fate should have befallen himself. He bit his nails, struck the walls with his fists

till the tears started to his eyes, and swore death and vengeance. Such an injury must be punished by king and parliament. Cost what it might, he was determined to sue the knight before the imperial or the secret tribunal—whichever then existed.

He was not a little disappointed at finding that he still had his purse. If that had been taken, he should at any rate have known that he had to deal with an ordinary, straightforward robber-knight, instead of with a soul-destroyer, who demanded things from a decent German citizen that made one's hair stand on end. Nay, he made a solemn vow that he would remain here for the rest of his natural life, and moulder away alive, rather than do what the knight wanted. He did not, however, begin to starve straightway, but prolonged his life till the following morning with a piece of rye-bread. The water-jug he left untouched, presumably because he thought it had been filled from the abominable waterfall.

He found that it is possible, if disagreeable, to sleep on damp straw and cold stone when anger has worn one out; and the *ranz des vaches* next morning awakened him out of a sound and refreshing slumber. The trap-door above opened, and Hans Preller's face appeared.

"Good morning, Sir Sabot-maker; how are your feelings for nature this morning?"

No reply.

"Well, well! I am in no hurry; your mind will open in time, as many others' have done."

The trap closed. Night returned. The toads and lizards hopped and crawled once more around his bed. The same ideas and thoughts visited the worthy man, and he spent this day like the last, except that he found his bread drier, and did not disdain a draught of water from the jug. He reflected that the poor water could not help tumbling over the rock. Nature had shown it the way, and it simply obeyed.

But Peter the Sabot-maker down below little imagined what was passing in the knight's bosom up above—little imagined that Hans Preller, at liberty, was suffering as much as he himself, immured in the castle-keep. For Hans Preller sat constantly for hours together in his leathern chair, his face between his hands, groaning—

"Why, why has Nature endowed me with æsthetic feelings which she has denied to so many millions, or has reserved for their posterity? Why can I not at once live in that enlightened age, when the English will flock here of their own free will; when Russian princes and German students and rich Americans will come to admire; when the whole of Switzerland will be what the Waterfall of Lauffen is now?"

Peter had now heard the morning Alpine horn seven times in his dark retreat; and, upon his host opening the trap-door for the seventh time, and for the seventh time putting the original question to him, he answered, without further hesitation, "Yes."

Down whirred the basket, and the cords creaked as

he was hoisted up again; but the sabot-maker remarked that he was a full fourth lighter than he had been seven days before. Quite touched, the host embraced his guest. He would not hear of his going in such a condition to witness the spectacle. He must first strengthen himself; he must prepare himself for it with some breakfast—almonds from Italy, raisins, gingerbread, and *dragées*, and Schaffhausen Rhine wine to boot. Peter had not tasted such delicacies for a long while—namely, for seven whole days; and the honest knight was so moved that this time he opened the door at once, and left the payment till afterwards.

It is asserted by the Swiss that the sabot-maker now stood by the waterfall with his eyes shut fast. He heard the roar of the water, and even let himself be splashed by it; but he refused to see it. Upon this point, however, implicit reliance cannot be placed on the Swiss. For though, on the one hand, Peter was still in a very exasperated state of mind, yet, on the other—at least so the Germans contend—it is difficult to believe that a Nuremburg trader would have given seven batzen without seeing what he got for it.

On leaving, Peter opened his purse, and produced seven batzen. Hans Preller took the money, weighed it smilingly in his open palm, and said—

"That is quite right, my friend, so far as you yourself are concerned; but as a good master, you will of course also pay for your people?"

"What! The fellows have presumed to see the waterfall? What need had they to see it?"

"Why, my good friend, my honest merchant," replied the knight, "you would not be so proud as to esteem your servants unworthy to enjoy that which you have just been enjoying? Nature is a great possession, belonging to the whole world. Rich and poor, high and low, have an equal right to it,—whence the term 'natural rights,' which, as the learned will inform you, are the same amongst all peoples, under all skies; and as I, a free knight, have admitted you, a mere burgher, without charge, surely you, as a good Christian, will not grudge your servants the same pleasure."

Peter dived down into his pocket, but growled out that he thought servants ought to pay only half-price. The knight smiled. "That is only the case," he rejoined, "where persons of rank give what they like. But here, in Switzerland, all men are equal—in paying."

But what was the astonishment of the sabot-maker when he found that he was not to get off with twice seven batzen! For not only had his ungrateful varlets been seized with the unaccountable desire to see the waterfall every day, but they had gone to see it many times each day; and for the amount chalked up against them on the door, the rogues might have drunk half the wine in his cellar at Nuremburg.

The tears stood in his eyes; but he was quite

merry, and laughed, and now wanted to enjoy everything.

He let himself be led down under the falls, and then let himself be ferried across to see them from the other side. A man was so good as to hold a couple of pieces of coloured glass before his eyes, and he saw the Rhine turn green, and blue, and yellow; and he gave the man as many batzen as he asked for, and the same to the boatman, and to the fellow who handed him in. Then a poor-box was held out to him, and he gracefully offered up what Hans Preller told him. The cowherd pulled off his cap, and reminded him of the great service he had performed for him every morning; and as he did not immediately seem to understand, the knight explained—

"This is the happy child of nature who announced the sunrise to you every morning with his horn. You must have slept through it."

"But I did not see the sun," the Nuremburger indignantly burst forth, "and I did not tell him to wake me when I was asleep."

"But was it the poor man's fault," said the knight, "that you did not see the sun? He wished to soften your heart by his touching rural strains, and to direct your attention to a wonder, which the unforewarned mind is apt to overlook, or set down as commonplace. Besides, it is a custom I have established, that all travellers should be moved to give some trifle to the good-natured, disinterested fellow for his obligingness,

which springs from no paltry desire for reward; and I will not have so ancient and honourable a custom fall into disuse."

Having, with a moved heart, paid the required batzen for the sun which he had not seen, the Nuremburger thought he had at last discharged every obligation; but imagine his surprise when Hans Preller produced a small bill for food and lodging, where it was no longer a question of batzen, but of silver dollars and gold crown-pieces.

"What conveyance is this?" cried he. "I know nothing about it. So high a fare would not be demanded from the King of Bohemia!"

"The conveyance, my friend," said Hans Preller, "is the one I had to hire to conduct you hither, as, if you remember, you were not in a state to walk. And bear in mind, too, that Switzerland is not Bohemia; that in Bohemia you have plains, whilst here you have mountains. It follows as a natural consequence that carriage-hire is more expensive; and you may be thankful that I was able to get a conveyance at all. Moreover, I see that my clerk has not even put down the back-fare, and it is only just that you should compensate the man for the time during which he could make nothing. The rule is to pay a second fare, but from you we will be content with half, which I beg you will add to the bill."

At last everything was settled in the castle, and Peter the Sabot-maker's heart began to beat more

freely when he heard the creaking of the drawbridge as it was raised behind him, although he foresaw that he would be expected to pay escort-money to the knight for his kindness in accompanying him, and guide-hire to the runner who preceded them to show the way—as well, of course, as return-money.

But Hans Preller was in capital spirits, jesting away in that free, outspoken fashion peculiar to the child of nature, which can offend no one, since it comes merely from a frank, open-hearted disposition.

"If you would not mind making a slight detour," he said at length, as they came to a place where the roads divided, "I can show you something eminently remarkable. An old fellow-countryman of mine lives there. Many years ago he was in the service of a gentleman of rank in the vicinity, acting as hall-porter; and one night, when robbers were breaking into the house, he fought so bravely for his master, that the whole world rang with praises of Swiss fidelity. He has now, in remembrance of that night, had a wounded lion cut in the rock to represent himself,—for he came off a cripple,—and he has built a hut hard by, and is so good as to show the lion—that is, himself—to every stranger who cares to see it; and, at the same time, he explains how splendidly he fought that night. For this courtesy it is the custom to give him a small fee."

Peter was now in a frame of mind to believe and admire everything that was demanded of him, and

he hastily plunged his hand into his pocket without having seen the lion or the veteran. Hans Preller smiled, and accepted the money for him.

They arrived at length at the point where they were to separate. The accounts were all settled; they had shaken hands,—when suddenly the Nuremburger remembered that he had not paid anything for the almonds and raisins, and the pint of Schaffhausen wine.

"Tell me, I pray you," said he, "what do I owe you for them? I could never forgive myself if I were to remain in your debt."

At this the knight became quite wroth.

"If you were not a dear friend, I should answer your question in a different fashion. I am a plain man and an honourable Swiss, and I never desire to be anything else; for the Swiss are celebrated throughout the whole world for their fidelity, honesty, and hospitality. Shame upon me if I were to let a guest pay for what I had set before him! Of what you have partaken let nothing more be said. If I should ever come to Nuremburg you will do as much for me. Farewell!"

"If I could but have the chance!" groaned Peter, as soon as he was sure the knight was out of earshot. He clutched his purse, and pressed it closer to him—not for fear of its being stolen, but because it was empty—and he set off on his road homewards.

"It is at any rate a good thing, master," said one of his servants, endeavouring to cheer him up, "that

it was no robber-knight, as I had at first imagined, but a good, honourable gentleman; and one has the comfort of knowing what one has spent one's money for."

We have no record that Peter the Sabot-maker's accounts of what had befallen him near Schaffhausen in any way increased the popular superstitions regarding Castle Lauffen. What is certain is, that he recommended the very same road to other rich merchants, who, in turn, frightened no one away by the reports they brought back. We may assume, therefore, that each was anxious the other should experience what had befallen himself; and those who reaped the benefit were Hans Preller and his descendants.

Times gradually improved, and in his old age Hans Preller had the satisfaction of witnessing the free advent of travellers eager to see the famed Falls of Lauffen. On his deathbed, in a voice of prophetic emotion, he spoke to his children these words—

"Keep what Nature has given you, and in spite of all revolutions you will be rich and happy."

His family prospered visibly. The Hans Prellers[1] spread like locusts over the whole country, and having dropped their title of nobility, which is hardly compatible with republican institutions, their descendants are to be traced to this day in the guides and hotel-keepers of Switzerland.

[1] The name "Preller" comes from "prellen," which signifies to "do" or "fleece."

# THE PUERTO DE MEDINA.

BY MAURICE KINGSLEY.

MEXICO, as Greece, for many a year has been famous and infamous for its highway robberies.

At the present day these are but the acts of vulgar footpads or marauding bands of revolutionists. But a hundred years ago and more, when the pressure of the Spanish yoke was grinding the souls and bodies of the Mexican Indians to exasperation, and as the first dawn of liberty began to glimmer through the minds of the boldest, there existed a different class of highway robbery, which perhaps might better be described as a guerilla warfare waged against their persecutors, the Spaniard.

Many a place has taken its name from some bold *guerillero*, now forgotten; and the scene of many a deed of daring, many a gallant struggle, is only marked to-day by a little pile of stones by the wayside, its history buried and forgotten.

One legend there is, though, of a spot called the "Puerto de Medina," on the boundary-line of the State of Michoacan, and some two hundred miles from the city of Mexico on the great highway westward, that time cannot obliterate; and even to-day, before entering that steep defile, the rich land-owner motions to his armed servants to close up and keep a bright look-out; the passengers in the jolting diligence look wistfully for their escort; and the master of the pack-train urges his laden mules forward, lest the ghost of old "Juan de Medina" burst from its grave under the cliff and swoop down upon them through the oaks, as he had done so oft in life on the Spaniard.

Few details are known of Medina's life, and all that I have been able to gather only show that the place took its name from him on this wise.

. . . . . .

## I.

Somewhere about the middle of the last century, one steaming May night, a man stood beside the iron-barred windows of a house in the little town of Maravatio, chatting in low tones with a girl inside.

"I tell thee," said the man, "there is no fear; unless, indeed," he added, after a pause, "my Chucha betrays me. Poor little one, but thou wouldst not do that for all the gold of the viceroy?"

"God of my life, no!" sighed the girl; "but, Juan, remember the risks you run coming here so often—though you are disguised, though the Coyotè is all ready saddled in the pasture, some day you must be suspected; and, when once suspected, you are lost. Colonel Torres has sworn on the altar to avenge his brother; and that affair of the archbishop's money has set all the clergy against you. You are rich, and I have something; let us go from here and live a free life down on the coast."

"No, Chuchita *mia*, no! I must despoil the persecutors somewhat more. There are two *conductas* passing the *puerto* soon, and have them I must. Hist! *adios, vida mia!*" and he slipped away under the half moonlight, almost brushing against two men at the corner.

Keeping well out of sight, they follow him to the edge of the town, where, springing over a stone wall, he whistled up a grey horse feeding in a meadow, and in a moment more was across the river and cantering away through the *mesquite* bushes on the plain beyond.

"*Caramba!* that was he," snarled one of the two; "and that was the Coyotè! So ho, my friend! you are in love with the little Chucha, eh? It's a pity to stop your billing and cooing; but stop it I will before two weeks are out. Ah, Juan Medina, Juan Medina! trapped at last! And now let's off to Padre Hurtado's." In a few minutes the priest's house was

reached, and the two were let in by a sleepy porter.

"*Ola*, Padre! Get up and give us a bottle of 'Tinto' for our good news! We've tracked the wolf to his lair and the Coyotè to his pasture! I shall have my revenge for my brother, and you for the fat old archbishop's gold!"

"Peace, my son!—not so loud; the fiend has friends everywhere. I come." And anon the broad figure of the priest steps out of a glass door on to the piazza.

"Estevan! *Tinto y copas*, and some white-fish salad. Ah, gentlemen, I was dreaming I was with Mahomet in Paradise, when your rough voice woke me, Colonel!"

"Or with the houris?" laughed the other.

"Ah, my colonel, what a bad man you are, always to be poking fun at a poor old fat priest! But a light, Estevan, and a table. Sit down, and keep your hats on."

A light and the wine was brought.

"To bed, Estevan. And now for your news, friend colonel."

"Padre," he answered, "Juan Medina has been in town three nights this week, and to-night I found out the petticoat that brings him here. Guess who it is."

"You are more likely to know than I, my friend. Say on."

"Chucha Delgado."

"Chucha?" and the heavy veins of the priest's coarse face knotted up, and he gripped hard at his glass. "The little devil!" he muttered.

"Ho, ho!" laughed the Colonel. "He has touched you near, eh? Well, the easier for my project, which is this: tax her with it in the confessional, and find out everything, under the threat of excommunication. Women can't stand that. And as for the rest, leave it and '*amigo* Juan' to me."

"Drink, drink, my friends!" exclaimed the priest fiercely. "Colonel, in this cup I pledge your revenge, the archbishop's, and, above all, my own. You shall know all to-morrow."

The first two bottles were soon replaced by more, and dawn saw them separate at the priest's door.

## II.

At noon a girl was kneeling beside the confessional in a dark side-aisle of the little church, muttering low her tale of life.

A pause.

"Is that all, my daughter?" said Father Hurtado's voice from within.

"That—is—is—all, Padre *mio*."

"Ah, my daughter, from your tone I know that is *not* all. Better unconfessed than half confessed. How can I absolve what I do not know? How can

the most blessed Virgin intercede, when she knows of some secret sin still untold? Damned in this world by the weight of sin, the burden of which sinks like lead into the soul; and damned in the next for sin unabsolved! Think, think—repent ere it be too late!"

"Oh, Padre," sobbed the girl, "it is not my secret, it is another's. If I betray him——"

"Stop, my child," said the priest. "Betray him you cannot under the seal of confession. Remember what the Church says, 'Come unto me and I will give you rest'—rest in this life for you, for him, and future glory. Only confess and be absolved."

And the poor girl sobbed out all her tale of woe,—how she loved Juan Medina; how he had told her of having robbed the archbishop's gold; how he came to see her; and, in a word, everything she knew of him and his whereabouts, under the searching questions of the cunning priest. Weeping, the girl received the absolution from his hands, covered her face in her shawl, and glided out of the door; while the priest, with a cruel light in his eye, strode through the sacristry and down to Colonel Torres's quarters.

"Some wine, some wine, friend Torres, to take the taste out of my mouth. Curse the witch! it was hard to do. I almost hate myself for it. Why, kneeling there sobbing, her upturned face in agony looked like that of the Madonna herself. The rounding of her neck and heave of her bosom was enough

to make Saint John forswear himself. But I have got all. He has a cave in the Zopilote Cañon, but mostly haunts the cliffs to the left, just above the *puerto;* and he will be in here again Saturday evening. Post some men on the east side of the *puerto,* so that if he escapes from here a squad can follow him, and he's sure to go up the cañon, pass the cave, and on to the high ground on the left; and there you'll have him between the men on the east and the cliff. Give me more wine!"

"All the wine you want, Padre *mio.* And I suppose he always leaves the Coyotè in the same pasture, eh?"

"Yes."

"Very well; now I know how to manage it. There's no use in shooting the Indian dog; I want to catch him alive, and then devise some pretty little means of getting rid of him that may be alike objectionable to him and serve as a warning to the rest of these Indian brutes. I don't think he can get out of town, but if he does, we'll have him at the head of the cañon. Saturday, the day of the *conducta,* you say? Why, then, he's certain not to attack it; and I can send on a couple of hundred men the day before to the Jordanna to come back and corral him. A bumper! a bumper, sir priest! Cheer up, man! there's no one hurt yet; and when the lover's done for, you may have a chance with the pretty Chuchita."

"Peace, peace, you fool! I'm in no mood for raillery now. I tell you she has bewitched me," said the priest, rising. "*Adios*, Colonel."

"*Adios*, Padre Hurtado. I kiss your hands."

## III.

The morning of the *conducta* came; but, contrary to the expectation of Colonel Torres, Juan Medina, with about forty armed men, sat awaiting it in a thick clump of oaks on the north side of the *puerto*. A long grass hillside, blooming with begonias from the first May rain, and studded with oaks, ran down to a little land-locked basin, shut in on one side by the hill on which were Juan and his companions; while on the other the cliffs rose sheer some two hundred feet. At each end of this basin the hill approached the cliff so abruptly and so closely as to form veritable natural gateways, between which crawled a winding, rocky road, dropping both on the west and east suddenly into valleys tributary to the river Lerma. On the west the cliffs turned northward after the gateway, rising higher and higher, until at about a mile away, where a large stream came into the valley, they were full five hundred feet.

"*Caramba!* what keeps them?" said Juan, testily. "*Ola*, José! bring me the horse."

"Why, colonel," said one of a lounging group,

"you are riding the red. Why didn't you bring the Coyotè! I am afraid it won't bring us good luck."

"Never fear," replied Juan, as a heavy, thick-set bay, with black points, was led up. "The Coyotè has work to do for to-night, and if the bay cannot carry me, I can go on foot. *Caramba!* a *burro* would be good enough to take in this *conducta*. Only two hundred men! Pshaw! I wonder, though, where that two hundred marched to last night; or rather, where they have gone to this morning. There's no one on the road Ixtlahuaca way, is there?"

"None but ourselves, captain," was the answer, as Juan swung himself into the heavy silver-plated saddle, and turned the bay's head up the slope.

Up and up through the oaks stepped the sturdy bay, unmindful of the weight of his rider, until the bald top of the hill is reached, and Juan throws himself on a rock to con the scene below him.

But no sign is there of the long-expected train of troops and pack-mules.

To the westward, half a mile away and below, is the little white wayside inn — a few wayfarers indulging in a quiet breakfast with the inn-folk; then beyond, the stage-road winding wearily for a couple of miles through the "bad lands," on which points of grey black lava glittered under the sun. Further, a faint cool ripple on the water in the great reservoir of Tepetongo, bedded in waving green corn-fields mapped out with stone walls.

How cold the grey stone tower of the bath-house, from which a white film of mist is rising, stands out against the ruddy tiles and brick walls of that village—call it not house, though closed in one giant wall it be!

Westward still, over the undulating grass plain, off which brood-mares and cattle are lazily wending their way to shelter for the noontide to Pomoca, where the mountains shut in the upper and more arid plain, only to open wider again in the greater luxuriance of the Maravatio valley, all abud with rich green growth, far in whose corner, nearly thirty miles away, can Juan discern the Moorish spire of the church—that church in which *she* is worshipping, maybe is now praying for him. But no mule-train yet! and his eye wanders on to the westward, past the town, over chine upon chine, hill upon hill, peak upon peak, dying away indefinitely under the spring haze, save where the bald top of the Capulin rises blue-black under its piny garb. Petulantly he turns to follow up the stream to the southward, to where it is shut in by dark cliffs in which lies the well-known cave; and over the table-land to the eastward, where far, far away, he just can make out the peak of Xochititlan, raising a sugar-loafed head five thousand feet high out of the fair meads of the broad Lerma valley. "Nothing on the road ahead of us, at any rate," he mutters. But as his eye turns back to the westward, he springs up and forces the bay back-

wards down the slope they had come up. Scarce a mile away was the pack-train, hidden hitherto in a deep gully—two companies of cavalry in front and three companies of infantry behind. "The idiots cannot have a hundred and fifty men! Can they be going to entrap me? Impossible! Well, at all events, I'll change the order of battle." So saying, he mounted, and sent the bay down the hill at a pace that showed he cared for his own neck as little as for the horse's fore-legs.

A gallant figure he was—his tall form swinging in the saddle with that peculiar loose and graceful Mexican seat; the ends of his gaudy *sarape* streaming out over the horse's quarters; the broad white felt hat heavily garnished with silver, flashing in and out of the dark oak-trees; while the silver buttons on his jaguar-skin overalls tinkled a merry tune.

The rattle of his horse's hoofs had roused the men, who were mounting fast and furious, the gleam of battle in every eye.

"Here, Isidoro," said Medina; "quick to Gabriel, to the east, and tell him to follow down opposite to us; to give the leading companies a volley when he hears the old signal, and then out on them with the *machètes*. Let him leave five men only in the pass to cut off the stragglers. Rafael, go down on foot to Josè, and tell him, the moment he hears us fire, to set half-a-dozen men throwing down the wall above the inn, and come himself up; and we'll drive the

whole train down the hill to the west, and then into the cañon, and have the mules at the coast in three days, and the plunder safe in the Laurelis. Run! run! Follow me down to the right!"

In five minutes they were ensconced in a thick grove of scrub oak, scarce one hundred feet from the road. "Now, men, steady! Remember the old word, 'Death to the Spaniard!' Save all the Indios. We'll let the cavalry get past for Gabriel; and when I give the word, give the infantry the contents of your *trabucos*, and then out on them with the *machètes* and ride them down!"

But many a horse was pawing the ground eagerly; many a man was nervously blowing at his priming ere the helmets of the first few dragoons rose the crest.

Half-a-dozen men riding negligently, chatting and smoking; and then a space of a hundred yards or so to the main body of dragoons, in number some sixty. Then the long line of forty pack-mules; the mules grunting and puffing up the steep—every five with their Indian driver, and each with its little leather saddle-bags, which might contain four thousand dollars in silver, or sixty thousand dollars in gold, who knows? As the dragoons came opposite to the ambuscade, the infantry bringing up the rear were just rising the slope a little below where Josè was posted.

The whole thing was over in thirty seconds. A

shrill whistle from Juan. A rain of bullets on to both cavalry and infantry. A wild charge, in which the impetus of the horse told more than the *machètes* flickering around their heads. A wild confusion, as the pack-train turns at a lumbering canter down the hill, bursting through the already broken file of infantry below. A few gallant rallies against the inevitable, where three or four Spaniards, back to back, try to save themselves, although the day be lost, — to no purpose though. The bell-mouthed *trabuco* rains bullets around them, the desperate charge of the horsemen with the *machète* stabbing death, the lasso swinging a more certain death for the fugitives. Spain cannot fight against this odds, and after one look over the field, Medina with a few picked men is so certain of the result, that he is hurrying after the train to stop them ere they shake the bags off their backs or founder themselves.

Over rocks, boulders, and ugly country of all sorts dashes the bay, to be brought up plunging and rearing, as Juan heads the train just at the broken wall and forces them into the fields; and in two minutes they are steadied down and walking slowly off towards the gorge. Gabriel is getting together the arms and horses of the soldiers above, and Josè with half-a-dozen men is sent down to the little tavern to see that no one plays false there, though little fear there is. Another picket is sent on to the Maravatio road, and Juan with the booty rides slowly onward.

Down through the green corn-fields, stopping now and again to throw down the stone walls dividing them, winds the train of mules and horsemen, some of the latter stanching their fresh wounds; anon one or two dropping back to help along a comrade who has had rather more that his share of the fight, and who, with that dogged Toltec courage, or, possibly, want of keen appreciation of pain that more civilised races have, keeps on horseback to the last.

The bottom of the hill is reached, and then they strike a trail winding along the stream up into the cañon.

Even with the sun almost at high noon, how dim and forbidding the gorge looks, scarce one hundred feet broad at the bottom, enclosed in rugged rock-walls five hundred feet high, which from below look as if they met at the top. The harsh bark of a raven is all the response to the stream cascading down into grey and black pools; the mules, tired with their long morning march, make bad work of it up the rocky trail, and more than one falls and has to be relieved of part of his load.

In about a mile a little grass lawn opens out about a hundred yards across, on the right of which a heavy stone wall covers the entrance of the cave. "Ride on, two of you, to the reservoir, and keep watch the Jordanna way, and get the mules unpacked;—quick, men!" was the order.

The horses were tied up to the trees around, and a

man put at each end of the lawn to prevent the mules from straying, and in ten minutes the sacks were brought into the mouth of the cave, and the counting and sharing began. Thirty-nine mules, with four thousand silver dollars each, and one mule with gold ounces that made the men's eyes sparkle—forty-eight thousand was in those two small bags. It was a good haul—better than they had expected.

One-tenth of the whole booty was laid aside for the widows and orphans; and one-tenth for the general fund for keeping up the guerilla system; one-twentieth for Juan and the two lieutenants; and then the rest was equally divided amongst the one hundred and twenty men who had taken part in the raid, giving each about a thousand dollars.

The money in gold for the widows and campaign fund was soon repacked on a couple of the stoutest mules, and five trusty men despatched with it over the mountains to their old treasurer and father-confessor at Laurelis. In a few minutes more appear Gabriel and his band, with the captured arms and horses. The arms are given to those that want them most; the horses and mules are divided up by lot, and a man sent down to the tavern to recall Josè. In the whole affair only one man was killed and nine wounded—two badly; while, as Gabriel grimly informs Medina, not a Spaniard escaped.

"Well," said Juan, "we must move from here now. The other *conducta* starts in about three weeks,

and we cannot attack it here. All this part will be patrolled. Get to your homes, boys, as quickly and quietly as you can. Mind, no drinking and gambling on the way, and you'll hear from me in two or three weeks. Till then, *adios!*"

And within three hours of the fight all visible traces of the band were scattered on the little mountain-trails to the southward, except Juan Medina and his first lieutenant, who, with two servants, were taking a light breakfast of black beans and red pepper, the sting of which was relieved by little flat corn cakes, prepared by the old Indian woman who kept the cave.

"We had better be jogging soon, captain," said Gabriel, as they finished; "it won't be long before this is known, and we had better make for the Laurelis."

"I shall be there to-morrow; you can go on," replied Juan. "I must go to Maravatio to-night to see Chucha."

"What! into the lion's mouth!" exclaimed Gabriel, aghast.

"I'll go up the cañon with you, and up to the cross-roads, and then I will strike down to Josè's, and wait there till night. The Coyotè is there, you know; but go to Maravatio to-night I must, and that is all," said the other.

To change Medina's purpose Gabriel knew was impossible; so, mounting, they rode up and out of the

mouth of the cañon, where it opens into a broad fertile plain two or three miles long. On reaching it they struck up into the hills to the right, and after eight to ten miles, separated at the cross-roads.

## IV.

It was nearly two in the morning when Juan was knocking at Chucha's window in Maravatio, cursing the innumerable patrols of cavalry he had been forced to avoid on his way down from the mountains, and wondering how cross Chucha would be at his lateness.

"Chucha, open—it's me," he whispered.

The windows were flung back suddenly; and Chucha, the picture of agonised despair, dropped on her knees by the bars.

"Fly, Juan! fly!—they are watching for you all over the town; they knew you were coming, and you are surrounded."

"*Caramba!* how did they know that?" asked Juan, in surprise.

"Oh my God! my God! it was Father Hurtado; I confessed it to him. Forgive me, forgive me, Juan! I have killed you."

Juan's answer, whatever it would have been, was cut short by the furious gallop of a horse up the street, followed by the jangling of cavalry scabbards.

For an instant he hesitated. To kill the crying girl and then himself only needed two dagger-blows. But was she worth it? Ere he could answer, his plan was changed by recognising the Coyotè sweeping up the street towards him. A whistle brought the horse close to him; and hurling a curse at the fainting girl, he was into the saddle and away into a cross street at full gallop. "They've left a picket at all the gates; the best way is to run the gauntlet of the *cuartel* and try the main gate. They won't think I shall dare to try that, and I think the Coyotè can jump it." But the three short turns before he got into the main street kept the pursuers uncomfortably close, as he dare not let the horse out in full running for fear of a slip at the corners; but when they were passed, and the grey felt the rein slacken, down the street he raced. The "*Halto ahi! Quien vive? La Guarda!*" had hardly been challenged in quick rough tones from the *cuartel* (barracks) ere Juan was thundering past it, too fast for the volley the guard gave him. That he felt was the critical time, —for himself he thought not, but for the horse; and he gave a sigh of relief as the horse neither swerved nor trembled in his gallop when the volley hissed around them. And now for the gate. The pretty white houses all agleam in the brilliant moonlight changed into low hovels, from which the dogs rush out barking in his track; then the long parapeted causeway, lined with weeping willows, with its low

swampy fields of *alfalfa* on each side; and the gate is before him. No one there! And he is within fifty yards of it when twenty dragoons form on the outside of it from the roadside. Trapped! One furious wrench at the heavy Spanish bit brings the grey on to his haunches, and pivoting the horse around on his hind-legs, he puts him boldly at the parapet wall to the right. It's a long drop, some eight feet: but will he clear the irrigating ditch? And as the horse lunges outwards and downwards a sickening sense of uncertainty comes over him. How long it seemed ere they struck! Juan seemed to hear the hurried orders of Torres to the dragoons to ride out along the causeway and up the river to cut him off, and hear, too, the "*carambas*" from the troops following him ere the grey crashes into the *alfalfa* below. A deadened blow, a fearful shudder, a mad reel forward, and the Coyotè pulls himself together again, and is away through the deep holding ground of the *alfalfa* patch. If he can get through the river now at some place, Torres and his dragoons have such a long round that they will be too late, and the desultory fire of the troops behind him is not enough to trouble him. A long staggering jump over an irrigating ditch, and then better going, as he keeps close to the edge of the river looking for a ford: but the banks are too steep. At last, under a willow-tree, three hundred yards below his old fording-place, where he can see a squad

of dragoons posted, there is a good place for getting out; and he turns the grey at another deep drop. This time, though, into water. The plunge fairly rends in twain the little stream, and ere Juan and the grey can see through the dripping water, they are struggling against the opposite bank. He slips off the horse, which crawls out almost as soon as his master, who claws his way up the willow-roots. On to his back and away again, free! The up-stream squad of dragoons, afraid to cross, or not knowing of his old ford, pepper wildly at him to no purpose. The squad with Colonel Torres are a quarter of a mile away at least, and he pats the horse's shoulder as they sweep out of the low land and on to the firm holding turf above, free! Stop! a single horseman is racing up the road to the left to cut him off. Instead of turning short up the bank of the river with the rest of the dragoons, he has held on up the main road. Only Colonel Torres's black can gallop like that. Yes, the Colonel it is! "Well, we'll try conclusions between the Spanish Colonel and the Indio Medina," says Juan, between his teeth. If both keep their line they must come together in about half a mile; and both do—Torres with his pistol out and Juan with his *riata* (lasso) trailing behind him. When scarce twenty yards apart, the Colonel bids him stand; Juan, who has his grey well in hand, ducks his head and rides straight at the black. Bang goes the pistol, and as Juan passes under the black's

stern, the loop of the *riata* settles over the Colonel's shoulders to the waist. A sudden jerk that no horseman can withstand, and Juan is galloping up the road, dragging over its cruel stones a lifeless body. In a hundred yards the end of the *riata* is let go from Juan's saddle-bow, knowing the chase to be too hot to stop and take it off the body; and he settles the Coyotè down into a steady gallop.

It is six miles to the bridge across the "Little river," where there is probably a cavalry picket on the scout for him; the troopers behind cannot live with the grey even at this pace for three miles; so for them he has no care. He has nothing to do but nurse the grey and think. Think? of what? of the past?—perish the thought! He hates the idea of Chucha unfaithful. Of the present? What cares he, with a good horse between his legs and no more danger than in many of his escapades? Of the future? What future? a future without Chucha! There can be no happy future. And he wanders back again to the window scene in Maravatio. How beautiful she had looked amid her tears even! how he had loved her, and did still! But could she ever be his wife now? The only woman he had ever really cared for, the only one in whom he had confided all; then to be foiled almost at the last moment by that cursed infatuation all women have for confession—little knowing that the very priest laughs at them for it.

"*Halto ahi!*" challenges the picket upon the "Little river" bridge, which Juan had altogether forgotten in his reverie, and which now loomed up white and cold against a dark bank of trees only some hundred yards away.

To be only a hundred yards from twenty well armed and mounted dragoons who are on the watch for you, would be too close quarters for most men, but room enough for Juan and the Coyotè. In three minutes there were as many large irrigating ditches between Juan and the picket, still craning at the first one. Then across the river at a cattle-ford only known to herdsmen and robbers, and into the road a half-mile beyond. The picket evidently had not seen him come back to the road again, so that he could slacken the gallop down to the Mexican jog-trot, alike so untiring to man and horse. The low grass fields, with willow-fringed irrigating ditches, give way to more broken ground, covered with locust, cactus, agave, and weird grey-stemmed "*huele de noche*" trees, redolent with great white bell-flowers. Ahead loomed up a spur of the mountain-range, along which he must coast until the cañon is reached. A *coyotè* "yap-yapping" across the road, a "tulli-wheeping" flock of curlews over his head, are his only companions. The chase has died away, and the only point to fear is the bridge at Pomoca, five miles beyond. The game is up now, he feels; he must get over to Laurelis as soon as possible. The *con-*

*ducta* taken in, and Torres, the best officer of the west, killed all in a day, will be enough to make the viceroy hunt him down like a dog. Chucha—to the devil with Chucha! No use for women in his business, except old Mother Josefa in the cave. Best go there, get her and the money on horseback, and over the hills to Gabriel's. Hurtado probably knew of the cave, and the old woman might be killed if found there.

Pomoca at last! Which road shall he take when he gets to the little farm? Across the bridge, and so past Tepetongo? or along the trail to the right?

A gleam of light from the Magdalena on the opposite hillside shows some early *peons* making ready for the day. How bright the moon was, and how still the night! Twenty yards more and he'll be at the cross-roads. The mares corralled opposite the farm-gate on the threshing-floor, where they have been plodding a ceaseless round, start up and snort as he appears. "*Quien vive?*" rings out from the bridge road, and Juan jams his spurs into the grey, dashes past its mouth and up the right-hand trail, to find dragoons springing up on every side of him, unmounted fortunately, all save one who bars the passage of the narrow trail ahead of him. But the dragoon's horse swerves under the grey's thundering charge, and his master drops heavily on to the lava by the footpath, under the thrust of Juan's *machète*. The broken ridges of lava, covered with heavy *nopal*

cactus, are all that save Juan from the muskets behind. "Fifteen miles from the cave, over a villanous trail, *caramba!* how well Torres took his precautions! I suppose I am free now at all events, unless the grey lames himself in this cursed *malpais.* They'll give up the chase before the cañon, and I'll have time to get the old woman on to the horse and away, anyhow, before daylight."

"Hold up, Coyotè!" They were now skirting along the edge of the stream, sometimes two hundred feet below them and again at their own level, as they rose and fell on the long veinous ridges of lava, jutting down black and snake-like from the line of craters rising to the right. The chase is soon hull down, and the grey going steadily and well, jogging, walking, cantering, picking his way from stone to stone, anon swinging out into a gallop when he finds good going, as though he, too, was well aware that the safety of his master depended upon his holding together for many an hour yet.

The mists of the valley rise ghostly under the waning moon, the bleat of sheep and low of waking herds from Tepetongo echo down the morning air. The walls of cliff loom and loom up ahead, darker and darker, as the first faint glimmer of dawn struggles to take the place of the day-star above them.

The *malpais* is past, and the trail leads through damp shaughs and over grassy meadows a couple of

miles, to the face of the wall before him, out of which rills the cañoned stream which eighteen hours before saw the band ride from victory. How long it seemed ago! what was life to him now, that he could not trust Chucha? And back again with fuller force came the long year old feeling that he was alone,—an outlaw, an outcast. True, he might be fighting for his country, but what chance was there? In all the years he had been at it, he had only had some ten men he could rely upon. All of the rest—and hundreds there had been—had, after making a little money, turned either informer or else had left the gang; and now, after the successful *coup* of to-day, perhaps he should find himself with only twenty men, and without Chucha,—her he could not marry. No, he must be alone, alone always—curse the thought! The gloomy walls of rock fall asunder, and the little glade, half in dense shadow, half in moonlight, is before him.

He calls old Josefa. No answer, and the handkerchief on the eastern end of the wall tells him she is up the valley. A sort of foreboding comes over him that all is not right, and he rides on past the cave; and half a mile from it Josefa shows herself, and in a whisper tells him that the head of the gorge is patrolled by infantry from the Jordanna, and that he had better turn back. But even as they speak, they hear the clank of horses and steel coming up from below. Caught, caught!

"Take the sheep-trail,—quick," says Josefa; "the old horse can make it, and you can get out on the down above, and so away to the northward."

"*Adios*, Josefa! I shall never come back; all my money in the cave is yours if you can save it," said Juan sadly, as he started up the slender path which led on to the high table-land to the left of the cañon, turning short back towards its mouth.

An awful trail it was, giving scarce foothold to the horse. And slowly and painfully Juan struggled up it, till he could see the dragoons two hundred feet below, riding slowly up the bottom of the gorge. It was fortunate that their eyes were for things earthly and not ethereal, or Juan would have been discovered. They pass up slowly, and the plateau is at last reached. He mounts and gallops along the edge of the cliff at right angles to the cañon to the northward. By this time the sun is gleaming on Xochititlan, and in a few minutes more its red disc is heralded on to the plateau by brilliant rays, under which Juan, to his horror, catches sight of a wall of infantry cutting him off. Slowly a dark line of blue-coats is closing in on the north-eastern side of a triangle, the south and western sides of which are sheer cliff. Another look, and he sees escape is hopeless. No chance of breaking through that line of men alive. After all, what need to?—better to die; and he pulls up the grey, pats the faithful old horse for the last time, and awaits his fate, *machète* in hand.

Suddenly an officer hails him to surrender; saying that if he does, he will be well treated. He too well knows what Spanish promises mean. What if he and the Coyotè should not die? What if a Spaniard should back Juan de Medina's grey? What tortures are in store for himself if he does not die? A look at the foe;—there are some five hundred of them. A look at the cliff behind;—it is sheer! The horse has been his only true friend,—Chucha might have been, many might have been, but the horse is his oldest and truest and last! They shall die together! and turning boldly, Juan Medina rode the grey out over the cliff, crashing through the oaks on to the cruel stones, four hundred feet below.

. . . . . .

"He spurred the old horse, and he held him tight,
And he leapt him out over the wall;
Out over the cliff, out into the night,
Four hundred feet of fall.

They found him next morning below in the glen
With never a bone in him whole:
A mass or a prayer, now, good gentlemen,
For such a bold rider's soul."

# JACK AND MINORY: A TALE OF CHRISTMAS-TIDE.

BY COL. ALFRED HARCOURT.

---

## CHAPTER I.

MISS RAYMOND, wrapped up in her furs, tried to peer out of the first-class carriage she had to herself; but all was darkness and gloom without, and it was also intensely cold, and with a little shiver she resigned herself to the situation. Just such a Christmas Eve as one would enjoy in a well-lighted house, with warm fires blazing in every hearth, and the sound of cheerful voices surging up in whatever room you might enter. Rather a contrast flying through the air in such bitter weather, the silence unbroken except by the rush of the wheels; and these at last seemed to revolve more quietly, while the pace slackened perceptibly.

The young lady ensconced in the further end of

the carriage drew her fur closer round her, as she did so tilting up her hat, and for the moment uncovering her face, showing fair golden hair swept back from a low white forehead, and eyes brown and full of *esprit*, —in truth, a very sweet, true woman's face, graced also with a mouth that, in its delicate curves, would have entranced any modern Greuze who might be in search of female loveliness. And the eyes too told, if a hasty glance at them could declare anything, of a sweet, frank, kindly nature, with just such a mere touch of coquetry that would never venture over the bare boundary of flirtation. It was the face of one to whom the little ones would fly for comfort and consolation; and, if it told its story truly, of one who, if she put her trust at all, would do so with all her heart. But what can you discern in a momentary inspection of another's physiognomy? And only for a moment could any one, had he been so privileged, have had the opportunity of arriving at conclusions; for with a hasty gesture the girl drew her mantle almost up to her eyes, and audibly giving vent to her impatience, murmured to herself, "How slow we are going, and what a night it is! However, we must he near Draycombe now."

The train was an express, and for over half an hour had stopped nowhere. It was considerably past its time, but now the station was approached, and the pace was sensibly moderating. Miss Raymond started up, oblivious of the cold, and busied herself in getting

her things together; and as there was a sudden stoppage, she let down the window.

It was snowing hard, and the storm had evidently been going on for some time, for on either side of the rails there was one great white expanse. Further up the line some conversation was going on, and leaning out of the window, she caught sight of the station not a hundred yards away. From what was said, she gathered that the line was hereabouts so blocked by a drift that there would be delay till the snow could be cleared; and thanking her good fortune that had brought her so close to the end of her journey, she refastened the window and patiently waited. After a short interval the train dragged slowly on to the station, where descending, she quickly collected her belongings, and asked the porter whether any carriage was in waiting from the Hall—Mr Beaufort's.

"No, miss, nothing have come yet; perhaps it's been delayed by the snow."

"Has the snow been falling long?" she inquired, as she moved into the cheerless little waiting-room, where there was a miserable fire trying to keep alight.

"Well, miss, it's been goin' on for the last two hours, and it don't look as if it were a-goin' to stop."

"Can I get a fly here?"

"Indeed, miss, I fear you can't; but I'll see the station-master."

This official, who presently came up, was, however, not able to afford her much help. It appeared no

conveyance of any kind plied to and from the station, nor was there anything but a farmer's cart in the village, and that lay a mile and a half distant.

"No, miss. I think you had better stay here. Mr Beaufort's carriage is sure to come; it's just been delayed a bit."

He then made her an offer to come into his own quarters, and wait there till the carriage might appear; but Miss Raymond, thanking him much, said she would do very well in the waiting-room, and she retired thereto — and placing her smaller belongings on the table, closed the door, and drawing a chair up to the fire, sat there enjoying the blaze which a vigorous application of the poker had drawn forth.

"This is truly cheerful," she remarked. "I suppose I ought not to blame the Beauforts, but it's an unpleasant position; and if this trap of theirs does not turn up, what on earth I am to do I don't know."

Her reflections were here broken in upon by the opening of the door.

The new-comer, swathed up to his mouth in a heavy overcoat heavily topped with snow, started back when he found a lady in possession, and made a movement as if to retreat; but as Miss Raymond did not look very fierce or hard-hearted, and indeed was clearly a very pretty girl, and it seemed like a case of beauty in distress, he took his courage in both hands and advanced into the room.

"Pardon me for coming in so suddenly. I trust I am not intruding."

Now Miss Raymond was what every right-minded and properly educated girl is—self-possessed. Before her stood a good-looking, soldierly figure, the face ornamented solely by a heavy moustache—the coat, thrown back, setting forth the lines of a powerful form which, garbed in its then fashion, seemed even taller than it really was.

"No, I assure you not."

"I fear," he hesitatingly said, "that you have been disappointed in getting away?"

"Yes," she responded, "that is just my case. Perhaps you are going to the same house? Mrs Beaufort promised to send for me."

"No; it is not my good fortune to have to go there to-night. But I know the Beauforts very well. They are great friends of mine. I cannot understand why their carriage has not come."

"Probably the snow——"

"Yes, of course, that must be it! How stupid of me. I—my place is the Heronry—telegraphed this afternoon to send the dogcart for me, and I suppose it's been delayed on the road."

"Won't you sit down?"—making room for him at the fire; "you must be very cold."

"Thanks, I will. I was half frozen out there. A gun-case has gone astray, and I was poking about the station."

"I hope you found it."

"Thanks, no; I suppose it's gone on. But really, before this capital fire, I feel inclined to laugh at troubles."

"Yes—is it not nice?" she assented. "I wonder how long we shall be here?"

"I hope for age—hm! I mean," he confusedly corrected himself, "we shall soon get away."

"It's very good of you to say so," replied Miss Raymond, who, as he had spoken, had turned her face aside with an amused smile on it; "but suppose no relief comes!"

"Upon my word, in that case"—he stopped.

"Yes, in that case?" persisted his questioner.

"Well, Miss——"

"My name is Raymond."

"Thank you, Miss Raymond. Let me introduce myself—Jack Woolcombe. I perhaps ought to say Captain Woolcombe; but, you see," laughing apologetically, "all the fellows call me Jack."

"All the fellows?"

"I mean all the fellows in the regiment—the Rutland Hussars."

"Yes. But, Captain Woolcombe, to return to what you were saying, please tell me what I am to do,"—and here, unwittingly, she held out her pretty little hands, as if to give emphasis to the question; for, indeed, the poor child was not taking her enforced stay with anything like the equanimity of her com-

panion. "Suppose this wretched storm goes on, and no carriage comes! I've tried to get a conveyance from the village, which they say is a mile and a half off."

"Really," said Woolcombe, quite distressed, "I feel for you awfully," and he did indeed look very sympathetic. "I wish I could do anything."

"And if nothing can be done, and we are left here like two babes in the wood," she went on in a tone that tried to be light, and yet in her voice there were tears.

"Then, Miss Raymond, there's only one thing to do," he promptly answered.

"And that is——?"

"You encamp here. I'll rig up things all round the windows, and I'll bivouac outside."

"On such a night! I could not dream of it. No, really," as he persisted. "The station-master offered me an asylum, and if the worst comes to the worst, I'll go to him, and leave you in possession here."

Just then the door was opened, and the porter appearing, announced that he saw a trap coming up the road, but it was as yet a long way off.

The two fellow-passengers went outside. The snow had now ceased, and a dull moon was shining, showing one vast area of white as far as the eye could reach. Some distance up the road two lights were seen advancing slowly.

"I'm sorry to say, Miss Raymond," said Wool-

combe, "that that is the wrong direction for the Beauforts' carriage, and I am afraid it is my cart;" and he was right, for presently the man driving came up to Captain Woolcombe, and, touching his hat, explained that he had had the greatest difficulty in forcing his way on at all, and had almost given up the idea of making further progress, when the snow stopped falling, and the moon coming out, gave him hope he might be able to push along.

And now, what was to become of the lady?

Miss Raymond, of course, could only resign herself to the situation, and return to her asylum in the station, and there she was found by Woolcombe.

"I suppose," she said, rising and extending to him her hand, "we must now say good night. I hope you will speedily reach your home."

"Pray, do not think I take a great liberty," he rejoined; "but you just now said you would take any conveyance from the village. Why not take mine? I am quite sure something must have happened to the Beauforts' carriage. Mine, you see, is a light dogcart, and so would travel easily."

"But I certainly am not going to take your cart and leave you here."

"You are awfully good," he warmly said, "and indeed I was going to propose to drive you to the Beauforts'. May I?"

"But this is immensely out of your way."

"Not a bit. See, Miss Raymond, it's past twelve

now, and it's high time you were fast asleep. Now let me decide for you. Here, James!" calling to his servant, "put this lady's things with mine in the cart. The boxes can be sent to-morrow, Miss Raymond. Now let me help you up. Yes, in front please. We can defy the cold with all these rugs. Now, James, let her head go. Poor Bess! she must be as glad as we are to get home."

## CHAPTER II.

Progress of course was slow, but it was sure, and at any rate progress it was, and that was something.

"I wish you would smoke, Captain Woolcombe. I am sure you would like to do so."

"May I really? Sure you don't mind?"

"I like it. Let me hold the reins."

"How curious it is," he said presently, "our thus meeting! It seems like a sort of fate."

"Doesn't it!" She laughed. "A very lucky fate for me. You are my guardian angel."

"I wish I—hm—I mean it's been very fortunate for me."

"Now you know I ought to take that as a most unkind speech."

"No—'pon my honour, you can't think that," he said, in a grieved tone.

"Oh yes, I can," she lightly made reply. "You

were really glad that this misfortune overtook me."

"Never," he protested; "you must not imagine that, Miss Raymond. But you know, I am certain what I did mean. Don't you?"

"Perhaps I do," she half shyly assented.

"Are you sure you are quite warm?" as he tucked the plaids closer round her.

"Quite sure, thanks. Is it far now?"

"Well, about a mile, or a little less. Curious," he went on, "our both travelling and being belated on Christmas Eve. It's like those stories in the Christmas books."

"The real truth is," said Miss Raymond, "I ought to have been at the Beauforts' yesterday, but, just when starting from home, I was detained."

"That is my case. I had half promised Cicely, that is my sister, to be with her on the Tuesday."

"Then she has been expecting you?"

"Oh, Cicely and I understand each other. My younger brother Trevor is to be at the Beauforts' soon, and so you'll know him. He is in the Rifle Brigade," continued he, growing communicative, "and a dear good fellow, though I say it that shouldn't. I hope Cicely will soon know you."

"It will be a great pleasure to me," began Miss Raymond.

"Every one likes Cicely. But as to her expecting me, you see I was staying down in Surrey, and could

not be sure of the day. I had made a half promise to try and be back by Christmas Eve. Holloa! it's begun to snow again."

And this was the case. It is true the flakes were few and far between as yet, but it was clearly expedient to lose no time on the road.

"I tell you what I'll do, Miss Raymond. When we get to the Beauforts', and we are already well up their avenue—you ought to see the lights of the house from here—I'll ask them to put me up for the night."

"Yes; I think you had better."

"I'll go no farther to-night. Well, here we are. Why, the house is shut up!"

They had now come close to a great structure, but no signs of life were to be seen anywhere.

"This is most strange!" said Woolcombe. "Not very polite, either, to ask you to their house and leave no one to welcome you when you come."

"But are you sure this is the house?"

"There's no doubt about that. James, ring the bell, will you."

The servant rang and rang, and at last, after what seemed an interminable delay, a faint noise was heard, and finally, after various chains and bolts had been withdrawn, the door was opened by an old man, who was in an extremely bad temper, and was very hard of hearing. He was quite unmoved by the information that the lady in the dogcart had come to stay with the Beauforts, and curtly informed the pair at

the door that she couldn't stay with the Beauforts,—"'cos why? 'cos they wasn't there." They managed to drag out of him that three days ago there had been something very wrong with the drains, and the entire household had decamped to the Manor House, the Hall being now entirely in the hands of the builders, the speaker having been left in charge as caretaker.

"But is there no room where this young lady can stay for the night?" demanded Woolcombe.

"No," he shortly replied, there was no room. The whole house was upside down.

"And how far off is the Manor House?" inquired Miss Raymond.

"It's a good four mile at least."

"What is to be done?" asked the girl, in great perplexity. "Could not this old man get me something to take me there?"

"No, Miss Raymond. It's hopeless to expect anything of the sort. You must still place yourself under my guidance. We will see how soon we can get there."

"Oh, Captain Woolcombe! I am so distressed. I never meant to make myself such a burden, but what can I do?"

"Believe me, Miss Raymond, it will be a real pleasure to me, and indeed it is my positive duty to see you safely home. Pray, say no more. Now, James, turn the mare's head."

"I beg your pardon, sir. The four-mile road goes

by Shelvers Dip, and with this fall, and the wind there has been, the snow must have drifted fifteen feet there."

"And the longer road—I forget the distance?"

"It's eight miles, sir, and I doubt if that's much better."

"A nice look-out, certainly. Well, we can't encamp for the night under the cart. Now, Miss Raymond, the only plan left us is to go on as quick as we can to the Heronry. It's barely five miles from this, and the track is fortunately over level country. We ought to do it in an hour and a half. My sister is there, and after you have had a good night's rest, I'll drive you to-morrow to the Beauforts'."

"You are really too kind. I suppose it is the best thing to do. I gratefully accept your offer, but I am so distressed at having put you to all this trouble."

"No, no," he pleaded, "don't say that. All this to me is really nothing. The real misery is, that you should have had such a time of it. Now, pray, wrap up well. I fancy it's going to begin snowing again, but luckily the lamps will hold out for some time yet; and so now for the road."

It was past one on Christmas morning, and as if to do honour to the day, the snow now recommenced in downright earnest, though fortunately there was no wind. Had the road been any but a most clear and well-defined one, there is no saying what might not

have happened; but Woolcombe knew the way, and the mare felt she was going home, and so they plodded on in silence, the wheels noiselessly wading through the snow, which soon piled itself in layers over the cart and its inmates. The poor girl, tired and fatigued, had fallen fast asleep, and unconsciously her head, declining lower and lower, at length rested on Woolcombe's shoulder. He at once saw what it was, for his companion's condition made him doubly on the alert, and drawing the wrap right over her, he steadied the sleeping girl, who slumbered on, undisturbed by the movement of his left arm around her; and so they jogged along, and after a weary time of it, at last approached the house. Miss Raymond did not awake until the servants, who had been sitting up, came with lights; and then having been carefully lifted down, she stood with dazed eyes in utter bewilderment before them. But the bright room and the blazing fire soon recalled her numbed senses to activity, and with a feeling of warmth and comfort she sank into a roomy settee. Refreshments were brought at once, and Woolcombe, taking the butler aside, told him to call one of the maids, and let Miss Woolcombe know of the new arrival.

"Miss Woolcombe went away this morning, sir, before your telegram came."

"Good heavens! was ever anything so unfortunate? Where did she go?"

"To the Manor House. She thought you weren't coming at all."

"All my own stupid delay! By the by, Lomax, this lady is a Miss Raymond. She was to have been met by Mrs Beaufort's carriage, which never turned up. What on earth is to be done?"

But Lomax had not an idea.

"You see," suggested his master, "there's no housekeeper."

"No, sir, there ain't," acquiesced Mr Lomax.

"Well, there's the cook!"—this rather vaguely, as if he was not quite sure such an official was on the premises.

"Yes, sir, there's the cook, and the upper 'ousemaid."

"Of course! let's have the upper housemaid. Jane, isn't it? She'll do. For some one there must be to show Miss Raymond to a room. Send for her, and tell her to come into the drawing-room."

Now the difficulty was for him to break to this young lady, so strangely drifted into his protection, that the sister whose presence she had relied upon was not in evidence! There was no help for it. It was simply impossible for Miss Raymond to leave the house that night, and they must just make the best of the situation.

"I fear," said his guest, standing before the cheerful blaze of the fire, "that I am giving Miss Wool-

combe a great deal of trouble. I do hope you won't let her be disturbed; but I never dreamt I could see her till to-morrow. Would you let one of the servants show me to my room?"

Under the circumstances, perhaps the best thing for Woolcombe would have been to accept the position in which they were so strangely placed, to allow his guest to retire, and inform her next morning, when she was thoroughly rested, that Cicely was not in the house, having suddenly left. But it seemed to the young squire that he was bound in simple honour, be the consequences what they might, to tell Miss Raymond exactly how he and she were situated.

"It is," he began, "really most provoking——"

"What can be provoking in this charming house?" she said, glancing round the pretty room, and trying, dead tired as she was, to brighten up. "Here am I just beginning to become myself, and you try to damp my spirits."

"Not for the world would I do so. But I fear I must seem to you something like an impostor." Here he hurriedly went on. "The fact is, my sister, believing I was not coming, has, I find, left this—or as it really was, yesterday—morning, and is now at the Beauforts'."

Miss Raymond looked at him rather blankly. Then the vague suspicions on her mind vanishing as she glanced up at her host's vexed and most troubled countenance, she cast all consideration for herself

aside, and thought merely of the position as it affected him.

"Of course it is awkward," she gravely remarked, "but I see no help for it. You could not tell this when you brought me here."

"It is not indeed of myself I am thinking, Miss Raymond," he earnestly said, as he approached nearer to her. "I know how awkward all this is for you, and with no lady in the house to receive you; but on such a night — tired and fatigued as you are, too — you can't possibly go elsewhere."

"Why should I? No, Captain Woolcombe, I place myself in your hands. You have done your best for me. No blame attaches to you."

"Perhaps not," he slowly said; "but if there's no blame on *me*, there may be—however, we need not enter on possibilities. Let us say no more on the subject. I honour you for your pluck. And here is Jane. She is my sister's favourite, and you will be safe with her. Jane!" turning to the girl who had come in, "please take Miss Raymond to the room prepared for her, and stay with her. Be careful as to this. She is tired to death, and must not be left to herself."

"But, indeed," began his guest.

"No," he rejoined, almost sternly, and yet with a tender softness in his voice. "Pray oblige me in this, Miss Raymond. It is no great favour, surely;

and some day," he vaguely added, "I may tell you why I ask it."

"Be it so, then, if this is your wish. Good night."

"No; I'll see you safely housed for the night."

As the servant turned to leave the room, Miss Raymond timidly approached her host, a dim sense of his meaning in all these preparations stealing over her, and with a little tremor in her sweet voice, and the faintest rise of colour that enhanced her beauty, she almost whispered—

"Captain Woolcombe, you are very kind. My own brother could not be more thoughtful. As you say, it is best. I will keep Jane with me."

In a swift and rapid glance, Woolcombe took in the tender grace of face and figure before him, but this was no time to weary her with pretty compliments; and, in truth, his feeling for her had risen beyond the stage in which bare compliments could have been uttered. He merely said, "Let me show you up-stairs. It's nearly three o'clock. Why, you will never look as you did at the station if you don't soon get some sleep."

"How did I look at the station?" she demurely demanded, with her little head bewitchingly poised on one side as she put the query.

"Honestly, I dare not tell you," he laughed. "Perhaps some day I shall find the necessary courage."

"I must have been a very dreadful personage."

"Dreadful is not the word to use," he rejoined. "Appalling is nearer. But I must keep you up no longer. I shan't expect you to breakfast. Here is your room, and Jane in waiting. Again, good night!"

As the door closed on her, he stood for an instant or two in a dreamy way, and then leisurely descended the stairs. To the surprise of Mr Lomax, who had gone fast asleep in the hall, his master, throwing his greatcoat over his arm, and snatching up a rug, preceded him, and passing through the kitchen, let himself out, dismissing the servant, and plodded through the snow to the stables, ostensibly with a view to seeing whether the mare had been looked after. But groom and mare had long before gone to sleep; and so, making up the fire in the harness-room, he smoked a peaceful pipe, his feet planted high up on either side of the hob. He sat there for some time, pleasantly musing over the events of the night, till at last wearied nature came to his rescue, the pipe dropped out of his mouth, and he sank into most profound slumber, only awakening, cold and stiff, when the coachman, coming in next morning, found him before the embers of a still smouldering fire.

## CHAPTER III.

By 10 A.M., however, Woolcombe, having found his way to his room, had finished his dressing, and came

down fully expecting a solitary breakfast. He rang the bell, and asked if anything had been sent up to his guest, and was discussing this question with Mr Lomax, when the young lady, apparently none the worse for the past night's experiences, entered the room.

"Now this is really too good of you," he declared, moving eagerly to meet her, and welcoming her with outstretched hands.

"A merry Christmas and a happy New Year to you, Captain Woolcombe!"

"Ah, now to think you should have forestalled me! But, you see, I never believed you would have ventured down so early."

"Why not? I slept splendidly, as I hope you did?"

"Magnificently!" and quickly turning the subject, "I hope you are ready for breakfast?"

"Indeed I am delightfully hungry. But," and here she stopped.

"Yes. Ah! I see you are thinking of those most detestable Beauforts. Well, you may make your mind easy. I have sent off a man with a letter to my sister, requesting her to explain everything."

"And you will have me sent there after breakfast?"

"My dear Miss Raymond, just look at the weather. It's been snowing hard ever since we parted, and does not look like stopping now. I doubt if a trap can possibly reach the Manor House. If it can, I will of

course drive you myself. I asked Cicely to come over at once; and if the road is at all practicable, you may depend on it she will come. I know as well as you do how anxious you must be to go," he added, wistfully.

"No, no, Captain Woolcombe! pray don't put it in that way. But you see," and here she stopped in pretty confusion.

"I quite see. These awful rules of propriety, and that dreadful Mrs Grundy, appear on the scene, and of course spoil everything."

"It's not exactly that," she hesitated.

"I'm afraid it is just exactly that. But perhaps my sister will turn up."

"How can she, if the roads are impassable?"

"They are not impassable to pedestrians, though I firmly believe no carriage can go."

"Then why can't I walk there?"

"We might manage it, but we must, at any rate, give the weather a chance. It may clear later on, and if the snow hardens we could try and tramp it."

"So be it. I therefore dismiss all unpleasant thoughts. May I make tea for you?"

"Will you? How nice that will be! You look quite as if you were the mistress of the house."

"Do I?" she shyly said. "A poor substitute for Miss Woolcombe, I fear."

"I have my own opinion as to that,—not that Cicely is not the dearest girl possible."

And so chatting gaily, the two got through the meal, and then rose and looked out on the lawn, where the snow still fell, but not heavily.

"A dreary prospect, in sooth," he said. "I don't think there's much chance of Cicely coming."

"Then it does not look hopeful for our trip."

"Indeed it does not. Of course, as far as I am concerned, I don't want you to go, but I suppose that wretched Mrs Grundy insists upon it."

"Mrs Grundy, Captain Woolcombe," looking at him reprovingly, "plays a very useful *rôle* on occasions."

"Does she?" he rejoined, discontentedly. "Perhaps so. None the less is she a nuisance."

"But see! the snow has stopped, and I declare there is an opening in the sky. I believe, after all, it's going to be fine."

"What a bore!"

"Captain Woolcombe," looking at him with a saucy look in her eyes, "how can you!"

"For me only, of course," he laughed. "Well, I'll be magnanimous. Let us wait half an hour. A slight thaw will set the snow, and then we may be able to venture, and two of the men can carry our things."

"Our things?"

"Yes, our things, mademoiselle. Why, you don't suppose I am going to return to this miserable place, to live here like a hermit."

"I am agreeable, I am sure. I feared it was

just possible you might be tired of my society by now."

"How can you talk like that? Well, suppose, if you like, it is so, and the temptation is on me strong to return here alone, I shall resist that temptation, and—and——"

"Deny yourself?"

"Well, if you will have it in that way. At any rate, I shall certainly stay at the Manor House."

She turned to him quite naturally and simply. "Yes, do. It will be pleasanter for me. You must know I have not seen Mrs Beaufort since she was married, some six or seven years ago, and I never met her husband. Is he nice?"

"Tom Beaufort is a capital fellow," replied Woolcombe, heartily. "There are a lot of people in the house. My brother Trevor will come if he can get leave; he is at the depot. By the way, your name seems very familiar to me. I wonder it never occurred to me before. I was A.D.C. in Egypt to a General Raymond. Any relation of yours?"

"He is my uncle."

"A dear old fellow he was, too. In India now, is he not?"

"No, in town. Mother and I live with him. Mother did not like my coming alone, but there was no help for it, for my maid was quite laid up with a cold. It's just as well she did not go through last night's business."

"I am sure," he laughed, "I am not sorry she was absent. But that is selfish of me—to talk like this. She would have been invaluable to you."

"No; in such weather as we enjoyed, she would have broken down altogether."

"I fancy so. It is not every one has your pluck. Now, can you excuse me while I go and make inquiries as to the state of the road? I'll be back in half an hour. First, let me show you into the morning-room. I have had it thoroughly warmed, and you will be very cosy there."

Leaving his guest safely ensconced, he set about ascertaining whether the road to the Manor House was practicable, and learnt that no wheeled conveyance could possibly get there till the snow subsided. Returning to Miss Raymond, he informed her what the state of affairs was, and asked if she still felt inclined to dare the long walk, with all the chance of being buried in a snow-drift.

"Well, you see, Captain Woolcombe, it's the proper thing to do, I suppose; and as there now seems every chance of its keeping clear, I think the sooner we start the better."

Just then Lomax came into the room holding a cigar-case, which he handed to his master.

"James found this in the harness-room, sir. I hope you did not catch cold, sleeping there last night, sir."

"No, no," hastily said Woolcombe, in some con-

fusion. "It's all right. I fell asleep over the fire, and I suppose this dropped out."

When the butler had disappeared, Miss Raymond turned to her host reproachfully. "You make me very unhappy, Captain Woolcombe. I put you to enormous trouble, and finally I drive you out of your own house. Yes, I saw you last night go across the yard. I am sure you intentionally meant to sleep in the harness-room."

"No. Well, the fact is, I lit my pipe and—fell asleep."

"Oh, I know better. It is indeed high time I ran away from you."

"How can you be so cruel? I wish you would not talk like this," he protested.

"All the same, it's perfectly true. But," looking at him with sweet moist eyes, "you do believe I am very grateful for all your kind consideration for me."

"Oh, don't!" he passionately implored. "If you say more, I shall—— But there, I am not fair to you." And with an effort restraining himself as he took her hand in his own—"I seem somehow to have made a great deal out of nothing. Pardon me. Shall we start?"

She recovered herself at once.

"Yes, by all means. We will make our venture."

"Together?"

"Yes, together," she made answer.

"So be it," he muttered below his breath. "The words have a good augury."

## CHAPTER IV.

The pair progressed very much better than they had expected. The sun came out, and its warmth hardened the snow and made walking easy; the air, too, felt delightfully fresh and buoyant, with just that pleasant feeling of cold that was sharp and invigorating without being bitter. The two laughed and talked, and might (so intimate had they become) have been taken for friends of quite old standing, so much can circumstances effect in a short time. The path they were pursuing led over the fields, two men with the *impedimenta* being some way in advance.

"I suppose," said Miss Raymond, "there's no chance of our disappearing in a snowdrift."

"No; the snow has fallen less heavily here, or it has been blown below. You see our path is along rising ground."

"But does it not descend?"

"Not much; and where it does, if there's any risk we will leave the road and find a higher track. I expect every minute we shall meet my sister."

"Oh, I hope she won't venture."

"She is sure to do so. The only thing is, the

messenger may have been delayed, and certainly there's no marks of his having passed this way."

"But you recollect it snowed after he left. Oh, listen!" cried Miss Raymond, stopping. "The church bells. Of course it's Christmas-day. Is the church far?"

"No; we are pretty close to it. How distinctly the sound comes through the clear air! Do you hear the children singing?"

"Yes; it's some nursery rhyme."

"Is it? How clever of you to know that! Why, I can only hear a confused babble."

"Don't you think children are much better off now than they used to be? I mean," she went on, "they have all sorts of charming books now, which I am sure I never had when I was a child."

"What an immense time ago that must have been!" he said, with an amused look.

"Indeed it was. Do you know how old I am, sir?"

"Well, let me see. I must really have time to consider."

"Nonsense! I am nineteen: now!"

"Why, it's the very age I was going to mention."

"Oh, Captain Woolcombe, that's a horrid story!" stopping and looking at him, as if daring him to jest on such a subject. "Now confess it is, or I won't go another step."

"Upon my word and honour now, you look just

nineteen. Did you think I was going to say you were thirty?"

"That's all very well," and again moving onward, "but you thought I was much younger, I am quite sure."

"Truly I did not. But you will allow," he added, maliciously, "that even your great age is not so far removed from childhood."

"And what may your great age be?" she saucily demanded.

"Guess."

"No, I can't. Well, then, twenty-eight?"

"Capital! You are a necromancer. That is correct."

"So, as we have made peace again, tell me if I am not right as to the advantages children of the present day enjoy."

"Certainly, I think you are. All I can recollect was about Jack and Jill, Old Mother Hubbard, and the cow jumping over the moon."

"Yes," she laughed assentingly; "and they had such dreadful pictures."

"Ghastly; all red and blue and green. My old nurse had some legend she used to sing to me, but it never got further than the first two lines:—

*'I'll tell you a story*
*Of Jack and Minory.'*

Why, have I said anything to hurt you?" For just

then the young lady turned aside her face to conceal a smile she could not control.

"No; really not," laughed Miss Raymond; "but what you said in a way struck me."

"What on earth did I say?" he asked, in dismay.

"Perhaps," she hesitated, "when I know you better I'll tell you."

"Why, I am sure you know me now."

"Captain Woolcombe, do you remember that this time yesterday we were not aware of each other's existence?"

"Well, even so. We know each other now. At any rate, I know you, I'm glad to say."

"What can you know of me in such a few hours?"

"Quite enough to satisfy me. I feel as if I had been acquainted with you for years."

"And so I feel," said she, quite naively. "Is it not strange?"

"Oh, don't say that."

"Very well, I won't. Let us come back to what we were speaking about. We were talking of some rhyme, I think," she presently remarked.

"Oh yes; about Jack and Minory. Surely no one could ever have had such a name."

"There's the Minories, you know," she suggested.

"Yes; but that's not Minory. And besides, Minories is the name of a street, I think.

"I don't know why it is called the Minories, but

perhaps the gentleman who gave his name to the street called his daughter Minory."

"Oh, you think it is a girl's name? The question is whether it really is a name."

"Oh, I am sure it is—that is," with some confusion, "I fancy it must be."

"I can't imagine a pretty girl going about with such a name."

"Nor can I," replied the lady, demurely. "But," looking up to him, and as quickly away, "a plain girl might."

"Yes," he assented, as if regarding it judicially from this point of view; "a plain girl might do anything."

"It is clear you don't like the name?"

"I don't know," he replied. "There's a quaintness about it. The name would rather set off a plain girl."

"Wouldn't it! That idea never occurred to me."

"And now," he asked, "will you tell me what your name is?"

"I am Miss Raymond."

"Yes, I know; but what is your Christian name?"

"It begins with an M; see if you can guess."

"Is it Mabel?"

"No."

"Then Maud?"

"No."

"Madeline?"

"No."

"Millicent?"

"No."

"I'm glad it isn't Millicent; that always goes to Milly. Is it Muriel? Wrong again! Hang it! it can't be Martha?"

"No, it isn't Martha."

"Of course it couldn't be Martha. And not Minnie?"

"No, not Minnie."

"Then I'm dead beat. Please come to my rescue."

"Do you know you have once said it this morning? No! I must positively leave you to find out what it is."

"But why won't you tell me?"

"Because—it's really too absurd—I can't!"

"How mysterious! and I've said it already?"

"Yes. OH!"

The fact is, the two in their talk had rather wandered off the proper track, and Miss Raymond, suddenly plunging into a drift, had spasmodically stretched her hands out for anything to support her, with the result that she lay three feet deep in the snow, her companion, who had lost his balance at her touch, falling in after her; and there she was, her upturned face not two inches from a blond moustache, which, for a second or so, seemed unable, so nonplussed was its owner with his somersault, to move to either one side or the other! The pair burst

into a peal of hearty laughter, and at once Woolcombe scrambled to his feet, making many apologies for his clumsiness.

"Indeed all the apologies should be on my side," said Miss Raymond, as she hastily swept off the snow from her hair, while the gentleman beside her did his best to clear her dress. "How stupid of me to have stumbled and to have dragged you down also!"

"I ought to have been more on the look-out. I hope," he anxiously asked, "you are not hurt?"

"Not a bit, thanks." Then turning round: "Is the snow out of my hair?"

It seemed to take a long time to decide this, but at last Captain Woolcombe, after pointing out several minute specks, which the lady removed with all gravity, announced that he could see no more.

"What a lot must have got in!" said Miss Raymond.

"Oh, a tremendous lot!"

"And I'm all tidy now?"

"You are perfection. Why," suddenly looking up, "I declare if there isn't Cicely, and Mrs Beaufort, and Harry Jocelyn! Oh, I quite forgot to tell you he and Cicely are engaged."

The trio now came up.

"Oh, Minory!" cried out Mrs Beaufort, warmly kissing Miss Raymond. "How glad I am to see you, child! Let me look at you. Why, you are grown out of all knowledge."

"Dear Kate, think of the years it is since we met."

"Of course—I forget. My dearest girl, what a dreadful time you must have had of it!"

"Captain Woolcombe has been so very kind to me," said Miss Raymond, with much feeling, to Cicely, who was now introduced to her. "I cannot tell you all his thoughtful care has done for me. I fear I have been a great burden to him."

"Well, we have you now," broke in Mrs Beaufort. "Do you know, we sent the brougham for you last night, and it got perfectly engulfed in a drift, and the coachman had to take the horse out and leave it. They have gone now to see if it can be dragged home. What you must have gone through on such a night! We were in perfect despair about you."

"Pray, don't commiserate me. Captain Woolcombe came to my aid, like a knight of romance; and indeed," she added, as she went on alone with Mrs Beaufort, "you cannot imagine all the trouble he took to secure my comfort."

"Just like him. He is a dear, good fellow, and I believe is perfectly adored in his regiment. And now to get you home as soon as possible."

"Yes; but all my things are at the station, except what the men are carrying."

"We sent for them, my dear. We fully intended to get you over somehow. We have the house full of

people, and we must do our best to amuse ourselves. You don't know the Manor House?"

"My dear Kate, I've never been here before in my life."

"I quite forgot. Well, we had to suddenly leave the Hall. The smells were something too dreadful. The Manor House is my brother's place, and I act as hostess. Jack Woolcombe's sister, that nice girl behind, is engaged to him. Is it not jolly that we shall keep her close to us?"

And so they chatted on; and reaching the Manor House without further mishap, Miss Raymond was shown into a very charming room, where, to her delight, her boxes had been already conveyed.

Coming down-stairs just before lunch, she met Captain Woolcombe for an instant.

"Why would you not tell me your name, Miss Raymond?" he asked, reproachfully. "I would rather have heard it from you."

"How could I tell that?" she murmured. "And besides," with more confidence, "it's such an absurd name."

"Indeed it is not," he rejoined. "It's the quaintest name I ever heard."

"Is it? I don't know that," she doubtfully answered. "But you see it's the only one I've got, so I have to make the best of it."

Just then Cicely Woolcombe, quite unaware any

one was in the room, came in humming in an audible tone the old rhyme—

*"I'll tell you a story*
*Of Jack and Minory;"*

—and then, perceiving her brother and his late guest, she ran out again precipitately.

Miss Raymond turned aside to conceal her confusion.

"Well, it's perfectly true, Miss Raymond, that she now can tell a story of Jack and—and Minory."

"What story?" asked the girl in a nervous tremor.

But here, to her great relief, a crowd of people came streaming into the room, and the colloquy, to Woolcombe's evident chagrin and to Minory's intense relief, was broken off.

## CHAPTER V.

The Manor House was filled with guests. The home party was in itself a large one, consisting of the Beauforts, *père et femme* (Tom and Kate); Mrs Beaufort's brother, Harry Jocelyn, the owner of the property; their brother Dick, a youngster just on the eve of going to Woolwich; with two of the Beauforts' children—Maud, aged about six, and a small boy. Then there is Harry Jocelyn's *fiancée*, Cicely Wool-

combe, and her two brothers, Jack and Trevor, the last having turned up on Christmas night. In addition, we have to add to the count Sir Piers and Lady Gore; a pretty widow, Mrs Evesham; Miss Raymond and two Miss Mashams; a Major Clayton, and two subalterns from the garrison town, completing the circle, some being the guests of Jocelyn, and the remainder having flitted over from the Hall.

The snow still lay on the ground, but the weather was fine and the air clear and brisk; and as the ice on the Long Pond was bearing beautifully, the greater part of each day was spent in skating, while the nights were devoted to such amusements as the whim of the moment brought about.

Somehow Woolcombe could seldom manage, in a house so full of people, to get more than a few minutes alone with Minory; and over and over again, when he thought he had secured her for himself, there would be an inrush of children or of some of the party in the house.

He managed to be with her as much as possible on the ice, though, as she skated very well, and skating was an accomplishment he had never gone in for, they were of necessity soon separated, Miss Raymond being swept off by the crowd of eager aspirants for the honour of her hand as she flew along through the frosty air.

On the fourth day of her stay, however, Minory, shaking herself free from the others, found herself

close to poor Jack, who was indeed making but very slow headway. He was feeling depressed—in fact, had shown he was so all day; and the girl reproaching herself for having appeared to desert him, though this she had never intended, came from behind and softly mentioned his name.

"Ah, you there!" he gladly made response, at once brightening up. "You see I can't get on at all." Then changing the subject: "I see so little of you now, with all these people about."

"Is it my fault?" she shyly made response. "Indeed I have not meant to treat you so badly—you to whom I owe so much."

"Owe me!"

"Yes. But let me help you. Now lean on my arm and strike out."

"My dear Miss Raymond, it is no good. I shall be down to a certainty, and bring you down too. No; I can't risk giving you a tumble."

"Then I'll tell you what I will do. You sit down on this chair, and I'll push you to the very end."

"If I agree, it is because it's the honest truth," he said, with a rueful visage. "I am so mortally tired with these infer— I mean, these vile skates, I can hardly stand."

"Of course you must be. Now, are you ready?"

"No; please wait a second. I'll just get rid of these things if I may. They are no good. Will you give me a minute's grace?"

"Of course."

Freeing himself from his skates, the two were soon skimming over the level surface; and laughing and talking, they were oblivious of everything beside them. It so happened, however, that Major Clayton and Mrs Evesham were similarly occupied, and were equally lost to a sense of their surroundings, and the rival pairs meeting at an angle, the result can be imagined. Major Clayton, who was steering the widow, caused the chair she was sitting on to collide with Minory's foot, sending her with tremendous force on the ice—Jack's chair, from the impetus, being upset, he, Clayton, and Mrs Evesham all rolling together in a confused heap. They got up none the worse for the encounter; but this was not poor Miss Raymond's case, for though she sat up, she did not attempt to rise. Woolcombe ran to her aid: "Let me help you."

"I fear," she said piteously, with a brave effort keeping down her tears, "I cannot rise."

"Good heavens!" in alarm, "you are not hurt?"

"I have twisted my foot, I think. Please take off my skates."

He soon, and yet with great gentleness, removed them.

"Are you easier now?" he asked, in anxiety.

"I fear I cannot walk," she said, in a low voice, with the tears in her eyes.

Others now came round her, but Woolcombe was

not going to give up his post of vantage, and held her securely as he lifted her carefully from the ice.

"Rest entirely on me," he murmured; and then added aloud, "Bring that chair, Clayton, will you, like a good fellow! We must put Miss Raymond on it, and take her quietly to the shore. But no, that won't do, for her foot will be on the ground. I will carry her. May I?" he asked, leaning over the now nearly fainting girl.

"Whatever is best," she assented.

Woolcombe needed no more.

"She can't go on the chair. She's as light as a feather. I'll carry her."

"My dear fellow," said Sir Piers, "you can't possibly carry her all the way to the house."

"Can't I? I think you will find I can. Now," as he skilfully lifted her, "just steady me as we go over the ice. Not too fast, please, or I shall be stumbling."

Minory closed her eyes, and bore up as well as she could; and not a sound escaped her, though it was easy to see, by the tightening of her mouth every now and then, that she was suffering a good deal of torture.

. . . . . .

When the doctor came he gave, on the whole, a favourable report. It was a mere sprain, that with care would be quite well in a few days. For that night his patient had better keep quiet in her room;

but if she was fit for it, she could come down on the morrow and venture on a sofa.

## CHAPTER VI.

The next evening Minory felt so very much better that she pleaded with Mrs Beaufort to let her appear after dinner; and when the men returned from the dining-room they found Miss Raymond the centre of a bright circle, reposing, as old Sir Piers gallantly remarked, like a queen-regnant with her ladies-in-waiting in close attendance.

"Minory, you ought to be the Sleeping Princess," said little Maud Beaufort.

"I'd rather be the Waking Princess, dear, and be able to run about like you."

"No," returned the child, "that would not do. You know the Sleeping Princess lay just as you are, and then the Prince comes in and wakes her with a kiss."

"It's a pity we have not a Prince handy for you, dear," laughed Mrs Beaufort.

"Miss Raymond has only to choose," suggested Sir Piers. "Any of us here would gladly take the part of the Prince."

"But, as you see, Sir Piers," returned Minory, colouring, "I am not a Princess, and I am not asleep, and so the Prince here would be out of place."

Here she caught Jack's eye, he all the time having said nothing, and apparently not much relishing this sort of badinage.

"Are you wise to venture down?" he whispered, as he leant over to pick up her handkerchief.

"Yes, really, I am very much better," she said, in the same tone, thanking him with a grateful glance.

"Well, we must not mob you in this fashion," put in Cicely, always thoughtful for others. "Maudie, dear, come and show me the pictures you had for me."

This created a diversion, and the rest of the company kindly took the hint and dispersed, leaving Woolcombe and Miss Raymond alone.

"I am sure I am much obliged to my sister," said Jack. "She and you are great friends, I hope."

"The greatest. I love her exceedingly. But why," she demurely asked, looking at him for a second, "are you grateful to her?"

"For drawing off the crowd," he promptly returned.

"But, indeed, they are all very kind."

"Including that old mummy, Gore,"—this sarcastically. "But who could be anything but kind to you? What I meant was——" and he stopped.

"Well, what was it?"

"It was—well—that—that now, I had you to myself."

"You must surely have had too much of that at the Heronry."

"I wish we were there again, all alone."

"It *was* very nice then," wistfully, and quite ignoring the dreadful impropriety of her stay there with a solitary bachelor.

"Wasn't it! And here, you see, there are such lots of people, I never get you alone. Do you know, I've been thinking over your name, Miss Raymond. It is a very pretty one."

"Suitable," she said, saucily, "for a plain girl."

"I don't know about that," he hotly rejoined. "I know it's very suitable for you."

Half rising on her elbow, and fixing on him a piercing glance, under which he quailed—"Captain Woolcombe, did you not say it would set off a plain girl?"

"So I did," beginning to get a little uncomfortable, "and I say it again; and, *par consequence*, how much more must it set off a lovely girl!"

"Why, you distinctly said you couldn't imagine—yes, *those were your very words*—a pretty girl going about with such a name."

"No; did I really?" showing signs of complete defeat. "I never could have said that."

"Yes, you did, though."

"Well, it shows," he stammered in confusion, "how little I knew about it."

"Why, what more do you know about it now, sir?"

"I know you—and—and——"

"Hush! you are going to pay me compliments."

"Never! I was going to tell you the real honest truth. But let me know how you came by your name."

"Did you ever hear of a place called Minori?"

"No."

"Well, there is such a village, and it so happens I was born there. It is quite close to Amalfi."

"I'll look it out in the map."

"I doubt if you will find it, as it hardly ranks as a town. However, there I was born, and I took my name from the place."

"How very interesting! But it's my luck over again. Here's Dick!"

"Yes, here's Dick," said that young scapegrace, sauntering up, not in the least aware how little he was wanted. "I'm come to relieve guard. Kate wants to see you—at least she did ten minutes ago—about to-morrow."

"What about to-morrow?"

"Oh, I don't know. She'll tell you."

There was no help for it, and Woolcombe had to retreat, to his disgust—finding out, after all, that Dick had mistaken his message, and that Mrs Beaufort had referred to some one else. That night Woolcombe only caught a hurried word or two with Miss Raymond before she was carried away, but the bright smile she gave him, and the cordial clasp of her little hand, sent him into the smoking-room in a delightful frame of mind, with all the pleasures of

anticipation as to what the coming hours might bring forth. The next day broke with heavy rain, and, to the delight of the men, there was, with the break up of the frost, every prospect of a good time for hunting. But the day itself was hopeless : the state of the roads, to say nothing of the continued showers, kept all but the most enterprising indoors ; and as the dull, dark, and cheerless evening fell, the party found themselves assembled in the drawing-room over afternoon tea, with the gloom only broken by the bright flickering of the fire, which leapt and sparkled on the hearth.

The several inmates of the Manor House had grouped themselves around Mrs Beaufort, and the cravings for refreshment having subsided, the question arose as to what was now to be done.

"Well, for one thing," cried out Dick, "we ought all to be here."

"So we are, are we not?" asked Mrs Beaufort.

"Not a bit of it," responded Dick, who was reposing on the easiest chair in the room, with his arms behind his head.

"You disgracefully lazy boy, sit up and tell us who the defaulters are," commanded Cicely.

"I don't see Trevor and Enid."

"You rude boy! what right have you to call Miss Masham Enid?" asked Mrs Beaufort.

"She asked me to — didn't she, Grace?" to the younger Miss Masham.

"Upon my work, Dick, you are highly favoured," said Jack, laughing.

"Oh, she calls me Dick, so it's all square."

"Rather a one-sided bargain, Master Dick," said Beaufort. "But here are the delinquents."

And as he spoke, Trevor Woolcombe and the eldest Miss Masham sauntered in, in the most unconcerned way.

"Why, where have you been, Enid dear—the tea must be quite cold?" asked Mrs Beaufort.

"Thanks, dear—I like it cold. Mr Woolcombe was showing me a stroke in the billiard-room."

"A jolly light to see strokes by," yawned Dick.

"You incorrigible little villain," from Harry Jocelyn *sotto voce;* "can't you let people enjoy themselves their own way?" Then aloud—"It so happens," he pronounced oracularly, "there are some strokes at billiards that always come off best when there's not too much light."

"True for you, old man," said Trevor good-naturedly, laughing. "Pitch that fellow Dick over the arm of the chair, and make him shut up."

Here a diversion was made by Mrs Evesham saying that, as they were all present, it now had to be decided what they should do. Dancing was vetoed, because Minory could only just manage to hobble; charades were thought slow; and dumb crambo would not do, for there was not enough audience.

Lights were just then brought in, and something

like a redistribution of places took place as the tea things were taken away. Mrs Beaufort, however, sat considering, twisting her rings off and on her fingers.

"I call you all to witness," called out Tom Beaufort, "that if Kate persists in playing with her rings, and taking them off as she does, she'll some day lose them."

"Nonsense, dear! I never lose them. There, see! I take them all off."

"What! even your wedding-ring?" asked Mrs Evesham in horror.

"Even so. Look here! there's the lot!" and she gave the sparkling brilliants a little toss in the air, but somehow missed the catch, and two rings fell to the ground. There was an instant search, but only one of the two that had dropped was recovered.

"Oh dear!" cried Mrs Beaufort, in real distress, "how foolish of me! The one missing is my wedding-ring."

There was a renewed effort made, and wanderers went all over the carpet, but the ring was not forthcoming, and presumably it had rolled into some remote corner.

"No, please don't search any more," said Mrs Beaufort, colouring, however, with annoyance at her peculiar loss. "It's very aggravating, but I've only myself to blame. Before we go up to dinner we can have another look."

"The very thing," said Dick; "the word search made me think of it. Look here! let's have the thought game."

"But how is it done?" asked some one.

"Oh, easy enough. You place something somewhere, and then the searcher has to look for it."

"Rather vague. Why, how ever can he find it?" demanded Jack.

"Oh, easily," answered Dick. "We'll hide a thing and blindfold you, and I'll bet you find it."

"Of course, if you take him up to it," said Trevor.

"I'm not going to take him up to it. I merely go with him to prevent his tumbling over the chairs. You'll see it's all fair."

"But," protested Jack, "I must see what it is I am to find."

"Of course. Look here! there's this bit of string. You see it?"

"I can venture so much. Yes, I see it."

"Then we will now blind your eyes. Some one tie a handkerchief tight round his head."

This operation being performed, Woolcombe was turned round three times, and stood motionless, while Dick went very gently up to Minory with the string in his hand, which, as he had explained, was tied round a shilling to steady it, and placed this in her left hand, with explicit instructions she was not to open it, or the whole charm would be lost.

No one in the room had seen the sort of thing be-

fore, so Dick was allowed his own way, and Minory promised implicit obedience. Woolcombe was then led about, and Dick, pretending to let him guide himself, after several feints in various corners, at last brought his victim up to Miss Raymond. The excitement now became great, and Dick, to control his emotions, was obliged at this juncture to force his handkerchief into his mouth. By judiciously moving Jack about, he made him at last actually touch Minory's left hand, and at once declaring he had succeeded in his search, took the bandage from his eyes, and told him to remove what he had found.

Captain Woolcombe gravely, before the eyes of the multitude, unravelled the string, and lo and behold, instead of a shilling there was a wedding-ring!

The risible faculties of the audience could not be restrained, but Miss Raymond coloured perceptibly, and Jack bit his moustache, looking round with indignation after Dick, who had, however, swiftly taken himself off.

"That wretch Dick! It's my wedding-ring, of course," said Mrs Beaufort. "It really is too bad."

But the absurdity of the position presently occurred just as much to the chief actors in it as it did to the others, and they heartily joined in the laugh.

"I'll trounce Master Dick when I catch him again," said Jack *sotto voce*, and with some graveness, to Minory.

"Please no," she pleaded. "He is a mere boy.

Take no notice." Then turning to Mrs Beaufort—"Well, dear, you have your ring?"

"Yes," responded Mrs Beaufort, firmly holding it on its proper place with the fingers of the other hand, and regarding her newly-found treasure with high regard.

"I thought I saw Dick fumbling about on the carpet," remarked Trevor Woolcombe, "when we were looking for the ring. Of course he secreted it then. I must say it is to his credit to have gone through the performance so admirably."

"Yes; and fancy his taking us all in with his thought-reading," laughed old Lady Gore.

"Well," said Tom Beaufort, "if my wife only learns now the folly of playing with her rings, there'll have been something gained. But I think it's time for us all to be off, and there's the dressing-bell!"

As Jack, lingering behind the others, leant, considering, against the old mantel-shelf, his brother Trevor came up to him, and, caressingly placing his hand on his shoulder, softly repeated the old rhyme—

*"I'll tell you a story*
*Of Jack and Minory,*
*And now my story's begun."*

Then Jack, promptly catching him by the waist, laughed, and continued the ballad—

*"I'll tell you another*
*Of Jack and his brother,*
*And now my story's done."*

"I think, dear boy, you have arranged your little affair?"

"Yes, old man; you and I are in the same boat. Wish me joy. Enid has consented to be mine."

"All luck to you, my dearest fellow. May similar good fortune be in store for me!"

"Of course it is."

"I wish I could be certain of that," returned the elder brother, somewhat wistfully. "Until I can settle it one way or the other, I hardly know what I am about. But come; we must go and dress."

## CHAPTER VII.

That evening Cicely brought up the repentant Dick to Jack, and under her powerful protection his pardon was of course assured. At first, however, Woolcombe did not feel much inclined to be lenient.

"You see, Cicely, it's not me who has to be considered—it is Miss Raymond," he added, stiffly.

"She has, I assure you, quite forgiven him," replied his sister, eagerly. "Now do be good-natured. Dick did a silly thing, but"—in a lower tone—"he is only a boy, Jack, and you must make excuses."

"All right," said Jack, all his bad humour vanishing, and good-temperedly giving Dick a slight shake, with his hands on the lad's shoulder; "we'll say no more about it. But you will allow me to remark

that such very personal jokes are not always pleasant to the victims."

"Yes, it was wrong," allowed Dick, somewhat abashed. "I didn't stop to think, but really I meant no harm."

"Of course you didn't. And, of course, if Miss Raymond has forgiven you, I'm helpless."

"Of course," replied Dick, with a gleam of fun in his eye. And he made himself scarce, glad to get so well out of the difficulty.

"He is incorrigible," said Jack, laughing in spite of himself.

"It's very nice of you to be so good-natured, Jack. I hope he has done no mischief. She is such a dear, sweet girl," she added, gently.

"It's just possible he may have done a very great deal," was her brother's moody reply.

"I really do not think so. I should say to the contrary."

"Well, you ought to know best. I trust you are right," he doubtfully put in.

"The rest remains with you."

"What rest?" he asked.

"Until you ask her whether she cares for you, she can't very well decide one way or the other."

"It's easy—well, I don't know about that——"

"What is easy?"

"I was going to say, to offer. Man proposes, and the lady sometimes objects."

"I think you need not be cast down. She is a most sweet darling; and, I believe," with a bright smile and a nod to him, "you are not absolutely indifferent to her."

"If I could only be sure of that. Would she were mine!"

To this his sister made reply—

> *"He either fears his fate too much,*
> *Or his desert is small,*
> *Who fails to put it to the touch,*
> *And win or lose it all."*

"Ah, Cicely! that's just it. Suppose it was to lose it all!"

"See!" said his sister, quickly; "now's your opportunity. She has gone into the library for a book. Go and plead with her now. I'll take care no one comes in."

"What a dear girl you are! It's a chance I may not have again."

"Come!" drawing him to her. "All good fortune attend you."

Brother and sister leisurely walked across the room; and Cicely turned at the library, which led out of the drawing-room, and closed the door.

Minory had not heard Jack enter. She was able to move about by herself, though unfit for active exercise, and was now standing looking up at the shelves. He came close to her, and she, seeing him alone, started; and for a second the colour faded

from her cheek—for intuitively she felt the crisis in her life had arrived. But she controlled herself at once.

"You are come to help me to find——"

"No. I came to ask you to help me;" and he hesitated.

"Command me, Sir Knight; what can I do?" she said, with a poor attempt at unconcern.

"Darling! I cannot keep it to myself." He was now standing close to her, eagerly taking her two hands in his, where they remained trembling in his firm grasp. "I love you, sweet Minory, with all my heart. It went out to you from the first moment I saw you."

"Really and truly?" shyly looking at him.

"Most really and most truly. Oh, sweet heart, say you will be my wife!" bending down as he pleaded towards her, as if to give emphasis to his entreaty. She did not answer in words; but the soft and happy glance from her true and tender eyes assured him the victory was won; and he held his prize in his arms.

"Now, my own love, I shall repair Master Dick's mischief. One ring I took from you to-night; but soon another shall find its way to this dear finger."

"So you like the name of Minory now, Captain Woolcombe?" she asked, with an enchanting shyness, and in no way attempting to free herself from her lover's embrace.

"Like it! I adore it. But won't you call me Jack?"

"Jack!" as if learning a pleasant lesson. "What all the fellows call you! You see, I recollect, sir, what you told me," laughing gaily. "But you are my Jack now."

"Yours for ever. And yet I feared to speak to you."

"Would you not like to put it off for a week or two?" she demanded, with much gravity, half drawing herself from him, and looking mischievously at him as her two hands rested on his shoulders.

"Thank God, that can't be now! Why, I should not love you any better then."

"What a shocking confession!"

"Not a bit of it; for I can't possibly love you any better than I do now."

"Well, I suppose I must submit"—making a pretty little *moue.*

"Of course you must. There's no help for it. It's only what was to be. It was foretold in the old rhyme—

*'I'll tell you a story*
*Of Jack and Minory,*
*And now my story's begun.'*

And now our story has begun. I know I shall always bless the winter snow, for that brought me, my own love, to know you."

"Dear Jack——" she hesitated.

"Yes, you must call me by my name. Tell me in words that you care for me."

"What are words?" she gravely replied. "But if you wish, I will. I love you," she simply said, holding up her mouth to be kissed. "Will that content you?"

What need to record any answer?

And here we may bid adieu to the two who have vowed to be all in all to each other along life's dusty pilgrimage, which indeed were but a sorrowful passage were it not lighted up by the faith of man and the love of woman.