

NORMAN SINCLAIR

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"BOTHWELL—A POEM," ETC. ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

EWINS OF THAT ILK.

I WAS strolling one fine afternoon in February through the Park, by way of relaxation after my work, when I descried immediately before me the tall gaunt figure of Mr Jefferson J. Ewins. Without losing a moment I made up to the Yankee, upon whose cadaverous countenance hovered a grim smile as he returned my greeting, protesting that he was as happy as a clam at high water to renew the pleasure of our acquaintance. Mr Ewins was nowise altered in appearance since I saw him last, save that, in honour of the country he had been visiting, he had donned a pair of trousers of the fieriest tartan, which made him rather a conspicuous object, and attracted the notice of several butchers boys, who facetiously inquired if he had been getting his legs cut up into collops. He told me that he had recently arrived in London after a prolonged sojourn

in the north ; and was quite eloquent in his praise of Glasgow, a city which he vastly preferred to Edinburgh, because it was a " rael go-ahead place, and no mistake, where the people knew how to put the licks in ;" whereas the Scottish metropolis was, in his opinion, " used up, mighty fine to look at, but bogus to the backbone ; and as for doing a streak of business there, it was as useless trying that as whistling psalms to a dead horse." With regard to London, his mind was not yet exactly made up, though from what he had seen he was inclined to admit that it was " some pumpkins," but by no means comparable to New York.

" I say though, mister," he remarked, after some other desultory and miscellaneous conversation, " land can't be very valuable hereabouts, else them there parks would have been squatted on long ago. They tell me they are public property. Wall, then, as you've a good jag of public debt, I reckon it would be the sensible thing to sell these clearings and run up streets. I would, I know, if I had only half a jumping claim, and I guess it 'ud be a grandacious spekilation."

" Why, Mr Ewins, you must remember that the parks are the very lungs of London, healthy as well as ornamental. Without them there would be no ventilation."

" That's all moonshine," said the Yankee. " I guess the folks in the City don't draw much breath here ; but jest you rub their hair back, and see if they won't holler as loud as any nigger when he gets a taste of the cow-hide. That shows there's no want of lung leather

among them. I don't know what wind's good for except to drive a mill or blow up a pair of bagpipes. But there's a sorter conceit about the south Britishers that pulls wool over their eyes, and makes them as blind as a honey-bear after he has plundered a beehive. They ain't smart hereabouts, that's a fact. It's a huckleberry above my persimmon how the onnateral old country keeps thriving, with its Lords, and Commons, and rotten institutions such as no free and enlightened citizen would knuckle down to; but I allow it's a wonderful place, considering its size, and I ain't such a goney as to run down the land of my forefathers. Do you know, Squire Sinclair, sir, I've discovered that I'm a kinder countryman of yourn?"

"Indeed! I'm extremely gratified to hear you say so, Mr Ewins. May I inquire if the discovery is a recent one?"

"Wall, it's not my way to care a chunk about pedigree or such darned nonsense. I'm not the chap to ring my own bell; still I go for this, that decent extraction is some; and as every man must have had a grandfather, it's worth knowing what he was, and where he came from. Mine was Enoch Ewins, an awful hand at lumbering, I can tell you; and he used to say that his father was raised in Scotland, somewhere about Kilmarnock, where they make hosiery that whips all creation. So, when I was down in the north, I went to that location—no parks there, I can tell you; the folk have too much gumption for that—and I began to poke up for my ancestors. I'm blest if I mightn't

as well have tried to whistle a grape-vine from a white-oak! No man's telescope there was pulled out to reach beyond gaze of his father. I put an advertisement into the papers, to the effect that any person who could give information regarding a certain Ewins, who was supposed to have emigrated from Kilmarnock about the year 1770, would hear of something to his advantage; and then, jewhilkens! if I didn't get as many letters as ever reached the President of the United States when a place in the customs was vacant! There were Ewinses, and Ewings, and Ewarts, and Irvings, and Owens, and Eunsous, all mad to know if there was any legacy forthcoming, and all ready to swear that they were the legitimate descendants. I guess I cut them as short as a bar-keeper would a loafer's tally! I didn't calculate, when I wrote the notice, on bringing a whole bilin' of suckers about my legs; so I jest put the letters in the fire, and absquatulated from Kilmarnock as smart as if the yellow fever had been there."

"Nay, Mr Ewins," said I, "it must be confessed that such an advertisement was calculated to stimulate the rapacity of the ravens. It reminds one of the old war-tune of the clan Cameron, 'Come to me, and I will give you flesh.' But what occurred next?"

"Why then, I pulled up stakes and went to Edinburgh. A mighty proud kind of chaps they are in that city, head and tail up like chicken-cocks in laying-time; but I scraped acquaintance with one or two fellows that were not so offish and stuck-up as the rest, among others an old lawyer called Shearaway."

“ Ah, my kind old friend ! It is long since I heard of him. I hope you left him well ? ”

“ As tight as the bark of a tree,” replied Mr Ewins. “ He’s a ’cute old ’coon is Shearaway ; for when I told him what I was after, he sniggered like a hog in a bean-field, and said it was the easiest thing in the creation to get my pedigree made out, and that he knew a first-chop hand at genealogies, who would rummage out the history of every Ewins that had cut teeth, only I must lay my account to come down handsomely with the dollars. I said I didn’t mind standing up to the rack for once in a way ; so he introduced me to a queer old hunker of the name of M’Scutcheon, a chap with a mouldy wig and fishy eyes, who asked me the names of my father and grandfather, and then said that he would make the proper inquiries, and had not the least doubt that he would succeed in finding me a pedigree. ‘ But,’ says he, ‘ Mr Ewins, how far back would you wish me to go, for that makes some difference in the cost ? ’ ‘ Go the whole figure, old hoss ! ’ says I ; ‘ right it up to the beginning of time ! ’ ‘ That’s enough, sir,’ says he ; ‘ you shall hear from me in the course of a fortnight.’ ”

“ I hope,” said I, “ that the result was in every way satisfactory ? ”

“ I guess it was ; though, when I saw the bill, I allow I was as wrathful as a ram-cat in a shower-bath. But it ain’t many dukes in England that have got such a pedigree as mine, I can tell you ; and when I go back to the United States, my ! won’t I hold up my head

like a Narragansett pacer? Won't I be a big bug there? Oh, no!"

Here Mr Ewins hitched up his trousers in an ecstasy of supreme delight, grinned, chuckled, and expectorated.

"Darned if it ain't stuniferous!" he continued. "I say, mister, you're a kinder judge of these things; suppose, now, you jest step with me to my hotel, and I'll show you something that'll allfiredly astonish you."

As a matter of course I accepted the invitation, for I was really curious to know how far the ingenious M'Scutcheon had pushed his inventive powers in a case which was by no means promising. I was aware that the said M'Scutcheon was a fellow of infinite fancy. He had concocted claims to no less than four Nova Scotia baronetcies which were popularly supposed to be extinct; and got his clients served, by complaisant juries, to titles of honour which they had no more real right to assume than I have to take upon me the style of the Cham of Tartary. Likewise he had made a most gallant but unsuccessful attempt to resuscitate a defunct earldom, by fabricating a galvanic chain of honour between a younger brother of the last peer and his own employer; of which chain, on strict investigation, only two links proved to be spurious. But on the wide common field of heraldry, where no challenge was to be expected, M'Scutcheon ruled without a rival. He could find you a progenitor of note and eminence at any particular period of history you might happen

to desire, and establish the reality of his quondam existence by extracts from charter and sasine. Ancestors he would furnish to order, just as a dealer of Wardour Street can provide you, at an hour's notice, with a complete series of family portraits; and if you wished for a dash of the blood-royal, why, you could have it injected into your veins for the moderate extra charge of fifteen guineas. Purchasers of pedigrees are invariably men with long purses; and Mr M'Scutcheon, in his award of the honours of descent, was scrupulous in one respect only—viz., that the honours should be in exact correspondence to the magnitude of the honorarium which he received.

On arriving at his hotel Mr Ewins desired the waiter to fetch two rummers of a peculiar compound called "pig and whistle," of which he had furnished the recipe; and these being discussed, he produced from a closet a tubular japanned case, such as is used for holding plans, whereon was inscribed, in large letters of gold, "FAMILY TREE OF EWINS OF THAT ILK."

"That, I consider, Squire, is no small potatoes!" said the Ewins, pointing with exultation to the scroll. "But wait till you see what's within. I guess it's up to the rub; a sight of that will raise Cain throughout the Union!"

And he drew out a long roll of parchment, which he deliberately unfolded. It was an ancestral tree, got up in M'Scutcheon's very best style, gorgeous with gules and azure, and at the base of the trunk was inscribed the following legend:—

FOUNDER OF THE FAMILY,

“UWAYNE, MAORMOR OF CLACKMANNAN. MARRIED CROMLECH, ELDEST DAUGHTER OF MACBETH, KING OF SCOTLAND. PERISHED AT THE SIEGE OF DUNSINANE, ANNO DOMINI MLXI.”

“There, mister! What do you think of that for a beginning?” shouted the exulting Yankee. “Ain’t that a rumfoozler? Darned if I don’t feel as proud as a tame turkey!” And he went whirling round the apartment like an inspired tectotum.

I confess that I felt a strong inclination to give audible vent to my inward mirth; nevertheless, by a powerful effort, I restrained myself; for there is no subject upon which men are so touchy as that of their descent; and though I could hardly suppose that Mr Ewins had implicit faith in the veracity of M’Scutcheon, he was clearly interested in maintaining the genuineness of the document for which he had paid so exorbitant a price. I therefore contented myself with tracing the high house of Ewins from so auspicious a root to the present representative. I must admit that it gave me a high idea of the genius of the framer. The Maormors speedily disappeared; but the introduction of the feudal system was marked by the apparition of one Evanus de Clackmannan, whose son, however, for some reason unassigned, dropped the territorial title, and appeared simply as Reginald Fitz-Ewin, *miles*. It appeared that the grandson of this modest soldier, having divested himself of the Fitz, had re-

ceived a grant from the Crown (*tempore Roberti Tertii*) of certain lands in Ayrshire, which were erected into a barony, and thereafter the family was designated as Ewins of that Ilk. There was a Sir Ludowick Ewins, who died at Flodden, and a Sir James Ewins, who, very stupidly, involved himself in the Bothwell business in Queen Mary's time; whereupon the estates passed to a younger branch, who enjoyed them without molestation until the period of the Civil Wars, when the Ewins of the day joined the Marquis of Montrose, and incurred forfeiture as the penalty. The rich Barony of Ewins was then gifted to the powerful Earls of Glencairn, who, in order to obliterate all memory of the ancient possessors, the descendants of the Maormors, changed the name of the estate, which is now known by the base appellation of Puddockholes. The Ewineses were thenceforth landless, but undismayed. Walter Ewins, the male representative of the race, was a soldier of fortune in the Low Countries, attained the rank of colonel, and served under Viscount Dundee in his desperate attempt to retrieve the waning fortunes of the Stuarts. After the fall of his great commander he retired to France, where he received from the grateful but dethroned monarch the St Germain's title of Lord Dyvourstone, which, however, he did not assume. He married the daughter of a French *fermier general*, and begat two sons—Charles Louis, of whom more anon, and Jacques, his younger brother, whose line terminated by the death, on the field of Borodino, of the celebrated Comte d'Ouaines, for whom, as is well

known, had he survived that bloody fight, the great Napoleon had reserved the honour of the baton of a marechal. Charles Louis, who was engaged in commercial affairs, did not, as a matter of course, turn out in the 1745 ; but he did what was quite as foolish—viz., advanced large sums of money to the insurgents, especially to the unfortunate Earl of Kilmarnock, who suffered upon Tower Hill. According to M'Scutcheon, who now quoted from what he called "the Pittenweem Papers,"—documents which possibly may exist, but have never been printed,—Charles Louis Ewins came to Scotland with the view of ascertaining whether, on account of bonds granted previous to the Rebellion, he was not entitled to rank as a creditor on the Kilmarnock estate. When there, news reached him that the house in which his whole capital was embarked had gone to smash ; and being too proud, under such circumstances, to return to France, he contracted a matrimonial alliance with Jean Puddifute, a daughter of Puddifute of Cowthrapple. Being unable to maintain himself as a gentleman ought to do, and being exceedingly unwilling to defile his fingers with any touch of manufactures, Charles Louis Ewins emigrated to America, where his son Enoch, the lumberer, was ushered into the world. Enoch begat Aaron Ewins, whose calling was that of an itinerant merchant ; and Aaron was the father of my friend Jefferson Job Ewins, in whose person the honours of this illustrious line were now concentrated.

Such was the information I gathered from the

ancestral tree, and an appended historical memoir ; and I could not but admire the dexterity with which M'Scutcheon had piloted the family through the vicissitudes of so many centuries. Doubtless there was something extravagantly preposterous in the idea that the blood of the remorseless Macbeth, the slayer of the gracious Duncan, was circulating in the veins of the eccentric Yankee ; nevertheless, if the compilations of modern heralds are to be relied on, such anomalies are by no means of rare occurrence.

However, to do Mr Ewins justice, I must say that, after the first burst of exultation was over, he ceased to harp upon his ancestry, and dropped the subject so soon as the scroll was returned to its case. I devoutly wish that people who have a somewhat better authenticated pedigree than his would imitate his example, for I know of no greater trial to the temper than being compelled to listen to the harangues of a fellow who persists, on all occasions, in glorifying himself by parading his dull genealogy. Gentlemen who are addicted to this silly practice cannot surely be aware that the effect which it produces on their audience is extremely detrimental to themselves, since it engenders a strong suspicion that they have nothing else to boast of, and that they are trying to cover their personal insignificance by vapouring about their blazons and their quarterings.

Mr Ewins then proceeded without any reserve, his heart being apparently opened by this confidential communication, to detail his plans for the future. He

had intended, he said, to return early in the spring to America ; but the prospect of gain arising from speculation, which the English share-market promised, was so tempting that he had changed his mind. Already he had dealt largely in scrip, with far more profitable results than legitimate trading could have produced ; and, gratified as he was by the mere fact of his having cleared several thousand dollars, the patriotic reflection that they were drawn from the pockets of the Britishers gave a double zest to his enjoyment. Nor can I imagine that any man was ever better qualified, through natural aptitude and training, to enter the lists of speculation than the representative of all the Ewinses. He was thoroughly conversant with the principles and practice of what is called in America "the grab game ;" he was an adept in the mystery by means of which fluctuations in "fancy stocks" can be effected ; and in "cornering," which is a choice Transatlantic mode of rigging the market, he boasted that he had never found an equal. It must be remembered that the vast majority of the British public who were infected by the prevalent gambling mania, knew little or nothing of the secrets of the Stock Exchange, but were simply blind players who put down their stakes at random. An old hand like Ewins, who, though possibly never a pigeon, was now a most accomplished hawk, had them entirely at his mercy ; which quality, however, as it does not pertain to the accipitrine order of fowls, he was never known, upon any one occasion, to exhibit. In brief, my accomplished and long-de-

scended friend intimated to me that it was his intention to sojourn in England so long as there was any prospect of plunder ; “ after which,” said he, “ I’m off, like a streak of greased lightning ; and the chap that tries to get hold of me will catch an elbow-jar, worse than if he had sniggled an electric eel.”

This sort of conversation had for me a peculiar interest, because I could not help seeing that a monetary crisis was impending ; and although at that time I had not given much of my attention to questions of political economy, it struck me that the Government, in taking no direct steps towards regulating the movement, had failed to discharge one of its most important duties. I had yet to learn that our statesmen, while avowedly repudiating the doctrines of Machiavelli, can act upon them so far as to encourage popular delusion in order to divert attention from political schemes which otherwise might provoke resistance.

Nothing is more delightful to a man than gaining the ear of a willing listener ; and Mr Ewins finding that, like Desdemona, I did “ seriously incline ” to his talk, proposed that we should dine together. I, nothing loth, assented ; and we spent a very pleasant evening. My companion was in high glee, and produced a budget of excellent stories, one of which I shall try to give as nearly as possible in his own language, though no description can convey an adequate idea of the whimsical intonation and droll gestures which accompanied its delivery.

CHAPTER II.

THE SMARTEST MAN IN CREATION.

“WALL, Squire,” said Mr Ewins, “I’ve been over all that there country of yours, sir ; and I ain’t going to deny that I found your folk pretty spry and sharp in their notions. They’ve a neat way of turning the dollar twice over in the Highlands, that’s a fact ; and the man that stays long enough at Inverness, at the gunning season in the fall, will find himself pretty much in the predicament of a skinned ’coon. They are almighty sharp, to be sure, considering the scarcity of breeches’ pockets ; but there be some of the Lowlanders, too, that ain’t soft, I can tell you. I guess there ain’t many loafers in Aberdeen. A chap would require to step out pretty smart before he could get ahead of a native of that location ; and they are by no means the kind of men that I would fix upon for a deal.

“But if you want to see what rael smartness is, I guess you must go for it to the States. There’s something in the air of the great Free and Independent that

polishes up a man like a razor, till he can a'most shave a grizzly bear without the critter knowing it. It ain't education that does it, and it ain't reason. It's a kinder of instinct, like what naturally sends a young duck into the water. The children have it before they are weaned; and there ain't a boy four years old in Connecticut but knows how many hiccory nuts go to the baker's dozen.

“It's a proud thing, Squire Sinclair, sir, to be a citizen of a country like that—a great, free, and glorious nation, where every man keeps his eye skinned, and walks with his wits cocked and primed. I've heard of some sharp things that have been done in this country, more especially of late years; for you Britishers are beginning to take a wrinkle or two from us free Americans—I guess from the smash among your banks that you are becoming alive to the grand system of unlimited credit and universal speculation—but for rael genuine smartness, I calculate, as I said before, that you must go for that to the States. Oh, it raelly makes one feel quite juiced-up like to think how smart our people are!

“The smartest chap by a long chalk that ever I knew was Haman S. Walker, who was raised in Massachusetts, but had gone down to settle in Virginny. Haman had a bit of a plantation, where he made show of growing cotton; but that wasn't by any means the way that he grew his dollars. He did a good streak of business, I can tell you, in the nigger and horse line, for he was a prime judge of flesh; and once or twice

every year he went through the country, picking up bargains and selling again at a profit. He didn't need to look twice at cattle to know their rael value to a cent; and as for cleaning and currying them up for sale, there wasn't the like of him throughout the whole of the confederation. I've known him pass off a sixty-year old nigger for forty-five, and get the sound price for a brute that was a regular roarer. Haman it was that painted the donkey black and white, and sold it to the Philadelphia Zoo. Gardens as a zebra.

“Wall, Squire, two years gone by, business was rather slack down by in Virginny. It was one of those oneasy times when folk are timersome to sell, and buyers are as skeary as buffaloes in a clearing. Niggers wouldn't move nohow, and horses were at a nominal quotation. So Haman, who knew as well as most men that time was the Delaware for dollars, moves up a bit to the north, by way of spying if anything could be done thereabouts; for, thinks he, there must be a lot of runaway niggers caved up in these parts, and who knows, if I swear stiff enough, that I mayn't pick up a specimen for nothing? However, he soon found that two could play at that game, for there were a lot of chaps, a'most if not entirely as 'cute as himself, prowling about the prisons, and rapping out affidavits of ownership to every likely nigger as thick as ca-doodle bugs in a sugar-barrel. Wall, when Haman saw that no good was to be done among the New-Yorkers (for there are a plaguy lot of onnatural citizens up there that hold shares in the under-ground railway),

he notioned that he would take a cast over the frontier, and try to strike trail in Canada. I expect, however, that he was clean too well roused up to show himself in his own character, for there weren't many loafers in the States that didn't know Haman, and the bare report that he was in the country would have cleared that district of niggers, as fast as the Unitarian congregation dispersed when a skunk got into the chapel. So he first gets hold of a razor and shaves himself as clean of hair as a terrapin (for Haman commonly wore a beard that might have broke the heart of a billy-goat), then he rigs himself out from head to foot like a Methodist parson, with green barnacles, a white choker, a broad-brimmed hat, mits without ends to the fingers, and a genuine sanctified umbrella, such as them critters always carry, with half the whalebone broken. Oh, he was a lovely disciple, was Haman! The very sight of him was enough to convert a whole biling of sinners. He had a knack of groaning so loud, that I'm blessed if he didn't give you a pain in your bowels; and he spoke in a choking kind of way, as if he had swallowed a force-pump and kept the nozzle in his nose.

“Wall, he crosses the frontier and comes to Toronto, where the people don't think they are as soft as steeped dough-nuts, though, I guess, they are confoundedly mistaken. He walks slap up to the biggest hotel he could see, and into the bar, where a weakish-looking chap was serving out the liquor. ‘Young man,’ says Haman, says he, ‘will you oblige a suffering labourer in the vineyard with a brandy cocktail?’ ‘What

name, sir?' said the help, looking somewhat bumbazed; for, as I hinted, Haman wasn't exactly the kind of looking man you would like to take bitters with before breakfast. 'I am known to the brethren,' says Haman, turning up his little finger, 'as the Reverend Issachar Quail, a poor but parseverin' pilgrim in the great cause of Abolition. I was raised in Louisiana, called in Tennessee, and tarred and feathered on account of my principles no later than three months back, at New Orlines; may the devil gouge my parsecutors!' The young help bangs up like a gosling at the sight of a corn-basket. 'Here's glory!' shouts he, and he rings a bell like mad; whereupon the landlord and a dozen whacking niggers of waiters, every one of whom had bolted from their lawful owners, came tumbling in; and if they didn't make a saint of the Reverend Issachar when they heard how he had been handled by the down-south Philistines, there ain't no alligators in Arkansas.

"Oh, they are a soft set, these Canadians! Darn me if I don't think a States baby could find out the blind side of the 'cutest of the lot, and thread him like a needle. They took for gospel every word that Haman uttered, and a'most bohooed at his animated description of the tortures he had undergone for the sake of the afflicted niggers. When he saw that they swallowed the tarring and feathering as oily as a ginsling, he thought it safe to put on more steam and go ahead; so he told them that he had been twice hung up, and once roasted alive, not to speak of whippings,

skinings, and suchlike small mishaps, which were as common as his daily bread. If he had pretended to have been clawed to death by wild cats, I do suppose they'd ha' believed him. You may guess that they couldn't make enough of such a glorious victim of onnatural parsecution as the Reverend Issachar Quail, so they gave him free quarters in the hotel, stowed him in the best room, crowded him with victuals, juiced him up with liquor, and allowed him an unlimited credit for roosterskirts at the bar.

“But it didn't stop there; for the soft-heads must needs have a public meeting of sympathisers to welcome the interesting stranger; so they held a kind of tea-drinking, with prayers and speeches; and Haman he gives them such an account of his parsecutions as frize up the marrow in the women's bones, and set them a-sobbing as though they had been troubled with the hiccup. Of course such vartue couldn't be allowed to go without some kind of reward; and you may guess how Haman grinned in his heart as he pocketed a heavy bag of dollars, which the sisterhood had subscribed as a small recompense for his sufferings.

“Among the foremost of the women folk that came down with the rowdy was a slapping black wench called Indolence Bungo, the daughter of old Daddy Bungo, a thriving horse-dealer, who had been located at Toronto for some thirty years. Daddy was raised in a plantation somewhere down south, but had taken to his heels and absquatulated without leave, about the time that he cut his wisdom-teeth. He got safe to

Canada ; and being a thundering tall nigger, as strong as a buffalo, he managed to work his way from one thing to another till he owned the biggest stable in the place, and was worth a deal of money. His daughter, Indolence, was a grand specimen of the she-nigger, evidently intended by nature to hoe canes, and feed upon yams and salt-fish. Haman no sooner set eye upon her than he priced her at eight hundred dollars, and I calculate he was not likely to be far wrong in his reckoning. She was as fat as a porcupine, large lipped, well ballasted, and showed a figure-head like the Hottentot Venus. I guess she was as powerful a slut as ever tied a red handkerchief over wool.

“ Wall, it wasn’t in nature that Haman could see such a valuable article as that without vicious notions about a deal. ‘ You tarnation fine cow,’ thinks he to himself, ‘ wouldn’t I jest like to have the selling of you at New Orlines? I’d make you useful in your generation, I would, instead of letting you loaf about in lace and satins, and hiding your hoofs in silk stockings. You’d look pretty in a blue petticoat, picking cotton ! and if that hide of yours were only barked a little, you’d be as active as a squirrel in a nut bush !’ That was what Haman thought, but he didn’t say it nohow. He squeezed Indolence by the fist, and told her he would mention her in his prayers, which, you may be sure, was a great comfort and satisfaction to the poor deluded she-nigger ; and he announced his intention of calling next day on Daddy Bungo. Indo-

lence went home as pleased as a cat with a new collar ; and though she was not altogether a handy gal with her needle, began to work a pair of embroidered slippers for the Reverend Issachar Quail.

“ Next day Haman looks in upon Daddy, whom he found down in the stables watching his helps who were rubbing down the horses, and swearing away at a rate that might wake the thunder. Haman saw with half an eye that it was no use trying the evangelical dodge with Daddy, so he quietly pocketed his barnacles and mits, stowed away his umbrella behind a pail, and went up to the old horse-dealer.

“ ‘Morrow, Mister Bungo,’ says he ; ‘glad to see you looking so well, sir. I heerd a good stock about your horses, and I want to see them a bit.’

“ Daddy looked quite puzzled like.

“ ‘ You berry good, sar ; but I not know you. Whom hab I de honour to address, sar ?’

“ ‘ My name,’ said Haman, ‘ is Issachar Quail. I have a kinder notion you may have heerd of it afore.’

“ At this Daddy snorted.

“ ‘ Iss, Massa Quail, I hab heard of you before, sar. You are de man dat my daughter Indolence gib ten dollars to yesterday for helping niggers to run away. You no wanted here, sar !—dis de free country, where ebery man hab his liberty and do as he like.—I say, you Jake !—you pick up dat halter, or I’ll whip de liver out of you, you dam dirty black scoundrel.’

“ ‘ That, I notion, is a rael stupendous horse, now,’ said Haman, pretending to think that Daddy was quite

pleased at the visit. 'I reckon that ere animal would go over a snake-fence like greased lightning.'

" 'I hab to inform you, sar, dat all my horses is of first-chop quality, sar. But what de debil do a parson know about a horse?'

" 'Maybe more than you are aware of, old 'coon,' quoth Haman. 'I guess, now, that ere bay mare has been down on her knees; that ere colt has a splent on his near fore-leg; and this horse has a touch of thoroughpin and the hieksies.'

" 'Eh, Gor! what dat?' sings out Daddy. 'You no parson: you Obeah man! How you come to know dat, sar, ah?'

" 'I guess there's tricks in all trades,' replied Haman; 'and though I be a parson to-day, maybe I may have a deal with you for a bit of sound horse-flesh to-morrow. So shut up your ivories, old 'coon, and let's go and liquor.'

" 'You berry cleber man, sar—berry cleber!' said Daddy, who, you see, Squire, was clean taken in by Haman's cool owdacity. 'You no parson, sar; dat be all gammon. Berry glad to see you in my house; you walk dis way.'

" I guess it wasn't long afore Haman made himself at home at Daddy Bungo's. It's a pity if he didn't cast gravel in the eyes of the old nigger, till he made him believe that he was the cleverest chap on the face of the whole airth—and Haman wasn't very short of it either; but he did more than that, for he persuaded him that he was a right good friend of his'n, and as

upright a character as ever mixed a ball. As for Indolence, the black wench could not think enough of that blessed Issachar. He sat with her all mornin', squeezing her big hand, and administering spiritual consolation; and it was beautiful to see them going together to a revival meeting—he stalking along in black and white, like a penguin on the beach, and she ogling him with her saucer eyes, as fond-like as a Frenchman is of oysters. In less than no time he had wormed out of Daddy the whole of his previous history. He knew the plantation where he was raised, the name of his owner, and the year and day when he absquatulated; and Haman wasn't the man, as you shall presently hear, to let that information grow rotten for want of use. Then he knew to a dollar how much Daddy had saved, for the stupid old nigger, when he was juiced up, would tell anything; he also knew what was the value of his stable; in short, he had an entire and thorough knowledge of the whole concern.

“So, one morning, when he saw that he had brought old Daddy up to the scratch, and crammed him choke-full of sawder, ‘Mister Bungo,’ says he, ‘I swear this is a pleasant location of yourn, but it won't do for me to remain here loafing, with my hands in my pockets, when it's positively raining dollars elsewhere. I have a notion to drop the parson for a bit, and go down to the States with some horses on specilation. Now, I'll tell you what it is, old 'coon. That ere daughter of yourn, Miss Indolence, is as likely a gal as I ever sot eyes on. She's a burning beauty, that's a fact; and if

she is agreeable, I don't see any reason on airth why she should not become Mistress Quail. If you were to marry her to any chap in Toronto, you'd have to come down, I guess, with an almighty heap of dollars, which ain't as pleasant as pumpkins. Now, I'm a reasonable man, and if you'll let me have a span of horses with your daughter, we'll cry quits, and I'll marry her off hand; so say the word, and it's a deal!

“Daddy did not come into the thing just at once; for, though a nigger, he had some kind of natural affection, and was right sorry to part with his daughter. But Indolence no sooner heard that she had a chance of reposing upon the bosom of that blessed Issachar, than she became as wild as a prairie mare, vowed that if she had not her own way she would swaller pison, and gave old Bungo no rest day or night till he consented. I guess theirs was a slap-up wedding. All niggerdom was in an uproar, and Indolence shone out like a redhot rainbow. Haman alone took things quietly; but you may suppose he was not without a kind of deep satisfaction at the thought of so beautiful a sell.

“I daresay now, Squire, you think that Haman would be in a right hurry to turn his bargain to the best account, and that he put up Indolence for auction at the very first mart he reached in our free and enlightened States. You're wrong. He was a good bit of a tender-hearted fellow was Haman, and he didn't wish to make her squeak afore the appointed

time ; besides, he knew well that she wasn't in any kind of training for the cane-fields, and was too unhandy for house-work, so that he could not get anything like the price for her which he was fully determined to have. Sold she should be ; that was a settled point from the first minute that he sot eyes on her : but he didn't want to be harder on the poor black wench than was needful, and beyond that, he saw his way to a right good deal without putting her up to the hammer. So he contented himself in the meantime with selling the span of horses, for which he got awful prices ; and took the heifer down with him to Charleston, treating her with all matter of fixings, and never once hinting at the cowhide. He was a rael agreeable chap, was Haman, I can tell you ; and it's odds if Indolence didn't worship him as devoutly as her mother worshipped Mumbo-Jumbo.

“ Wall ; they had not been at home for two days before Haman brings to the house a tall wiry chap, with whom he had had many a deal already, Judge Cyrus J. Flinter, as 'cute a hand as ever sat on the judgment-seat in his shirt-sleeves. Indolence was quite in glory at getting a visit from a man of such high distinction as the Judge ; she showed her white teeth, chuckled, and goramightied, and wriggled about like a bass on a fish-spear. The Judge, he takes a long look at her through his glasses, and then says to Haman,

“ ‘ All right, Squire, ’ says he. ‘ You're a lucky man !

It ain't every one that can show a beauty like that. I would be mighty onreasonable if I did not go in to your farms.'

"'Say no more, Judge,' quoth Haman, 'here's the paper ready; and I guess I may jest at once sign and seal. Indolence, my canvass-backed duck, look smart and fetch me the ink.'

"Indolence did that; and also, to show her devotion to Haman, mended the pen, which was blunt as the wits of a Blue-nose. Haman signed the paper, handed it to the Judge, and then said,

"'Indolence, my beauty, I'm obliged to go this afternoon on some tarnation business to Washington. As you would be lonely-like here, Judge Flinter has been good enough to ask you to his house. So you'll jest go with him now, old gal, and you needn't mind taking any things with you. Now hand me these rings, my dear; I want to get them matched at Washington.'

"'Goramighty, Issachar!' says Indolence, 'I must hab another soot o' clothes. I nohow fit to go to Massa Judge's widout dem.'

"'Wall!' drawled the Judge, 'I guess you might allow her a change.'

"'Darn me, if I do!' says Haman; 'you'll see to that, Judge; and Indolence, I'll trouble you for your keys. There's a pesky set of niggers hereabout, whose fingers are as sticky as molasses; and I've no mind that the ametheests Daddy Bungo gave you should go astray. So—good-by to you, old gal, till we meet again.'

"That was the last parting of the spouses.

“About ten days after this interview, Daddy Bungo, when superintending the grooming of his horses, and swearing awfully at his nigger helps, Jake and Juba, had a letter put into his hands which he could no more read than a shark can the name of a vessel that is painted on her stern. ‘Dis come of dat dam edication!’ says Daddy. ‘What for um teach piccaninnies to write? Berry hard to hab all dis bother.’ However, he took the letter, and crossed to the hotel, where he knew he would find some Toronto lawyer who would read it to him for the matter of a cocktail.

“The lawyer put on his spectacles, and began to read aloud, but before he had got over six words he gave a whoop like a wild Injun. ‘Fire and blazes!’ says he, ‘this is the deepest dodge that ever was heard on.’ ‘What you mean by dodge, sar?’ says Daddy. ‘O’coons! that *is* sharp practice, and no mistake,’ says the lawyer. ‘I no understand you, sar,’ says Daddy; ‘you read dat letter to me, sar, or I tink you not able.’ ‘’Tain’t just the kind of letter, Mister Bungo,’ says the lawyer, ‘adapted for general circulation, and I guess you would hardly thank me if I were to read it at the bar. So, if you please, sir, we’ll step over to my office, and I’ll let you know all about it.’

“And a very nice letter it was, as you may conceive. I got a copy of it at the time, for the Abolitionists made an awful row about the matter, and printed a statement of the case; and I guess it ran somehow thus:—

“ ‘MR BUNGO.—Sir,—This is to inform you that I have purchased a black slave calling herself Indolence Bungo, aged 25, sound in limb and wind, no marks, white teeth, and likely for domestic work, from Haman S. Walker of Charleston. Said Indolence Bungo describing herself as your daughter, I have to state that I am willing to allow you to purchase her freedom, for the sum, which is the lowest I can take, of 1800 dollars, money to be paid down here at Charleston. If I do not hear from you within thrée weeks from this date, I shall put her up for public auction, as I do not want such an article for myself, and her keep is expensive.—Yours,
 CYRUS J. FLINTER.’ ”

“ ‘Goramighty!’ shouted Daddy Bungo. ‘Dat nct my daughter! She married woman. Who be dat Walker?’ ”

“ ‘That’s explained in the postscript,’ said the lawyer, and he read—

“ ‘*P.S.*—For your better information, I may state that Haman S. Walker above referred to, was, I am given to understand, known in Toronto by the name of Issachar Quail.’ ”

“ ‘It’s no use trying to describe the scene that followed. Daddy howled like a wolf in a trap, or a Methody minister when he gets on the subject of brimstone; hopped round the room like a ball of Injun-rubber, tore out his wool by handfuls, and upset the ink over bundles of papers, for which he had afterwards

to pay considerable smart-money to the lawyer. It's my belief that, but for a bottle of brandy which the lawyer happened to have in his desk, he'd ha' gone stark staring mad, and they must have clapped a strait-jacket on him. As it was, they had to send for Jake and Juba to carry him home, which they did with great difficulty, for he bit viciously, and kicked as hard as a mustang.

"There was no help for it; so he had to draw all his ready-money out of the bank, and with it he started for Charleston, thinking he was safe enough, for he had been thirty years and more in Canada, and had certificates from the first-chop men in Toronto as to his character and occupation. When he gets to Charleston he goes direct to Judge Flinter's, who was quite cool and pleasant like, and said he was rael sorry to have given him the trouble of coming so far.

"'Fact is,' said the Judge, 'I wasn't quite sure about the gal's being your daughter, for Haman is an almighty deep file, and it ain't a'most possible to fix him. I s'pose,' says he, 'it wasn't a lie of Haman's that the gal was born afore you bought your freedom?' and he squinted at Daddy Bungo like a rattlesnake.

"'No, sar,' says Daddy, 'dat no lie.' But he felt particularly uncomfortable, and his knees began to fail him.

"'Wall, in that case,' said the Judge, 'you jest step into that 'ere room, and see if it be your daughter. She's been well cared for; corned to the lips, I can

tell you, and I'll charge nothin' for her feeds. I'm apt to be soft in these matters, but I hope for a blessin'; so get through it, will you, as smart as you can, for I may chance to be wanted in court. There's some talk of lynching a nigger this artemnoon.'

"You may guess that the interview between Daddy Bungo and Indolence was very short. Heaven knows what they'd not ha' given to be set down safe in Toronto.

"'All right?' said the Judge.

"'Iss, sar, all right. Dat my daughter,' said Daddy. 'There um dollars. Where um paper?'

"'Here it is,' said the Judge. 'But we need a witness,' and so saying he rung a hand-bell; the door opened, and Haman S. Walker appeared.

"'Good morning, Daddy Bungo!' says he, as cool as a block of Wenham Lake ice.

"'You dam villian!' shouts Daddy, up to the point o' bursting.

"'You tarnation nigger!' says Haman, hitting him a whack with a supple-jack across his cucumber shanks, which made him dance like a dead frog at the touch of a galvanic battery—'You tarnation nigger, do you dare to speak in that way to your owner? Darn me, if I haven't a strong mind to give you ten dozen of the cowskin!'

"'What dat you say, you dam scoundrel? Me free Canadian—me British subject—write to the Gubberner, sar, and make um civil war! You no owner of mine. I horse-dealer in Toronto.'

“Haman, with some self-control, did not apply the supple-jack at this second provocation.

“‘Bungo,’ says he, ‘you stupid old nigger, don’t make the game worse for you than I like ; for I’m a quiet and reasonable kind of man, and am disposed to let you off easy. I’ve bought you. I guess you may remember telling me the plantation from which you absquatulated ; and as you were long wiped off the books as a bad debt, I bought you for twenty dollars. Here are the papers, old darkey, and you’re my nigger now. The Judge here sacks two hundred dollars as commission on the sale of Indolence ; and I’ll trouble you to make up three thousand dollars to buy your own freedom, else Jake and Juba will have the letting-out of all the horses in Toronto. It ain’t no use your making a row about it, for I know to a cent what you’re worth in the world, and I reckon I am unkimmon liberal in not piling you altogetther. Daddy Bungo !—if a nigger ever can be a Christian, you ought to remember me in your prayers.’

“The upshot of the matter was, that Daddy Bungo had to put his mark to a letter directing the Toronto lawyer to sell off his stock ; and, till the money was paid, he and Indolence were handsomely boarded by the Judge at the rate of two dollars a-day. Now, that’s what I call smartness. I guess you’ll allow that no Britisher ever born could hold a candle to Haman S. Walker, who, besides a handsome subscription, got a black wife and a span of horses, and sold them both, and his father-in-law into the bargain.”

CHAPTER III.

A NEW PROSPECT.

PARLIAMENT met at last ; and everything betokened a most busy and animated session. Not only was it known that public measures of vast importance, and likely to provoke vehement opposition, were to be propounded, but never in the recollection of the oldest solicitor had there been such an accumulation of private business as was now thrust upon both Houses, and which threatened to change the whole character of the legislative body, by converting it into an aggregate of permanent committees. Enterprise had for many months been running riot ; and the result was a perfect avalanche of bills that struck terror into the hearts of the officials. Nor were they of a kind that could be easily adjusted or disposed of, like the ancient road-bills, which passed almost as a matter of form ; for now, company was arrayed against company in fierce and deadly antagonism—each projected line had at least one direct competitor ; and then, beyond the question of comparative advantage of route, lay the

claims of the sturdy land-owners, many of whom were determined that their fields should remain as sacred from the whistle of the locomotive, as are, at this day, the sterile wastes of Palestine.

The men of the younger generation, whose memories do not reach so far back, can hardly credit the intensity of the excitement which then prevailed, not in London only, but throughout the whole empire. The tone of society seemed to be completely changed. Many entirely neglected, or even abandoned, their legitimate business pursuits, to rush headlong into the tempting field of speculation; proprietors in embarrassed circumstances burdened their lands to the utmost available extent, in order that they might take part in the game; all ordinary topics of conversation, even in the politer circles, were merged into discussions upon the value of shares, the prospects of conflicting lines, and the probabilities of an enormous premium; even the fair sex did not escape the infection, for ladies of high rank and position placed themselves in direct communication with sharebrokers, and bought and sold in the market more recklessly and greedily than their lords. No such revival of the worship of Mammon had been known since the days when the ingenious Mr Law inflated his gigantic Mississippi bubble.

One symptom of this excitement was the universal recklessness which was displayed. It seemed as if men could not bide at home, but were prompted by some irresistible impulse to rush from place to place, like so many evil spirits doomed to perpetual wandering. Their

anxiety was too great to allow of their sitting still. They dashed over the face of the country on visionary errands and quests. You could never calculate upon finding a speculator by his own fireside. Either he had gone off at a moment's notice to transact business with a broker in some distant city, or he had been summoned to attend a meeting of the local provisional board, or he had levanted without confiding the object of his journey even to the wife of his bosom. Some fellows actually took a pride in assuming the manner of conspirators. If you chanced to ask them whither they were going, or where they had been, they would purse up their mouths, wink with one eye, look ineffably mysterious, but vouchsafe no direct reply; wishing you thereby to understand that they were "deep files," conversant with as many wrinkles as seamed the forehead of Methuselah, and actively engaged in a plot too intricate and momentous to be revealed.

London in particular, as the grand focus of speculation, the seat of the august tribunal that ruled the destinies of railways, was crowded with strangers from all parts of the country. Some were there as conductors, managers, and promoters of the new schemes; others as witnesses to their merits; others as mere scrip-holders, to watch and profit by the alternations of the market. Westminster was choked with the influx. You could hardly elbow your way through the lobbies which led to the committee-rooms of the House of Commons; and as to forcing an entrance into one of

those dens where a smart contest was going on, you might quite as rationally have tried to squeeze yourself into the Black Hole of Calcutta. Vanity Fair itself could not have exhibited a scene of more bustle, throng, and excitement.

That I had not yielded in any degree to the mania of the day, was perhaps the result rather of accident than of rigid principle. It is true that I had an innate horror of gambling in the usual sense of the term, and that no inducement would have led me to enter the door of a gaming-house, or even to take a hand at brag. But the consciences of men, especially when avarice is whispering in their ear, are remarkably elastic; and it is not difficult to find some plausible excuse for doing that which jumps with our inclination. Plain, unvarnished gambling with cards or dice, we all denounce, or affect to do so; but how when the transaction assumes a mercantile form or character? If I know, for example, that the market price of iron is low, and have reason to expect a speedy rise, am I a gambler because I effect a time bargain to the extent of some thousand tons, whereon, if my anticipations are correct, I shall realise a handsome sum by way of difference? Is it gambling if I buy scrip at five shillings premium, in the confident expectation that I shall be able to sell it at twenty? I don't pretend to furnish an answer to these queries; I merely venture to suggest them. Far be it from me to arouse the wrath of Lombard Street by giving an offensive name to what may be a blameless commercial operation. We are told

upon high authority, and experience confirms it, that there is little certainty in the affairs of this world. If so, there must be a great deal of chance ; and certainly it would be hard to denounce the calculation of chances as a sin.

Had I known much at that time about the mode of dealing in the share-market, I daresay I would have acted like my neighbours ; but I was an entire novice—knew nothing of the merits of competing lines, and, moreover, was too well aware of the difficulty of getting money to hazard what little I had upon a precarious venture. But as I continued day after day to frequent Westminster (the weary work which I had undertaken at the suggestion of Sir George Smoothly being well-nigh completed), I gradually picked up a deal of information which I was called upon to use in a manner that was wholly unexpected.

I have already alluded more than once to my journalist connection, which of course brought me into frequent contact with the editor of the paper—a grave uncommunicative man rejoicing in the name of Wilkins, who, whatever might be his opinion of the abilities of the several members of his staff, made a point of abstaining from all expression either of encouragement or censure. It certainly was not agreeable to work under the superintendence of a gentleman practising such rigid reserve ; for praise, as all authors know, even though it be sparingly administered, is a very great incentive ; and no man likes to see his article received with mere tacit acquiescence, just as if it were an extract from a speech or a quo-

tation from a published volume. But, with Wilkins, method was all in all. He was, like one of the old Austrian generals, fond of discipline and parade—a thorough martinet, but incapable of awakening the enthusiasm of his followers ; and it often was a matter of wonder to me how the paper, under his superintendence, should continue as it did to prosper. But I soon began to suspect, from various little incidents which occurred, that though Mr Wilkins stood forth as the ostensible editor, sharper wits than his were engaged in the direction. I knew that the chief proprietor was a Mr Osborne, a man of large fortune, who had once been a solicitor, but had long retired from practice ; and, if fame belied him not, few shrewder men of business were to be found in the shrewdest capital of Europe. I had never seen this gentleman, nor, so far as I can remember, had Mr Wilkins ever spoken of him to me ; so that I was somewhat surprised at finding, one day in my rooms, a very polite note from Mr Osborne, requesting me to pay him a visit at his country place, about five miles out of town, early on the ensuing Saturday, and remain over until the Monday following. Although no reference was made in the billet to business, I could not doubt that Mr Osborne desired to see me for an especial purpose ; and, accordingly, I was a little impatient until the appointed day arrived.

Mr Osborne's country-seat was not one of those flimsy boxes which city men are so fond of rearing for the enjoyment of their weekly holiday. It was a handsome mansion, tastefully designed and carefully

built, with slopes of well-shaven turf, a spacious garden rich in vineries and forcing-houses, a sheet of water of no despicable size, well stocked with aldermanic carp ; a "wilderness," with fine old trees, containing an incipient rookery ; and some pleasant fields, then green with the bright emerald hues of spring. It was just the sort of villa for a London Mæcenas, who, not coveting much extent of domain, wished to concentrate within a limited space all the luxuries and comforts that ingenuity could suggest and great wealth procure ; and if the descendant of the Tuscan Lucumons, who, more than any other man of his day, understood æsthetic luxury, could have been summoned from the shades below to look upon this English paradise, assuredly he would have returned to the company of his darling Horace in the Elysian fields with some feelings of envy, and more of regret that, in aiming almost at regal magnificence, he had overlooked the subtle combinations which insure the most perfect comfort.

I was cordially welcomed by Mr Osborne, who was waiting my approach—a gentleman apparently above sixty, with a clear quick grey eye, aquiline nose, and features that betokened uncommon vivacity of disposition. He was arrayed in a country garb, shooting-jacket, gaiters, and a low-crowned white hat, and carried under his arm one of those old-fashioned implements called, I believe, spuds, with which tidy proprietors of pleasure-grounds are armed for the extirpation of dockweed and dandelions. He hurried me into the house, introduced me to his wife and daughter—

the former a plain, sensible, unaffected woman, the latter a remarkably pretty brunette, with sparkling eyes and a profusion of jetty ringlets—pressed me to take some luncheon, with a glass of choice old Madeira, remarking, however, that he dined punctually at six, and then carried me forth to take a survey of his grounds. As a general rule, I am not fond of surrendering myself for a whole forenoon to the tender mercies of my host, who, if he happens to have a strong agricultural bias, rarely fails to abuse the advantage given him by his situation. If he happens to be building new farm premises, you are expected to stumble through quantities of rough stones and smoking lime-heaps for the purpose of gazing at a few unfinished walls,—or you must climb up frightful ladders to scaffoldings, and walk with tottering steps across shaky gangways, in mortal dread lest you should share the fate of Eutyclus. Next follows the colloquy with the contractor, compared with which those of Erasmus are lively; and then you are taken to see fields of wheat, and beans, and turnips, and mangold-wurzel, upon each of which you, as a courteous guest, must bestow an eloquent eulogium. Well for you if he does not go farther; for some country gentlemen, who are possessed by the demon of breeding, do not hesitate to decoy their unsuspecting visitors into fields tenanted by vicious-looking oxen, or even bulls—huge clumsy brutes that snort, and stare, and stamp, and switch their tails, while Cincinnatus dwells delightedly on their points and symmetry, sometimes even exhorting

his timorous auditor to feel the ribs of the monsters,— than which a request to pull the whiskers of a royal Bengal tiger in a menagerie would not be one whit more atrocious and unreasonable.

But it is a very different thing when you are asked to accompany your host on a round of inspection of objects which are really beautiful ; and such undeniably were the gardens and grounds of Mr Osborne. No expense had been spared in laying them out ; and what is there that wealth cannot command in England !

“ It is too early yet for out-of-door plants,” said my entertainer. “ But you must come back in summer, when the roses are in bloom. I flatter myself they are worthy of Gulistan. But meanwhile, let me show you the conservatories. M'Farren, my Scotch gardener, would never forgive me if I did not call your attention to the heaths, which are the very pride of his existence.” The boast was a justifiable one, for I doubt whether even Kew Gardens could show a finer collection.

Mr Osborne, however, did not lose much time in descanting on the merits of his own possessions. He rambled from subject to subject with an alacrity that was truly wonderful. He never dwelt long upon any one topic, and rarely expressed any opinion of his own ; trying rather, as I thought, to bring out, by way of question, what knowledge might be in me. But his retorts and casual remarks were shrewd and apposite, evincing much quickness of intellect and power of ready comprehension, as also an amount of dry

humour, which would have made him a formidable antagonist in a conversational skirmish. Not a word, however, did he utter relative to business, or my connection with his paper, or anything pertaining to journalism ; so that, but for my previous knowledge of the fact, I never would have suspected him of being largely interested in the success of one of the most influential of the London daily journals.

On returning from our stroll, which had been so much prolonged as to trench upon the half-hour dedicated to the cares of the toilet, we sate down to an elegant and most *recherché* repast, Mr Osborne being one of those sages who esteem *gourmandise* as an important branch of the fine arts, to be wooed and cultivated by every man with the slightest pretension towards refinement. As, beyond myself, no stranger was present, the party was a very cheerful one. Miss Osborne, who inherited much of her father's sprightliness, was willing to amuse and ready to be amused ; the old gentleman was in high good-humour ; mamma kind and conversable ; and under such influences I shook off diffidence, and strove to make myself agreeable.

After the ladies had retired, Mr Osborne desired the servants to place a small round table near the fire, ensconced himself in an easy-chair, and declared his intention of making himself comfortable for the evening.

"Help yourself to claret, Mr Sinclair," said he : "it is old Chateau Latour, the proper drink for a young

man and a Caledonian. As for me who am an ancient Londoner, I must stick to port, even at the risk of gout, whereof I feel occasional twinges. And now let us have a word or two on business. I should tell you that I had a double motive in asking you here. In the first place, I wished to become acquainted with you personally, which we shall now consider to be a *fait accompli*. In the second place, I should like to know what your views and engagements are, because I think it possible that, unless you have formed some decided ulterior scheme of your own, we may make an arrangement that shall be mutually advantageous. Have you any objection to tell me candidly how you are situated?"

"None whatever, sir. I have nothing to conceal; and even if there were circumstances which I should hesitate to communicate to a casual acquaintance, Mr Osborne's character for honour is too well known to——"

"I understand! Prettily said, though a little too rhetorical. Nay, don't blush, my lad—I do not doubt your sincerity, but I have a strong objection to rounded sentences, especially when they convey a compliment, except in leaders, where, I admit, they are quite appropriate. Now, then, let us talk after what the Oxford men call the Socratic method—that is, I ask, you answer; it saves a world of trouble. Do you agree?"

"Certainly," said I, entering somewhat into the humour of the man, and yet a little abashed by the slight rap on the knuckles which he had administered.

“Not another compliment shall you hear from me this night, except that which I now pay to the excellence of your claret.”

“I fear you are a regular dodger, sir,” said Mr Osborne, “and that you have an eye towards a second bottle. But you are not singular in your preference. A fortnight ago three quarts of that nectar from the Dalilah Bordeaux barely sufficed to quench the thirst of a Cabinet minister who is held up to the whole world as a pattern of abstemiousness. But to the point. You began your connection with us, as nearly as I can remember, about three years ago?”

“True, sir. I was indebted for my introduction to Mr Montresor, with whom I became acquainted at Vienna.”

“Ay—Montresor. I remember him well. He was a clever writer, with dash, energy, and so forth; and his articles told well with the High-Church party, though they were somewhat too learned for the million. He had an ugly trick of always quoting the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon. It became a positive nuisance, and brought the paper into ridicule. I was compelled to issue an order for the entire suppression of Chalcedon. But Montresor was well provided for: he has now a fat rectory in Surrey.”

“Knowing that, sir, I presume you are not ignorant of my farther connection with the paper.”

“Of course I am not. I know the name of every man who has blotted paper in our service. You began by sending us foreign news, and more recently you

have been engaged in the reviewing department. But I hear from Wilkins that your contributions of late have been rather scanty. How is that?"

"Why, sir, much of my time has been occupied in preparing a document upon a somewhat intricate and difficult public question."

"What!—do you mean to bring out a pamphlet?"

"By no means, sir. This is a task that I have undertaken for a friend."

"That must be a very good friend for whom you are willing to make such a sacrifice—that is, unless you expect some corresponding advantage," said Mr Osborne. "The intellectual labour of a month at your time of life is a gift that borders on prodigality. May I ask if your friend is a politician?"

"I told you, Mr Osborne, that I would speak without reserve. His name is Sir George Smoothly, member for Effingham."

"Whew! Smoothly again!" cried Mr Osborne. "This, unless I mistake much, is a new case of crimping. And pray, Mr Sinclair, how did you happen to fall in with Sir George?"

"I met him on the Continent, sir; and afterwards, for a day or two, last Christmas, in the country."

"And he was very polite and civil, told you he took a deep interest in your welfare, hinted that he had some little interest with the Government, and so forth? Was it not so?"

"You must be well acquainted with him, Mr Osborne; for such certainly was his language."

“Oh, I know him very well—that is, I know all about him—rather more, perhaps, than he is aware of. And what next?”

“That, Mr Osborne, I do not consider myself at liberty to mention. I see plainly that your opinion of Sir George Smoothly is not a favourable one, nor am I thoroughly convinced of the sincerity of his professions; but he desired me to regard the main subject of our conversation as confidential; and such being the case, I cannot be more explicit.”

“Quite right; you are a good lad, and know how to act honourably. Faith must be kept even with a rogue,—mind, I don’t apply that epithet to any one in particular—but to trust a rogue after you have once detected him, is an act of egregious folly. But let me understand. Is your engagement with Sir George Smoothly, of whatever nature it may have been, at an end? Are your hands free?”

“Very nearly so. In fact, I have only to revise my paper.”

“Be done with it, then, as quickly as you can, but don’t commit yourself further. Now, as I have constituted myself Grand Inquisitor for the nonce, I must go on with your examination. Thus much I know already, that you follow no regular profession. Now, tell me frankly, do you aspire to entering the public service?”

“Frankly, such is my wish. You must know, Mr Osborne, that I have few friends, hardly any means, and no resources but such slight share of talent as God

has given me. Consequently, I desire, if possible, to procure some permanent appointment."

"It is very strange," said Mr Osborne, musingly, "that nine out of ten of the clever young men who come to London entertain precisely the same ideas. They all want to be provided for out of the public purse. They ask for permanent appointments, forgetting, or not aware, that the public service is of all others the worst remunerated, the most harassing, and the least likely to lead to distinction. Is there not a Scotch proverb, Mr Sinclair, to the effect that kings' bones are better than other folk's meat? I suspect you have been reared in that opinion."

"No, indeed, sir," I replied. "My wish has always been for independence, but that is surely not inconsistent with public employment."

"I made no such assertion," replied Mr Osborne. "I only marvel at your humility, or rather lack of ambition. Look you here now. I could give you many instances of men, your own countrymen, who came to London quite friendless, without prospects, and with scarce a shilling in their pockets. They had no such education as you have received; but they had good principles, industry, and that indomitable resolution which can conquer even fortune. I doubt not that some of these men might—not perhaps at first, but certainly after a reasonable period of probation—have been received into the public service in some grade suitable to their station. You Scotchmen stick by one another with a tenacity most creditable to your

nationality ; and it is not a difficult thing, through the good offices of some member of Parliament, to procure an appointment as a tide-waiter, a letter-carrier, or a subordinate station in the Excise. The men I refer to never thought of such employment. They fought their way as shopmen, as journeymen, as artisans, throwing their whole soul and energy into their business, saving money when they could get it, practising thrift, making themselves indispensable to their employers ; until, one by one, they rose in the social scale, became honoured members of the great commercial world ; and such you will find at this day among the wealthiest citizens of London. Have you ever thought of this, my young friend ?”

“ Alas !” said I, not, however, without an impression that Mr Osborne was making out a strong case against me, “ you point to a commercial career, for which I am altogether unfitted.”

“ Pardon me !” replied Mr Osborne ; “ I have merely given you an illustration. You will admit that such men acted more wisely in trusting to their own energy and perseverance, than if they had solicited and obtained some small public appointment. Your case differs from theirs, but simply in degree. If you were a barrister, though only in name, patronage might help you to a comfortable berth. Lawyers have a wide nest, but they keep it exclusively to themselves, and allow of no interlopers. If you were in orders, and could be of use to your party, promotion might follow. But what is it that you can expect ? Do you wish to

go into the Treasury as a junior clerk? Why, I'll insure you a larger salary, with more rapid promotion, if you choose to become a reader in the printing office! Or is it your ambition to become a minister's private secretary? My dear lad! look at the times in which we live. Ministries are bowled down like nine-pins, and when the principal is upset, where is the subordinate? And then, mark you; between you and the object of your desire lie hundreds of the young aristocracy who are fit for nothing else, and who swarm in the troubled waters of patronage as thick as ground-sharks in the surf at Madras. *Dixi*; I have spoken. Take another glass of claret, for the enjoyment of which I fear our conversation has spoiled you. Never mind. Think over what I have said. To-morrow we shall go to church for morning service; but, as I am no Puritan, I shall be ready to hear your views thereafter. A white-wash? No? Well then, let us join the ladies."

CHAPTER IV.

ARTHUR FAUNCE.

WHEN I awoke next morning, the sun shining cheerfully through the gay chintz curtains of my bed, Mr Osborne's language gave me ample subject for reflection. Was it indeed true that I was in danger of sacrificing my time and subjecting myself to the bitter pangs of disappointment by grasping at a shadow? Was it folly in me, left without a profession, to desire employment in the public service? Were the chances of success so small, and the advantages to be gained so trifling, as this shrewd observer had represented them to be? These were questions to which I had not as yet applied myself, but they were clearly of the utmost importance. I was vexed and amazed at my stupidity and want of foresight in blundering onward without any clear aim or distinct object before me. I could not disguise from myself that I stood in the unenviable position of a vague place-hunter, somewhat analogous to that of the sons of Eli; for was I not, notwithstanding all my boasts of independence, crouch-

ing for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread? And then the gain—would my ambition be satisfied with the situation of a clerk in a public office? Would that elevate my social position, or entitle me to aspire to the hand of Mary Beaton? Clearly I was on the wrong road; or rather, like the traveller overtaken by a fog on the muirland, I had altogether lost my way.

Then for the first time I began to perceive the grave error I had committed in not selecting a profession—an error which cannot be too much exposed, or too unequivocally condemned. All professions have their own peculiar rewards and prizes which are attainable through patience and perseverance; but for the mere adventurer, whatever may be his ability, there is nothing of the kind. He may succeed by some lucky accident, but the chances are woefully against him. His lack of a profession, acknowledged and recognised by all, is naturally attributed to deficiency either in application or talent. He has no regular certificate to produce; no exact position in society to which he can lay an unquestioned claim.

Bitterly did I regret my folly in having abandoned the law without going through the ceremony of assuming the barrister's gown. Had I taken that step, which at one time was perfectly within my power, what a prospect might now have been open to me! Lawyers who could make even a decent appearance before committees, were in high request. The demand was for a certain time much greater than the supply. Seniors who were known to be men of ex-

perience and ability, had so many briefs showered in upon them, that it was absolutely impossible to count upon their attendance. A steady junior, who would pledge himself to attend only one committee each day, was instantly bought up. Elderly gentlemen, who for many a long year had laid aside the horse-hair wig, now assumed it with far brighter prospects than they had conceived in the days of their ardent boyhood; and the dullest blockhead who could utter two connected sentences, or conduct an examination from a brief, was sure to have a pocketful of guineas.

From all participation in this golden shower I was utterly excluded. Not a drop of it could come my way. I began to see that in adopting an erratic course, I was so far from securing independence, that I had absolutely sacrificed it; and now, when too late, I found myself little better than a veritable Bohemian. Well!—I had no one but myself to blame for it, and I must even make the best of circumstances. So, laying aside in the mean time all thoughts of patronage, I resolved to give a serious ear to Mr Osborne's proposal.

"So, then," said that gentleman, when we sallied forth in the afternoon, "you are willing for the present to drop that nice little scheme about entering the public service? Understand me—I don't mean to say that you should reject a desirable offer if such were made; but I think it vastly absurd that you should lose your time by dancing attendance on this or the other political character, and doing jobs for them with-

out even the certainty of being thanked. It is no doubt to be regretted that you are of no profession—still, all men cannot be professional. There are a great many things which lie out of the province of lawyers, doctors, and divines ; and these must be done by other people. You have educated yourself up to a high literary point. Well, then, literature is your proper line. If you were one of those ridiculous young fellows, who think that literature consists in stringing rhymes together, I would as soon advise you to enlist in a marching regiment as to follow any such profitless occupation ; but you have too much sense for that. We want writers for the press—men who can direct, and in some measure control, the public mind ; and, trust me, the field is as wide as the functions are important. Let who will sneer at the press, it is a rising and a growing power. Men speak reverently enough of the tracts of Bacon, Milton, Marvell, Swift, and Addison, while they affect to despise the anonymous contributions of the day ; yet what were those tracts but the precursors of the leading articles that appear in our daily papers ? I tell you that we want the best men, and must have them at any price. To influence public opinion, as we do and shall influence it, is no ignoble calling.”

“Most cordially do I concur, Mr Osborne, in every word you have uttered regarding the dignity of the press,” I replied. “I only wish that such sentiments were more generally entertained.”

“There I differ from you,” said Mr Osborne, “at

least if you imply that writers for the press ought to receive an unusual share of individual consideration. Drop the anonymous, and the best of you would be useless. Who could care for the opinions, if announced as such, of John Smith or Paul Jones? No doubt they are good men and true, but they are serviceable because they are part of the regiment. We don't allow them to ride forth and tilt on their own account. Fame I do not promise you, but good employment and the means of making yourself useful: and, after all, what more could you expect from a professional career? But lest you should be appalled by the prospect of becoming what fine gentlemen, who are not without some knowledge of the interior economy of spunging-houses, call a worn-out literary hack, I shall let you into a secret. Journalism is not the worst kind of introduction to ministerial favour. Your friend Montresor is a notable instance of that; and, for my own part, I am obliged to keep a watchful eye on the motions of the rocs of the Treasury. One of the most promising young writers I ever had was caught up last year and dropped into a consulship near the Equator. I would not have parted with him for a wilderness of consuls!"

"Well, Mr Osborne, I shall be ready, so far as I have the power, to carry out your views."

"That's right! I thought we should come to an understanding. What I propose is this: I don't want you to go into the political department—we are already provided with a robustious specimen of *le beau Sabreur*

—but there is a new element developing itself which requires immediate attention ; I mean the growth of the railway system. For good or for evil, that will have an enormous influence on the interests of the country, and its progress must be narrowly watched in every phase. I wish you to devote yourself to that subject—but stop ! perhaps you have been dabbling ?”

“ I assure you, sir,” I replied, “ these hands are clean from the contact of any kind of scrip.”

“ So much the better,” said Mr Osborne. “ Let them remain so. The subject is a difficult one, and will require much time and study ; but that, of course, you will not grudge. Observe ; what I want to have, both with regard to the merits of competing lines, and the soundness of the movement generally, is the plain unvarnished truth. If I consulted interest alone, I should say to you, Write up the railways, for the advertisements have brought us a prodigious harvest ; but in a matter of this magnitude there must be no paltering. It behoves us to tell the public what is sound and what is rotten—to caution them against bubbles, of which there are many afloat—and to see that Government officials are not remiss in their duty. You shall have what reasonable assistance you may require, and these are the terms I propose.”

So saying, he handed me a slip of paper, containing a most liberal offer—so liberal, indeed, that it was far beyond my expectation.

“ I only dread, Mr Osborne,” said I, “ that my inex-

perience may disappoint your expectations. However, I shall do my best."

"No man can do more," said Mr Osborne. "But you are, I am given to understand, as yet almost a stranger to London; and this kind of work requires knowledge of individuals, as well as general sound judgment. Now in order to supply that, I have devised a scheme which, perhaps, you may consider a queer one, but I can think of none better. I happen, among other plagues, to be afflicted with a nephew, a wild scamp, but honourable, I believe, in the right meaning of the word. This hopeful young gentleman, by name Arthur Faunce, having a patrimony of his own, which obviates the necessity of his applying himself to any kind of business, has become a regular man about town, and knows everybody of any mark or notoriety. I wish I could say with truth that the little villain confined his acquaintance to persons of respectability, but such is not the case. He is as familiar with the city as with the west end—knows all about Jews, sharks, sharpers, money-lenders, and betting-men—has each fresh scandal at his fingers'—end—and has visited every haunt in the metropolis. This I admit is but a bad account to give of a young fellow, and one not likely to predispose you to make his acquaintance; still Attie has good points about him, and I am not without hope that in time he may sober down. He is, of all others, the very best man to give you information regarding doubtful characters,

of whom you will see many ; and I have asked him here to-day to meet you."

We heard a burst of laughter from the drawing-room as we entered the hall.

"That's Attie Faunce !" said Mr Osborne. "He has been telling some of his droll stories to the ladies, and the rogue can be irresistibly comical."

Mr Faunce was a very boyish-looking individual, with a slight but compact figure, curly hair, quick eyes, and a smiling mouth. He was neatly but somewhat too foppishly dressed, being much addicted to sartorial adornment ; his boots were as perfect in shape as if they had just been taken from the last, and his gloves would have satisfied a Parisian. He would have appeared somewhat effeminate, but for a saucy confident air which to him was habitual, and which gave additional piquancy to his talk. High-bred he certainly was not ; but his manners were those of a gentleman, though without a particle of diffidence or reserve. His spirits were exuberant, his sense of the ludicrous keen, and his mimetic talents extraordinary. Such was Mr Attie Faunce.

For my own part, I looked at first upon this strangely with some little apprehension ; for he clearly could be mischievous if he pleased, and I had seen enough of the world to know that nothing gives greater delight to young gentlemen of this stamp than leading their companions into scrapes. However, Attie, over whom his uncle had much influence, behaved himself tolerably well, and the dinner passed over as well as could have been expected.

When, however, over our wine, Mr Osborne explained his views to Master Faunce, that hopeful youth burst into an uncontrollable scream of merriment.

“Bravo—bravo! *mon oncle!*” he cried. “So you have found a use for me at last; and I am to have the honour, in consequence of my intimate acquaintance with all that is disrespectable, of piloting Mr Sinclair through the shoals and narrows of London vagabondism! Really you over-estimate my poor abilities. Don’t you think a detective officer would answer your purpose better?”

“Come, Attie; don’t be a fool! When you can make yourself useful, which seldom happens, I expect you will do it.”

“But, sir, have you really considered this matter seriously? I am very glad, I am sure, to make Mr Sinclair’s acquaintance,”—said Mr Faunce, looking, however, as if his gladness was infinitesimally small—“but I hardly think that an arrangement such as you propose can be very agreeable to him. I know, sir, you consider me to be rather a loose fish; and although in that respect as in some others you may have exaggerated my merits, I cannot fancy that a gentleman of staid habits and sedentary occupations would like to be seen associating with a youth who, I confess, is much better known at Tattersall’s than at the Athenæum.”

“The worse for you, Attie! the worse for you,” said Mr Osborne. “I wish to Heaven, boy, you kept better company.”

“Forgive me, Mr Osborne,” said I, “if I beg that

nothing further may be said on the subject. I will thrust myself on the acquaintance of no man living. Mr Faunce has a perfect right to object; and I am only sorry that this proposition, for which I am not answerable, was ever made."

"Now, Mr Sinclair," said Faunce, rising from his seat and coming round to my side of the table, with a sweetness of manner which I certainly did not expect, "you must do me the honour to take my hand. It is I who am not worthy of your intimacy, for I know something about you already. Bingham, whom you have met at the house of your friend Mr Carlton, has spoken of you more than once; and, to say the truth, I felt a little puzzled, when I saw you here to-day for the first time—my uncle never tells me whom I am to meet—whether you were the same Mr Sinclair whose adventure in Switzerland was much spoken of in town last autumn."

"What adventure do you allude to, Attie?" said Mr Osborne.

"Nothing of any consequence," I interposed. "A thing not worth speaking of."

"That," said Faunce, "is not the opinion of Lord Windermere, who, I am credibly informed, thinks it very strange indeed that you have given him no sign of your existence. Of course I know nothing of Lord Windermere; for fellows such as I am are not recognised by personages so stately and decorous; but I have heard as much from those who have the honour of his acquaintance."

“Lord Windermere!” cried Mr Osborne, “One of the best and truest noblemen of England! And have you, Mr Sinclair, with such an introduction, been pottering with a Smoothly? But of that more at a convenient season. Upon my soul, it is some recompense to old fellows like myself, whose years have slipped from them, to observe that lads invariably lose or throw away their best opportunities. What a grand thing it must have been to have lived before the Flood! A man could then afford to bestow eighty or an hundred years upon preliminary education. About the middle of his second century he might begin to think of marrying; and, if human nature was the same then as now, he would hardly commence saving money until he had attained the respectable age of four hundred. The insurance tables giving him four hundred more, as his reasonable expectation of life, how interest would accumulate! No wonder that Noah was possessor of the whole earth—he had succeeded to the savings of Methuselah! Now, you two lads go out and smoke a cigar. If you agree—well. If not, there is no harm done on either side.”

Certainly this was a very wise proposal. Attie Faunce and I speedily came to an understanding. I made him aware that I had anything but a wish to bore him, and he undertook to place his stock of miscellaneous knowledge at my disposal.

“It is little I can do,” said he, “but I certainly have contrived to pick up some information regarding city matters. Do you know, I think I might have become

a brilliant meteor in Lombard Street if I had been regularly bred to the business. I like nothing better than to observe the complicated transactions of this huge commercial Babel, where knaves, dupes, and honest men are alike actively employed. At present, I fear, honesty is somewhat at a discount. The great capitalists, usually so cautious, have been bitten by the mad dog, speculation; and hundreds of them, who would have looked very shy a year ago if asked to discount an ordinary bill, are now raging in the market, buying up every kind of scrip in expectation of a rise. Now, in order to bring that about, they are compelled to puff their projects to the uttermost. More than one clever fellow, with a turn for romance, has made a small fortune merely by drawing prospectuses; and as for the lies that are daily circulated on 'Change, they would exhaust the invention of Munchausen. But what is worst of all, many members of Parliament are deep in the game; and as they possess means, unknown to the rest of the world, of influencing the decisions of committees, they have at least twenty points out of sixty-three in their favour. But you'll know all about that in time—only don't be astonished if you should find men, who bear the highest character for probity and honour, engaged in tricks and traffickings that savour more of the atmosphere of the Old Bailey than that of the meeting-house."

Next morning Faunce drove me into town. I began rather to like him; for although it would not be accurate to say that his was a wise head upon young

shoulders, still it was a head of no ordinary capacity and cleverness, and the quaint humour of his remarks would have done no discredit to Lucian, immeasurably the most amusing of the satirical writers of antiquity. I chanced to ask him if he knew anything of an individual of the name of Speedwell, and the following was the prompt reply.

“Speedwell? Do you mean a thick-set Jew, with bushy whiskers? I know the man perfectly by sight and reputation. He is as consummate a scoundrel as ever cheated the pillory—one of the very worst of the bill-discounters that infest this precious London of ours. The higher fellows in that line, who deal with the nobility, and assume the airs of men of fashion, are, Heaven knows, hard enough; but they are generous and liberal in comparison with such a dog-fish as this Speedwell. Woe betide the unfortunate sinner who falls into his clutches! He would strip him past the drawers on the frostiest night of January.”

“I conjectured as much,” said I. “And has this Mr Speedwell given the benefit of his remarkable talents towards the development of the railway system?”

“You may assume that as a certainty,” replied Faunce. “Not one remnant of the whole twelve tribes of Israel but is, at this moment, actively engaged in rigging the market. A speculative craze of this kind is a more important event for them than the return from the Captivity. Spoiling the Egyptians was a mere joke compared with it. I do not believe that

there is a single orange-boy, or vendor of sponges, or collector of cast raiment, who has not managed to get an allocation of hundreds of shares in some of the competing lines; and when that is the case, it is not likely that an acute Sadducee like Speedwell will fail to profit by the occasion. Indeed I have observed him of late in close attendance at Westminster. There is no mistaking him. Curious that so deadly a snake, to whom concealment must often be an object, should be so fond of conspicuous colours!"

"But why should he haunt Westminster?" said I. "Surely it would be easy to procure early intelligence in the city."

"Of a verity," said Faunce, "you have got a great deal to learn. Go to any committee-room where there has been a regular stand-up fight between two competing lines for a fortnight or three weeks; for, when the prey is good, the lawyers have no fancy for abridging proceedings. There have been opening speeches, and evidence, and replies, until the five worthy senators who are to decide which is the better line, and who are usually selected on account of their entire ignorance of the peculiarities of the district, are utterly bewildered, sick of the whole concern, and well-nigh weary of their lives. At last, in desperation, the chairman orders the room to be cleared, that the committee may deliberate which preamble has been proved. In the mean time, mark you, and during the whole discussion, the price of each stock, or I should rather say scrip, has been fluctuating in the market. If Jack's line is preferred,

Jack pockets a cool thousand. If Tom's is thrown out, Tom must descend to the dreary valley of discount. But they are both confident of success, and to the very last moment the brokers are buying and selling. After an hour or two, the doors are opened. In rush, higgledy-piggledy, the barristers and solicitors,—the more wary speculators keep without. The chairman rises, and announces, with a provoking drawl, that the Wessex line has the preference. Then along the lobbies and down the stairs is a frantic race of Jews, jobbers, and publicans, each striving for dear life to be first to get into the city. Some throw themselves into cabs, others rush to the bridges for river-steamers, others trust to sculls.—Neck or nothing!—Devil take the hindmost!—Nothing like it on the Derby-day! Nay, I have been credibly informed that carrier-pigeons are sent off to convey the intelligence to Liverpool, Manchester, and Glasgow, in anticipation of the mail; and it is said that a knowing fellow, who was posted with a gun near the premises of a Birmingham broker, brought down a bird that was worth two thousand pounds to his employer. Such things may seem strange to you, and doubtless will be disbelieved when told hereafter; nevertheless, there they are, facts that will not brook denial. But here we are in Jermyn Street, so for the present I shall bid you good-bye."

CHAPTER V.

A RAILWAY MONARCH, AND A POLITICAL CRIMP.

THE observation of a few weeks gradually opened my eyes to the true nature of the great speculative movement. To a casual observer, it doubtless must have appeared to be a mere scramble—a reckless rush of a desperate mob, struggling for admission at the door of the temple of Fortune. Or, to use a more classical simile, it might have been thought to resemble one of Homer's battles, in which the champions are represented as fighting indiscriminately, without any regard being paid to disposition, military arrangement, or skilful marshalling of the forces. But although there was, no doubt, a good deal of desultory skirmishing, and many attempts at pillage by mercenaries and camp-followers, the railway movement had a distinct organisation of its own. Let me try to explain this briefly.

In the infancy of the railway system, the chief, indeed the sole object was to facilitate and expedite intercourse between large towns; and by the connection of lines, to establish a thoroughfare for passengers

throughout England. The practicability of doing this, so as to economise both time and money to the public, and yet give a profitable return on their outlay to the projectors, had been demonstrated by the famous engineer Stephenson, who constructed the Manchester and Liverpool line; and then it became evident that the greater portion of the traffic of the land must in future pass along the vast arteries of iron. In order to accomplish this, new companies were formed, consisting chiefly of local capitalists; each of which broke ground in a fresh district, without being subjected to competition. And so long as the movement was confined to the construction of what may be called trunk railways, the only opposers were the landed gentry and others through whose properties the lines were to pass.

But in order to feed those great arteries, and bring traffic from a distance, it became necessary to make side or cross railways. Some of these were undertaken as extensions by the existing companies, others were projected by independent speculators; and as by means of them traffic could be diverted from one main line to another, a vigorous contest for their possession, or suppression, as the case might be, arose among the proprietors of the existing lines. England became, as it were, mapped out into large districts, in each of which the whole traffic, direct and contingent, was claimed by a monster company to the exclusion of interlopers; and thus originated the strife which, though it brought vast profits to lawyers, engineers, and contractors, had a disastrous effect in lessening the dividends of the

shareholders. Subordinate lines were purchased or leased at rates which were utterly exorbitant; and many, from which it was hopeless to expect that a remunerative return could be derived, were undertaken for the sole object of driving rivals from the field.

The affairs of those huge companies were ostensibly administered by the directors; but it invariably happens that, when a trust of this kind is committed to some ten or twelve gentlemen, the majority are little more than cyphers, and the real management devolves upon two or three, who act under the influence of the chairman, and are, in fact, his cabinet ministers. As a vast responsibility rested on the shoulders of the chairman, so was he allowed large discretionary powers. To dispute his fiat was petty treason—to interfere with his negotiations was tantamount to absolute rebellion. The common purse was at his disposal. He had a controlling power in the allocation of shares. He could make the price of stocks rise or fall in accordance with his smile or his frown. He was more than Fortunatus—he was Fortune's self personified—an idol to many worshippers, who overlooked the bandage and the wheel. Such, in the days of which I speak, was the Railway Monarch, of whom there were several in England; that country being, for railway purposes, again resolved into a heptarchy.

Not the least powerful and imperious of those autocrats was Mr Richard Beaton, whose mercantile experience, ready resources, and reputation for sagacity, had raised him to so enviable a position. It was under-

stood that he had made a large fortune before he embarked in railway enterprise. He stood well with the Ministry, by whom he was regarded as a financial authority, was a respected member in the House, and held a good position in society. Still there was about him—at least those who knew him intimately averred so—a certain taint of that arrogance which we often find in men who have been successful in the attainment of wealth ;—a subdued boastfulness which makes itself rather felt than audible, but which is manifested by inflexibility of opinion, and a disregard, almost amounting to contempt, of the suggestions of others. His weak point was vanity. He liked adulation ; though, if such a charge had been openly preferred, he would, doubtless, have denied it. Nevertheless, an adroit master of the art could always gain his ear by following the method through which Decius Brutus boasted that he could overstay the haughty Cæsar,—

“ But when I tell him he hates flatterers,
He says he does ; being then most flattered.”

Hence he had favourites connected with the railways—low, fawning fellows, who often misled, and, I fear, sometimes betrayed him ; and they, by ministering, or rather pandering, to his vanity, induced him to dash headlong into schemes which, in a prudential view, were dangerous, and, in a moral one, even reprehensible.

Much of this I discovered at a later period, though I think it best to state it now, while sketching the character of the man.

Being in possession of the power, more potent than patronage, of dispensing fortune to others, it is not surprising that Mr Beaton's acquaintance should have been sedulously courted by a whole swarm of persons who, neglecting the scriptural caution, were in exceeding haste to become rich. Selfishness is of no rank; neither, I must admit, is servility. Rich and poor, high and low, can, when it suits their turn, become both selfish and servile. Indigent men sell their votes to the highest bidder; peers of the realm forsake the traditions of their house for the wretched guerdon of a ribbon. Nay, have we not seen, within a limited space of time, a king debase himself so far as to act the part of jackal to an emperor, and yield to the imperial tyrant, not a portion of the territory which they had jointly conquered, but the most ancient province of his own hereditary dominions? So runs the world. I regard it not scoffingly, like a Menippus—I weep not, with Heraclitus, for the exceeding frailty of mankind. There is the picture. Turn it over in your own mind. Consult the records of all ages—Jew, Pagan, and Christian—and you will find that the love of gain is the grand motive power. But that was not according to the law of the inspired Jewish dispensation, or the philosophic glimmering of the speculative Greek, or the distinct enunciation of the Gospel. Just fancy a sermon preached to a Lombard-street congregation on the text—“Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal!” Would not the

majority of the audience be inclined to rely upon the non-oxidation of sovereigns, the impassibility of their safes for moths, and the scrutiny of the detective police? I fear they would; and yet they overlook God's judgment announced against those who esteem the mere acquisition of wealth, and the indulgences which it can afford, the main objects of our earthly existence.

Well, let us quit that argument. Weak nature succumbs. We have one talent—say, a thousand pounds—we want to make it ten. There is a kind of scriptural authority for that, though it may be read otherwise; but we must not be nice in our application. If we don't get shares in a most promising undertaking, which we can sell to advantage in a few weeks, somebody else will reap the benefit. Detested, though unknown, is that "somebody else!"—perchance an intriguing Jew, a miserable attorney's clerk, or—for such things have been bruited abroad—a common cabman! Why should gentility be excluded from participating in such very good things? Why should not aristocratic money fructify as readily as plebeian? All that is requisite is a good introduction, and a hint as to a profitable investment (*N.B.*—In those days every kind of purchase was dignified by the imposing title of investment); and who better able to give the hint than that wonderfully clever man, Mr Richard Beaton, who never was detected in a commercial blunder, or known to be wrong in any one of his calculations?

So Mr Beaton, already a celebrity, took first rank in the London menagerie as a lion of superb dimensions.

Stiff-necked dukes relaxed their dignity, and became quite affable in conversation with the distinguished commoner, whose genius, they were proud to own, was an ornament to British commerce. Minor magnates, somewhat out at elbows, greeted him with much cordiality—you can't help liking a peer who has a jovial demeanour—haunted him at clubs, and requested his advice with that free-and-easy air which brooks no denial. The leaders of fashion, a most obdurate and exclusive clique, discovered that Mr Beaton was just the man to be patronised, and that his daughter was a lovely and accomplished girl, with sufficient charms to grace a courtly circle. "And then," said the dowagers in their conclave, "such a fortune! Really it would be quite wicked if we allowed her to be thrown away." So the gates of fashion opened spontaneously for the admission of the father and the child. Of course that was very gratifying. It is easy to pooh-pooh these things, and to protest that we care not for them; but did you ever know a person indifferent to such homage? Think over the list of your acquaintances, and tell me if you can fix upon one.

In return, Mr Beaton, who, though fond of acquiring money, was liberal in spending it, enlarged his establishment, gave splendid entertainments, and might, if he pleased, have held *levées*, so numerous was the host of his admirers. And it was the daughter of this high and mighty financier, this especial favourite of Plutus, that I, an unknown journalist, presumed to love! Well might I keep that portion of my thoughts a close

secret ; for, had I confided it to any one, I should either have been laughed at as a fool, or regarded as a positive madman.

I found Attie Faunce of great use to me ; for he freely communicated much curious information which he had picked up in the city relative to the doings in Capel Court, and the *fourberies* of the inferior jobbers ; so that I was enabled to spice my articles, which otherwise might have proved heavy, with some pungent matter that rendered them generally acceptable, attracted the attention of the public, and, above all, provoked discussion. Still, I acknowledge that my task was both difficult and delicate, for I was convinced that the Government had not adequately performed its duty in restraining the flood of speculation ; the effect of such regulations as they did prescribe being rather to increase than allay the fury of the torrent. But I was resolute to obey to the letter the instructions of Mr Osborne, and to proclaim what appeared to me to be the honest truth, without equivocation or reserve.

I began to like Attie Faunce very much. He certainly was one of the drollest fellows I ever encountered, with such unflagging vivacity that one could hardly have wished him other than he was. The great majority of people with whom we are brought into contact are so saturnine and dull, so reserved or suspicious, or so terribly afraid of compromising themselves by giving utterance to anything approaching to eccentricity, that it is quite a relief to meet with a clever rattle, who does not weigh his words, but comes out with what-

ever is uppermost in his mind. At length I came to regard his visit to my rooms as the most pleasant event of the day. He glided in like a streak of sunshine, and his mirth-provoking talk relieved the monotony of my occupation.

One evening I went down to the House of Commons in hopes of meeting in the lobby a member who had expressed himself anxious to communicate some information regarding a transaction which had become notorious, and had recently been made the subject of comment by the newspapers. I cannot now recollect precisely what it was—doubtless some nefarious job that had come to light through the bungling of the operators, for such things were of daily occurrence. The lobby of the House, while an animated debate is going on, presents a curious scene, very interesting to a stranger who knows the leading political characters by name, but who has never had the opportunity of beholding them save through the medium of a caricature. A view of it does more than anything else to impress one with a due sense of the dignified position of a member of the House of Commons; for the two well-fed gentlemen who are custodiers of the door, and whom, doubtless, official etiquette restrains from lavishing much courtesy upon mere visitors, are most obsequious to honourable gentlemen; and the very policemen, who are uniformly civil in that place, seem to regard them with an eye of intense admiration. I cannot say, however, that the aspect of the majority is such as would inspire awe or impress with rever-

ence. They are, for the most part, very ordinary specimens of humanity; though here and there you descry some men of commanding port and imposing appearance, and others in whose lineaments you may perceive the unmistakable marks of genius. Many pass to and fro unnoticed and unknown—men whose names we never meet with except in the *Parliamentary Companion*, or the division-lists; but when a celebrated statesman or orator enters or issues from the House, his name is rapidly circulated—there is a buzz among the spectators, and all throng forward to gaze on the individual whom, though they may not agree with his opinions, they nevertheless honour as an able or consistent politician.

On this evening there were not many persons in attendance, though I was given to understand that the House was rather full.

“It is a Scotch debate,” said a brother of the press with whom I had a slight acquaintance, “and that, you know, excites little interest. Sawney manages his own matters through his representatives, and they know well enough how to take care of number One. But this is a Government night, for there has been a whip, and I am told the sitting will be late.”

“Do you happen to know what Bill is before the House?” said I.

“Indeed, I do not,” replied the other. “I have not been in the gallery. But here comes a man that can tell us. Hallo, Phipps! what’s going on?”

“Scotch poor-law,” replied Phipps. “Devilish dull

work. But old Smoothly—the Treasury dodger, you know—is making an extraordinary appearance. Hang me if they are not cheering him like mad!”

“By Jove, that’s something new!” said my friend. “I’ve heard him speak twice, and a duller dog never tried the patience of the national assembly. The Speaker nearly dislocated his jaw with yawning. If the House goes along with Smoothly, there has been no greater miracle since the ass spoke to Balaam! What’s his line of country?”

“Statistical. I don’t know anything of the subject myself; but there’s a Scotch reporter up there in the gallery—a relation, of course, of M’Callum More or M’Callum Beg—who swears that Smoothly must have the second sight. He was very big about a place with a most extraordinary name. It sounded something like ‘perpendicular.’”

“Benbecula, perhaps?” I suggested; a passage in a certain paper recurring vividly to my memory.

“No doubt you are right, sir,” said Phipps. “That entirely corresponds in sound; but of course there are limits to the study of geography. All I can say is that Smoothly is making a sensation; and, what is queer enough, the Scotch members are cheering him the loudest.”

“Are you going to stay here, Sinclair?” said my acquaintance, “or shall we have a bit of supper? I have marked a most appetising lobster.”

“Thank you,” said I, “but I must wait for a little while. I have come down by appointment to see a

member who, no doubt, is in the House, and I should be sorry to disappoint him."

"*Chacun à son goût*, my dear fellow! I would not sacrifice the crowning hour of the night for a colloquy with the Premier himself. What's life without relaxation? Phipps—are you game?"

"I am," said Phipps. And the twain departed.

Shortly afterwards the door was opened, and there came a rush of members.

"Very extraordinary speech that was of Smoothly's," said one. "I had no idea he was so conversant with details."

"I should not have thought so much of it," said a Scottish member, "if it had been delivered by one of ourselves. But how an Englishman came to know the real weak points, fairly takes me by surprise."

"Peel's as pleased as Punch," said another ministerialist. "The young Opposition had not a word to say. Who could have expected it from Smoothly?"

"I always said he was a most able man," drawled a slim youth who laboured under the suspicion of having a sheep's-eye to a place in the Treasury. "I like to hear solid information, because, you see, it helps one to arrange his ideas. Now Smoothly is evidently up to the whole thing, and he made a most convincing speech—everybody must allow that—and Peel cheered him; so you may depend upon it he was in the right line, and I shall tell him so to-morrow. I don't think Sir George is properly appreciated."

"That's not a bad idea of yours, Popham," re-

marked a sarcastic recusant, who had already exhibited some symptoms of rebellion against the Tamworth dynasty. "Peel's squad of official young men is made up—no more vacancies there. As it is of no use applying to the captain, you are quite right to make a friend of the recruiting sergeant!"

"Ah, you are always so bitter!" said Popham. "You fellows are doing all you can to break up the party, with your nonsensical ideas about independence, and oligarchies, and stuff! What is your objection to Smoothly?"

"Objection, my good fellow? You never heard me state any! What objection can there be to a man who is as pliable as a glove, as slippery as an eel, and as consistent as April weather?"

"Ah, that is one of your paradoxes, I suppose! Do you know G—— said the other day that a Young Englander was no better than a walking paradox? Ha, ha! was not that witty? Leave the old stagers alone for finding out your weak points!"

"My dear Popham," replied the other, "I am only too glad to learn that there *is* a kind of wit which you are able to appreciate. But hush, as you hope for promotion!—Lo, the conquering hero comes!"

And, in effect, the mysterious door reopened, and the Premier came forth, talking with much animation, but in a low tone of voice, to Sir George Smoothly, on whose countenance was written obsequiousness tempered by complacency. The latter threw a furtive glance around; and I was certain, from a slight contraction of

his mouth, that he saw and knew me. But he gave no sign of recognition, and the two passed towards the library.

“ Now,” thought I, as I bent my steps homeward, “ I shall very soon find out whether this gentleman was sincere or not in his professions. The result is to me matter of comparative indifference ; for, thanks to Mr Osborne, I have woken from my dream of patronage ; but I own I should like to know whether he is a true man or a hypocrite. Strange that so many people should mistrust him ! And yet the Premier, who must have ample experience of mankind, evidently regards him with favour.”

I was not then aware—for that kind of knowledge is seldom early attained—that extreme plausibility is the surest mark by which knavery can be detected. A very clever knave is not habitually plausible. He rather tries to throw you off your guard by the assumption of a candid outspoken manner, giving you thereby to understand that he is quite as much alive to his own interest as to yours. Such a character is very dangerous, and may long escape suspicion. But your uniformly plausible man affects you with a kind of nausea ; just as if you were compelled to swallow repeated doses of cod-liver oil. Your stomach revolts against the medicine, and you transfer your dislike to the practitioner. Moreover, I committed a gross mistake in supposing that the man who is plausible to his equals and inferiors must necessarily be so to those who rank above him. There is a certain level beyond

which plausibility does not or should not rise. It then becomes obsequiousness or servility. If you want to ascertain the real character of any man, whatever be his station in life, do not rest satisfied with the report of his superiors. Push your inquiries among his equals and contemporaries; and, my life on it, that you will arrive at a more satisfactory result.

I rose the next morning, I admit, more expeditiously than usual, to peruse the report of the debate in the House of Commons; and there, sure enough, was the speech of Sir George Smoothly, which, allowing for the difference in form between an oration and a written memoir, was exactly what I had penned by way of summary. I glanced over the columns—for, having real matter to bring forward, this ornament of the Commons had made a lengthy speech—there were my thunders, or my blunders (the one being as probable as the other); but I confess I felt considerably irritated when I read the following paragraph:—

“I do not presume,” said the honourable member, “to aver that the facts which I have laid, and will lay before the House, are the results of personal experience or investigation. With Scotland I am but remotely connected; yet, knit as are the sister kingdoms together, though with a difference in their system of laws, I may perhaps be allowed to say that I regard the welfare of either from a purely British point of view; and should feel ashamed if I did not extend to the people of the North that interest, and sympathy, and consideration, which every English member so

devotedly accords to those who have the closer claim. Accordingly, when I first became aware that this great measure of popular relief was in contemplation, I considered it my duty to place myself in communication with many persons of high reputation and esteemed character in Scotland. I trust the House will pardon me if I abstain from mentioning names—that being the condition which some, indeed most of them, expressly made, while developing their views with remarkable candour and sagacity. I think, nay I am sure, that honourable members will believe that the facts which I shall now state, and the arguments which I shall use, are, all of them, the result of close intimacy with the wants and requirements of the people, and of profound professional knowledge of the operation of the existing law, and an enlightened regard to its amendment. (Cheers.) I perceive, Sir, that the House acquiesces in the propriety of the course which I propose to adopt; and though, undoubtedly, the force of the few observations which I am about to submit would be materially strengthened were I at liberty to say from whose experience they are derived, I shall, as in honour bound, waive that advantage, leaving it, of course, to honourable members who may take a different view to controvert my facts or meet my arguments by appeal to direct testimony, from which I am unfortunately excluded.”

The impudence of this exordium was something perfectly astounding. I had, as is the way with men who must read parliamentary debates, and who esteem the

mere artifices of rhetoric at their proper value, applied myself first to the body of the speech, without paying attention to the introduction. Not one fact was stated by Sir George Smoothly that was not set down in my paper—not one argument did he use which I had not expressly suggested! I—poor ignorant being that I was—had been the sole adviser and correspondent of this audacious impostor! I had been made to do service for a whole army of witnesses, just as, in some mean theatrical exhibition, a single lout in buckram passes and repasses on the stage as the representative of Richard's forces at the field of Bosworth! I read the speech twice over, in the hope that I might find, for the mitigation of my self-reproach, something beyond what I had communicated. There was no trace of anything of the kind. I, whom no man in his senses would have brought forward as a witness on such a subject before a select committee, was absolutely horrified to find myself represented as the embodiment of the wisdom and practical experience of the North; and the extreme annoyance which I then felt will never pass from my recollection.

To discover that you have been thoroughly duped and befooled is not a pleasant sensation. The poor cat had practical experience of that when the monkey used its paw as the implement for extracting the chestnuts from the fire; but the personal slight which had been passed upon me gave me less annoyance than the thought that I had, unwittingly indeed, been made an accomplice in a gross and fraudulent deception. It

was undoubtedly some little consolation to reflect that in the execution of my task I had been throughout conscientious, that I had perused the documents which were laid before me with care and in an impartial spirit, and that I had refrained from hazarding rash and speculative opinions upon a subject of so much importance. That in some points I should have erred in judgment was natural and to be expected—that I should have attached more importance than was justly due to the statements and representations of enthusiasts did not infer absolute blame; neither would it have been fair to taunt me with the adage of *ne sutor ultra crepidam*, since I had studied the subject to such an extent as would have justified me in treating of it in an article; and in these days of rapid, and, I fear, careless legislation, men must perforce avail themselves of such material as comes most readily to hand, following the example of the lawyers, who, without any deep medical knowledge, contrive to glean from treatises so much information with regard to toxicology as enables them sometimes to puzzle and confound even the most experienced practitioners.

But the gall and wormwood lay in the reflection that I had been made a party to an act of deceit; and that this hoary humbug, whom I now regarded with absolute detestation, evidently believed that he might safely calculate on my acquiescence. I could not help seeing that he looked upon me as one whom he had already bribed, and with whom it was no longer necessary to keep up appearances. A thorough adept in

the diabolical policy, he conceived that, having once wrought me to his will, he might dispense with the garb of an angel of light, and exhibit the cloven hoof in all its bare deformity. As the habitual profligate and seducer, after he has secured his victim, throws away the mask of virtuous intentions, so did this Smoothly, very calmly and deliberately, disclose to me his real countenance, which was that of a consummate rascal. I doubt not that he considered his secret perfectly safe, being confident that I would not, from interested motives, venture to expose him. And it was safe with me; though I would not condescend, after such an instance of duplicity, to have any further dealings with the man. As yet the falsehood was his alone. To continue my relations with him would have been an act of guilty complicity, a stain upon my honour, a deed of self-degradation. I resolved at once, and without ceremony, to get rid of so disreputable a connection.

I had not long to wait for an opportunity. In the course of the same day a ponderous package was left at my rooms, accompanied by the following note:—

“MY DEAR SIR,—I have not, at the present moment, leisure to inform you fully of the commendations which your valuable, or rather invaluable paper elicited *in a certain quarter*. You will, doubtless, have observed from the newspapers, that I made some use of the facts which you had arranged with so much skill and perspicuity; and I do not doubt that in a very short time it will be in my power to convey to you a mes-

sage which shall satisfactorily prove that your promptitude in meeting my wishes has been duly appreciated. The usage of official reticence prevents me from being more explicit ; but probably I have said enough to convince you that your interests are *safe* in my hands. In the mean time, and as a further proof of your aptitude for the public service, I venture to suggest that you should make a *resumé* or abstract of the documents which I now send, bearing upon a subject which ere long will engross the attention of the country. It is desirable that this should be done as speedily as possible.—Believe me to remain always, my dear sir, yours very faithfully and sincerely,

“G. SMOOTHLY.”

The documents referred to in this precious epistle were three enormously thick folios, crammed full of figures, purporting to be the report of a Select Committee upon the Trade, Commerce, and Manufactures of the United Kingdom.

“I wish St Dunstan had you by the nose with his tongs, you wretched old hypocrite !” was my mental apostrophe. “Green as the grass was I to suffer you to bubble me once ; but to do so twice is entirely beyond your power ! And you may thank your stars, if any star has an interest in so miserable a being, that I am above evoking the revenge which your own stupidity has suggested ! What could be easier for me than to sit down and frame a table of results so utterly preposterous and absurd as would leave you, after you had

stated it to the House of Commons as the product of your own laborious inquiries, utterly bankrupt in reputation, and make you a public laughing-stock? Would that be malice? Not at all. There is no malice in trapping vermin; and what fun it would be to see the plausible impostor involving himself in a network of hopeless contradiction and inextricable blunder, to the discomfiture of his panic-stricken colleagues, and the delight of a joyous Opposition! Clever as you think yourself to be, Sir George Smoothly, I begin to doubt whether you have made a sufficient compact with the fiend; for at this moment I feel him at my elbow, jogging me towards the inkstand. But, *avaunt Sathanas!*”

So I sent him the following polite note, which, under the circumstances, was at least sufficiently temperate:—

“Mr Sinclair is gratified to learn that the private information which Sir George Smoothly has received from persons of high position and character in Scotland, is corroborative of the views which Mr S. ventured to express, after a careful perusal of the documents which were placed in his hands. For the assurances of goodwill contained in Sir G. Smoothly’s letter, Mr Sinclair is duly grateful; but as his other avocations will not admit of his devoting any further portion of his time to the preparation of parliamentary abstracts, he is under the necessity of returning the statistical volumes, and begs that Sir G. Smoothly will give himself no further trouble on his account.”

Ingenuous young reader, whose faith in the sincerity of trading politicians has not yet been shaken by the rude hand of experience!—you possibly may regard the preceding sketch as an exaggeration. Yet, if you should ever be tempted to linger on the threshold of patronage, and court the smiles of those who have the entry, you may esteem yourself fortunate if you escape as easily as I did from the clutches of a senatorial swindler.

CHAPTER VI.

LORD WINDERMERE.

“SINCLAIR,” said Attie Faunce, one morning as he was lounging in my room, “have you been at Lord Windermere’s lately?”

“No, Attie; and, what is more, I have never yet seen his lordship.”

“Indeed! it is a comfort to know that there is at least one man ready to testify against the tuft-hunting propensities of the age. Now, as you have profited, in some respects, by my insatiable curiosity, I hope you will not be offended if I ask the reason why?”

“To confess the truth, Attie, that is a question I have put to myself more than once without receiving a satisfactory explanation.”

“Then, Sinclair, depend upon it, you and your conscience are at variance. Shall I tell you how the matter stands? You feel that you ought to wait on Lord Windermere, and you don’t like to do so; your pride, or obstinacy, or some such other ridiculous scruple, standing in the way. Have I not guessed aright?”

“I must acknowledge that you are very near the mark.”

“Nay, I am certain that I have hit the bull’s eye. Now, setting bashfulness and that sort of thing aside, do you really think that you are conducting yourself politely towards Lord Windermere by turning your back upon him? Does it not strike you that that is tantamount to an affront?”

“Nonsense, Attie! you forget the difference of our positions.”

“Do you mean to say that the poor or humble have it not in their power to affront the rich or proud? I should like to hear you maintain that position! Why, old Diogenes, who lived in a tub, affronted Alexander the Great by desiring him to stand out of the sunshine; and I rather imagine that Lord Chesterfield was considerably affronted by the famous letter of Samuel Johnson. You see I have read enough to be able to cite an instance or two that will apply. But to come to the immediate case;—I presume—no offence—that you consider yourself to be a gentleman?”

“I hope so.”

“And is not Lord Windermere also a gentleman?”

“Undoubtedly he is.”

“Why, then, should you withhold from him that courtesy which is the common bond of gentlemen, and their duty towards each other? Excuse me for speaking so frankly. You are an older and much abler man than I am, Sinclair, but you have not yet rubbed off

the old skin of prejudice. Come—what would you say if I were to accuse you of cowardice ?”

“No third party being present, which might make a difference, I would ask for an explanation of the charge.”

“Well ; cowardice, I grant you, is an ugly term, but it has many modifications. Ask yourself, however, this, or let me ask it of you : If Lord Windermere were simply a private gentleman, without wealth or station, would you not, considering what has passed between you, have made his acquaintance long ago ?”

“Attie—you young villain ! who taught you to be so cunning of fence ?”

“A palpable hit ! Score me one. ‘Our son shall win,’ as the Queen says in *Hamlet*. Are you ready for another bout ?”

“No ; I give in. You have the best of it in argument, and I cannot but acknowledge that you are in the right.”

“Then, my dear Sinclair, don’t you persist in doing wrong. I never pestered you with personal inquiries, which would have been downright impertinence on my part ; but Uncle Osborne, with whom, let me tell you, you are an immense favourite, has told me something about you ; and I know that you have very wisely given up the idea of soliciting official employment. That being the case, I presume you have no favour to ask from Lord Windermere or any one else. I know there are a few men, and I think you are one of them, who, though they may have a direct claim upon a great man

for the exercise of his interest on their behalf, would rather cut their tongues out than undergo the pain of asking for it. It is an honourable if not a wise feeling, and I say nothing against it. But, having nothing to solicit, why don't you at least cultivate the friendship of Lord Windermere? It would be an immense thing for you in a mere social point of view; for, let me tell you, there are hundreds of fellows, moving in good society in London, who would esteem it a very high honour indeed if they received an invitation from his lordship."

"That may be true enough, Attie; but I don't choose to show myself under false colours. I am neither more nor less than a journalist; not by way of amusement or occasional occupation, as is the pretence of some men who live in the Inns of Court and call themselves lawyers, but a downright slave of the pen; and I think I have heard it said that persons in a high position do not affect the society of journalists. It is that consideration chiefly that has hitherto deterred me from obtruding myself on the notice of Lord Windermere."

"Good lack, how punctilious we are!" said Attie Faunce. "I wish the old gentleman were here to argue the matter with you; for, my life on it, he would make you thoroughly ashamed of yourself before you were four minutes older. Look to himself for instance. Uncle Osborne is not a literary man; his former occupation as a solicitor gave him nothing more than a respectable place in society; and though I believe he is tolerably rich, there are thousands of men in the

city far wealthier than he is, who are held in no estimation. Yet, let me tell you, he is courted not only by persons of title, but by ministers, diplomatists, and the highest intellectual celebrities of the day. Not a door in the west end that would not joyfully open to him ; not a *coterie*, however fastidious and exclusive, to which he could not gain admission. It is his way, to keep aloof from society as much as possible, for the old boy, as you may have observed, is somewhat of an Epicurean, and likes to concentrate his comforts at home ; but he is an Amphitryon of the first class, and I doubt whether there is any man of political or literary eminence who has not been glad to avail himself of Uncle Osborne's hospitality—ay, and to boast of it afterwards as if it were a thing to be proud of. And why is this ? Just because he is a leading newspaper proprietor, thoroughly independent, utterly beyond corruption, uncommonly shrewd and far-sighted, and the wielder of a power that makes itself felt throughout the nation."

"But a proprietor is different from a writer."

"No doubt he is ; and you might add, that a publisher is different from an author. But, let me tell you, Sinclair, that you greatly underrate your own position, or rather, to speak more correctly, that you attach more importance to its consideration than it deserves. I have seen a good deal of authors and writers of every kind. As a class they are not popular ; but that does not arise from their vocation—it arises from their personal peculiarities. For example, one fellow who seems

very pleasant upon paper, is absolutely tongue-tied in society, and has the manners of a boor. Another is forward and flippant, always trying to say something smart or witty, and disgusts by positive impertinence. A third, being in his own opinion a genius, expects that every one shall worship him, and becomes sullen and sulky if he does not engross the whole attention of the company. Some again there are who consider it necessary, or at least becoming, to put on airs of eccentricity, and conduct themselves as fantastically as Malvolio in the garden, when he appeared cross-gartered and in yellow stockings. Such men, if they are neglected or scorned, have themselves entirely to blame. It is not their profession, but their personal defects or follies that stand in the way of their recognition. The truth is, that, at the present day, nobody cares to inquire how a man gains his livelihood. Exclusiveness is going out of fashion, and none know that better than the aristocracy, who must needs make themselves popular if they expect to retain their influence. Some of the older gentlemen, whose backs are regularly ossified, may find it difficult to unbend, but the case will be different with those who have to follow after them."

"You have said enough, Attie; and I don't know that even Mr Osborne could have treated the subject more luminously or better. I shall therefore make an exertion to overcome my shyness, and shall wait on Lord Windermere."

I lost no time in carrying this resolution into effect; and certainly, if anything further was required to make

me ashamed of my dilatory behaviour, the kindness with which I was received would have had that effect. Lord Windermere was a handsome man, with an exceedingly courteous manner, which set me at once at my ease. He was far too well bred to show any symptoms of condescension, which I have observed some high aristocrats to display when addressing those of a rank inferior to their own ; indeed, he was so evidently one of nature's nobles, that any assumption of the kind would have marred the grace and destroyed the charm of his demeanour.

Although I have the autobiographer's privilege of being egotistical, and must of necessity be so more frequently than I could wish, I have no desire to bore the reader by recounting conversations having exclusive reference to myself and to my fortunes. Indeed, I fear that, in that respect, I have trespassed too much upon his patience ; therefore I shall merely state that Lord Windermere, in a most cordial but delicate manner, expressed his desire to be of service to me in any way that lay within his power, and that I deemed it my duty frankly to relate my circumstances, position, and prospects, as already amply detailed in the foregoing chapters of my narrative. I ended by assuring his lordship that I had no favour to ask, that I had quite abandoned the idea of entering the public service, and that I really would feel grateful if, after this explanation, the subject should be dropped for ever.

"And so," said Lord Windermere, "you propose, Mr Sinclair, that I should eternally remain your debtor !

Do you know, my friend, that you place me thus in a very unenviable position ; and yet I cannot but acknowledge that your resolution seems both right and honourable. One remark, however, let me hazard. I observe that, in speaking of your past history, you expressed some regret that you had not adopted a profession. Surely it is not too late for you to retrieve that error. You are yet a young man ; and if you choose to qualify yourself for the bar, which seems to offer the best prospect of success, I can only say that whatever influence I can bring to bear on your behalf shall be most strenuously exerted. Think of this at any rate ; and in the mean time let me hope that we shall often see you here. We are rather quiet people—that is, in comparison with some of my friends, who ought to be especial favourites with the London tradesmen ; still we are not altogether secluded from society, and I think I can introduce you to some people whose acquaintance may be really valuable. But first of all, you must promise to dine here to-morrow. Lady Windermere, who has gone out for the present, would never forgive me if I allowed you to depart without that pledge. Nay, I will take no denial.”

I expressed my thanks and acceptance, and was about to depart, when Lord Windermere resumed.

“Unless you have any particular engagement, Mr Sinclair, perhaps you would remain for a few moments longer. I daresay you thought me somewhat vague in my offers of service—I am not about to renew them after what you have so distinctly said ; but the fact is—

for I like plain speaking—that had you wished me to use what influence I may have with the present Government in your behalf, I might have felt a difficulty in doing so. Your principles, I believe, are Conservative?”

“They are those, my Lord, which were held by the old Tory party.”

“Exactly ; I see you don't like the new name ; and, for my part, neither do I. Well, I cannot avoid the conclusion that some great political event is impending which will lead to the disunion of the Conservatives. There is no longer that confidence and cordiality between the leader and the main body of his followers, which is indispensable for the maintenance of a firm Government. The country gentlemen, to whose support the Premier owes his present high position, feel uneasy as to the policy which may hereafter be recommended. The younger men in the House of Commons are beginning to revolt against what they consider to be intolerable dictation. I know something of that ; for my eldest son, Ashford, has a seat in the House, and is leagued with a knot of young enthusiasts who are determined, at all hazards, to uphold the rights of labour. They say—and there would appear to be some truth in the averment—that recent legislation is favourable to capital only, that the interests of the working-classes are neglected ; and they maintain that it is the duty of the aristocracy to interpose on their behalf. Much of this may be fanciful ; still there can be no doubt that such opinions are becoming prevalent, and that they must ultimately cause a very serious rupture.

In the event of a party crisis such as I foresee, it is my desire to be perfectly unfettered; and therefore I am naturally unwilling to place myself under any obligation to the present Government, or to solicit a favour at their hands. So that your disinclination to enter the public service relieved me, though I must appear selfish in saying so, from some little embarrassment."

"I can assure your Lordship," said I, "that it would have been the last action of my life to have solicited from you any favour contrary to your inclination."

"Of that, Mr Sinclair, I am well aware, since you have resolutely declined to receive any kind of acknowledgment from me in return for a heavy debt. But we, who have the misfortune to be, in some measure, public men, do not always meet with persons so considerate, or, I should rather say, so entirely disinterested as you are. But I need not pursue this subject further. I introduced it merely for the purpose of making you aware of the exact position in which I stand in regard to the present Government. And now I need not detain you longer."

I dined next day at Lord Windermere's, according to promise, and met with a most cordial reception, not only from Lady Windermere, who could not conceal her emotion when referring to the adventure at the glacier, but also from Lord Ashford, a very fine young man, whose appearances in the House of Commons had already begun to attract attention. He had thrown himself into politics with a warmth and enthusiasm very unusual with young men of his station, who for

the most part revolt from the drudgery of the House, and consider that they discharge their duty with sufficient zeal if they attend and vote at important party divisions. Not so Ashford, who had really devoted himself to the study of social questions—not superficially, or in the spirit of slavish adherence to the expressed opinions of others, but with an earnest desire to arrive at the truth, and to take a part in remedying those evils and reconciling those anomalies which, like weeds in a fertile soil, are always springing up, with rank luxuriance, in an old community like our own. Naturally romantic, and with a strong dash of chivalry in his character, it was natural that he should sometimes rashly adopt a theory, and even push it to an extreme. In the eyes of the young and ardent, the suggestions of worldly wisdom and experience often appear to be the result of sophistry, callousness, or timidity. The bare discovery that there is a wrong which ought to be redressed, makes them restless until a remedy can be found; and in searching for that remedy they do not always consider that legislation has but a finite and limited power, and that the elevation of a people depends fully more on their own individual exertions, than on what can be devised for their good by the cumulative sagacity of statesmen. Such errors, however, are venial; or rather, springing as they do from a noble and generous impulse, they should be regarded as the immature fruit of a goodly tree, hereafter to be the pride of the orchard.

At the time of which I write, there was unquestion-

ably a strange ferment and agitation in the minds of those of the younger generation who bestowed any sort of attention upon public affairs. The leaders of the two great recognised parties in the State had alike shown themselves to be less guided in their policy by principle than by considerations of expediency; and although expediency is a thing not to be overlooked or treated with disdain, because it enters largely into the art and science of government, still, when opposed to principle, it has a vicious and repulsive aspect. But there are two kinds of expediency. A Government may find itself compelled to pass a measure which is not in its judgment a good one, because the mass of the population are resolved to have it so, and resistance to the popular will might lead to outrage and revolution. No doubt in such cases it may be wise and expedient to yield, for expediency then is resorted to for the safety of the fabric of the constitution. But no such motive as that actuated the leaders of parties. They were political rivals; and in order to retain power, or to wrest it from the other, they bade for popularity almost as openly as competitors in an auction-room. Converts they might possibly be to the new commercial doctrines, which at that time were freely discussed and excited much interest, especially among the trading community; but the curious thing was that they became converts not at once, but piecemeal; and that the measure of the conversion of each depended upon the progress of his opponent. As in Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, Martin and Jack, being dis-

pleased with the embroidery, tags, and frippery with which their brother Peter had persuaded them to decorate their coats, alternately stripped off the obnoxious ornaments by the handful, so did the two political leaders, in the pure spirit of emulation, despoil *their* coats which they had previously exhibited as being of the true constitutional pattern, pausing after every pluck to observe what next the emulous rival would surrender. Swift represents Jack as becoming at last so furious that he tore off the lace by main force, to the sore rending of the original garment. Between ancient Jacks and modern Jacks, between Jacks typical and Jacks real, there is probably little to choose; for it would seem to be the destiny of all the Jacks that they should be rash, pragmatical, and destructive. But in this instance, Martin, or Martin's representative, seemed inclined to go quite as far as Jack, to the disgust of many of his followers, who had no notion of being made consenting parties to such a degrading competition.

This abandonment of principle on the part of eminent statesmen, while it had upon some minds an exceedingly deleterious effect, by inculcating the notion that party predominance may be regarded as of more importance than the public weal, inspired others, among whom was Lord Ashford, with deep distrust, and led them to form the resolution of thenceforward pursuing an independent course of action; a resolution which, moreover, they did not scruple to avow. This, in the eyes of the Smoothlys, was an act of flagrant rebellion,

admitting of no palliation or excuse, and beyond the reach of forgiveness. Your thorough-paced underlings abhor nothing so much as the assertion of independence, especially when made by a young member of Parliament. It is an offensive reflection on their own servility, an outrage against the conventional decencies of red-tapism and departmental discipline. The shock of an earthquake could not alarm them more than the announcement that a young fellow, on whose vote they had reckoned with perfect confidence, has dared to express an opinion of his own.

“By heaven, sir!” they would exclaim, “things have come to a pretty pass when such a whippersnapper as that presumes to differ from his elders! If this sort of insubordination is to be allowed, our party will be broken up, the other side will come into office, and then where are we? ’Pon my soul, it’s insufferable! Why, he must be mad—stark, staring mad! I happen to know that only the other day he was spoken of as a man likely to be put forward at the first vacancy—there will be one very soon; for poor Ganderby got himself into an awful mess by those blunders about the timber duties, and he is to be shelved with a colonial appointment. This young idiot would have had a capital chance, for he speaks rather well, and we want to hook his father, who of late has been somewhat shy. But this escapade, of course, renders that out of the question. What an infatuated fool he must be! But he shall not get off without a dressing. If he ventures to open his mouth in the House, we’ll

set Curson at him—no better hand than Curson for throttling a contumacious puppy! And stay—did not the jackanapes publish a volume of poems lately? By Jove, he did! I'll take care that M'Fang gives him a regular trouncing in the *Review*."

So Messieurs Curson and M'Fang, the Trois Eschelles and Petit André of the Treasury, to whom the congenial duty of branding malefactors is intrusted, are let loose upon the delinquent! After which it is superfluous to say that there is very little chance indeed of the return of the Prodigal Son.

No matter what may be the amount of his ability, the extent of his rhetorical genius, or the measure of his dexterity in effecting combinations, no Minister can hope to become a permanent leader, unless he also possesses the rare and valuable art of securing the confidence of his party. Without that, his power, however great it may appear to be, rests upon a slippery foundation. Like those Continental despots who but yesterday exercised supreme authority, and to-day are fugitives and despised, he will ultimately find himself without any following beyond the few who are inseparably identified with his policy. With it, he may be defeated over and over again, be forced from office and power, be subjected to the bitterest attacks that hostility or malice can devise—and yet, by virtue of that loyalty and devotion which set falsehood at defiance, and which adversity cannot extinguish, he may achieve a triumph greater and more complete than if he never had sustained a check in the course of his political

career. And the way to estimate the amount of party confidence which each statesman really possesses, is, not to ask the opinion of old and jaded officials, but to gage the sentiments of the young, the enthusiastic, and the brave. The man with whom they declare themselves ready to stand or fall, of whose honour and integrity no doubt ever crossed their minds, who not only commands their admiration but engages their love—that man is indeed a leader and a prince, and beyond that unpurchased confidence fortune has no higher gift, no mightier treasure, to bestow.

CHAPTER VII.

RAILWAY MORALS.

MY duty as observer and chronicler of the progress of the railway movement led me often to Westminster, where the committee-rooms exhibited a most extraordinary spectacle. It has been doubted by many persons, whose practical experience was such as to give great weight to their opinion, whether committees of either House of Parliament were the best tribunals which could have been devised for adjudicating upon what were, in reality, gigantic public works, albeit promoted by private enterprise and capital. I confess, after mature deliberation on what I have seen, that I more than participate in such doubts, and that I have arrived at the conclusion that Parliament, in order to retain the confidence and command the respect of the nation, must sooner or later delegate no inconsiderable portion of its powers to be exercised by a judicial body, as remote from influence and as little liable to suspicion as are the judges of the land. We have arrived now—indeed, we arrived long since—at this discredit-

able position, that only a fractional part of the public business, which Ministers have declared to be urgent, can be carried through in the course of a protracted session. Some measures, specially recommended in the Speech from the Throne to the consideration of Parliament, are abandoned from sheer lack of time to pass them through the formal stages; whilst others, equally important, and affecting large interests, are hurried forward with precipitate and indecent haste, which precludes the possibility of objection, or of a fair and impartial discussion. In fact, more work is thrust before Parliament than it can, under any circumstances, overtake. Even if the whole body of members was composed of men of first-rate business talent, resolute for despatch, never wandering from the point immediately before them, and eschewing talking for mere talking's sake, they could not accomplish the feat of satisfactorily disposing of the whole enormous programme. But we know very well that, for one man possessed of such qualifications, there are at least three quidnuncs who are absolute obstacles to business; being either inveterate chatterers, whose sole object it is to have their speeches reported in the papers, or stolid monomaniacs, who advocate some monstrous impracticability, or cankered objectors-general, who consider it their duty to challenge every proposition. Night after night is the time of the great council of the nation abused and frittered away by those merciless and intolerable pests; and the consideration of public business is continually postponed to an hour,

long before the arrival of which honest men, who are not connected with Parliament, have sought the solace of their pillows.

In the days of the railway mania, so numerous were the applications to Parliament that the majority of the House of Commons were drafted out into committees to hear, yawn, and determine. Unless the prevalent idea that judicial talent is comparatively rare be altogether erroneous, it would seem difficult to defend an arrangement which left interests representing millions of capital and realised property to the tender mercies of gentlemen who were for the most part utterly ignorant of the rules of evidence, unused to be addressed by lawyers, apt to be confounded and puzzled by details, sometimes actuated by prejudice, and always liable to be swayed by external influences. No man, who had a personal cause of his own impending, would have selected such a tribunal; but it was deemed quite good enough for companies who were claiming a monopoly, and for proprietors who were defending their possessions. And as if to make the thing more glaringly absurd, the ordinary judicial safeguards were dispensed with. No oath was administered to witnesses, who, being thus relieved from the moral guilt and final consequences of perjury, did certainly oftentimes hazard the most astounding assertions. I shall not go the length of saying that false evidence was given as to what was strictly matter of fact; but as to matters of opinion, there was amazing discrepancy. Engineer testified against engineer

as to the merits and practicability of competing lines ; valuers reported thousands or hundreds, according as they were engaged for the landlords or for the companies ; fertile regions became sterile, or sterile regions fertile, as occasion suited or interest required. Vast mineral beds yet unopened, and the extent of which it was utterly impossible to compute, would be made available to the country if one line was granted ; whereas another, leading through a district already glowing with furnaces, could be of very little use, because, in the opinion of men of skill, the seams were well-nigh exhausted.

I had the pleasure one day of hearing my friend Davie Osett examined as a witness ; and certainly a richer scene it was hardly possible to conceive. Davie had gone through his examination as a surveyor of the Goatshead and Ditchington Junction in a highly creditable manner, for he was thoroughly master of his craft, and had only to speak to the gradients ; but he had been impressed as a witness by some company that had started a line on the Border, and was required to speak, from local knowledge, of the advantages which the scheme held forth. In answer to the friendly questions put by the counsel for the promoters, Davie testified valiantly ; but I could perceive that the opposing barrister, whose powers of badgering a witness were reputed to be extraordinary, intended, if possible, to break him down. It must be premised that, before these railway committee tribunals, learned gentlemen did not think it necessary to be very courteous in their demeanour or

fastidious in the style of their examinations, but assumed a licence which certainly would have been checked in a regular court of justice. This particular barrister was a beetle-browed, flat-nosed man, with something of the look of a bull-dog; evidently a dangerous customer, and one from whom mischief was to be expected.

This gentleman, after taking a long and deliberate survey of Davie through his glasses, rose up; and, giving to his forensic gown a peculiar jerk, which was meant as an intimation to the committee that he intended thoroughly to demolish the witness, began his cross-examination.

“I think you have told us, Mr Osett, that you are a surveyor?”

“That is just what I said,” replied Davie.

“Then, may I ask if you have been professionally consulted, or in any way engaged, in connection with this line, the advantages of which you have detailed with such wonderful precision?”

“Not I,” said Davie. “I have not been in Scotland since the line was projected.”

“That was not what I asked you, sir!” said the counsel, whose name was Churnley. “No prevarication, if you please! Answer me—yes or no—have you seen any plan or section of the line?”

“I have seen no sections, but I have seen a plan.”

“Aha! I thought we should get at the truth at last. And what sort of plan was it?”

“That’s easily answered,” said Davie, “for that’s it hanging on the wall.”

“And you mean to say you have seen no other?”

“Ye have said it, sir,” replied Davie, lapsing into the vernacular.

“Then, sir, will you inform the committee how it is that you are able to speak with such confidence as to the resources of the district?”

“Just because I was born there, have lived there a’ my days, and ken the country as weel as ye ken the streets of London.”

“You described yourself as the son of a Mr Osett of the Birkenshaws, if I recollect aright?”

Davie assented.

“Now, sir, I ask you, is your father proprietor of that place?”

“Dear me! No, sir; he’s only the tenant, as his father was before him.”

“Then how came you, sir, to be so audacious as to attempt to impose upon this honourable committee by giving your father, whom you now admit to be a mere tenant, a territorial designation?”

“It’s easy to see you never crossed the Border,” replied Davie. “Ilka tenant amang us gets the name of his stading.”

“Do you absolutely, sir, mean to persist in such a statement, in order to cover your imposture?”

“Troth, if I’m an impostor, there’s another I am speaking to,” said Davie.

“Is that insolence, sir?” blustered the lawyer. “I call upon the chairman of the committee for protection.”

“O man, can ye no protect yoursel’? Wha’s going to meddle wi’ ye? But I’ll tell you what I mean, and make gude my words. Are na ye Mr Churnley of Lincoln’s Inn?”

“Well, sir, what of that?”

“Just this—that Lincoln’s Inn nae mair belongs to you—that is, in the way of absolute property—than the Birkenshaws does to my father. Sac ye see, Mr Churnley, you should think twice afore ye begin to misca’ folk.”

This sally provoked a roar of laughter from the audience, with whom Mr Churnley was no favourite, albeit he was patronised by some solicitors on account of his pre-eminence in browbeating.

“I think,” said the chairman of the committee, a mild-looking gentleman, who was evidently amused by the encounter—“I think that the learned counsel need not press that point any farther. Indeed, I happen to know that what the witness has said regarding the prevalent custom on the Scottish Border is correct.”

“Very well, sir!” said Mr Churnley, with a suppressed snort. “If the members of committee are satisfied—which I am not—that this young man intended to make no misrepresentation, I shall proceed to more important matters. Now, sir, attend to me if you please. You have said that this line of railway passes for the greater portion of its length through a

pastoral country. Now, I ask you what may be your estimate of the number of sheep annually reared in the district?"

"I could not answer that question with anything like precision."

"I don't expect you to inform me as to the exact number," said Churnley; "I only ask for an approximation. Speaking so confidently as you have done of the large traffic to be derived from that source, you must of course have formed an estimate."

"Indeed, sir, I have formed naething of the kind," said Davie. "I am a surveyor by trade, and not a traffic-taker."

"Then, sir, will you state for the satisfaction of the committee, the grounds upon which you rest so very confident an opinion?"

"I'll do that, sir," replied Davie, with the best goodwill in the world. "Ye see, sirs," said he, addressing himself to the committee, "that if it were a question whether London would afford sufficient traffic to maintain a line, it would be a clean waste of time to inquire how many souls dwelt within the city. Ae glance at the streets wad satisfy ony reasonable man without condescending on particulars. Now, if you were in that district about which I was speaking, in the spring-time, you could hardly hear yourselves speak for the crying of the ewes and the bleating of the lambs, that are as thick on the hill-sides amaist as are the gowans. Nae man can count them. Ye might as weel try to count the bees that are humming by, or the butterflies

that are flaunting past, or the trouts in the water, or the crows that are clavering in the wood. And what ye see for twenty lang miles on either side of the road is but a sma' portion of the stock that is bred up in the glens and high farms. This gentleman is very good at speering, but I'se wager he canna tell me how many cab-horses there are in London, ony mair than he can specify how many hairs there are in his wig!"

"Then, sir, you admit you have been speaking at random?" said Mr Churnley.

"I admit naething of the kind. I never made even a rough guess at the numbers, which indeed would be a kittle job; for what wi' hoggs and gimmers——"

"Aha, my friend! have I caught you tripping? Confine yourself to the question of sheep, and not of other animals."

"Weel—that's just what I'm doing."

"Not at all, sir! Take care what you are about. You were beginning to estimate the number of pigs in the district."

"Troth, sir, ye maun be dull o' hearing. Feint a word have I said about pigs this day."

"Will you have the audacity to deny, sir, that you particularly mentioned hoggs?"

"Lord save us!" cried Davie, "here's a man that disna ken a hogg frae a sow!"

This caused another shout of laughter, which was not allayed by a malicious suggestion made by the counsel for the promoters of the bill, who expressed his regret that before handling so technical a subject,

his learned brother had not taken the pains to consult the well-known tractate of the Ettrick Shepherd, *Hogg upon Sheep*. It cost the chairman of the committee, who evidently was conversant with agricultural affairs, no little pains to persuade the discomfited and fuming Churnley that, in Scotland, a sheep of a year old was technically termed a hogg. That legal luminary seemed inclined to maintain an argument upon the interpretation given in Johnson's Dictionary, and rather imprudently indulged in some derogatory remarks on the barbarous customs and jargon of the north, whereupon the junior counsel on the opposite side, a fiery young advocate from the Scottish bar, started to his feet, and made a stinging rejoinder, noways complimentary to the called of Lincoln's Inn.

This fracas being over, Mr Churnley, who now appeared to suspect that he had caught a Tartar in the person of the redoubted Davie, continued his examination more cautiously and less offensively than before. He now shifted to another topic.

"On referring to my notes, Mr Osett," he said, "I find you state that you expect a considerable traffic in wood and timber. That, I think, was the purport of your evidence in chief?"

"That is what I said, undoubtedly."

"Sheep you consider to be one of the staples of the district?"

"That I stand by."

"And wood also is a commodity which, in your opinion, will be conveyed along the line!"

“That also is my opinion.”

“Then, Mr Osett, will you inform the committee whether, in that district, there is any tract of planted land which can with propriety be called a forest?”

“As to propriety I cannot weel say; but the whole district is known, and has been known for hundreds of years, by the name of The Forest.”

“Then am I to understand you to say that there is much valuable timber growing in the neighbourhood?”

“That ye never heard me say. There might be natural wood enough, if the sheep didna eat it down; but beyond auld thorn-trees, and a when elms, and birks, and rowans, that are gey and plenty in the cleughs, and some young larch plantations, I can hardly say that you will find muckle standing timber.”

“Enough to make sleepers for the railway—eh, Mr Osett?”

“Indeed no, sir. There’s barely enough to shelter the gowks and cushie-doods.”

“And I presume there is not much extent of the other kinds of wood you have specified. An American, no doubt, would consider that the country was very well clearéd?”

“I’m thinking that would be his view,” replied Davie.

“Then, sir, answer me distinctly—how do you reconcile those admissions with the statement that you expect a traffic in timber?” And Mr Churnley rested his hands on his hips, and glared on his victim.

“How do I reconcile it?” said Davie, “Why, of course, on the principles of political economy.”

“Oho! I have brought you to that, have I? Well, Mr Scot, expound your theory. I am curious to learn how you will contrive to conjure a trade out of nothing.”

“It’s not to be supposed,” said Davie, “that a gentleman like you can be ignorant of the leading doctrine propounded by Adam Smith, and supported by other able writers, of demand and supply.”

“Come, come, Mr Osett! you are following the disreputable practice of your countrymen, who, whenever they find it inconvenient to answer a plain question, skulk into a thicket of metaphysics. You admit that there is no timber, or next to none, in the district—how then can you expect a traffic in that commodity?”

“Just because, as we grow no timber ourselves, we must get it from elsewhere. Can ye no see that a railway must thrive by the wants as weel as the produce of a district? Is there ony cotton grown in Manchester? and yet what keeps that wealthy city afloat, and gives good dividends to the railway company, but the transmission of American bales? In the Forest, though it may be a contradiction of terms, we want timber, and must have it for many purposes, building and agricultural, and this railway will bring it to our doors far cheaper than by ony other conveyance. If you want to examine me further, Mr Churnley, since that’s your name, ye may go on as long as

ye like, but I warn you it's no in your power, clever as ye may be, to catch me in ony contradiction."

The ringing of the bell, as an intimation that the Speaker had gone to prayers, broke up the sitting of the committee; and on the following day Mr Churnley declined to proceed further with the examination of the acute surveyor.

Such fencing-matches as that which I have just described were very common; but beyond relieving the monotony of details as to gradients and sections, and affording some amusement to the audience, they were of little use. The fact is, that members of committees, being for the most part strangers to the districts through which it was proposed to carry the lines, were very much influenced by the opinions, of course cautiously expressed, of other members of Parliament who were intimately connected with the localities. As it frequently was the case that the latter had a direct pecuniary interest in the success of those enterprises, they were not scrupulous as to the means they employed for advancing them; and a good deal of delicate negotiation and private earwiggling was practised, which hardly would have stood the test of a rigid investigation before a court of honour.

In the course of those visits to Westminster I occasionally fell in with Mr Ewins, who had scraped acquaintance with some Radical M.P.'s, whose exquisite good taste led them to prefer American institutions to our own. My Yankee friend, however, gave

me to understand that he had no very great admiration for those gentlemen.

“ They ain’t no good,” he said. “ They ain’t sound on the goose. They’re a low set, and as greedy as snapping-turtles in a bayou. It’s a mean thing for a man to run down his own country, as I heerd those critters do ; and that out of sheer envy, because folks won’t allow that they are as big bugs as the aristocracy. And ain’t they darned hypocrites ! I could laugh fit to burst to see them turning up the whites of their eyes at basket meetings, and hollering about the Nigger question, when every one of them has made his pile by caving up white gals in their factories like birds in a pigeon-roost, and, if they don’t work double tides, treating them to a touch of the billy-roller. We manage such matters very differently in the States, I can tell you. You should see the young ladies at Lowell works, each of them as straight as a loon’s leg, and as smiling as a basket of chips, sweet as sugar apples, and winking at you like a star in the firmament. I swamp it, if they don’t cap all ! But them Manchester chaps have no bowels for their own flesh and blood. They go for nothing but dimes ; and if you hint to them that their poor helps are worse off than the niggers, who never want hog and hominy, don’t they go thrashing round like short-tailed bulls in fly-time ? ”

But Mr Ewins had other acquaintances ; for I more than once observed him in company with Speedwell

the Jew, engaged, as it appeared to me, in very earnest colloquy. Now, as my opinion of the flashy Hebrew was very low indeed, and as I meant, if possible, to keep an eye on his motions, believing that he was intimately bound up with the fate of the unfortunate Littlewoo, of whom I had seen nothing for a long time, I resolved to ascertain whether my Yankee friend could throw any light upon his avocations and pursuits. I knew, of course, that Ewins was not usually communicative; still he had a sort of liking for me, probably because I was amused with his talk, and was a patient listener, and I did not despair of extracting from him some kind of information.

Accordingly, one evening I had the descendant of the Maormors at my rooms, supplied him copiously with fluids and cigars, allowed him the monopoly of the sofa, and led the conversation to the all-engrossing topic of railway shares.

“It’s a pity, Squire Sinclair,” said Ewins, knocking the ash from his third cigar—“it’s a pity you won’t take a hand in the grand game that is going on. I swear it’s like hitting fortune a slap on the face; and fortune does not come every day knocking at the door, I can tell you. I happen to know a thing or two that would suit you—sure cards as any in the pack—and if you only say the word and go in for it, I’ll insure you an almighty heap of dollars.”

“The fact is, Mr Ewins, that I am not of a speculative turn, and therefore am not fitted to enter into such

transactions. I fear that success at the beginning would turn my head, and prompt me to increase my stake rashly, without calculating the chances. Liquor tells more powerfully upon a man who is unaccustomed to it than on a habitual toper ; and I suspect the same remark applies to all kinds of speculation."

"But, Squire, what if you had a sure card offered you?" said Ewins—"a card you could play down with perfect certainty of winning? I guess that's a pretty considerable advantage."

"Are there such cards?" said I. "I was under the impression that certainty, at least, was excluded from any such dealings."

"That's all you know!" replied Ewins. "Now, Squire Sinclair, sir, I feel a push to tell you something that I wouldn't tell to any one else in this darned city. I've a kinder respect for you, sir, because you've kept your head above water when other men would have gone down among the snags, and I call that good swimming, and no mistake. Besides, there ain't a man here that I can talk to freely except yourself. I've got to deal, I notion, with a sort of sinners as hard as hiccory-nuts. It's skin hunter or skin bear with them ; and I don't feel quite as sure of my feet as if they were planted on the Broadway. I'll tell you what, Squire—we're up to a dodge or two in the States, and ain't mighty particular ; but I've tumbled in with men here that make me feel vartuous in comparison."

As I did not feel myself called on to insinuate that

Mr Ewins might, through an excess of modesty, be doing injustice to himself, I kept silence, and the American proceeded.

“ Yes, Squire ; it’s been my way hitherto to go on my own hook, and to hitch horses with nobody. But, somehow or other, in a strange place one gets out of his reckoning ; so I’ve been among the curb-stone brokers, and it’s my belief that if the devil himself were in the market, they’d somehow manage to circumvent him. You see, Squire, I wanted to do a bit of cornering, and that’s a kind of transaction that a man can’t take on hand himself—it requires a squad to do it. So, the other day, I went down to the city to cast about for a likely chap with the grit in him, to put on the rubber. I dad ! didn’t I fall in with a thoroughbred honey-fogler, a real plug-ugly as ever gave a turn to the screws ! I ain’t scrumptious, Squire ; but, darn me if I wasn’t well-nigh skeared to go into the water with such a right ravenous alligator ! ”

“ But surely, Mr Ewins, if you conceived so bad an opinion of the man, you did not prosecute his acquaintance ? ”

“ It’s a rum world ! ” replied the Ewins, sententiously. “ It’s like the grog-tub the traders use for making Injun liquor ! There may be in it about a bucketful of right good Monongahela whisky, such as a Christian might take for a leg-stretcher, but there’s four times that quantity of rain-water, stiffened up with dog-leg tobacco, red pepper, and hot root ; and when the stuff’s mixed you can’t separate it nohow. I guess

it's no use being particular when you want to make a deal. And it's my notion that some of them sanctified chaps that wear white chokers, and have prayer meetings before going to business, are just as likely to land you in a hole as any regular Sucker or Roper that ever played the Patent Safe Game Operation. But, for all that, I allow that this Jewish chap is as black a scalawag as ever whipped the devil round a stump !”

“ So then,” said I, “ your friend is of the Hebrew persuasion ? ”

“ I guess you're right. Speedwell's his name ; and an owdacious customer he is.”

“ And you have had dealings with this very unscrupulous person ? ”

“ Wall—I own to one or two, and they didn't turn out bad, neither ; though I had to keep my eye on the skunk, otherwise he'd have over-jewed me. But I ain't a baby in business, 'specially when I'm in team with a vicious sinner like that.”

“ Well ; but, Mr Ewins, you were about to tell me something relative to a proposed speculation—at least so I understood. Was that in any way connected with this man Speedwell ? ”

“ Hark ye, Squire ! ” said Ewins, lowering his voice. “ There's a lot o' things it don't do to be hollering about ; and this is one of them. I tell it you as a dead secret, and I ain't jest sartain I would have mentioned it at all if I had any way made up my mind to go through with it. I am not particular, I allow. I began life as a poor man ; and I had to bushwhack my

way through a pretty stiff cane-brake before I came to a clearing. The worst of that kind of bringing up is, that a man loses the knack of looking straight before him. He gets a kinder squint in his mind, and don't very well see the difference between what's right and what's wrong, or how far he may stretch out handsomely without walking into a regular quagmire. I don't want to do anything that's downright wicked; and if you think this dodge is one that no honest man should tie to, I'll drop the ticket and be done with it."

I assured Mr Ewins of my entire readiness to give a candid opinion after being made acquainted with the nature and merits of the scheme.

"I daresay you've heard," said Mr Ewins, "that the British Government is going to do something by way of stopping this run of speculation. I guess it would be as sensible to try to put a dam across the Mississippi. Wall; there's to be a select board, and all new railway projects are to be referred to it; and according as the board reports, the lines will be allowed to go on, or be sent to eternal smash."

"I have heard a rumour to that effect; and have reason to believe that something of the kind will be attempted."

"Now, Squire, don't you see that the members of that board will have a pesky hold of the share-market? They have only to make up their minds as to which line shall go ahead, and then step down to their brokers. My! what would I not give for such a chance! I guess

I'd make prices dance like the barometer mercury in a tornado !”

“ You seem to forget, Mr Ewins, that such a duty will be imposed only on men of the highest character and probity, who would scorn to betray their trust, or do anything that might be deemed dishonourable.”

“ Wall ; I allow that may be true,” replied Ewins. “ The chaps of the upper crust here do stand stiff on their honour, that's a fact. But it's an almighty temptation ! We could nohow venture on such an experiment in the States.”

“ I can assure you, Mr Ewins,” said I, “ that you are utterly mistaken if you suppose that there is the slightest chance of procuring a hint as to the resolutions of the board, before these are announced to the public. That, I think, is the mark at which you aim.”

Ewins gave vent to a low, dry, chuckling, and somewhat sinister laugh.

“ Don't wake up your dander, Squire, if I hint that you ain't quite as 'cute as a beaver. Look ye here, now. When a London cracksman wants to know the whereabouts of the plate-chest in a gentleman's house, and what kind of shutters there are to the windows, he doesn't ring the bell and ask the master for information. He slips quietly down the airey-stair, makes love to the house-maid, and soft-sawders the critter so that she can deny him nothing. In that way he worms out of her all that he wants, as you'd pick a grub out of a sugar-tree. Now, in all public offices there are a lot of chaps loafing about, pretending to be mending pens,

and bringing in letters, and looking for books, and what not; but all the while they keep their ears cocked like a rifle, and it's curious if they don't get an inkling of what the bigwigs are after. There are more uses for a key-hole than one, I can tell you; and a clever fellow has found out a secret before now, by taking a good squint at the blotting-paper."

"I perceive your meaning now, Mr Ewins. You think that the subordinates may be bribed."

"I won't say that that same is beyond the horizon of possibility," replied Mr Ewins. "Few things there are that one can't buy for hard cash, specially from lads who find it difficult enough to keep decent clothes on their backs, and fill their bellies. Money is an awful temptation to a young man in a place like this, where there is no end of theatres, and gardens, and cider-cellar, and casinos filled with bouncing young sluts, all sweet sap, and as pert as rice-buntings in May. Many a chap can no more steer clear of them, than a moth can keep away from a candle."

"And I tell you, most confidently, from what I know of men in such situations, that if you were to offer them money to divulge a secret, they would dash it in your face with scorn."

"I ain't going to try the experiment, Squire, so you needn't fly off the handle. Mind you, I am only putting a case in which I have no consarn; and it's time enough for you to look rumbustious when I ask you to put a finger in the pie."

I deemed it the correct thing to make apology for my warmth.

“Oh, darn apologies!” said the Yankee. “They’re as useless as ricepaper bank-notes. I respect you, Squire Sinclair, I do, because you stick up for your countrymen; and I believe you are partly right, though it’s a grand tree on which there is no rotten fruit. But it’s not a question of bribing. It would seem that this gallows-bird Speedwell has got the heads of one or two young fellows connected with the public offices under his arm. They’ve been borrowing money from him, and he holds their bills; and from what I could gather—for he’s clean too wide-awake to speak out—he can do with them exactly what he pleases. One of these chaps is in the Board of Trade, where this investigation is likely to take place; and as he is a weak goney, Speedwell thinks he can make him scout after everything that is going on.”

I saw at once how the land lay. Poor wretched Littlewoo was now fairly in the fangs of this detestable Jewish miscreant! Already beggared in purse, he was to be stripped of the last rag of character, compelled to become a criminal, and perhaps doomed to undergo a felon’s shame and punishment. And this was to be the fate of the innocent lad I had known in Edinburgh—the darling of his fond old mother! God forgive those, thought I, who sent out so silly a sheep into the wilderness, where the wolf was certain to devour him!

“And what think you, Squire, of this neat little project of Speedwell’s?” said Mr Ewins. “It ain’t ill devised, I reckon, though it looks rayther ugly. When I hinted to him that the commissioners might take the liberty of locking their desks, he sniggered, and said something about double keys, which don’t mend the matter nohow, in my apprehension.”

“My opinion, Mr Ewins, can be very shortly expressed. A more nefarious proposal was never made by one man to another; and I am only surprised that you did not knock the scoundrel down!”

“Why, Squire; you see it was not altogether a proposal, but jest a kind of feeler like. Speedwell ain’t the man to commit himself outright, though he did show a foot as cloven as a moose’s. As to knockin’ down, that’s not my way. It’s trying to the temper, and bad for the knuckles; and I somehow think that it’s better to hear a chap out and say nothing, than to flare up as savage as a meat axe. I’ve contrived, don’t you see, to make him show me his hand, which I calculate he wouldn’t have done had I begun to holler like a bull-bat.”

“Well, Mr Ewins; it is a happy thing to be able to control your temper. I presume, after this, you will give Mr Speedwell a wide berth?”

“Quite the other way,” said the Yankee; “I’ll stick to him close, and ride him savagely whenever I can. He does understand the market right well, that’s a fact; and now that he has given me a kind of hank over him, I’m not soft enough to let him go. I guess

he'd be but too glad if I allowed him to slope. I've a kinder notion he was like to bite his tongue off when he thought over our talk ; but I led him on the ice so cleverly, that he did not know where he was till he heerd it crack under him. I've got my lasso over that mustang, and it's a pity if I don't make him snort before I slip the leather !”

So saying, the virtuous speculator finished his tumbler, and took his leave.

I own that I was less astonished at the villany which the American's narrative disclosed, than concerned for the fate of that unhappy Littlewoo. It was quite evident that he had not found courage to write to Mr Shearaway with a full confession of his folly, as I suggested, and as he had promised to do. He was still in the hands of the Jew, probably more deeply implicated than before ; and, knowing as I did the extreme weakness of his character, I saw how easily he might be led, under the threat of ruin and exposure, to become an active accomplice of the villain by whom he was entangled. The danger appeared to me so imminent that I determined at once to sit down, and explain to Mr Shearaway what I knew of Littlewoo's embarrassments, making no allusion, of course, to anything beyond the pecuniary difficulty.

I was the more moved to this step, because my conscience smote me for having so long neglected the friends of my youth. I cannot reproach myself with any real lack of warmth of feelings, and can truly say that the lapse of years makes no change in my affec-

tion towards those from whom I have long been separated ; but I never was, and I fear I never shall be, a regular or diligent correspondent. I suspect that is the way with most men who write much professionally. Correspondence often bores them, or interferes with more serious labour ; and being in the habit of addressing themselves to the public, they reserve little for private confidants. At times, however, I have felt an irrepressible yearning to take up the pen, and tell some early friend, perhaps in New Zealand or India, of my progress in life, my hopes, joys, cares, and sorrows, with all the unrestricted freedom of former intercourse. That is, in some measure, a renewal of the old pledge of friendship and of love ; a token that the silver cord is yet unloosed, and the golden bowl unbroken.

It was with such a feeling as that, that I began to write to Mr Shearaway ; for after having said all that was needful regarding the main subject of my letter, I gave my old friend and master a full account—I suspect, at unmerciful length—of what I had seen and done, and of my present prospects. I certainly had no expectation of receiving a reply in a corresponding strain ; for a Writer to the Signet in large practice has daily to indite so many epistles for the modest remuneration of three-and-fourpence and six-and-eightpence each, that he may well stand excused if he declines to imitate the example of Horace Walpole, and waives the chance of posthumous fame accruing from the smartness of his letters. However, I was wrong. Mr Shearaway, who, as I have stated throughout, was

a first-rate fellow—as kind a soul indeed as ever graced an honourable profession—seemed for once to have pitched aside his papers, and covered more than four sides of creamlaid quarto with the well-known characters which, many a time, I had transcribed into the letter-book. It is strange how old associations continue to affect us. The time had been when a letter addressed by Mr Shearaway to myself would have been opened with some awe and solicitude; and when I found upon my table a letter with the well-remembered superscription, something of the same feeling came over me, notwithstanding the change in our relationship. But as Mr Shearaway's communication had an important effect upon my fortunes, I must take the liberty of postponing it for the initiative of another chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERIOUS ADVERTISEMENT.

“MY DEAR LAD”—thus wrote Mr Shearaway—“I was truly glad to receive tidings of you, and more especially from your own hand. For though you have been long away from us, you are by no means forgotten, at least by me; and I have often caught myself wondering, when I ought to have been doing something else (possibly attending to a sermon), what on earth had become of Norman Sinclair, the steadiest lad I ever had in hand, but also the queerest in so far as regarded his notions for the future. For a time I heard something about you from your old guardian, Ned Mather; but he became tired of Edinburgh, where his acquaintances were gradually dying out, and about three years ago settled down in some remote part of Galloway, where good fishing is to be had, since when he has given no token of existence. I always thought that you would make a spoon or spoil a horn (which, by the way, is but a stupid proverb, because if you don't make a spoon, the horn of course must be spoiled);

but you know very well what I mean ; and I really am delighted to hear that you have got on so well, and prophesy even better things for the time to come.

“With regard to that poor demented creature, Jamie Littlewoo, it will be my duty to tell his father what you have communicated, and to concert measures for saving the idiot from absolute ruin. I am the more bound to do this, because it was partly through my advice that he was sent to London, for giving which I am now like to eat my fingers from vexation. But I did it all for the best. We could make nothing of him here. He could neither settle down in the office, nor study for the bar, but took up with idle officers and dissipated ne'erdoweels, of whom it can hardly be said that they were *fruges consumere nati*, seeing that, for the most part, they subsisted entirely upon drink. What could we do with a lad who would neither read nor work, and never came home to his bed until three o'clock in the morning ? I thought the best thing was to send him away from such graceless company, and to get him a situation where, at all events, he would be compelled to attend for certain hours ; but it would seem from your account that he has louped from the frying-pan into the fire, and got into the hands of the Jews, for whose conversion I would sincerely pray, and even cheerfully subscribe, if I thought that on becoming Christians they would cease to be discounters of bills. Mr Littlewoo must just make up his mind to advance whatever is necessary to clear his gowk of a son. His case is a hard

one, for I don't think he has saved much, having an expensive family. What with dinners and balls and pic-nics (in spite of which none of the Misses have got married), they must have muddled away an awful deal of money. I know I should not like to have to pay the haberdasher's account for the last twelvemonth.

“It will not be necessary that I should write to James Littlewoo immediately, as I expect to be in London in the course of a fortnight, when I shall ascertain the amount of his liabilities, and consider how they may be discharged. I should not have thought of coming to London at this season of the year; but, like every one else, I have got mixed up in railway matters, and have to look after the interests of some clients in a bill which is now depending in Parliament. This railway mania is the most extraordinary movement that I can recollect. It has taken possession of well-nigh everybody in Edinburgh. Advocates, writers, doctors, citizens, subscribe for hundreds of shares in every new line that is projected, and these come out often at the rate of seven in the day. Nobody thinks it worth while to consider where the money for making all these expensive works is to be found. It is enough if they can scrape together sufficient cash to pay the first deposit; for then they get scrip in exchange for their certificates, and, as the market presently stands, all kinds of scrip are at a premium. But the end cannot help being disastrous. I am greatly grieved by the infatuation of some personal friends of my own, who have gone in dreadfully

deep ; but wilful men will have their way, and they would not listen to my preaching though I had the gift of Moses and the prophets. Glasgow is fully worse than Edinburgh. The chappies are as greedy as gleds, but there will be long faces among them when the day of reckoning arrives.

“ By the way, did you receive a letter which I addressed to you rather more than a year ago, at Vienna, where I understood you were residing? I rather suppose not, because, as it related to a matter of business, you would naturally have replied. It contained an advertisement which I cut from the *Times* newspaper, thinking that it might refer to you, and I kept a copy of it which I now enclose. The advertisement was repeated several times, and then withdrawn. I would have written at once to the London solicitors whose names are given, and who are men of high respectability ; but, to say the truth, I was not sure as to your father’s rank in the army, and the number of his regiment. My excellent old friend, Dr Buchanan, your uncle, never spoke much about him ; and I was apprehensive of committing a mistake, as once occurred when I lodged a claim for a client, in answer to an advertisement for the heirs of the deceased Captain Colin Campbell. Not that your name is quite as common as the other, at least out of Caithness, but I could not depone to the identity. I also sent a copy of the enclosed to Mather ; but got no answer, Ned being notoriously a wretched hand at the pen. It is, however, possible that he may have applied on your behalf

(that is, supposing you are the party indicated); but I would not have you take that for granted, so you had best look after the matter yourself."

The enclosure was to the following effect:—

"If the heirs of the late Henry Sinclair, Lieutenant in the ——— regiment of the line, whose name appears in the return of the killed at the battle of the Pyrenees, will apply to Messrs Poins and Peto, solicitors, Westminster, they will hear of something to their advantage."

"Poins and Peto!" said I to myself, "I thought that association had been dissolved in the days of the mad Prince! There can be no doubt that I am the party indicated by the advertisement, but what can it possibly refer to? Most likely some small arrear of regimental pay, which my poor mother had overlooked in her distress; at least I can think of nothing else. But here comes Attie Fancee. Did you ever get a letter, Attie, stating that if you made application to so-and-so, you would hear of something to your advantage?"

"Scores of them," replied Attie. "But as they invariably contained a preliminary condition that I should forward a sovereign as the price of the information to be given, I was content to remain in comparative poverty rather than part with my twenty shillings. Once, indeed, I carried on, by way of fun, an animated correspondence with Joseph Ady, who had sent me a letter of the kind; my object being to secure, if pos-

sible, a personal interview with a gentleman who had achieved a notoriety unparalleled since the days of Dando the oyster-eater. I assure you I put forth my full powers of persuasion, and was well nigh successful, for Joseph at last gave me a rendezvous; but alas for the vanity of human hopes! when I had penetrated the regions of far Whitechapel, and reached the Adyan domicile, the door was opened by a truculent-looking Hebrew, with fiery hair, and something like a bed-post tucked under his arm—a very hideous Cerberus, I assure you; and he denying that Joseph was at home, I was fain to sneak off, lest Barabbas might take it into his volcanic head to administer a touch of his bludgeon. I learned from the papers next day that I had only been an hour too late, Joseph having been taken into custody that morning, on some charge of levying money under false pretences.”

“Did you ever hear of any result from such advertisements?”

“I draw a distinction between letters and advertisements. A letter costs the sender nothing; but advertising is expensive, and therefore not likely to be resorted to without some kind of object. But why do you ask?”

“Because I have just received, from a correspondent in Scotland, a copy of an advertisement which appeared in the *Times* more than a year ago, when I was abroad, and which cannot apply to any other person than myself.”

Attie read it over with attention.

“You may depend upon it this is worth inquiring into, Sinclair,” he said; “Poins and Peto stand high in the profession, and reckon among their clients some of the first gentlemen in the land. You may consider yourself fortunate in having to deal with them. But tell me; was the Lieutenant Sinclair, mentioned in this advertisement, your father?”

“He was.”

“And are you his eldest son?”

“I am an only child.”

“Do you know of any relations who may have died without heirs; or are you aware if your father’s name was inserted in any deed of entail? Such things are by no means uncommon.”

“I have no expectations of the kind, Attie; and I do not think it at all likely that there is any such fortune in store for me. I lost both my parents so early that I know little of my family history; but I resided, when a boy, with my sole maternal uncle, and he gave me to understand that I had no near relations.”

“Well; we need not speculate upon that, which doubtless will be made clear by Poins and Peto’s explanation. I say though, Sinclair—will it not be best for you to lose no time in seeing them? Depend upon it, you will not be able to apply yourself seriously to anything until you know the full meaning of this advertisement. It is extraordinary what an effect a mysterious communication has upon the mind! It sets it fermenting like one of Meux’s porter-vats, and

stimulates the imagination to the uttermost. Ah, there is nothing like mystery! More than half the romance of society departed with the mask and domino; for a modern unsigned *billet-doux* is but one degree more interesting than a washing-bill, and the orthography usually employed in both kinds of documents is the same."

Faunce was right. I can conceive the fisherman in the Oriental story poring for hours over the mysterious vase which his nets had recovered from the sea, gazing with wonder on the strange characters impressed on the cabalistic seal, speculating on what the contents possibly could be—beginning perhaps with simple nard, and then mounting, through gradations of value, until diamonds, rubies, pearls, emeralds, and opals flashed upon his imagination as the kernels of that rugged rind. At length he opened it, and lo, it appeared to be no more than a bottle of smoke! So with the wife of Bluebeard. What could be more natural than that poor Fatima should long for a glimpse of the interior of the forbidden chamber? Surly woman-haters (if such monsters there really be) are fond of quoting that instance of female curiosity; but, as I read the story, Fatima was less actuated by curiosity than impelled by the wild force of an over-excited imagination. Curiosity is a mean and furtive propensity—imagination is a godlike attribute. It is miserable weakness to yield to the one; the other compels you to do its bidding.

Accordingly, I repaired to the chambers of the solici-

tors ; and, after waiting for a short time, was ushered into the apartment of Mr Pains, the senior partner of the firm ; a quiet, composed, gentlemanly man, who, without rising from his seat, motioned me to a chair, and then asked what my business might be.

“ I wait upon you, sir,” said I, “ in consequence of an advertisement which I understand was issued by your firm rather more than a year ago.”

“ What advertisement do you allude to ?” said Mr Pains. “ Our business being rather a large one, I must beg you to be more specific.”

“ I believe this is a copy of it, sir,” I replied, placing the document in his hand.

Mr Pains glanced at the paper, and, I think, slightly shrugged his shoulders. He then favoured me with a long and attentive look.

“ Are you, sir, an heir or relative of the Lieutenant Sinclair here mentioned, or do you simply come in behalf of a claimant ?”

“ My name, Mr Pains, is Sinclair—Norman Sinclair. Lieutenant Henry Sinclair was my father.”

“ Indeed ?” said Mr Pains, still continuing his scrutiny. “ Pardon me for asking if you are prepared to make good that assertion by undoubted evidence ?”

“ Unquestionably I am ;—that is,” said I, correcting myself, “ the evidence is in Scotland, the country of my birth, whence it can readily be obtained.”

Mr Pains paused for a moment, and then said—

“ This advertisement, Mr Sinclair, is of a somewhat

remote date. May I inquire why you did not make earlier application?"

"Because, sir, I never heard of it till this morning, when the copy which you now hold in your hand was forwarded to me from Scotland. I have been for several years on the Continent, and I have reason to think that a letter, informing me of the announcement when it first appeared, miscarried."

"That was unlucky," observed Mr Poins.

Somewhat piqued by the dryness of the man, I said—

"The advertisement, sir, is to the effect that the heirs of Lieutenant Sinclair, on applying to your firm, will hear of something to their advantage. I have told you that I am his heir—I now request that you will favour me with the promised information."

"Nay, nay! We must not go on too rapidly. The first condition, you observe, sir, is that you shall furnish proper proof that you are the heir. Without that, I cannot proceed upon your assertion."

"Then, sir, you doubt my word? That leaves me no other alternative than to cut short an interview which, remember, I did not solicit."

"Stop, if you please, for a moment, sir," said Poins, who did not appear to be displeased by this slight ebullition on my part. "You must not be offended because I show the habitual caution of a lawyer. You will at once understand why I require satisfactory proof that you are the heir, when I inform you that already we have had applications from several claimants."

“As heirs of Lieutenant Sinclair?” cried I, in astonishment.

“Even so,” said Mr Poin.

“And did they offer to produce evidence to that effect?”

“They not only offered, but actually did so. The evidence, however, did not prove to be in any way satisfactory.”

“You amaze me, Mr Poin!” I exclaimed. “I am my father’s sole child: I never understood that he had any near relatives. The persons, therefore, who applied to you must have been impostors.”

“In that view,” replied Mr Poin, “I am certainly disposed to join. We members of the legal profession are compelled to be most circumspect in our inquiries, so numerous are the instances of fraud that are daily attempted to be practised. In cases of succession this is very common; and therefore it is usual, when claimants present themselves, to ask whether they have any references to give as to position and antecedents.”

“I perfectly understand your meaning, Mr Poin,” I replied. “You want to know precisely who and what I am?”

The solicitor assented by a bow.

“Then, sir,” said I, “I shall frankly tell you that I am not prepared to give such references immediately. There are, indeed, two individuals resident here to whom I might confidently appeal if this were a question of character; but, except from what I have myself

communicated, neither are acquainted with my early history."

"Would you have any objection to mention their names?" asked Mr Poins.

I was on the point of referring to Lord Windermere and Mr Osborne, when it occurred to me that I really had no right to take such a liberty ; so I replied—

"I might do so, Mr Poins, if their testimony could in any way expedite the business ; but from what you have said, I apprehend such would not be the case. I understand this is simply a question of fact. You require that I shall prove my birth—that proof you shall have. Any other considerations are extrinsic."

"Sir," replied Mr Poins, "that is the correct business view. In the mean time, will you favour me with your address?"

"Most willingly." And I gave him my card.

"One word more, Mr Sinclair," said Poins: "are you acquainted with any solicitor in town? Because, if you are, that might materially tend to obviate difficulties."

"I have no legal adviser here," I replied. "But in the course of a fortnight I expect the arrival from Edinburgh of a friend who has known me from boyhood, a gentleman well known to the profession, to whose hands I shall intrust the further conduct of the business."

"Surely you may confide to me his name, at all events?" said the inquisitive Poins, who seemed bent upon gaining information without imparting any.

“I allude to Mr Walter Shearaway, Writer to the Signet.”

“A member of the firm who act as family agents for the Marquess of Carrabas?”

“The same, sir.”

“In that case, Mr Sinclair, I anticipate no difficulty in the way of a settlement; that is, if Mr Shearaway should corroborate your statement.”

“That you must learn from Mr Shearaway himself. And now, Mr Pains, I shall wish you good morning.”

“Good morning, Mr Sinclair. It is from no discourtesy that I withhold for the present the information you desire. When you substantiate your claim—that is, when the evidence of your birth is laid before me—you will, I am sure, admit that I have not been wantonly trifling with your time. Put what construction you please on that, and farewell for the present.”

“Well!” thought I, as I turned my steps homeward, “if these are the pleasures of hope, they bear a marvellous similitude to disappointment! Why, my case is much harder than that of the suitors of Portia; for they had the option of terminating their anxiety by selecting one of the caskets, whereas I am not only left without a choice, but cannot obtain the remotest idea of what I may reasonably expect. The ancients said of Plutus, the god of riches, that he was lame as well as blind, so that when Jupiter desired him to visit any favoured individual, his approach was so slow that oftentimes the expecting party grew old before he came. But what reason have I to suppose that Plutus is even

on his way? That impenetrable Poins is qualified to have been high-priest of the oracle of Dodona! And yet, if the information he possesses, but will not disclose until I have established my identity, has reference to a mere trifle, would he have given himself all this trouble? Really it is most vexatious to be launched on so uncertain a sea!"

It is not without a feeling of shame that I record these impressions. Natural they might be, under the circumstances, but surely ungracious; since it is our duty to wait for what fortune may befall us, without impatience and without repining. But I fear it is true that even a glimpse of prosperity is apt to unsettle our minds, and to expose us to the haunting influence of troublesome and fallacious phantasms. Alnaschar, before he found himself in possession of his basket of glass-ware, was doubtless a happy and contented man, going to rest with the sun and rising with the lark, trusting to Providence for his daily bread, taking no thought of the morrow, and implicitly adopting the maxim that sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. But his brittle hoard became a curse. It made him a visionary, taught him to indulge in the wildest and most extravagant expectations, and finally was shivered into a thousand fragments by a touch. My own hopes, so suddenly roused, did not rest on a much more substantial basis; but I had heard enough to destroy the equilibrium of my mind, and to withdraw my attention from that daily labour which hitherto had been my duty and my comfort. It was in vain that I tried, by

a strong effort, to master this feeling. The *omne ignotum pro magnifico* had fairly got possession of my thoughts. I had found a Mephistopheles in Poins, and felt assured that rest would never return to me, until the secret was extorted from the demon. So I resolved to do what, under the circumstances, was perhaps the wisest thing—that is, I agreed with Attie Faunce to go down to Greenwich, and discuss the subject over a fish-dinner and a cool bottle of claret.

CHAPTER IX.

A DAY AT GREENWICH.

OUR Parisian friends are extremely fond of contrasting the gaiety and pleasure which surround existence in their beautiful and luxurious city with the dull monotony of London life, which, they opine, must be very grievous to bear. The sturdy Briton who, in dietary matters, maintains the unrivalled superiority of beef-steaks and brown-stout, and who is as methodical in his recreation as in his mode of conducting business, may esteem this an absolute delusion ; nevertheless it must be allowed that there is more than a substratum of truth in the vaunting of the foreigner. I exclude, of course, from consideration family establishments ; because there is nothing in the whole world to be compared with the comforts of English domesticity ; so perfect, so well regulated, so conducive to the health both of mind and body, is the arrangement of our homes. What can make up for the lack of the fire-side round which wife and children are gathered—for the mutual confidence of spouses—for the sweet social

intercourse of family connections and friends? With us marriage effects a vast change in the thoughts, habits, and pursuits of men. They have entered upon a new sphere of duty, and to that they must adapt themselves and be true, if they wish to gain the esteem or deserve the applause of their fellow-citizens. In France it is different. There, marriage is regarded purely as a matter of *convenance*, which does not necessarily imply any change of habit. Monsieur has his own apartments, and breakfasts, dines, and spends the evening irrespective of Madame, whose intimate acquaintances, male and female, need not be those of her husband. Of all gods, the French Hymen is the most pitiful. He is simply hired for a single day to attend the ceremony with his torch; and then, having received the stipulated number of francs, is dismissed from the establishment for ever.

But the arrangements for bachelor life are, or rather were before the establishment of clubs, infinitely more delightful and commodious in Paris than in London. The raptures of Bob Fudge, though conceived in a spirit of extreme sensuality, are not much exaggerated, and must have found an echo in many British bosoms. Between the wretched London lodging-house breakfast, and the elegant *déjeuner* of the Parisian *café*, what an egregious difference! With what an infinite disgust must those who have habitually dined at Beauvilliers' or the Rocher de Cancalle, recall to memory the stifling odours and coarse fare of a city chop-house! There may have been, since then, some improvement in that

respect ; but in the days of which I am speaking, it was next to impossible to extemporise a really good and elegant dinner in London, at least without payment of a most exorbitant price. In order to secure that, you were forced to go either to Greenwich or Richmond.

It being now the whitebait season, Greenwich was of course the favourite, and thither Attie Faunce and I repaired. How that little Hospital town could manage, with all its hotels, to accommodate and provide for the entertainment of the throng of guests daily disgorged by the city, was exceedingly miraculous ; for in addition to the usual number of Londoners who were lured thither by the fine weather and fresh salubrious air of the Park, there was a whole army of railway witnesses and railway officials, who, being sustained and fed at the expense of their respective companies, came flocking to the banquet with the voracity of ravens, resolute not to lose the golden opportunity of enjoyment which the speculative mania had so unexpectedly placed within their reach. Old Father Thames might have addressed to Ocean a complaint similar to that which Xanthus preferred, when, in revenge for his aggression on Achilles, Vulcan invaded his banks and made havoc among his fishes—such demands were there for fresh relays of whitebait, eels, and flounders, as threatened the absolute extermination of the whole of the finny tribe. Loud was the bray for viands, incessant the popping of the corks ; while, half distracted by the multitude of calls, and

yet attempting to maintain the semblance of perfect self-possession, the ministering waiters flitted through the motley groups.

Having secured a table, and ordered dinner to be ready at a particular hour, Faunce and I strolled out into the Park, where the *Mayflower* was yet luxuriant, filling the air with its delicious fragrance, and where the forest foliage admitted the sunbeams in long shafts of golden green. Passing from glade to glade, among the quiet fallow-deer, apart from the more open slopes, where the lads of Cheapside and damsels of Bow-bell were making holiday in their own quaint fashion, after the manner of Jack and Jill renowned in nursery song, we came to a little postern-gate opening on Blackheath, and emerged upon the breezy common. Considering its vicinity to London, the scene was strangely solitary. Scarce a passenger or vehicle appeared on the road. A few donkeys ready caparisoned, but unbespoke by riders, were nibbling the stunted grass, whilst the urchins who had them in charge were engaged in an animated game at leap-frog. In the distance two processions of boarding-school girls, headed by their respective duennas, moved along at a funereal pace. Otherwise the place was as destitute of life as the long reaches of Salisbury Plain.

We set out for a brisk walk, as a preliminary for the dinner; and Attie, as usual, made himself most entertaining. Observing that I was rather absent (for, to say the truth, I could not dismiss the interview of the morning from my mind), he launched out into all

sorts of droll conjectures regarding the secret which was locked up in the bosom of Mr Poin. Among other vagaries, he composed a brilliant little romance, after the manner of Alexandre Dumas, making me out to be a Crown-Prince who had been changed at nurse. He then sketched our triumphal entry into the hereditary dominions—for he insisted on being nominated Prime Minister—amidst the *vivats* of the populace; negotiated a very convenient marriage with a neighbouring Archduchess of surpassing beauty; embroiled me in a quarrel with the Sultan for having raised the tariff upon bowstrings; and finally conducted me, at the head of a victorious army, to Constantinople, where we plucked down the crescent from the dome of St Sophia. I could not help laughing heartily at this, and expressed my surprise that he had never turned his talents for romance to any practical purpose.

“Why, you see,” said Attie, “the public taste has been somewhat debauched of late, and a fine inventive genius like mine, which spurns at probability, would hardly be appreciated. I once tried a tale for a magazine, but the manuscript was returned to me with an intimation that the editor considered my story rather too bloodthirsty and truculent for insertion in his pages. Certainly it was not milk-and-water. If I recollect aright, there were ten single combats, three assassinations, two poisonings, an Inquisition scene, and the sack of a city, compressed within very narrow compass; and in order to prevent unnecessary mourning at the close, I killed off all my characters except a jocose

servant-man, who wound up with a comic ditty. I don't know where else he could have got so much stirring action thrown into so limited a space; but the blockhead rejected my contribution for a Low-church story intended to expose the Puseyites. Most consummate trash it was, I can assure you."

"But really, Attie, I wonder you don't turn your attention to some steady pursuit. A butterfly existence is all very well just now, but you will grow tired of it at last; and then perhaps you may regret that you have not employed your time to better purpose."

"I have a high respect for your opinion, Sinclair; but it strikes me that at present you are enunciating something like cant. What would you have me do? Is it not a common complaint that, owing to the extraordinary competition, it is most difficult to find an opening for young men of education—meaning of course those who have no fortune of their own to trust to; and would you have me, who, thanks to Providence, am somewhat better off, go in for a share of the miserable cake which must be divided among so many applicants? I give you my honour I should regard myself as a shabby fellow if I did anything of the kind."

"But, Faunce, constituted as we are, work of some sort is almost a necessity."

"I deny that. Deep scholars don't work: they read, and so do I, though my reading may be different from theirs. But what do you mean by work? Most people use the term as significant of something that remun-

rates—that can, one way or other, be estimated at a money value. Now, suppose I were a lawyer, and laid myself out for practice. I should have to defend Nokes and Stokes against actions for trespass, or prosecute Giles and Styles for poaching, or make motions in Chancery, or plead, if you like, before the House of Peers. All very well, and I get a lot of guineas for doing so. But if I have enough guineas of my own and to spare, is there anything commendable or exemplary in my devoting my time to the turning over of musty law-books, and thinning my hair by the continual attrition of a confounded wig? Suppose that I get to the top of my profession, shall I have done anything to cause me to be remembered? Certainly not. Three years after the demise of ‘Arthur Faunce, Esquire, Queen’s Counsel, whose eminence at the bar is proverbial,’ the name will be utterly forgotten. Is that a tempting prospect?”

“Then, am I to understand, Attie, that you put in a plea for indolence?”

“Certainly not. I call no man indolent who exerts his faculties in any direction whatever; but I protest against the vulgar notion that it is a meritorious thing for a man to lead the life of a pack-horse. You, Sinclair, are one of the busy people whom Byron has sweepingly condemned, because ‘they rack their brains for lucre, not for fame.’ In that you show your sense, because your object is to make money, and your proper implement is the pen. But suppose that you succeeded to a fortune to-morrow, would you continue to

be a journalist? I suspect not. You might attempt authorship in another form, either with the view of acquiring reputation, or because that mode of filling up your hours of leisure is the most congenial to your mind; but you would not, as now, bind yourself to the performance of a daily task, which must be accomplished even though your inclination rebels against it. Am I right in that conjecture?"

"Probably you are right. Every man, I believe, looks forward to a time when he can gracefully relinquish labour; but your argument, in so far as I can understand it, is directed against labour generally."

"Against needless labour only, for I go no further. For what object do the majority of mankind labour? Undoubtedly to supply their wants. That is a condition of existence; and you and I, if we could find no better means of livelihood, would be fain to handle the currycomb or carry the bag, in the capacity of groom or gamekeeper. Many an Oxford and Cambridge man has been reduced in Australia to the necessity of blacking shoes or breaking stones for the highway; and in doing so there was no dishonour, for they were earning their daily bread. But if your wants happen to be already supplied, are you still bound to labour? That must be your proposition, else your whole argument is based upon nothing."

"Nay, but remember, I spoke of labour rather as a means of happiness than as a positive duty."

"Then, in doing so, you overlooked the notorious fact that the kind of occupation which gives happiness

to one man would be positive misery to another. All of us have our tastes and our pursuits ; and in cultivating and following these, supposing them to be blameless of their kind, we shall not only best consult our own happiness, but in all probability contribute most effectually to the happiness of others."

"Then," said I, not without a certain consciousness that I had the worst of the argument, for, like many other preachers, I had been founding on my own forced example as a positive rule of life, "what kind of existence do you propose for yourself in the future?"

"A very happy one," replied Faunce, "if the fates prove propitious. Being reasonably well provided with this world's goods, there is nothing to prevent me from marrying, supposing I can gain the consent of the lady and her papa. My cousin, Janey Osborne, will not, I trust, prove relentless ; and I must get you, one of these fine days, to put in a good word for me to my uncle. He is a fine old fellow, Sinclair, that uncle of mine ; and if he thought such a match would be for Janey's happiness, I am sure he would not refuse. He likes me well enough, I believe ; but he has got a notion that I am somewhat scampish and unsteady, which is no further true than that I have been fond of amusement, and not very particular in the selection of my company. That unquestionably was a great blunder on my part. Men are judged quite as much by the character of their associates as their own ; and I acknowledge to have gone about town with more than one fellow whose private character would hardly stand

examination. But then it should be remembered that I was left to my own guidance at a very early age, and nothing flatters a boy more than the notice of a man who assumes an air of fashion, and pretends to a thorough knowledge of life. I may thank my stars that I did not suffer more severely from such intimacies."

"But how did you get rid of them, Attie? for I have always understood that there was much difficulty in terminating connections of that kind."

"Faith, sir, my friends saved me all superfluous trouble, for they disappeared of their own accord. The first and most distinguished was a meteoric genius called Jack Fuller. What Jack's antecedents were nobody knew, and he never vouchsafed to explain; but he descended on town like an aerolite, and blazed away for a considerable period. He was a tall, strong, hilarious fellow, with a loud voice, the brawn of a Hercules, and the digestion of an ostrich. Brandy, which he consumed by the quart, seemed to have no effect upon him; at least it did not incapacitate him from taking a distinguished part in various nightly encounters with those implacable enemies of fast men, the police. Jack had formed himself a good deal upon the Tom-and-Jerry model, now fortunately out of date; he knew every late tap and finish in London, and was a strenuous supporter of the decaying dynasty of the prize-ring. How I became acquainted with Jack is little to the purpose. My weakness then was a passion for the turf, which Jack fostered by taking me with him to

Epsom and Doncaster, and you may be sure that the company I was introduced to there was none of the most select. I might have been pigeoned to almost any extent, for I was a perfect novice ; but Jack, with all his faults, and they were many, was good-natured, and kept me from the beaks of the falcons, at the expense, no doubt, of a few feathers, which he extracted for himself. But I soon grew tired of stables and betting-rooms. I never could bring myself to listen with interest to the oath-bespangled conversation of a jock, nor did I feel any antiquarian delight in tracing the pedigree of a filly. I got sufficient insight into the mysteries of racing to convince me that all sorts of blackguardism were practised by men who made a regular profession of the turf ; I was thoroughly disgusted by their slang, and not particularly fascinated by their manners. So I gradually withdrew myself from Jack ; who, poor fellow, shortly afterwards, withdrew himself from town. He had made a bad book on the Derby, having been sold by a rough-rider, in whom he placed an unwise confidence ; and as it was always his maxim that debts of honour must at all hazards be paid, he took the liberty of counterfeiting, on stamped paper, the signature of a friend, who, being a lover of practical jokes, might be disposed, as Jack thought, to overlook the eccentricity. But it is wonderful how touchy people are about their bank accounts. Jack's friend denounced the forgery—for such, alas ! it proved to be ; and all the efforts of Serjeant Wilkins to save his client from the legal consequences were futile. He

crossed the seas at the expense of Government, but soon got a ticket-of-leave; and his name appears prominently in the list of those who patronise the races at Melbourne."

"And who replaced this favourite of the Dioscuri in your intimacy?"

"A very queer fellow, who had a decided turn for theatricals. I was always fond of the theatre, and could not help fancying that those aerial creatures who come upon the stage in flesh-coloured tights, with pretty buskins, and who look so coquettish and enticing, must bear a close resemblance to the nymphs with whom Mohammed peopled his Paradise for the future delectation of the faithful. I had no turn for the higher department of the Thespian school of art. Juliet might rhapsodise, and Belvidera dissolve herself into tears, without inspiring me with any wish to cultivate their further acquaintance; but I have seen some very attractive soubrettes, and a certain young lady who performed the part of Apollo, in the opera of *Midas*, made capture of my heart for the better part of a season. You never heard anything like her way of singing, 'Pray, Goody, please to moderate the rancour of your tongue.' It would have overcome even the prejudices of St Anthony. Well; my new friend, Charley Higgins, had the *entrée* of all the green-rooms, was hand-in-glove with every professional gentleman who nightly ran rapier through his fellow, and, what was more to the purpose, was acquainted with all the actresses. He took me behind the scenes, and introduced me to

mimetic life. For a time I thought it grand fun. We had roaring suppers, followed by first-rate comic singing, and imitations, that would have killed you, of well-known public characters ; and then, on holidays, had I not the honour of conveying some of the prettiest women—if you will but excuse a slight touch of the artificial rose on their cheeks—to Richmond, where, at the Star and Garter, we did enjoy the most ambrosial banquets. There were two sisters—Evangeline and Louisa Fitzmaurice—(I suspect those were not their real names, but the theatrical world is indifferent to such trifles as a rigid adherence to baptismal records)—whom Charley and I peculiarly affected. Evangeline was admitted to be the finest Oberon on the boards, and she fixed my fancy. Louisa was a bouncing Columbine, and more suited to the peculiar taste of Charley.

“ Flirtations of that kind are no doubt very pleasant, but they are especially dangerous. There is no calumny more gross or unfounded than that which casts a general aspersion upon the character of female performers on the British stage. In that respect they are, most of them, quite exemplary ; but their professional habits set them apart as a class, and they are beset with admirers. Very few of them are really so fond of the stage that they would not gladly leave it to be insured of a comfortable home ; and each of them has a duenna, in the shape of a reputed aunt, who, while apparently absorbed in her knitting, has her ears quite open to what is going on, and registers the vows of lovers with much more exactitude than Cupid.

“I defy any man to mix much in theatrical society, without contracting a habit of talk borrowed from the language of the stage. ‘Angel’ is about the mildest term that you can apply to a young lady, who that evening will exhibit herself to the public with a pair of butterfly wings attached to her shoulders ; and if you add the prefix of ‘adored,’ you hardly transgress the verge of common compliment. But ‘auntie’ takes a quiet note of such sayings ; and if you are rash enough to repeat them on paper, the billets are carefully put up, and treasured for future contingencies. Now I won’t deny that I flirted considerably with Evangeline. She was a good girl, but not very bright ; and when I said anything beyond her comprehension, she simply exclaimed, ‘Ah!’ in the most pathetic tone possible, and turned upon me the artillery of a pair of melting dove-like eyes. There were moments when she might have made me promise anything, and I hardly know at this moment how I managed to avoid committing myself beyond retrieval.

“But if I was in a bad way, Charley was in a worse. Nature intended him, if not for a Harlequin (which character he would have performed very well but for a peculiar Dutch-like obesity of conformation), at least for a master of the ring at Astley’s amphitheatre, so thoroughly imbued was he with the passion for theatrical display. He ought to have been a Prince of Monaco, which territory, you are aware, pertains to the ancient house of Grimaldi, it being the etiquette

there to jump into the premises by the window, instead of entering as elsewhere by the door.

“A new Christmas pantomime was got up on an unexampled scale of grandeur, and in it Louisa Fitzmaurice danced a *cachucha*, which created a *furor* far exceeding anything that had been known in London. Her portrait instantly appeared in every cigar-shop. She was more talked of than Lola Montez; and Charley, worked up to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, offered her his hand. He was not very rich, to be sure, but there was something in expectation; Louisa had been bounding for three years without any eligible proposal; so Charley, to his intense delight, was accepted. He rushed one morning into my rooms, and told me of his happiness. ‘Now,’ said he, ‘but one thing is wanting to complete our bliss. Propose to Evangeline, old fellow, and we shall all be married together!’

“Charley knew the theatre, but he did not know human nature. The most daring swimmer feels a spasm of dismay when he sees a man drowning beyond the reach of help or recovery; and the catastrophe announced by Higgins had simply the effect of awakening me to a sense of my danger. I muttered something about my entire innocence of any such design; whereupon Charley knit his brows, and, throwing himself into an attitude, commenced a sentence to the following effect:—‘The man who is base enough wantonly to trifle with the affections of a confiding and unprotected female——’

“ ‘Cut it short, Charley,’ said I; ‘you are infringing copyright by poaching on Fitz-ball. Marry whomsoever you please. It is quite indifferent to me, but I don’t intend to marry Evangeline.’

“ ‘And yet you could take her to Richmond!’ hissed Charley.

“ ‘Why not?’ said I, ‘when I paid the shot for you, and her, and Louisa.’

“ ‘You shall hear more of this anon!’ said Charley.

“ ‘Anon be it!’ said I, ‘and in the meanwhile I wish you good morning.’

“I did not get out of that scrape without a threatened action of damages for breach of promise; but as I had been chary of letter-writing, they could not make up a case. That was, I think, my last escapade; but the memory of it has done me a deal of harm. An absurd and perfectly harmless intimacy with a third-rate actress has been magnified into worse than an intrigue; and I suspect that this story, which it is very difficult to explain to a gentleman of his years, has reached my uncle Osborne, with many aggravations. I have told you the whole truth, Sinclair, and I am sure you will trust to my sincerity, and do what you can, if the subject should be mooted to you, to remove any false impression.”

“That you may rely on, Faunce; but surely Mr Osborne is not so austere as to make no allowance for youthful follies. Pray what became of Evangeline?”

“She married a railway contractor, who is supposed to have been reared in a barge, but against whose sove-

reigns I should be sorry to count down my shillings. He is said to be an excellent fellow, with no worse failing than an addiction to gin-and-water. It is supposed that Peel will elevate him to the baronetage, and Evangeline may possibly become the mother of a British peer."

"Well ; let us suppose that all obstacles are removed, and your marriage over. What follows next ?"

"A box in the neighbourhood of London, where I can receive my friends, who, I assure you, shall be sufficiently select. Not one of the kidney of Jack Fuller or Charley Higgins shall be invited. There I shall have a billiard-room, a nice library and gardens, which Alcinous might envy ; though I shall not ruin myself by giving exorbitant prices for exotics. My weakness is for fruit ; and I shall grow such nectarines, and plums, and peaches as never were seen before. Melons also, and strawberries shall be there in profusion, and jargonelles, to gather which Adam would have climbed the outer wall of Paradise. Then I shall rent a moor in Scotland, with salmon-fishing adjacent thereto ; and if my means will allow, I shall keep a yacht. That is my programme of existence ; and I submit that it is artistically conceived."

"It certainly would be difficult to invent one more thoroughly agreeable. All good-luck to you, Attie, and may your wishes be realised ! But now let us back to Greenwich. We have had rather an extensive walk, and I begin to experience the pangs that afflicted the ancient Ichthyophagi."

CHAPTER X.

THE ADVERTISEMENT EXPLAINED.

OF course I lost no time in communicating to Mr Shearaway the issue of my interview with the respectable head of the firm of Poins and Peto, coupled with such information as would enable him to procure the necessary certificates of my birth. I now awaited his arrival in London with considerable anxiety, for, as I have already said, it was difficult for me, so long as the enigma remained unsolved, to apply myself steadily to my ordinary avocations. I once knew an unfortunate gentleman, who, in an evil hour for himself, became impressed with the conviction that he was heir to an ancient title, to which considerable estates were attached. He was a man of fair average ability, who had creditably worked his way in the world, and reared a promising family ; but from the moment this delusion—for it was nothing more—took possession of his mind, he passed into the downward path of ruin. Not only did he neglect his business, but he exhausted his credit, and incurred frightful responsibilities for

the purpose of raising funds to carry on a hopeless suit. One by one his former friends fell away from him, some provoked by his obstinacy, and others scared by the reckless importunity with which he levied contributions. His children, poor things, had imbibed the fatal notion that they belonged to a class exempt from the necessity of labour ; and they went about, boasting of their pedigree and large possessions as confidently as if the one had been unquestioned and the other actually realised. At last the bubble burst ; the claim was dismissed as untenable : and from that hour nothing more was heard of the luckless aspirant to the peerage. Let us hope that in some corner of the New World he has forgotten his disastrous dream.

I was therefore much gratified, and not a little relieved, by the appearance of Mr Shearaway, who one day burst into my apartment with the energy and vivacity of a boy. Age had not much altered his appearance ; for after a certain period of life, lawyers undergo but little change, being, I suppose, exempted from many of the cares that thin the temples of their clients ; and Shearaway had in him much of the nature of an evergreen. Our meeting was truly an affectionate one, for our regard was mutual and sincere. Both of us had much to tell and listen to, and more than one hour elapsed before we touched upon matters of immediate business.

“ Well, Norman,” said Mr Shearaway at length, “ I have got the certificates all right and formally attested ; so I think I shall just step down this after-

noon and have a talk with your friend Mr Poin. Don't fash yourself by going with me. Some matters are much better discussed by agents than principals ; indeed, I make it a general rule to prevent my clients, as much as possible, from interfering in their own affairs. The best of them have little sense. They are always getting into a fuff, and they are a perfect nuisance at consultations. 'Gudesake, Shearaway!' auld John Clerk used to say to me, 'what gars ye bring your cattle rowting here, man? Hae ye no the sense to tether them in the field, or tie them up in the byre?' Then you never can get them to understand the proper meaning of law terms. I mind as if it were yesterday, the laird of Carterhaugh, who was a fiery body, swearing that he would crop the ears of the agent on the other side for having inserted the words 'falsely and fraudulently' in a Summons of Reduction-improbation, and no power on earth could persuade him that it was the usual form of style. To be sure, Norman, as you have had the benefit of a regular legal education, it's not to be thought that you would bear yourself otherwise than discreetly ; still it will be best for you to keep out the way, for what's the use of having a cook if you have to look after the making of the kail?"

So saying, Mr Shearaway departed, and I sat down to finish a leading article impugning the wisdom of certain new schemes recommended by railway potentates, among others one of unusual magnitude, of which it was supposed that Mr Richard Beaton was

the main projector. In fact, speculation had now attained to so gigantic a height, that the moneyed interest began to be seriously alarmed for the consequences, and to prepare for the adoption of such measures as, by restricting credit, would more effectually operate as a check to the movement than any legislative enactment whatever. It was indeed high time for the lords of Lombard Street to hold a deliberate monetary congress, for a large section of that independent class of the community who have nothing to lose and everything to gain had declared themselves against bank restriction in any shape ; and, using for their own purpose the popular cry and favourable dogma of the men of Manchester, demanded that there should be free trade and unlimited competition in money as in everything else. Uninfluenced by the traditions of old disaster, they maintained that there was no proper limit to circulation, that bankers ought to have the power of issuing notes unrepresented by any sort of convertible security, and that the control exercised by the State was at once tyrannical and absurd. In short, they wanted to become their own bankers, and to be allowed the privilege of fabricating money or its similitude in the shape of notes ; a licence the result of which would undoubtedly have been to involve the whole community in bankruptcy and ruin. Such doctrines were little likely to obtain favour at a period when no violent causes were deranging the ordinary course of trade and commerce ; but in the midst of the speculative tempest they appeared in no

way unreasonable, and were eagerly adopted by those who were painfully conscious that their own credit rested upon a slippery foundation.

I was just laying down the pen when Mr Shearaway reappeared, rather flushed in the countenance, but exhibiting none of those symptoms of hilarity which are supposed to be appropriate to a harbinger of joyful tidings.

“I’ve seen Poins,” he said.

“Well ; and I suppose you have discovered that the mountain has brought forth a mouse ! So be it. For my part, I am thankful, in any event, to be rid of the anxiety. What is the amount ? Fifty pounds ? I hope it is at least sufficient to cover the expense.”

“Norman,” said Mr Shearaway, without vouchsafing any more direct reply—“Norman, you were always a good lad, and have shown yourself both able and willing to make your own way, for which perhaps I may take some little credit to myself, seeing that I had to break you in. Now, tell me frankly, will you feel disappointed if this affair should turn out to be next to nothing ? It’s a great thing to be contented, Norman. There never was a truer saying than that content is better than riches, for riches often take wings to themselves and flee away, whereas content abides with a man, and cheers him at the humblest ingle.”

“It would be very unreasonable in me to feel disappointed when I had no grounds whatever for entertaining any high expectations. And even if I were disappointed, what of it ? I have not now to learn for

the first time that disappointment is one of the best aids for strengthening the faculties of a reasonable man, for where would be the pleasure of success if we were always sure of our aim?"

"Admirably well said, Norman; and I am glad to find that ye have that leaven in you. So you are quite resigned to settle to your work again as heartily as before?"

"That most assuredly I am; and the best proof of it is that I have been at work since you left this room. But why this beating about the bush? Surely you did not expect that I should sit down and whimper, like a spoiled child, because you do not, like Ancient Pistol, discourse of Africa and golden joys?"

"But what if I were to bring you news, and good news too?" said Mr Shearaway. "Do you think, Norman, my laddie, that you could take that quite as quietly as the other? But I'm an auld fool to go on in this way, and me bursting all the while to tell you everything. Grand news there is, indeed, Norman; for you have stepped into a fortune!"

I will not deny that I felt a sudden spasm of delight at this unexpected announcement, notwithstanding the philosophic indifference which I had attempted to assume. I do not believe that it is possible for a man, by any exercise of mental discipline, to become wholly regardless of the smiles or frowns of fortune, however temperately he may meet the one, or however bravely he may endure the other. Such asceticism may perhaps be claimed for the monk, who, in renouncing the

vanities of this world, has also renounced his share of its active duties ; but to those who have objects in life yet unattained, and aspirations which have not been realised, it does not naturally belong. And I had such aspirations, which appeared utterly vain so long as poverty stood in the way ;—was I to blame for giving way to a thrill of exultation when I saw that dark shadow moving from my path, and the skirt of its garment disappear ?

“Yes, Norman,” continued Mr Shearaway, “there is no doubt about it. You are entitled to a clear sum of forty thousand pounds at the very least, which I take to be about as pretty a pose as any gentleman could desire. I wish you joy of it, my lad ; and may God grant you grace to guide it well !”

“This is astounding news indeed, Mr Shearaway—so astounding that I can hardly believe it possible. Whence comes this most unexpected legacy ?—for such I presume it to be.”

“Why, it appears that your father had a first cousin of his own name, who was some time a merchant in London, and then went out to Mexico. He prospered there, married, and had a family. But the yellow fever, or some suchlike disorder peculiar to the climate, crossed his threshold—it’s by the Lord’s appointment these plagues are sent, so we never should repine, though we may take the chastisement to heart—wife, and bairns, and a’, were stricken down, and the auld man found himself alone in the midst of strangers. It seems his wife was a Roman Catholic ; so the priests

gathered round him, doubtless with an eye to the siller. I have heard of such doings, Norman, even in a Protestant land ; but he was owre pawky a carle to believe in their saints' miracles, or ony nonsense o' the kind ; and though he could not help coming down with a round sum for masses, which, considering all things, was but a reasonable concession, deil a dollar could they extract from him for candlesticks, or endowment for their nunneries or convents. Maybe he ken'd better than I do what sort of hizzies they keep under lock and key.

“It's a poor pride that sets up men to found hospitals to the neglect of their kith and kin. This Mr Sinclair knew of but two near relations that he had in the world, both of them first cousins, though he had never set eyes upon either. One of them was your father, Norman, and the other was a Mr Richard Beaton.”

“Richard Beaton !” I exclaimed, “not surely the gentleman whose name is so well known in connection with railway enterprises ?”

“The very same,” replied Mr Shearaway, “and I mean no disparagement to him when I say that I wish with all my heart that he were known for something better. Mony a poor chield who crows crouse enough this day will live to curse the hour when he was tempted, by the example of grand speculators like Beaton, to meddle with the rails. But that's neither here nor there. I was saying that these two were the only near relations of the Mexican merchant ; and to them and their heirs he left his fortune in equal shares

naming Mr Beaton as executor. That is the secret of the advertisement, which seems to have created a grand stir among the Sinclairs, for Mr Poinc tells me that he was just deluged with applications on their behalf."

"But is he now satisfied that I am the proper claimant?"

"Make yourself easy on that score. The certificates are quite satisfactory, and supersede the necessity for a service. Mr Poinc, who, let me tell you, is a very sensible man—I'm to dine with him on Thursday—is prepared to advise Mr Beaton to proceed to an immediate settlement."

"What a strange story this is!" said I, half unconscious that I was speaking aloud. "A cousin, of whose existence I was wholly unaware, leaves me a fortune, in conjunction with the man whose goodwill I am most anxious to propitiate!"

"I'm sorry to hear you say that, Norman—very sorry indeed!" said Mr Shearaway, earnestly. "What in the world can you have to do with such a character as Mr Beaton? Lordsake, laddie! don't walk by his advice, else you'll have a toom purse before you ken that it ever was full!"

"You need not be alarmed, Mr Shearaway. I assure you I am in no such danger."

"Not alarmed! It's easy for you to say that; but if I was to see you venturing on the ice of Duddingston Loch before the frost was a day auld, I trow I would have reason to feel alarmed—and yet it would be safer for you to try that, than to trust yourself on

the slide of speculation. You might scramble out with a wet jacket from the one, but the other ends in a hole deep as perdition, into which you will coup, head over heels, and never more be seen! No danger? I wonder, Norman, to hear you speak in that rash kind of way! There's aye danger when you have to deal with a character that seeks to beguile ye; as the piper of Bervie found to his cost when he supped sowens with the Water-Kelpie!"

"Why, Mr Shearaway," said I, "your extreme earnestness would almost lead me to suspect that you had suffered in your own person."

"And did you ever hear me pretend to be any wiser than my neighbours?" replied Shearaway. "It's precisely because I know from sad experience what is the upshot of speculation, that I speak so confidently this day; and thankful may I be that the tide did not run then so strong as it does now, else I would have been clean swept away altogether. But this is no time for sic clavers. I'll warrant you would like to be left by yourself to think about the golden eggs."

"I would much rather profit by your experiences, Mr Shearaway. You can break off, you know, should you find me an inattentive listener."

"*Infandum jubes renovare dolorem!* It's like ripping up an old sore," said Shearaway. "But lads like you can be none the waur of hearing of the misfortunes of their elders. One reason why almost everybody has run mad just now, is because the public have had a long rest from speculation; few remember what

came of it at the last spurt, and even of them some are none the wiser. The notion of making a fortune, by buying and selling, in four-and-twenty hours, had clean gone out, at least with us in the north. We were doubtless becoming a wealthier people than we were before, but that was by dint of work and saving, without which no country can ever attain to prosperity.

“However, about twenty years ago, there was got up a great cry for improvement. Folks began to think that many things which their fathers neither missed nor wanted, were downright necessities of life; and they were not far wrong either, for science has made most wonderful discoveries, and doubtless will make many more. It’s a silly thing to set one’s face against improvement—that’s just the act of a savage—but it’s even sillier to run away altogether with the harrows, and to rush headlong into new schemes without the benefit of experience. Well, there came among us a set of projectors, men who were always finding out something of immense advantage to the public, but never making anything for themselves; indeed, I never knew a projector yet but was as poor as Lazarus. However, they had the gift of the gab; and one of them—he came originally from Banff, and his name was James Divetts—was the most wonderful creature for scheming that I ever encountered. He had his pockets stuffed with all sorts of plans for increasing the national wealth; and all that was wanted was capital, which, he said, could easily be raised by the formation of joint-stock companies. Mines were to be drained,

canals dug, peats made into coal and candles, gas pumped into bottles and sold for so much a gallon ; and heaven knows what more beside ; and for every such adventure the return was to be at least twenty and sometimes fifty per cent.

“The English folk have a notion that we are very canny and cautious in the north, and so we are in the way of regular business ; but when it comes to speculation, we can be just as daft as our neighbours. The Darien project, that was started before the Union, was as wild a scheme as ever was set on foot ; and I’ve heard it said that there was not a single man in Scotland, gentle or simple, but suffered from that awful failure. Thrift is a very good thing, and a praiseworthy, but it by no means implies a want of appetite for gain.

“Money was plenty at the time of which I speak, and the banks ready to give accommodation and discount bills—maybe readier than they should have been, for there was a hantle of loose paper flying about—so a plausible fellow like James Divetts found many a listener. I had saved two or three thousand pounds ; but I began to be ashamed of myself for letting my money lie at ordinary interest, when it might be fructifying tenfold if invested in some of the new projects ; so, like a fool as I was, I began to dabble a little, just by way of experiment, but not intending to go very far.

“But it is the first dip that settles the business. I went on from one thing to another, until I had drawn out my whole capital, which was a mad-like thing for

a man in business to do ; and in return for my hard-won money I got shares in the Oil-Gas, Stockbridge Market, and Caledonian Dairy Companies, besides some distilleries, and a grand national concern for reclaiming the Muir of Rannoch. I was a director in some of them, and had to attend board meetings, which took up one half of my valuable time ; and when I was alone, instead of thinking about my proper day's work, or taking up a book as I used to do, I found myself calculating contingent profits on the backs of old letters, and squaring accounts as if I had direct dealings with the Old Enemy, and had to post up our transactions in my ledger. I began to feel perfectly miserable. I very seldom went now to the Whist Club, where we played for half-crown points ; and as for a social supper-party, I was fit for nothing of the kind.

“ To make a long story short, I had to pay for my folly. The crash came before there was even a possibility of a dividend ; and all our grand schemes melted into nothing, like snow off a dike in February. Not one sixpence did I recover ; on the contrary, I was glad to escape without bankruptcy, when many better men than myself went to the wall. That's the reason why I dread speculation, and would warn you against it.

“ But I see by your eye, Norman, that you are paying little attention to what I say ; and I surmise, from the motion of your fingers, that you are calculating the probable interest of forty thousand pounds. Don't commit a blunder, as the weaver did, who added the

year of the Lord at the top of the page to the amount of his profits. Lads of your age always reckon upon five per cent, whereas four is the outside you can get, if you wish for perfect security. Now, laddie, good-bye. I've been talking to you this last half-hour about my own affairs, to keep you from thinking too much at first about this accession of wealth, just as one of these new-fangled doctors wraps his patient in a wet sheet to keep down the symptoms of fever. And now that your business is so far disposed of, I shall e'en go on a different errand, and look after Jamie Littlewoo."

I believe that the announcement of any great change of fortune induces a kind of torpor and stagnation of the mental powers. As in a dream the fairest visions are always accompanied by a certain sense of unreality, so does any sudden event affecting our future career perplex us by its novelty, and throw us into a state of bewilderment. I seemed to have lost for a time the power of looking forward. I hardly even thought of the amount of the fortune that had so unexpectedly devolved upon me. One idea alone took possession of my mind, and that was the reviving hope that I might yet approach Mary Beaton and tell her of my love, without at any rate incurring the charge of inordinate presumption. For the distance between us, though still great, was now materially lessened. I was of her kindred; and could her father, however arrogant or supercilious he might be, entirely ignore that claim upon his notice?

To the habitual reader of romance, such an avowal

as this may appear utterly preposterous, because, according to the received dogma, there can be no love without a certain amount of love-making; and I have not ventured in the foregoing part of my narrative to assert that Miss Beaton had distinguished me by even so slight a recognition as a smile. She knew nothing of my homage—she perhaps hardly remembered my name; her affections, for anything I knew to the contrary, might be bestowed upon another. Therefore, was I not a fool to persist in such vain idolatry, and to indulge in such fantastic dreams? I answer—No; for true love is in its nature intrepid, and there is no obstacle so serious that it will not endeavour to surmount.

CHAPTER XI.

CLOUDLAND AND A COMING SHADOW.

I AM not much of a schemer, nor extravagantly addicted to the architectural amusement of building castles in the air, but the consciousness that I was now in possession of a fortune much greater than I had ever hoped to obtain by personal exertion, did certainly give some stimulus to my imagination. When I awoke on the morning after my interview with Mr Shear-away, I was in no hurry to rise, but gave myself up to indulgence in a reverie as full of thick-coming fancies and brilliant phantasmagoria as are the clouds at sunset, when all the hues of heaven are intermingled in gorgeous profusion and disorder, and when aërial forms of wondrous tracery and device rise, float, and dissolve in the molten atmosphere of the west.

Independence, to a certain extent, I had already achieved—that is, I had abjured the folly of trusting to others for a helping hand, and thus had escaped from the degradation of political subserviency and bondage. That was, of itself, no slight matter; because expec-

tancy is not only an obstacle to all honourable enterprise, but it insensibly cripples and enfeebles the mind, depriving it of the power of forming just conclusions, and of discerning between the false and the true. The man who is wholly self-reliant may no doubt be unfortunate, but he never can be despicable. Though his labour may but suffice to gain for him a daily crust, better is that meagre fare than the seat of a sycophant at the sumptuous table of the rich.

Now, however, I found myself all at once not only independent, but free—free from the necessity of labouring continuously for mere existence—free to adopt any career in life towards which I felt an inclination. What ought I, under the circumstances, to do?—what were to be my future avocations? Should I attempt to make a figure in the world, and strive after fame and distinction?—or should I, availing myself of my good fortune, abandon all such ideas, and subside into passive inaction? In the days of my poverty I had almost reproached Carlton for his indolence in avoiding public life, since he had ample means at his disposal. I had talked somewhat dogmatically to the apathetic Mr Lumley of the duties incumbent upon men of property and position; and I had even lectured Attie Faunce on his desultory and aimless habits. I was then very proud of myself, and self-gratulatory, because I had worked steadily, and to some little purpose; and it had appeared to me that all men were under a moral obligation to do the like. But I had omitted to take into account the nature of the incen-

tive. I had really no merit in working, for without work I must have starved. There was no help for it; I must either swim or go down, so I set myself to buffet with the waves. I tried to reach the shore, on which I saw other people reposing; and it seemed to me that their quiescence, in contrast with my struggle, was something almost sinful. I wondered why they also did not battle with the stream. At length, however, I felt ground beneath my feet, and then began to think that, after all, there might be some sort of difference between forced and voluntary exercise.

My cogitations, as is usual in such cases, had no definite or practical result. I have already hinted that my ambition was never exorbitant in degree; and increased experience, and observation of the world and its ways, had convinced me that those who attempt to climb the highest, and who cannot endure to see a rival above them, make a wanton and foolish sacrifice of much of the happiness of existence. I am loth to disturb with a rude breath even one filament of the charm-woven gossamer of poetry; but I really must say that I feel no sort of sympathy for Mr Longfellow's hero, who persisted in carrying his Excelsior banner to the very summit of the Alps, and got frozen to death for his pains. Common sense should have dictated to him the propriety of tarrying at the hospice. This, I know, will be regarded by many as a base and ignoble sentiment; for it is astonishing what a multitude of people are continually urging others to press forward and upward, whilst, for their own share, they are

content to remain stationary. They are quite happy to be spectators of the superhuman exertion, energy, and daring of the gladiators whom they can coax into the arena; but catch them deliberately placing themselves within reach of the weapon of the retiarius! So they will applaud—and very loudly too, and sometimes sincerely enough—the feats which are exhibited before them; whether the operator be a politician, who, by dint of vivid intellect and commanding oratory, aspires to sway the senate—or a hero (so long as he is fortunate), who presents himself as the champion of the liberties of his country—or a tauridor in the bull-ring of Seville—or a Blondin, wheeling a barrow on a tight-rope over the Falls of Niagara—or any other character who has nerve enough to approach the confines of the impossible. It is *they* who shout “Excelsior!” and they often continue to do so long after the object of their applause is thoroughly sick of his undertaking, and would fain retire from the post of peril. God forbid that I should undervalue any effort which a man can make when prompted by a sense of duty! I know, and am proud to acknowledge, that there are men—ay, and women too—who have dignified our generation by the most noble disinterestedness and self-sacrifice; who have consecrated their lives to the service of their Creator and their fellow-men with entire singleness of heart, and no thought of the applause of the world; but deeply indeed would I dishonour them if I should say that they were actuated

by ambition. Ambition, according to my understanding of the word—for I never trouble myself with the definitions of metaphysical writers, whose alembic seems to me especially constructed for the decomposition of sense—implies the presence of a purely personal and selfish motive. Now, selfish motives are, to a certain extent, entitled to respect. The man who neglects to provide for the wants of his own household, is justly stigmatised as worse than an infidel. There is, no doubt, a meaner and more contracted sort of selfishness than this; but, for the credit of our species be it said, it is not often exhibited, and is always visited by reprobation. But, is climbing the ladder, for the simple sake of the poor brag that you have attained the highest round, a wise thing, or a right thing? I venture to doubt that. Such faculties or powers as God has given to a man, that man is bound to exert for God's service, but not otherwise. Something he must do for himself, for that is the divine commandment, earlier than almost any other; but he is nowhere required to make himself a Nimrod or an architect of the Tower of Babel. Sheikh Abraham was about the quietest and least obtrusive character that ever existed. A man more devoid of personal ambition never drew the breath of life; and yet to him was given the Promise that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed. As for your Alexanders, Cæsars, and Napoleons, your Wolseys, Cromwells, and Robespierres, what can be said of

them beyond this, that they were quite as much the slaves of ambition as the hoarding miser is the slave of avarice?

Then, looking around me on those whose ambition was of a more contracted kind, what did I descry? Men of real talent abandoning those pursuits for which nature had designed and culture qualified them, to wrangle and intrigue in the senate; urged on by the hope that one day or other they might attain to political power. Hopes, alas! often miserably frustrated; but when realised, how pitiful does the reality appear! Baited by opponents, reviled by the envious, molested by greedy dependents, haunted by unreasonable fools, sometimes blamed and sometimes most cruelly betrayed by friends,—Is the life of a statesman, with all these drawbacks and annoyances, so very desirable or attractive? Some, no doubt, consider it so, and are willing to make the venture; while others are forced to adopt it from a sense of duty, or from responsibilities which they cannot avoid. But not one out of a hundred who engage in a political career ever attains to the dignity of statesmanship. The other ninety-nine who, by the grace of the electors, are privileged to write the letters M.P. after their names, are simply rank and file—fellows of small consideration, who, nevertheless, must go through a deal of dreary work in order to satisfy their jealous and exacting constituencies. These are they who must commence the labours of the day by attendance on committees, and sit on through the

watches of the night till the dull debate is adjourned ; for in these days no excuse, however plausible, will pass current for absence from a division. The constituent, after a comfortable supper and a glass of hot brandy-and-water, may pull his cotton nightcap over his ears and retire to roost at eleven ; but no such happiness is the lot of the member, who must be vigilant as a watch-dog or a sentinel. At his peril let him leave a single letter unanswered ! For each act of neglect a burst of wrath, hot as the breath of Tophet, will be wafted against him ; for an insult offered to a free and independent elector is treason to the majesty of the people. Other persons may think for themselves, but a member of the House of Commons is not allowed that liberty. He must swallow pledges, as a conjuror swallows clasp-knives, by the score, however much they may encumber his digestion. He is sent, not to deliberate, but to vote according to the will of the majority ; and woe to him if he interprets his trust otherwise, for the hustings will be transformed into a pillory !

Such is modern senatorial life—let those follow it who have the inclination. For my own part, I much more affect the philosophy enunciated by Alexander Iden, that “ poor esquire of Kent,” *before* he had the luck to take the head from the shoulders of Jack Cade — which feat being performed, he straightway posted off to London to put in his claim for promotion.

“Lord, who would live turmoiled in the Court,
And may enjoy such quiet walks as these ?
This small inheritance, my father left me,
Contents me, and is worth a monarchy.
I seek not to wax great by others' waning,
Or gather wealth, I care not with what envy ;
Sufficeth, that I have maintains my state,
And sends the poor well pleased from my gate.”

My dreams, therefore, were not of triumphs won in the forum or the senate-house. I did not fancy myself standing on a pillar, like St Simeon Stylites, the object of admiration to a gaping multitude. I contemplated no ovation ; I was haunted by no promptings of ambition. But I had visions of sunny Italy, of lovely Switzerland, and, above all, of the lakes and mountains of my own dear native land ; and I thought that there I would be content to live and die, if only my one fond hope could be realised. So that, in point of fact, that youthful sage, Attie Faunce, was entitled to claim me as a convert ; for, now that the impediment of poverty was removed, I could not frame for the future a design more spiritual or exalted than his. In making that confession, I feel no touch of melancholy such as enthusiasts have described as stealing over them when they become aware that, one by one, the aspirations of their boyhood were departing. In early youth imagination usurps the office of faith. We read of and we believe in enchanted castles, and fairy grottos, and errant knights, and marvellous adventures ; and these for a long period are accepted by us quite as implicitly, and far more gratefully, than the dry details of history. Next comes romance, somewhat more mundane in its

character, of which Arthur, and Charlemagne, and Richard of the Lion-heart are the favourite heroes ; and that, too, passes away, or becomes modified in our belief. Then from the past we turn to the future, and with that indomitable valour and surpassing confidence which is the sublime privilege of the boy, we laugh destiny to scorn, dash aside circumstance, despise difficulty, and make up our minds to beat down opposition, and hew our way to fame and glory with the might and recklessness of the Berserkars. And towards this we are greatly encouraged by the testimony of spectacled elders — those tough, everlasting veterans, who are always to be found on the back benches of meetings for the promotion of social science—to the effect that it is in the power of every man, if he chooses to exert himself, to attain to the highest dignity or place of honour open to a British subject ! No doubt such things are on the cards ; for, according to the present form of our constitution, there must always be one Lord Chancellor and one Archbishop of Canterbury. But they might just as sanely tell a navvy, that if he will only dig long enough and deep enough, he is certain to turn up a diamond as valuable as the Koh-i-noor ! Such teaching has a bad effect, because it fosters in young men a spirit of arrogance and presumption, leading them to undervalue and despise their seniors, who have long ago subsided into the jog-trot pace of ordinary existence, and are content with reverencing dignitaries instead of aspiring to be added to their number. But a few years' experience of the world

suffices to bring young men, save those who are incorrigibly vain and conceited, to a more just estimate of their powers. The lawyer who, when called to the bar, had formed the resolution that he would not take unto himself a wife until he could set up a handsome establishment and a carriage, is fain, when verging upon forty, to look out for an eligible matrimonial connection with some young woman who, having a couple of hundreds per annum in her own right, can enable him to keep a better table than the scanty fees of the solicitors have yet allowed him to afford. For ten long years and more he has ceased to dream of the wool-sack ; and now, if Fortune herself were to appear and offer him what boon he pleased, he would prostrate himself before her feet, and supplicate to be made a county judge. Young Charles James Fox Simcox, heir to a colossal fortune, accumulated by the manufacture of beer, and distinguished at Cambridge by the precocity of his oratorical genius, finds his way, by the aid of some ingenious Coppock, into the House of Commons ; and, disdaining, like the knight of Ivanhoe, to touch the shield of an inferior opponent, dedicates his first parliamentary effort to the exposure and demolition of the most brilliant debater of the age.

“*Heu puer infelix ! impar congressus Achilli !*”

He is sent spinning, like a teetotum, over the tail of his hobby ; and for all time to come the uprising of the Simcox is the signal for unextinguishable laughter.

And the young poet, who is to be the prophet of the new era—who considers the old school as effete, and the old masterpieces wanting in inspiration and in power—how fares it with him? His favourite notions are, that to be sublime it is also requisite to be unintelligible, and that elaborate mysticism, divorced from sense, cannot fail to make a profound impression upon the minds of the rising generation. So he consumes the midnight oil in fabricating verses, which, when you read them, suggest the idea that they were extorted under pressure of the nightmare; and, having found a publisher, willing, on being guaranteed against loss, to act as *accoucheur*, he presents his bantling to the public. Brutal, stolid, grovelling, apathetic public—not worthy to witness the avatar of such a bard—not competent to appreciate the soarings of lofty genius! It refuseth to be stirred by the trochaics—it will not melt to tears at the warbled melody of the iambs! What, in the name of Pegasus, can be the cause of such disgusting indifference? Here are mental spasms portrayed, compared with which the writhings of the cholera are languid—here is anatomy of soul more appalling than the demonstrations of Dante—and yet that wretched, stock-jobbing, cotton-spinning, money-making public, will not attend to the noble utterances of the heir of time and eternity! As for the critics, poor curs—ha, ha! What are they but a set of base assassins, brothers of the poniard, leagued to murder genius? Who cares for the opinion of the hireling

knave, who pollutes his soul by writing infamy for the *Sunday Slasher*? "Unmitigated trash," did he say? Ha, ha! The arrow is in his bosom!

In spite, however, of such excusable ebullitions, the aspiring poet will be found, after a year or two, doing yeoman's duty as a clerk or warehouseman, having very wisely abandoned the notion that he is destined to have a public funeral at Westminster,

"Where lightly may his honoured ashes rest,
That lie by merry Chaucer's noble chest."

Having mused thus far upon ambition and cognate topics, I arrived at the conclusion that it was not necessary, in the mean time, to form any decided plans for the future, or advisable to alter my way of life in consequence of my accession of fortune.

"Which fortune, by the by," said I to myself, as I went through the ceremonies of the toilet, "is at present only to be classed in the category of things *in posse*. For anything I know to the contrary, there may still be a hitch in the business; so the wisest thing I can do is to follow the directions of the old proverb, and abstain from counting my chickens before I am certain that they are hatched."

In my sitting-room I found Davie Osett, of whom I had seen but little since our encounter at Wilbury, absorbed in the perusal of Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

"Good morning to you, Mr Norman," said Davie. "I daresay you wonder to see me here; but this is a

slack day with us, and I thought I might as well step up, and hae a crack wi' you about auld times. I fand you hadna come down, so I was laith to disturb ye; and to put by the time, I was reading about the ride of William o' Deloraine. O man, what a pith there was in Sir Walter! Poetry like that sends one's blude tingling to the finger nails."

"Yes, Davie, no hand like his for kindling the beacons of the Border! But how are your own affairs prospering, and how do you like London?"

"Troth, Mr Norman, I dinna like it ava; and if it werena for my engagement, and the cash I am to get, I wad just make a clean pair o' heels, and gae back to kindly Scotland. But the money that's here is just something untold; and as I hae got my heuck into the rigg, I'se no desert the shearing."

"Wisely determined. So I conclude you have no want of occupation?"

"You may be confident of that! If I had a hundred hands, like the auld heathen giant, I could find work for them a'. Never was there such a season in the whole annals of the profession! I've been concerned, one way or other, with fifteen lines, forbye the Goats-head and Ditchington that I surveyed; for you see there's a new trade sprung up, that of railway witnesses; and a grand paying one it is for men that are sensible and discreet."

"But, Davie, are you always able to reconcile your testimony with your conscience?"

"'Deed am I, Mr Norman! You must understand,

that when I am sent down to take a look of a line, so as to be able to speak about it to a committee, I never fash myself with making particular inquiries. The engineer takes me here, and he takes me there; and it so happens that I aye see the best portions of the line. It's possible, nae doubt, that there may be queer or difficult bits; but how can I tell that, when they are no brought under my observation? My rule is, never to speak to anything that I have not seen—that's the safe and honest plan, and the way to win credit and respect. But, after a', it signifies little what the witnesses say. If there are ten stiff chields brought forward on the one side, there are ten as dour on the other; and it's my belief that hoodie-craws are just as fit to form a judgment on the merits of a line, as the maist feck of the members of Parliament."

"No one can blame you, Davie, for making hay while the sun shines. And you do well to avail yourself of the present opportunity, for I have grave doubts as to the endurance of this golden period."

"So you think the cards are pretty near played out, Mr Norman? Troth, that's my opinion too; and if I were a speculator, I wad lose no time in wurbling out of every concern. I am neither deaf nor blind; and I prophesy that some who hold their heads high enough this day will be in grief and sorrow before Yule!"

"Is that remark merely general, Davie, or does it apply to any one in paticular?"

"Baith, Mr Norman. Men in my position, as ye are doubtless aware, are consulted chiefly as to the

laying-out of lines, and have nothing properly to do with the finding of the money, or even the contract business. However, there's no one on the staff but has an inkling of what goes on in the other departments; and if there is anything wrong, especially as regards the supplies, we are sure to hear of that immediately. And there's a kind of freemasonry among us, sae that we have a gey guid guess as to our neighbours' affairs. Now there are the lines in the north that folk make sic a sang about. The shares were run up to a perfectly ridiculous premium; and aye the mair engagements the directors entered into, the greater demand was in the market. Weel, they are through Parliament now, and the siller is being called up, and the Lord kens whaur it is to come from, for maist of the holders are bit merchant bodies, clerks, and attorneys, that had little credit to begin wi', muckle less money o' their ain."

"What lines do you allude to, Davie?" said I, a most unpleasant suspicion for the first time crossing my mind.

"Just Beaton's lot," replied the surveyor. "He's a bauld chield, that Beaton, and ventures far; but there's water enough in the sea to drown the biggest man. I winna say but that the main lines might hae answered and paid weel when the traffic was fairly established; but they've been buying up and guaranteeing all manner of trash at prices that were clean extravagant; and I wad like to ken how dividends are to be paid for years to come except out of capital, and that's

just shifting siller frae your waistcoat to your breeches pocket."

Alnaschar's basket! Wretched Ned Mather—if through thy negligence this gleam of fortune should pass away like a dissolving view! I caught up a share-list from the table (for in those days share-lists were handed in much more punctually than newspapers), and I sought for the suspected lines. The quotations certainly were somewhat lower than before, but not to an alarming extent, and the transactions were very numerous. I pointed this out to Davie as a proof that his apprehensions were exaggerated. The surveyor shook his head.

"Ken ye sae little, Mr Norman," he said, "of the way these things are managed, as to suppose that a great concern like that wad be allowed to go down without the sairest fight that ever men made for existence? Mind ye that there's not a county bank in the district but has an interest to keep up the price of stock! They've been lending, sir—lending right and left to Beaton and others, who have been speculating in iron and what not, and fient a security do they hold beyond the shares. There's plenty of that stock in the market—far mair than is wanted by legitimate buyers; but the companies and the bankers daurna let it down, and it's them that are buying in. I hope, Mr Norman, ye are no a shareholder? If ye are, tak' my advice, and sell out as fast as ye can. Better tine a plack than peril a jacobus."

"I must acknowledge, Davie, that what you say

disturbs me not a little. I have just ascertained that Mr Beaton, with whom I have never spoken, is a relation of mine——”

“Ay?” interrupted Davie. “To be sure, that makes a kind o’ difference, for there can be nae doubt that blude is thicker than water. But surely ye are no like to break your heart for the misfortune of a far-off cousin? Three days ago I saw by the papers that Sandy Osett, meal-dealer in the Canongate of Edinburgh, who is my father’s brother’s son, had applied for a *cessio bonorum*; but though I liked Sandy gey and weel, and would blithely have put my hand into my pouch to help him in a reasonable way, I canna aver wi’ truth that I grat when I read the news.”

“I suspect, however, friend Davie,” said I, “you would have felt more concerned if your cousin Sandy had happened to be in possession of all your property?”

“Eh—Lord save us! What’s that you say, Mr Norman? Have ye really lent him money?”

“That, Davie, was fortunately an impossibility. Yesterday morning I should have said that you and I were about equal as far as regarded wealth—perhaps that you were the richer man of the two. But I have since learned that I am entitled to no inconsiderable share of a large sum of money which is entirely under the control of Mr Beaton; and if your suspicions should be well founded, it may chance that I shall forfeit all.”

“Deil a bit of it—deil a bit of it!” cried Davie.

“Tell me first—is your claim a good one, that cannot be contested, or thrown into a court of law?”

“I apprehend so—indeed, I am so assured by my own man of business.”

“He’s no a landlouper about London, is he?” quoth Davie.

“No, indeed. I have the advice of my old and respected friend, Mr Shearaway, in whose hands I leave the management.”

“You are right there, Mr Norman; but maybe Shearaway is no just up to the state of matters in London. I aye mind what auld Jamie Telfer o’ the Sorbiehope used to say. Jamie had been sent up wi’ some cattle for an agricultural show, and when we asked him what he thought o’ London, nae word mair would he utter than that it was the fellest place he had ever seen in his born days for driving a beast through. Faith! a man needs to cock his lugs if he seeks to walk scatheless in London.”

“I am under no apprehension on that score, Davie; still, I thank you for the caution. What I ought to do, under the circumstances, must be matter of reflection.”

Davie Osett regarded me with a look of absolute astonishment.

“Are ye mad, Mr Norman?” said he. “What is there you have to reflect about? Your interest and your duty is to get your money as fast as you can out of the hands of Beaton, for if you lose the opportunity, my certie, you’ll hae to whistle for’t. Maybe he’ll try to put you aff, but dinna listen to anything o’ the kind.

Insist on getting your siller, and ye'll get it, whaever's pouch it may come frae ; for he's clean gane if he loses credit, which, after a', is like the feet of clay of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, unco brittle, and will snap across as readily as a pipe-shank."

"Well, I shall consult with Mr Shearaway. You will readily believe, Davie, that I should be very sorry indeed to forego my inheritance ; but there are certain considerations which I must keep in view, and these I am not at liberty to explain."

"Mr Norman," replied Davie, "I hae but ae word mair to say ; and if ye werna something like my foster-brither, it should ne'er be spoken by me. You come of gentle kin, I'm but a sma' farmer's son ; and I ken vera weel that folk like you and me dinna see wi' the same kind o' spectacles. Gentles—that is, true gentles, for auld blude can breed blackguards, as maggots are begotten in the vera best o' cheeses—whiles tak' up romantic notions, and think that it is a grand and a beautiful thing to abstain from asking for what is their ain. Trow ye that they get ony thanks for that ? Deil a grain ! What they lose is picked up by hallin-shakers, who laugh at them as fules ; and even the man they have lost by, after he has become a dyvour, will feel nae shame in asking them to help to maintain him. Now, simple folks like me—though doubtless you'll find a when idiots that wad sooner be roused out than look after their ain affairs—hae but one rule ; and that is, pay what ye owe, and insist on getting

what is your due. I think that the maist feck of what people ca' Political Economy is havers; but one truth cannot be denied, and that is—that capital is the accumulation of labour. It matters not whether your grandfather, or your father, or you, have laboured for the capital; but it's yours, and if ye let it slip, and pass into the hands of a swindler, is it not plain that you surrender and sacrifice, if I may so speak, the toil of those who have gane before ye; and are ye no answerable, in a measure, for all the pinchings they have made to benefit the next generation? And now I hae done. Gudesake! I wish Lord Brougham had heard me. Maybe he might have wafted me into a chair of Political Economy, where naebody could contradict my doctrine!"

"I can assure you, Davie, if you were always to speak as sensibly as you have now spoken, you would be esteemed a most admirable professor."

"Weel; be that as it may, dinna you be blate. I'm no expecting that the storm will burst for a while yet, but there are kittle signs in the weather-glass; and it's aye a wise thing to put the corn under thack and rape sae lang as the lift is clear."

Honest Davie left me, I confess, rather in a state of perturbation. I knew him to be a shrewd fellow, well able to form a just conclusion from what he saw going on around him; and my own knowledge of the extent of the liabilities undertaken by the directors of the lines in question was sufficient to convince me that any sudden check or panic in the market must lead to

disastrous consequences. My breakfast, therefore, was a very uncomfortable one ; and no sooner was it over than I sallied forth in quest of my adviser, Mr Shear-away. He had left his hotel, with an intimation that he would not return till evening. I then went in search of Ewins, thinking it probable that the acute Yankee might have picked up some information that might be useful ; but the descendant of Macbeth had gone to the city, and doubtless by this time was in deep colloquy with the bulls and bears. So I had nothing for it but to return to my apartment, and apply myself to the preparation of a leader, which I suspect was not much more cheerful in its tone than a page of the *Sorrows of Werther*.

CHAPTER XII.

MY COUSIN.

LORD and Lady Windermere had continued to extend to me very marked and thoughtful kindness, and I had a card that evening for one of the countess's receptions. I had not mingled very much in society; being, to say the truth, somewhat indifferent to its charms, partly from a sort of shyness which was constitutional, and partly because I felt it a sort of hypocrisy to enact the character of an idler. But an invitation to the Windermeres was not to be lightly regarded, or in anywise passed over; so I went there in pretty much the same spirit as that in which a bashful country member presents himself for the first time at a Royal *levée*.

The company at Lady Windermere's receptions was rather select than numerous, for she had a horror of lionising—that is, of crowding her drawing-room with celebrities, diplomatic, literary, or otherwise; a practice which is resorted to by some great people, by way of showing that they are in nowise insensible to the claims of genius. Few were invited save those who

were connected either by family ties, or those of political association, recognised eminence, or otherwise friendship and esteem; consequently the *reunions* were voted to be tiresome by people to whom excitement had become a necessary condition of existence, but highly prized by those of more sober and intellectual tastes. There it certainly was not to be anticipated that you would meet without fail the utterer of the last flashy speech in Parliament—the distinguished patriotic refugee upon whose head foreign governments had set a price—the preacher whose eloquent neology was attracting thousands of professed orthodox Christians to his chapel—the writer of the recent pamphlet that had fallen like a bomb-shell into the Cabinet—or the author of that charming novel which everybody was bound to read. But you were sure to find people of sense, intellect, cultivation, established fame, and high unblemished character; and beyond that, surely, there was very little to be desired.

After I had made my bow to Lady Windermere, the first person I recognised in the saloon was Mr Lumley, whose acquaintance I had made at Wilbury. From what I had seen of him there I liked him very much, for beneath the mask of apathy he concealed much quiet humour and good feeling, and he was, moreover, thoroughly in all respects a gentleman. He greeted me very cordially, and began to talk over the events which had occurred when we met in the country at Christmas.

“I have sad tidings to give you,” said he, “of your

fair friend, Miss Bootle, who, you may remember, made such a decided set at you on the subject of the Jesuits. Heaven knows what had possessed the excellent old lady ; but she took it into her head, after you had left, that you were a member of the order, and absolutely quarrelled with Dr Wayles, who, regarding you as an excellent specimen of the antique Scotch nonjuror — for you gained his heart by a eulogy on the seven bishops—maintained that you were a second Spinckes. But when the poacher story got wind, Miss Bootle's suspicions became convictions ; and in order that she might thoroughly escape from a world, which, in her diseased imagination, is thickly planted with Jesuitical traps, she has entered an Agapemone, or Home of Love, to which she has conveyed not only her esteemed person, but some fifteen thousand pounds invested in consols, whereunto, according to the rules of genealogy and representation, I ought to succeed ; failing heirs of her body, which contingency would be miraculous, as she has nearly attained to the respectable antiquity of Sarah."

"I do hope, Mr Lumley, that I was not the cause, however innocent, of such a catastrophe."

"Most assuredly not : I acquit you entirely. The agent was a red-haired foxy fellow, who had been lurking in the neighbourhood under the pretext of collecting subscriptions for a Patagonian mission. It is wonderful what interest ladies of a certain age will take in savages that are seven feet high ! They don't seem to care so much about pigmies. But I really want to know something about that surveyor whom we

started in the preserves. He was a first-rate fellow—fairly puzzled me ; and I have a sort of notion, from something that fell accidentally from Carlton, that you are acquainted with his antecedents.”

“Your conjecture is right, Mr Lumley, though I did not recognise him at the moment. I ought to know him well, for he happens to be my foster-brother.”

“Well, I have to thank him for as pretty a run as I ever took across a country. But there is quite a Wilbury party here to-night. I heard in the next room the stentorian voice of Sir John Hawkins declaiming to Lord Windermere on the subject of the right of land to be protected against railway aggression ; and there sits a most charming representative of the opposite interest in the person of Miss Beaton, who should certainly command my vote in the event of a division being called for.”

I looked in the direction indicated, and there indeed was Mary Beaton, evidently a centre of attraction ; for a group of young men were hovering round her, anxious to engage her attention, but apparently not very successful in the attempt. The truth is, that few Englishmen are expert in the science of love-making, and when they attempt to practise it in public, display unaccountable awkwardness. A Frenchman, when addressing a lady, always tries to convey by his manner an impression of gallantry and devotion, which could hardly fail to have its effect, if, at the same time, he did not neutralise it by too strong an infusion of *fanfaronade* and extravagance. He thinks that he is

using the language of Bayard, but it is of Bayard only as represented at the *Cirque Olympique*. Nevertheless he has self-possession and a happy audacity, which the Englishman commonly wants. The latter cannot turn a compliment, is clumsy in his *petits soins*, stammers, blushes, or else becomes egotistical, and, foregoing homage, talks incoherently on subjects in which the fair listener can have no manner of interest. It is not at all uncommon among a certain set of young men to hear such expressions as—"Well, by Jove, who would have thought it? Harriet Erpingham has hooked Jack Newlands." This sounds degrading, not only for the particular fish, but for the whole shoal to which he belongs, yet it is the true confession of a fact. Jack would never have proposed to Harriet, unless she had relieved him of the intolerable nuisance of love-making. He liked her very well—better than any other girl he met with at balls or assemblies; but when he tried to make himself agreeable, he could talk of nothing except hunting, which was his favourite pursuit. Harriet was naturally a devotee to music, but did not dislike Jack, who was a personable good-humoured fellow, and possessed of an excellent estate, and she was ambitious of an establishment. She might as well have quoted the Talmud as have spoken to Jack of the divine beauties of Beethoven or Mendelssohn; so she affected a vivid interest in his tales of the field and its trophies, and by that means won his heart and took possession of his fortune. "Hooking," when we come to analyse it, means simply this, that a clever, well-educated girl,

can make conquest of an honest oaf, who ought, by rights, and from the dignity of his sex, to be the ensnarer, but who is so absolute a fool that, for his own comfort and advantage, it is necessary that he should be basketed with the minimum of trouble.

It was very evident to me that Miss Beaton was undergoing the persecution to which all heiresses are liable, but not evident that any one of the suitors then gathered around her was likely to succeed. One of them was Mr Popham, the young aspirant after Treasury honours, who had really nothing to recommend him beyond a vapid kind of good-nature, and an aptitude for retailing what he considered to be the *bons mots* of eminent men of his party—platitudes which might have been received as smart enough sayings in the lobby of the House of Commons, but were by no means likely to interest a lady who cared nothing for things political. Another candidate for favour and smiles was a gentleman of limited fortune, but, by his own assertion, of long descent ; notorious for his egotistical qualities, and the supercilious and depreciating way in which he talked of others. He was not exactly a tuft-hunter, for he considered himself, on the strength of some dubious interjection of Tudor blood, quite upon a par with any nobleman in the land ; but he had studied the Peerage Book with amazing industry, for the purpose of finding out blots in pedigree and unenviable alliances, and of these he had a large stock of instances which he carefully carried in his memory—offensive pebbles from the brook, to be slung at the

foreheads of tall aristocratic Philistines. There was not a case of divorce or scandal among the higher circles that had occurred during the last century and a half, of which he could not furnish the exact particulars—nay, he had pushed his studies so far, that he knew all about the plebeian races that in former generations had supplied wives to needy or extravagant patricians. If a living duchess was cited as a pattern of worth and benevolence, Mr Francis Gorget would inform you, with an air of infinite concern, that her grandfather had vended figs and other groceries in the City. Was an earl quoted as a model of high integrity, Mr Gorget would contrast his conduct with that of his maternal granduncle, regarding whom he had ascertained the melancholy fact that he was hanged at Tyburn for forgery. These being his usual topics, it was not probable that the small-talk of this accomplished heraldic devil's advocate would find favour in a lady's ear. But there was yet another attendant upon Miss Beaton, if attendant he could be called, who kept staring at her without uttering any word beyond an occasional inarticulate gobble. I surveyed this worthy with some curiosity, because it struck me that I had seen him before; and, sure enough, though the whiskers were somewhat bushier, and the face redder than in earlier days, and though the capillary honours had departed from his sloping forehead, I recognised the lineaments of our old election candidate, the Honourable Sholto Linklater.

“You see how it is,” said Mr Lumley; “Miss

Beaton is not a flower born to blush unseen ; nor need she waste her fragrance on the desert air for any lack of admirers. Now there is something melancholy to me, who am, you know, a confirmed old bachelor and cynic, and may, therefore, speak my mind, in such a sight as that. There is a most charming and accomplished girl, well worthy, for her own sake alone, to be wooed by a Paladin, if such a character could be found in our degenerate days ; and yet, because she unfortunately has the reputation of being an heiress, fellows of no consideration, and with nothing to recommend them—the mere flesh-flies of society—flock around her, and molest her with their impertinent buzzing. I wish Ashford or some such fine young fellow would come forward and drive them away ; but Ashford is a Sir Galahad, who will not bend to love ; and others, I suppose, hold back, lest they should be suspected of mercenary motives. After all, wealth is not a decided advantage to a young lady so endowed by nature as Miss Beaton.”

“ I see,” said I, “ that a countryman of mine has enrolled himself among the number of her admirers.”

“ You mean Mr Linklater ?” said Lumley. “ I take it that is a very hopeless attempt ; unless, indeed, the excellent fellow could procure a dragoman or interpreter. I must needs say, Mr Sinclair, that you do occasionally send us some strange animals from the north. Sholto came up to town some years ago, under influential Whig patronage, to be licked into some kind of uncouth official shape ; for I understand him

to be one of that favoured class of well-connected younger sons, who, being guiltless of means and unable to do anything for themselves, must be provided for at the public expense. That, at any rate, is the doctrine and practice of your Scotch Whig magnates, who seem to be provided with harpies, as their fathers were furnished with hawks. But it was utterly impossible to make anything of Sholto. They gave him several chances, but his stupidity was really awful—he could hardly even affix his name to a receipt for salary without blundering. At length the party trainer plainly intimated that the attempt was hopeless; and when the Whigs went out of office, Sholto was turned adrift. Since then he has been grazing, I fear, on rather short commons; but it would seem that he has a noble ambition of his own, and hopes, by a lucky matrimonial speculation, to make up for the double deficiency in fortune and in brains. But, Mr Sinclair, do you not intend to renew your acquaintance with Miss Beaton?—or are you one of those faint-hearted people who shrink from dowered beauty? Come, I shall assume the privilege of a senior, and conduct you under cover of my wing.”

“Miss Beaton,” said Lumley, after making his own salutation, “here is one of our Wilbury Christmas party, lost in the maze of the London labyrinth, to whom in charity you should give a clue.”

“You are much too learned for my apprehension, Mr Lumley,” replied Miss Beaton. “I must ask Mr

Linklater to explain your meaning. But I have not forgotten Mr Sinclair."

"I am too happy," said I—stammering, of course, as men always stammer when they lose their self-possession—"to have kept any place, however slight, in Miss Beaton's memory. May I ask if you have heard recently from our friends at Wilbury?"

"O yes!" said Miss Beaton, "Amy is an excellent correspondent. They are all well—I mean the Stanhopes; and—and your friend Mr Carlton is, I believe, still in that neighbourhood. Does not he communicate with you?"

"Very rarely, indeed—in fact, I have not heard from him since my return to town. Men are generally negligent correspondents, and Carlton is no exception."

"Forgive me for remarking," said Mr Lumley, "that your assertion requires to be qualified. Men are vigilant correspondents on all matters that affect their interest. They write fluently and most perspicuously from the head. It is the language of the heart that they either will not or cannot express; and therein lies the marked superiority of the other sex."

"That's very true, indeed. Just so—quite what strikes me," said little Popham, who was jerking about like a grasshopper. "There can be no doubt about the superiority of women! There's that Madame de Sevres—Savigny—you know who I mean—she, you know, who wrote the letters——"

“My dear Popham!” said Lumley, “don’t waste time in literary criticism just now. I had no idea you were in the room. Tressilian has been here in search of absentees, and entreats you will hurry down to the House instantly, as a division will probably take place. He said they had put up an old stager to speak against time, but the members were becoming restive.”

“You don’t say so!” cried Popham. “Then I must be off as fast as a cab can carry me.” It’s a very hard thing, Miss Beaton; but duty—duty, you know——”

“Nay, Mr Popham—no apology is requisite for yielding to the call of duty!”

“Very justly observed,” replied Popham. “That reminds me of what Peel once said to me, just before a question—I think it was something connected with the budget which was coming on.”

“My good friend, think what Peel would say *now*, if you should chance to be shut out from the division,” said Lumley.

“Bless me! that’s very true,” cried Popham, and he disappeared.

“Rather cruel sending poor Popham on a fool’s errand, though it is the only one he is fit for,” remarked Mr Gorget, sneeringly. “I have just heard that the debate is adjourned. But Popham has a hereditary aptitude for running messages. I happen to know that his father began life as a clerk in the establishment of Pickford & Co., the van-and-waggon people. His mother, to be sure, was a Pendarves—very fair

blood, but she married old Popham out of sheer necessity. Her father was utterly ruined."

"You are quite right, Mr Gorget," said Lumley; "accurate as usual in your facts. Mr Pendarves, of whom I have a distinct recollection, was ruined, as you say, and, if rumour is to be credited, through the malpractices of a rascally Welsh attorney—let me see—what was his name?"

"I wish you good evening, Miss Beaton!" said Gorget, hurriedly. "I think I see—that is, I promised to tell Lady Oaks"—and he vanished into the crowd.

"Mr Lumley!" said Miss Beaton, laughingly, "I shall be seriously angry with you if you continue to play the part of the malevolent enchanter. What right have you to dismiss my poor familiar spirits?"

"I should not despair of your forgiveness, fair lady, if I were permanently to imprison both of them in the caverns of the Red Sea. But my power over them is only momentary, though I use it for your deliverance."

"I wish I had the secret of your spell, Mr Lumley. It must be a very strong one to have effect upon Mr Gorget."

"There is really no secret. Gorget was simply foolish enough to display a chink in his armour. I marked the vulnerable point, but merely threatened him; and he, like most people who delight in inflicting wounds, made off in terror of the thrust. The Welsh attorney in question was his uncle. Yet," said Lumley, lowering his voice and glancing at Sholto

Linklater, who was helplessly playing with his hat, "it would appear you have another sentinel."

"O, do pray relieve the poor fellow, Mr Lumley!" said Miss Beaton. "He must be very tired, for he has been on duty the whole evening, and you know that sentinels are forbid to speak."

"To hear is to obey," said Lumley; "and you will, I am sure, pardon my presumption when you remember why I came to the rescue. You were speaking to Mr Sinclair of my dear little pet, Amy Stanhope, who has adopted me as an honorary uncle; and I was naturally desirous that neither of the gentlemen who have now dissolved themselves into thin air, should have an opportunity of eavesdropping."

"Thank you, Mr Lumley; you are always kind and considerate."

"A cold compliment, Miss Beaton, since you will not admit me to the roll of your adorers."

"I am not aware, Mr Lumley, that you ever offered yourself for enlistment."

"It is my usual fate!" replied Lumley. "In these unromantic days no man receives credit for an undivulged passion. So I shall content myself with acting the inferior part of corporal of the guard." And he moved towards Sholto, who appeared to be mightily pleased by being addressed by a human being.

It is curious how much more confident a man feels after the ice has once been broken. An hour before, I durst not have accosted Miss Beaton; but now the persiflage to which I had listened, and the easy tone of

her conversation with Mr Lumley, so unembarrassed yet so purely friendly, gave me courage.

“Miss Beaton,” I said, “the merest chance has given me the opportunity of approaching you this evening, not in the character of a casual acquaintance, which I scarcely should have ventured to do, but as a kinsman, and not one very far removed.”

“Mr Sinclair!”

“Pardon my abruptness. I knew nothing of this when we met at Wilbury; and since then it has been divulged to me in an extraordinary manner. Nevertheless, I have the undoubted right to call you cousin, though perhaps you may feel indignant at the claim.”

“Surely not indignant—say rather gratified, Mr Sinclair; for though the name I bear is an old, and, I believe, was once a proud one, it is now nearly extinct, and there are very few indeed related to us by a family tie. But it is strange! My father, who is sensitive on such subjects, though he rarely alludes to them, never mentioned this.”

“I have not the honour of knowing Mr Beaton,” I replied; “and it is very improbable that he should ever have heard of me—therefore there could be no recognition. You may, however, be aware that a person of my name, a merchant who died in Mexico, made your father his executor——”

“O yes! I know all about that. It has often made me sad to think of the old man dying alone, heart-broken and bereaved, in a distant land. But we understood he had no relations beyond ourselves. There

was indeed a Captain Sinclair, but he died when young, falling gallantly in action."

"Most true; and it is his son who now claims the honour of addressing Miss Beaton as a kinsman."

"I am sincerely glad to know that, Mr Sinclair; for you have a very attached and enthusiastic friend in the person of Mr Carlton, who used to entertain Amy and me with stories of your rambles abroad. So, you see, you are not quite a stranger. But you will see my father soon, will you not? I know he will be most happy to receive you."

"I shall certainly wait upon him, Miss Beaton, without loss of time. Indeed I should have done so before now, but until recently the history of the Mexican merchant was quite unknown to me. One thing, however, let me request; do not say to Mr Beaton that I have told you this, until he has acknowledged my claim."

"Miss Beaton," said Lumley, "I grieve to interrupt you, but Mr Linklater craves an audience."

"Tiresome man! However, I shall use him as an escort to Mrs Delamere, who was kind enough to bring me here, and whose forbearance I must not abuse. Good-night, Mr Lumley—farewell, Mr Sinclair." And giving me her hand, which I would fain have carried to my lips, Mary Beaton withdrew.

"Upon my honour, Mr Sinclair," said Lumley, "I think you must possess a recipe for making yourself agreeable, which would be well worth knowing. A few minutes ago I was presumptuous enough to imagine

that you stood rather in awe of the charming heiress, and, in the simplicity of my heart, I offered to take you up under cover of the ægis of my effrontery. In requital I am desired to watch the somewhat ungainly movements of Mr Linklater, leaving you to a *tête-à-tête*, in the course of which it would seem that you have made decided progress. But take care, my young friend, or you may chance to have a smart attack of heart-ache."

"Surely, Mr Lumley," said I, with as indifferent an air as I could assume, though I felt my cheek burning—"there is nothing very unusual in a few words of conversation being interchanged by cousins?"

Lumley looked astounded.

"Cousins, did you say, Mr Sinclair?"

"I have the honour to stand in that relation to Miss Beaton. I was not aware of it, however, when we met at Wilbury, and therefore I was a stranger; so you see there is no mystery in the matter."

"Singular good fortune, though, I should say," remarked Lumley. "Cousinhood is a most satisfactory tie. It is neither too close nor too wide; and, like india rubber, is elastic. Without meaning to be impertinent, Mr Sinclair, I congratulate you on the discovery."

"Thank you, Mr Lumley," said I, "both for your congratulation and for the diversion you effected in my favour."

"By my honour," said Lumley, "I wish I could do more than that. Hark you, Mr Sinclair—I felt inte-

rested in you when we first met, for even a jaded fellow can admire freshness and energy in others ; and since I returned to London, Ashford has told me something more. I like you for the manliness and pluck you have displayed, which have not been exerted in vain, since, without solicitation on your part, you are received in such society as this. So I say to you, in the words of Portia,

‘ I pray you, know me when we meet again ; ’

and, if you please, fix an early day for dining with me at my bachelor quarters.”

“ You are most kind, Mr Lumley. A few days hence I shall avail myself of your permission to call.”

“ Do so. And as by that time George Carlton will probably be in town, we shall arrange for a quiet symposium.”

I had no inclination, after this interview, to remain longer in the crowded rooms ; indeed I felt as if I had need of solitude to calm down the tumult of my thoughts. So I made my escape into the streets, and went homewards in a most excited mood. I had seen her, I had spoken with her, I had felt the pressure of her hand, and she had welcomed me cordially and graciously as a kinsman. That was much. Much ! I should have thought myself insane, but two days gone by, to have dreamed of this. And she so sweet and gentle, yet so greatly courted and admired ! Now, at least, I was known to her ; and fortune too had come forward in my aid, so that the great barrier was removed. Ah !

but Mr Beaton—her father—that worldly, purse-proud, ambitious man—how would he welcome me? This was his sole child, the heiress of all his wealth, for whom doubtless he had toiled and schemed in anticipation that she might attain that rank to which alone does wealth pay homage. Old men are tenacious of their purpose—was it probable that he would lightly forego his, even if I were successful in winning the affections of his daughter? That thought staggered me; but then I remembered what I had heard that very morning from my foster-brother of the doubtful state of his speculations, of the immense extent of his engagements, of the precarious nature of credit—and I could not help seeing that there was more than a possibility that Mr Beaton's prosperity might, after all, prove fictitious, and that the fabric might be tottering to its fall.

Then came another thought—Would it be generous in me now to press my pecuniary claim—of no trifling amount—upon a man so embarrassed, if he should throw himself on my forbearance for delay? To refuse might be the destruction of my hopes—to yield might be the loss of my fortune. I protest that in weighing that matter I strove to be as unselfish as a man can be—nay, that I felt more than once inclined to let fortune go, rather than be in any way accessory to the ruin of the father of Mary Beaton. But there was much force in the argument of Osett, that such a sacrifice on my part would not avert his doom; whereas, with the means now within my reach,

I could, in the very worst event, alleviate the disaster, and perhaps, through it, attain to the dearest object of my heart.

“Yes!” said I, as I mounted the stairs to my bedroom, “Davie was right. I need have no scruple in demanding what is my own. Money may be the root of all evil—though I never knew any one who carried that theory into practice—but its possession has manifold advantages; and were I to forego those, the hopes which this night’s adventure have raised from the merest spark to a fervid flame might be utterly extinguished.”

So I went to dream of Mary Beaton.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW RELATIONS TRANSACT BUSINESS.

WHATEVER might be Mr Beaton's views as to the expediency of an early settlement, he showed anything but a disposition to postpone our meeting ; for, next day, I received from him a letter, formal of its kind but politely worded, requesting a personal interview at his house at an early hour of the following morning. Shearaway, when I informed him of this, urged upon me very strongly the propriety of bringing matters to a speedy conclusion, observing that he had never, in the course of his long experience, known a single case in which postponed Count and Reckoning had not been attended with unhappy consequences.

“ Squaring accounts, Norman,” said the excellent Writer to the Signet, “ is a Christian duty as well as an extraordinary comfort and convenience. Titus, the Roman Emperor (who, you mind, was son to the man that first levied a tax upon fulzie), made a point of balancing the books of his conscience every night before he went to bed, and left no scores to be settled after-

wards, showing himself thereby to be a God-fearing man and an upright. If clients in general, and lairds in particular, would take a lesson from him, and insist upon having an annual redding-up of their accounts, say at Whitsunday or Martinmas, there would be less complaining than there is about the hardness of the times, and the exorbitant charges of lawyers, who, it stands to reason, have no other resource, in default of ready money, than to calculate interest on arrears. And in your case, Norman, there is especial reason why you should proceed *sine mora*; for you hold no kind of security whatever for your money, being therefore less favourably situated even than an agent, who, at the worst, has a lien over title-deeds. Not that I doubt Mr Beaton's sufficiency, though, truth to say, he has ower many irons in the fire; but it's aye best to be regular and exact, even though you are dealing with your brother."

I concluded from this speech that Mr Shearaway, notwithstanding his habitual caution and professional acuteness, entertained little or no suspicion that Mr Beaton's own affairs might be in a critical or embarrassed state. Nor was he singular in this. When I reflect now on the transactions of those memorable years, nothing strikes me more forcibly than the partial blindness which seemed to affect people, who had nevertheless discretion enough to doubt the soundness of the movement. They would shake their heads and remonstrate with men who were recklessly dealing in scrip, and subscribing contracts for sums infinitely larger

than the whole amount of their worldly means. They saw, without obstructed vision, that a course so opposed to the principles both of prudence and of fair-dealing must have a wretched end; but while they thus lavished their pity and commiseration on the minnows of the shoal, it did not seem to occur to them that the larger fish, the originators, projectors, and instigators of the schemes, might be in equal, if not greater danger. It was, I suspect, a common impression, that in process of time the big fish would turn round upon and swallow the fry—a notion, in some instances, not altogether without foundation; but few were so clear-sighted as to perceive that around them all, without distinction of size or weight, the net of retribution was being drawn.

It was remarkable—at least I thought so at the time—that on that very day there was a decided rally in the value of all kinds of shares pertaining to what Davie Osett had tersely denominated “Beaton’s lot.” There was no apparent cause for this. A parliamentary contest with another great company was still impending, which, it was thought, would be influenced by the decision of the Board of Trade, or rather the select committee to which such matters were referred; but that oracle had hitherto been mute, and its deliberations were reported to be as fenced and guarded from espial as those of the *Vehmgericht*, or of the mysterious conclave of Venice. Fluctuations were by no means uncommon; but this seemed to be a steady rise, which hardly could have been produced except by

a preponderance of buyers, or some gigantic operation on the part of a great capitalist. For me it was a favourable symptom, because it diminished the chances of there being any extraordinary pressure on the financial arrangements of Mr Beaton.

Moreover, in the course of the day, I encountered Ewins, who was, he told me, as busy as a gobbler in a field of maize.

"It's go ahead now, and no mistake," said the Yankee. "I've got hold of the cypher, and I guess it's as good as second sight."

"Any new discovery, Mr Ewins?"

"Wall, I reckon it ain't new neither. I allers had a kinder notion that it was possible to screw the cork out of every bottle; and it's all crankum to tell me that folks are closer here than they are elsewhere."

"Since you are so deeply engaged in speculation, Mr Ewins, I conclude that you do not anticipate a reaction?"

"Not before the fall, Squire, according to my thinking; but then let folks look out for chilblains."

After this Delphic utterance, which the Yankee seer enforced by a wink of preternatural sagacity, there was nothing more to be said; so at the appointed time I repaired to the mansion of Mr Beaton.

It was that gentleman's fancy to transact all his private and railway business at his house rather than in chambers; an arrangement which gave it very much the appearance of a public office, so great was the throng that resorted thither of a morning. In

answer to my inquiry whether Mr Beaton was visible, the porter, who seemed duly impressed with the dignity of his function, solemnly asked—"By appointment, sir?" and being certified of that, handed my card to a footman, who ushered me into the dining-room. There were already congregated nearly twenty people,—country agents, contractors, surveyors, and nondescripts,—all waiting eagerly for an audience of the railway monarch, who certainly appeared to have a quick way of getting through business, judging from the rapid manner in which the servant called the roll. Still, however, there were as many entrances as exits. Several who had arrived after me had priority of presentation, and I began to think that my card must certainly have fallen aside. At length the gentleman in the plush uniform made proclamation for Mr Norman Sinclair, and then intimated to the remainder of the company Mr Beaton's regret that he could receive no more visitors that morning.

"A mighty cool proceeding this," thought I, "on the part of a London merchant! Why, if he were Prince Metternich, transacting the affairs of the Austrian Empire, he could not behave more cavalierly."

I was ushered into a handsome library, where, at a table covered with plans and papers, the great man was seated. He was tall and portly, with an upright carriage, a hawk's eye, compressed lips, and a countenance expressive of determination. Like all shrewd negotiators, he kept his back to the light, a position which gives the advantage of scrutinising the faces of

others, while it partially conceals the expression of your own. He rose up immediately, but without advancing a step, and extended his hand.

“Before entering upon business, Mr Sinclair,” said he, speaking very slowly, and honouring me with a fixed regard, “it is my duty to greet you as a relative, which I do with all sincerity. Blood, sir, has its claims; and I trust I shall never be found deficient in consideration towards those who are scions of my family tree.”

This was an unfortunate salutation, for it roused that ancestral pride which burns strongly, however quietly, within the bosom of every genuine Scot.

“I thank you for your greeting, Mr Beaton, and am proud to be acknowledged as your kinsman; at the same time allow me to remark that your family tree and mine are quite apart. I am a cadet, though a remote one, of the noble house of St Clair.”

“Doubtless you are right, Mr Sinclair—that is, according to strict heraldic rules,” replied Mr Beaton, evidently, however, a little annoyed at the rebuff, not being prepared to receive an answer of the kind. “You must overlook the inaccuracies of a plain London merchant, who is unfortunately too much engrossed by the cares of business to give that attention to pedigree which you seem to have had leisure to bestow.”

I remembered the adage about the impolicy of shaking a red handkerchief in the face of a bull, so I contented myself with making a bow, and took a seat without

solicitation, the rather that Mr Beaton had resumed his chair.

“You have been abroad for some time, Mr Sinclair—at least so Poins informs me,” resumed Mr Beaton after a pause. “May I ask if you have travelled much?”

“A good deal in Europe,” I replied, “and but little beyond; though I have been in Egypt and the Lebanon.”

“Indeed! those countries are very interesting to us in a mercantile point of view. Have you studied their products and their trade?”

I was at no loss to comprehend the drift of this query. Mr Beaton wanted to find out in what capacity I had travelled, whether as a tutor, a courier, or a commercial agent; he being utterly in the dark as to my present position, which I had cautioned Mr Shearaway not to disclose.

“I regret to say I can give you no information on such subjects, Mr Beaton. I travelled solely for the purpose of studying foreign art and literature.”

“A most delightful occupation, though I believe rather an expensive one?”

“Not expensive to a man who knows what his means are, and is determined not to exceed them.”

“A very just remark,” said Mr Beaton. “And have you been long in London?”

“For a few months only.”

“Do you not feel it dull for want of society?”

“I cannot say I do. It seems to me, on the contrary, that in London one may be easily tempted to sacrifice too much time to society.”

“Society, however, is a word of expansive meaning. I hope, Mr Sinclair, I may be of service to you in giving you some introductions; for I should very much regret if, with your prospects, you should make acquaintances which it might be difficult hereafter to shake off.”

“It think you would hardly advise me, Mr Beaton, to shake off, as you term it, the acquaintances that I have formed, or to forsake the houses to which I have the honour to be admitted. I need merely mention the names of the Earl of Windermere, Colonel Stanhope of Wilbury, and Mr Osborne, to convince you that I do not stand in need of your offer—for which, however, I am sincerely grateful.”

Mr Beaton's face, on this announcement, would have been a capital subject for a caricaturist.

“Do you mean to say, Mr Sinclair, that you visit at such houses—Lord Windermere's, for example?”

“Certainly I do, Mr Beaton; and I am at a loss to understand why that should astonish you. Bating the dignity, we hold, in Scotland at least, that the poorest gentleman of coat armour is fit to associate with a duke. In England, so far as I have observed, heraldry is dispensed with altogether.”

“Upon my word, my young friend,” said Mr Beaton, assuming a friendly tone, instead of that of patronisation—a transition which he accomplished very credit-

ably, and which would have been perfect, but for a slight huskiness which he could not conceal—"you have taken me entirely by surprise. Now, don't be angry—but I will fairly admit to you, for honesty is the best policy—" (ah, Mr Beaton, had you firmly believed that it was so!) "that when you entered this room, I regarded you, being utterly ignorant of your antecedents, as a young man struggling with difficulties, to whom I might offer assistance. I am very glad, indeed, to be assured that no such offer is necessary."

"The kindness of your intention, Mr Beaton, remains the same. I have never made pretence to fortune, which indeed would have been a gross falsehood on my part; and I have had difficulties to contend with, though these have in a great measure disappeared. It was from no ostentation that I named those who have honoured me with their friendship and countenance, but solely for the purpose of making you aware that, in one respect at least, the distance between us is not so great as you possibly may have been led to imagine."

"I rejoice to hear it," replied Mr Beaton. "It is an agreeable surprise to find that, instead of a young man of imperfect education and unformed manners, I have to treat with a kinsman who possesses the rare faculty of making his talents known to and appreciated by men whose mere recognition is applause. For, to be quite frank with you, I was under some apprehension, before this interview, that my newly-discovered cousin might be one of those raw specimens of humanity imported from the north, for whom an ensign's

commission in a marching regiment is the highest attainable prize."

There was something in this speech that jarred disagreeably on my nerves. Possibly it was not meant to be sarcastic, but it sounded very like a sneer; and, remembering that my poor father, who died fighting for his country, was a Scottish cadet and soldier such as Beaton had contemptuously described, I felt somewhat exasperated.

"Mr Beaton," I said, "I am not a candidate for military honours; but I must nevertheless say that I hold the profession of arms in the highest respect, and consider it to be the most honourable in which a gentleman can engage. It certainly is not so lucrative as the occupations of trade or commerce, but these, and even greater things than these—the liberty, the power, and the glory of the British nation—are guaranteed, protected, and maintained, by the army and the navy. God knows, the service is ill requited by a country which boasts of its enormous wealth—but this I will say, that if I had been the rawest lad from the Highlands, of gentle blood, who was an applicant for a pair of colours, I would deserve fully more consideration, and be entitled to more courteous treatment, than the youth whose ideas of promotion commence with a stool and a desk in a counting-house."

"Surely you are unnecessarily warm, my friend," said Mr Beaton. "I had no intention of offending you; and, indeed, I do not exactly see why you should have put in such a strong plea for the military profession.

I am not one of the Manchester men who believe that the millennium will follow on free trade and the unlimited importation of cotton. Persons who hold such views are either knaves or idiots ; and the experience of a few years will show to which category they belong. But don't let us get into discussion upon abstract points, when we have real business before us ; for, Mr Sinclair, you and I have an important settlement to make."

"Pray, then, proceed, Mr Beaton."

"Here, then, are the executory accounts, examined and taxed, by which it appears that I am indebted to you in the sum of £42,000 odds, being your share of the estate of our deceased Mexican cousin. Your title has been examined by Messrs Poins and Peto, and is fully substantiated. I only regret that your attention was not earlier drawn to the advertisement."

"I have not the slightest doubt," said I, "that the calculation is quite correct ; and I am ready now, without giving any further trouble to you or your solicitors, to subscribe an entire acquittance."

"Would it not be more satisfactory to submit the papers to your legal adviser ? I am a strong advocate for method in all matters of business."

"Your well-known character for precision and accuracy, Mr Beaton, renders any further examination superfluous."

"Well, then ; since you are content to rest satisfied with my statement, you have simply to execute the deed of discharge, which I have directed Mr Poins to prepare. But—pardon me for asking the question—

have you made up your mind as to the disposal of this considerable sum of money? It does not amount to what we city men, who have rather enlarged notions about capital, consider to be a fortune; but it is sufficient, if judiciously laid out, to beget one, especially at a time like this, when money is circulating with almost miraculous rapidity. I should like to do something for you; the more especially as money is precisely the commodity which is most scarce with me just now, and were I to realise at present in order to meet your claim, the immediate sacrifice would be little compared with the prospective loss."

'*Diavolo!*' thought I to myself, 'I must be cautious how I deal with this old gentleman. Sorcerers work by fumigation; and already methinks I can discern a palpable odour of shares!'—"I understood, Mr Beaton," said I, "that the sum in question was of the nature of a trust-fund."

"No doubt it is, Mr Sinclair; and had I been aware of your existence, not one penny of it should have been invested otherwise than in Government securities. But please remember that, failing your father's family, I, as executor, was entitled to the whole estate of our Mexican relative; and when, after minute investigation and repeated public advertisements, we could trace no representative of your father, I was legally entitled to assume that no such heir was in existence. Indeed, I was so particular on that point, that I scrupulously abstained from drawing the money until I received an opinion from eminent counsel to the effect that, under

the circumstances, I was perfectly justified in doing so. If you desire it, that opinion, along with the case submitted to Sir William Follett, shall be placed in your hands."

"That is quite unnecessary, Mr Beaton. I am thoroughly convinced that in everything that has been done you have acted as a man of honour."

"I am gratified by that assurance," replied Mr Beaton. "Honour, Sinclair, is a jewel of the highest value. It is even worth more than credit; and, believe me, it is prized by the merchant as dearly as by the noble."

Sentiments of this sort are very beautiful to listen to, and are often received by simple-souled people as equivalents for performance; just as promissory notes are taken in lieu of cash payments. But it so happened that, a day or two previously, I had been reading the *School for Scandal*, and the apothegms of Mr Joseph Surface were still fresh in my recollection. Moreover, in my capacity of journalist, I had occasion to observe, from several rather curious disclosures which had come under my notice, that the laws of honour were not always held in strict observance by members of the mercantile order; but that, on the contrary, a vast deal of villanous fraud and hypocritical imposture was practised under cover of the convenient cloak of respectability. So that Mr Beaton's asseveration as to the high principle of his class had the effect rather of putting me on my guard than of disarming my suspicions.

"Now," continued Mr Beaton, "I am quite aware

that you must think it a strange thing that a man of my reputed means—and, perhaps, in this instance, the public voice does not much exaggerate—cannot easily, at any moment, command large sums of money. That certainly would be strange, if it were so; but I wish you to understand that, although I can always command the money, I cannot always do so *easily*. That will happen occasionally to the greatest financiers of Europe. I remember one occasion when Baron R—— had the utmost possible difficulty in whipping up a partry sum of £90,000. He had just transacted a loan of millions to the Austrian Empire, and wanted that little advance for some domestic purchase—pictures or furniture, I know not what it was. Would you believe it? There was a tightness then in the money market, and the Bank insisted on exorbitant terms, to which R—— must have yielded, if I and another, who happened then to have reserves, had not prevented the scandal. Well, in like manner, all my money is now engaged—invested in such a way as must bring a return of nearly fifty per cent, if time is allowed for the operation. Your money is also so embarked—as I have explained to you, through no fault of mine. I now make you the offer—and it is one upon which you will do well to pause and reflect—that, instead of giving you a cheque for the sum to which you are unquestionably entitled, I shall transfer to you the railway shares which have been purchased by your own money, and which are now worth far more than the sum they originally represented, provided that you leave

the disposal of them in my hands for six months from the present date."

"Mr Beaton," said I, "now that we have advanced so far, frankness is an absolute necessity. You propose to become my trustee. I am very much obliged; but I would rather that we should remain independent of each other. Without questioning the sufficiency of the securities which you indicate, or discussing the probability of the advantages which might accrue from such an arrangement, I must tell you at once that I have hitherto abstained, for weighty reasons, from all connection with railway enterprise, and that nothing shall tempt me now to swerve from that deliberate resolution."

"Oho!" said Mr Beaton; "so you are one of the prudent people who would rather have their money lying barren in a bag, than secure a handsome return by using it to stimulate labour! Why, even a South Sea islander has sounder and shrewder notions. Be advised, Sinclair! Do not throw away a chance which may never again present itself to your reach. Fortune, you know, my good fellow, is a female goddess, and, true to the instincts of the sex, will avenge herself if slighted—and do not deprive me of the power, which I am most willing and anxious to exert, of making you a wealthy man!"

I had entered the room sheathed, as I believed, in the full panoply of resistance, but I now felt as if the buckles were giving way. Armida had no great difficulty in disencumbering Rinaldo of his cuirass; and,

although old Beaton was not exactly an Armida, I could not forget that he was at least the father of my enchantress. I hesitated.

Mr Beaton saw his advantage, and pursued it.

“Come now, Sinclair,” said he, “you see how the land lies. I have explained to you what your interest is—I now appeal to your generosity. The payment of this money would hamper me very seriously. Let it stand over for a little. You will be no loser by agreeing to this—on the contrary, I can insure you a large addition to your capital—and, moreover, you will lay me under a great obligation.”

Short-sighted Shearaway! Wherefore didst thou forbid my presence whilst thou wert negotiating with the agent, and yet leave me to grapple single-handed with the far more dangerous principal? Like one of the Roman mob under the spell of the rhetoric of Mark Antony, I was rapidly changing my mind. Here was an opportunity of making a favourable impression upon Mr Beaton, and—what was more—of gaining access to the bower which, otherwise, I never might enter!

I was about to yield; when, by one of those habitual tricks, to which people labouring under the influence of agitation often unconsciously resort, I put my hand into the pocket of my waistcoat, and found there a small scrap of paper which I had picked up from my desk in the morning, and stowed away without perusing its contents. I now opened it, not from any feeling of curiosity as to its purport, but simply from

mechanical impulse, and there I saw, written in pencil, the following words :—

“ MR NORMAN, HAUD THE GRIP!—D. O.”

Had my good genius sent me a telegraphic message, it could not have had a stronger effect than this laconic note, the significance of which I thoroughly understood.

“ Mr Beaton,” I said, “ I do not consider it advisable that this interview should be prolonged. I have listened to you with profound attention ; but nothing that you have said has in the least moved me to alter my resolution as to hazarding any portion of my capital in railway speculation. But I should be extremely sorry to put you to any inconvenience by pressing my pecuniary claim. There is, however, a mode of settlement with which, as a mercantile man, you must be familiar, and which will obviate all difficulty. Give me your acceptance for the amount at any date you please, and I shall be perfectly satisfied.”

Sudden as the explosion of a mine burst forth the wrath of Beaton.

“ No !” cried he, with a deep oath, “ I will submit to no such degradation ! Has it come to this, that Richard Beaton, who can command millions by a stroke of his pen, is to be bearded and insulted in his own house by a runagate boy, who, for anything I know to the contrary, may just have emerged from the kennel ? Leave my house, sir, and never hope to enter it again ! As for your paltry debt, go down to Mr Pains as speedily as you choose. He shall have orders to settle

it this afternoon—ay, mark me, sir, this very day! and so I shall be rid for ever of an ungrateful whelp, who I believe from the bottom of my soul to be a braggart and an impostor!”

“Sir,” said I, “I am at a loss to understand how, as a gentleman, you can justify to yourself the use of such coarse and outrageous language. Your unworthy taunt I scorn and despise. Were I a braggart, I would tell you that the sanctity of your own roof alone protects you from my anger. But you are safe anywhere from me. The violence of age calls rather for pity than resentment; and I, at least, shall not forget our common blood, though in your veins it would seem to be mingled with that of a churl. I go, sir, without one bitter feeling save regret that a kinsman should have demeaned himself so unworthily!”

The expression of Beaton’s countenance was absolutely fiendish. I knew him by report to be a man of uncontrollable will, but I never could have imagined that passion would so utterly overpower his reason.

“No kinsman of mine!” he cried. “I disown you, sir—I revoke the name. Hence—begone! And hark-ye—tell this where you go, and proclaim it on ’Change if you will—that Richard Beaton, the merchant, the member of Parliament, humbled himself so far as to crave that you would grant him time to make a paltry money payment, and that you—ha, ha!—refused him! Tell that—tell that to all the world if you will, sir! It is a rare boast for a beggarly Scot, and for once you will be speaking the truth!”

“Silence, old man!” said I. “If you have no respect for others, at least respect yourself. The beggarly Scot is more of a gentleman than you are, and even richer, since he can afford to give you his pity. Farewell, sir! May God restore to you your reason, and forgive you for your gross injustice!”

So terminated my interview with the father of Mary Beaton.

CHAPTER XIV.

SUN-GLIMPSE AFTER STORM.

I DO not know how other people may feel after experiencing strong excitement, but the effect which it has on me is painful in the extreme. It somewhat resembles the sensation produced by laying hold of the wires of a galvanic battery—a twitching of the nerves, a contraction of the muscles, and an apparent diminution of physical power. I have been told by more than one public speaker, that when rising under the influence of more than common excitement to address an audience, they have felt as if smitten by a sudden stroke of paralysis, when volition loses its habitual control over the limbs. That, I suppose, is an extreme case; but I can bear testimony to the subsequent languor and depression, both of mind and body, when the passions have been violently agitated.

The gross and extravagant affront which I had received from Mr Beaton did not move me much. No one is entitled to be seriously offended by the virulent ravings of a madman; and I could attribute the fury

of the merchant to nothing but temporary insanity. Some people there are, generally regarded as wise and even temperate, who nevertheless, when thwarted or contradicted, become absolute maniacs for the time; and many a scene which, if it occurred publicly, would be deemed sufficient to justify the removal of the principal actor to Bedlam, takes place in the privacy of a family regarded, even by familiars, as a model of forbearance, harmony, and affection. In presence of a witness, Beaton durst not have spoken as he did. No one was by when Saul, under the instigation of the evil spirit, sought to smite David to the wall with his javelin; for madness has a cunning of its own which always dreads detection. The entrance even of a lackey would have made the railway potentate lower his tone; and conscious as I was that, in maintaining my undoubted rights, I had done nothing to call down the discharge of such a vial of wrath upon my head, I felt in no way humiliated by the contumely to which I had been exposed.

I *did*, however, feel, on reflection, a consciousness that I had been a little too stiff and defiant—perhaps even peppery—throughout this unfortunate interview. I had neither cared for soothing, nor studied to ingratiate myself with the man. I had acted under the influence of pride rather than discretion; and I had not borne with sufficient meekness, or made the proper allowance for that arrogant assumption which is so often the concomitant of successful enterprise. Prudence might have dictated a different line of conduct;

but then Prudence is twin-sister to that jade Hypocrisy, whom I abhor, and it is not always possible to distinguish the one from the other. But, attributing to myself the largest admissible quota of blame, that could never be held, in the opinion of any jury, to justify the conduct of Beaton.

My sorrow—nay, my grief, almost amounting to despair—lay in the thought that now, after this violent and apparently irreconcilable rupture with her father, I must abandon all thought of approaching Mary Beaton as a suitor for her hand. That was what unmanned me. Granting that, in the most sanguine view, my chance of gaining acceptance was but a slight one, still it afforded at least a rational ground for hope, but that hope had disappeared for ever. Without her father's consent I felt sure that Mary Beaton would never wed, even if she had bestowed her affection; but of that as yet I had no proof, and now I was banished from her presence. Even worse than that—the old man in his irritated mood might speak of me in her presence as a designing knave or a selfish sordid adventurer, and so degrade me in the eyes of her whom I loved with as pure a passion as ever burned in the heart of man. Life has many bitter hours, and in its course we must all expect to meet with heavy sorrows that will bear down the strongest man, and depress the most undaunted spirit; but perhaps the sharpest pang, though not the most enduring, is caused by the annihilation of those cherished hopes of love that have

given light and lustre to our existence in the hey-day of our youth and expectancy.

I am not a demonstrative man ; so I went through no pantomime expressive of anguish even in my own chamber : but I doubt not that I looked gloomy enough when the door opened, and my dear friend George Carlton appeared. *He* at least was not gloomy. There was more fire in his eye, and animation in his face, than I had remarked since the days of our early travel ; and a certain listlessness and indifference of manner, which he had contracted since our return to England, had now entirely disappeared.

“ Norman—my dear fellow—how goes it with you ? Gad ! this is a decided improvement on old Mother Lewson’s establishment ! But what is the matter ? You look pale and out of sorts. Have you been unwell ? ”

“ No, Carlton—not in health, but somewhat vexed, I own, in spirit. However, let that stand over. You, I rejoice to see, are strong and sprightly.”

“ And no wonder, Norman ! The demon who, somehow or other, had got possession of me, and compelled me to wander among tombs, is fairly exorcised ; and I am now, if not a free, at least a happy man.”

“ And who, if I may ask, was the exorciser ? ”

“ Love, Norman, love—the most potent deity of the old faiths, and the culminating principle of that which is purely divine ! In one word, I have proposed to Amy Stanhope, and she has honoured me by acceptance.”

“What!—without fame?”

“Ah, Norman! Spare me your ridicule. I admit that I was an ass; which, being a candid and broad confession, should protect me from any observations founded upon the past. I have abandoned the Paladin theory, and shall take that place which God has assigned to me; only too happy if, in the great and final account, it shall be admitted that I have striven to discharge my duty. But I grieve to see you in this plight, for something serious must have occurred to overcome your spirit. May I know what it is?”

“*Imprimis*, I have succeeded to what, for me at least, is a fortune.”

“I would wish you joy, with my whole heart, if it were not that you give the intelligence with the dismal tone of an undertaker.”

“Say a mourner, and you are right. I mourn over a perished hope. But do not let us speak of that now, Carlton; I would rather hear of your happiness.”

“Nay; when grief and joy chance to meet, grief ought to have the precedence. What has happened? Can I aid you?”

“No, Carlton. But you are so true a friend that I will tell you all, certain at least that you will give me your sympathy; and to confess the truth, I do stand much in need of consolation.”

So, without reservation, I imparted to him the secret of my attachment, the circumstances which brought me into contact with the speculative merchant, and the untoward consequences of our interview.

“My poor Norman!” said Carlton, after I had finished my narrative, “yours is a very hard case. You go to this man Beaton’s house, by special appointment, to effect a settlement; and because you will not let him make ducks and drakes of your money, the unreasonable old savage gets into a violent passion, gives you hard names, and orders you to leave his house! Well, if he were not Mary Beaton’s father—and I marvel how so gentle a creature can be his child—there would not be much to regret in that. As for your notion that you might possibly have conciliated him by adopting another tone, I dismiss that as utterly visionary. Depend upon it, nothing would have satisfied him but an unconditional acceptance of his proposal, which would have been madness on your part. You were quite right in resisting his attempts; and I wish you to be satisfied as to that; because, whatever may be the issue of the affair, it must be some comfort to reflect that you did nothing to provoke the anger of this imperative dictator.”

“I am like to derive little comfort from that or any other consideration,” was my reply. “Show me how the evil may be remedied, and then you may speak to me of comfort.”

“Nay, Sinclair; that is no sound philosophy. Let a man suffer ever so much from the tyranny, injustice, or caprice of others, so long as he is conscious that he has done no wrong, he preserves his own respect, and is free from that worst of torments, the reproach of an inward accuser. But I suppose, in your

present mood, you would say to me, as Romeo to Friar Lawrence,

‘ Hang up philosophy,
Unless philosophy can make a Juliet !’

so let us pass from that part of the business. Then you have seen Miss Beaton ?”

“ Yes ; I spoke with her at Lord Windermere’s.”

“ It is curious how sharp women are in love matters ! When we were at Wilbury, it never once occurred to me that you had any admiration for her ; but Amy saw it clearly enough, and insisted that you had lost your heart.”

“ She did not hint such a thing to Miss Beaton, I trust !” said I, nervously.

“ Why, as to that I really cannot speak with any certainty,” replied Carlton, with a somewhat provoking smile. “ Young ladies, you know, have their confidences, and are rather fond of rallying one another upon the subject of their supposed adorers. Depend upon it, few gentlemen of their acquaintance escape without notice in those mysterious little conclaves, sacred from all intrusion, which are held in dressing-rooms.”

“ Ah, but that must have been a mere jest on the part of Miss Stanhope !”

“ Very serious earnest, I assure you, at least as uttered to me. Amy is convinced that you were smitten. But as I am quite unaware of the state of the feelings of the other party, that can make no difference to you,

unless you accept it as a proof that you are not quite such a master of innocent dissimulation as you seem to have supposed. However, of one thing I am tolerably well assured, and that is, that if an indifferent spectator can detect symptoms of admiration, the person to whom the homage is rendered will hardly be less observant."

"I wish to Heaven, Carlton, you had not told me this! If it is so fated that I am never to see her more—never to gaze upon that sweet face, or hear the melody of that gentle voice—can you not feel that a misery so great is but aggravated by the knowledge that she knows that I had dared to love?"

"In that I differ from you," replied Carlton. "I have read deep enough in Cupid's books to know that women never despise admiration; and if you could be quite candid—which, I admit, under present circumstances, is hardly to be expected—you would confess that the other evening at Lord Windermere's you were trying at all events to lay the foundation for a deliberate courtship. Why not? You were quite entitled to do so. Most of the men who besiege Miss Beaton, believing her to be a great heiress, have not half your pretensions even in a worldly point of view, and are immeasurably your inferiors in worth and intellect. Dared to love, indeed! I doubt whether I ever said to you anything more foolish, though, perhaps, I may have said the same. If I did so, I felt it thoroughly, Norman! But if we must make divinities of those we love—and shame to us it would be if that

high worship were abandoned—let awe be subordinate to devotion. If you will have a saint, either in heaven or on earth, pray to her, and let her know that you pray. But do not approach her as an Isis or Persephone, for it is to the human feeling alone that you must appeal.”

“Carlton,” said I, “I know you well enough to be satisfied that you would not hold such language unless you thought that there was some possibility of my attaining what I have frankly told you is the one object of my heart, just as your whole affections were centred upon Miss Stanhope—and even in the first hour of my affliction, the knowledge that you are happy and contented, and relieved from those bugbears of your own imagination, has been to me a delightful thought.”

“Of that I am quite sure, my dear fellow; and I don’t see why you should despair. We never can tell what an hour may bring forth. Circumstances may alter materially. I don’t contemplate impossibilities, such as a sudden relenting on the part of old Beaton, for flints never thaw; but even his exorbitant pride, which is the offspring of prosperity, may be humbled. My knowledge of such matters is very limited, but I have heard it whispered that the gentleman is by no means so wealthy as was supposed, and, of course, his engagements must be enormous.”

“Supposing that it were so, Carlton, which it would be uncharitable to desire—because, though Mr Beaton has used me ill, I could not rejoice over his misfortune—I do not see what difference that would make in my favour.”

“ Ah! I perceive you are not acquainted with the real state of matters in regard to the Beaton family. You must not imagine that the young men whom you saw in attendance on Miss Beaton are her sole admirers. Were you in the habit of frequenting the clubs, you would ere this have learned that the favourite for the heiress-stakes—to use the polite phraseology of modern society—is the young Earl of Pentland, son to the impoverished Duke of Dryfesdale. He is said to be quite a harmless lad, who has borne the reverses of fortune with remarkable equanimity—a virtue mainly attributable to his peculiar temperament, for those who know him best declare that he has no more feeling than a tortoise. He takes everything coolly, with the passive fatalism of a Mohammedan; and might appropriately be likened to a well-furnished railway-carriage, which will roll along at the rate of forty miles in the hour when coupled to an engine, but which is of itself utterly incapable of progression. He dresses unexceptionably, talks conventionally, offends nobody, and excites but little envy. Therefore he is esteemed as a sort of model young man, who possibly may not be a genius, but who is certain, if he survives his father, to be a duke. What he lacks is money; and he has no chance of supplying that want except through matrimony. Mary Beaton is supposed to be a great heiress; and as—though I need hardly insist upon that point to you—her beauty and accomplishments would adorn the highest rank, Pentland has come forward as her suitor. Mr Beaton, as a matter

of course, would move heaven and earth to bring about that alliance. I say, as a matter of course ; because human nature exhibits itself everywhere with miraculous uniformity, undisturbed by creed or climate ; and the British merchant who barter his daughter in order that she may have rank and title, is on a par with the Circassian chief who sends his child to the seraglio of the Sultan."

"And this Lord Pentland—what does Mary—Miss Beaton think of him ?"

"She regards him pretty much as you regard your watch—an implement to measure time by. In his eyes, she is the agreeable representative of half a million or more. He would, if absolutely necessary, propose to Tisiphone herself, in order to secure the like amount ; but I make no doubt that he finds a sort of torpid pleasure in addressing a rich Aglaia. But if the money, which is his motive power, should disappear, Pentland will come to a stand-still. Domestic happiness is not his aim. Banish consols and dividends, and you will find him perfectly heart-whole, questing about for some other unfortunate young woman possessed of a large fortune realised by trade ; and doubtless, in the long-run, he will be successful, for the daughters of commerce can rarely resist the fascinations of aristocratic courtship."

"Then what do you counsel ?"

"Patience, Norman !—patience, that often leads to results which no violent energy can achieve. Do not look so dolorous. I mean not to propose that you

should linger on without an occasional glimpse of the lady of your love, or even the opportunity of an interview. It would be too cruel to deprive you altogether of the benefit of the sunshine. The Stanhopes have taken a house in London for the season, and will be here immediately. I shall let Amy, who is true as steel, into the secret—nothing like a female auxiliary in such cases—and you may rely upon it, she will befriend you to the utmost of her power. What matters it that the arrogant old merchant has forbidden you to enter his house? He cannot interfere with the Colonel's establishment, and there I can insure you a welcome. There is no reason why you should be punctilious with such a Brabantio. I can respect a man who throws down his gauntlet according to the usages of chivalry. If he had treated you as a kinsman, and yet intimated that he disapproved of your attentions to his daughter, you must, as a man of honour, have respected his mandate. But this has been a base and even cowardly attack, and has absolved you from ordinary restraint."

"George, you give me new life! I shall be able then to meet her? Be assured, I shall not abuse that inestimable privilege."

"What! Do you mean to say you won't communicate the fact of your adoration? Bah! Please to recollect that we have now changed places. A few months ago, I was the faint-hearted one, and you were the ardent adviser; now you are Mr Timorous, and I am the redoubtable Greatheart. What, man!

shall we let you be carried into the castle of Giant Despair? Perish the thought! We shall knock the ogre on the head, raze the building to its foundation, and celebrate the event by a jolly nuptial feast, at which my Norman shall caper like a kid on the mountains of Cadwallader! And now farewell for the present. Keep your heart up; and, believe me, everything will go well. Oh, by the way, have you chanced to encounter Lumley?"

"Yes; he wants us both to dine with him on an early day."

"Then do you fix it for any day you please, and let me know. Not sooner, however, than a fortnight from the present time, for I am under a pressure of upholstery. Do you feel better now, Norman?"

"Better? Yes—much, much better; thanks to you, my kind and trusty friend."

"I thought so," said Carlton. "The science of homœopathy is not yet fully developed. I recently caught a friend of mine, who dabbles in minute pills, prescribing for an unfortunate patient an infinitesimal dose of Lachesis, which appeared to me to be ominous of Atropos. I marvel that they have never yet attempted to concentrate the virtues of Speranza."

CHAPTER XV.

FALSE PLAY SOMEWHERE.

“It is a very pleasant thing, Norman,” said Mr Shearaway, “to know that we have got the money safe and sound. Mr Beaton may have behaved ill to you, and no doubt has done so; but this early settlement somewhat redeems him in my opinion; for prompt payment, like charity, will cover a multitude of sins. I’ve transmitted £40,000 through Coutts and Co., to lie in the Royal Bank of Scotland as a deposit in your name, on which you will receive the ordinary rate of interest, but we must look out by-and-by for a more profitable investment. I suppose you will not think of buying land just yet?”

“That is the very thing I have set my heart on. With forty thousand pounds one should be able to purchase an extensive property in the Highlands.”

“Doubtless; and a pauper population into the bargain! Wait till the new Poor-law Act has come into full effect. It may work well enough in the south, where the folk are used to labour, and can get plenty

of employment; but it will be a sore scourge to the lairds in the northern and remoter districts. The Highlands are very bonny to look at in the summer-time, but I never would advise a client of mine to buy land there, unless he was prepared to expend in improvements as much again as the price of his estate. Stick to the Lowlands, I advise you; and maybe, one of those days, I may hear of a likely purchase."

"I shall always be glad, Mr Shearaway, to avail myself of your advice. But tell me, have you seen anything of James Littlewoo?"

"I have seen him, Norman, and a sore sight it is! The poor thing is just broken down with dissipation—utterly feckless. When he saw me he shook like a willow-wand; and when I asked him a question or two about his affairs—though I spoke as kindly as I could—began to blubber. I doubt he is in a very bad way. But he vows and declares that in money matters he is all right. I inquired if he had any debt, but he swore positively that he had none."

"That is very strange! He confessed to me quite recently that he had signed a bill for several hundred pounds."

"Then he must either be telling a lie, or he has found out some way of making money that baffles my comprehension. Do you think he can have been gambling in shares?"

"Why, there have been such fluctuations of late, that he may have made a lucky hit. Those connected with

the Board of Trade are forbidden to speculate, but I daresay he is not over-scrupulous upon that score."

"Anyhow it looks queer," said Shearaway; "but I am to be in town for three weeks yet, and I shall keep a sharp eye upon him."

In the course of a few days afterwards I had ample reason to congratulate myself that I had not yielded to the solicitations of Mr Beaton. The prices of the northern lines began steadily to decline, in consequence of heavy sales that were forced upon the market. Within a week from the date of that declension, it became publicly known that the decision of the committee of the Board of Trade, upon a point of great magnitude, was hostile to Mr Beaton's, and favourable to a rival company.

This event created an immense sensation on the Stock Exchange. It was immediately surmised that there must have been foul play—that some one in the confidence of the committee, or having access to their documents, must have betrayed his trust; and loud and awful were the denunciations of the losers. A gross fraud on the Stock Exchange creates, among the respectable buying and selling community, as profound a sensation as the birth of an infant in a nunnery. In both cases the corporations, though they may not altogether have escaped the venomous tongue of slander, are scandalised, and most justly, by the appearance of an undeniable token of frailty, which reflects upon the character of the order. No one has such an intense

horror of being bit as the habitual biter ; and beautiful it was to hear the virtuous indignation of Capel Court at so vile a breach of morals.

No doubt the offence, supposing it to have been committed, was a grave one, and demanded inquiry. I had more than a suspicion, in consequence of what had fallen from Ewins, that Speedwell was cognizant of the transaction—if so, what more probable than that he should have made a tool of Littlewoo? Not the least terrible result of pecuniary embarrassment is the moral obliquity which it seems to produce even in men whom the world has esteemed the most upright and honourable. They will risk almost anything in the desperate attempt to retrieve themselves, and very often throw away character in addition to the loss of fortune. James Littlewoo had not much character to lose, and little principle to sustain him ; therefore he was the more likely to yield to temptations. His declaration to Shearaway that he was free from debt, appeared to me, who had heard him tell a different story, a very ugly symptom.

I had no personal interest in expiscating the details of this fraudulent episode ; but it was a very serious matter for the Government, against whom all sorts of unfounded accusations might be made, and the public security demanded that the matter should be probed to the bottom. I therefore considered it advisable to have a special interview with Mr Osborne, and found him at his villa.

It was unnecessary to enter into a lengthened expla-

nation, for the old gentleman had heard the rumour, and was ready to discuss the subject.

“I quite agree with you,” he said, “in thinking that some official must have played the spy. Such things are not so common now as they once were, but I could tell you strange stories of what used to take place some thirty years ago. Foreign governments, if they chose to pay for it, might have accurate information of the designs of the British Cabinet. I do not mean only that despatches and State documents were surreptitiously copied, but even private conversations were divulged in spite of the most careful precaution. Mechanism can do wonders. Fouché, who had a first-rate genius for such things, was cognizant of every word spoken in the Emperor’s private apartment. The palace Master-of-Works was in his pay, and there was no difficulty whatever in laying down an acoustic pipe. The most sagacious statesman England ever knew was Lord Burleigh, who never opened his mouth, but expressed his opinion by a shrug.”

“This, I take it, must have been a case of pilfering documents.”

“Very likely—pilfering, or getting access to them by means of duplicate keys. Even Chubb cannot guard against conspiracy.”

“I presume it will be advisable, sir, that an event like this, which is creating much sensation, should have prominent notice?”

“Of course. We must insist upon the necessity for a rigorous investigation, as such an escapade is calcu-

lated to throw discredit on the whole public service. By the way, do you happen to know who have profited most by the operation?"

"It appears to have been conducted chiefly by private speculators."

"Ah! Then it might not be impossible to find a clue. But that does not concern us. Well, Mr Sinclair, have you anything more to say in the way of business?"

"No, sir; but I confess I am anxious about this matter. The fact is, that from certain circumstances which have come to my knowledge, I have a strong suspicion as to the delinquent."

"The deuce you have!" cried Mr Osborne. "My good friend, if you have really strong grounds for suspicion, I don't envy you; for in that case it may become your duty to communicate them to the Secretary of State."

"Not, I apprehend, unless the authorities should resolve upon commencing an investigation."

"That's true enough; but upon what grounds does your suspicion rest? I am an old lawyer, though now a retired one, and have done business in Bond Street in my day. If you have no objection to tell me what you know or have observed, I think, from my experience in such matters, that I can form a shrewd guess whether you are right or no."

Having the most complete reliance on Mr Osborne's discretion, I did not hesitate to tell him what the

reader already knows—Littlewoo's entanglement with Speedwell, and the extremely significant hints which the Jew had given to the American.

Mr Osborne listened to the narrative with evident interest, and then said,

“I agree with you, Mr Sinclair, that there is here ground for strong suspicion, but nothing more. There are many rascals who would stick at no villany in order to come by profitable information ; and Speedwell, from your description of him, must be one of the worst of his tribe. Evidently he has got that poor young fellow entirely in his hands, and would not scruple, for his own gain, to make him liable to the penalties of transportation. But, after all, there may be no investigation, at least none which will be announced to the public. It is sometimes wiser to hush up a scandal than to make a noise about it ; and I think that the Board of Trade will be extremely unwilling to admit that there has been any such laxity in its arrangements as would enable a subordinate to betray them. But if you have any regard for that unhappy youth, get him out of the way as fast as you can.”

“That is my anxious wish, Mr Osborne. But his father's partner in business, who is now in London, is the proper person to make such arrangements.”

“Undoubtedly. Now, Mr Sinclair, will you take a stroll through the gardens ?”

I agreed ; and in the course of our walk informed Mr Osborne of the recent change in my fortunes. The

old gentleman was warm in his congratulations, and very much pleased to learn that I had no immediate intention of throwing up my engagement.

“You are doing what is best and wisest for yourself,” he said. “Believe me, you would become quite wretched were you left without occupation; for you are just at the time of life when work is an absolute necessity—it clears the brain, ripens the understanding, and is as healthful to the mind of man as exercise is to his body. Idleness is the mother of mischief—an excellent adage, which I have tried in vain to impress upon Attie Faunce. When you get well up in years, you may, if so disposed, follow my example—assume long gaiters and a spud, and indulge in the delusion that you are a first-rate experimental farmer. I daresay that sort of thing appears ridiculous to many; but it is a foible of old age, and a very innocent one. There is a decided pleasure in pottering among turnips; and I can quite enter into the feelings of the respectable Cincinnatus. You know he was upwards of eighty when they dragged him from his plough to assume the office of dictator. I make no manner of doubt that the excellent old man swore frightfully when they divorced him from his clover.”

“My own inclinations, Mr Osborne, would lead me to retreat somewhat earlier to country quarters.”

“I advise you to get a wife before you make any movement of the kind. A solitary hearth is dreary enough in towns—in the country it must be utterly unbearable. I suppose if you settle down it will be

in the north, a region of which I have no personal knowledge ; but, if books are to be trusted, give me Hampstead or Highgate rather than the most romantic Highland glen, where the people speak no English, and have a cordial detestation of breeches. My good friend ! if you were left alone in such a place for three months, you would find your intellect gradually departing, and premature old age settling upon your shoulders, like the fiendish companion of Sinbad. They say that the Highlanders consume a vast amount of whisky—I don't wonder at it. Men must have some occupation ; and solitude is a strong incentive to the bottle."

"Then, Mr Osborne, company—which is often regarded as synonymous with conviviality—has been much belied."

"That is my thorough conviction. The love of society may, no doubt, lead to occasional transgression ; but the great majority of sots are men of solitary habits. But this is a stupid kind of discussion to follow immediately on such an announcement. So Mr Richard Beaton proves to be a cousin of yours ? Faith ! I doubt if he would relish the connection, if he could trace to their source the hard hits at railway mismanagement that have been made by a certain pen."

"The knowledge of that sir, would make no difference in our relative position. There has been a complete rupture between us."

"Eh ! How was that ?" said Mr Osborne.

"The explanation is easy. Mr Beaton wished me

to take payment of my bequest in shares, but I preferred the currency."

"Capital!" cried Osborne. "Now, my dear boy, you have undergone the *experimentum crucis*, for, I warrant, Beaton would do his very best to drive you to the wall. But you carried your point?"

"Yes, sir, Mr Beaton behaved most honourably with regard to the settlement; but, though admitting my claim, he thought fit to use language so offensive that henceforward we must be strangers."

"I believe you; for I know him to be a most arrogant and inconsiderate man. I am glad, though, that you are out of the scrape, for difficulties are gathering round him. Though I do not now personally practise as a solicitor, I have still a share in my old firm, which has intimate connections with Lombard Street; and Beaton's paper, however high he may hold his head, is not exactly the kind I would pass without strict examination of the indorsements."

"Yet the world gives him credit for the possession of enormous wealth."

"The world, Sinclair, therein resembles individuals, who commonly judge from appearances, and do not take the pains to inquire any further. It was Beaton's misfortune to be uniformly lucky in the early part of his career, and that has turned his head. It is the way with all speculators; they never know when to stop. He is ambitious too, after his own fashion. I hear it said that he wishes to get a coronet for his daughter."

“Such, I believe, is the general report,” I replied.

“Ah, then, he had better lose no time in completing the arrangements,” said Mr Osborne. “And yet, that is a foolish and rather cruel remark ; for men who wed solely for money are rarely otherwise estimable ; and if, after marriage, it should be discovered that the poor girl is not to be an heiress, her lot would be one of wretchedness. The fine folks who now fawn upon her would tear her to pieces without remorse. No ; I sincerely hope that Mr Beaton may be baulked in that attempt.”

“Amen !” was my mute ejaculation ; but I did not consider it necessary to say anything further upon that subject, and the conversation gradually diverged into another channel.

CHAPTER XVI.

JEW AND GENTILE.

SHORTLY after this I obtained another glimpse of the interesting Mr Speedwell.

I was returning homewards in the dusk of the evening, when a sudden thunder-plump forced me to take shelter in the Burlington Arcade. I tried to hail a cab, but every vehicle seemed to be engaged, so I had nothing for it but to remain in the obscure and nearly deserted passage. Presently there entered a well-dressed man, followed closely by a person, whose shabby garments and battered hat gave token of extreme poverty. They faced round towards the street; and I, standing at a window close by, could not avoid hearing their conversation.

“What the devil do you mean by following me in this manner?” said Mr Speedwell (for I instantly recognised that worthy), in a harsh and imperious tone—“’Sdeath! things have come to a pretty pass, when a gentleman cannot walk through the streets of London without being molested by vagrants! Do

you think to bully me out of money by trotting at my heels, you mangy and disreputable cur? Get along with you—vanish this instant, else I shall hand you over to the police!”

“Ah, for the love of God, Mr Speedwell, do have compassion on me!” said the man, in a humble and very piteous voice. “Give me a little charity, but a shilling or two, please, for this one night, and I won’t trouble you again—indeed, I will not. It’s but little I ask, Mr Speedwell; and you know I never begged from you before, nor would I do so now, were I not driven almost mad by misery. My poor wife is ill with ague, lying on straw in a garret; and three children are crouching beside her, shivering with cold, and without a morsel to put into their mouths. Ah, dear sir, do have a little mercy!”

“Curse you!” replied Speedwell, savagely. “Don’t stand there whimpering about your wife and brats! It is such fellows as you that swell the poor-rates. You can’t earn bread for yourselves, and yet you must needs beget paupers. No—I’m wrong in one thing. You *can* earn bread, and something better; but you won’t do it, though employment is thrown in your way. You see, Flusher, I know a little more about you than you were probably aware of.”

“I am sure, Mr Speedwell,” replied the other, “I would do anything—that is, anything that is right and honest—for the mere fraction of a wage. God knows, I am not idly inclined. If I could only maintain my wife and children, I would work harder than any slave

in the United States of America—and I often wish that I was one, for the slave is fed and tended, while the freeman rots and starves.”

“A very pretty sentence,” said Speedwell, sneeringly, “which you had better reserve for your next Chartist harangue. I tell you it is of no use bothering me. I shall not give you one penny even to get rid of you, which I freely confess I am anxious to do, because the odour exhaled from your garments, now that they are wet, is most infernally nauseous. So be off without further ado! You know as well as I do that you can have a job if you choose to accept it. If you are obstinate, and if your brats perish from starvation, you alone are responsible.”

“Then God help me!” cried the unhappy supplicant, “for never was man in a sorer strait! Will you not give me one shilling—but one, Mr Speedwell, that I may take home a loaf of bread to my children?”

“Not a stiver,” replied the Jew. “You have, I understand, been very eloquent upon the subject of the big loaf—you will be all the better of a practical lesson as to the difficulty of finding the means to buy one, whether it be big or small. And the shilling, which you have so pathetically requested, shall go to the driver of that cab, who has just responded to my signal. Go home, Mr Flusher, and reflect seriously upon your duties as a husband and a father.”

So saying, Mr Speedwell rushed towards the arrested vehicle.

The men of our country are not much given to pan-

tomime. They do not express by outward gestures their inward emotions, as is the case with the French and Italians; and, owing to that peculiarity, it has sometimes been alleged that the Saxon race is deficient in sympathy and in feeling. That is a vast mistake; for *quietism* is the characteristic of deep and genuine passion. It is no proof of a man's sincerity or of his affection for the lost, that he shall tear his hair, beat his breast, or give any other violent manifestation of affliction. The sorrow which lies heavy on his heart is too profound for histrionic display; and the sorely-stricken man, with the instinct of the wounded deer, retires from the company and shuns the observation of his fellows. I caught, however, a glimpse of this poor man Flusher's face, and never did I see agony more strongly depicted. I laid my hand upon his shoulder.

"My friend," I said, "there is a heaven above us all, and God sends aid to those who believe and trust in him. I know nothing about you, but I have heard enough, though from no curiosity, of your conversation with the man who has just gone away, to satisfy me that you are in grievous necessity. Take this coin, and go home and comfort your family."

I gave him a sovereign; and however well the poor man might have sustained denial, the gift was almost too much for him, for he broke into a paroxysm of tears.

"Not a word more to-night," said I. "No thanks—you cannot contain yourself. Come to-morrow, if you will, or next day, to my rooms—here is my card—

and perhaps I may be able to do something for you. Meanwhile, hie home. Wife and children are beyond all the riches of the universe."

"God's blessing be upon you, whoever you are!" cried the man. "My dear wife—my poor children—they will not perish from want. Oh, sir!—if you only knew——"

"Home—home!" said I. "Waste no time in talking now. I can hear your history hereafter."

He seized and wrung my hand with a force which I hardly should have expected from a man of so attenuated a frame, and then darted from the Arcade.

CHAPTER XVII.

HISTORY OF A CLEVER MAN.

A DAY or two afterwards, Flusher presented himself at my rooms. The appearance of the poor fellow was somewhat altered for the better ; at all events, there was nothing about him to excite disgust, though much to awaken compassion. Evidently he was no habitual beggar, for he used none of that lugubrious cant which is the language of confirmed mendicity. He told me that, since our meeting in the Arcade, he had been successful in recovering a small debt, which had enabled him to get better covering for his wife, whose health, he thought, was improving ; and he spoke as if he regarded the future, not cheerfully perhaps, but, at any rate, without despondency.

There was something in the man's manner that gave me a favourable impression. He was neither obsequious nor forward, but expressed himself with the ease of a person who had seen a good deal of the world, and had associated with people of education. Some of his remarks, which were shrewd and sensible, evinced

a knowledge of mankind and an amount of information much greater than could be expected from one who stood apparently so low in the social scale ; and when I indicated a desire to become acquainted with his previous history, he manifested no reluctance, but began the following narrative :—

“ I make no doubt, sir, from what you observed the other night, when I was driven by extreme necessity to supplicate help from yonder man who has no compassion in his nature, that you regarded me as a desperate and hardened beggar. If so, the more honour to you for having given me relief. You believed, at all events, that I told no falsehood when I said that my wife and children were starving ; and though there are some men, passing for devout and sincere Christians, who refuse under any circumstances to bestow charity upon a common beggar, I am sure they do not act according to the spirit of the Bible. The prayer of the beggar never sounded in vain in the ears of our Lord and His apostles ; and even the habitual impostor may be reduced so low as to have a fair claim on the sympathies of the benevolent. Pardon my presumption for beginning with something that may be too like a homily. What I mean to say is this, that even the most abject beggar is still a man, who is privileged to cry to God from the depth of his wretchedness ; and if any hear that cry, and steel their hearts against it, they offend the mercy without which no one can see salvation.

“ I was not always the degraded and impoverished

being you behold, though I never found myself in what are usually termed easy circumstances. Had I acted like most of my contemporaries, the men with whom I started in the race of life, and applied myself to some reputable trade or calling, I think I should have been successful. I am not a careless or extravagant man, and I never threw away money, when I had it—which was very seldom—upon sensual indulgences. I am not a drunkard! I abhor sottish habits, and years have gone by since I lifted a glass of gin to my lips. I never committed a crime that could bring upon me the chastisement of the law. No man living can say that I ever attempted to swindle him. I have tried to act uprightly—yes, and honourably—with what result you may perceive, by my threadbare, or rather ragged coat, and my shoes, which are no longer impervious to the mud of London.

“ You may wonder at this, sir. The explanation is quite simple. I was regarded, from my early youth, as a sort of phenomenon—a wondrously clever creature. My father, who was a shipowner in Newcastle—I was the child of his old age—thought me a perfect prodigy. I was allowed to have my own way in the nursery, which perhaps did no great harm, though the dear old woman who presided there annually tendered her resignation on account of the ‘ fractiousness of the bairn.’ That, however, was a mere threat; but, after I was promoted to a jacket and corduroys, my existence must have been a serious annoyance to the old friends of my father. They were, for the most part, quiet, plodding,

money-making men, whose reading was limited to share-lists, and who were accustomed, over their port wine, to talk of nothing but the rise or fall of markets. You will readily imagine that they were not much delighted either by my monkey-tricks or my recitations—indeed, I once overheard one of them mutter to his neighbour, ‘That boy will certainly be hanged!’

“I was sent to school, where I made some progress in letters, being distinguished for proficiency in spouting, and the fabrication of verses, which, though doubtless very bad, were considered by my master as proofs of decided genius. I was apprenticed to no trade; indeed, I had no inclination for any kind of laborious employment. I believed that I should ultimately inherit money, and I did not care to work for more. So I led an indolent kind of life until I was upwards of twenty, when my poor father sickened and died. He was an amiable but somewhat easy man, who never looked very closely into his affairs—the worse for me, as, on investigation, it appeared that his liabilities were greater than his assets. Everything was swept away by his creditors, and I was left to begin the world with scarce a shilling in my pocket.

“I comforted myself with the thought that I was no worse off than hundreds of others, and resolved to settle to work with energy and perseverance. So, in the first instance, I applied for employment to the old friends of my father, never doubting for one moment that I would readily procure a seat in a counting-house. I might as well have asked them to take me into part-

nership! I was much too clever, they said, for the situation of a clerk. I was a young man of genius, and, as such, could not be expected to submit to the drudgery of making out invoices. They were profoundly sorry, but they really had no room or occasion for a poet on their establishments! Such were the answers I received from gentlemen who had dined once a-week in company with my father for more than twenty years. I began to feel alarmed. 'Of a verity,' thought I, 'this same genius must be a fatal gift, for, whether I have it or no, the mere reputation of possessing it stands between me and my daily bread!' I then thought of applying for a situation as usher or under-teacher in a school, and made my obeisance to a D.D. who had advertised for a helper.

" 'Can you make verses, young man?' said the portly dignitary.

" 'Certainly, sir,' was my reply.

" 'In Dochmiacs, and Trochaic Tetrameters?'

" 'I am afraid, sir, that I do not comprehend the intricacies of the Greek measures.'

" 'Then I wish you a good morning.'

" Foiled in this attempt, I sat down to write an article for a popular review. The manuscript was returned, with a polite intimation that it would not suit. I tried the newspapers, and gained admission to Poet's Corner; but, alas! beyond the empty honour, I received nothing; and poets are not chameleons—they will not thrive and fatten upon air. In brief, I could find no suitable employment in Newcastle.

“ ‘It seems to me, Flusher,’ said one of the few friends who still adhered to, and, I think, really compassionate me—‘it seems to me that you are too well known in this place. There is a vast deal of envy, and not much less malignity, in the world; and people who remember that you held your head rather high before misfortune came, and sneered at their pursuits, are glad to see you brought to bay. You had better leave this. I will give you a letter to a correspondent in Glasgow, who perhaps may be able to find you a situation.’

“ ‘I had nothing for it but to comply; so I started for Glasgow. I found the gentleman to whom I was recommended in his counting-house. I gave him the letter. He read it.

“ ‘Humph!’ said he, ‘a landlouser, nae doubt! What are you fit for, young man?’

“ ‘Any employment, sir, that you may chance to require.’

“ ‘Onything? That means naething, or my name’s no Watty Govan. Ken ye ought about shirtings?’

“ ‘No, sir; but I could learn.’

“ ‘Nae doubt of that; but ye canna expect me to pay for your schuling; ye may gang your wa’s. But stop! ye’re frae Newcastle, and that’s a mining district—I advise ye to step down to Airdrie. It’s a rising place, and maybe you’ll find employment there.’

“ ‘So Heaven help me, I knew no more about mines than I did of conic sections. Airdrie, therefore, was as unlikely a spot for me to prosper in as Laputa. I

roamed for a whole day, nearly distracted, through the damp streets and dingy atmosphere of the western Scottish metropolis, sustaining myself with the cheapest food—for by that time my coin was nearly exhausted—until I came beneath the flaring lamps of a theatre.

“ ‘ There’s a pass cheque for anybody who wants it ! ’ cried a Glasgow buck, tossing the bit of pasteboard away. Perhaps the action was not very honourable, but, as the ticket fell at my feet, I picked it up, and, without challenge, was admitted to the boxes.

“ The audience was scanty ; and no wonder, for the company was a very poor one. The walking gentleman and lover was a rickety lad with a lisp, who might have been a waiter in a country inn. The benevolent father was about as affable as the keeper of a turnpike. The hero was a consummate ranter ; the low comedian a bad specimen of Cockaigne ; the tragedy queen a powerful scold ; and the soubrette evidently a minx. The life of the company was the manager, a queer gaunt old fellow, who rattled through his part without caring for adherence to the text, and sometimes gave a zest to the otherwise dull performance by addressing sarcastic remarks to the occupants of the gallery, which were responded to by roars of laughter and a battery of orange-peel.

“ ‘ Well,’ thought I, ‘ if fellows like these can get an engagement, why should I despair ? I may not exactly be a Kean or a Macready, but I flatter myself that I can act better than any member of that company.

Since the commercial world will have nothing to say to me, why should I not become an actor?’

“Full of this idea, I requested an interview with the manager when the performances were concluded, and was admitted to the dressing-room of that worthy. He was exchanging the raiment of Sir William Wallace for the garb of the nineteenth century.

“‘What brings thee hither, cavaliero, ho?’ cried he, divesting himself of a pasteboard cuirass. I should mention that, at times, the manager discarded the use of the ordinary speech of mortals, expressing himself in blank verse, which he poured forth with marvellous fluency.

“‘I wish, sir,’ said I, ‘to join your company, if there should happen to be a vacancy.’

“‘Aha! a new recruit for ‘Thespis’ line!’ cried the manager. ‘Pr’ythee stand forth and let me view thee, lad!—A likely form, with thews and sinews good. An eye like Mars—no, hang it, I don’t mean that!—An eye that hath a language of its own. Demeanour, gesture, such as fits a man—A voice not raucous. Tell me, gentle youth—Hast ever felt the perfume of the lamps, or trod in ecstasy the scenic floor?’

“‘No, sir; I am quite new to the profession.’

“‘That’s strange indeed, and passing pitiful!’ replied the manager. ‘Yet say I not to thee, Begone, depart! Not in one day did royal Rome arise. What! was not Roscius once a country clown? And gentle Shakespeare was a poor man’s child. I like thee, lad! But what dost thou affect? Woo’st thou Thalia in her

sportive mood? Or mak'st to mad Melpomene thy moan?’

“ ‘I am quite ready, sir, to undertake any line of characters you please. Though I have never ventured upon the stage, nor indeed thought, till now, when necessity leaves me no choice, of adopting it as a profession, I have carefully studied elocution, and would try to make myself generally useful.’

“ ‘A brave resolve! and I do need a man—To act incontinent the lover's part—And sigh like furnace in a lady's ear. Jones, whom the bills do blazon as Fitz-George—Hath cast his seal'd commission in my teeth; Deeming at Manchester to shake the world—And flutter Volscians in Corioli. His place is thine, if thou accept my terms—Which, for the present, must be moderate.’

“ ‘I am willing to take, sir, whatever you consider to be the value of my service.’

“ ‘A sovereign, then, shall be thy weekly wage, Until the moon hath twice renewed her horn. Give me thy hand, and pledge me in this bowl! I do foresee thou shalt be great anon,—And, like the witches on the blasted heath, I'll hail thee Thane of Cawdor!’

“ So saying, the inspired tragedian handed me a pot of porter, by way of ratifying the bargain.

“ And so I was enlisted for the stage. It is a poor and wretched life, that of an actor, at least in the humbler walks; and I never had an opportunity of rising in the profession. I did all in my power to

make myself useful ; and was, I think, rather a favourite with the frequenters of the Glasgow theatre, to whom I was known as Mr Sidney Fortescue. Though the manager did not spare me—for I was compelled at very short notice to assume any kind of part—he was considerate enough to raise my salary ; and perhaps I might have gone on till now, huffing and stamping on the boards, but for an untoward accident which cut short my theatrical career.

“ We had made grand preparations for the production of a Christmas pantomime, in order to replenish our somewhat limited exchequer ; and the whole inventive powers of the carpenters and scenic artists were put forth on the occasion. A harlequin of much renown, whose real name, I believe, was Grimes, but who preferred the imposing denomination of Signor Torre del Greco, had been specially engaged ; and at least three dozen unpromising infants had been transformed into fairies, and were to flutter across the stage as denizens of the Celestial Bower. All things were ready, and the public was supposed to be on the tiptoe of expectation, when the manager received a letter, informing him that the gifted Signor, having indulged too long and copiously in the use of British spirits, had been seized with a nervous attack, for which he was now under treatment at a public hospital, and that his appearance at the Glasgow theatre was utterly out of the question !

“ Here was a precious dilemma !—the play of *Hamlet* ready for representation, with the omission of the

principal part! Our manager, as was his wont when anything went wrong, stormed and raged ferociously; and for four-and-twenty hours it was not safe to approach him. But he was a shifty man, full of resources, whose boast it was that he never had broken down in any theatrical attempt. He summoned me to his room.

“ ‘Kind Fortescue,’ he said, ‘attend to this! Torre hath failed, and Greco cannot come. Yet shall the winter of our discontent, By thy assistance, my amphibious boy—Resolve itself into perpetual spring! Thou art the flower and garland of our youth—Strong-limbed art thou and agile for the dance—The double-shuffle thou dost comprehend, And thou art prompt to point the pliant toe. Therefore, good youth, be ruled in this by me. Don thou the dress of pleasant Harlequin! Assume the bat, and, through the mazy bowers—Fly with the fond and amorous Columbine—Whilst, vainly toiling in thy glittering wake—Perspire the Clown and slipper’d Pantaloon!’ ”

“ ‘Surely, sir, you do not mean to propose that I should act Harlequin!’ cried I, quite aghast—for I need hardly say that pantomimic characters were quite out of the usual range of a performer’s business.

“ ‘And wherefore not? Some one must take the part; And who so fit and excellent as thou? See—I have set my fortune on a cast—On one great venture perill’d all my means; And if I fail, why then—put out the light! I know, thee, boy, far better than thyself! Thou art no summer friend, to shrink away, At the first piping of the northern blast, From him who

cheer'd, and taught, and tender'd thee! Thou wilt not leave the old man desolate! O Sidney Fortescue, forsake me not—But be the joy and comfort of mine age!’

“‘I would do anything in my power to assist you, sir; but really I cannot undertake the part of Harlequin.’

“‘Then perish, Priam! Troy, be thou consumed! And never more let Ilium have a name! I’ll take my staff and wander through the world, As Belisarius did, to crave an alms. And when they ask me how I fell so low, I’ll say the stroke that beat the old man down—Was not misfortune, but ingratitude!’

“All this must appear to you supremely absurd; but theatrical life is made up of whims, oddities, and queer shifts and transformations; and it was quite true that upon the success of the pantomime depended the stability of the theatre. I was always facile; besides, the manager had been kind to me after his own fashion. The exigency was pressing, and I thought there might be some fun in the performance of so exceptional a part. To the intense joy of our chief, I yielded, and for the next few days did nought but practise dancing and the necessary stage rehearsals. I found that I could go through the mimetic business well enough, but the flying leaps somewhat dismayed me. It is no joke to launch one’s self head foremost through a shutter or a clock!

“Well; I acted Harlequin for several successive nights without mishap, and to the satisfaction of the public—

at least if I might judge from the newspaper notices of the entertainment, wherein I was likened to a flying-fish. But my flights were soon brought to a close. The four scene-shifters, whose duty it was to break the fall of the pantomimic acrobats by catching them in a blanket, were unfaithful to their trust. I bounded valiantly through a post-office window, came down with a heavy crash on the bare boards behind, and discovered that my leg was fractured.

“This disaster terminated my connection with the theatre. A subscription was opened for the unfortunate mime who had suffered for the public amusement ; and on the proceeds of that I lived till I was able again to move. But in the interim, during the many solitary hours which a sick-bed affords for reflection, I had taken counsel with myself as to the means of obtaining subsistence in the time to come. Of the stage I had had quite enough, and to it I would not return. I bethought me that I had a talent for drawing, which might possibly be turned to advantage ; for although I did not expect to shine as an artist, I thought I might contrive to get some employment as an engraver. So I procured a set of etching-tools, and before I was allowed to leave my room, I had acquired some manual dexterity. Well, sir, I did get work, and wrought very hard for more than a year, when I was suddenly seized with a dimness of vision ; and on consulting an oculist, was told that, if I persevered in engraving, I would certainly lose my eyesight.

“This announcement was a heavy blow to me ; never-

theless, I was determined not to give way to despondency; and by the advice of the doctor, who recommended country air, I left Glasgow, and went to the lake district of Westmoreland. Though forbidden to engrave, I could still sketch; and I hoped to find a ready market for my productions among the tourists who in summer-time swarm through that beautiful country. I took up my headquarters at Keswick, and did well enough for a time, till competition—which political economists maintain to be an admirable thing, but which I consider to be a grievous curse—forced me out of the field. Two rival sketchers came down from London; and as their drawings were, I must needs admit, somewhat better than mine, my occupation was speedily gone.

“And now I come to what was in truth the only really happy period of my existence. I fear, sir, that I weary you with these details, but you have asked for a faithful narrative, and you shall have it. In one of my sketching expeditions to a remote part of the lake country, I had made the acquaintance of a worthy old *statesman*, for that is the name by which yeomen-proprietors are called in Westmoreland. He and his wife were primitive people, cultivating their own small farm, and living entirely on its produce, without any care or curiosity as to what might be going on in the great world that lay beyond the limits of their glen. It is a happy lot, that of the husbandman who is beyond the dread of penury; and if God would vouchsafe me a

choice, I rather would be one of them than dwell in a thronged and heartless city.

“This pair had but one daughter, a beautiful girl of nineteen, modest as the mountain daisy, sweet as the lily that blossoms in the lowly vale. No artificial boarding-school accomplishments, which warp the mind and destroy the simplicity of the female character, had impaired the simple nature of Lucy Brathwaite; yet was she not illiterate, for she had ventured into the fairyland of poetry, and had perused attentively such books—and these are the works of the older masters, Jeremy Taylor and Bunyan and Fuller—as are commonly found in the houses of the northern yeomen. I venture to think that their writings are somewhat better, and far more wholesome, than the trash which constitutes the staple of modern circulating libraries. Lucy had no harpsichord, but she sang—O how sweetly, and with what pathos!—the simple English ditties to which the chords of the heart so readily and sympathetically respond. To see her was to love her. So, when I became convinced that a protracted residence at Keswick would be useless, and a mere squandering of the small sum of money which I had contrived to scrape together, I sought the farm of John Brathwaite, and offered myself as a lodger. I shall not dilate on what followed; suffice it to say, that I was fortunate enough to win the heart of Lucy, and to consummate my happiness by making her my wife, with the approval of her parents. I did not conceal from them

my want of means ; but they, dear honest folk, had a kind of reverence for a man who had seen more of the world than themselves, and who had received a wider, for I shall not say a better education. Above all, they were bound up in the welfare of their child ; nor would they have thwarted her inclination, had she made a more objectionable choice.

“ I would not, however, consent to eat the bread of idleness. There was room for a school in that part of the district where my father-in-law resided ; and by favour of the rector, who had taken a fancy for me on account of my presumed classical attainments, which, no doubt, were superior to those of some licentiates of St Bee’s, I was enabled to commence business as a teacher. The duties were not onerous ; at all events, the holidays were long ; and, my health being then robust, I could aid in the operations of the farm. I was then, I may say, supremely happy. Two children were born to me ; and, gazing on them with a father’s love, I forgot all my previous misfortunes. I began to think that my malignant and persecuting demon had lost trace of me among the valleys of Westmoreland. I was grievously mistaken. Alas ! he found me out, in the guise of a Midland County newspaper, to which I had the misfortune to subscribe.

“ I shall not take the liberty, sir, of guessing at your political opinions. Mine were then tinged with Radicalism ; for those who have not succeeded in the world are apt to attribute their failure to defects in the social system, rather than admit their own incompetency.

Without being exactly envious, it is difficult for a man of education to suppress a certain bitter feeling when he sees others surrounded by that wealth and luxury to which he never can attain ; and I will add that the classical studies pursued in this country by the youth of the middle classes, often to the exclusion of subjects more really useful, tend to foster democratic notions. The downfall of royalty in Rome, the conspiracies of Harmodius and Aristogiton, the assassination of Julius Cæsar, and the sedition of the Gracchi, are represented to boys as things worthy of admiration, if not absolutely to be imitated. They rarely learn anything in the schools about the principles of the British constitution, whilst they are sedulously indoctrinated with the details of republican polity. It is astonishing to me that this view has never occurred to the Dons of Oxford, who are staunch Tories as well as great sticklers for antiquated education. If your function were to teach Christianity, you would not take the Koran for your text-book.

“ I had then very loose notions on the subject of Government, and I am not sure that my ideas as to the apportionment of property were strictly correct. I thought the American constitution a noble model, overlooking the fact that it has perpetuated slavery, and made the rule of the civil magistrate subordinate to the tyranny of the mob. I was not exactly prepared to advocate the establishment of a republic in Britain, but I looked with an evil eye on the existence of the hereditary Chamber, believed that the revenues of the

Church might be advantageously cut down, and was decidedly in favour of household suffrage and vote by ballot. I see things now in a very different light ; but then I was a regular Chartist.

“Well, sir, I soon began to take an active interest in politics ; and, having plenty spare time, I commenced writing a series of letters, explanatory of my views, to the editor of the newspaper, all of which duly appeared in print ; and as they were not deficient in point of energy and strong language, Marcus Junius Brutus—for that was the signature I adopted—was spoken of and commended in Radical circles as an intrepid patriot, a fearless denouncer of abuses, and an unflinching friend of the people. Finding that my first essays were so favourably received, I waxed yet more eloquent ; and as general denunciations are apt to pall if too frequently repeated, I looked out for individual instances of what I deemed tyranny and oppression, and drew my illustrations from our own immediate neighbourhood. Was a poacher convicted before a Westmoreland justice of the peace?—I made it the text for a diatribe on the crying iniquity of the Game-Laws. Did a squire raise his rents?—I reviled him as more covetous than Ahab. At the surrounding clergy I shot shafts innumerable, sparing only—for I had some gratitude left—the good man who had befriended me. All this I did absolutely without malice, as is the case, I believe, with many writers, who, bent upon exhibiting their dexterity, never think about the pain which they inflict ; but to that persuasion it was obviously impossible that the

men whom I had maltreated should incline. Local allusions roused suspicion. An investigation followed, and I was detected as the author of the libels. Such a ferment arose as I dare to say was never known before in that secluded district. Radicalism was a thing abhorred by the honest statesmen and farmers, who regarded it as synonymous with infidelity; and the residence of a Radical among them was esteemed pollution. All my scholars disappeared. The rector, formerly so kind, now passed me without recognition. More than once I was insulted on the road; and I received a courteous intimation, that if I presumed to show myself at any fair or rustic gathering, I would do well to provide a cart to carry me home, as my carcass would be so handled as to preclude the possibility of walking. Had I been a solitary man, I might have tried to stem the tide of prejudice—or righteous indignation, for perhaps that is the more appropriate term—in the hope that it might gradually subside; but its rage was felt severely by others. Dear old John Brathwaite, though perfectly innocent, shared in my unpopularity, and was taunted with having disgraced a respectable family by giving his daughter to a revolutionary blackguard. He stood up for me as long as he could, but the storm was absolutely overwhelming.

“ ‘Will,’ he said to me, one day—‘Will, I know that thou art a good man at bottom for all they say about thee, and I wanna believe but that thou means well enough, though thou has set up the neighbours’ backs by speaking ill of dignities, which is clear against gospel text.

But thou hast been a good husband to my Lucy, and a fond ; and I think, lad, that thou fears God, so thou canna be quite the wicked one they call thee. But for a' that, Will, thou hast gi'en offence, and I wotna what made thee do it ; for sure am I that ye never were wronged to the breadth of a hair while under my roof, and wherever thou gaed there was an open door for thee, and it's thy fau't, and nane ither, if thou finds them locked. I'm a failing man, Will ; and I've tauld them where to dig my grave, and I'd like to be let down into it by them that knew the Brathwaites before thou came among us, and to have a decent burial like, and to have some folks to say, as they hear the clods tumbling down, "The Lord have mercy on old John !" Now, lad, that canna be if thou stays here. It's a sore thing to me, and like a tearing of my heartstrings to tell thee that thou must take Lucy and the childer wi' thee. It's the same as saying that I will die four years before the time that I might have lasted ; but what's that, if we have the trust that where time ends, eternity begins ? Right or wrong, thou must make a flitting, for the honour of my forebears is upon me ; and, though I like thee weel, I mun hae tears upon my coffin, and a gathering that won't be there if thee carries my head.'

"What could I do, branded with infamy as I was, but leave the sweet spot where alone I had found rest and happiness ? Ah, miserable fool, to throw those inestimable blessings away ! My poor wife never upbraided me, though she wept often and bitterly in secret, for I could see the trace of tears and deep sor-

row on her countenance ; and she went about the house quietly, but like one that was heart-broken. No more singing now ! So on a fine spring morning, when the lambs were racing on the meadows, and the larks carolling in the air, we went forth from the home of love, knowing well that we never should return. Still I see the venerable form of John Brathwaite, but slightly bowed with age, his grey hairs streaming in the wind, as he folded his daughter in a last embrace, and implored a blessing on her head ! Then my heart filled to bursting, and I cried out in the words of Esau—

“ ‘Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father!’ ”

“ ‘The Lord be with thee, my son!’ said the old man, laying his hand upon my head; ‘may He guide thee in the right path! And, O Will, if thou hast done wrong and offended, harden not thy heart, nor strengthen thy pride, but humble thyself and ask pardon, and it may be thou shalt yet prosper. And O, be kind to my Lucy, and these dear babes that are sent out so early to wander in a wicked world!’ ”

“And so we left the pleasant uplands — left the crystal streams, and winding gleus, and the hill-sides studded with thorn-trees, wherein the cuckoo was proclaiming the spring—and we came to the low-country thronged with life and swarming with industry, where no familiar faces were to be seen ; and we passed through districts blackened by smoke, where night and day the huge furnaces were vomiting forth their flames

—through towns that seemed but an agglomeration of colossal factories—through hamlets peopled by care-worn men and women, with countenances prematurely old; and still, as we advanced, the throng became denser, and the roar of life more stunning, until we descried a thick cloud that, heavy as a funeral-pall, lay above a great city; and in the dusk of evening we mingled with the crowd that poured along the streets of Manchester.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

HISTORY OF A CLEVER MAN—*continued.*

“ I HAD but a few pounds in my pocket,” continued Flusher, “ when we arrived in Manchester ; for old John Brathwaite, though a careful man, had got into difficulties by becoming security for a neighbour, an act of imprudence which eventually absorbed the whole of his little property. He gave me, however, what he could afford, and that was all we had to depend on, until I could procure bread for my family by my own exertions. I dared not incur the risk of losing my eyesight by again applying myself to engraving, the only occupation which I had found really profitable ; and I was as little likely to succeed in gaining admission to a counting-house in Manchester as I had been in Glasgow. In all great cities there are hundreds of people able and willing for headwork who cannot find employment—the mere artisan has a much better chance. For my part, sir, I sometimes think that this fact, which is quite notorious, might be shaped into an argument against over-education which it would

puzzle philanthropists to refute. You may over-educate a man—that is, you may give him notions and tastes that are inconsistent with his calling and station in life—in short, you may spoil a good workman by making him a sorry philosopher and a still worse politician. If you were to instruct every adult in the country beyond a certain point, there would be a scarcity of ploughmen and mechanics ; for let a man be once possessed with the notion that he is mentally superior, or even equal to those who are above him in worldly station, and he will not rest satisfied until he has either forced his way upwards, or pulled the others down. That I take to be the explanation of most revolutionary movements. They are never originated, and seldom are countenanced, by the real working men : they are designed and carried into execution by scheming fellows, whose education is not of the highest kind, but who have been educated beyond their sphere.

“ If I could have made shoes or hats, or applied myself to any kind of handicraft, I might have picked up a living. Manual skilled labour can always obtain a price ; but for intellectual labour there is much less demand. The business of the world is conducted by a few heads but many hands—a fact which the more ardent promoters of education either overlook or cannot be brought to comprehend. However, I was not down-hearted. The editor of the newspaper in which I had made my unfortunate political *debut* had furnished me with credentials to the effect that I had suffered martyrdom, and been exposed to grievous affliction

on account of my advocacy of the people's cause—therefore, that I was entitled to the sympathy and aid of all advanced Liberals. I had been furnished with a list of gentlemen residing in Manchester, whose declared opinions brought them under that category, and I waited upon several: some, with gruff frankness, desired me to go about my business; others expressed their sorrow for my wrongs, and the indignation which they felt towards my oppressors, but did not happen to know of any opening. A few hesitatingly put their hands into their pockets, and tendered me sums varying from half-a-crown to five shillings, which I declined to accept, for I had not yet arrived at that stage of wretchedness when men are fain to clutch even at the poorest alms. And yet these were magnificent master-manufacturers of almost fabulous reputed wealth! This was a hard lesson, and somewhat shook my faith in the definition which I had adopted of the term 'Liberal;' for I had been foolish enough to believe that political sympathy implied practical generosity, and that a poor fellow who had been turned out of house and home for advocating the cause of liberalism would be backed by the magnates of his party in his efforts to find employment. I was not then aware that the only effective mode of dealing with such gentry is that resorted to by St Dunstan, when he caught up the red-hot pincers and took the devil by the nose. Radical editors—ay, and Radical writers—are now quite alive to the utility of that process. They always take care it shall be known that they

have the hot pincers in reserve ; and, as moneyed men are sensitive of cuticle, the result is a relaxation of the purse-strings, which, under ordinary circumstances, it would be utterly in vain to expect.

“ The only man who manifested any real sympathy was an unfortunate being like myself ; who, bred a surgeon, but unable to get practice, or to maintain himself till practice should come, had been forced to resort to all manner of shifts, and was now a hunter-up of accidents, and penny-a-liner for a Manchester paper. He was a good creature, though disappointment, and the late hours incidental to his occupation, had fostered an innate propensity for drinking, which he knew quite well would either kill or reduce him to idiocy in a few years. He prognosticated that as his fate. Socrates did not talk more rationally before he took the dose of hemlock.

“ ‘Flusher,’ he said to me once, when I had been remonstrating against his alcoholic tendencies, ‘I don’t drink either for pleasure of the palate or for physical excitement—I drink for oblivion. So long as I retained a vestige of hope that I might yet better my condition, I refrained from the bottle ; but now, when there is nothing before me but wretchedness, and nothing to look back upon but sorrow and disappointment, I am fain to drug myself into stupor. Don’t speak more of it ! The only comfort is that I have no one to care for. I have long since ceased to struggle ; but you—my poor fellow !—have a wife and young children, and you cannot give up the contest.

Look you here—it's no use trying to get a situation as a clerk ; you must make a bold push in another direction. Politics, you say, have pulled you down—well, then, try if politics will not set you on your feet again. There's a great agitation getting up for the repeal of the corn-laws. The Manchester manufacturers are determined to carry that measure ; for they think that if bread were cheap they could lower wages, and secure a larger amount of profit for themselves. That's their true motive, but of course they don't tell it to the working classes. They have subscribed large sums for the purpose, as they say, of enlightening the public mind on the subject ; which means that they want to get up a row, and bully the landowners into submission. They need lecturers. You are smart enough, and doubtless can talk glibly—why not apply for an engagement in that line ?'

“ Democrat as I was, this advice did not altogether tally with my inclination ; for, though I certainly did think that the corn-laws laid a grievous burden on the people, I saw clearly enough that selfishness was the mainspring of the movement, and I disliked the idea of hiring myself out as the tool of an unprincipled faction. But when want is staring a man in the face he cannot afford to be scrupulous. Hunger is a rare casuist, and reconciles us to many things from which well-fed morality would recoil.

“ I presented myself at the head office of the League, had an interview with the secretary, and explained to him my wants and my wishes.

“ ‘A victim of persecution,’ he said, ‘denounced by a bloated aristocracy—trodden down by tyrannical monopolists—hunted from a peaceful village home for attempting to enlighten the benighted hawbucks and chawbacons! My friend, you are a monstrously fortunate fellow! These things will be the making of you, if you know how to go about it properly. You come just in the nick of time, for I have orders to look out for an agricultural victim, who can address a public meeting, and speak from his own experience of the oppression of the landlords. And so they turned you out of a nice little farm, in which you had sunk all your capital in improvements, because you would not submit to an arbitrary doubling of the rent, eh?’

“ ‘Not so, sir. I thought I had explained that I never rented any land.’

“ ‘Pshaw, man! Surely you have a bad memory. Think again! Did not the landlord seize your furniture and cattle?’

“ ‘Certainly not—for the best of all reasons, that I possessed neither the one nor the other.’

“ ‘Then what’s the use of you? How the devil do you make yourself out to be a victim?’

“ ‘I did not call myself by that name, sir. If I have been persecuted, it was for expressing strong political opinions; but as regards property, I never experienced any personal wrong, and never came in contact with the landlords.’

“ ‘That’s a pity,’ said the secretary, dryly. ‘So you’re a Chartist, are you?’

“‘I certainly desire to see the suffrage extended, and the working men admitted to a larger share of political power.’

“‘A laudable desire, doubtless. But hark ye, my friend—if you want to get employment from us, you must keep the Charter in the background for the present. Levelling is a very pretty amusement ; but it’s our way to level upwards, and we don’t want to have a mine sprung beneath our feet. What we say is, heave down the aristocracy! When that is done, it will be time enough for the capitalist and workmen to come to terms. I am sorry to say we have had a great deal of trouble with some men of your way of thinking. They are confoundedly obstinate and impracticable, and cannot be brought to see that the working man has no chance at all unless he goes along with his employer. That stands to reason. Now I tell you frankly, that if you get a job from us, it can only be on the condition that you abstain from talking any nonsense about shortening the hours of labour, inspection of factories, protecting infants, or the like, which is just playing into the hands of the common enemy. We want utterly to demolish the idea that the Tories have any regard for the labouring classes or the poor. That’s our aim ; but we have not succeeded as yet in getting the operatives to believe us. Now, the grand point for attack is the maintenance of the corn-laws. All you have to do is to show that they were enacted by the aristocracy, for the purpose of enriching themselves and impoverishing the

people ; and any dunce can prove that, from the statistics contained in the numerous pamphlets which we are distributing by the ton, and which are supplied to all our lecturers. Free-trade, cheap food, and down with monopolies ! That's our text, and the text you must stick to if you wish to have employment here.'

" 'Well, sir, I think I can preach from it without any violation of conscience.'

" 'Conscience, my good fellow ! I advise you, as a friend, not to cumber yourself with so troublesome an article. Conscience is a capital guardian for a full purse—nothing like it for staving off subscriptions ; but it is a decided obstacle when a man is in want of pounds, shillings, and pence. By the way, that suggests a very important question. Do you profess to know anything about the currency ?'

" 'No, sir—I really do not.'

" 'Then thank heaven for your ignorance ! It is a decided point in your favour. Now, as to your lecturing qualifications—what are they ?'

" 'I have been well educated ; and I have had an engagement on the stage.'

" 'Under a fictitious name, I hope ; for we cannot adopt a cast-off comedian. We stand well with the Dissenting interest, and respectability is our motto.'

" 'Having allayed the apprehensions of the secretary on that score, I was conducted to an inner room, where the triumvirs of the League were seated in council. There I was subjected to a rigid examination, which appeared to be on the whole satisfactory ; for one of

the gentlemen was pleased to say that he thought I should do well enough when I had read up the subject, and acquired some statistical information, for which an interval of two days, devoted to diligent study of the tracts, would be amply sufficient. On the third day I was to commence lecturing at a neighbouring town. Meanwhile I received a temporary supply of money; and the secretary was instructed to supervise some practical reforms in my habiliments, the condition of which, I must candidly admit, was not such as would have done credit to the vaunted respectability of the League.

“Well, sir, I made my first appearance on a platform before an audience of operatives, who, I believe, were attracted rather from curiosity to hear a new lecturer than from any desire to gain instruction. For a few minutes they were tolerably attentive, and even applauded a very fine apostrophe to bread, upon which I had expended the whole of my rhetorical accomplishment. But when I descended from that altitude to the vale of humble figures, and began to wade through calculations, there arose an ominous hum and murmur, which soon deepened into a clamour, intermingled with cries of ‘rot!’ ‘stuff!’ ‘gammon!’ and ‘cut it short!’

“‘Pitch it in stronger, man!’ whispered the secretary, who was seated at my elbow. ‘Try them with the big loaf dodge!’

“And, so urged, I took from a basket an enormous loaf, specially prepared for the occasion by a patriotic

baker, which I elevated with both my hands, like Atlas balancing the globe.

“ ‘Men of England!’ I cried, ‘behold the untaxed loaf which is your birthright!’ ”

“ ‘My eyes! vot a whopper!’ cried the small shrill voice of an urchin. And there was a general roar of laughter, which deepened into a bray as I tabled the cereal monster, and placed beside it a little thing about the size of an orange, which we called the Protectionist’s loaf.

“ It was of no use—the trick was a stale one, and would not go down. In vain did I plead for a patient hearing. Let an audience once become riotous, or even frolicsome, and it is beyond the power of the most consummate orator again to rivet their attention. I was no orator, but merely a poor creature who had been engaged to spout in return for a certain number of shillings; and I found myself as helpless as a child on the back of a runaway steed. I grew dizzy and confused as I gazed upon the sea of grinning faces, lost the thread of my discourse, and wandered into the realms of nonsense.

“ ‘You had better give it up!’ whispered the secretary.

“ I was decidedly of the same opinion; but I was resolute not to move until I had delivered the peroration, which I had got up with much care and committed to memory. It was framed on the Demosthenic model, and, as nearly as I can remember, concluded thus:—

“ ‘Yes, tyrants of England! Ye who from your haughty ancestral palaces look down with scorn and contempt on the weltering masses of the poor! ye who sit at the riotous banquet and quaff the foaming wine-cup, while the children of the land are fain to moisten with their tears the stinted crust which your foul rapacity has curtailed! ye moral locusts, who devour every green thing, and cast a mildew on the wholesome harvest! ye children of Tophet and of perdition, tremble as I announce your doom! The hour is coming—yea, is at hand—when, in the grasp of an outraged people, you and your shameful privileges—your wealth, your honours, and your rank—shall be crumpled up, as I crush this wretched scroll!’

“ ‘Huzzay!’ cried the audience, electrified, it would seem, by this burst of unexpected and unadorned eloquence; and, under cover of their plaudits, I made my bow and bolted from the platform.

“The secretary had a cab in waiting for us, and I entered it with the full expectation of then and there receiving my mittimus and discharge. But the representative of the League refrained from speech, and methodically lighted a cigar.

“ ‘I fear, sir,’ said I, ‘that I have made a sad bungle of it?’

“ ‘By no means,’ replied the secretary, emitting a protracted whiff. ‘You did very well indeed, considering that it was a first appearance. That last touch about crumpling up was really decidedly clever, far too good to be thrown away upon such a pitiful

audience. It is one of those happy notions that may be repeated with great effect, and I'll take a note of it for the benefit of our crack orator.'

" 'Then you do not consider this an utter failure?' said I, much relieved.

" 'On the contrary, I regard it as a signal success. You managed to make them hear you to the end; and you retired amidst applause, which is more than any other of our lecturers has been able to accomplish. We know quite well that it is up-hill work. Do you think that, if it were otherwise, the leading men in Manchester would have come down so handsomely with the ready? Catch them! I am very well satisfied with you, Flusher, and I shall report accordingly. But, I say, don't bother yourself about statistics. Fellows such as those you have been addressing are not calculating machines; and they can't follow you when you talk about exports and imports. Stick to the denunciation of the bloated aristocracy—that always tells, because we have a set of tale-writers in our pay, whose business it is to represent the nobility and gentry as unredeemed profligates and debauchees. I am not sure that our Saturday publications, which are extremely spicy, and regularly contain some interesting matter, such as the violation of a poor man's daughter by a peer, don't help us better than any sound argument. And, by the way, you ought to pitch into the bishops. That may not go down with the people, who have a kind of lingering superstition; but we must

conciliate the Dissenters, who won't part with a shilling unless we pledge ourselves to abuse the Church.'

" Conversing on such high themes, we reached Manchester ; and next morning I had the pleasure of perusing this tribute to my talents in the columns of a newspaper of large circulation, and, as it boasted, of European renown :—

“ ‘ ANTI-CORN-LAW DEMONSTRATION AT SALFORD. —UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESS!—Last night William Flusher, Esq., a gentleman well known in the literary and economic circles, delivered a lecture on the grand subject of the day to a crowded and enthusiastic audience. So great was the excitement caused by the announcement of Mr Flusher's appearance, that, although the meeting was held in the largest hall in Salford, many hundreds of persons could not obtain admission, but retired disappointed from the door. Mr Flusher's style of address is particularly fascinating. He is master of a range, or, we should rather say, a fugue of singular extent, ranging from the highest flights of oratorical embellishment down to the simplest colloquial illustration. Before he had given utterance to three sentences, the audience evidently felt that they were listening to a man of consummate genius, who had not only studied his subject deeply, but knew how to relieve the almost unavoidable tedium of a political discourse, by the sheet-lightning of wit, humour, and sarcasm, and the scarcely less effective glow of genuine pathos, and that unfeigned

philanthropy which, to use the language of the poet, never fails to open the "sacred source of sympathetic tears!" It is much to be regretted that the aristocracy, many of whom, we are persuaded—for it would be uncharitable to place a worse construction on their conduct—have, through sheer ignorance, committed themselves to a dangerous contest with the people, should neglect such opportunities of acquiring sound information and large and enlightened views as are afforded by the prelections of Mr Flusher. But it is always thus. History demonstrates, and even religion proves, that the good seed must be scattered far and wide before it can take root in the heart of those haughty classes, who seem to consider that this fair world was created for no other purpose than that of ministering to their selfish enjoyment, and affording them the means of indulging in their guilty pleasures. Had we observed but one aristocrat amongst the multitude that last night was electrified by Mr Flusher's eloquence, we might have entertained some hope for the order; for even the most callous, hardened, and unprincipled enemy of social progress must have felt a pang of shame and a thrill of terror as he listened to the vivid descriptions and tremendous denunciations which the gifted gentleman poured forth, with an energy scarcely inferior to that of an ancient prophet of Israel. Alas! not a single descendant of the rapacious Norman invaders deigned to mingle with the honest Saxon throng. We look forward with intense interest to Mr Flusher's next appearance.'

“ So easy is the conquest of fame when one is backed by an unscrupulous editor !

“ For some time I prosecuted lecturing with tolerable success, though the pay could hardly be regarded as a fair equivalent for my pains. But the doom was on me that I should never prosper in any undertaking. Intoxicated by applause, which I sometimes did receive after I had become more used to discoursing in public, I forgot the warning of the secretary, and began to expatiate upon the rights of labour and the tyranny of capitalists. I found that I had struck the true chord, for the cheering immediately became tumultuous ; and, warming with my subject, I gave the mill-owners a conspicuous place in that Gehenna to which the nobility, clergy, gentry, and all other persecutors of the people were consigned. That finished me. I had an ovation, it is true ; but next morning I received my dismissal, with an intimation that the League had no further occasion for my services. Worse than that, the editor who had praised me so highly put forth a leader, in which he hypocritically blamed the League for their carelessness in the selection of agents ; and stated, though without mentioning my name, that it had just been discovered that one of their lecturers was a person of bad moral character, whose prompt dismissal scarcely atoned for the blunder which had been committed in engaging him without due precaution !

“ Infuriated by this calumnious falsehood, I rushed to the office, intending to demand an explanation from

the editor. I suppose that my agitation betrayed me ; for I was shown into an apartment, where I was presently joined by a man, a veritable son of Anak, who bore a suspicious resemblance to a prize-fighter. With a charming frankness he informed me that he was the sub-editor, admitted that he had written the article in question (though I don't believe the fellow was able to sign his name), and then asked me what I wanted? I demanded a retractation, at which he grinned, and requested to know if I was particularly anxious to be pitched out of the window! I do not think I am deficient in moral courage ; but it would have been pure madness for me to engage in a personal struggle with such an athletic monster ; so I contrived to swallow my indignation and gained the street, rather thankful than otherwise that I had escaped without broken bones.

“ Repudiated by the League, I next offered my services to the leaders of the Chartists. Some of them, I believe, were perfectly sincere, devout believers in the revolutionary creed which they had adopted ; but they were miserably poor. That difficulty constantly stared them in the face ; for I am convinced that, if all their available means had been clubbed together, these would not have sufficed to equip a single regiment. The days of political unions, when money was surreptitiously supplied by Whig magnates, had long gone by ; and voluntary contributions went a very short way to fill up the deficiency. They were willing enough to allow me to lecture under their auspices,

taking my chance of remuneration through the primitive process of sending round the hat ; but, alas ! on examination the hat contained nothing but the very basest metal, and that not in sufficient quantity to render it a cumbersome burden. Still I went on, with far more genuine zeal than I had felt when lecturing for the League ; but I trod upon dangerous ground, for I was approaching the line which separated legitimate discussion from sedition.

“ I had no wish to be seditious, and I never was so foolish as to contemplate an appeal to physical force ; but I was no lawyer, and it may be that my notions of what we called ‘ a grand demonstration ’ were not in accordance with the declared opinions of the jurists. But, in self-justification, let me say that we had before us the example of the meetings at the time of the Reform Bill, when unbounded licence of speech, even threatening the sanctity of the throne, was not only tolerated, but countenanced by a great political party ; and that more recently Daniel O’Connell had been allowed to hold in his hand the flag that would have been the signal for Irish insurrection, the unfurling of which was openly avowed to be merely dependent upon opportunity. After such examples, it is hard measure to seize upon a poor fellow for talking nonsense about a tyrant oligarchy.

“ I was a very poor snake, and my exhortations could not have made the people either worse or better affected than they were disposed to be. But I used as strong language as could be found in the vocabulary,

and that was reported to the authorities. Most fortunately for me, a nobleman of Conservative opinions, Lord Windermere, who was on the commission of the peace, heard of this, and managed so that I was brought before him for examination. I entered the room with the proud demeanour of a patriot resolute for prison and chains; but I was rather staggered by the benign appearance of the earl, who looked the very reverse of a tyrant. I had prepared myself to undergo an ordeal not much less formidable than that of the Inquisition; and as I still retained something of the histrionic leaven, I had meditated a defiant speech, to be delivered after the manner of Pierre in *Venice Preserved*. But I had no opportunity of desiring the officer to conduct me to my dungeon and my straw. The earl simply referred to the informations before him, pointed out to me the extreme hazard of indulging in such inflammatory discourse, warned me against a repetition of such conduct, and then intimated that he did not consider himself bound, as a magistrate, to order any further proceedings.

“ ‘But, Mr Flusher,’ said he, ‘I should like to have a word or two with you in private. You appear to be a man of more than average intelligence—how is it that you have contracted such a bitter feeling against those whom you call the aristocracy? Has any man wronged you or oppressed you, or can you complain of having received injustice? You talk, I observe, about privileges, as if the British nobility had seignorial rights or special exemptions, which you must be aware

is not the case. As to taxation, that is the function of the House of Commons, the direct representatives of the people ; and the Peers, through immemorial usage, are forbidden to interfere. You will oblige me much by stating what it is that you charge against us. For my own part, I declare as a Christian that my conscience is void of offence—in so far as any mortal dare use the term—towards those who are my brethren, the labouring men of England.’

“ I must confess, sir, that I never felt so utterly small as I did at that moment. I tried to recollect what were the special offences of the aristocracy ; but, for the life of me, I could not hit upon one to justify the general obloquy. However, it would not do to give in all at once, so I muttered something about the corn-laws and poaching.

“ ‘ Well,’ said the earl, ‘ the corn-law question is one which undoubtedly will admit of argument. If those laws could be abrogated or modified without causing a great amount of distress amongst a large and important class of the community, I for one would willingly agree to the alteration. But surely you are aware, my friend, that the question is surrounded with many difficulties, and that there are serious differences of opinion amongst those who profess to have studied it with the deepest attention. That being the case, it seems to me that unless you are prepared to assert the infallibility of your own judgment—which nobody in Europe now pretends to do, except that respectable old gentleman the Pope—you should be lenient to

persons whose mental vision does not correspond with your own. It may be a misfortune to a man to be short-sighted, but you can hardly charge it against him as a crime. As to poaching—do you not hold the doctrine that an Englishman's house is his castle ?'

“ ‘Certainly, my lord.’

“ ‘Well—that is so, simply because it is his own possession. What constitutes the difference between land and houses ? I can see none. The peasant is entitled to prevent the peer from trampling through his cabbage-garden, and the law will rigorously enforce that right—is not the peer entitled, in like manner, to say that no one shall encroach on his preserve ? The game-laws, you think, make criminals—so they do ; but so do all laws enacted for the safety of property. My friend, did it never occur to you that, if the property of the rich is not respected or defended, that of the poor stands in yet more imminent peril ?’

“ ‘It would not become me, my lord,’ I said, ‘to presume to argue the subject with you.’

“ ‘Why not ?’ said Lord Windermere—‘I want to know why you have been holding me up, in common with other men of my position, to popular indignation. Say your worst, for I assure you you have nothing to apprehend in consequence. It is not difficult to see that the two instances you have stated are not the real reasons for lavishing so much abuse upon the aristocracy—which term, remember, includes a great number of Englishmen who bear no titles of honour. The distinguishing feature of the British nobility is, that it

is constantly recruited and sustained from the ranks of the people ; and it is a downright falsehood to call that order the representatives of the usurping Normans. As for usurpation, if you go far enough back you will find that the Saxons were themselves usurpers ; but that is mere rubbish. My great-grandfather was a banker in a country town—a thrifty man who boasted of no pedigree ; and I certainly am not answerable for any of the heraldic legends which have emanated from the College of Arms. My ancestors, at a comparatively recent period—which, I doubt not, provokes a sneer from many a long-descended English and Scottish esquire—became wealthy through honourable exertion, were ennobled, and carried to the House of Peers that attachment to the people, of which they were the fitting representatives. Now, Mr Flusher, setting minor considerations aside, can you urge any objection to a constitution such as ours ?’

“ ‘ My lord, I replied, ‘ admitting the truth of much that you have said, I would ask whether the glaring social inequalities which we everywhere behold do not furnish conclusive proof of one-sided and partial legislation ?’

“ ‘ Alas !’ said the earl, ‘ is that all you have to urge ? Can you find no more forcible argument than the unequal distribution of property ? Nay, then, your case is a desperate one indeed ; for you are objecting, not to the work of man, but to the will of God. You think it a hardship that one man should be doomed to labour whilst another can take his ease. Is it the labour you

complain of? Reflect for a moment, and you must see that, without labour, society would retrograde, and mankind again become a race of sordid savages. Through labour, fields are cultivated, cities reared, mines explored, and the industrial arts brought to perfection. The universal cessation of labour, even for a single month, would be more severely felt than if the land were scourged by famine or overrun by an invading army. And what is it that sustains labour?—I will tell you. It is that very surplus wealth or capital which it would seem you grudge to others. You talk of the splendid palaces of the rich and the miserable huts of the poor. You contrast luxury with indigence: did you never reflect at what a cost those palaces are built, by what a liberal expenditure that same luxury is maintained? Without wealth, labour would sicken and decay, and this fair and flourishing realm would be degraded to a colony of paupers.’

“‘That is your view, my lord, not mine,’ I replied, doggedly: for though I felt the force of what Lord Windermere said, I did not choose to read my recantation.

“‘Then,’ said the earl, ‘I need pursue the subject no further. It is with great pain that I find a man of your apparent intelligence so wedded to dangerous opinions, the more so because you have expressed no kind of desire to abandon your present occupation. Had it been otherwise, I should gladly have tried to assist you, for I know very well that misfortune, to which all men are liable, engenders discontent, and is

the fruitful mother of railing ; but for a determined agitator I have no sympathy. You may now go, sir ; but, for your own sake, I advise you to remember my warning.'

" I have sometimes wondered whether Lucifer could ever have been brought to acknowledge that he was in the wrong ! I think not ; for Pride, that most potent yet insensate passion, common alike to men and demons, would have forbidden him to give way. And pride had then the mastery over me. So I went out apparently defiant ; but, in reality, so much impressed by the earl's discourse, that I resolved seriously to consider whether my political views were not based upon a total misconception of the duties of society and the reciprocal obligations of men. The more I pondered, the more I became convinced that I had committed a gigantic blunder. It is strange how, at such times, old recollections come to our aid ; for somehow or other, those long-forgotten words of the Church Catechism forced themselves upon my mind—' Not to covet or desire other men's goods ; but to learn and labour truly to get mine own living, and to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me.' A holy lesson, from which the man may profit even more than the child ! Had I so done my duty ? I could not answer in the affirmative ; and from that hour I abandoned the occupation of a Chartist lecturer.

" But I have already, sir, occupied far too much of your time. It would be tedious to tell you of all the shifts and devices to which I was forced to resort in

order to keep my family from starving. I came to London in the hope of getting some employment as an engraver-draughtsman ; but I failed, mainly owing to my beggarly appearance, which offended respectable tradesmen. One offer, indeed, was made to me, which in my ruined condition was tempting ; but I refused it, because it was evidently associated with crime. And now, sir, you have the whole of my story, at least as much of it as is worth narrating. I might call it the experiences of a man who has missed his way in the world."

"I assure you, Mr Flusher," said I, "that I have listened to your story with the utmost interest. I wish that other men would be as candid as you are ; for if that were the case, the way would be greatly smoothed towards the solution of some difficult social problems. Meanwhile, our object must be to get you some profitable employment. I hope I shall be able to accomplish that through a friend who is connected with railway business ; for I hear there is a demand for draughtsmen, and I am persuaded that you will work with diligence."

And, in effect, I did so interest honest Davie Osett in Flusher's behalf, that in a day or two afterwards he procured him as many jobs as would maintain his family for a year ; railway companies then having received no practical lessons as to the observance of a strict economy.

CHAPTER XIX.

PARENTAL DESPOTISM.

CARLTON was as good as his word. To the home-circle of the Stanhopes I was admitted on the footing of an intimate friend; and there I had several times the opportunity, so much coveted, of conversing with Mary Beaton.

I shall not attempt to relate how, day by day, the tie between us gradually was closer drawn, until I knew that I was no longer indifferent to her, whilst my worship had deepened into adoration. What true lover could ever chronicle the words, the smiles, the looks that gave him hope? As in the garden of the blest, where the happy hours roll away without leaving trace of their passage, because they are so purely happy, I gave myself up to the transport of the moment, and forgot, or tried to forget, that there were yet trials to be endured.

Whether from contempt, or from a consciousness that he had compromised his dignity by allowing his passion to overpower his reason, I know not; but so it was that Mr Beaton had not mentioned my name to

his daughter, though she, of course, was made aware by Amy Stanhope that there had been a serious quarrel. This was so far a restraint that it prevented me from making a broad declaration of my feelings, which, under the circumstances, I thought would be hardly honourable—indeed, I felt assured that Mary, whose sense of duty was strong, would never enter into any engagement without the knowledge of her father. Probably I should have seen less of her than I did, had her home been a happy one ; but wealth, either real or apparent, gives no exemption from misery, and cannot make up for the want of tender cherishing and the glow of natural affection. Mr Beaton had never been what the world calls a domestic man. Immersed in business, commercial and political, he considered that he was amply discharging his duty to his daughter by giving her every means of instruction which money could procure. He was not blind to her great accomplishments, but he was proud of it only as something which was the result of his lavish outlay. He was one of those unhappy men who hold, with the followers of the Prophet of Medina, that females are, in every respect, vastly inferior to the lords of the creation, and that, though it might not be wise openly to proclaim the doctrine, they are virtually to be considered as chattels, and may be included in the household inventory. I have often mused how a heresy, so opposed to natural yearnings, Christian teaching, and Gothic chivalry, should be by no means singular or uncommon in a country such as ours ; and I think it is explained by

the fact, that the men who hold it have, almost without exception, made unhappy marriages. Not having cared for their wives, they care still less for their daughters. There is a link wanting in the chain of affection. A fond husband recognises, or tries to discover, in his budding girl the image of his living or departed wife ; and he sees again renewed the charms which long ago had won his admiration. He loves her because he loved her mother, and because she is the pledge of a holy and a happy union. But of an unhappy marriage, the daughter is an unfortunate memento. Her face recalls the eidolon of the neglected woman ; and that, carelessly regarded at first, and afterwards often loathed, is terrible to the selfish man, who, let him try to excuse himself to himself as he best can, has always the humiliating conviction that he has been acting the part either of a tyrant or a hypocrite. And so the father does not love his child with that absorbing affection which demands the most devoted return.

Richard Beaton had married a wife for whom he did not care a straw. In fact, it is absurd to say that he married a wife — he married twenty thousand pounds, saddled with a female incumbrance ; and, instead of cultivating affection, he cultivated wealth and power. It is quite possible that Mrs Beaton might not have been a partner of congenial tastes ; but such matters ought to be considered before the alliance is concluded. This, at least, is certain, that she brought to him the capital which thereafter he enormously improved, and enabled him thereby to prosecute his

schemes of ambition. Neglected and despised—virtually a widow, yet with no fond memories to console her—the poor woman pined and died; nor did the husband indulge in any exorbitant grief, seeing that the money, which was the motive for the marriage, was not buried along with her. He did not look out for a new alliance, matrimony not being an indispensable requisite for a man of his tastes and temperament; but as it was necessary that some one should be placed at the head of his establishment and do the honours of his table—for he knew well that ostentatious hospitality is a sure way towards success—he selected his sister, Mrs Walton, who had been left in poor circumstances, but who was nevertheless a shrewd, scheming, and ambitious woman, to fill that post, and to her he committed the charge of his household and the education of his daughter. Mrs Walton was quite ready to undertake the first duty, but the second she resolved to perform by deputy; for, being childless herself, and never having entertained any sisterly affection for the deceased Mrs Beaton, she cared little for the orphan girl, who was committed to the custody of a governess. Fortunately for Mary, the lady who was engaged in that capacity was a person of high principle, enlarged understanding, and warm affections. She watched over the child with unremitting care, teaching her those lessons which cannot be taught too early—of self-denial, control of temper, sympathy for the distressed, and reliance on the will of God—that mould, influence, and sanctify the future character.

And so little Mary grew up, like a pure and spotless lily, though reared amidst the heat and throng of a crowded and noisy mansion.

Neither her father nor her aunt interfered with her education so long as she was merely a girl. But when years rolled on, and the time drew nigh when she might be introduced to society, Richard Beaton bethought him that the very quiet and unassuming governess, who had such influence over his daughter, might not be the most competent person to fit her for her entry into the fashionable world ; and, after many colloquies with his sister, it was deemed expedient that Miss Russell should be requested to retire, which is the polite form of a dismissal. Nevertheless Mr Beaton, who was by no means stingy, whatever might be his other faults, tried to make this intimation as little obnoxious as it could be by the settlement of a life-annuity upon the lady, "in respect of her invaluable services ;" but that did not lessen the pain, and even agony, of the separation. Miss Russell, during the long period that she had resided in the Beaton family, had formed a perfectly accurate estimate of the characters of the father and the aunt, and she was terrified lest their practised art and habitual dissimulation might taint the candour of her pupil. But the fear was groundless. The old adage of "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," is the acme of human, or rather inspired wisdom ; but we are not all agreed as to the training. Too often we restrict it to such

accomplishments and arts as are useful only for the promotion of temporal interests, forgetful that the time of our sojourn upon earth is but limited, and that we are also the heirs of immortality. But here the seed had fallen upon good ground, and neither briers nor thorns were permitted to spring up and prevent it from coming to maturity.

I have already said that from her very first introduction to society Miss Beaton was courted and admired. Numerous were the dowagers who, in their maternal zeal for the advancement of their darling Edwards and Alfreds, offered to *chaperon* her to the gaieties of London, much to the contentment of Mrs Walton, who, though proud of doing the honours of Mr Beaton's mansion, was yet fond of her ease, and did not relish the idea of receiving a smaller share of attention than her young and beautiful niece. But all the arts of the wily diplomatists of fashion were in vain. No Edward nor Alfred, though they tried to charm never so nicely, could make an impression on Miss Beaton's heart; and then it was whispered that, with all her apparent frankness and simplicity, Mary Beaton was a clever designing girl, who knew perfectly well what she was about, and would enter into no alliance which did not procure for her high rank in exchange for her abundant gold. That rumour received corroboration when Lord Pentland formally appeared as her suitor, and absolutely haunted her like a shadow. Of all the young men who had paid attention to his daughter, Pentland was the one whom

Richard Beaton favoured. He never for a moment thought of ascertaining what Mary's wishes might be ; nor did he study the character of the young earl for the purpose of assuring himself that her happiness would be safe in his custody. The truth is, that he regarded all young men of fashion with a certain cynical contempt, esteeming them of little real use in the practical business of life, and not much more intelligent than the wax figures which used to adorn the windows of the hairdresser. He had not much belief in youthful talent—none at all in youthful capacity. Had Lord Pentland been a private gentleman, Beaton would not even have noticed him ; but he was an important person as the inheritor of a ducal title. Possibly he might have hesitated had the general report declared Pentland to be a profligate ; but as there was no such charge, he did not trouble himself with minute inquiries.

He and Mrs Walton had made up their minds that Mary was to be the bride of Lord Pentland, and they acted on that persuasion. Never had suitor so many opportunities of declaring himself ; but still Pentland, though constantly in attendance, did not propose. Mrs Walton was greatly perplexed. The earl, though formal and precise, was not shy ; and, had it suited his purpose, would have declared himself with as much deliberation as if he were bargaining for a pair of gloves. Could it arise from the perversity of the girl ? She resolved to watch ; but she could see nothing in Mary's demeanour towards Lord Pentland differing

from that which she showed to other young men who surrounded her. If she did not encourage his advances, certainly she did not shun them. This appeared to the good lady rather a favourable symptom ; whereas, had she known anything of the manifestations of love, she would have drawn quite the contrary inference ; for, of all tokens, a tranquil indifference is the least encouraging to a lover. However, that did not weigh upon the mind of Pentland, who did not even contemplate the possibility of a refusal. He saw quite plainly that old Beaton was anxious for the alliance—nay, that he had set his heart upon it ; but that assurance, which would have stimulated a more ardent lover, was the very cause of Pentland's backwardness. He thought that, having the game in his own hand, he need be in no hurry to play out the cards ; and also that he might command more immediately advantageous terms, in the way of settlements, by stimulating the merchant through delay. Moreover, being an exceedingly prudent young man—for which he deserved credit, improvidence having been the ruin of his house—he was resolute to ascertain, before committing himself irretrievably, whether Beaton was actually that Cræsus which he was said to be by popular report. Carlton had not done full justice to Lord Pentland's intellect. He was no fool, but a profound calculator. Family misfortune had made him circumspect. He was resolved to take nothing on trust ; and the profusion which was the characteristic feature of Mr Beaton's establishment was so far from preventing his

suspicious, that it absolutely led him to suspect. He had heard or read of Law of Lauriston, and other superlative blowers of bubbles—of French financiers, whose revenues were computed as equal to those of a minor sovereignty, but who had collapsed like exhausted balloons—of speculators who, in one week, might have bragged a prince, and in the next could not command silver enough to purchase a decent meal. Had there been a living Elwes, with a daughter, Pentland would have made appliance there. But the breed of absolute misers is wellnigh extinct. In our day it seems to be an axiom, though I dispute its soundness, that lavish expenditure can be made more profitable than prudent saving. Hence the splendid additions to the Gazette, of which each week contributes its quota, and the jolly confessions of humorous bankrupts, exciting roars of laughter, in which, I suspect, the creditors rarely join. No doubt, as he was perfectly heart-whole, and had only one thing, which was his title, to barter in exchange for wealth, Lord Pentland was entitled to use every possible precaution.

At length Mr Beaton, who was not blessed with a large stock of patience, determined to bring the matter to a crisis, by the short and summary method of demanding of the earl what were his intentions. I understand that this duty, which sometimes must be performed in order to bring dangles to their senses, is usually undertaken by the female head of the house, as having more tact and temper, and withal more persuasive powers, than the irascible sire, who may

nevertheless be called in as *dernier ressort* in case of undue hesitation. Mrs Walton, who was a woman of spirit, stood up for her prerogative, and insisted that she was the proper person to bring Lord Pentland to book. But it occurred to her, which it had not done to Mr Beaton, that, in the first instance, it would be proper to sound Mary's inclination—not that she anticipated any decided opposition, but for the purpose of providing against any possible difficulty or delay; for Mr Beaton had been at great pains to impress upon her the necessity of getting the affair over as soon as possible, if the match was to take place at all. Mr Beaton pooh-poohed the notion as a piece of absolute supererogation, swearing—for the respectable gentleman could sometimes swear quite as lustily as a drill-sergeant—that he should like to see a child of his venture to thwart his wishes. “You are unreasonable, brother,” said Mrs Walton, “and you do not understand our sex. Women are easily led, but they do not like to be driven. Mary is a fine girl, but she inherits the Beaton blood, and I think you will allow that our family were never famous for yielding their opinions. If you try to coerce her, you will fail, or at all events create a vast deal of unnecessary trouble. Leave the management of the affair to me. I have your interest deeply at heart. I know your wishes, and I shall do everything that woman can to see that they are fulfilled.”

The debate terminated, as usual, by the lord of the creation giving way; and Mrs Walton, who was a sort

of Machiavelli in petticoats, began the delicate office of ascertaining the state of the affections of her niece. To her surprise and dismay, Mary avowed her total indifference to Lord Pentland, and even ridiculed the notion that he meant to honour her by a proposal.

“ I assure you, aunt,” she said, “ that he has never spoken a single word to me, which, by any effort of imagination, I could construe into love-making. He is a most precise young man, who seems to admire nothing but his gloves, which he is perpetually surveying, to the exclusion of any of those glances that novelists refer to as symptoms of the tender passion. No—no ! my true lover is Mr Linklater, who stares at me with afflicting constancy, and sighs as if he had the asthma. I’ll tell you why Lord Pentland follows me. He thinks it may be of use to him that the idea should go abroad that he is intimate with papa ; and he has no objection to the good dinners with which you so frequently indulge him

“ My dear child,” said Mrs Walton, “ I must really tell you that you are labouring under a great misconception. Lord Pentland’s attentions to you have been so very marked, that all London talks of him as your suitor ; and he is actually so compromised that he could not in honour draw back, which, I am sure, he has not the least intention of doing, without an explanation.”

“ I certainly,” replied Miss Beaton, “ neither expect nor would accept an explanation from a man for whom I have no regard. If, in your view, matters have gone

so far as to raise a rumour, of which I was unconscious, and now hear with astonishment—for I have never given any encouragement to Lord Pentland—the remedy is simple. Abstain from inviting him to this house, and you will have no further trouble.”

“Yes, Mary; but at what a sacrifice? Do you not perceive, my sweet child, that you also are compromised? If Lord Pentland should draw back without making you an offer, will not the world say that you have been slighted, and your affections trifled with?”

“The world, aunt,” replied Miss Beaton, “may say what it pleases. I have yet to learn that the opinion, or rather the gossip, of the world ought to influence our actions; and from what I have seen of London society, I certainly shall not bow to the judgment of any such tribunal.”

“My love!” said Mrs Walton, in her most insinuating tones; “you are very young, and perhaps you do not yet comprehend the importance of that opinion which you rather rashly despise. In this country we are all slaves to public opinion. Even the Queen on the throne must bend before it—how then can a simple maiden escape? It is impossible to evade the fact. Lord Pentland has paid you marked attention; and I, who have not been an unattentive observer, cannot say that you have met his advances with that coldness which is understood to convey a hint that further courtship would be unacceptable. We cannot read hearts—we can only judge from tokens. Now it is quite evident to me that Lord Pentland loves you. His

person is agreeable—there is nothing against his character or his morals, and the woman whom he weds will become a British duchess, than which there is no superior rank short of absolute royalty. Mary Beaton ! all that is ready for your acceptance. Poverty you have not to dread, for your father can bestow upon you an enormous fortune. You will take rank with the highest, the proudest, and best descended peeresses of Europe, as you are entitled to do ; for the mere name and cognisance of Beaton is a sufficient certificate ; and you will have the glory of raising a family, fallen by misfortune, to a position higher than that which it occupied nearly three centuries ago.”

“And what is Lord Pentland or his family to me, that I should make a sacrifice of myself ?” replied Miss Beaton. “Dear aunt, you know me very little indeed if you think that I either covet or envy rank, which is to those who are forced to bear it a heavy load, and sometimes a great misfortune. I have no wish to be a duchess. It would make me blush with shame to be pointed at as the city heiress who took the hand of an impoverished nobleman for a title in exchange for her gold. And to marry without love, without affection, without even cold esteem ! The thought is monstrous. Aunt, let us drop the subject. Even to speak of such a thing is degradation, and creates within me a feeling which I cannot express.”

“Nevertheless, Mary, you must control your feelings, and submit to listen to me,” said Mrs Walton. “I do

not speak without authority—I speak in the name of one whom you are bound by the laws of God and man to reverence and obey. It is your father's will that you should accept of Lord Pentland as your husband."

"It cannot be!" cried Miss Beaton; "I will not believe it! My father order me to do a thing from which my mind recoils with abhorrence! Dear aunt! say this is a device of your own—say that my father never uttered such a word—and I will forgive you the pang which you have inflicted!"

"I cannot say so, Mary, because I then should be telling you a falsehood. It is by his desire that I have spoken to you to-day; and I undertook the duty the more readily because I was fearful of the consequences which would follow direct opposition to his will. Your father, Mary—I need not mince the matter—has a violent temper, and will not brook contradiction. He loves you well, for you are his only child, and hitherto have been an obedient one; but if you thwart him, the explosion of his wrath will be terrible. So, my dear child, be persuaded, and listen to reason. I stand to you in room of a mother——"

"No, no! don't say that!" cried Miss Beaton. "If my poor mother were alive I should have one to take my part, and protest against a tyranny which would make a free English girl as helpless as an Eastern slave! For your affection, aunt, such as it is, I am grateful; but you cannot counsel me as a mother would have done."

“Very well, my dear ; then I shall simply speak as your father’s sister, which is indeed my proper character ; and you cannot object to my drawing your attention to the possible consequences, if you should prove stubborn. In the first place, are you aware that you have no fortune of your own independent of your father ?”

“I never gave a thought to the subject.”

“Such, however, is the case. Your mother had some property ; but it was left to his absolute disposal.”

“And what of that ? What has my lack of fortune to do with that other odious matter ?”

“Much. I know my brother well ; and should you incense him by declining a match upon which he has obviously set his heart, he is quite capable of disinheriting you, and leaving every shilling of his vast accumulations to an hospital.”

“And let him do so, rather than force me to sell my freedom !” said Miss Beaton. “Oh, aunt, threats of that kind have very little effect upon me. I am not so enamoured of wealth as to prize it above my conscience ; and what I would not yield to a parent’s entreaty I will not be coerced into by menaces.”

“Poor child !” said Mrs Walton, pityingly. “You talk lightly of wealth, because, reared in the lap of luxury, you have never known what poverty really is. I have known it, Mary—I have seen the face of the gaunt spectre, and I yet shudder at the remembrance.

But I was not nurtured as you have been. From the first my lot was a hard one. As a girl, I was used to no luxuries and few indulgences. I fared plainly, dressed simply, and had to undertake household tasks; but that was comfort—nay, opulence—contrasted with what followed. Mary, I have known what it is TO WANT; and if I refrain from exhibiting to you a picture which would make you quail, it is because I still hope that your good angel will interfere, and cause you to abandon this miserable obstinacy. You say you despise wealth! O child! reared, as you have been, like an exotic in a rich conservatory, how could you bear exposure, even for a day, to the bitter blast of poverty? Away with romance! Be reasonable, be dutiful, and all will yet go well.”

“Aunt,” said Miss Beaton, “I will speak to you quite frankly. Nothing that you have said has availed to shake my resolution, nor is it likely that anything you can say will have that effect. But I will confess that I am exceedingly anxious to avoid anything like an altercation with my father—yet that is not the proper word, for, however angry he might be, I hope I know my duty too well to fail in respect, though I may not be able to yield obedience. You see that this announcement has taken me quite by surprise. It is the privilege of our sex to have time to reflect upon so important a subject, and that privilege I claim. If you press me now, my answer, whatever may be the consequences, shall be, No! And having once said

that, I shall not retract it, but leave the issue in the hands of God, our heavenly Father, to whom there is an appeal from the hasty sentence of an earthly parent. If you accord me time, I shall consider what you have said. I ask your pardon if, in my impetuosity, I have said anything to displease you, for you have always been kind to me, dear aunt, and I have often heard you say that the Beatons were a hasty race. Be good enough to suppose that I am not exempt from the family failing, and do not press me just yet for an answer, which would make us all so unhappy."

Mrs Walton, though a very worldly-minded woman, had yet some good points in her character. It was fortunate that she had no children; for, had that been the case, some malignant fiend would doubtless have suggested to her that, by precipitating matters, and revealing Mary's disobedience, she might make a splendid provision for her own particular brood. She spoke the truth when she said that Beaton, if his daughter resolutely opposed his wish, was capable of treating her as an alien. But her own desire was to have peace in the household in which she was so comfortably ensconced; and I doubt not, if it had been possible to penetrate into the recesses of her heart, it might be read there that the promotion of her niece to the rank of a duchess interested her much less than it did her ambitious and scheming brother. Women of her stamp do not feel greatly elated by such violent changes in the social position of their youthful relatives. They have sense

enough to know that it by no means follows, as a matter of course, that they also shall share in the elevation ; and Mrs Walton was far too well versed in the ways of society to fall into the delusion that she would be adopted and recognised as a member of the ducal family. In short, she was acting in this matter rather in obedience to the will of her brother than from any personal motive. Therefore, she passed her solemn word to use her influence with Mr Beaton to refrain from forcing on an *eclaircissement* ; and so the story must rest, with a halt for the breathing-time.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.