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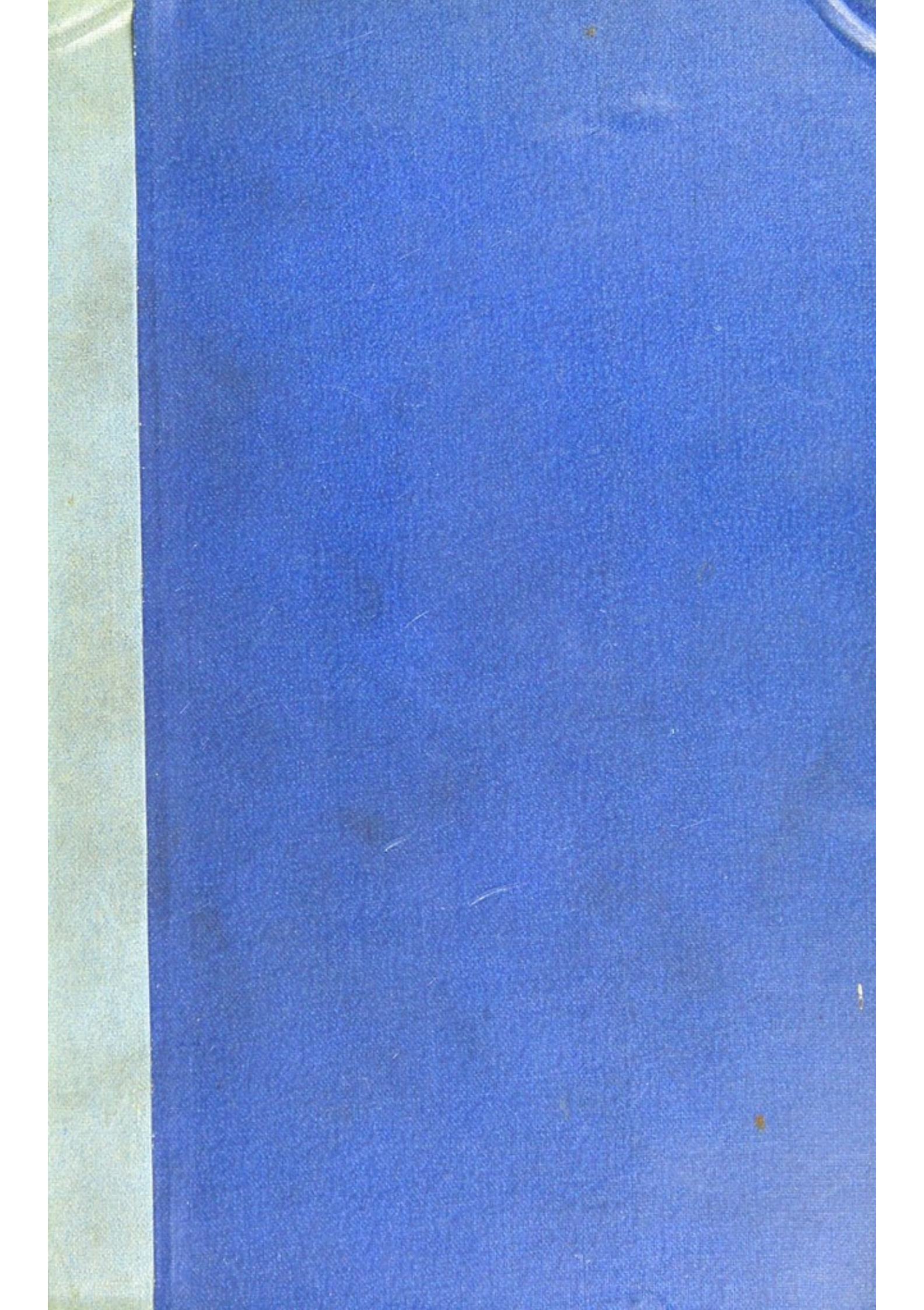
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The little picture!
painted at the holiday
time

Par un mot
ou

Pa's un mot!

AX

The very very best
copy.

45/1

(Sir Henry Thompson)

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CHARLEY KINGSTON'S AUNT.

THOMPSON (Sir H.)
C



CHARLEY KINGSTON'S AUNT

BY

PEN OLIVER

LONDON

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1885

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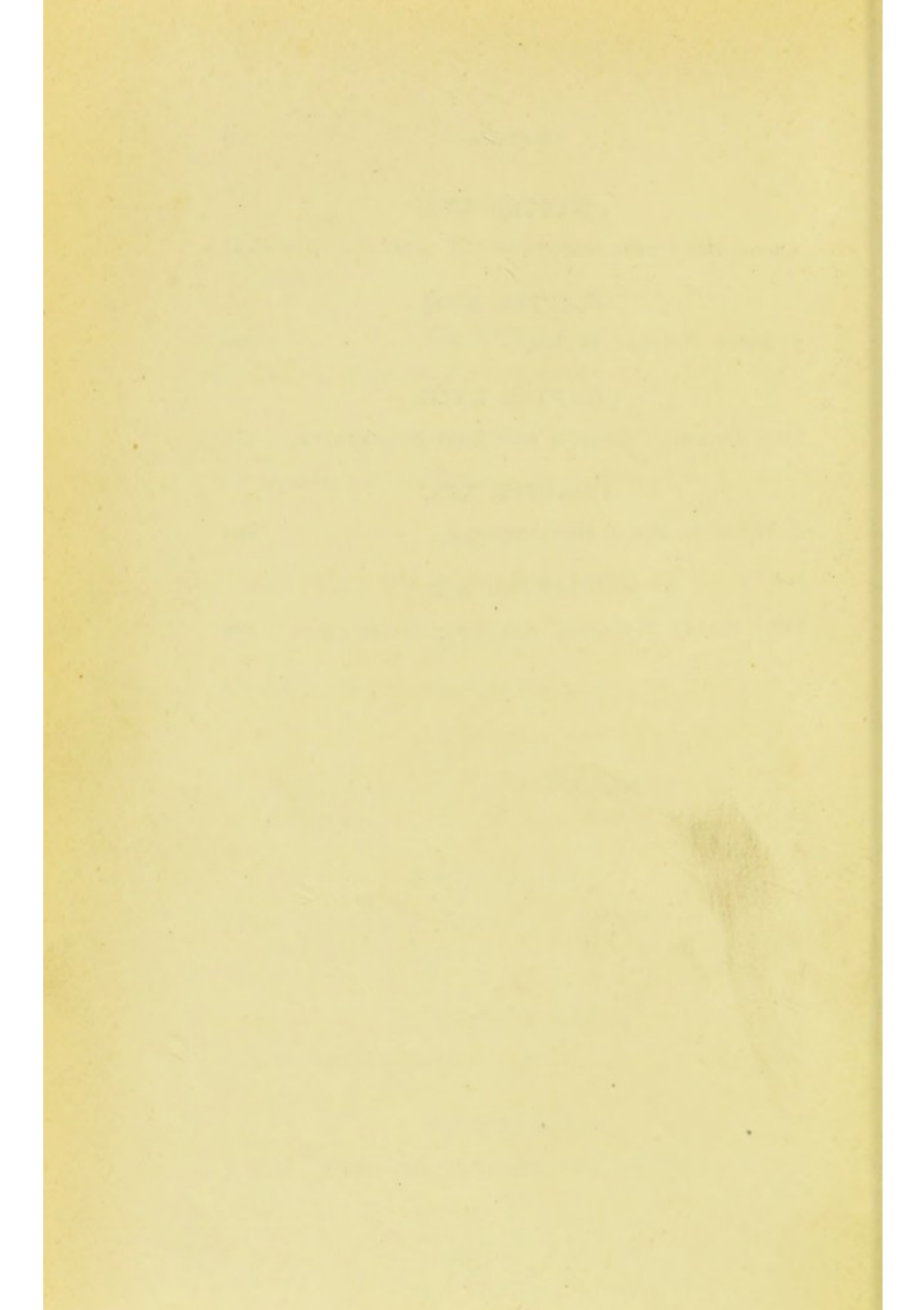
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CHARLEY KINGSTON'S AUNT.

CHAPTER I.

I LEAVE HOME TO RESUME MY STUDENT LIFE AT THE HOSPITAL.

I HAD now passed about a fortnight at home, in the house of my father, a clergyman administering a rural parish in the eastern part of the county of Suffolk. It was the "Easter Vacation" at my college, in 1857, although the term expired in the end of March, almost three weeks before Easter Sunday, which fell on the 12th of April in that year.

The short period of rest had been very welcome after the long and laborious winter session which, as a medical student in my third year, I had devoted to really hard labour, partly

by reading, partly by working at all hours during night and day in the wards of one of the large London hospitals, and in connection with a very active and crowded school. The fine weather of that spring season, which possibly some one of my readers may be able to remember, together with the breezes freshened and scented by the sea only a few miles distant, afforded abundant means for recruiting strength to a healthy young fellow not yet twenty-two; and I soon began to feel a conviction that work must be speedily resumed at this critical period of a medical student's career, if I was not to be out of the running in the college competition for honours, where a good place was necessary to me at any cost, and that for more than one good reason.

"Pater," said I, "you must let me go to-morrow; there are three weeks yet before May the first, when term begins, which I should be glad enough to spend here with you all, but the fact is I must be well advanced with my dissections before the summer comes, no easy matter unless I get back early and secure the means at once if possible." He was really sorry to part with me—still more so were my mother and

sister. I am the only boy ; and although never spoiled I fancy, I have been well looked after and cared for by that affectionate trio. And each one of us well knew that I could not afford to lose time, for I had no prospects after the cost of my education had been defrayed. And although only a few years ago considerable expectations had been entertained from a distant relative, an elderly woman, who had long lived with us as one of the family, unexpected circumstances had now rendered any such hope utterly devoid of foundation.

But even that dear trio, who had long made a true and happy home for me, had, it must be confessed, for some time past failed to include all the objects in which my heart was deeply interested, notably one towards which very ardent aspirations had of late gone forth. Another, a more anxious and a more difficult leave-taking, was somehow or other to be accomplished before night, somewhere within the skirts of our little village. That was quite a different task ; it was surrounded by obstacles, and plans for overcoming them had been matured some days before the announcement of my departure to my father.

It is not my province here to say more of that meeting than this—namely, that it did come off, and that it brought more of heartache than of happiness or of hope, certainly to one of the two parties concerned therein.

Of that one centre of supreme interest to myself just referred to, I must now say a few words.

Some sixteen or seventeen years ago, a military officer who had retired after thirty years' service with the rank of colonel, came to settle in our parish. He took a small house with garden and paddock, the latter joining the strip of glebe which skirted our own garden, and furnished a grass run for my father's pony. It was understood that he had lately met with a calamity which had almost overwhelmed him—namely, the loss of a wife much younger than himself, and to whom he had been married only three or four years, leaving him a widower with an only daughter. He lived a retired life with this little girl, to whom he devoted almost all his time and thoughts, and whom he educated with the aid of a nursery governess. The father and the child might be seen in their rambles together from

year's end to year's end, and among the very few persons he cared to associate with for the purpose of finding some society for himself, and a suitable playmate or two for his daughter, my father and his family ranked among the first.

Katie Clavering was at the present date eighteen years of age. She had been a pretty and interesting girl, but she had recently developed the stage of early womanhood, unfolding a type of singular beauty. Some of her friends who met her only now and then were almost startled at the change; those who saw her every day were of course less aware of it. She was herself absolutely unconscious of the transformation, and saw the same Katie in her glass to-day that she had seen the day before. I may sketch her for you, but her portraiture is beyond any art I have ever had the fortune to meet. No brush, however facile or experienced; no pen, however powerful, copious, or accomplished, has yet produced a first-rate female portrait. The firm lines and marked character of man can now and then be fixed on canvas or traced on paper by a great artist. The subtle expression, the delicate tints and unmeasurable contours of female beauty,

have never yet been transferred to a flat surface of any kind.

She was of full middle height, with a well-formed figure inclining to be slender, but round and smooth in outline, apt for supple and graceful movement, the small compact head and oval face contributing to make her appear slightly tall. The features were half-crowned, half-framed by a mass of loosely-banded chesnut hair, which out of doors in sunlight shone like golden bronze, its deep brown in shadow giving full effect to the lovely complexion, light but warm, of the firmly-rounded neck and shoulders. The brown eyes, lying tranquil under a deep fringe of dark curving lashes, not largely, nor perhaps always quite equally opened when at rest, disclosed ample expanse of liquid depth, with violet hues when aroused and stirred by feeling, one brow arching slightly higher than the other, and giving a piquancy to the expression never failing to attract, and never forgotten by her admirers. A straight well-chiselled nose; short curved upper lip, full and projecting, rested on its firm round companion below, each joining the other at a deeply recessed angle, and opening not too

scantily to show the perfect teeth within; the chin rather small, marked in form, not prominent, but not retreating.

Can you imagine her? I, who can so completely recall her at that period of her life, have thus placed her image before myself, but cannot know how far I have succeeded, or rather how much I have failed in suggesting some notion of it to my reader. Such at any rate to the outward eye was the girl between whom and myself a childish friendship had ripened, almost without our knowing it, into a warmer sentiment—one which imperiously dominated my whole being, one to which I had some reason to hope she was not indifferent. My impulsive, ardent passion recognized no obstacles as insurmountable. She owed her first allegiance to her father, and I felt that she would loyally maintain it.

To return to our history. On the morning but one after that on which my story opens, I was seated at breakfast in my London rooms. The meal was above the average in point of quality, owing its butter and new-laid eggs to my mother's thoughtful care. The family means were moderate, not considerable; our pure and

cheap country produce was everyway welcome, and I had brought up a hamper of it. My rooms were, as all hard-working students' should be, close to the college and hospital, so that no occurrence of importance at the latter place, whenever it might happen, could be missed by me. An occasional "tip" to the porter ensured my being sent for whenever any unusual emergency had taken place—a sudden influx of injured people after a railway or other accident, and the like—whether I were officially connected, by dressership, with the department of the hospital which, by rotation, was so fortunate as to receive it, or not. Of course, to ensure facility of approach and of movement, and to avoid disturbing the other inmates of the house, my rooms were on the ground floor, and I was accessible from the outside by signal, a pebble launched against the window pane. For this purpose, a little bedroom in front, and a quiet sitting-room communicating with it behind, amply sufficed—an accommodation which cost a rent of twelve shillings weekly, including the services of a dirty little maid-of-all-work, and such cooking as breakfast and tea demanded. Coals and lights were

extra. Once more I was in possession of my latch-key, seated in my den—an apartment of ten feet square. I have my needful books arranged on shelves almost all within reach of my one arm-chair ; a well-prepared skull, “in seven sections,” for study at my elbow, Quain’s plates with which to verify anatomical descriptions on the table, a box or two of instruments and my stethoscope on the mantelpiece, and lastly a good student’s microscope and its belongings under a glass bell jar within the single ray, mostly of dusty or foggy light, which slants down by a back area into the one window of my snugery ; and I am ready to buckle to for any amount of work, hard, it is true, but always so full of interest and of novelty. But this slight sketch of my interior would be incomplete without reference, not merely to the three or four works of art which my landlady, the wife of a clerk in a large furniture establishment in a neighbouring thoroughfare, has hung on the wall, and which serve to mitigate by so much covering the enormous flaring pattern of the paper, but to a little water-colour sketch or two by my sister, from scenes in the neighbourhood of home, which I have attached by drawing

pins ; while one faint effort of my own to produce in pen and ink the head of that young girl, the only *souvenir* thereof I have dared to acquire, holds the place of honour among these familiar treasures of my own.

My breakfast finished, I sallied forth to the hospital, nodding familiarly to the porter in the entrance hall, and demanding whether Allison, the house surgeon, was still in his private room, or had commenced his round of the wards, which, during the session, it was his duty to enter, accompanied by the staff of dressers, at ten o'clock precisely every morning. In the vacation most officers are less punctual, so mounting to the second storey, I knocked at the door of his private room and entered. A good-natured bright face, with clear eye and keen glance, regarded me closely for a moment, above the line of the morning paper, which instantly dropped as its owner greeted me. 'Charley Kingston, of all men ! why, what on earth has brought you here so soon ? Right glad to see you though'—rising, and shaking me by the hand.

"Getting anxious about work ; the old story, so much to do, and so little time to do it in. The

truth is I want to dissect as soon as I can ; are there any bodies going, think you ? But first of all, is there anything particular in your wards here ?" I added.

" Well, not badly off ; gradually getting up a few useful cases to begin with for the chief's first operating day when the session opens, and to lecture on. Go round with me ; I shall start soon. No dresser has come yet, it is only ten minutes past ; and two of the four are away in the country, so you may lend a hand if you will."

" With all my heart ; nothing will suit me better."

The resident house surgeon of a London hospital, it should be explained, is generally a young man whose career of study at the college and hospital has been passed with more than usual credit. He has probably obtained a scholarship or a medal or two in competitive examination for honours on those scientific subjects the elements of which must be mastered by every qualified medical man ; and he has usually taken one of the degrees which are necessary to render him a legal practitioner of his profession. He is rarely more than five-and-twenty years of age, and

having been able during a term of four or five years thus to lay a good foundation of theoretical knowledge, he wisely elects to devote further time, such as few indeed can afford, to the practical observation of disease or injury in the wards of the hospital. If the study and management of internal disease chiefly attract him, he is a house physician, and is exclusively attached to the medical wards, which he watches under the direct supervision of one of the leading physicians of the day, with whom he has the advantage of being daily brought into more or less intimate relations. If injuries and operations are more interesting, he takes charge in like manner under some distinguished surgeon of a surgical ward, and receives the appointment during a certain term, varying from six to twelve months, as house surgeon, which necessarily carries with it residence, board, and constant duty within the walls of the institution. And, if possible, a thoroughly earnest man, with abundant leisure, will endeavour to hold both appointments in turn.

We held some brief chat on surgical topics interesting him most at the moment, illustrations of which were abundant in such an officer's room,

crowded as it always is with hospital papers and case books, portions of fracture apparatus and cases of instruments, glasses of secretions, contents of cysts, &c., for chemical and microscopical examination, preparations of disease just removed by operation or from autopsy demanding inspection and description, &c., together with apparatus for making all the necessary examinations referred to. A room appropriately furnished with Spartan simplicity, but comprising a single sofa and easy-chair for the weary officer to rest in, or even to sleep on at night when an important or anxious case renders retreat to bed undesirable or impossible. Allison tended his patients with enthusiasm and devotion, sacrificing all considerations in order to achieve a success for them, for himself, and for his chief, the great operating surgeon, whose lieutenant he was; and in this respect he was only a fair type of the young fellows who fill these offices, and who learn, in accepting large responsibilities for the first time, how absolutely the demands of duty to the post override all other considerations.

The dressers came, and we spent two pleasant hours in the routine of the wards; then, before

parting, Allison and I agreed to dine together at a student's restaurant hard by at 7 o'clock. I descended to the entrance hall of the hospital. Here is always to be found, especially shortly before the opening of the new session, a crowd of announcements of all kinds, inviting the attention of old and new students to matters respectively concerning them. I searched among them for any notice from the demonstrator of anatomy, and I found one as follows:—

“Gentlemen requiring early opportunities of dissecting are requested to put their names down at the demonstrator's room on and after Friday next, April 10, 1857, at one o'clock precisely.”

The date of to-day. I was just in time; two men besides myself only attended, and our names were duly entered. It should be stated that a body designed for anatomical dissection, the proceedings of which are prolonged and minute, and conducted strictly under the eye of the professor of anatomy or of his trained substitutes, is divided for the purpose into certain definite “parts,” each of which is appropriated exclusively by at least one dissector, and becomes his property for the time; two, however, may share a “part”

together, and divide the labour. The "part" which I required was the head and neck; it is that which of all others requires the greatest care, and some little skill on the part of the student, and demands the greatest expenditure of time and labour. Six weeks at least of very hard work only just suffice to complete the task; and it is never attempted by a first year's man, or ought not to be. However, there was no subject available at present; and these preliminary arrangements were necessarily made while awaiting the advent of one. Complete and thoroughly understood as the conditions are under which that most necessary element to sound medical instruction, viz., the supply of human bodies, is furnished, few persons outside the pale of the profession, perhaps, have ever considered the subject otherwise than with a feeling of profound repugnance, and with a half-suppressed wish that no such practice as dissection existed. Let it then be briefly stated that the practice is most carefully regulated, that those bodies only to which no claim whatever is made by any friends are thus applied, and that they are equally distributed among the schools of London according to their respective wants, by an officer

appointed for the purpose by Government. Furthermore, all possible security is afforded that each body is, subsequently to dissection, decently buried with religious rites. The dissecting rooms are kept in admirable order, and are jealously guarded from public intrusion, although probably very few lay persons would be hardy enough to make an uninvited attempt to visit the interior; while among the students occupied there, no undue license of any kind is permitted to take place therein. It should be added that spacious buildings, well ventilated and regularly disinfected, have now taken the place of those low, out-of-the-way, half-lighted vaults in which, fifty years ago, this course of study was followed under conditions which were loathsome and unwholesome to a needless degree. These remarks are not only desirable for the information of the general reader, but are necessary in relation to the development of my story.

CHAPTER II.

A STUDENT'S DINNER AT "THE LARDER."

THE afternoon was devoted to study in my den, where Allison called for me on our way to the Devonshire Larder, a well-known and favourite haunt of the students belonging to the medical side of the college. His dining quarters, as house surgeon, were, of course, the officers' table of the hospital, at which some eight or ten met daily, including the matron and secretary of the institution, but on this special occasion he was my guest. Dinner is, for a hard-working student with slender means, and there were many such, not a necessary part of his daily life, but only an occasional luxury. Tea in his own rooms, fortified by a sausage, a slice of ham, or even a chop, is made to suffice by men who read much and give little time to exercise, and answers better than a heavy

meal with beer, when the evening is to be devoted to work.

A few steps brought us into a busy street, where a familiar door, opening direct upon a narrow staircase, admitted us to the first floor, originally consisting of two rooms, now thrown into one, and crowded with small tables accommodating two guests each and four. We selected a vacant one of the former kind in a quiet corner, and were soon recognized and welcomed by Mary, the one waiter of the room, who was popularly believed to know at sight every man of the hundred clients who, when in town, habitually dined there from our place alone, as well as his gastronomic peculiarities, but not a single man by name. Mary was a short, stout, good-natured, happily by no means good-looking country girl, freckled, round faced, and scantily furnished with hair in tiny ringlets, warily peeping out beneath the margin of a muslin cap. Never flurried or ill-tempered, but always active, and labouring steadily to perform the task of waiting on a crowd of hungry persons, in number nearly double that which ought to have been allotted to her, she almost succeeded in satisfying every one, and

somehow contrived to escape blame to herself for the frequent shortcomings of the service. Now, however, it was vacation time, and Mary was enjoying a state of ease and freedom from distraction never to be witnessed in term. The *menu* at the "Devonshire" was a simple matter; there were always two hot meats, sometimes three, whereof the plate—and a very good allowance it was—cost sixpence. There were potatoes and one green vegetable, either being optional, at one penny the portion; bread was a penny, a glass of beer or of porter was a penny, and Mary's own fee was another. If you did not object to risk the reputation of indulgence in gourmandise, or in luxurious refinement, or if you were very young and pretentious, and imagined it to be a glorious thing to exhibit publicly your reckless indifference to pecuniary expenditure, you might select one of two puddings or a tart at threepence, and even order a savoury "bout" in the shape of cheese to follow. But such banquets as these were for most of us the type of Sunday dinners, that is when no invitation from some exalted friend in or out of town had rendered us for the moment sublimely indifferent to all eating-house temptations.

Mary had time to stand at ease, with one hand resting on her rounded hip, and smilingly approve of our unexpected return to town, and compliment at least one of us on country looks, her face instantly resuming its business aspect as she added briskly, "Roast ribs beef just up, sir, shall I bring you a plate each?" We assented, and left ourselves unreservedly in her hands for the rest, intimating that the repast was to be exceptionally liberal, *ab ovo usque ad malum*.

"And now," said Allison, who, I need scarcely here say, was an old friend and confidant, "tell me what you are going to do—what are your plans for the future?"

I replied deliberately, because I had been for some time carefully considering them, "I must, if possible, first get through the College of Surgeons; then I must do the 'second M.B.' next summer, here, of course. If I could bring in with that scheme four or five months of the autumn or winter at Paris, or better still, at Vienna, I should be very glad; but I am almost afraid those horses won't pull together."

"No," said Allison; "the French and German

work won't advance the M.B. examination, and that will take all the strength you can give it. Besides, you will please to remember that you have to do more than merely pass it: we look to you to take honours and support the credit of the old place."

"My dear Allison," said I, "I want time, and time is money. I never knew as I do now how true that saying is! Lucky to be you who can go on as long as you like, and never need think of the cost. You can't have a big man in medicine now, whatever his genius may be, who hasn't got the staying power which easy circumstances give; it wants five years at least now to lay a foundation, and three were more than enough in our fathers' time."

"Yes, old boy," said my friend in a lower tone, "but it would not matter so much to you even now if it wasn't for that little complication of yours——How is she? You have met, of course?"

"The 'complication,' as you are pleased to call my little angel—here's her health in a bumper of that excellent Bass!" (We were indulging wildly to-day.)

"Here's another to you both!" said Allison.

"The 'complication,' I say, so far from being a drawback or a check to my progress, is a constant incitement to a keener struggle. Anxious I often am, and depressed with deadly doubts, but a thought of her—and am I ever without them?—never fails to stimulate me to go in and win if possible."

"Highly poetical, my dear boy; and being so won't advance matters much; still there is more truth in it than in much sentiment of that kind. But to put it practically, what does the old man say?"

"What, Colonel Clavering! Good heavens, you don't suppose I have walked up to the guns yet? And I would almost as soon march right to the muzzle of any gun I ever saw as face that old warrior with a demand for his daughter."

"But you must, if you are in earnest."

"Am I not in earnest? Well, we met three times during my fortnight in Suffolk, the last time the best—yes, and the worst!—only the day before yesterday. She will never leave him; he married late in life; she is the only child; he is seventy, and these two have been alone, comrades

almost, ever since her mother's death so many years ago. The girl is everything to him, and he is very much to her. I can't say she is wrong; but he is hearty, and may live to eighty. Why should he not to ninety, for the matter of that, or to a hundred! Such things are done."

"You did not meet three times without trying to see a way out of it?" said Allison.

"Trying, yes, but with small result. You see if I had a fortune there might be a way open. Thus, the old boy naturally does not find the keen air of the eastern counties exactly essential to his health at times, and there are charms about that ancient warrior's retreat in Pall Mall, 'The Senior United,' to which he is not insensible. Now I only want to be able to take a good position as a London consulting man at the West End, with ample means, and I might face those guns I dread so much with a proposition like this: 'Give me your treasure, and come and live with us in London till you are a hundred or more, if it's any amusement to you, or, what is of more consequence, if it's a pleasure to Kate.' That is all I want. It isn't much, is it? Alas! if it doesn't come off until that dream is realized!"

"I see," said my friend slowly, lighting a cigar ; "a question of ways and means chiefly. It is a complication, and a grave one, say what you will, for a man who has planned his life for a career, and is bound to have one if he goes straight, my dear Kingston. I wish you would take my view of these love matters—look on them as incompatible with an existence which must be entirely devoted during a long time to our art, and adjourn them *sine die*. You know that for seven years I have not read a single book, not even a Review article—a brief daily glance at the newspaper has only been indulged—which has not formed a part of my professional study, a rule I shall obtain inviolate for three years longer. Our student life must be one of faithful devotion to a jealous mistress, who permits no real, earnest love-making with the daughters of men. A passing tribute to their charms is, of course, another matter."

"You may be right in theory, Allison, but all the talk in the world won't bring us into accord on this subject. You see, Kate and I have grown up boy and girl almost together ; and only since I left the old place to come up here, and went

back to it again after a year of absence, did I discover for the first time what a glorious creature she had become. And, unhappily, it would appear that the Colonel himself has suddenly grown alive to the fact that she was a prize to be coveted and by possibility removed, and was not a pretty fixture in his house, and inseparable therefrom; and henceforth the old boy became as stiff and cold to me as if I had somehow or other mortally offended him."

"And no doubt he had sufficient reason."

"Probably the change in our relations would have been less marked had it not been for what we call at home 'our family misfortune.' I don't know whether I ever told you that up to not so very long ago we all believed in an old aunt—well, if she wasn't aunt she was something, nobody exactly knew what—who had lived with us for years, nursed us as babies, and belonged to us, as we thought, as well as all that was hers, which no doubt was something very considerable. Then one day, as ill luck would have it, an American skipper came on a visit to our place, a plausible and audacious animal, who introduced himself, and made himself agreeable to my father

particularly, with his yarns and his outlandish experience, to say nothing of an undoubtedly large inventive faculty. Fancy this Othello all the time to be working crafty designs on our Desdemona—a scheme which the ladies of our house were of course the first to suspect, and which my father, good, worthy soul, would never believe in. However, so it fell out ; the skipper actually persuaded our own aunt to marry him and in one short month, before our eyes, he carried her off with all her belongings, and sailed for the far West.”

“ By Jove, that was a smart transaction ! ”

“ Smart, indeed ! we have smarted for it ever since ; and all we have ever learned of her was through a letter or two received during the following year or so, and then we lost all trace of them both, and have heard nothing more for four or five years at least, during much of which time we have made numerous inquiries, always unsuccessful, as I said. She wrote at first, of course, of her great happiness, and of her delight with strange and varied scenes, &c.—ah ! and now I just recall too—poor old fool !—that she said she had, in order to please this new seafaring husband,

been tattooed with her initials on one arm, he being, like many of his kind, thus largely decorated himself, a story which by the way we have always looked upon rather as a joke; lastly, and evidently in her eyes the most important news of all, she informed us that at present there was no issue to the marriage—a wholly needless communication, I should have said, at her time of life.”

“That’s an unfortunate story,” said Allison, “but there’s absolutely no accounting for anything which a middle-aged spinster will or will not do; the science does not yet exist which can forecast all an old maid’s follies and fancies.”

“Well, Allison, you are a right good fellow thus attentively to listen to a man who comes up full of his troubles, and I thank you sincerely for so patiently hearing me, and for your advice, which I half fear to be sound, and which I haven’t the courage—if that is the right word—to take. I hope I have no desire to screen myself behind a petticoat, but there is another consideration I cannot lose sight of. I am much mistaken if I am not bound to give due weight to the feelings of the young lady as well as to my own in this matter.”

"Be it so. You lovers are always such marvellously unselfish persons. What say you to a stroll down to the Olympic and see Robson. We shall get there just about half-price. He is playing 'Daddy Hardacre' every night, and if we miss the best of that, he is in the last piece also."

So I settled my reckoning, with an exceptionally liberal honorarium to Mary, and we left for the theatre.

CHAPTER III.

THE DISSECTING-ROOM AND AN ADVENTURE
THEREIN.

ON the next morning I walked round to that distant and retired quarter of the College where lies the dissecting room and the offices related thereto. I went in search of a subordinate, but very important officer, well known to all the school, and of whom the younger students stood in considerable awe. This was the anatomy porter, and the post he held was one which necessarily demanded a good deal of indifference to natural prejudices, and perhaps to early beliefs if he had ever had any, while its duties could scarcely fail to blunt any extraordinary delicacy or consideration he might otherwise have manifested for the feelings of the young and uninitiated applicants for information in his department.

Reefman, for such was his name, was short in stature—not more than five feet six—but a strong and active man about forty years of age, of whom the most obvious impression received on first seeing him was that his head was out of all proportion large for the rest of his body. His face was long, the forehead was high and protuberant, and yet he contrived not to manifest the slightest expression of either benevolence or dignity, attributes which the conformation described usually indicates. His hat was said to be the largest in the College, larger even than that of the Professor of Physiology, a worthy, good-tempered and learned Scotchman enjoying great popularity and influence among the students, and who was, physically regarded, considerably beyond the average stature. But the Professor's head, although its contents would have been backed for quality and quantity against those of any man in his line then in London, was in the matter of size a bad second to Reefman's. Irreverent first year's men said he must have had water on the brain when a child, and had somehow overcome and survived the disease while retaining the form. But these wags soon learned to their cost, if they ventured on the

strength of this theory to trifle with the anatomy porter, that he had a will of his own, and a power quite incompatible with the presence of any remaining aqueous deposits within his cranium, or any sign of that instability of character which on high authority is associated with the element in question.

In a large paved court, surrounded by lofty white brick walls, partly the boundary wall of a back yard opening on a narrow quiet street by large high gates, opened only for the service of the department, and partly the rear of lofty buildings containing the lecture theatres of the school, all blank and almost windowless, doubtless a provision against too curious inspection by neighbours and others, were Reefman's headquarters. A low doorway with steps leading down into a vault or cellar was the only port of entry visible, arrived at which I listened for some audible sign of his presence, and then shouting his name awaited a summons to proceed. A somewhat gruff "Who's there?" came up from the unlit depths, to which, slowly descending, I halloed my name in reply. The friendly tone of invitation to come down which I had expected did not de-

ceive me, and the porter, with his large apron and his cuffs turned up, with a short pipe in his mouth—true sign of vacation time—stood before me, not smiling a welcome, a feat not within the range of his powers to accomplish, but not in the least degree resenting my visit as an intrusion, the utmost his best friend could expect of him.

“Well, Reefman, how are you?” I exclaimed in my jolliest manner. “I’ve turned up, you see, and you are one of the first I have come to call on.”

“You’re just wanting something wi’ me then, I fancy, or you would not come down here,” said Reefman, who nevertheless meant nothing discourteous, but intimated that he was not accessible to compliments of that kind. “I’m busy here cleaning the last month, so we’re all as neat as a new pin. There’s no call for parts yet.”

“Never mind, Reefman; pleasure first, business afterwards. Just take my little Easter offering,” putting a crown in his hand, “and then I’ll tell you what I want if you can manage it.”

“All right, sir; as long as it’s anything that’s not agin the Professor’s orders,” said the porter, touching his hat, but cannily evading personal responsibility himself.

"Then give me the first chance of a nice fresh body as soon as you can. I can't wait for others, and want to begin."

Three or four days after the above-mentioned visit I found the porter looking for me in the hospital precincts.

"The Professor's agreeable, and you will get," said he, "what you want directly. Look round to-morrow morning, and I expect you'll be suited."

Accordingly, the next forenoon I descended the steps before described, where Reefman met me, and said, "You're in luck's way; I never saw a better; came from the parish only this morning—an elderly female. As usual, in the room at one o'clock."

I went to the dissecting-room at that hour, finding no one there but myself with the porter and his assistant, who had brought the subject in, completely covered according to custom, on one of the stands or tables adapted for the purpose. Had it now been the time of the session, several, perhaps most, of the nineteen other tables would have been similarly occupied, each with its group of active stu-

dents—a busy scene. As it was, I was alone, and the appearance of other claimants at present was even doubtful; one or two at least might be expected, but none coming, I prepared to commence. Uncovering the bust for general inspection, I remarked the unusually pale and emaciated condition of the subject, and its slender, delicate features, circumstances extremely favourable to the dissection, and I congratulated myself on having a task unusually devoid of the disagreeable characters it often presents. I then commenced my work in the usual way on the left side of the neck, and was deeply engaged in the very delicate anatomical pursuit of tracing the cutaneous nerves for some three or four hours, wholly absorbed in my occupation, during all which time the features are necessarily turned directly away from the dissector, and are not within the range of his view. It was now time to give up, and I went round for the purpose of leaving all closely covered for the night, when it suddenly occurred to me that the face somewhat resembled one which I could not recall, but which I seemed to be familiar with. I looked at it again, and my impression became strengthened.

Still, I could not remember in the least degree the person whose lineaments these seemed so strangely to recall. But I knew how misleading such fancied likenesses are prone to be, and also how strikingly death sometimes changes or obliterates the living expression which marks the countenance. And I knew, moreover, that I myself have always been a prey to that curious, semi-artistic facility for seeing resemblances, everywhere, in all bodies animate and inanimate, to other known forms and features: a mental peculiarity which those who possess the art of expression by drawing often display, and a well-known family inheritance affecting us all more or less during three generations at least. So I quitted my labours, announced my departure to the porter, left my books, instruments, and dissecting dress in their places in the adjoining corridor, and started for my rooms. After the day's confinement I thought I owed myself a good walk, and took a stretch round the outer circle of the Regent's Park, which from my own street door made a circuit of four miles out and back, a favourite hour of healthy exercise, which, or its equivalent, I contrived, if possible, to accomplish three times a-week. My thoughts

naturally recurred to the occupation of the afternoon, and I recalled with increasing intensity the features of my new subject, which persisted in intruding themselves more and more on my fancy. I remember even at this moment, with a slight shudder of excitement, while writing this, the precise spot at which a flash of intelligence seemed to enlighten my mental gropings in relation to those features. Pondering over every aspect of them, and feeling about in every direction in which memory would travel for a solution, I had arrived exactly opposite St. Catherine's Church on the eastern side of the park, when I spontaneously exclaimed, "Good heavens! the old aunt! Of course it is the face of the old aunt of which I have been so persistently reminded!" I stood still, breathless almost, for a few seconds, and then slowly moving on, I was next forcibly struck with the absurdity of the idea, and expostulated with myself for so readily falling victim to a scare arising out of that constitutional weakness just referred to. This reaction, however, did not last long, and the conviction returned with increased force that it certainly might be the aunt down there in that last and fitting receptacle for

utterly friendless bodies! Horrible thought! My aunt, our old aunt, without a friend to close her eyes, or to offer the last homage of family respect, to say the least of it! My imagination gave me no peace: it was impossible to turn my attention to any other subject while I concluded my exercise, and returned to my home, where, having had little to eat during the day, instead of going to "The Larder," I ordered a dinner, such as it was, tea-fashion, in my rooms, that I might think quietly over the situation, if possible, which was assuming every hour more importance. It was out of the question to attempt work, or indeed do anything but consider, with a view to action, what course would be the most prudent one to take in the embarrassing circumstances in which I was placed. As it grew later, and it was now nearly nine o'clock, I became more and more uneasy, conscious that my suspicions as to the terrible possibility were increasing, and I felt that a night of suspense in relation to them would be intolerable. What was to be done? I dared not avow these suspicions to any other person. How could I venture to breathe a hint to any man of my fear that a relative of my own had been brought

as an unclaimed body to the dissecting-room, and was actually under my personal supervision at this moment? It was, of course, next to absolutely certain that I was the victim of my own imaginary and wholly groundless hallucinations, and the avowal of them, much less of any overt act dictated thereby, and taken at this time of night, would, if it became known, render me the laughing-stock of the school, and perhaps be remembered against me as an act of absurd and ridiculous weakness as long as I lived. No, I must not open my breast even to my friend Allison. Was I not a foolish, deluded, brain-weakened idiot after all? Perhaps I was; at any rate, it was more natural to believe that this should be the fact than that my very improbable dream, a very nightmare, should be true! Nevertheless, I could have no peace without endeavouring to determine whether the present situation was due to some mental aberration on my part or was a matter of stern reality, and requiring therefore to be dealt with promptly.

But now, how to effect an entry to the dissecting-room in the night was the question to be solved. Reefman's permission must be obtained;

and Reefman must be kept in entire ignorance of my reasons for desiring admission. Under what pretext would it be possible to bend the stolid porter to my will, and to gain access by myself at this hour of the night to that *sanctum sanctorum* at the remotest corner of the college buildings? After a thorough consideration of several plans, I considered myself justified, under the circumstances, of undertaking the following enterprise.

Putting candles and matches in my pocket, I started for Reefman's house, and luckily found him at home. I told him I was in the greatest distress at having left my pocket-book in the dissecting room, with some papers of extreme importance therein belonging to my father, which I was under engagement to send to him by to-night's post, and that have it I must at all cost. I assured him that if he would but trust me with his keys, namely those opening the high gates alluded to in the back yard of the dissecting room, I would go by myself and find the missing packet, asserting that I would on no consideration give him the needless trouble of accompanying me, and that I should bring the keys back direct to him, so that he could have no

difficulty about entering in the morning. With a good deal of persuasion, and some cajolery, I at last obtained his consent to my going on these terms, and thus furnished with all that was necessary, I started on my expedition, in high spirits at the success which had thus far attended it. I pursued my way rapidly, fearing that suspicion might arise in the porter's mind on more matured consideration of my eccentric demands, and that he might after all feel it to be his duty to follow me. I well knew my way to the little street, and then remembered that, commanding a corner hard by the gate by which I was to enter, there was a small public-house, a place not unknown to some of the wilder and idler students, who found occasional means of exit from distasteful work in order to obtain refreshment, or to relax a brain overtaxed with anatomical studies by playing "fifty up" on a third-rate billiard table in the back parlour. The presence of only one individual who knew me, or of a too inquisitive neighbour, might be fatal to my scheme, and I arrived within sight of the spot, watching carefully the aspect of the narrow track to be passed, and which, thanks to the brilliant lamp of the public-house, was but too

well illumined. Three or four persons were chatting about the corner, and as it would be almost impossible to unlock the gate at this hour of the night without attracting their attention, I was forced to saunter slowly out of sight to any spot from which I could observe their proceedings. Meantime my patience was gradually ebbing; it was clear that the difficulty of my enterprise was greater than I had anticipated. I could, however, for the present only lie in wait and reconnoitre. At length the group separated, then one person only remained, and he at last, after what seemed to be a suspicious look first up and then down the street, followed by a prolonged gaze at the partly starlit sky, as if he were making a weather forecast for the next day, turned about, entered the house, and closed the door. How well I remember the tedious proceedings, and how inexpressibly long every item of action thus observed appeared to be. I decided that the best course now would be to walk with a business-like air down the turning to the gate, key in hand, and unlock it without hesitation, which accordingly I proceeded deliberately to do. I was in the act of turning, not too easily, the heavy key in the some-

what stiff and noisy lock of one of the two unwieldy gates which formed the entrance to our yard, when I heard a measured step accelerating in my direction, and in a few seconds became aware of the presence of a policeman, who challenged smartly,

“Hullo, young man, what are you doing here?”

My heart beat violently, but I had self-command enough to assume a decided and somewhat coarse manner as I replied—

“Looking after my business, sir, as assistant to Mr. Reefman, whom you know very well. Come in if you like; you are not afraid of ghosts, I dare say.”

“All right,” said my interrogator, “I didn’t know he had got a new helper. I hope you’ll like your trade—there’s no accounting for tastes.”

At last, then, I was safely inside, and locking the gate to make all intrusion impossible, I went anxiously on to the dissecting-room. It was gloomy work; and I cannot say that I have ever so completely forgotten that legendary superstitious lore of which, in my earliest childhood, the elements were instilled, as part of their earliest duty, by the nursemaids of that epoch, as not to

feel their influence still in circumstances adapted to reproduce them, and the present conditions were certainly such, summed up as they were in my situation, alone in this region of the recently dead at midnight. What a dream one might have here, if overtaken by trance, of an assembly of countless avenging ghosts, belonging to all the so-called victims of science, immolated upon its twenty altars in this place! What terrible odds against the intruder, if this should chance to be a night for conclave or for orgie among them! Should I find, on opening the door of the spacious hall, where so many hundreds had lingered on their way to the grave, a dim, blue light revealing forms innumerable, peopling every point of space, each awful eye in anger, turning on that pale mortal who had dared to enter alone, an act audaciously transcending all precedent, and declared in full chorus by this weird host to demand instant and ample penalty? Indulging in such speculations I entered, finding darkness and a solemn stillness everywhere, broken only by my footsteps and by their portentous echoes, which the walls of the large and void interior flung back on my ear. Having succeeded in

lighting my candle, I proceeded slowly in the direction of the table covered with the white sheet, which, catching the rays of my light, stood out from the darkness beyond, and showed the outline of the form beneath. Lighting another candle and placing it in a rest hard by, I held the other in my left hand, while with the right I drew down the sheet and scrutinized the placid features of the body. I had not seen my aunt for at least seven years, and now, for the first time exercising a critical regard, the likeness certainly did not grow upon me. I altered the position of the head ; it was scantily covered with grey hairs, unlike to the effigy which my memory retained of her, not unmindful, however, that her hair might have been more abundant at the period in question, or it might have been reinforced by art. I then examined the hands, which were delicate; the third finger of the left showed evident ring marks, apparently that of a wedding ring, which had been removed. I was uncertain, more doubtful than at first, and gradually becoming satisfied at being so, when, in the act of replacing the limb, my eye suddenly caught sight of some dark marks on the middle of the left arm, about six inches

above the elbow, a part which, until now, had been covered by the sheet. The history of the tattoo marks, which, strange to say, I had completely forgotten in my bewilderment, came back in a moment, and I was astounded to believe I had not originally applied it as a test to remove all doubt on the subject. There were the letters, clear enough, "A. M. P.," with an American Eagle below, in dark-blue dotted lines, relieved by a little red. There could be no mistake. There lay our aunt!

What next was to be done? Nothing at all events to-night. Arranging everything as decorously as possible, I rapidly retreated, and made the best of my way to the house of Reefman, whom I found grumbling sorely at my long absence, but content to receive his keys again, and a small *douceur* for his permission. He was pleased to utter a grunt of satisfaction on learning that I had found my papers, and had obtained the object of my visit.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VILLAGE OF LAXENFORD AND SOME OF ITS
INHABITANTS.

I HAD no sooner arrived at my lodgings than, late as it was, I wrote a letter to my father informing him of my extraordinary discovery. I had had time to think over what was best to be done, and felt that there could be no other course than to reclaim the body if possible without delay, and take it down to be buried in our parish churchyard. She was a relation, and had for years been acknowledged as such in our family; and although there could be no occasion to tell our neighbours all the little of her recent history which we yet knew, there was no doubt that she ought to be publicly consigned by the family to her last home in that spot where it is certain she would have desired us to place her, had not some mysterious circumstances affected her in a

manner which at present we knew no means of explaining. The last necessary rites accomplished, the solution of that mystery must be diligently sought without an instant's delay.

I went to the dissecting-room early the next morning, and, finding Reefman, told him that I had most unexpectedly discovered our body to be that of one who had known me as a child,—had nursed me and cared for me and my family. Hence I should feel it to be my duty to see the Professor of Anatomy or his substitute on the subject, with the object of removing the body and giving it an appropriate funeral. I pointed out the tattoo marks as those by which I had identified her, and asked under what name she had been sent in here. He replied that her ticket bore the name of A. M. Parkinson, aged 61, adding that as no one else had arranged to join me I was responsible for the body, and he believed, under the circumstances, no objection to my proposal would be made. I then left for the purpose of calling on the Professor, who, on learning my errand, courteously helped me to carry out my wishes. He directed me first to pay at the dissecting-room all the regular charges incurred

by the school in connection with a subject, and amounting to something under three pounds, and then to apply to the parish authorities for the certificate of death, which had been already registered, and without which I could not move the body. Further, I must be prepared to make a declaration that it was no longer unclaimed, and that I appeared to take charge of it on behalf of the next of kin. Accordingly I was directed to the parish officer by whose agency the transference of the deceased had been made from the garret of a crowded lodging-house in Rabbet's Court to the mortuary of the Marylebone workhouse, from which it had been delivered by order of the inspector of anatomy to our school, owing to which occurrence the remarkable coincidence of its coming under my observation has now been explained in every step of the circumstances which led to it.

I had thus obtained one very important fact—viz., the situation of my aunt's last home, at all events the address of the house she last occupied before her death; and this would furnish me with a clue which I should lose no time in pursuing after the funeral ceremony was over. It

will be unnecessary to recount all the details of the petty negotiation in which I became involved, or all the forms necessary to be complied with before I obtained the power requisite for removing the body. At the close of a long day I had accomplished my task, and had arranged with an undertaker for the conveyance of the body by the Eastern Counties rail, the line which led to a small and somewhat remote station near to which our village was situated. I found my father, mother, and sister recovering a little from the shock which the unexpected and startling event had necessarily produced, and that preparations were making for a funeral in our own vault on the day but one following (to-morrow being Sunday, April 19). It took place very quietly ; of course some of the villagers attended, and the gossips of the place were busied with speculations on the slender facts made known to them. Our own reticence, which was at once prudent and perfectly natural during the earlier days of mourning, had permitted the following circumstances only to be mentioned, namely, that my aunt had but recently arrived in this country, had been taken ill in London, and that before she

could communicate with her friends or summon them to her bedside, the attack had proved fatal, the event being wholly unexpected by us or by others. It was not necessary to say more, and that little sufficed; for no one would have had the bad taste, at any rate for some time, to inquire more curiously concerning her late circumstances in our hearing.

As may be supposed, our small family circle formed a conclave in perpetual session for discussion and conjecture as to the cause of my aunt's appearance on this side of the Atlantic. Nothing else was talked of. Was her husband living? If not, why had we not heard of his death? If he was, why had she left him? Why had she not come direct to us, or communicated with us in some way before leaving America, or, if unable to do so, why should she not have done so since her arrival on this side? Such questions as these were perpetually asked, only to be dismissed without the pretence of a plausible answer. As old reminiscences of her former life were brought to light in the course of these debates, the curious fact came out that my father had never once been consulted by her in regard

to the property which she was believed to possess, nor had she ever acquainted him with its nature or extent. He did not even know from what quarter she drew any periodical payments, nor indeed if such was the form in which her income reached her ; in fact, in regard of all these subjects his mind was a perfect blank. It was not in his nature to be curious about such matters, and had he been so, his strong sense of delicacy and propriety would have repressed any temptation to inquire, naturally inferring that if she desired to communicate with him on financial matters she would do so without any suggestions on his part. My mother knew very little more, but she was aware that my aunt now and then called on a shrewd, respectable, good sort of woman, a Mrs. Dickson, who kept one of the village shops, and had an acquaintance with her, of the nature of which my mother was wholly ignorant, but which was not altogether an agreeable circumstance according to my mother's estimation, a sentiment which she would not have condescended to utter in words within the hearing of any one, and which would not even now have been expressed had it not been for the

exhaustive investigation which I at least was quite determined to make into the circumstances of this case.

At this point, and before pursuing further the incidents of this history, I think it will be desirable to say a few words about my father, whose relations with my aunt have just been alluded to. Tall and dignified in appearance, deliberate in movement, he also enjoyed a calm mental repose not easily ruffled by those events of life which most men deem exciting and profoundly important. He was essentially what was called an easy-going man, who had manifestly never cared to concern himself greatly in matters which threatened to occasion any friction or rough contact with the outer world. A scholar of the old classical type, with antiquarian tastes, and surrounded by local material sufficing to maintain them in activity, he performed the duties of his parish, containing fifteen hundred souls, in the quiet, well-bred fashion of the country parson of that day, reading weekly, in good Saxon English, an exposition of the motives which should lead his hearers to live righteously and soberly; rarely declaring his faith or the

grounds thereof except when required by special occasion, and then always without excitement or the smallest approach to dogmatic assertion. Holding the commission of the peace for the county, as many of the most respected of the clergy then did, he discharged the duty with punctilious regularity, and with scrupulous anxiety to do justice tempered by mercy. In daily life he maintained a kindly but dignified relation to every parishioner with invariable courtesy, the manifestations whereof were always delicately modified according to the distinct and varied grades in which it has pleased God, even in a small country village, to create and sustain humanity. His leisure, which was considerable, had for years been devoted to the collecting of materials for a voluminous history of the eastern division of the county, and which has not yet appeared. No good man, however, is permitted in this life to pursue a pilgrimage unattended by trials and difficulties, and my father shared the common lot. Notwithstanding his apparent stoicism in relation to human evils generally, and, I may add also, to any speculation regarding their origin, he was called on to carry what he

deeply felt to be "a cross," and it was one which at that time he and others of his brethren often found a heavy load to bear; indeed, on rare occasions, when called upon in the exercise of his profession to reflect on the innumerable mysterious dealings of providence with men, nothing appeared to his mind so inscrutable, so inexplicable as this trial, this thorn in the flesh of many a single-minded and hard-working country clergyman at that time. I need scarcely say that I refer to the advent and spread of dissent in the parish.

My object in presenting this brief sketch of that excellent man, and an allusion to his one great grief in this place will now become apparent. Mrs. Dickson was a dissenter. Mrs. Dickson was the dissenting shopkeeper, and although holding a commercial position below that of the chief general shop of our village—which had indeed lately risen to the rank of an "Emporium" by virtue of a large painted board bearing that term thereon, and of plate-glass windows recently introduced, which greatly excited the admiration and astonishment of the natives—she was supported by many of the

smaller people, whose religious sympathies were actively engaged on behalf of the "new meetin'."

Now, it was evidently desirable that Mrs. Dickson should be judiciously sounded for any information she might be able to give us about our deceased aunt. My dear mother's countenance assumed an expression which clearly conveyed her readiness to sacrifice any personal feelings of her own to the claims of duty, for the purpose of the inquiry, if so much should be expected of her. My father naturally thought that nothing would come of it, and ventured to doubt the propriety of the step. My sister, who was a great believer in her brother, suggested that I had in time past been half an old favourite of Mrs. Dickson, and that "she would be better managed by a good-looking young fellow fresh with his honours from London town" (a suggestion which, from my sister, was at least extremely flattering, and denoted an acuteness of perception and a knowledge of the world for which I had hitherto not given her credit) than by the more formal approach of the Rector's wife and her obvious condescension, which might freeze poor Mrs. Dickson and check

any little disposition she might otherwise manifest to further our inquiry. My mother, good soul, was not sorry to escape the uncongenial task; while nothing pleased me better than an opportunity of exercising any latent talent for diplomacy which I might possess, and I agreed to commence at once. Before calling on Mrs. Dickson, I shall say something about the road to her house and its surroundings.

Our village of Laxenford is, I think, one of the prettiest in the eastern counties, and as we are gradually becoming acquainted with its inhabitants, its topography and local colouring cannot be left entirely to the reader's imagination. It consisted of one long street and of two or three minor tributaries, but the distinguishing characteristic of the place, one which could be scarcely missed by the most unobservant traveller, was the abundance of tree growth which adorned every portion of it. The country around is flat, and the street, which gracefully curves in obedience to the windings of a small stream, is perfectly level; so that at every turn charming vignettes are presented of irregularly built old houses mostly of red brick interspersed with a

few of the Suffolk white brick, which is famous, many being roofed with brownish tiles more or less besprinkled with circlets of green moss; all the principal dwellings being surrounded by flower gardens containing shrubs and trees, some of venerable growth. Thus lofty elms shade the High Street in more than one place; in others, a weeping willow or some beeches catch the eye; here again tall Lombardy poplars flank the slightly elevated pathway, firm and clean, but free from flags or pavement, while the old English variety flourish along the roadside hedge which at the outskirts marks the paddock of our village lawyer, who is esteemed as almost a suburban inhabitant. Were we to continue that road and really pass the precincts of the village, we should wind round by the thick plantations which skirt our squire's park, and should soon catch a glimpse of the distant red and white front of the old English mansion at the end of a heavily-shaded avenue, crossed picturesquely by the local stream. The mansion with its grounds, and the extensive domain attached thereto, as well as its respected owner, Sir George Andover, we shall probably know more of hereafter, as he was a valued

friend of my father and, indeed, of myself.

Returning now to the principal or "High Street" already referred to, we shall observe that at about the centre of its course it gradually widens out and swells as it were with a sense of increased importance for a short distance, constituting an oval area which we villagers have called the market-place, although no market, chartered or other, was ever held there; the only public institutions indeed which occupy the open space being the town pump and the dilapidated stocks, the latter having long ago fallen into disuse, but nevertheless have still been retained, possibly as a wholesome form of terror to evil-doers of very tender age. And here, too, are some of the most venerable trees, those on our, that is the western side, guarding the sacred precincts of the church-yard, within which a fair example of flint-faced work, the black and white flint-chequer work so deftly used by the Suffolk church builders of the 15th century, is to be seen both in the body of the church and in the four-square steeple which rises above the trees of the enclosure. Adjoining this appears our own

modest rectory, with trim flower-beds and grass in front, and so standing back somewhat partially veiled by a row of limes behind the palisades which mark its front to the market place, from which opens a central gate and gravel path to the front door. A red brick house, with two windows on each side of the aforesaid door, two tiers of five above, and three dormers in the sloping roof, all scantily ornamented in the Adam's taste of its period. Another street or lane runs out of the market at right angles, making a corner of the church-yard, and bounding it on the further side from us. It is down there on the right that Colonel Clavering lives, whose back garden and grassy domain behind skirt the glebe before alluded to, which forms the limit to my father's occupation in that direction, and thus it came to pass, as has been already intimated, that throughout our early life no other of Katie's companions had such unrestricted opportunities for games of fun and for quarreling, for playing at soldiers and defending our respective borders, for gathering wild flowers and for hay-making, for making mud-pies in the boundary ditch, or engineering means of communication when the aforesaid ditch was

rendered impassable by transient floods, periods always of immense excitement.

But for the present I have shown almost enough of Laxenford, requesting you only to observe, before passing out of the market-place on its opposite or east side, that we possess an ancient inn of great respectability—the Three Tuns—and famous in past coaching times for its team of four hardy roadsters to horse the “Old Blue” both up and down, the only daily coach to London besides the night mail. Hard by it will be recognized the “Emporium” and the plate-glass, with large packages and rolls of goods outside, as if the tremendous stock were too vast to be contained therein, quite in city style, after which we arrive at the narrower part where the market ceases, and the High Street commences and re-assumes the characters before described, evidently, however, showing signs of less distinction than the part already traversed.

A few steps brought me to an old house on the right, with one gable to the front, timber-built and plaster. A central open doorway is flanked by a long, low window on either side, the wood-work of which is substantial, and broadly frames

the square panes of glass of moderate size, behind which such goods as are offered to view are not too clearly visible. In one, various objects of dress and haberdashery are displayed, if such a term be appropriate. In the other, various articles of grocery, with brushes and ironmongery, may be seen. Over all runs one long, heavy beam supporting the first and second storeys, which project into the street about a foot and half beyond the ground storey, which forms the shop. On this beam, which is not more than eight or nine feet from the ground, is painted in large letters SARAH DICKSON, "licensed to sell, etc.," in smaller type below. Mounting from the street by one step I entered the shop, greeted, even before the actual entrance was effected, by that remarkably complex odour, always the same, which is invariably met with on entering or approaching a country general shop. Nothing is more interesting to me than the analysis of a complex impression on the senses, whether it be one affecting the palate, where by close attention and subtle discrimination every ingredient in an elaborate dish may be distinguished and declared, or one affecting the ear, as in a band of many and diverse instruments

where the voice of each may be detected, or the innumerable tints of a landscape which in like manner furnish occasion for most interesting scrutiny, research, and discussion. Who has not even as a boy demanding his first pennyworth of marbles at the little store of the village dame, who lives out her long-spun life beyond the half-door with its tinkling bell, encountered that unique and constant smell? A compound of coffee, candles, tea, Manchester goods, cheese, sacking, pepper, oilcloth, bacon, worsted-yarn, tinware, vinegar, and ready-made boots; a curious blend in which nevertheless each individual odour can, by an inquisitive and thoughtful mind, be readily identified.

Old-fashioned without, the shop was still more so within. I could have touched the ceiling with a well-extended arm, and the floor space remaining between the two counters, one on each side, right and left, was closely packed with goods of various kinds. A plain, steady-looking woman, say thirty years of age, Mrs. Dickson's niece and chief assistant, replied with extreme civility that her aunt was out for the present, but would soon return, if Mr. Kingston would have the kindness to wait or to call again. Meantime I may say

that the remainder of the staff consisted of a boy about sixteen, with dirty white apron and sleeves, behind the grocery counter, and an old man who was mostly occupied in mysterious places behind, and came forth when summoned to take out a parcel or hold a horse, and whom I had known from my boyhood as "Old John." I am not sure whether by virtue of an intimacy between us in the prehistoric, by which I mean the preschoolastic era of my childhood, I had not on rare occasions been treated by him to presents of suspiciously surreptitious origin, in the form of morsels of liquorice and sugar-candy wrapped up in scraps of paper, with a whispered hint to "put it in your pocket, Master Charles." At any rate it will never be possible for me to forget these substantial marks of favour by which one of my earliest friendships had been cemented. I had not seen him during my recent visit for the vacation, so I asked if Old John was in the way. Forthwith I soon heard the shrill voice of the boy in the back announcing that John was wanted immediately, and not long after was made aware, by his slow and heavy tread, that the old man was approaching. A round-shouldered, stiff-jointed labouring man in

rough working dress, showing deep furrows in his weather-worn but not unhealthy looking red face, fringed with a ragged growth of grey hair on either cheek and below the chin, under which a red cotton handkerchief was loosely knotted, came slowly in.

"Well, John," said I, "how are you? I couldn't call without asking for you."

Taking off his hat deliberately with one hand, and smoothing his almost bare head downwards with the extended palm of the other—a mode of paying homage familiar to the old Suffolk working man—he replied, in the peculiar chaunt of the county, the note gradually at first, and then suddenly rising at the end of the phrase:

"I'm fairish, thank the Lord, Master Charles, for an ould 'un; prahe howes yerself, sir?"

"Oh, I am very well, thank you. But 'old! you need not say much about that, John. I am very glad to see you so active and capable still," said I.

"Come Michaelmas next, I'm seventy-aight; werry nigh to fowerscore, that is, you know, sir."

"I shouldn't have thought it to look at you; how's your wife?"

"The missus, sir; she complain good tidily she dew. She's sorely eat up o' the rhewmattics; t' h' been a hard time this last winter; but that stuff there, sir, yeow sent her down from Lunnun last Christmas; that dun her a sight o' good; she often blessed yeow for that, Master Charles." After a pause, "This here's a bad job along o' your poor aunt, 'eent it, sir?"

"Very sad, indeed, John," returned I.

"Our missus here, she was a saying t'other day, Master Charles, as how the owld lady ought to a' left a warmish neast—somewheres," uttered very slowly, with an expressive look in his eye directed to me.

"A what?" said I.

"A warmish neast—ye know, sir; a—a—it isn't for the likes o' me to ax, but folks dew say she had a sight o' proputtty once upon a time; but surelye yeow knouw better than we puir cretturs dew, sir."

"'Riches often take to themselves wings,' you know, John."

"Ah, that's what Mr. Hickman often tell us—that's our minister, that is, at the new meetin' down hinder, axin' o' your pardon, sir, and his

tew—but I niver seed any a' flying this way ; leastways what little there be here mostly goes Lunnun-ways fust or last. Here be our missus, sir, now a' comin' ;” and he added in a lower voice, “ Our missus, she knouwed more about your owd aunt, Master Charles, than folks think ; yeow ax her quiet like, and see if she do'ant.”

“ Thank you, John ; good morning. I shall come and give your wife a look.”

“ Mornin', sir, mornin' ; the owd woman will be 'nation glad to see yeow, but it's a poor hole of a place for yeow to come tew, Master Charles.”

CHAPTER V.

MRS. DICKSON AND HER ACCOUNT OF MY AUNT.

A DAPPER little woman entered the shop, and seeing me there, curtsayed, and hoped I had not been kept unduly waiting. So I politely bowed and said: "I have called to know whether I may have ten minutes' chat with you, Mrs. Dickson, whenever your business engagements may permit. You must not let me trespass on you at an inconvenient time. May I reckon on your kindness, and if so when may I come?"

"Pray walk in, Mr Kingston," she replied; "this way, sir; just down here," leading the way through a dark, narrow passage at the back of the shop. "Pray mind the step there; we are sadly cramped for room, and you must excuse this little place—my counting-house, as I call it; pray be seated, sir."

I took one of the two chairs vacant, and she the other at a desk. We were in a tiny back room, with one window looking on a paved yard, with a storehouse or warehouse opposite. Shelves run round the room, loaded with packages, except behind the desk and Mrs. Dickson's head, where tall account books, bound in pale leather much soiled, occupied some space. Wooden boxes, paper parcels, rolls of carpet piled on the floor, leave little more than a passage to the place we occupy, and the everlasting odour is manifest in a modified form. A brisk little woman of fifty, twenty years a widow, sits opposite to me, wearing a simple cap, and her own light brown hair, now pencilled with grey, neatly parted in two bands. The small but active, intelligent grey eyes which for so many years had surveyed and controlled with success her little establishment, were now fixed on me awaiting an inquiry, respecting the nature of which, feminine intuition had, I doubt not, already enabled her to make a shrewd guess.

I instantly felt how overmatched I was likely to be in the pursuit of my object, if her temper should by chance lead her to oppose it, and that any attempt at a cunning or roundabout approach

would probably be resented and invite a defeat. Should there be any differences between us, the odds were very great in favour of an astute, business-like woman accustomed to the small diplomatic encounters of daily commercial life, as against a raw youth like me, who, although quite ready if need be to look her through and through so far as her lungs, heart, or other internal organs were concerned, and with a result which to her might appear little short of miraculous, must be infinitely her inferior as a fencer in the question of the moment—if so be that she should choose to fence. I decided then at once to throw myself on her mercy.

“Mrs. Dickson,” I said, “you have known me for many years, and I come to you without any claim beyond that of a neighbour, to ask your kind aid, more perhaps on my own behalf than that of my family, in order to learn whether you can give me any information about my old aunt Parkinson, whom we have just buried here. I have reason to believe that you knew more of her at one time than ever we did, and I shall be very grateful if you can give me some help in my effort to unravel the mystery which surrounds her ap-

pearance in this country. It seems that she died in unhappy circumstances, I fancy rather suddenly; and at present I am unable to say even when she quitted America. Indeed, ever since she left us we have had very little communication with her."

"Well, sir, you see," said Mrs. Dickson, with deliberation; "I kinder expected it was not unlikely that the Rector, or may be his honoured lady, might be making some inquiries about poor Mrs. Parkinson, who has been took away so sudden like—quite a warnin' to us all, sir, isn't it?—we who are in years that is; although there's no tellin', is there? who may be called next, young or old. And if the Rector had been pleased to honour me with a visit, I'm sure I should have been very glad to see him; but you see the dear old lady that's dead and gone were very close about her affairs, she ware, and she says to me, 'Mrs. Dickson, whatever you dew for me, you will not name a word of it to my good old friends at the Rectory; they are my only friends in this world,'—that was long afore she was married or ever thought on it, sir—'and although the day may come when they will see my feelings toward them, I greatly prefer that they shouldn't

know my business concerns now ; but I will put every confidence in you, Mrs. Dickson.' Them's her very words, sir, as she set where you dew now. I think I see her with her thin, pale face, and her brown partin' as she wore in front, and always a black bonnet, very neat."

I endeavoured to interpose here that it had been the express intention of my father and mother to call, but that I had particularly desired to be allowed to come myself ; and that they had somewhat reluctantly permitted me to do so.

"Now did you really, Mr. Kingston ? well, that's what I like. I'm very glad you've come, because I think I can talk to you more free and easy like than I could to your father, who, as everybody knows, is all over the gentleman, and so considerate and kind, if I may make bold, to say so ; but you see, sir, if he came here, although he can't exackly bring his gown and pulpit with him, yet one fares always reminded like that you can't speak to the parson—not to a church parson that is (our meetin' ones are different in course) just as you might to a plain mister ; you feel on your p's and q's, don't you, sir ? and I always seem to have such a mortial fear I may not speak my words

correct; you know well enough what I mean, sir?"

"I am really very thankful to you, Mrs. Dickson, for receiving me so pleasantly and so frankly. I expected nothing else, and it was because I did so that I preferred to come myself."

Now it will be quite unnecessary for me to report any more of the almost interminable conversation that followed on this and on the succeeding day, between myself and this characteristic specimen of an excellent village middle-class business woman of the Eastern counties; the reader may accept this as a fair example of the class, and it is, I believe, a considerable one. The facts, however, which I thus acquired after some little display of conscientious fear on her part of breaking faith with one who had placed implicit confidence in her, and who had died without releasing her from the promise of silence, may be briefly reported as follows. The reader will then be prepared to estimate what were the value and extent of the information which Mrs. Dickson contributed to the object of my inquiry.

I learned that my aunt—I believe she was really a cousin twice removed—had, when young,

and as an only child, inherited, in her own name of Anna Maria Wyndham, a considerable property, which had been invested by her trustees in Government funds and in shares ; and that she had acquired the full control of it since the age of twenty-five. She was in the habit of receiving her dividends for the most part half-yearly, and some years ago she proposed and arranged to pay the amounts to Mrs. Dickson, who transmitted them for her to the bank when she sent her own deposits in the way of business to save Mistress Wyndham trouble, but always, of course, to a separate account in the name of the latter. The bank was at the neighbouring town of Halesworth, a convenient distance, and the London correspondents of the country firm were the well-known house of Barclays & Co., in Lombard Street, from whom I might perhaps be able to obtain further information if required. Her money had been originally invested, partly in the Government funds and partly in Old East India Dock shares while she also possessed a very valuable fraction of an original New River share, her total income amounting at that time to not less than fifteen hundred pounds a-year. She had never been in

the habit of making any changes in her investments, and the only business she had to transact was that of investing every half-year the surplus of her increasing revenue of interest, of which she never spent more than three hundred pounds annually, to say the most. Of late years this surplus had been simply placed in the Three per Cent. Consols, for which purpose her bankers held a power of attorney, and did it for her through their agents. Meantime she was gradually becoming increasingly penurious, acquiring more money and expending less every year. At her marriage with Captain Zachariah John Parkinson, of Cleveland, U.S., against giving her consent to which Mrs. Dickson assured me she exerted all her powers of argument and persuasion, no settlement whatever was made on my aunt, again contrary to the strongest advice of her friend. Old as she was, and most likely for that very reason, the captain's proposal almost turned her brain, at no period a strong one; she was over head and ears in love with him, and disdained the idea of manifesting any want of confidence in his loyalty, as she foolishly believed might be inferred from her conduct if she consented to accept a settlement. Hence her hus-

band became absolute master of every shilling. No representation on this subject could be made to my father or to his family at this juncture, because, not merely on the first business communications between my aunt and Mrs. Dickson, was the latter bound to secrecy, so far as we were concerned, but still more during later proceedings had this condition been maintained in force. And it was only with great reluctance, and at our second interview, that my friend Mrs. Dickson admitted—and I regarded the acquisition of this fact as a triumph of diplomatic skill, or of personal influence on my part—that while she had at no time received any pecuniary acknowledgment for the long and important services she had been able to render to my aunt, the latter had acknowledged her obligations by subscribing very handsomely, under the denomination of “A Friend,” to the liquidation of the debt which had heavily oppressed the young but growing cause of the Lord’s work at the “new meetin’.” Indeed there could be little doubt that my aunt, partly as the effect of reaction against routine which constant intimacy with the daily life of an English parsonage might readily occasion in some minds, and

partly through the influence of her shrewd and useful friend Mrs. Dickson, whose devotion to "the cause" was only surpassed, if indeed it were surpassed, by the laborious application she bestowed on her worldly business, cherished at heart a real sympathy for the conventicle, which, out of consideration to our feelings at home, she was naturally unwilling to avow. And certainly by no other method could she have rendered Mrs. Dickson so useful and so sure an ally in the conduct of these financial operations, as by bestowing generous, opportune aid upon her pet religious institution. To return to a recital of the facts elicited, it remains only now to state that about two years had elapsed since the last communication from my aunt had been received, at which time she was living in the pleasant city of Cleveland, U.S., on the south shore of Lake Erie, in one of those beautiful villas, with extensive gardens, which are found in Euclid Avenue, familiar to anyone who knows the "Forest City." Indeed its upper streets, broad and overshadowed by luxuriant tree-growth, offer a residence whose occupants enjoy the luxuries of city life combined with many advantages accruing from the proximity of a great

inland freshwater sea. All these she was sharing at that period with her husband when not pursuing his seafaring life, which at present he had no intention of altogether relinquishing, being naturally of an enterprising disposition.

Mrs. Dickson showed me the last letter above referred to, from which she furnished me with its address, which might be useful hereafter; also, that of the lawyers there who transacted the Parkinson affairs, preferring to keep the originals herself. I learned by my aunt's last letter that she was still well and happy, that she had requested intelligence respecting her relations at the rectory, intimating that although her interest in these old friends was undiminished, of which she hoped to afford substantial proof at some distant date, still she increasingly felt that her act of marriage must have so greatly disappointed and alienated them, however amiable their expressions respecting it might be, that she had not the heart to continue any longer even the forms of correspondence.

"And now," said I, before taking leave of Mrs. Dickson, whose time I had so long occupied, and whose treatment of me had been so unreserved

and so friendly, "I really don't know how I am to convey my thanks to you for this kind reception; tell me how I can render you some service in return, and I shall be sincerely grateful."

She reflected a moment and said, "I shall feel it a great honour if you can find time to call and see me when you come to Laxenford, Mr. Kingston; it dew me good to have a talk now and then with a gentleman like you, sir; and if there's any more I can find out for you about your aunt, you've only to say what you wish me to do, that's all. And please give my humble duty to your respected father, and tell him I don't love him and his ways one bit the less now, although I don't sit under him no longer, like several more of us, as we formerly used to dew, which I know must be a little vexin' at times to a kind gentleman as he always is. We all of us hev our ways of seein' the truth; and are told you know, sir, that 'we are not our own,' and we must follow that which the Lord appear to make clear to us. We can't dew no more, and we dursn't dew no less. God bless you, sir, and pray excuse my speaking o' my mind so free."

So with a sincere and hearty shake of the

hand I left Mrs. Dickson, cherishing a higher opinion of her than I had ever entertained before, saying to myself—and many a time since have I fortunately had occasion to repeat it—“how much better than they appear to be are most of our neighbours when they come to be intimately known.”

The family conclave listened to my report of the interview, and commented upon it in a tone of slight coolness, not perhaps without the faintest tinge of cynicism, but of a very harmless kind. They had not participated in the warm and friendly atmosphere which had been evoked by the association of two persons who, approaching with a little mutual distrust, had learned to respect each other. Said my father, “Well, Charles, I hope you are now satisfied that there is nothing to be got by cultivating expectations any further which are certain to be disappointed—expectations, indeed, which I think must now appear to you to be quite groundless. Go back to your work, my boy; we have done our duty; let us enjoy the present and be content,” adding from his favourite poet:—

“Cur valle permutem Sabina
Divitias operosiores?”

My mother was of opinion that little or no advantage of a pecuniary kind was to be looked for by pursuing the inquiry; the sad termination to my aunt's career in London, literally that of a pauper, a most distressing idea, appeared to settle that question, which after all was one about which she had very happily never formed any sanguine expectations, and therefore was not disappointed, for which she hoped she was thankful. But she thought it was almost a duty to inquire further into her history, especially as fresh and striking facts had been obtained, although it might no doubt be a troublesome and difficult task. My sister ventured to add her opinion "that Charley will never be satisfied without getting more information, especially as he has been so clever in finding out the right side of the fascinating shopkeeper," with a sly look at me. As this sentiment was warmly approved by myself, I appealed to my father to consent to my devoting a week or two longer to serious inquiry in London, which at all events would not involve a very large expenditure of either time or money. And this was agreed to, *nem. con.*

I was next informed that Colonel Clavering

and his daughter had made their first call here since the occurrence, and had expressed themselves in the most sympathizing and friendly terms. They had been told that the discovery of my aunt's presence in London had been accidentally made by me, and that I had taken all the subsequent arrangements on myself, earning my father's gratitude thereby, and so had proved to be a real comfort to the family. I learned that the Colonel had been pleased to pass a warm encomium on my prudence and foresight, and that Kate's expressive eyes, at least so said my sister (who knew more of my secret than any one else) in a whisper to me, had thereupon been seen to open wide and sparkle, although she had said nothing audibly; which constituted all the consolation my affections were likely to receive from their visit. Was it not enough? On the whole I was hopefully content.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT I LEARNED AT THE MARYLEBONE INFIRMARY.

It is scarcely needful to say that I was now impatient to return to London and follow the track which was clearly marked out for inquiry. Accordingly, early next morning I bade adieu to my trio, and was reinstalled in my rooms that afternoon. I made it my first business to call and tell Allison that I had been compelled to leave town suddenly, and had no opportunity of explaining the circumstances which had led to my doing so.

"Well, some of the men here seem to know all about the business, Kingston; more perhaps than you do," said he.

"What have you heard then?" I inquired.

"Oh, only that you found to your great astonishment that you had got your old nurse

on the dissecting-table, and that, like a delicate minded youth as you are, instead of continuing your work you preferred to bury her in state and to erect a monument to her memory ; small recompense after all for her success in rearing the great surgeon of the future ! ”

I was greatly relieved, for I could not tell what story might have got abroad.

“ Barring the monument and your tag thereto, the story is fairly correct,” said I, “ as far as it goes. When time and occasion offer I hope to have something more to add to it for your private ear.”

“ And now you are back to business once more!?”

“ Not for a week or two. I have some affairs to attend to for my father, and that matter of the nurse is not quite closed, and demands inquiry. Give me a look any evening ; I shall be always at home in my rooms after dinner now, and shall be very glad to see you.”

“ It shan't be long first,” he replied ; “ but the chief is back, the men are now coming up, and we shall have a field-day next Friday. Some night after that. *Au revoir !* ”

On the next morning I proceeded to commence my investigations, and the first place at which it was necessary to seek information was the Marylebone Workhouse and Infirmary, where, it will be remembered, my aunt had breathed her last. The extensive and irregular pile of buildings which at that date formed the institution, and occupied a very considerable area, was flanked on the north side chiefly by a high brick wall, corresponding with the line of the Marylebone Road. A similar wall formed the greater part of Northumberland Street, on the east side, in the centre of which the principal entry through a small porch was found. Gaining admission here, I applied to the head porter, who occupied the tiny lodge within, and whose place it was to deal with the many scores of applicants every day, largely consisting of paupers, casuals, and petty parish officials, besides the more important guardians, medical officers, relieving officers, police constables, as well as occasional inquisitive taxpayers, tradesmen, and porters, the paupers' visitors at appointed hours, and the general public in the form of visitors to the resident officers, among which I myself now ranked; and whose

temper in the discharge of a ceaseless and most troublesome function was often sorely tried. Explaining my wish to see the chief resident medical officer, and sending in my card, I obtained the services of a grey-coated guide, a kind of utilized pauper resident, wearing the uniform of the parish, but with strength and enterprise enough to obtain some active employment, for the purpose of piloting me through the long whitewashed corridors and large flagged courts to the head-quarters of the doctor, whom I found seated at a large writing-table in a plain but airy room on the ground floor, with two windows looking out upon a miserable travesty of a flower garden, screened from all sunlight by the walls of the house itself. After a few introductory words had passed between us, I found that he had formerly been a student at my own school, a fact which brought us at once into pleasant accord. I then represented to him my interest in an unclaimed female body, which had been sent to us from one of his wards little more than a week ago, and begged him to tell me all he could about her, communicating to him her name, age, and the exact date of reception to facilitate the reference.

He reached from a pile before him a large square book, ruled with many lines in tabular form, and running his finger backwards from a vacant date up the first column through two or three pages, suddenly paused a moment, when he said, "Yes, here we are," and read aloud as follows:—

"Anna Maria Parkinson, aged 61, reported widow, brought in Saturday, April 11, 1857, at 7.30 P.M., from Rabbet's Court, by order of medical officer of that district; transferred to 'Elizabeth Ward.'

"*Symptoms on Admission.*—Semi-conscious; pupils equal, medium size, act slightly; does not answer questions, but puts out tongue slowly on demand; it is pale, exsanguine, and slightly furred. Pulse small, little irregular, 112. Surface cold; no external signs of injury observable; nor any statement relating thereto. No smell of liquor or of drugs, no symptoms of poisoning in any form. Body emaciated; hands show that she has done no menial work; appearance that of well-to-do middle-class, etc., etc., etc."

"Ah! I recollect now," he continued, "quite well; yes, I thought her condition due more to

want of food than to any obvious disorder, and we tried her with some concentrated nourishment, unsuccessfully by mouth, etc., and some stimulants. She never manifested any power or disposition to communicate with the nurses, by whom she was well watched all night. In the morning I found her weaker, and she slowly sank and died in about twenty-four hours after that. I am afraid that is all I can tell you. By the way, I ought to say that I made some special inquiry, and consulted with the district medical officer, and we came to the conclusion that there was no ground for making an autopsy, or holding an inquest. As you know, no one claimed the body, and she was sent to your school as the next on the roster."

"Can the nurse tell us anything further, think you? What became of her clothes and other personal effects; I suppose there was something of this sort?" I inquired.

"Let us go up and see the sister of the ward; she will tell us all she knows about it. Were you ever here before? I will lead the way; it's rather a maze of a place for a stranger," said my companion.

Solid, old-fashioned structures showed themselves everywhere, whitewashed and clean, as we passed through passages and up staircases, with more white passages on the first floor opening by casements into square paved courts, through which figures in the invariable grey uniform passed and repassed. Facing us at the end of the present passage was a door, on the lintel above which was painted in black letters, "Elizabeth Ward," at which door my companion, Dr. Charlesworth knocked, and then immediately entered.

"Is Sister Hannah here?" said the doctor to a little nurse who was at that moment in the act of carrying a glass of effervescing drink to a thirsty patient, a woman in a bed on the right.

"I'll call her directly," said the little nurse, preparing to put down the glass on the table.

"No, no, give that to your patient first," said Charlesworth, "and then call the sister. But perhaps she is in her little room in the corner?"

"I think she's there," said the nurse, who had instantly obeyed the doctor's order, and was satisfying the thirsty soul.

"That will do then." Addressing me, he con-

tinued : " Better for us to go and see her alone ; follow me."

We had entered Elizabeth ward at one end by a door opening in the middle, and saw a long perspective of fifteen or twenty beds on each side, with a wide aisle down the centre, part of which was occupied by a long, narrow deal table, on which were placed jugs of water, basins, bandages, lint, and other dressings, &c. A wide fireplace was on the left side half-way down the ward, and over the mantelpiece was a religious picture ; while one or two others, and a scriptural text or two, in large print, suspended here and there, broke somewhat abruptly the monotony of the whitewashed walls. Each patient occupied a neat iron bedstead without curtains, but here and there a screen was placed for shelter ; and each has at her side a small wooden structure something like a dwarf chiffonnier, a table de nuit and a dumb waiter, all in one, a compact and useful appendage. Turning my back on this scene, I followed as I had been bid, and the doctor tapped at a door situated in the left-hand corner regarding that by which we had entered. The door was opened by Sister Hannah with a pleasant

smile and a respectful inclination to the doctor.

"Sister, I've brought you a gentleman who wants to know anything you can tell him about that poor old creature who" (describing her so as to recall the case to the sister's recollection) "died about ten days since."

"I remember, sir," she replied, "but there's very little to tell about the poor lady—for she was a lady as I think, sir—because you know, sir, she was not in a state to say anything about herself. I don't think she was ever heard to speak anything, not distinctly."

"Had she any idea, do you think," said I, "of the situation she was in, or how she came here; or did she make any sign of desiring to make any communication with anyone, or to express any wishes respecting anything?"

"She might be partially sensible, sir," said the sister, "but she never was observed to take any interest in anything; she lay quite quiet and took no notice."

"Did she appear to suffer at all, or to complain in any way of local pain or trouble?" I continued.

"No, sir scarcely at all I think, and she went

off very easy at the last, poor thing. The chaplain came to see her; and finding she was not sensible, made a short prayer, and left her."

After a brief pause, "Could you tell me," I inquired, "what became of her dress or of any other things which she might have brought in with her?"

On reference to the proper quarter, it appeared that she had nothing whatever that was not on her person at the time of admission, namely, her dress and the contents of a pocket attached thereto. Respecting these, I learned that the outer dress was dirty and much worn, they called it "merino," and said it must have been a very good one once; a similar remark was applied to the underclothing. In the pocket were a bunch of keys, two or three evidently belonging to locks above the common quality; a stump of cedar pencil, a little bill for eatables without date or name, but indicating very scanty supplies; and a broken comb. Nothing else was forthcoming; nothing else was to be learned.

I had at least got possession of the address of the lodging-house she had left to come here, and I had instantly noted the words, "reported widow,"

but on the latter subject no evidence was forthcoming here. Retracing our steps, and thanking the doctor for his attention, I walked home, considering the next move in the game.

CHAPTER VII.

I DISCOVER FANNY HENDERSON IN RABBET'S COURT.

THAT portion of western London, using the geographical term not merely in its conventional sense, but in that which postal authority strictly warrants, which lies between the wide boulevard of Portland Place as one boundary, and that other parallel of metropolitan longitude, the Edgware Road as the opposite boundary, limited on the north by the Marylebone Road and on the south by Oxford Street, forms one of the best sites for habitation in the enormous area of our city. Yet whatever Portland Place may be, or may ere long become, there is at this moment, thanks to the caprice of fashion, scarcely an address in the district described which Society does not regard as second or even as third rate in the table of precedence which regulates locality for the upper

ten. No doubt, of late its claims to higher consideration are slowly becoming understood. Its elevation above the level of the Thames, which finds its maximum in the north-west corner of Portman Square; and the gravel which underlies it throughout, tending as it does to ensure its salubrity, are factors which in the choice of a residence will in time perhaps become as influential with the public as the near presence of a royal palace or a fashionable quarter, the foundations of which are little above high-water mark. Hence the fact that while several of the chief streets are tenanted by middle-class families, who find it healthy if dull, and that trade has slowly invaded others which not long since formed suburban abodes for the citizens, there have sprung up numerous small bye-streets and courts, giving shelter to a vast population of the so-called lower orders. There are localities within the parallelogram above defined where shelter may be found by the hundreds of waifs and strays which drift at the mercy of circumstances among the dense masses of population the habitation of which is more or less fixed. It is on a voyage of discovery to one of these by no means out-of-

the-way quarters that, following the information obtained at the infirmary, I started to pursue the thread of my inquiry. Turning out of a wide street of considerable length, containing shops of high repute and houses of architectural pretension, I at once find myself in what might be termed a narrow lane, since it leads out of that street directly to another, but is technically labelled "a court," perhaps because no vehicle above a truck or barrow is permitted to enter, partly since the way is paved with flags, and partly because its width is not sufficient for cabs or carts to meet or pass. The houses on each side are lofty and dark, and I found myself at once entering a region of half-light, contrasting strongly with the full, bright day which I have just left. The atmosphere is confined and loaded with odours, which are significant of an over-populated quarter and inseparable therefrom. Even the noise of the locality has its special character, and contrasts with that of the street, for here the air is filled in every direction with brief strident utterances, scarcely vocal, but rather resembling calls of the lower animals, not always recognizable as words, and rarely rising even to the semblance of conver-

sation, which issue perpetually from the throats of women and of innumerable children on the pavement, in the passages, and from every open window. Flanking either side of the way are the dark, open stores or shops of small traders, and narrow as the track is, at least one-half thereof is occupied by the goods and chattels which are exposed for sale or barter from one end to the other of the court.

At length I have discovered by its number the house of which I am in quest, and commence my ascent by a dark, irregular wooden staircase at the back of the narrow passage by which I entered, through a second-hand furniture dealer's warehouse on the ground floor. Passing each flat I obtain glimpses of a room or two containing numerous inmates of all ages, until I find myself on the last and most dilapidated flight, the fourth, being that from which my aunt is said to have been removed to the infirmary, and evidently the garret floor. There stood before me, on the top landing, close to her own door, a tall young woman, at any rate not more than three or four-and-twenty years of age, her upright, well-developed frame, powerful, but doubtless heightened

in effect by contrast with the dwarf door behind her, which no ordinary person could have entered without stooping. Her square brows, marked by regular dark eyebrows, veiling dark full eyes, gave force to a handsome face, the complexion of which almost suggested the warm tint of Southern blood ; but both form and colour were at this moment disturbed by an expression of ill humour, trouble, and perhaps pain, deeply stamped upon it. She carried an infant in her arms, whose fretfulness she was labouring to soothe by constant movement, aided by that characteristic humming and chirruping chant which the mothers of our species instinctively utter for the purpose. A large, thick, soiled shawl, the original colours of which had become blended by age into an indistinguishable neutral tint, served to cover loosely, not only the child, but her own ample neck and shoulders ; the rounded contours of her bust seen, in glimpses between the folds, to be scantily draped by a dingy, or perhaps faded chemise beneath. The well-chiselled arms, bare to the shoulder top, which would have served a sculptor to study for a Diana Venatrix, escaped through the not ungracefully falling folds ; the left arm clasping the infant, as

the right instinctively draws them more closely round her bosom on the approach of a stranger. Below the waist, fell in long straight lines round her shapely figure to the floor, an ample skirt which still showed signs of having once been showy, if not attractive. Her dark brown hair, unconfined by cap or fillet, curved easily behind her shoulders in flowing masses, which she is in the habit of throwing back out of her way, as it is easy to see by the mode in which the head is effectively tossed backwards for the purpose. She was in the act of calling in shrill, angry tones to another tiny child, who had just fallen flat with extended limbs on the landing before me, and who was screaming lustily ; and I arrived exactly in time to pick up the dirty brat and set him on his legs at the mother's feet, the little urchin now howling in a totally different key, and signifying thereby his terror of so unusual an intruder as myself.

Assuming a good-natured and apologetic tone, I said, "I am afraid I come upon you rather un-awares ; I didn't mean to frighten your little man here," patting him gently on the head, an overture on my part which he resented by executing a loud

crescendo in the still resounding scream. "Be still, you little villain, can't you," hissed forth the mother, at the same time giving him a vigorous shake which had the effect of communicating a corresponding quiver to the note, but happily with the ultimate result of producing a rapid resolution of the chord, and a finale to the music. And then in a tone of almost pleasing quality, the contrast being heightened by the explosion which had just occurred, she addressed me.

"I think you must have lost your way up here, sir, unless you're wanting to see the most miserable garret in Marrabone; you may find some others as bad, but there can't be many worse."

"No, indeed," I replied, "but I have come to make an inquiry, if I may ask you that favour, for it will really oblige me much if you can give me the information I am seeking."

"Of course, I don't know what you are wanting with me that I can tell you," she said, "but I am horribly ashamed that a gentleman like you should catch me in such a state, and in such a dreadful kennel; though God knows it's not fit for any dog to live in."

"My object, I may as well say at once, is to

ask you to tell me whether this is the place in which an old lady lodged, before she was taken to the workhouse infirmary, about a fortnight ago ? ”

Her brow contracted slightly, as if cherishing a suspicion of some sinister object which my errand might portend, an incident which suggested to me that she probably possessed some intelligence, or some materials, which might involve her in some trouble if imparted to a stranger, or which would probably be valuable to such an one, and must be disposed of with discretion by her. She answered rather curtly, “ Yes, it were.”

“ And may I ask if it was that room which she occupied ? ” indicating the low door-way behind her. We were still standing on the landing, the child had ventured to peep with one eye at the stranger, furtively emerging from the folds of the skirt in which his head had hitherto been mainly hidden, when the woman answered,

“ Come in if you like, though there’s nothing to sit down on, unless it’s the bed.” At the same time I observed that the aim of her invitation was probably less a tender to me of her miserable hospitality, than an attempt to withdraw the conversation from the hearing of two or three other

women who had hitherto, unperceived by myself, reached the lower step of the rickety staircase by which I had ascended, and were witnessing, with uplifted faces and open mouths, the exciting scene, which the mere fact of my presence here evidently sufficed to produce. I followed her into the room ; stooping to enter, and finding myself in a garret of which the central part was little more than six feet high, while the sloping portion on one side descended to four feet at the wall ; the partition at the higher side showed that the apartment was half a garret, and that a similar half must occupy the other side, the half now seen being about four paces long by three wide. A rickety-looking wooden stump bedstead occupied the lower side of the room, and upon it lay three or four sacks, worn into holes and partly stuffed with hay, which performed the office of mattress, and lay fitted closely together by long and undisturbed service, and looking as though any attempt to move them would endanger their continuity and defeat the object of their presence there. On these lay a few rags of dirty hue, some cotton, others woollen, besides some patchwork, which might once have been a counterpane, and, respecting the majority

of these, it would be difficult to decide whether they had originally been wearing apparel or bed clothes, and whether they were not now liable to serve in either capacity by turns. A small closet door, shut, was apparent, and, on a nail attached above it, hung a tawdry bonnet and one or two small articles of dress. The floor was dirty and carpetless; a small, three-legged round table, with a flap, stood by the side against the partition, and in the outer wall of the room was a narrow chimney opening, filled by a tiny fire-place, with a mantel-shelf over it, on which stood a candle fixed in a bottle. By the side of it was a casement much dilapidated, which looked, so far as its scanty supply of glass might warrant the use of such a phrase, upon a forest of neighbouring soot-begrimed smoke-stacks and chimney-pots, zinc cowls and roofs of all forms innumerable. In one corner of the room was a little heap of coals and firewood. Along the side of the partition, within a foot of the ceiling, ran a long wooden shelf, on which were assembled the household utensils, a meagre group of battered, cracked, and crippled wares. The rapid glance I had made amply sufficed to survey the narrow space

in which lived the group before me, with what others also, Heaven only knows. Meantime she, still holding her babe and dragging in the boy, turned to fasten the door, which she accomplished by pushing a bit of stick under the lower border, between it and the uneven, cracked, and splintered floor, the lock and latch having apparently been long ago removed, probably as being negotiable chattels.

I thanked her on entering, and said—"The poor creature who left this place to die in the workhouse was known to me years ago, and I took upon myself the charge of burying her. The workhouse people gave me this address, where they said she was ill some days before her admission. I shall be grateful to any one who has been kind to her, and shall be glad to know anything you can tell me of her, and for any relic you may possibly have, and that is the only object I have in finding you out."

"As to her few things," she replied, "the people who took her away took all her belongings too, and wouldn't pay me the trifle she had cost for a day or two's keep, though I can't say the poor dear ate as much as would keep a bird alive; and

the doctor he ordered some wine and soup, which he might as well have ordered a satin dress and feathers, and quite as much chance of getting one as the other."

There was an element of rude frankness about this which drew from me the remark—"I should be sorry if you were a loser by one I cared for. If you really were so for any small sum within my means, which, by the way, are not very considerable, it shall be repaid. May I ask how you met with her, and where?"

"Well, sir, as you speak fair, I'll tell you; but I can't bear that you should see me thus, and that I've no place here for you to sit down in." Assuming a more agreeable, and apparently a more natural air, she continued—"It's not above three weeks ago that I was coming along Oxford Street, late in the evening—I was more fit to be seen then, and not such a scarecrow as I am now—and just at the corner of Stratford Place I saw the poor creature resting against the corner there, quite helpless-like, and no one taking any notice of her. Presently I passed again, and there she was just the same, and so I asked her what was the matter, and she said as she'd no home to go

to; she couldn't say where she came from, and seemed as if she couldn't remember anything rightly. But she didn't smell of liquor the least bit, although not easy to understand. She seemed a nice old lady to look at, and while I was trying to make her out, there was a something about her—a quiet way, a gentle, good kind of way—which somehow brought back old times to me, and made me think of my poor, dear mother, who died only last Christmas was a twelvemonth, for she had much the looks of her, and I couldn't help feeling kindly to her, and didn't like to call the police, who would have said she was drunk, by her way of answering so slow and hesitating, and have marched her off to the station in their rough way, or at best have put her on a stretcher. So I asked her if she had been robbed, or if she had any money about her, as my first thought was to take her to some lodging-house I know of in a small street close by, and she said she might have a shilling or two in her pocket and a few things; and then all of a sudden she seemed to rouse up, and then she said—'My dear, don't leave me; yours is the first kind word has been said to me for days and days,' and she held my arm so tight,

and again she begged me not to leave her, or let any one else get hold of her. She seemed as if she must have been badly frightened like, and almost lost her wits. So I said—"Do you think you can climb up four pair o' stairs, with a little help, if I take you in just for the night," thinking she would remember her friends next day, and I should take her back all right. She said she thought she could, so I got her threepenny worth o' brandy in a little water at the corner as we passed, and then we came in and I got her up at last with a good deal of trouble, and made her a cup of tea, and a bit of bread soaked in it, which revived her, and she shared the bed there with me. My master, you know," she added with some hesitation, "he isn't much at home now, and these two babies here always lay on the floor on some wraps, so it was no great inconvenience. In the morning she seemed very weak, although she'd slept very well—in her clothes, you know, for there was nothing but what she stood up in; but she was so grateful, and took my hand just as if I were an old friend, and made me empty out her pocket of all her things. They didn't come to much: well, there was two shillings and tenpence

in money, and two pawn tickets, and a bill of her lodging-house paid, and a letter; there was a bunch of keys, and one or two useless scraps and things which went along with all her clothes to the workhouse. That forenoon she was easy, and we talked a little, just a word or two at a time—the poor thing seemed so revived when spoken kindly to—and as far as I could make out she said she had been alone ever since her husband's death, and never a friend that she could find anywhere; she couldn't tell me when he died, only that he was drowned. All I could do, she would take scarcely any food; but I got a little brandy and some good broth and a little jelly from a shop with her money, and she had a few spoonfuls. But in the afternoon she was very weak, and I couldn't do for her properly, and she couldn't do the least thing for herself, so that evening I went to the parish doctor, and got him to promise to come in the morning. She was very bad in the night—that is sinking-like—and wouldn't answer a question, and I was half afraid she might go off, and no one but me along with her. About noon-time the doctor came and asked a great many questions, and seemed suspicious,

and didn't appear to believe my story; at last he looked at her, and listened to her, and felt her a good deal, and seemed more satisfied. They fetched her away late in the afternoon, and I never heard anything more about her; but I felt certain she couldn't be long for this life. There, sir, now you know all about it."

I felt quite satisfied that my new acquaintance had told me a true story, and exclaimed involuntarily, "Poor soul, what she must have passed through before she came to this!" then turning to the woman added, "but I have no doubt your kindness was one of the last comforts she enjoyed, and I am grateful, not only for it, but for your account of the matter;" after a pause, adding, "May I ask if you preserved the letter?" "Yes, sir," she replied, "you may have it and welcome, it's of no use to me, and the lodging-house bill is with it; and there's the two tickets besides, sir, I daresay they are worth more than the miserable bit of money which they dole out to you for your things at the pawnshop, and might be worth taking up again if one had but the needful to do it with." She then placed the baby, which was now asleep, gently on the bed, leaving the young

but sturdy-looking child who could only just walk holding on to one of the corner posts, then turning to me with half a smile that gave a new and pleasant reading to her handsome features, exclaimed, "I'm letting you into all my secrets somehow!" the meaning of which remark, not at first apparent, was soon explained as she knelt on the floor at the corner of the room at the back of the bed, and lifting up a loose portion of plank, took from a dark chink there an envelope and a little bit of paper. "Look here!" she cried, "there's nothing else! there's the letter and the bill, and here's the tickets. I took care of them, being sure they could be of no use to the parish, and thinking they might perhaps be worth something to somebody." "Thank you very much," said I, "I accept the letter and the bill," putting them into my pocket—"let me see what the tickets are." There were two, as she had said—one was for a "lady's work-case, fifteen shillings;" the other, "a piece of lace trimming, two pounds."

"Now, my good girl," I said, "your care and your expenses, whatever they are, must be in some sense repaid, although I confess I owe you more than mere money payment for your good-

ness to my old 'nurse. What shall I give you? I should like to acquire these mementoes of her, although valueless to me."

"Anything you think proper, sir. I shall leave it to you."

I placed two sovereigns in her hand, and said, "are you content?"

"I am indeed," she said, "and thank you kindly, sir." On which I added, "If I find them more valuable than I expect I will let you know, and be your debtor for another. Now, one thing further, there is no telling, but you might perhaps yet come across some other relic belonging to this old creature." I didn't desire to suspect the woman of any reticence, and did not believe there had been any, but I thought it best to keep the way open for a chance of my hereafter acquiring some other matter which she might perchance have kept back, or to enable her to communicate, should she be able on second thoughts to do so, any information which, fear of being unduly communicative at the first visit of a stranger, had compelled her to withhold. So I handed to her my card and address in London, adding, "If you do meet with anything fresh, and can let me

know of it, there I am mostly to be found. In such case you may call and see me, and if not at home, I am almost certain to be found at the great hospital close by. You see I am only a medical student, and not a swell in disguise. By the way, please tell me your name, in case I may require to communicate with you."

Hesitating a moment, she said, "Fanny Henderson will find me here, if I stop, which God forbid. You may rely on it, sir, if I hear anything more about the old lady—not that I expect to, for I don't—I'll be sure to let you know somehow or other," adding as she showed me out, "You must be tired of standing, sir; pray take care how you go down those broken steps, which it's a shame the landlord won't mend them. He comes here like clockwork to take his rent for this hole of a place, and I told him last week I wished he might fall down and break his leg, and serve him right if he did."

Nodding her an adieu, I slowly wound my way among peering women and endless children to the court, and made the best of my way home, hastening to have a look at the letter which I had obtained from my new quondam friend, the good Samaritan of Rabbet's Court.

CHAPTER VIII.

I VISIT DR. TRANSOM AT LIVERPOOL.

ALMOST immediately after my late interview with Mrs. Dickson, at Laxenford, I had addressed a letter to Messrs. James K. & Frank B. Paterson & Co. of Cleveland, U.S., who, according to her information, had been the legal advisers of the Parkinsons, acquainting them with my aunt's demise, and of some circumstances connected therewith, not knowing the captain's whereabouts, since he might be afloat for anything we then knew, and according to our view at that time probably was so. It had occurred to us that his wife might have taken it into her head to pay us a visit during her husband's absence at sea, and perhaps availed herself of the opportunity which a voyage of longer duration than usual afforded to accomplish her object. We had not taken the

contingency of his death into our calculations and very naturally, because he was some five or six years her junior, although I cannot say that the idea had entirely escaped us. In writing these gentlemen I expressed the anxious interest which my father and mother cherished respecting the extraordinary circumstances which were attached to her presence here, and requested them to communicate an account of them without delay to the captain, who would probably come over here at once on his return from sea, should he now be absent, and requesting in any case some information about them both, if they were in a position to furnish it.

But the words "reported widow" in the case-book of Marylebone Infirmary, evidently founded on the evidence of Fanny Henderson, had given a new direction to my speculations, and made me still more determined to pursue the investigation thus far carried on successfully. And now I had before me in the letter obtained this morning from Henderson herself in Rabbet's Court another clue to follow up. By way of indicating what this was, I shall give a transcript of that letter here. It was addressed—

"To Mrs. A. M. Parkinson,
"No. ————— Street,
"Manchester Square,
"London."

and it was as follows:—

"Rodney Street, Liverpool,
"March 26, 1857.

"Dear Madam,—Replying to your recent note, it gives me pleasure to comply with your request that I should send you a copy of the prescription which you have mislaid, more especially as I am glad to learn it has been useful to you. It strikes me as very unfortunate that you still have no recollection of the address of your friends in this country, and I really do not know how to advise you in this matter. I had hoped that by this time your memory, which, after your serious illness, seemed to be almost totally gone, would have gradually returned, and that you would have regained at least the knowledge of so simple a fact as this. All I can advise is that both in this matter and in that of your management generally, you should confide in the judgment and ability of my excellent friend Dr. Wynchester of Upper Brook Street, to whom I originally directed you. I wrote him fully my observations on your case, and was glad to hear you had placed yourself

under his care. I am sure he will, under such painful circumstances as yours are, charge himself with the duty of advising you how best to take steps to obtain this most necessary information. Let me now add that, while I do not object to your occasionally taking the prescription which I gave you when here, in order to allay nervous irritability and sleeplessness, I can advise you only to do so with Dr. Wynchester's knowledge and consent; indeed, I must beg you to hand this letter to him at his next visit to you, if you do not send it to him at once after reading it.

"With my best compliments, and with every good wish, believe me, dear madam,

"Yours very faithfully,

"THEOPHILUS TRANSOM, M.D.

"Prescription enclosed."

Having read and re-read this letter with not a little astonishment, and some bewilderment at first, it appeared clear that my aunt, probably on her arrival at Liverpool from America, had been taken ill there and been detained for some time under the care of the writer, and that he had naturally advised her as to whom she should consult in London on her finding herself well enough to proceed there. Whatever had been

the nature of her illness, one notable result clearly was, that her nervous system had sustained a very terrible shock, obliterating from her memory some of those facts which, when in health, had been the longest and the most familiarly known by her, among them the place of residence and, almost certainly, even the names of her oldest friends and only relatives here.

I now prepared for an interview with the well-known Dr. Wynchester of Upper Brook Street, and made an appointment with the important official who superintends the minute division of that great man's time into portions of carefully regulated duration, with the strictest view to economy (that is of the time aforesaid) for the consumption of the public, who await its distribution equally with anxiety and with gratitude. Such a servant may be most valuable to such a master, and resembles the skilful carver at a feast who possesses the art of making a choice dish serve neatly, agreeably, and liberally a dozen guests, while a bungler would supply from it only half that number, and not produce a single portion of respectable much less of

inviting appearance. I obtained the hour of "one forty-five precisely" on the afternoon of Friday, first of May, six days hence, as the doctor was enjoying a few days of repose in the country, which he greatly needed, before the full tide of the London season set in. Many engagements were awaiting his return, which accounted for the lateness of the hour, and my allotment at the hands of his butler was duly registered in his book on the hall table.

As I walked away through Grosvenor Square, where the innumerable smoke-coloured stems and branches within its circular enclosure, as well as the privet hedge which lines the palisade, were showing the first signs of life in a sprinkling of fresh bright green spangles, I felt that the delay I had just unexpectedly met with was fortunate. It would be better to see Dr. Transom of Liverpool first, and afterwards to obtain Dr. Wynchester's opinion. Accordingly I wrote to the former a brief statement of the circumstances and how I had become possessed of his letter to my aunt, adding how glad I should be to receive permission to call on him for information respecting her, and that if he accorded it I

should go to Liverpool without delay for the purpose. To this application I obtained the following reply :—

“ Rodney Street, Liverpool,

“ April 27, 1857.

“ Dear Sir,—Pray come for a day at least, and I will tell you all I know. Call on me at half-past eight in the morning if you can ; but let me advise you to arrive the day before, to order a bed at the Adelphi Hotel, which is where Mrs. Parkinson stayed for about six or seven weeks, and learn anything you can respecting her from the manager and waiters who will recollect her well. By the way, show this letter to the former if you like, and it will doubtless facilitate your inquiries. Please write me the day before, so that I may know on what date I am to expect you at the hour named.

“ Believe me, dear Sir,

“ Yours very faithfully,

“ T. TRANSOM.

“ To Charles Kingston, Esq.,

“ London.”

I accepted the doctor's offer by the next post, and prepared to start myself on the following day. Meantime it is almost needless to say that I kept my father and mother informed of all my

proceedings, and was well pleased to learn that they considered the result of my labours at present very satisfactory. The occupation itself was to me novel, amusing, and somewhat exciting, and I began to think that were I at a loss for a profession, a good post in the private intelligence department of police would by no means be an unpleasant or an undesirable one.

Arrived at the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, I requested a modest bedroom, and sought an interview with the manager, whom a sight of the doctor's letter rendered approachable and courteous. But he was a business man of the bustling type, and had no time to lose, so, quickly turning to a book, he exclaimed :

“ Heigh ! that poor lady who was so ill here last winter ; she was in No. 24 sitting room, first floor, and had the bedroom out of it ; dressing-room for the nurse. Came here with the doctor for the steamer, one of the Cunarders I think it was. She would never have got here, nor anywhere else, if the doctor hadn't brought her, and taken good care of her too. She was a particular old lady ; and when she did get better at last, she grew more particular than ever : always so

fidgety about her luggage. You shall see the first floor waiter, sir" (ringing a bell), "who'll tell you more than I can; he had rather a lively time of it with her, I fancy. It was her packages she was always fretting about; it was not that she had so many of them either; but there were one or two boxes she would never let go out of her sight, if she could help it. That's how I recollect her so well; for every now and then she would send down here to my office to know whether I had got her box, she having it all the same time upstairs in her room. If it was but covered up with a shawl, she thought it was gone!"

A tall, good-looking waiter answered the summons, when the manager said, "Here, Wilson, just tell this gentleman all you can about the lady you had in No. 24 last winter, Mrs. What's her name, Mrs. Patterson, wasn't it?"

"Beg your pardon, Parkinson, sir."

"Parkinson, ah, yes; at all events, you know who I mean. Was so ill, you know, under Dr. Transom." Then turning to me, he said:

"Wilson, sir, will tell you all about her, and if I can do anything more for you, pray command

me." And the manager returned to the details of his ceaseless business in that small room of his, from whence he controlled the affairs of the well-known hotel.

Without reproducing the varied reminiscences of my poor aunt's eccentric conduct with which Wilson's conversation furnished me, and which in their way were by no means devoid of humour, I shall simply epitomize the information obtained. It really amounted to little more than the brief phrases of the manager had already imparted. He believed her to have been almost incapable of taking proper care of herself on account of her defective memory, and especially from the variable state of that faculty. Most of all, he was impressed with the peculiar and, as he thought, absurd anxiety she displayed about a certain stout tin box in her possession, adding that he had always said that she would certainly have it stolen some day, from the mere fact that such conduct necessarily created a belief that the package must be one of great value ; in fact, it was impossible not to believe that it was so.

Next morning at the appointed hour I waited on Dr. Transom, an agreeable man of fifty-five or

thereabout, with small intelligent eyes, high forehead, slightly bald, clean shaven face, and who evidently dressed with care; type of the popular, successful practitioner, enjoying the confidence of a first-class provincial practice. After some preliminary conversation concerning my relationship to the object of the enquiry, "Your aunt, sir; was she really?" he exclaimed. "Well, sir, hers was undoubtedly one of the most curious cases I have seen for many a day; but how very sad—how painfully sad, not to be able to recollect the names of her oldest friends. Some cerebral lesion, perhaps a localized softening, affecting quite a restricted portion of the great nervous centre; but a history so imperfect, owing to her mental condition, you know, renders all surmise very vague and uncertain. I remember a very remarkable case which I saw with Dr. Nottingham here some twelve years ago, one which Mrs. Parkinson's case strongly recalled to my mind," relating its particulars with a fulness which showed an interest therein which I confess transcended my own, but to which I naturally listened with exemplary patience. "But then your aunt's mind was a perfect blank, a veritable blank, sir, I

might say, on that single point, the names of her relatives and their abode. But you want to know, I daresay, how I met with her originally. Of course I had forgotten you have not yet been told that. Well, I was called in to take charge of her by my friend James Gordon, who is now, by the way, the oldest medical officer in the Cunard service, and makes the voyage regularly twice in six weeks. He informed me that she left New York in very poor health on the first day of November last, she had a bad passage, and was very much shaken by it, requiring his care all the way. He was very anxious about her, as, although her mental state offered nothing for special remark when she first came on board, he had been greatly struck with the change which had taken place before they had been at sea five days. She had vomited incessantly from the outset, and he was really inclined to think that her peculiarity was quite recent, and that some small vessel had given way in the brain, producing effusion, although no manifest signs were noted of any pressure therefrom—slight cerebral hæmorrhage, you see, sir, and the resulting influence of compression upon the con-

volutions around " (the reduplication of the statement affording in its second and more sonorous form an opportunity for an effective rhetorical emphasis not to be missed; evidently a little habit of the doctor's). "In about ten or eleven days the 'Russia,' I think it was, arrived, and he transported his patient with great precautions to the Adelphi Hotel, where I met him, and installed her under the care of a trustworthy nurse of mine. After the first fortnight, during which time her mental condition was variable, but always extremely defective, and her powers generally very weak, she began to amend, and before a month had elapsed, when she was able to sit up to a meal daily, I had learned thus much of her history.

"She had lost her husband, she couldn't say how long ago. He was drowned at sea; and the calamity had preyed greatly on her mind, and made her very ill. She believes that she was the subject of a very tedious and dangerous illness, so at least they told her afterwards, and she had never been the same woman since. As soon as she felt able to travel, she desired above all things to join her old friends in England, and made

every arrangement for doing so, realizing all or most of her property for that purpose, and, would you believe it, sir, was positively carrying it about with her in one or two boxes, securities I fancy, so as to be portable, and, as she imagined, absolutely safe—so like a woman, isn't it? She would not part with them out of her sight. I remonstrated with her, but to no purpose. I wanted her to put her box into the banker's hands—not a bit of it! She would have her own way. If I could have got from her who her friends were; that is what I aimed at continually; and that was just what she never would tell me. My first impression was that she would not tell, wanted to make some mystery about it, or had some reason or fancy for telling me only part of the truth, and keeping back the rest—it is so common this—it's just the way of the sex—they're all alike in that, these old ladies, as you'll know well enough when you are older, my young friend, if you haven't learned it yet. I was, however, soon satisfied that she did really earnestly desire to find you all out, and that she was incapable of doing so. There was a locality she once named, with an evident fancy that it might contain the

spot she wanted, and that was Hampton Court, but it was the only one she hit upon. She spoke of the place, and evidently had some recollection of its features, as I myself was able to judge. I named this circumstance to her London doctor, and begged him to recollect it; but as to the name of her friends, she still had no memory whatever."

"Hampton Court," said I; "that is curious, because she had certain associations with that place in very early life. I have often heard her say that she spent very happy holidays there when a girl with an elderly lady, some relative who inhabited a pleasant set of rooms in the old palace many years ago."

"Is that so? Now that's really most interesting; a fact of extraordinary interest, sir. Those young and deep impressions, among the earliest of her life, were deeply stamped in some part of her brain, you see, which the recent attack, whatever it was, failed to obliterate, although it totally erased some similar records belonging to middle life; and so she mixed up her faint recollections of the latter with those early and more enduring ones. Ah! when that complicated and delicate

brain of ours gets a shake, what confusion it sometimes makes. I recollect another case now, which illustrates that fact very remarkably—quite marvellously, sir. It was the case of ”—here pausing to look at his watch, he suddenly exclaimed, “but my time is almost up ; my carriage will be at the door in a few minutes for a long morning round. Pray pardon me, but I promise to relate you that interesting history another time. Say, you’ll come and dine with me to-night—with me and Mrs. Transom—at seven sharp ? That’s right ; Mrs. Transom will be delighted to see you ; and then I’ll tell it you all without hurry. To finish your aunt’s story in few words : she was well enough to move, physically well that is, about the middle of December, but her mental condition altered very little. I got the Adelphi manager to recommend her a thoroughly respectable small family hotel at the West-end of London, where she might be free from much noise and bustle, and he selected one in a quiet street in Mayfair. She left on the 18th of the month, and I did my best to ensure the safe transit of herself and her boxes, with the nurse to take care of them. I also advised her to consult Dr. Wynchester, the

great authority in these obscure cases, as you doubtless know just as well as I do, and I wrote him full particulars of the case. I heard from him that he took great interest in it, and subsequently learned that some little improvement in her condition appeared to have taken place. Wynchester will tell you anything he knows if you call on him."

I informed Dr. Transom that I had an appointment with him on his return to London next week, for which the visit to Liverpool had admirably prepared me. With a cordial shake of the hand and a repetition of his friendly invitation he bowed me out, and prepared for the professional labours of the forenoon.

I spent most of the day looking over the Docks, the Town Hall, and other noteworthy objects in the city, presenting myself in Rodney Street at seven, which gave me an opportunity of seeing pleasant Mrs. Transom and her promising family, together with the tastefully arranged interior beyond the doctor's study, which was the only room I had seen this morning. After an unpretentious but well served little dinner, the doctor produced a bottle of '34 port, now in the full ripeness of

body and loaded with exquisite flavour, a subject on which I had then much to learn, and gladly accepted my host's teaching thereon. Mrs. Transom gracefully sipped her single glass and retired, and after a pleasant current of sympathetic chat from the doctor, revealing his appreciation of this and other favourite vintages, stored in the goodly cellars of his large and hospitable circle of friends at Liverpool, we joined her upstairs. Here to my surprise the doctor showed me his little collection of certain works of art which his particular taste had led him to assemble, namely, an interesting group of those delightful and delicately-executed engravings, by "the little masters" Aldegraver, Altdorfer, Hans Beham, and others of the sixteenth century, down to Hollar in the seventeenth, of which latter the examples were numerous. These he preserved with tender care in the locked drawers of an escritoire in the drawing-room, and handled with a mingled expression of affection and reverence. Is it not a curious fact, for it is an indisputable one, that almost every medical man of ordinary intelligence, who achieves a fair share of success in his profession—and unluckily the taste sometimes exists

without success enough to warrant its cultivation—becomes a fine art collector of some sort, and has a hobby, which, when you know him, and not until then, you are perhaps astonished to discover? For this private indulgence, whatever the multitude of his engagements of various kinds, he keeps a clear and vacant space, however small, and worships quietly and undisturbed therein, wholly apart from the infinitely wearying and often distressing associations of his every day life. If he is a dweller in the country he may be a collector of rare and lovely objects associated with some special department of natural history, as plumage, butterflies, dried plants and flowers, to say nothing of those collections which result rather from the pursuit of scientific knowledge than of natural beauty. Or he picks up the coins, medals, and other relics which some neighbourhoods furnish; or the remaining products of an exhausted provincial factory of pottery or of porcelain, which are still extant; or the works of a celebrated local artist, as those of Constable in Suffolk, of old Crome and his followers about Norwich, of Bewick in the two northern counties, and of others who might be named, according to

the province in which the doctor's lot is cast.

In the large towns and in the metropolis he collects engravings, etchings, watercolour drawings, or he may possess works in oils by the best artists, not merely of modern time, but here and there a choice old master. Or he treasures up old plate, or Wedgwood, or Sèvres, or Oriental china, or ivories, or wood carvings, or what not. So surely as you find a successful doctor, so certainly will you find an art treasure of some kind somewhere about his dwelling. If you haven't found it, you don't yet know your man. Learn his secret; you will find in the innermost recesses of his home a gem or two most likely worth the pains of being discovered.

I spent the remainder of a pleasant evening over these engravings, and had much to learn from the doctor's facile talk on the time and the art which they illustrated. Happily he entirely forgot to recount his history of the interesting case he had promised me, as furnishing another illustration bearing on the nature of my aunt's cerebral condition, and I did not remind him of his omission. I thanked him and Mrs. Transom

cordially for the very friendly and agreeable reception they had given me, and arranged at my hotel to leave early for London on the following morning

CHAPTER IX.

MY RESEARCHES IN LONDON ARE CONTINUED.

MY next object was to visit the lodging-house which my aunt had left before she had been picked up at the corner of Stratford Place, and from which it would very naturally not be far distant. The paid bill, which together with a letter was found in her pocket, bore a simple name and address in printed characters thereon, and it was significant that the date of it, April the 4th, was just one week prior to that on which Henderson had found her. Had she, then, been able to defray her weekly expenses up to that time? Was it not natural to infer that when payment for another week's expenditure became due, she had at length found herself utterly without any means to meet it, and had therefore left the place, and in a moment of weakness and

despair had thrown herself upon the street? In that case was it not almost necessary to infer that her creditor must have acted harshly and threatened her? It appeared only too probable that this or something like it was her unfortunate history, and if my surmise should prove correct, there would be some difficulty in obtaining trustworthy information at this house.

Again, it was almost certain that she must have been in the habit of resorting to the pawnshop for a considerable period of time in order to meet the cost of living, and that probably at the date above-named she had little or nothing left which was available as security. Consequently I could not expect to find much property of any kind at the lodging-house, although the proprietor would probably have detained something to meet his claim. Reflecting also on the nature of the two deposits described on the two pawn tickets in my possession, the dates of which were March 21 and April 4, the former being that of the piece of lace, it was impossible not to speculate, and with some degree of probability, on what her previous experience of thus obtaining money must have been. It cannot be doubted that it must

have been considerable, and the stress of dire necessity must have been deeply felt by such a woman before she could have been compelled to resort to this bitter means of putting off the evil day of absolute and hopeless want.

The first things which in such circumstances as hers are usually dispensed with are of course articles of jewellery, and no trace of any had been seen or heard of in my inquiry hitherto; even her wedding-ring had disappeared, although this was a circumstance of little import, since it might have been easily removed by more than one person subsequent to death. After jewellery follow such articles as dressing-cases, costly nick-nacks, and minor ornaments, which often enter largely into the personalty of a lady's equipage in travel; costly portions of the wardrobe least required generally come next. The watch is retained to a late period; but all these, among other things, had doubtless furnished her the means of support, unless she had lost them by robbery. With reference to the two items for which I held the tickets, and which I had yet to redeem, the lace may have been removed from a dress or from underclothing which she could not

part with (a suggestion of Henderson's, by the way), being the last she had to wear. Her sewing-box, or "lady's companion," was given up at the very last, having doubtless done useful service to the end.

I arrived at a respectable street in the neighbourhood of Manchester Square, which is the only indication I need give of the lodging-house in question. The house, or rather two houses associated, presented a commonplace aspect, wholly without smartness, or rather in that condition of chronic grime which, although not more dirty perhaps than is commonly considered tolerable in the atmosphere of London, and passes muster in our city, would in any clean country town be stigmatized as "shamefully filthy" by a unanimous vote of the population. My second knock at the front door brought up a young German waiter, short, round faced, and fair, clad in a suit of the seediest black, and who in the English which he had recently come here expressly to learn—bartering long days of laborious service for the brilliant opportunity of acquiring the language which such a situation offered—demanded, "What did I want?"

I answered, perhaps rather too quickly, "Can I see the master of the house?"

"Ich verstehe nicht, mein Herr," was the reply.

Desiring to do my duty by him in relation to his linguistic aspirations, I persevered in my native tongue, saying very deliberately, "Is the master at home?" which elicited the distinct response, "Dere is here no master; Frau Robinson is here."

"Will you then say that a gentleman wishes to see her?"

"I will seek her, mein Herr, and tell that you to see her wish," he replied, showing me into a small front room leading directly out of the narrow hall or passage into which the front door opened, when he handed me a chair and disappeared.

After waiting about five minutes, an elderly woman, rather above the middle height, with dark dress, high-coloured cap, and wearing spectacles, appeared, and addressed to me a civil inquiry as to what I required. I replied that I had called on behalf of the friends of a lady who, I believed, had left this house on April 11th, and that my

object was to learn whether any further tidings had been received respecting her, and whether I could obtain any account of her residence here, and of its duration, as well as of the state of her health during that time. First, however, in obedience to the woman's natural demand that I should give my authority for demanding such information, I declared that, if not myself the nearest relative, I was acting by the instructions of that relative, who was my own father. On this I learned with some difficulty that my aunt had resided here six weeks, that she had very little luggage and few effects of any kind when she arrived, which she did from a hotel in the neighbourhood of Hanover Square, that she was very badly off, had no friend, not even a doctor to see her, that she evidently parted with the few articles she had to pay her periodical bills, "which it is our invariable habit to send in punctually every week." She appeared, according to the alleged opinion of my informant, not improbably to be a friendless lunatic who had escaped from some asylum, to which it would have been satisfactory to send her back had the place been known, and it was hoped every day

that some one interested in her would appear. There was one week's rent only due on April 11th, and on that evening, when the waiter went in to her little sitting-room to take a bed-room candle, he remarked that she was not there, and he supposed she had gone to bed; next forenoon, as she did not get up, the bed-room was opened, and no trace of her was met with. A few clothes were left in two trunks, and nothing else; and to this fact she (the managing lady herself) was ready to swear and make oath, and also that no other effects had been seen, except those which had been referred to. She also offered the trunk and its contents for inspection if I liked. On pressing her as to what steps were taken to discover the lost inmate, it was replied that the policeman on the beat was at once informed, and that inquiries were made among the neighbours and tradesmen; but the theory that she was a lunatic, that she had probably made some eccentric, but harmless move, sufficed to satisfy any little anxiety they might at first have felt, and they wondered if any intelligence of her would be forthcoming. I saw the small rooms she occupied, and the American trunks bearing

her name, observing that there was an address ticket on each, evidently somewhat recently affixed, of a hotel in New York, probably that at which she stayed at the conclusion of the journey from Cleveland to take the steamer for England. I demanded what claim she had against my aunt for the last week's lodging, stating that I would discharge it and remove the trunks and their contents, a proposition which was agreed to. The woman was hard, disagreeable, and reticent, and the little information which I obtained from her had cost a considerable expenditure of time and labour. At the same time I could not say, supposing her statements to be correct, that there was any particular circumstance which authorized me to utter any serious complaint. Ordering the trunks to be put on a cab, I carried my acquisitions home. I found several articles of soiled linen, some others of outer clothing, some shoes, empty cases, and a hand-bag or two, a few books and other trifles. A careful investigation of the whole, however, did not yield a single contribution to my stock of facts, a result which I confess was very disappointing.

My next step in the inquiry was to pay a visit to the pawnbroker's shop, the address of which, as furnished by the tickets, was in Upper Seymour Street, not far distant from the lodging-house just described. I instinctively awaited the commencing dusk of the evening, desiring to avoid observation, and found the shop at the corner of a narrow street, offering facility for easy and private entry. Passing through the easily swinging outer door, I found myself in a dark passage, on the side of which several narrow cells opened, each by its own proper door, and suggesting at first sight the purpose of a confessional, a service which they might be said not inappropriately, perhaps, sometimes to fulfil. But on occupying one of them, the first one vacant, and closing the door behind me, I received the wholly different impression of having entered a very small private box at a theatre, looking out, however, not on a crowded house and extensive scenery, but across a well-worn counter, at which the actors—three young men in Holland blouses—in an atmosphere stifling with dust, each with a pen behind his ear, were busily engaged. One was engaged in hot controversy with my unseen

neighbour in the adjoining box on the right, as to the value of an article brought for pledge, a contest which, on the part of the applicant, speedily subsided into earnest and whining entreaty, that the clerk would, "for God's sake, stand another bob this time," a position which the aforesaid clerk wholly declined to take. Other clerks were occupied in writing tickets, making entries in long account books, and adding carefully pinned parcels to a great heap of heterogeneous packages which lay piled up on the floor behind them. My turn came next. A brisk demand of what I wanted from a young man just disengaged, met its response in the production of my two tickets, with an expression of a wish on my part to see the articles in question, on behalf of Anna Maria Parkinson, in whose name they were pledged. After a brief reference to some other book not close at hand, with examination and comparison of the tickets with an entry there, a youth was dispatched with them to some upper regions to find the parcels corresponding thereto, while the clerk calculated from a table before him the amount of interest, the rate of which varies considerably with the amount of the loan,

for the number of months or days which had elapsed since the date of the deposit. This was handed to me for payment. The articles were soon produced, unpacked, and inspected—namely, a well-furnished lady's work-box and a small packet of lace of tawny hue, neatly folded and pinned. I disbursed the sum demanded—viz., two pounds fifteen shillings, the amount lent, plus one shilling and tenpence for interest, the accommodation afforded having been rather more than a month—received the pledge, and left with some presentiment, although without sanguine expectation, that the box at least might contain some object which would afford a fresh scent, to use a hunting simile, to my somewhat baffled powers of research. I now found it an exciting occupation to examine every pocket and cranny, as well as every article in the case, which bore "Mechi's" name upon it, and was probably taken out by my aunt on her marriage, and again I had the misfortune "to draw the cover blank!"

CHAPTER X.

I CONSULT THE GREAT DR. WYNCHESTER.

It was May-day, and my aspirations respecting it were neither sentimental on the one hand, nor did they manifest more than a faint shade of scientific activity or interest on the other. No memories of the village Maypole, and of romps with fresh-coloured, laughing country girls, much less of the troupe of tawdrily bedecked actors, dingy with irrepressible soot, for the "Jack in the Green" of suburban cockneydom, crossed the range of my thoughts that morning. And it was only in a mood of langour and discontent that I realized the fact that my college opened to-day for its summer session, and that Allison, with a loyal "quadrillo" of dressers, to borrow an analogy from the usages of Spanish Tauromachy, would support their brilliant chief in the area of

the operating theatre, surrounded by tiers of seats crowded to the ceiling, long before the hour, by youthful critics, to witness those deeds of skill and daring by which the direst forms of disease were often vanquished, and death itself checked in full career.

For I was not to be there. It was the day of my appointment with Dr. Wynchester, and the hour which had been allotted to me for the interview coincided almost exactly with that of the operations at the hospital, an unfortunate accident, but one which was not within my power to avoid. Having made an early lunch, I strolled to the doctor's house, taking care to arrive soon after one o'clock. The important official at the door, whom I had before seen, patronizingly recognized me as one happy to be favoured with the right to enter without question, and transferred me to the polite attentions of a footman, who conducted me through the hall, and quietly ushered me into the waiting-room, where he found me a vacant chair. I carefully looked around, surveying my companions with that furtive glance which alone seems permissible to the several occupants of the silent and often depress-

ing interior which constitutes the ante-chamber of a great doctor's consulting-room. There were five others to enter it before me ; three ladies, one with a child, a pallid youth, and an old gentleman. Respecting each of these, one fact may almost certainly be predicted. Each comes heavily weighted with his or her own special cause for deep anxiety ; each with a story of complaint so infinitely more important than that affecting any other of the group. Each frequently suspecting himself to be the subject of some peculiarity marking the case as distinct from all others—a curious but popular form of self-magnification. Each, as a rule, less desirous (for happily there are exceptions) to make a simple statement of the chief facts of his history than to record his own sentiments respecting the nature of the disorder, and found thereon some theory which, based on accidental hearsay, or the opinion of some well-meaning neighbours, has been carefully constructed for the purpose.

How easily and yet how completely will the mist of folly and error which has obscured the essential points of the case be scattered to the winds after a few questions from the doctor ; and

how soon will a few decided words of his dispose with pitiless logic of the absurd speculations which have been elaborated to explain the patient's morbid sensations. And how often is the patient profoundly disappointed by the unexpected demolition of his previous notions, and led to fear that the new views may be due to some oversight or defect of attention on the part of the hardly-worked doctor, who devoted but fifteen minutes to the case? A not unnatural deduction, especially in after times of doubtful progress and of weakness. But to the thoroughly practised examiner of morbid signs and symptoms, the nature of disease is, in nine cases out of ten, an established fact, demonstrable beyond dispute before the first interview is five minutes old; while with equal rapidity he recognizes the occasional case which does not so yield to inquiry, and which needs prolonged and patient study for its solution. No good consultant, however much occupied, can in his own interest afford to do less than his best for any applicant whom he undertakes to see. None knows better than he that any deviation from that rule would soon wear out the highest reputation.

Will the reader pardon this digression, and remember that the time devoted to it has been occupied by the doctor in considering the cases of the five patients referred to, and that not one moment has been lost? I have amused myself by scanning the daily papers, and by observing the two or three volumes of light literature, bearing on their title-pages autograph tributes of respect or of gratitude from their givers, besides one or two of the doctor's own works, the whole strewn over a substantial mahogany table.

Little else remains for notice besides three or four venerable portraits of life-size in oil, occupying the walls of the gloomy dining-room, which contains no other furniture than a long row of stuffed-back dining chairs on the side fronting the fireplace, and a capacious sideboard behind two Ionic columns in scagliola at the farthest end, opposite to the two dim and heavily-curtained windows which look upon the street.

I had just heard a bell and the movement of feet in the hall—signs that the last patient is in the act of leaving the consulting-room. The footman again quietly entered, and, without speaking, fixed upon me a look of invitation to follow, on

which I rose, and was ushered into the presence of Dr. Wynchester. I found myself seated nearly opposite to him in an easy chair, conscious that the light fell directly on my face, so that, at the first glance, the doctor met my eye merely as a dark silhouette against the window, his face being in shadow, a position of necessary and designed advantage for him.

I was soon able to distinguish a man past middle age, whose general conformation inclined to be slender. His complexion olive; the hair of his head, in short slightly waved growth, rose directly upward from the square forehead, and was still dark, but by virtue of innumerable fine silver lines inlaid therein, was no longer black, but of the tint called steel-grey. A well-formed but slightly wrinkled brow, emphasized by fully developed eyebrows, straight in line and still black, overshadowed small, dark eyes, evidently accustomed, without effort, to observe whatever lay before them. A nose faintly aquiline; a well-formed mouth, surrounded by features naturally firm and immobile, indicated that tranquillity of organization which results from the consciousness of strength.

A slight but courteous inclination of the doctor's head signified that I should state the object of my visit.

"I have come," said I, "to consult you, sir, not respecting myself, but about the case of a relative who was formerly under your care. May I ask if you have any recollection of Mrs. Parkinson, an elderly lady advised to seek your opinion by Dr. Transom, of Liverpool, and who was seen by you I believe, early in the present year?"

"I shall be able to recall her," said he, rising in order to reach from a shelf one of a row of large flat boxes designed for the store of manuscripts. Then, reseating himself, he opened the box and selected from it a sheet of paper, evidently containing numerous written entries.

Having looked it quickly through, he raised his eyes and said—"I have the notes of her case here—what is the nature of your inquiry?"

I then told him briefly my relation to the patient, with the recent history of my discoveries respecting her, adding that I should be very grateful for information as to her condition when he saw her, his opinion of her malady, the date of his last attendance, and the place at which she

was then living. And I wished, if possible, further to learn whether he could point out to me any channel of inquiry through which I might be likely to gain intelligence respecting her personal effects, which were believed, when she was at Liverpool, to be of considerable value. Lastly, I desired the doctor to choose his own time for furnishing me with such particulars as he might be able to communicate, delicately intimating that I was acting officially for the family.

He replied—"There is no time like the present; the subject is before me, and is quite in my mind now. A very few minutes will suffice to answer your inquiries." With the manuscript open before him, the doctor continued as follows:—

"I see that I first saw Mrs. Parkinson at ——— Street, Mayfair, on the 19th of December last. She had recently arrived; and I repeated my visits on the 21st, the 23rd, and the 26th, by which time I satisfied myself that she was the subject of chronic change taking place in the brain, and affecting, probably, an anterior lobe. I believed that this had most likely arisen from severe illness, which may have occurred some months or even a year before. I need hardly say

that I was fully aware of that peculiarity in her case, namely, her total inability to remember the names of her only friends here, and the place of their abode—a condition which in her circumstances was exceedingly distressing. I did all I could to afford her practical help in relation to this difficulty, but without success. Her general health was at times fairly good, and she drove and walked about a little with her nurse; but her moods were extremely variable; she was capable on some days of making exertions both mental and physical which might have surprised you, while on others she was almost helpless; and she was very difficult to manage or control, and particularly, as her nurse said, ‘to get on with.’ I continued to see her from time to time, and on the 4th of January remarked the absence of the nurse. Mrs. Parkinson told me that she had got rid of her, and was glad to have done so, as there was a female servant in the hotel who suited her better. On that day she thought proper to tell me of some boxes containing property of value that she had in her room, and I ventured to advise her strongly, as she had no friends

accessible, to place them in some recognized safe depository, as no hotel would be answerable for loss by robbery or otherwise. I confess that after the absence of the nurse I was less satisfied than before with her position alone at an hotel, on general grounds I mean, not having the slightest reason to dissent from the estimate which is universally entertained of the respectability of the landlord there, and of the excellence of his arrangements. I continued to visit her every three or four days, advising her generally according to the best of my judgment. On the 11th of February, at which date she was certainly better, she obtained my consent to her calling on me for the next visit, which she said she should prefer now for the present to do. I never saw her again. I went to the hotel about a fortnight afterwards to inquire for her, and learned that she had for some time complained of difficulty in meeting the weekly account, stating that her funds had unexpectedly failed her, and that she had made up her mind with much reluctance to leave, and this she had done on the 19th of February, for a hotel near Hanover Square. The pecuniary difficulty

was probably her real motive for requesting me to cease my attendance, and it was one for which I had not the slightest suspicion there was any ground, since I had understood her to be a person of considerable means. I desired the landlord to make inquiries respecting her, for I was very anxious about the poor woman, and he reported to me two or three days afterwards that he had done so; that she had left the hotel just referred to, the manager of which had not the slightest idea to what place she had gone. I have now told you all that I know. I am exceedingly sorry that no examination of the brain, after death, took place; although it would have been of little value unless conducted by a thoroughly-informed and practised pathologist, with some previous knowledge of the case. It appears to me that you should inquire of the landlord in Mayfair for information he may be able to give you respecting the fate of her personal effects, her boxes, etc., the safety of which was evidently an occasional source of anxiety to her."

I thanked the doctor for the clear and distinct statement he had given me, without hurry and

without loss of time—for I had not been in the room more than a quarter of an hour—and leaving in his hand the usual honorarium for a man in his position, I begged he would do me the favour to say if it sufficed for such a communication; he replied “Quite so,” and wished me good morning.

Next day I went to the Mayfair hotel, of which visit I need say no more than this, viz., that I learned from the servants that Mrs. Parkinson was in the habit of going about in a cab on those days when her condition was better than usual, sometimes attended by one of themselves, but usually alone, often taking with her a parcel which was not brought back when she returned. Her reserved manner made it impossible for the landlord to question her, and he had indeed no pretext for doing so, only he regretted that the poor woman had not some friends to see her and take care of her. On two occasions on which the chambermaid who had charge of my aunt's room, and gave her personal attendance when the nurse left, accompanied her on an expedition of this kind, the girl remaining in the cab while my aunt went

to some place not far distant, there was little doubt in the girl's mind that the object of the visit was to dispose of some article of value. And I was assured that no one had observed the removal or the destination of any particular box or other packages, none of which were very large. Her trunks were not numerous; she was travelling alone, and did not appear to carry about with her more luggage than under such circumstances might be regarded as necessary.

CHAPTER XI.

ALLISON COMES IN FOR COFFEE.

I HAD returned to my rooms from dinner at the "Larder" to make my own cup of strong and fragrant coffee, that simple but exquisite luxury which can be had only in this country, and very rarely elsewhere—after a now somewhat wide experience—except on conditions in part expressed above and partly understood.

For there are three conditions at least which are certainly essential, and they are of equal importance; the first is, that the maker should possess good coffee freshly roasted and ground; secondly, that he should know how to make the infusion; and thirdly, that he should perform the process himself, relegating no part of the duty, certainly not the boiling of the water, to any other person whatsoever.

The result of this diurnal brew of mine was the occasional appearance of a friend, one of two or three chosen intimates, who alone were aware of my secret and the time of the ceremony. To them only it was known that at eight o'clock I allowed myself, as a rule, before the studies of the evening commenced, an hour devoted to quiet digestion, a sacrifice of burnt-offering forming part of the rite, in other words, that a pipe of peace would in some form or other attend the coffee.

This evening, the 2nd of May, the pawnshop adventure having occupied the late afternoon, I was a little behind time. I was about to commence operations when there was a knock at the door, in which I at once recognized, by its brisk incisive initiative, and its gradual subsidence in delicate notes almost like a bar of Chopin, the light and flexible hand of the house-surgeon.

What a clue to character most men offer you thus on your very threshold! I don't know whether a truer estimate of energy, and of delicacy too, may not be made from a man's knock than from his handwriting. The latter is influenced so much by external circumstances, such as early

training, the distinct conventional styles of professions and of trades, that spontaneity of effort, the outcome of a man's very pith, are mostly obscured in penmanship; but with few exceptions express their character direct upon his door-knocking. It is on this account, much as I hate a noise, that as a student of my species, I regret the advent of the electric bell.

Allison is never kept waiting at that door. My dirty little maid, who understands door-knocking as well as I do, and, being feminine, probably better, rushes to let in my friend without seeking any leave from me, indeed that goes without saying. It is my firm belief that she cherishes a sneaking admiration, which she withholds from me (am I jealous?), for that smart bright-eyed fellow who nods her a familiar smile, and says nothing more than "Charley in?" to have my door opened in a twinkling. She utters, as in duty bound, the usual formality, "Mr. Allison, please sir," in a high recitative, with a sly admiring look at him from one corner of her eye—I can see it—as she withdraws through the closing door.

"Now," exclaimed Allison, as he grasped my hand, "I know your plan, you systematic dog,

and won't stay more than the hour, and then you shall work all night if you like—and quite right too.”

“ My dear Allison, I'm not on duty now ; I have no work and no relish for it, that's a fact, and it's a disgusting one too for a fellow who has so much of it to do. Come and cheer me a bit. I can't tell you how glad I am to see you. And you're just in the nick of time ; I haven't made the coffee yet. Settle yourself in that arm-chair and light your weed.”

“ I obey”—indistinctly ; with a cigarette in his mouth and striking a match.

“ Now then, Allison,” said I, proceeding with the coffee, “ all about yesterday, if you please.”

“ When you have done your cookery,” said he, quietly consuming his smoke, in full repose upon the chair.

I also was soon at rest, before him. The coffee, as good as usual, and as hot as it can be sipped : moreover, it is sipped with that complete satisfaction which only co-exists with a conviction that more can be had from the “ kaffee kanne” there, with a little blue flame beneath it. It is the known possibility of obtaining one cup only, that terrible

after-dinner conventionalism, which carries so bitter a pang with every sip ; the better the coffee the keener the anguish that this cup closes my experience, and that beyond it lies no future ! Society has decreed that after dinner I may swim in my host's " Mouton," if he has any ; but that the tiniest cup in the house should be found, and that once only should it be served me with coffee, is a usage which ranks above law.

After all, as what is served for coffee is usually bad, and is never hot, what does it signify ?

Such were my reflections during Allison's silence, as I determined the quantity we might desire to consume, and was occupied in the making thereof.

" By Jove, that is good—yes, fill it," said Allison, as I offered to replenish his cup. " You ought to have been with us yesterday ; the chief had a good reception ; he was in excellent form, and everything went well. An elbow joint, a re-section of the knee in a lad ; and ligature of the left carotid trunk—what say you to that ? "

" Did that come last, because if so I would have made a push for it ? I was doing a bit of

consultation on my own account at two o'clock ; actually sitting in a patient's chair and feeling very small ; where, think you ? Under the quiet steady eye of old Wynchester, of all men in the world. That's what kept me away."

" We took our ligature first, so that would have been out of the question," replied Allison ; " but what on earth were you about consulting Wynchester ? You're not going wrong in your head, are you ? Two signs of it certainly ; out of the way on operating day, and occupying a slice of Wynchester's time ; and we know what that's worth, or rather who does know but himself ? It must be an expensive luxury whoever enjoys it !"

" My belief is," said I, " that he's worth his price. Never saw a clearer-headed, shrewder old buffer ! He said exactly what there was to be said, and did not waste a word ; and everything as clear as daylight. It seems to me that whether you buy a hat or an opinion, the best is the cheapest in the long run. That's common sense, I take it, and no sign of my ' head going wrong,' I hope, as you are considerate enough to suggest. My dear Allison, I am deep in the history of my

old woman, the body you know, and Wynchester is a contributor thereto."

"What, still at that business, Kingston? There's some mystery about this, so now you've got to tell me; didn't you say so when I saw you in my room the other day?"

"Of course I did; I have no secrets from you, if you like me to utter a sentiment. And now, if you will give me the time, I'll tell you this one; only as you'll see, it is one. Light another cigar; my hour to-night lasts all the evening, for I am not at serious work yet, although I can clearly see it will soon begin. List, Allison, while I a tale unfold. Do you remember my telling you about my old aunt and her levanting to America with a new husband, *et cætera*?"

"Perfectly well; quite a graphic study of the situation; it was at the 'Larder' just three weeks ago. I remember every word."

"Graphic you say, do you? Well, in that case, my friend, fancy yourself with me only three days after that dinner, in the dissecting-room, us two, and alone by ourselves. Let me raise the sheet from that pale, delicate form on which I have commenced the 'anterior

triangle,' and that I say to you, Behold my aunt!"

"Good God, Kingston!"

"My aunt it was. I took care to transform her by report into my old nurse as an excuse for performing the last rites; and so please let the report remain, but of the fact there is no word from me to any single ear but yours, Allison."

"You're safe enough, as you know, my dear fellow. But what is it all to lead to? There may be a good deal to come out of all this."

"Yes, or nothing; in fact, 'neck or nothing' describes the situation. I'll tell you as briefly as possible. I want some one with a head on his shoulders to tell it to. Of course, the facts are well enough known at home, that is, in the family, not beyond it. But Laxenford, which in some circumstances would give me counsel and help, such as I should vainly seek elsewhere, isn't exactly the place to originate a bold and safe course when one's difficulties are altogether of the earth, earthy. Well, here is the situation now. My Aunt Wyndham married Captain Parkinson in 1849, now eight years ago, and went to Cleveland, with £1500 a-year of her

own, and no settlement. Parkinson was drowned nearly two years ago, after which she was very ill. When better, she came over, intending to visit us, last November, bringing with her no doubt a considerable amount of property. She was very ill in crossing, showing much mental disturbance, according to the ship's doctor, who took her to a hotel at Liverpool, where she is attended by Dr. Transom for about six weeks. He discovers that she is absolutely without memory of certain familiar facts, among them the names and residences of her friends here, that is of us. Nothing recalls these lost facts, and no clue to them is to be had. It is his belief also that she has much property of various kinds in her luggage, particularly in certain boxes. When she is able to move, he sends her with a trusty nurse to a quiet hotel in Mayfair, and desires her to consult Dr. Wynchester, who finds her with marked disease of the brain. He watches her for some time, and never observes any sign of reappearing memory. Thus far all is comprehensible; but gradually and unexpectedly it appears that she is in pecuniary difficulties, has to find cheaper lodgings, at last pawns her things, and

descends in the scale of misery until she dies a pauper's death in Marylebone Workhouse, and finally comes to us an unclaimed body here. The rest you know."

"What a tragedy!" exclaimed Allison.

"I am following out the steps of it, and what I have told you is the result of my labours thus far. For the present I have lost the scent, and am trying to pick it up again."

"What has become of the valuables?" inquired Allison.

"Precisely. They can't have been spent in board and lodging; there has not been time enough for that. I naturally fear robbery or foul play. One does not know what to think."

"Have you told the story to the police?" asked Allison.

"No, I haven't," I replied; "I don't see what they can do. If I could say such or such articles were missing, that might lead to something; but I have nothing of the kind to inquire for. Then I await an important letter from the American lawyers, which I hope to have soon. I wrote on the 22nd of last month. I can't expect a reply for a fortnight from the present date at the

earliest, and this letter, when it comes, may furnish hints for further research."

I then gave Allison some details of my visits to the Marylebone Infirmary, to Rabbet's Court, and to the lodging-house, besides Dr. Wynchester's opinion and remarks on the case, with all of which the reader is acquainted.

After consideration he said, "At all events this much is certain: you, or rather your father, must be the heir-at-law if she has died without a will, and if there is a will the lawyers will probably be able to inform you of the fact. As there was no family and the husband was dead, she must surely have been left mistress of what was her own property originally, and she could have no one else than you to leave it to. So that it is probably safe in America somewhere, only I foresee that you'll have to go there and look after it. And I think in the end I shall have to congratulate you on inheriting a handsome estate."

"All this sounds well," replied I, "and I hope may turn out to be true; but Dr. Transom evidently entertained a suspicion that before leaving America she had realized most, if not all, of her

property, and, as I have just told you, that she had brought it with her in some portable form, probably in a strong box or two, and this was corroborated by the observation of the landlord and waiters at the Liverpool hotel. Now, of the strong boxes I have found no trace whatever, and as I have no description of their appearance for identification, and no knowledge whatever of their contents, I can't describe them to the police. However, something of that kind could be got at the hotel, I dare say."

"I should take the business to Scotland Yard all the same, and ask what they think of it there. It can do no harm," said Allison.

"I think you are right, and I shall probably take your advice. Meantime I am coming to the conclusion that I must now go to work, endeavour to make up for lost time, and suspend further operations until I have heard from America."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Allison, "because such occupation as yours has been during the last three weeks is terribly distracting, and the sooner you get into the old groove the better. You have fairly set the inquiry going,

and may now leave it with advantage in the hands of the professional detective."

"And now, Allison, that I have you here, I am going to propose some future arrangements. My father and mother have often charged me to bring you down to Laxenford. You have never seen our Eastern counties, not that we have so much to show, but we can do this: we can give you as good a day among the partridges as you will meet with between the four seas, and that is something. Our very good neighbour, Sir George Andover, and naturally the squire of the place, has for the last three or four years always given me a few days with him over some of the best ground in Suffolk, and is always ready to receive one good friend of mine. We are excellent allies always, and the rector and he are hand in glove, as squire and parson in the same parish always should be."

"My dear Kingston, I shall be delighted. It is not the first time you've trailed that fly lightly and distantly across my vision, but never with such good aim as at this moment, and I rise to it—greedily. Formally, then, I accept. But there are more than three months before that good time comes."

“Exactly ; listen, then, to my plan. My examination comes on at the end of July ; your house-surgeoncy must expire about the same time, or soon after. I shall work on here till the middle of August. You might come down to Laxenford at the latter end of that month, and we will amuse ourselves about the country first and get some legs to walk with, and then we shall be ready to attack the birds with Sir George on the 1st of September if he will have us, or as soon after as may be convenient to him. We are neither of us, I presume, shots of the first rank, but respectable. I have been too much in it ever since I was a boy not to be that, and your experience of grouse on the Yorkshire moors will make our quiet pottering ways among the turnips easy.”

“Agreed ; your arrangements will suit me to a hair. The house-surgeoncy expires on July 31st. I shall go down soon after to my Yorkshire friends, and be ready for a few days there on or after August 12th ; and then having had as much of the cream as I can get off that dish of sport, I shall gladly come and help you to skim yours.”

We chatted and smoked till late, when, having opened the window of my little room to admit fresh air, I walked with him to his hospital quarters to get a breath of it myself before coming back to rest. Allison's society, and the pleasant prospects which were rising before us, had greatly cheered me, and my disturbed mental machinery was clearly about to regain its natural mode of action before long.

CHAPTER XII.

I AM EXAMINED AT THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF
SURGEONS.

AFTER further reflection, I decided to follow Allison's suggestion and place the business in proper hands at the head-quarters of police, and seek their advice respecting it. When my statement had been fully taken down, I was told to call in two days, and that I should then hear what an experienced officer thought of it. I did so, and after replying to a few more questions, he told me there could be little doubt of the presence of valuable property in one or two of the packages brought to the hotel in Mayfair, or of the fact that it disappeared during my aunt's residence in that place, and not subsequently. Further, he believed that if she were robbed during that

period, the fact must have been unknown to her, for if otherwise she would have proclaimed her loss in the house, and probably named it to Dr. Wynchester. The property, then, must have been either placed by herself in some safe keeping, thus following the advice the doctor had given her, in which case she might have forgotten the fact and the circumstances relating to it, a conceivable occurrence in her state of mind; or it must have been abstracted from the box by some other person or persons without arousing her suspicion. And inasmuch as its presence there was known to the servants, particularly to that one who had attached herself to my aunt's person, he considered that there was a strong presumption that it was removed by this girl with or without an accomplice, the latter being much more likely than the contrary supposition. He proposed that the girl's movements should be watched. If she had effected the robbery, some signs of it would soon be obvious, said the officer, about her person; he declared that the natural vanity of her sex would soon have to be gratified, and that we should find her with a gold watch or with unusual ornaments, or with a better dress than

ought to be expected for her position in life, on her Sundays out, on which days he would send an officer to watch her closely. And he added, that thus we shall not long be in doubt as to her participation in the booty : we shall, moreover, learn whom she meets on those days, and ascertain without difficulty what accomplice she has, as she will be certain to have communication with him (for it would inevitably be a man) when she is free to go out for her recreation.

Accordingly, I admitted the force of his shrewd and cynical observations, based on a large criminal experience, and assented to his proposal, not sorry to shift the labour of further inquiry from my own shoulders to those of the regular agents, who understood the work better than I could do. I now speedily regained my old habits, and soon found myself among my usual companions, pursuing my studies in full view of the expected examination already referred to.

But the morning's post of May 26th brought me a letter from the American lawyers, which necessarily revived my anxieties.

Its tone was cautious but friendly. They informed me that Captain Parkinson was drowned

in December, 1855, and they expressed some surprise that I was not aware of this fact. My aunt had only learned it a month or so afterwards, and was the subject of very severe illness, which lasted three or four months, leaving her in a serious condition, and disqualifying her for any active engagement for a considerable time after. During the summer of 1856, however, she gradually regained much of her strength. Captain Parkinson had left a will constituting his widow sole executor and residuary legatee, after the payment of a few trifling legacies to friends. She duly administered, after which she expressed her desire and intention to visit her friends, the Reverend C. Kingston and his family, in Suffolk, England, and in any case to settle in that country. She held most of her property in the form of American bonds and shares, with the nature of which they were acquainted. It had been thus held by Captain Parkinson himself, and it was not unlikely that she had taken with her these securities and other valuable effects as luggage. They communicated these facts in obedience to our inquiries, being satisfied by the late Mrs. Parkinson's statement, more than once repeated, that

she had no other relatives than the Kingstons ; and they would therefore inform me further that they themselves held no securities or papers, nor any will belonging to her, nor any further instructions relating to property or of any other nature whatever. If any more formal statement relating to the property, or any affidavits or vouchers should be required for the transaction of further business in this matter, all such future proceedings must of course be taken with the ordinary legal formalities specially provided in such conditions, for transactions between the subjects of the two countries.

The inference from all this was clear. Mrs. Parkinson had brought all her property with her, and as far as we were able to ascertain that property had disappeared. I carried my letter to the police, who had had the affair in hand for about three weeks, and who had thus far learned nothing. The officer stated that the servant girl appeared to be steady, and had shown no sign of possessing ill-gotten property or of having suspicious associates, that she was, in fact, conducting herself with propriety so far as he could ascertain. It was necessary, however, to remember, he said,

that it would be difficult for her or her companions to realize anything from such securities at present, by sale either of the bonds or of the coupons ; and that whoever had them would keep them out of sight for some time, and then would not dispose of them here but most likely take them to a foreign market. He had also obtained from the Mayfair hotel a description of the tin boxes referred to, which were evidently of American make, and for these search had been made at the public repositories and among the pawnbrokers, but nothing answering to the description had been brought to light. Further, special inquiries had been made at the hotel near Hanover Square at which my aunt passed three or four days before going to the lodging-house, but without learning any new fact respecting her. They finally advised that if the American lawyers who had written us respecting the securities possessed a list of them, with the number of each bond, which they naturally would have, a copy of it must be obtained forthwith even should it be necessary to send a man over for the purpose, for time ought not to be lost. My father's solicitor might perhaps first make an application duly

certified here, and this might perhaps bring the description required.

All this I communicated to my father, and he did not hesitate to follow up the course pointed out. His solicitor at Laxenford came up at once to consult his London agents—men who thoroughly understood what was necessary, and the application advised was made without delay.

From this time forward for about seven or eight weeks my time was devoted to regular and effective work. At the end of June my sister wrote me that Katie Clavering had come to town on a visit of three weeks to a relative in Tyburnia, and that she was enjoying as much sight-seeing and gaiety as could be administered during that brief period in the height of the season to a country girl who saw town for the first time since bidding adieu to short frocks. No opportunity, however, was afforded me to meet or even to see her, and although undoubtedly much disturbed by the knowledge that she would necessarily become the subject of many new impressions, and that she must inevitably produce impressions on others which might be powerful, I had no ground for complaint, having no claim whatever to be

considered by her friends. My state of mind was not a happy one, and when not actually immersed in study, which fortunately demanded almost all my waking hours, the short intervals of cessation rendered necessary by exhausted mental vigour were embittered by recollections of recent disappointment, and by anxious forebodings with which none but the faintest hopes were intermingled.

For we had evidently exhausted all known sources of inquiry relative to my aunt's property; every incident which seemed likely to afford a clue to the discovery had been examined without result, and he who could have farther pursued a search, as to the direction of which no sign of guidance in any shape existed, must have been a person of very sanguine temperament. I felt that my father had been justified by events in discouraging my exertions at the outset, although, had they not been made earnestly and perseveringly, neither my sister nor I would ever have been satisfied.

I was not to be a favourite of Fortune; the case was a hard one, for my expectations had been great, and not without warrant, although I

was not aware how great they were until their utter destruction revealed the truth, and taught me how the bare possibility of our acquiring the valuable property which had undoubtedly been brought over by my aunt had gradually and insidiously assumed the form of strong probability in my mind. I must henceforth rely on my own resources; and this resolution meant nothing less than the keenest engagement in professional labour for several years by myself alone, not merely uncheered by any association with Katie, but without the right, or even the wish under these circumstances, to invite her to share the prospect before me. The forecast of my career was indeed a painful one at this crisis.

But the duty of the moment was clear. Untrammelled by all other considerations, I had every motive to prepare myself well for the coming ordeal, which, although not severe, was one of which the issues must necessarily be uncertain for any man however diligent and competent he might be: I mean the examination for the membership of the Royal College of Surgeons. At that time it was conducted in a manner very different from that which is adopted now. It

consisted solely of questions personally addressed to the candidate during the short term of one hour by several different examiners in succession, each acting entirely according to his own taste and discretion. But it was this very character of brevity, combined with the certainty of encountering not less than four different examiners, which constituted a real source of danger even to the best prepared candidate. Each examiner was more or less a surgical celebrity, almost necessarily possessing some peculiarity in his experience or some singularity of view, I will not say crotchet; a fact which occasionally gave rise to a series of questions, unfortunate for a student who, well grounded in the principles and in the general practice of his art, might still have no acquaintance with the peculiarities in question, and thus might fail in each of the four cases to give the answers expected by the examiners.

My lot to "go up," as it was called, fell on Thursday evening, the 23rd of July, and it was the last chance offered during the summer session.

The candidates, twelve in number, were summoned from the different schools and colleges

chiefly in London, to attend, about seven o'clock in the evening, at the substantial grey building, with portico in classic style, which forms the centre of the south side of the square of Lincoln's Inn Fields. A small room was allotted to them in which to await their turns for admission to the hall of the library upstairs in which the dreaded proceedings were to take place. In the centre of each of the four sides of the long, spacious, and dimly-lighted interior, lined with books throughout, was a small table; at each table sat two examiners, and one vacant chair in front of them close by accommodated the victim of the inquiry. The President of the College, in his robes and chair, occupied a dignified and independent position of general superintendence. Four students at a time were ushered in with ceremony. One was conducted to each table, and each remained there receiving and answering questions, so far as he was able to answer, precisely a quarter of an hour, being shifted to the next table by signal from the President, who rang a bell to announce the time. By this arrangement one hour sufficed for the examination of the first batch of four candidates. The same process was repeated twice,

so that the twelve were disposed of in three hours. I was in the third batch, and I can still recall the anxious faces of the men, the eager inquiries for hints and scraps of information which were interchanged in the waiting-room among those who had been up and those who had yet to go, besides the speculation respecting their fate, not to be revealed until the examinations were concluded. We were then ushered in a body into the library, and ranged in line before our examiners, now seated in state together with the President, when our respective sentences were read to us. Most of us had been fortunate enough to pass the ordeal successfully, myself among them, and we were not greatly moved, I believe, by the fate of one who was "ploughed," and of two who were "advised" to read for six months longer, with permission again to present themselves. For all those who had passed forthwith began to feel a certain degree of contempt for the very slight test, as it now appeared to us, which for years had been contemplated with awe and anxiety. On leaving the library we were not long in rushing off with some college comrades who were waiting below to learn

our fate—all the successful men in tip-top spirits—some to Scott's oyster rooms at the top of the Haymarket or some similar place, for a well-earned supper; and one or two, whose homes were in town, to the anxious family circles awaiting the news there. My despatch was posted at one of the small morning hours to the family at Laxenford, where the little event, duly magnified, became the talk of the village during the day. My old friend John learned the important fact from Mrs. Dickson, and told the little wizen-faced old woman, his spouse, with wrinkled face, stiff joints, and twisted knotted fingers, propped up by cushions in her chair; "They dew sayh as how Marser Charley 'a cum off wi' flyin' colours up there in Lunnun; 'cordin' tew all accounts, he bet 'em all, he did: I was nation glad to hare it for he's a right good sort, and ollos was."

"And how thankful shall I be," quavered the old woman, "if, plase God, he'll cure my rheumatics now, when he come here nex' time!"

CHAPTER XIII.

FANNY HENDERSON RE-APPEARS TO SOME PURPOSE.

DURING the day or two following the event just recorded, I amused myself generally as much as circumstances permitted me to do, and passed my evenings with Allison, whose residence at the hospital was to close on the 31st inst., now only five or six days hence, at the end of which time he left for Yorkshire, agreeing that I should await his return to London on or about the 21st of August, when we were to go down together to Laxenford. I now pursued a moderate course of morning reading and of hospital visiting in the afternoon with the chiefs or with their subordinates, who were beginning to release the former for their summer vacation rambles. Most of the men had left or were leaving for the country, and by the middle of the month a few only were to be seen about the place.

I was seated one hot sunny morning in my room—it was the 17th—rather lazily reading and getting tired of it, when a single knock at the front door, of which I naturally took no heed, was observed by me to be followed by a prolonged colloquy in the little passage just outside my sitting-room door. Two voices were heard, and one of them evidently belonged to my dirty little maid. After hearing sounds which suggested a certain slight degree of altercation, there was a tap at my door, followed by the opening thereof to an extent just sufficient to admit the half of that young person's form to be visible, as if, conscious of unusual dirt, she desired to show as little of it as possible. I had on previous occasions observed, and had philosophically noted, that what may be poetically termed her condition of *déshabille* always attained its maximum in the forenoon, and gradually approached what it would be a flattery to call a minimum in the after part of the day.

Looking red and excited, as well as more soiled than usual, she said, "Please, sir, here's a woman and child wants to come in and see you." Then, manifesting by her expression that for her part

she devoutly hoped my answer might be given in the negative, she continued, "Please, sir, am I to let 'em in?" Without the faintest idea of what these applicants could want, I rose, indicating that I would come into the passage, doing so at the same time, when, to my astonishment, there stood before me the tall figure of Fanny Henderson.

"Oh!" said I; "is it you, Mrs. Henderson; what has brought you here this fine morning?"

"If you'll have the goodness to let me come in and speak to you, I shall be glad," said she.

"Certainly," I replied; and, evidently to the chagrin of my little janitor, I showed Henderson in and dismissed the former.

"Sit down, Fanny," said I; "you're looking remarkably well. How's the little one?"

Fanny's appearance, it may be said, was infinitely more respectable to-day than when I last saw her in her miserable garret in Rabbet's Court; and her good looks were enhanced by a pretty summer dress appropriate to warmth and sunshine; still more by a good-tempered smile, which had replaced, at all events for the time,

the stamp of sullen discontent which marked her features when last I saw her.

“Thank you, sir, the baby’s pretty well, but fractious with his teeth,” and as I gave no further sign of speech, she continued—“I hardly like to come and trouble you here, sir, and I was doubtful if I should find you, but I felt sure you would like to have anything more of the poor lady’s, because you said so, very particularly, and gave me your card on purpose. So if I’ve done wrong you must forgive me, sir. I must tell you that I have been going on ever since up in that filthy place, where you came up and found me that day—it must be between three and four months—until Monday last, as this is Thursday, and now I’ve moved to much nicer lodgings, where, at all events, I’ve no call to be ashamed of myself if anyone wants to see me. Well, sir, before I left the place, of course all the bits of stuff such as they were were taken down, so as to pick out anything that might be worth removing. You remember the bed perhaps, sir?”

“Perfectly,” said I; “the wooden stump bedstead, with several bags or sacks half-stuffed and closely packed together, so as to make a sort of mattress.”

“What notice you must have took, sir! That was it exactly. Well, when we came to move those sacks—and I’m sure they haven’t been moved before since I’ve been in the place, and that’s more than a year—I found this little old red pocket-book lying in flat between two of those sacks, and I looked at it, and I do believe it must have been put there by that poor old creature. There’s a name in it, and several bits of writing here and there, and things. At all events, said I to myself, I’ll take that to Mr. Kingston the first morning I can, and ask him what he thinks of it,” handing me the article described.

I took it, I confess, with a somewhat tremulous hand, and with an eagerness which, however, I managed to control. It was an American pocket-book or diary for the year 1856, with red roan cover and tuck. On the first page was written in a female hand, “A. M. Parkinson, Cleveland.”

Showing the name to her—“Yes, indeed,” said I, “that was the old lady’s name, and this was her book, and I shall be very pleased to have it and look at it, for I have never yet been able to find out half as much of her history as I have wished to do.”

"I am so glad," said she. "You were very kind to me when I most wanted kindness, and the help you gave me kept me and the children out of much trouble. Do you know," she said, "I think the old dear must have set some store by that book, and my belief is that she took the trouble to hide it up, as she thought, in a safe place, before she let me see what she had besides in her pocket. You remember she told me to do that, sir?"

"I remember."

"And to think it should have laid there all this time! Then I hoped to find something else, but I didn't, although I searched everywhere. So far as I am concerned, there's no more to be found. I only wish it were something more worth the finding! You never got any more pawn-tickets, did you, sir?"

"No, Fanny, never," said I; "in fact, although I discovered two or three boxes and trunks in the lodging she left before you found her, I have never met with anything which could have been of any use to her or to anybody else."

After a little further chat about the same subject, and also on her own affairs and prospects,

which it is not necessary to relate here, I said, "Now, Fanny, you must allow me to offer you something for your trouble in coming here this morning. I don't know how far you have to go back, but you mustn't carry that big child about all day, strong and hearty as you seem; he is getting very heavy, to look at him."

"No, sir, please, you musn't name that, and what is more, it isn't necessary—no, indeed, it isn't, or I wouldn't say so. Besides, I came in a cab to the corner of the street, but didn't like to be set down at your door. If you should want any more information at any time about what happened when the poor soul was with me—I only wish I had been as well off then as I am now and she shouldn't have wanted for anything—I hope you'll let me know; p'raps you wouldn't mind taking my card," giving it me.

"By no means, Fanny; I am sure I'm glad to see you in clover. I shall take care of your address; no one knows but I might want to see you about the matter again; and for my part, if I can be useful to you or to the children, let me know. One good turn deserves another."

"Thank you kindly," she replied; "I'm very

glad I found you at home and could give you the book. I fancy it may have something in it after all."

I rang my bell and walked out with her to the door. The dirty little maid came up. I saw by Fanny's eye that she was preparing a retort for that young person, who had evidently not at first been unduly polite, for, holding up the skirts of her ample dress with a somewhat dignified movement, and looking down upon the girl, she said with an air I had not before remarked, "Have the goodness to call me a hansom, will you?"

"Yes, get one at once," said I.

Mary Jane bustled off round the corner and came back in the hansom, not unwilling to enjoy the brief luxury of a drive in that delightful vehicle, but by no means openly manifesting her delight. Fanny's revenge was complete and triumphant as she said, "Thank you, my girl," giving her a shilling, and nodding a friendly adieu to myself.

I went back into my room, eager to have the opportunity of examining the little book by myself alone. A cursory survey revealed the fact that there were several entries in it made by my aunt

during the autumn of the preceding year; that several payments were noted down about the earlier part of that time, with dates and names of places. There were three pockets, of which two opened outwards, one in each cover; the third was in the reverse position, opening inwardly in a more secure situation. In this latter I found a card.

Fancy my astonishment, blended with another feeling, which at this moment I scarcely dared permit myself to recognize as a compound of delight and triumph, on finding this card to be a receipt for several packages stored at a public repository. As upon my desk it now lay before me, I read the statement, partly printed and partly written thereon, from which it appeared to be the formal acknowledgment by the well-known and respectable firm Messrs. Bilberry & Co., that they retained on behalf of Anna Maria Parkinson of —— Hotel, Mayfair, the undermentioned property confided for safe keeping by her to them: to wit, two deal boxes, a carpet bag and a package of clothes rolled up in canvas, and that the afore-said property was placed in a room, No. —, with leave of access on her part to it at any time, or to

remove the whole or any part thereof on payment of rent at the rate of — per month from the date recorded on the face of the instrument, that date being January 6th, 1857.

My first impulse was to go straight to the warehouse, with the receipt as my authority, and demand the property to which it related. But a few moments' reflection convinced me that the guardians thereof would never part with it to any person other than Anna Maria Parkinson, without indubitable proof of right to remove it derived from the proprietor and depositor. No statement of mine, even supposing me to be her nearest relative, and equally in either case whether she were living or had deceased, would be accepted by the holders as entitling them to quit possession of any goods she had confided to their keeping.

That I had found a clue at last to the missing luggage seemed certain, and therefore such an obstacle to the gratification of my ardent curiosity was intensely disappointing. But, further, might it not prove to be a very formidable obstacle, for how was it possible for us to sustain a claim to the property if we held no authority in the form of a will? Then another fact, not at first observed,

now aroused a horrible suspicion in my mind. I read and re-read the little document and found no sign of a tin box! After all, had that apparently much-treasured package not been entrusted to the Messrs. Bilberry, having perhaps been stolen, in which case the property might consist simply of superfluous encumbrances of which my aunt desired to be rid? Had she not feared to entrust the chief of her treasures to the public warehouse, as in her view insufficiently safe for such a purpose? For, supposing it to have been deposited there, she would have had no difficulty in obtaining therefrom the means of meeting all her wants, and placing herself in circumstances of comfort whenever the necessity for fresh funds arose. On the other hand, it was impossible to resist the not improbable conclusion that her fatal defect of memory might deprive her, not only of the knowledge that she had made the deposit in question, but also that she possessed a voucher thereof in the secret pocket of her book. The single idea that the book was an important one, containing various memoranda, etc., might quite consistently with her state of brain, be the sole fact she was capable of retaining in reference to the subject.

And thus that wary secretiveness, which in her was almost a natural instinct, might suffice to prompt her when almost at the hour of death to hide away the one article she then desired to retain, in a crevice of her bed, which in her feeble state of mind she had no idea of quitting any more than she could have of quitting life itself, before she authorized Fanny to empty her pocket and utilize its contents such as they were, an occurrence which the reader may perhaps be able to remember.

Perplexed by these contending speculations, and uncertain as to my power to act, the question arose—shall I seek counsel of the police, or go at once to Laxenford? I decided on the latter course, preferring to take a friendly legal opinion, in the first place, to the responsibility of making known my discovery, even in Scotland Yard. I took the next train about midday, and startled the little circle at the rectory by my sudden apparition late in the afternoon. My father and I called at once on Mr. Westerham, our solicitor there, who kindly received us, although his office was closed, when we related to him our story. He enlightened my natural ignorance on the

question of our power to obtain the warehoused property, although we were unaware of the existence of a will, and could only surmise that such an instrument existed, the ground for which will soon be apparent. My father was the next of kin, and could therefore administer; and by that same right would not be refused possession of the packages, at any rate on giving an undertaking to indemnify the present holders. After some consultation it was agreed that my father and myself, accompanied by Mr. Westerham, should go to London early next morning for the purpose of making the application; and, if we succeeded in obtaining the packages, that we should go to the office of his town agents and examine the contents there, probably with one of the partners, so as to be able to take such further steps as the result might indicate in their opinion to be desirable.

That evening was passed at home with my father, mother, and sister, to all of whom the pocket-book was an object of great interest, and we made a joint investigation of its contents. Most of the entries had been made in pencil, and were not very distinct. Those which related to

her journey here consisted almost entirely of memoranda of payments, and of arrivals and departures of which the dates were recorded. Thus we discovered that my aunt arrived at New York on the 20th of October, 1856, staying at the —— Hotel. On the next day she appeared to have secured two berths in a state-room, obtaining the same for her sole use on board the "Russia," a Cunard steamer fixed to sail for Liverpool on Saturday, the 1st of November, from a note of the fact, together with one other of payment for the same. On the day following she sent for one of the partners of C. P. Trentham & Sons, well known lawyers there, giving instructions for a will, which, after two meetings for further instructions and rectification, seems to have been executed on the 30th of the month, the fees for which were paid on that date and entered. Notes of trifling purchases, and the amount of her hotel bill, were also duly recorded. The pencil notes now became irregular, and much less clear; some uncertain entries of expenditure following on the 13th, on which date she appears to have arrived at Liverpool. A considerable interval without entry ensued, and this was followed by rude attempts to

note down hotel expenditure, as well as a single payment to her doctor at the time of leaving Liverpool, the date of which was recorded as December the 18th. It appears that she almost relinquished the habit of making notes after this date, for the records were few and showed little purpose. Now and then an entry was found relating to the state of her health. But we were deeply interested and not a little touched by discovering here and there reference to some passages of Scripture indicating the direction of her thoughts, probably during her seasons of greatest anxiety and trouble. It was a painful task to realize the full meaning of these, and it is impossible to express how keenly we now felt the evidence which this slender record adduced of the terrible trials which our poor relative had undergone during the last few weeks of her life.

I was truly glad to feel myself warranted in believing, and in assuring my family of the fact, that by reason of the malady from which my aunt suffered, the condition of her brain was one in which mental anguish was far less poignant than it would have been under similar distressing circumstances affecting a person who still possessed

mental soundness. It was probable, indeed, that for the most part her capacity for mental suffering was greatly limited by the very disease which had occasioned her calamitous loss of memory, and its terrible consequences in her particular case.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GREAT DISCOVERY.

THE plan briefly sketched yesterday was carried out to the letter this morning. Mr. Westerham gave satisfactory guarantees for their safety in the transaction to Messrs. Bilberry, who indeed professed themselves quite content with the security which my father's presence ensured. The four packages were placed on a cab, and we drove direct to Bedford Row, to the well-known house there, who had been advised by post on the previous evening to be prepared to expect us. There we were furnished with a private room, to which the things were removed, and the examination was proceeded with at once. The two deal boxes, not of equal size, but varying between three or four feet in length, by two feet or more in width, appeared to have been packed in America,

and not to have been re-opened. The first and larger of the two contained mostly articles which my aunt had evidently long possessed, and which, being indisposed to part with, she had brought with her as old companions. Two clocks, several pieces of plate, articles of toilette, an old writing-desk, which was empty, colour-boxes and old sketch-books, a considerable number of foreign curios which had probably belonged to her husband, and had been brought home by him from his travels, were the chief articles brought to light. The second box contained almost entirely books, principally those by which she had been surrounded from her childhood upwards, some of them being recognized by my father as having filled her bookcase when she was an inmate of the rectory before her marriage.

The large package of clothes came next. This was very closely fastened by numerous stitches, which were unpicked, when various parcels of carefully-packed linen for personal wear, some fine old table linen marked by herself when young with the family crest in the corner, and also recognized, besides other things such as shawls and

articles of needlework which would not suffer from pressure, were exposed to view.

Arrived at this stage of our proceedings, during which it was manifest that our interest had gradually flagged, we were now forced to confess to each other that it was impossible to be sanguine as to the prospect of finding the missing securities. We were fatigued with the labour and disappointed with its results, and we turned wearily to the last package, an old-fashioned carpet bag that was strapped and locked. I had, of course, brought the bunch of keys which was handed to me at the Marylebone Infirmary, and trying the two Bramah keys which had been noted by me on my first seeing them there, found that one of them fitted the lock, and opened it. It was a single bag, tolerably capacious, without division, and opened widely enough to reveal its entire contents—one single roll of linen, which filled the space completely—nothing else !

Here, then, was the end of our hopes. We determined to remove the roll, not an easy task. It had probably not been a difficult task to force the package into its present situation, but the removal was by no means an easy undertaking. By

turning the bag bottom upwards and shaking it forcibly, the roll was at length dislodged. The outside was an ordinary large towel, which formed a closely-fitting envelope by being stitched tightly at the ends and at the free margin. We cut the stitches, and found the roll within still made up of other linen materials. As the towel was removed, I remarked the name of the hotel-keeper at Mayfair upon it, which struck me as a curious circumstance, constituting as it did an unwarrantable appropriation of that gentleman's property. The roll now on the table was fastened with large pins, forming a complete *chevaux de frise*, which in due time were also removed. The nature of the linen now met with may not, I fear, be withheld; I have to deal with facts only, and as a scrupulously accurate historian I cannot reconcile my conscience to the record of any statement here which is not a literal representation of fact; and at this important crisis of affairs especially, I may not be guilty even of a *suppressio veri*. The linen now met with consisted of one of my aunt's night-gowns, her name and number being marked thereon. She had evidently used it as the most convenient and comprehensive envelope wherewith

to accomplish the purpose she had in view when she employed it; little thinking, poor soul, that other hands than her own were destined to cut those stitches and withdraw those pins, her purpose having been to collect and secure in portable compass a vast number of papers chiefly printed, tied up in packets and bearing labels thereon. These had been laid within the garment named, than which nothing better could have been possibly devised for the purpose, and had then been rolled up tightly, elaborately pinned with true feminine art, and outwardly secured as above described.

These packages were now laid out on the table prepared. Here was doubtless what we had been seeking. Naturally enough we were now all once more keenly interested in the examination, and had forgotten the fatigue and disappointment of the previous proceedings, which had involved nearly two hours' work; for we had thought it prudent not even to admit a clerk to assist in the labour, desiring to guard the result of our search from the knowledge of a single person besides ourselves and our responsible legal advisers.

A cursory examination revealed the presence before us of a very considerable number of

American securities, evidently of various kinds. It was deemed advisable by our London solicitor that under the circumstances we should at once make an accurate list of these papers without any cessation from our labours, and this business was accordingly commenced at once. Lawyer as he was, however, he was also at this crisis sufficiently human—I might rather say humane—to quit us for a moment to order a lunch tray of light refreshments to be sent into the room, which, as we had eaten nothing since the early breakfast at Laxenford, we found exceedingly opportune.

Each packet had to be examined, the nominal value of each bond noted, and their number counted ; and the whole called over afterwards to check the first record and ensure the absence of error. The result of this operation appeared to show, as far as we were able to judge, that at any rate my aunt's property had not diminished in value since the time at which a rough estimate of it had been made, as noted in an earlier part of my story. As to what the present value of these securities might be, an approximate estimate only was possible, for few if any persons in this country knew the value of American railway bonds and

shares at this time (1857), not more than one or two being then even quoted on the London Stock Exchange. The United States bonds were known to the English investor, practically, however, only to a small extent, and their 6 per cents. formed a considerable portion of the property before us.

But one of the most important packets brought to light by our examination was one consisting of a large envelope doubly sealed, and purporting to be my aunt's will. The cover bore a date at the end of October, 1856, together with the names of a well-known firm of lawyers at New York, thus corroborating the entry in the pocket-book above alluded to. Mr. Westerham was desired to open it and to read it aloud. It then appeared that my aunt, impressed, on her arrival at New York, by some presentiment or dread respecting her approaching voyage across the ocean, and regarding generally the uncertainty of life, had thought it prudent to make her will before undertaking the journey. Having recited thus much respecting herself, the instrument proceeded in brief and simple terms to bequeath her entire property to her dear cousin, the Rev. Charles Kingston, of Laxenford, in the county of Suffolk,

England, constituting him her sole executor, subject, however, to one legacy only, which she desired him to pay at a conveniently early period after her decease, viz., the sum of five hundred pounds sterling, free of legacy duty, to her much-respected friend, Mrs. Dickson, grocer, of Laxenford aforesaid.

Our solicitor, Mr. Westerham, not as a matter of professional formality, but as an old friend, very warmly and sincerely congratulated my father, who received the news with his accustomed equanimity, quietly saying, as he put his hand on my shoulder, "Whatever good fortune has come to us from this source is due to the energy and perseverance of my boy Charley here, and I doubt not it will prove of much greater value to him and to his sister than it can possibly be to his mother and myself; and I heartily thank God on behalf of us all."

It was now agreed that the London firm should, for the present, place the securities before us in their fire-proof room below stairs, in an appropriate box duly labelled, giving to my father a copy of the list we had made, and a proper acknowledgment from the firm that they held

these for a time on his behalf. As we were now deeply interested in their safety, I remember that we accepted an invitation to inspect the place forthwith for ourselves, and that the result of our visit was highly satisfactory.

It was further arranged that steps should be taken without delay to prove the will ; and a second meeting in London for my father, of which he would be advised by Mr. Westerham, was soon to follow for that purpose. We now took our leave, and hastened to the Shoreditch Station to secure the first train for the station nearest to Laxenford.

On discussing the subject on the return journey, it now became clear that my aunt must have made the deposit at Bilberry's only a day or two after the advice given her by Dr. Wynchester that such a step would be most desirable. The strong tin box, which was known to be the object of so much solicitude on her part, was probably emptied for the purpose, perhaps, to avoid unusual observation as the object of her movements. All that could be remarked concerning such a removal, or as an explanation of it to those about her, needing to be stated by herself, if statement were necessary, would be that she desired to send there

her household stores for a time until she should find a settled home. There is no evidence that she took them herself, as they may have been sent by some servant or porter, a point, however, of no importance, and easily cleared up, no doubt, if necessary. What subsequently became of that notable box has never been learned; not possibly, therefore, it was at some later period stolen in the belief that it contained her treasure.

After further consideration, also, it was ultimately agreed with our friend the solicitor that not one word of the discovery was to be uttered by ourselves to any one. There were several good grounds for adopting this course for the present, and I had at least one cogent private reason for urging it upon the others. My mother and sister were of course to share all that we knew, but under the conditions aforementioned. And little as has hitherto been said of either of those two members of my family, I may here affirm that none among us were more worthy than they to receive unexpected bounty at the hands of fortune, or more likely to exercise discretion and kindness in the administration of her gifts.

We arrived at home in time to enjoy a supper

designed to take the place of dinner, for which no time could be afforded during our fully occupied stay in town. Indeed, it had been prepared expressly, because it was expected to be necessary, after due calculation had been made from the time-table, and it was doubly welcome and more than doubly relished, because our two dear ones had planned their engagements during the day so as to share the meal with us. The events of the journey were minutely described, innumerable questions were asked and answered, after which a little aerial castle-building was indulged in—yet so little—a pursuit which seemed irresistible, and might be pardoned under the circumstances. Finally, the formal oath of secrecy was taken by all four, for the solemnization of which prodigious ceremony, a glass all round of my father's favourite "Liebfraumilch" of 1846 was administered; he having permitted himself to be indulged after the severe fatigues of the day by the disinterment of a bottle thereof before supper by my sister, whose function it was to keep the key of our modest cellar, and the book thereunto belonging. Our evening was a long and late one, not perhaps according to my own estimate of an evening, but

it was so when judged by the Laxenford standard in general, and certainly by the Rectory standard in particular. Our farewell greetings for the night as we slowly separated, after procuring our candlesticks in the little hall (for the servants had been sent to bed long ago), and parted on the landing upstairs to seek our respective rooms, were not more affectionate than usual—I think nothing could happen to increase our affection for each other, unless, indeed, it were the advent of overwhelming misfortune, which might haply do so; and which God in his mercy forbid!—but they were more effusive. My sister Janet and I occupied rooms in the next storey, and had another pair of stairs to mount. Arrived at her door, she looked at me archly and said, “What luck for you round there, Charley dear!” nodding her head in the well-known direction of the neighbouring paddock. “For which most cogent reason, Janet darling,” I replied, “not one syllable of that luck must be whispered there!”

CHAPTER XV.

A DAY AT THE SEA-SIDE, AND THE EVENT OF A LIFE.

NEXT morning at breakfast it was agreed that I should go to London this afternoon, close my lodging accounts for the vacation, and pack away in safety all my moveables there, with a view to returning as usual at the commencement of the term on the first of October next. Allison was to arrive there from Yorkshire on the 21st inst., two days hence, and we were to come down to Laxenford together on the 22nd. It was agreed that the family here should now arouse their neighbours to a sense of what would be due in the shape of hospitality to a distinguished young surgeon, who was, moreover, a special friend of my own, about to visit us for the first time. It was thought advisable that my mother and Janet should call on Colonel

Clavering and Katie, and at least propose a day's excursion to our favourite seaside resort, to one of the most accessible and at the same time most enjoyable spots on the eastern coast, the pretty town of Southwold, and arrange it if possible for a day in the middle of next week. A joint visit there of this kind had indeed for several years past been regarded by the two families as a kind of annual holiday—a festival in honour of Neptune, if you please; like a “harvest home” after the gathering of the crops, or like the annual *fête* of the village to its patron Saint, embodying, if not precisely religious sentiment, yet feelings somewhat akin thereto, and strengthened by usage. It would be difficult, therefore, I felt, for the Colonel to decline his accustomed assent to the plan, an alternative which probably did not occur to anyone else but myself, who had special grounds for anxiety that he should not do so on the present occasion. My brief absence in town was soon over, and on my return I introduced Allison to the Rectory and its inmates on the day appointed. I learned that our proposal was cheerfully accepted, a long day was planned,

and that the large waggonette from the "Three Tuns' Inn and a pair of horses were engaged for Thursday next, the 27th," the comfortable open interior of which vehicle easily accommodated eight persons—four on each side.

On each of the next two or three days, Allison and I amused ourselves with some long walks over the flat but pretty rural neighbourhood of Laxenford, after which the quiet habits of our family circle harmonized equally with the excellent appetite and pleasant languor which follow abundant healthy exercise. I called on the squire, paid my respects to him, and received a hearty invitation to join his party of the fourth of September, and to bring my friend Allison with me. The parties of the first and second were full; Sir George intended to rest on the third, and to have only a small party on the fourth.

"Be here a little before ten o'clock—not too early, is it? I like to start punctually at the hour."

"We don't mind how early, Sir George, and we won't keep you waiting," replied I, wishing him good morning, and assuring him how much

pleasure we both anticipated from the sport he offered us.

On my way home I called upon my old friend Mrs. Dickson, who seemed particularly anxious to learn whether we had heard any news of a satisfactory kind from America about the property. She knew nothing of our investigations, but it was clear that a general feeling had arisen in the village that the rector would eventually benefit by the decease of our relative, and Mrs. Dickson, for her own part, cherished a conviction that we must do so. She assured me that she herself had not expressed such an opinion to others, or given currency to the report in question, believing, after the true British fashion of that period, in the uncertainty and untrustworthiness of every American, or indeed any other security than her own religious faith and the Three per Cent. Consols. I fenced with her inquiries, displaying as much appearance of candour as possible, adding that I had a faint idea of being able to give her some news before long, and that she would certainly be the very first to whom such news would be communicated. I also made an early visit to old John's afflicted

wife, to hear her pitiful tale, and do my best to soothe her painful joints.

It was a little before ten o'clock on Thursday morning, the sun shining brilliantly amidst tranquil clouds floating safely far away in the upper regions, that the waggonette pulled up at the Claverings' door before calling at the Rectory. I walked round the corner to greet them and help them in. Katie was radiant with health and spirits, and agile as a fawn; her light and simple dress illustrating her perfect figure without impeding a movement, as she stepped gaily to her seat with the semblance of aid from me; and the Colonel wore a good-natured smile. Then we drove round and picked up my father and mother, Janet, and Allison, who made up the party of seven. Bowling briskly along the hard old turnpike road which formed nearly two-thirds of our route, we passed Sir George Andover's place, the route being flanked for some distance on either side by a well-preserved game district, most of it belonging to him, divided into enclosures of moderate size, now lying chiefly in stubbles, clover, and turnips, and fenced by rough hedges, dotted by many a tree, and affording food

and shelter for ground game and cover for birds ; a condition admirable for the sportsman, but not so to the eye of the modern agriculturist. The road passed over gently undulating ground, with peeps of well-wooded country, for about five miles, when it gradually descended into the marshy valley, where runs the local stream which joins the sea near Southwold, and constitutes the little town a port. It is the entry to this valley which brings picturesquely into view on the left the beautiful old church of Blythburgh standing on the opposite side. Allison, of course, has an artistic pursuit which in town he cherishes mostly in secret, but of which he never quite loses sight in his busiest hours, not hitherto mentioned here ; he has been an enthusiastic amateur student of church architecture and its belongings. On reaching the church, we pull up at the roadside, from which the building, slightly elevated on a mound, is a little distant. The parish sexton is summoned to open the interior, which contains portions of a fine rood screen, besides carved wood of the fifteenth century, and we are allowed a stay of twenty minutes. Meantime we make a cursory ex-

amination of the exterior, remarking the buttresses which support the body of the church, each one being surmounted by a large, quaint figure, very curious in its way.

Then on again, up a long hill with an extended view on the right, and again up and down as the local road runs, shaded by the dense and well-preserved coverts of Lord Stradbroke on either hand; startling as we pass many a head of game, to whose sounds and movements our ears and eyes are acutely sensitive, as become those of men with the "glorious first" in near view. We are soon trotting over the rather barren level which mostly marks the near approach to ocean, when the square tower of Southwold Church on a gentle rise shows its goodly proportions against the sky, and a section of the horizon is seen for the first time to be marked by the delicately drawn curve of a blue sea-line. Now up that gentle rise and into the chief straight street of the town, leaving the church on our left, which Allison is to visit before lunch, for it is a lovely specimen of fifteenth century flint building, with an elegant porch, and contains some carved stalls and the remains of a beautifully painted rood-loft,

much defaced, however, it is said, by the Puritanical soldiery of the Commonwealth.

Reaching the triangular market - place, our driver pulls up his lively roadsters with an important air at the door of "The Swan," central in one of the sides, undeniable in respectability and resource, and we are greeted by the portly hostess with one of her most gracious smiles. She knows the Rector well, who had, moreover, sent her a line beforehand to secure her best sitting-room for the day, and a suitable lunch to be prepared for one o'clock, that the young folks may have, according to precedent, a long and undisturbed afternoon for their rambles. We descended and took possession of our quarters, and being almost mid-day, I took Allison to see the church, while the Colonel and my father escorted the ladies to the Gunhill, some three hundred yards obliquely from the Swan, and offering to view a fine stretch of German Ocean, with the piers, the narrow harbour, and the little village of Walberswick running inward on the right. Still farther, in the same direction, are the saltmarshes and the common of the town, and beyond the whole a purple line of distance,

presenting a charming, tranquil scene of Suffolk coast and country. The party met for lunch were admonished by my mother, happy that it was her lot this year to receive them for dinner at home on our return, that this important office was fixed for seven o'clock, or soon after, according to circumstances, the horses being ordered for the homeward journey at half-past five. And when the mid-day meal had been discussed, my mother displayed her tact by requesting the Colonel, much to that gallant officer's surprise and satisfaction, to light his cigar, a concession she had never been known before to yield to man's weakness in the matter of tobacco, hinting as a reason that her son had at last overcome some of her former aversion thereto, and to relax the ancient rule forbidding its introduction into the Rectory. My father, whom we already know as a type of clerical decorum and respectability, had of course never been known to touch the accursed thing, although he had gradually learned to exercise some toleration towards others who were not thus void of offence. At home a small apartment, thenceforward called "the chimney," had been allotted to me as the sole place in

which I dared, or indeed desired, to gratify my taste when at Laxenford. The Colonel opened a case of cheroots, his favourite variety, settled himself cosily in an easy chair by the open window, while my father advised the young people to go off for a quiet stroll, and let their elders take care of themselves. The girls went upstairs for their bonnets; Allison and I awaited them in the hall, and then all received our mother's notice, "Mind you come home before half-past five, and then you shall have a cup of tea with us before starting."

We four then sauntered together across the market-place, over the Gunhill aforementioned, and down along the walk which leads at the back of the beach in less than three-quarters of a mile to the ferry across the river on the road to Walberswick, a quaint fishing village, of which the picturesque ruin of a fine old church is one of the chief attractions for visitors to Solebay. Allison now took charge of my sister, who knew every inch of the ground as well as I did, and went in front. I and Katie followed them. We had about three hours, or nearly so, before us; the church was a mile and a-half distant at most, so we had plenty of leisure.

Katie and I were side by side with a convenient interval between ourselves and the pair before us, and with a consciousness of being together with more of sanction from our elders than had been experienced at any time during the last year or more. Katie looked at me significantly; the slight uplifting of the eyebrow expressed at all events her surprise, if not her satisfaction, at finding ourselves with an afternoon at our disposal, and beyond the reach of disturbance. For the latter condition, I could trust implicitly either of the two in front.

At this moment I confess that I felt myself to be intensely selfish, and with resolve to be so, determined to make the most of my chance. Should I have such another if I let it slip? How much might depend upon it! I intended that Allison should devote himself profoundly to the study of church architecture, and I knew that Janet would help him if she could. For my part I designed to study Katie Clavering.

I had but to give her a look in reply, expressing my complete satisfaction with the situation, and await a clue to her feelings, which she gave me by saying, timidly :

"Hadn't we better . . . ?" pointing with her hand to the pair before us.

"No, I think not," said I.

"Doesn't it look rather—rather planned, this?" she suggested.

"Ill-planned or well-planned, Katie?"

"Oh! I don't know; but should we leave them—so much?"

"I don't think they mind. Are you content as you are, Katie?"

"Yes, I think I am, for myself, Charley," she murmured.

"Well, then, if there was a plan at all, it was my mother's; or rather, I believe it was a sudden happy inspiration of genius, that idea of asking your father to smoke. I should not have dreamed of it. She deserves at least my gratitude; she never was a better mother to me than at that moment!"

"Don't talk nonsense, Charles."

"I don't intend, Katie." After a pause, I continued: "Tell me about your London life. How I used to think about you then! I called twice, but there was no seeing you."

"Well, I enjoyed it very much; the Far-

quharsons were very kind and took me everywhere. I never thought one could see so much in so short a time. Yes ; I had your card, but only once ; I couldn't tell them to ask you, you know."

We continued to chat about her London experiences, more or less warily on my part, until we arrived at the river side. I could discover no sign that her affections had been in any way engaged there ; no hint of such a thing escaped her, for the manifestation of which I was anxiously watching.

We were now all four together, awaiting the heavy old ferry-boat and its ancient mariner who was slowly paddling towards us with two women, over the hundred and fifty yards of tranquil water which, on this fine day, floated lazily to the river mouth, a quarter of a mile lower down, and joined the ocean between two primitive piers of old iron-stained piles and beams, already named, and looking like antiquated Norwegian timber barques moored there for the purpose. The ferry-boat was now alongside the slimy landing-stage ; we took the vacant seats, and in five minutes were on the other side. Disembarking, we again fell

into open order and held our route straight on, past the village inn and a few red-tiled, Dutch-looking houses ; then bearing to the right among scattered cottages for another half-mile or so to the church, the remains of which, grey, ivy-clad, and roofless, still retained their chief features and enclose within their ample limits the small building which now sufficed for the religious service of the small population. Katie and I had continued our chat ; we knew the ruin by heart ; so also did Janet, and we left her as *cicerone* for Allison, who was in raptures at the idea of acquiring a third example of our famous churches as the booty of one day, while we slowly pursued the road a little farther by ourselves. Katie had lost a certain timidity and hesitation which the unexpected incident of finding herself *tête-à-tête* with me had naturally at first produced. Our rare chances of meeting had of late been associated with the consciousness of some taint of wrong-doing attached thereto, and when realized, their brevity and the anxiety inseparable from fear of discovery rendered them unsatisfactory and disappointing, and it was not easy at the outset to rid ourselves of the same depressing

influence at the present meeting. But now it had vanished, and Katie was herself, almost her old self, once more.

We had now reached the margin of the common, the ground undulating, broken by gravel and sand pits, in part rabbit warren, and dotted elsewhere with thick, well-grown patches of gorse and bracken. It was not difficult to find a shady nook to rest in, and we seated ourselves side by side on the dry, warm turf, with a bank behind us, and under the shade of its lofty hedge.

"Katie, my dear old playfellow," said I, "a few years ago we should have made with our little spades here a real paradise amidst all this sand, and in such a place as this!"

"We are to be much too grand for any fun now, Charley, aren't we. I beg your pardon—I must say, Charles Kingston, Esquire, M.R.C.S., I suppose?" with a prolonged emphasis on the titular letters.

"Grand, indeed! I hope not; that small addition you make so much of is Charley's first step to earning bread and cheese—a hard necessity which is laid on humanity. But don't laugh at

my small beginnings, and 'Charley' let me be from your lips to the end of the chapter."

Somewhat slowly and seriously she replied :

"No, really, I don't laugh at you, 'Charley,' if you like it so. But I am beginning almost to think sometimes that as one grows older, one finds life more serious, and laughs less."

Drawing nearer to her, I almost whispered : "Katie has no secret heartaches yet, has she, under that bright look of hers ? she must tell her old friend if she has." Venturing to pass my fingers lightly over the ungloved little hand which lay before me as if mechanically, and unconscious of my act, I said, "Has she, after her own father, one other friend who would more lovingly, more devotedly than he, move heaven and earth if it were possible, to lighten any burden of hers?" I just held her hand so tenderly that she need not be aware that I did so, and it was not withdrawn.

She said nothing, but turned the dark, deep eyes upon me, with a faint expression of distress and anxiety, unconsciously offering me a new and touching form of her natural beauty.

"Tell me, Katie," said I, "tell me."

"My father and I have been very happy at Laxenford," she slowly replied; "but I think he would like to go away. Indeed, he has quite lately told me as much. Do you know, I have been thinking this afternoon that perhaps he wouldn't have let me come out thus if he hadn't made up his mind that it might be the last time, and that we should soon be away, and that perhaps——;" then hurriedly, as if recollecting herself, "But I've said so much more than I ought. Oh, Charley, don't say a word of this! How could you make me tell it you?"

A tremor of anxiety and fear crept through my whole frame at the idea of Katie leaving us. That was a misfortune which had never occurred to me as possible.

"Not a syllable, of course; but, Katie, where does he wish to take you to? You must tell me that," said I.

"Oh, well, somewhere in or near London, I suppose. I almost think our friends the Farquharsons wish to further his views. Lessons for me, and more society, both for him and for me, you know. Even you, I suppose," drawing herself up, releasing her hand, and making a dear little

moue, "wouldn't wish me to be always a dowdy, ignorant country girl? And then, Charlie, I should be in London as well as you. Why not?"

"And do you or do you not vote for the move, Katie?"

"I haven't a vote, you know. I think my father would say that he can judge best as to what is good for us both," she said.

"You looked at me just now, you dear old thing, for when I think of you I think of fifteen years at least, very much as if you didn't care to leave us. Now tell me truly, do you or do you not?" I had regained her hand on the excuse of adding, "Now lift your hand and swear!" and I looked earnestly into the lovely features, on which a glow of delicate colour was rising.

"Well, Charley, I'll tell you the truth—I always did do that; I don't care to leave Laxenford, and your dear old father and your good, kind mother, for I haven't one of my own. Who can tell what a difference that may make to a girl! Do you know, Charley, I don't think any man should think of marrying a woman who hadn't a mother—I mean to bring her up, of

course. That's a "dear old thing's" advice to a young man like you. And your sister, too, who is like a real sister to me. Oh, I should never find the same thing again anywhere else!"

"And me, Katie; me too! Am I to count for nothing?" I exclaimed.

"No, Charley, I think I should miss you—very much. There, I won't make fun of him to-day; dear old thing!"

I still held her hand; neither of us spoke. After a minute or two, oppressed as I felt with new anxieties and dangers, filled with life-long memories of our past, flushed with the tenderest affection, for months unnaturally pent up, burning to be expressed if possible, I found myself almost dumb amidst a conflict of tumultuous feelings. Turning full round upon her a gaze of profound admiration and tender love, I faltered forth—

"Dearest Katie, what is to be the end of all this? You must and will forgive me, if I say—I cannot after this be silent—any longer—I must tell you—for long, my whole life, and all its work, has had but one aim—to win you—to be worthy of you. If you knew—if I could

make you believe—how that one thought blends with every other! Don't speak of your father for one moment yet. Tell me your own, own heart—what that will say to me. For your own sake, for my sake, tell me truly. Difficulties there may be—yes, great ones, too—but love can wait, and can work. Oh! anything can be done, if you do but say you love me—can love me but half as well as I love you, my darling Katie!”

My broken, almost breathless appeals were followed by silence. The long dark lashes, veiling her eyes with their deep fringe, trembled; the hand I held seemed to respond so gently to my involuntary pressure; perhaps it was only my fancy.

Slowly turning towards me, she regarded me with a look of exquisite trust, and said—

“Dear Charley, I cannot say all you ask me. You are free, and therefore you can say all you feel for me. And do not think I could be indifferent to such words as you have spoken to me. Oh! it is too much, too difficult for me; but it wouldn't be true if I were not to say you are more than any one else to me. I do love you, Charley; but—but I must not say more to

you than I would dare to say to my father. You understand?"

"Sweet words from you, my Katie, dearest Katie; but hear me further. Will you give me leave to go and tell your father just that which I have told you, with some faint hope that, if he consents, you will, after that, once more say to me, and to him, that—that you still love your Charley?"

"But what would he say? Isn't it a risk? Mightn't it be very dreadful?" looking at me with an expression of concern, almost of alarm.

"Well, what would he say? Does he hate me, Katie?"

"No, Charley, he likes you very much; but he thinks you have no business to marry for ever so long, because—because, you know, he says—of course—that you—that we, I mean, can't quite afford it—yet!"

"Is that the whole of his objection, my darling girl?"

"Well, of course he doesn't wish to lose me; and, Charley, if—just supposing—for a minute only—you know"—with a little flourish of her hand—"that I really loved you, oh, ever so

much, all that was possible—I still should not like to lose the dear old father—dear old darling! And I couldn't bear to see him suffer—all alone you know—without me!”

“Any other difficulty besides that, dear, eloquent little woman?”

“Don't laugh at me, Charley, when I am telling you all my heart, just like a sister!”

“Laugh at you, darling! not for worlds; only admiring your dear, earnest little ways; not at all like anything I ever saw in a sister though! Please don't say that. Well, I want still to know what other difficulty is there?”

“I can't say, Charley,” she replied; “I don't know that there is any other, much; there might be, but I can't think of any other in particular.”

“Now, then, my darling Katie, in your own heart, if all these could be set right, and on my soul I think they might be some day, not so very far distant—in your own heart of hearts, what would you say to me then?”

My arm crept slowly round and gently drew her nearer, as I raised the little hand by degrees to my lips, and met her gaze. That long, deep look which followed! “You are my own Katie,

on those conditions, are you not?—Your own conditions you know. Is it not so?" This time the eyes fell not, but seemed rather to open, so that my deep gaze might plunge profoundly to the depths of that loving expression which rose in full tide to meet my own, and prove their power to return, even with interest, all the deep passion I could offer. Moment of exquisite bliss! it could not last for ever, and terminated in our first lover's kiss; the first meeting of ripe lips, touched with divine fire; lips parted so long ago when with little meaning they often met in childhood!

Her head rested on my shoulder: my own Katie! her hand in mine, as we silently sat . . .

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The last hour—or century—for it might be either—I had no sense of time—had been one of intense excitement; and now we breathed again. At length we recollected; and were startled by the thought, that, in this world of ours, other beings dwelled besides ourselves; and then we slowly awoke to the consciousness that some of them at this moment, at the Swan Inn in the next parish, claimed from us the fulfilment of cer-

tain conditions, an important one being our re appearance there at half-past five o'clock. Then there was one, Allison—not to speak of another, Janet. Where were they ? What was the hour ? I had a watch ; happy thought ! It was produced, and found to mark half-past four exactly. We had passed just one hour at our seat on the common. Delicious hour !

We rose and prepared to leave ; Katie picked a wildflower or two which blossomed hard by the spot on which we sat, and giving them to me, said, "Put those between the leaves of your sketch-book, press them nicely, and take care of them for your Kit, my boy."

We now retraced our steps towards the church, which gave us another quarter of an hour together.

"Now, my own dearest Katie," said I ; "it will be a very short time before I shall call on your father, and demand you."

"Charley !"

"Yes, dearest ; you have given me courage, and fortune will favour me ; you shall see. Not one word of our compact to-day to a single soul, until we agree that the moment has come ; no sign to

any one. You and I shall have our secret, our own dear solemn secret, whereon our eyes shall discourse to each other when we meet and are not alone ; for you and for me to think of when separated, every hour of the day, knowing and feeling that the one other is thinking of it too. Is it not so ? And think, also, darling Katie, that I verily hope soon to have the means of overcoming our two difficulties, and then we shall be so much each others' that all the world shall know it. Unless you invent me another difficulty. You won't do that, will you ? ”

“ Not if I can help it, Charley ; or anyone else making it for us. But you have some scheme, I am sure you have ; you talk so grandly.”

“ I feel so grandly ; I never felt of so much importance before,” pressing the arm which lay on mine. “ My own, own Katie ! in that lies much more than half the reason. Who wouldn't feel important with the whole world within his reach ; and are you not all the world to me ; ” “ yes,” reverently, “ and heaven too ! ”

And thus we babbled on that sweet love's foolery, so inexpressibly delightful to the two con-

cerned, so uninteresting to all outsiders. And there we shall leave it, for I have already recorded more than enough, and my reader can doubtless supply the rest if he pleases, and imagine more if he desires. All I shall add is that he may so imagine ; but that the intoxicating dream of first love, that inspiration so delicious, so entrancing in its sense of satisfaction and completeness, with such exquisite consciousness of a boundless faith in springs of love and delight which neither time nor eternity can exhaust, is not within the power of mortal to portray. Let the few who have once so dreamed be grateful for existence. Let those who can in after years recall some faint memories of their dreamland, in fancy pluck an image therefrom now and again, and rest content. But it is altogether another matter to essay more than the crudest sketch of that dream, with the incomplete material and limited resource which prose affords. As well hope thus to reproduce the scent of the jessamine, or to render faintly audible a harmony of Beethoven.

Janet and Allison were standing at the little wicket by which the churchyard is entered, looking for us as we arrived. The flushed beauty on

Katie's cheek, and the brightness of excitement in her eye, had not so far subsided as to be unobservable ; and I think Janet, who knew her so well, could not have failed to remark it. We walked home chatting all together. Unless Janet and Allison were far better actors than we were, their studies had not in the least resembled ours. I felt severe twinges of conscience, owing as I did to each of the other two more than slight apology for the situation in which I had placed them all the afternoon, undesigned as it was by any of us ; but I was tranquil in the knowledge that the moment for affording explanation would arrive ere long. No doubt each had silently guessed it, and did not misinterpret the situation. Before the hour appointed we were sipping together my mother's tea at the Swan, and receiving warm expressions of approval for our punctuality from the elders. Then came round the horses ; the drive home in the late afternoon was delightful—for Katie and myself, a weary tramp through winter's "slush," as they say in Suffolk, would have been equally so, provided only it were a tramp together.

The eventful day was closed by a successful

dinner ; and the last and not the least delightful thrill even of all that day's experience, was the firm pressure of a little hand when the last " good night " was said at the Rectory door.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMONG THE PARTRIDGES.

“FINE September weather” is one of the most enjoyable among the many and varied forms of that changeable climate which is provided for the inhabitants of the British Isles. It denotes a season in which the severe and sometimes stifling heats of our full summer have passed away ; yet in which, with very little interruption by rain or storm, we may on most days still bask in the sunshine for an hour or two before and after noon ; while there is an enjoyable freshness in the morning and evening air that exhilarates and invites to exertion, and thus it is especially grateful to the sportsman.

The morning of the 4th of September had shone upon Laxenford before we left our rooms. Sir George was not one of those excitable, early-

rising sportsmen—a race I think now almost extinct—who are not satisfied without killing a brace or two of birds before breakfast; at all events during the first week, and who knock up, if not themselves, at least some of the friends who have been invited to join them, before the hour of lunch arrives. Besides, Sir George was, to use his own expression in the field, “no longer a chicken,” and was content, as might be many a chicken also, with three hours or so of good sport before that mid-day meal. By the time we had driven in our pony chaise, with our guns and dressing bags, the long mile which lay between the Rectory and the Hall, the sun had risen sufficiently high to dissipate all trace of dewdrops from the trees and hedges bounding that side of the road on which his warm rays fell, while the opposite side in shadow was still covered with brilliants, down to the tiniest twig. Myriads of cobwebs, like the finest filmy lace, richly garnished with seed pearl, hung about them, while aerial lines thereof, which reached upwards to the bright ray and floated therein, crossed our faces as we met the fresh current of cool air. A fine day then was an assured certainty. We reached the

Hall door a few minutes before ten ; our moveables were carried round to the gun-room, close to Sir George's own private sanctum for business, from which point the start was usually made. We were shown into a small morning parlour adjoining the breakfast room, and were soon joined there by Sir George, to whom I introduced Allison, and he received us both with a hearty welcome. Immediately afterwards entered two gentlemen who had evidently been just equipped, and had come here for the rendezvous, and as the party was so small we were introduced to them—Lord Orwell, one of the county magnates, and General Gordon, a Scotch friend of Sir George's. Passing in single file through a corridor which led from the back of the entrance hall, we arrived at Sir George's room, and then by an open doorway at a flint-paved court, where I recognized my old acquaintance Will Barber, the head-keeper, attended by a young under-keeper in charge of the dogs, together with our host's loader, and the well-dressed but business-like servant who attended Lord Orwell and loaded for him. The Scotch General, with the well-knit frame of a man turned sixty, but still "hard as nails," did his own

work, as we youngsters were of course obliged and quite content to do also. After the usual salutes and a few words from Barber to Sir George, indicating the line of the proposed beat to be taken, and in which one caught the terms, "down the long fourteen acre," "round Harvey's bottom," "up the Mill house rise," and "nigh the first home farm, Sir George," etc., etc., we sallied forth, finding a couple of beaters helping to take care of the dogs and awaiting orders. I saw that we had two brace of good-looking pointers and a couple of retrievers. We were thus altogether a snug, well-provided party of five guns. I had seen nothing of Allison's shooting and was naturally a little anxious about him, but I knew the man and trusted him, confident in the conviction that he was no boaster and that he would do me no discredit.

Soon beyond the walls of offices and gardens we entered by its gate a large field in stubble, and were immediately put into line. A stubble left at that date by the old reaping-hook—not by the scythe, then coming into vogue (much less by machine) which ruthlessly cut the straw down to a short stubble, leaving no cover for birds, and

where, to use Barber's language, they were as "wild as hawks and went out of one end of the field as soon as the guns came in at the other." Consequently a stubble in which birds, especially English birds, such as, I am happy to say, were still holding their own with the keeper's management, would lie, and where we might therefore expect before we were half way through to find a good covey or two. I may premise that we were at that time in Suffolk, so fortunate as to be able to follow our birds in the good old-fashioned style, covering the ground completely at each beat with a brace of good pointers, who hunted every yard thoroughly, one right, one left, accustomed to work together, standing staunchly and backing each other like brothers—a sight as attractive in its way almost as that of the birds themselves. If the covey rose out of distance, no matter, they were marked down and were certain to go sooner or later into a piece of turnips, or to a heavy clover layer or the like, where we were equally certain to come up with them, and to get them up three or four at a time. The needs of modern agriculture have done much to destroy this delightful pastime, together with the gentle but continuous

healthy exercise which it afforded ; and I believe that modern gunners have mostly now to sit in groups, to smoke and tell club stories behind a hedge, or an artificial fence maybe, and kill the time until a great drive comes up like a whirlwind, and a volley of rapid shots does its worst among them, when the sportsmen return to their pipes and await a like chance perhaps half an hour later. Such, at least, has been my experience of the drive for a season or two, when I tired of it, giving it up henceforth and for ever, and only following the partridge now and then in one of those occasional spots where a friend can still offer me a really good day over the dogs.

Sir George put Lord Orwell in the centre, and took his own station at twenty yards to the right, with the General again on his right ; Allison came to his lordship's left, and I to the left of Allison. The keeper slipped a brace of pointers, leaving the rest in hand behind, at heel. " Spot " and " Ponto " commenced their operations with a little superabundant spirit at first as usual, for a few minutes only, and we followed. We had entered a fine enclosure of not less than sixteen acres, a little above the general level, so that we

surveyed the country, and we took it up and down, beginning at the left, as our beat lay to the windward, that is slightly to the right. All on a sudden Ponto made a dead point, Spot backing instantly in fine style ; every man cocked his gun, and strode steadily on ready for action. After a few steps, a covey of fourteen or fifteen birds at the least rose, strong on the wing, at about five and twenty yards, with that magnificent whirr which cheers and excites at one and the same moment. Sir George stopped two with a deliberate right and left. The General killed with his first, and scrutinizing severely the flight of his second bird, declared "he was a dead one wherever he went to." Lord Orwell's loader procured him three shots, but the last was very long, and I think he got only one. Allison's bird fell dead from the second barrel, having missed his first by firing a little hurriedly, perhaps, too soon and too near. "Well killed indeed !" said the keeper, by way of encouragement to the young stranger. My first barrel killed the outlying bird on the left ; but the covey having risen a little to my right, and flying in that direction, the position yielded me that one chance only. The rest were

well marked down, over not the next, but a second fence, which looked as if they were a little wild, at all events like well grown birds. We stopped to load; the dogs were quiet, and no shouting "Down charge," or whipping and scolding were necessary—the hateful tactics of ill-tempered keepers, harrassed by the bad manners of ill-bred dogs. With the help of one retriever for a single bird, we picked up three brace and marched on.

It would be tedious to the general reader, although scarcely, I believe, to a sportsman, thus to trace our progress from field to field, meeting with some good coveys on the way, until we had driven seven or eight at least before us, to a splendid piece of white turnips of nearly twenty acres, an excellent crop, showing only one thin place in the entire enclosure. We were in it soon after eleven, and some remains of the heavy dew lodged in the hollows of the leaves still. Barber observed authoritatively, "We'll dew this, please, Sir George, wery careful; there's a sight o' birds here, besides what 'a bin driv into it;" then turning to Lord Orwell, and touching his hat, said, "We may very easy walk over 'em here, my

Lord, if we don't keep together; they'll lay very close here this morning." Accordingly we took it not more than a dozen yards apart, and had first-rate sport for above an hour. The birds rose three, four, or five at a time, and we made a capital bag; all of us shot fairly well, and each man therefore was on good terms with himself. After that we took another stubble or two, where we picked up some hares and an odd rabbit or so, as well as birds, when Sir George said, "It's now half-past one; Barber has steered us well, for we shall find the people with lunch just over that little rise under the big oak tree in the corner, and I hope you're all ready for it."

The cart had brought Sir George's large tarpaulin to cover the grass, to save us from cold-catching and rheumatism. The basket was a simple one, a business-like arrangement for men who cared about their sport, and thought little about their food until dinner time, desiring to shoot as well after the midday meal as before, at all events not to be the worse for it. Some beef-sandwiches, cold chicken cut up into pieces which could be handled, a sliced tongue, biscuits and cheese, light pale beer in bottle, soda and sherry.

The servants unpacked these, drew some corks and set us going, then left us to ourselves. The keeper headed his party with stouter viands and home brewed, on the other side of the hedge within call; but with previous notice that we would start in one hour's time for our afternoon beat, so as to be at home not later than five. After lunch we opened our cigar cases and discussed the morning's sport, the keeper bringing us word that our bag amounted to forty-three brace of birds, of which fifteen brace were "red legs," thirteen hares and five rabbits—in all one hundred and four head. And then followed some talk common always at this time on the question of guns. We were now in the middle of the transition period which witnessed the very gradual exchange of the old muzzle-loader for the then modern system of breech-loading. Most of the older and seasoned sportsmen still adhered to the tools they had used so long and so well, and although not confessing it they were at heart a little afraid of a principle of construction which allowed the breech end of the barrel, a part invariably associated in their minds with the idea of immobility and strength, to be, on

the contrary, an opening close to the face, "where nobody knew what might sometimes happen." Hence Sir George still shot with a pair of double-barrelled muzzle-loaders by Joe Manton, of superb twist and No. 16 bore; and Lord Orwell, I think, patronized a similar pair by Lang. The General had an excellent implement, less expensive in finish but probably equally good as a performer, and this also was a muzzle-loader. The young men had commenced their career by adopting the "pin" or "Lefauchaux" pattern, the only breech-loader in vogue in this country at that time, since universally superseded by the central-fire, and of course they defended the innovation against the conservative instincts of their associates. Then each of the elders had his story to tell, mostly so pleasant to hear; some legend of a previous generation, and relating of course to their sporting experience. Thus, Sir George told of his father—who was a cool hand and excellent shot, and killed all his game from a single-barrelled fowling-piece with a flint lock—that it was a favourite habit of his to take a pinch of snuff after the bird had risen and before raising his gun, and then would never fail to kill. No

doubt there was a trifle of daring in this proceeding, but it was a good lesson to the younger men, who then, as now, lose more birds by firing too soon and too recklessly than by waiting too long. At the same time it was quite true, as Lord Orwell remarked, that in those days there was no second bird or second barrel to be thought of, and the chances of killing, especially with a close-shooting gun, are infinitely better at a distance of thirty to forty yards than at twenty to thirty, while below twenty they are practically *nil*. Yet many an eager man will fire his first barrel at game less than twenty yards distant, in which case he either misses it altogether or blows it to pieces, in needless hurry to be in time to use his second barrel with effect; the consequence being that with neither barrel in this state of hurry does he allow himself fair chance of a steady aim.

Time was now called, and we made an easy afternoon of two hours with a brace of fresh dogs, coming in with the feeling that we had worked well, but not in the least degree fagged, and learning that we had added twenty-eight brace to our score

Just before entering the house, Barber came round to me, and touching his hat deferentially, said, " I beg your pardon, Mr. Kingston, I scarcely like ta ax yeow such a favour, sir, but my wife and I, leastways my wife, she bid me ax yeow, sir, and that's the truth. But she hev suffered so, poor sowl, with her bad leg, and she hev had the doctor tew her iver so long ; there's tew year come Christmas we've paid them bills, and niver a mite the better for anything as hev been done ; no more for Holloway's stuff, as my naybor Tom Johnson said, as hev cured Lord somebody's legs, both of 'em, sir, but t' niver cured my wife's, not the lessest bit, and she hev only one bad nayther. I'd bring her up a' any mornin' tew the Rectory, you knouw, sir, if so'd be you'd only be so good as jest ta look at it, sir, and tell her what ta dew. She hev so much faith in yeow, sir, if you'd only be so kind."

" No, Barber," I said, " don't bring her to me. I'll come and give her a look some time to-morrow. She is best at home ; I know where to find her, and I only hope I may be able to do her any good."

" Thank you kindly, Mr. Kingston ; yeow can't

think how plaised she'll be when I go home to-night and tell her ; and werry grateful, both on us, sir, I'm sure."

Such is the invariable experience of the young doctor fresh from London when he shows his face in the country. Great is the faith of the poor in us, half-fledged doctorlings as we are ; we who for years to come have little chance of evoking faith or confidence in the breast of any invalid who haply may have a guinea in his pocket wherewith to pay for an opinion !

We now found our dressing-rooms ready, each with a fire and a hot foot-bath before it ; our bags unpacked and dress clothes laid out, together with the choice of a cup of hot tea or a glass of brandy and water, with notice that dinner would be ready at seven o'clock. Shortly before this hour we were received by Lady Andover in the drawing-room, meeting her daughters, with Lady Orwell and another lady, and sitting down to a pleasant dinner of ten. After dessert, when the ladies had retired, we men devoted the best part of an hour, according to the fashion of that time, to our wine, and fought over again the battles of the day in conversation interspersed with some

discussion of county topics and such trifling local scandal as the neighbourhood afforded. After adjournment to the drawing-room for tea and leave-taking, our pony carriage awaited us. Sir George had kindly ordered four brace of birds and a hare to be put therein, and we were soon at home, at the end of our first day among the Suffolk partridges.

CHAPTER XVII.

FURTHER HOLIDAY DOINGS.

SINCE the excursion to Southwold, now more than a week ago, two opportunities for an interview with Katie had arisen, of which I need not say we availed ourselves. The slight amount of extra gaiety to which the presence of our visitor gave rise had furnished occasion for these meetings, and had enabled me to sustain the position I had taken, and to strengthen Katie's own decision, for at present she was ignorant of our recent good fortune, without which, it must be confessed, I myself should not have dared so confidently to press my suit. And one of my chief objects in doing so had been to obtain a declaration of her state of feeling towards me, before she could possibly hear of that fortune from any source. But I was becoming anxious that she should

not do so from another, and that she should soon be acquainted with those particulars which she was now entitled to hear first from me. Hence I had taken a fitting opportunity during the week for confiding the exact state of my relations with her not merely to my sister, but to my father and mother, who received my communication without expressing surprise and with kind approval. My father considered, and I doubt not wisely, that I was at least seven years too young to enter married life ; indeed, I may add that at the present moment, writing as I do long after the events here described took place, I fully concur in his view, with respect to the general principle he then enunciated. But the circumstances which had brought myself and Katie—and such a Katie!—into intimate contact during so great a part of our lives, were exceptional, and as far as they were so, necessarily involved exceptional results. Then my father was greatly pleased to learn that among any crude notions which we young people were disposed to entertain in relation to the future, no thought of a near approaching marriage had found a place. A residence of some months at a foreign capital

appeared to me to be an essential part of my course, so that at least a year must elapse before the important event named could take place.

It was further agreed that my father should himself see Colonel Clavering on the subject, and that this step would not be advisable until the former was in a position to speak confidently about the question of property, on which he must be prepared to make a more or less definite statement. And when we had come to the end of our discussion, he added, "I am sure it is only due to you, Charles, to say, that any proposal I may make in relation to that matter shall be a liberal one, as in mere justice to you it ought to be, and one with which I venture to believe you will be perfectly satisfied." Moreover permission was afforded me, if I judged it necessary or desirable for the purpose of allaying Katie's natural anxieties about the future, to give her in confidence some intimation relative to my expectations. It was very hard for her, poor girl, to be deprived of that solace in regard of the position she had somewhat hesitatingly accepted, which this knowledge must necessarily afford her. It was my duty to relieve her mind as soon as I could of apprehension re-

specting pecuniary difficulties and dangers, which, in the absence of independent fortune would undoubtedly be incurred if our union should take place within a few years only from the present date ; and to assure her that, so far as human foresight could predict, neither narrow means nor undue delay need be reckoned among our difficulties.

Such results from our deliberations were in every way favourable to me ; but they were no more than I had every reason to expect. My father, always instinctively kind, straightforward and judicious, although undemonstrative in manner, would, I knew, arrive at the views he ultimately entertained on hearing all the circumstances, and I was relieved by learning what I had not expected, namely, that he would himself lay siege to the Colonel. For although I am of opinion that a young fellow in my position should, as I have before somewhere put it, boldly face the guns himself and take the fire, if there be any, without flinching, the fact that the Rector would undertake to lay the first parallel, gave an importance and a dignity to the whole proceeding which I felt sure the Colonel would appreciate, and

which, indeed, might issue in a surrender without a siege. So that I had good reason to be hopeful and happy about my future prospects. It was with a light heart then that on the morning following our sport with the Squire, I went round to our neighbour's door about ten o'clock with a leash of plump young birds in my hand. I was admitted to the breakfast room, not yet cleared although the meal was finished, Katie occupying the seat where she had presided, looking an ideal morning companion for one happy man, in her pale blue morning dress, and her father standing on the hearthrug as if in conversation with her.

Bowing familiarly to her and shaking hands with the Colonel, I said, "I have come to bring you a little of yesterday's spoils, if you will do me the honour to accept them."

"Thank you," said he; "I needn't ask if you had a good day; Sir George would be sure to give you that. It was the first time, I suppose, you had shot since last season. I hope you killed your share?"

"I think so," said I; "my new breach-loader is very handy, and does its work well."

"Ah, by the way, you promised to show it me.

I shall ask you to do so next week. This is our Saturday morning, you know, at the 'Justices' sittings,' and we ought to meet about ten o'clock or so. I shall see your father there, of course." Turning to Katie, "I must run away, my dear; tell Kingston about our little plans;" and then to me—"You have come in quite *à propos*. Katie is going to enlist you all, if she can, for a picnic; now, good morning." He went out and left us, the hall door closed, and the gallant old Colonel walked out, passing the window, cane in hand, upright, grey, every inch a soldier still.

"Fine old fellow!" I ejaculated, almost unconsciously.

"Yes, Charley; so true, so good, and so devoted to me," with a sigh; "and wasn't he nice to you?" she continued.

"I thought so; particularly"——"and to leave us here together; what delightful luck," said I.

"Ah, Charley; he thinks all his friends are as good and true as he is."

"He will never have reason, I earnestly hope and believe," said I, "to find me, at any rate, an exception—never! Now let us have a dish of

talk. You have something to tell me first ; and then it will be my turn."

"Draw up your chair," she said, "and listen. There—just one—that will do—no more. Now am I not good?" Do you know, my father thought we might make an afternoon to Sibton Abbey. The excuse is, of course, to see the tulip-tree there in blossom—which they say at Sibton it does only once in a hundred years—my belief is it blossoms every three years. I've seen it twice before, I know, and I'm not two centuries old, am I, Charley?" The reader should be informed that the ruins of Sibton Abbey, three miles distant from Laxenford, form a popular summer rendezvous for the neighbourhood, and that the legend above alluded to no doubt has its origin in the value which accrues from a popular belief therein to the custodian who shows the place to the public, whose access to it is regulated by his permission.

"Well, it is said to have blossomed this summer. Whether or no," continued Kate, "you will come, won't you, all of you, and help us to boil our kettle there and make some tea? But we are going to ask Sir George's two girls and their

cousin Philip, who comes on Monday for a week or two's shooting, and who may be amiable enough to devote one afternoon to the young ladies, and to—bread and butter.”

“Shan't see much of you Katie, then, shall I?”

“What a selfish boy you are. I see I must cure you of that. We can't be always—always—you know—what's the word I mean?”

“Spooning, Katie?”

“Is that it? then I don't like it, Charley. Pray don't call it that any more.”

“Never mind the word, Katie, as long as we enjoy the reality,” I replied. “And of course I will behave myself, and be a very pink of propriety. Will that do? And when?”

“Wednesday next,” said she; “we shall meet at the Abbey grounds gate at half-past three. We shall provide a real kettle and all the rest.”

“Agreed. I will answer for the Rectory; and”—after a pause—“now, Katie, dearest, it is my turn. There was the tiniest little bit of edge, rather sharp edge, in what you said to me just now when the good Colonel left us, to say

nothing of the sigh that followed. It needs only a lover's eyes and ears to read your thoughts, my Katie; and they were at that moment a little melancholy, not without a tinge, perhaps, of self-upbraiding. Tell me, my own one, have I not spoken truth ? ”

“ Yes, Charley ; there are times when I can't hide from myself that I have kept a secret, and an important one, from my dear old father ; and I tell you frankly I shall never be happy, really happy, until my secret is told, and nothing is concealed any longer from him. Charley, my dear boy, I am sure you must feel this with me. I don't blame you at all. If there is any blame, it is mine ; I can't go on very long living a life apart from him which he does not know, and which I am sure he does not suspect.”

“ I know you too well, my dearest child,” I replied, “ not to be aware how much you must feel this ; I should honour you less than I do if it were not so. I feel keenly the pain I have caused you to suffer, and I have come prepared to lighten some of it, if I can. It was precisely on that account that I asked my father's leave to do so only last night.”

"Your father's leave, Charley; what can you mean?"

"I couldn't make you an entire confidant in this matter without that leave; and now I want to do so."

I then told her with as little detail as was necessary, and which need not be repeated here, that we were now in easy circumstances, and that one of the two difficulties no longer existed, a condition which would probably afford the means of overcoming the other in good time. Finally, as soon as certain formalities in relation to the will were completed, that my father was going to name the subject formally to the Colonel, and ask his permission.

"Oh, Charley, Charley! this is dreadfully serious! I never thought—quite yet, you know—to be talked of everywhere. Oh! no, no; one feels so frightened to think that it's all so very real. And, then, how you've taken me in, you deceitful creature; who would have believed it of you! and looking so artless too! Oh, Charley, how could you?" lifting up both her hands in apparent alarm, but letting them gently fall into mine immediately afterwards.

"I thought you didn't like the affair to be a secret, and now you seem not to like it to be the other way; I don't quite understand," said I, looking, I suppose, a little perplexed.

"Oh, what fun! How solemn and serious he is! and doesn't know when his Kit is—well—only a little surprised, or making believe, perhaps, just a tiny bit, to be so. But, Charley, all the same, does it not seem very, very serious—when one's father is to be called on and talked to about this by your father—about you, Charley, you and me—playing in the sand, as you said only the other day! All it seems now is, that as we get older the games are different and harder to play, but very nice, Charley! Well, I suppose I shall get over it. Well; yes, one more; no, well, one then. Dear old thing, you do deserve them."

"Now, not one word," said I, "to any one, you mad little pussy! Pray mind that, and I shall see you at church, you know, to-morrow; twenty-four hours of heart-breaking separation!"

"Poor, dear Charley, good-bye; you must go now. I shan't look at the clock, and then when

‘the Justice’ comes in and asks how long you have been here, I shan’t know. Oh, Charley; well, I think I shall really dream of this all night,” clapping her hands; “I’m so much better now, Charley! And what a wonderful story it all is when one comes to think about it.”

I walked home, called for Allison, and promised him a surgical treat (!) in proposing that he should accompany me in a walk of about a mile and a half to Will Barber’s cottage to inspect that one bad leg of Will Barber’s wife.

And then as we went I was too full of my happiness not to yield to his naturally inquisitive disposition some further insight into the present state of affairs, whereat my friend Arthur Allison was, I think, really pleased. He offered me warm congratulations on my prospects, and his expression of unfeigned admiration of my *fiancée*, in terms which sufficed, and were not too ardent—a happy mean requiring some tact and judgment on the part of one’s best friend to discover.

As we approached our destination, I told Allison he would have the opportunity he had been requesting me to find him, of hearing the

Suffolk dialect spoken in its natural purity and grace, Mary Barber possessing in an eminent degree the qualities which race and breeding conferred upon her as a native of "High Suffolk."

We reached a pretty cottage at the corner of a wood which skirts the Park. It was built in rustic style, and was half-covered with flowering creepers; a row of comfortable kennels and a yard for their occupants were ranged on one side, with some necessary offices. The approach to the door was through a wicket, whence a pathway led through a neatly-kept flower garden. Here I knocked, and a shrill demand to come in was heard in reply, which I obeyed, followed by Allison. We found ourselves at once in the "living room" of the family with Mrs. Barber, a strong, active-looking woman of five-and-thirty, busily occupied in preparing dinner, with a troop of children about her.

Putting down a large saucepan on the fire which she held in both hands, she rapidly seized one corner of her apron wherewith to wipe her rosy, heated face, and dropping a curtsey—

"I'm sure," said she, "I beg yer a thousan' pardons, Dr. Kingston, for not a' lettin' yeow in afore; ye find me all of a muck here, sir, an' ketchin' me all pramiskas like. Will, he said I was ta hev the honour o' seein' of yeow, sir, and I sartan thowt yeow wouldn't come till th' arternoon."

Observing her look of perplexity regarding Allison, to whom at the same time she had bobbed two or three curtseys by way of being on the side of safety as to manners, I interrupted her here by saying,—

"This is my friend, Mr. Allison, one of our learned doctors from the Hospital in London; he is visiting us at the Rectory, so you will have the advantage of his opinion too, because, as you know, I suppose, we have come to hear about a bad leg which Will says has long been a great trial to you. Only I'm afraid we've come at an inconvenient time. I suppose you're getting dinner ready for the keeper."

"Oh no, sir," she replied; "they're a shutin' agen at the Hall to-day, and Will's there, in course. Thank God, to-morrow's Sunday, thouw there's little rest for keepers, sir, Sundays nor

weekdays, night nor day; what with fust a-breedin' the bahds, and then a-lookin' arter 'em an' a-feedin' on 'em, and then a-keepin' off the poachers, who won't let 'em bide, and a-watchin' and goin' on. An' then, in course, there's Sir George, he expeck a fine head o' game everywhere, and if it een't there, Will he hev to answer for it. Ah, sir! it's a hard life, sir, is a keeper's!"

"Very like a doctor's, it seems to me, Mrs. Barber; your account of Will is almost the same that your old friend Dr. Hayter here in the High Street would tell you of his life. He is up at night with patients, and Will is up with poachers; but both must go when they are sent for, wet or dry, as you know, Mrs. Barber."

"Ah, sir! I s'pose we all hev our tryles; only we fare to know our own the best, don't we, sir?" she replied.

Four children had been standing round, meantime, at respectful distance, with mouths open and eyes fixed on the strangers, whose presence somewhat cowed them—three girls and a little boy. So I observed—

"If you have a little time to spare now before

dinner, suppose we hear about the leg, and then let us have a look at it."

"Sure-lye, sir," said she; then turning to the children, "now, yeow all run off into the backus, and keep there till I call yer," at the same time opening a door behind and hustling them out; then, as she returned to me, "troublesome little crittars, sir!"

The poor woman had suffered with a sore leg two years, which would not heal: one of the most common affections among the labouring classes, and mostly only curable when the patients can give the limb a prolonged period of rest, in the horizontal position—a condition of course impossible for a hard-working woman, and especially for the mother of a family whose life in such circumstances is one of ceaseless activity. She had had "stuff" and "sarves," to use her own words, from one source and another all the time, of course without any good result, for the reason just given. The sore was a little above the ankle, always painful and always demanding attention to prevent its growing worse. And thus her temper was becoming soured by the constant irritation, and Will and

the children were suffering in consequence. Formerly always good-natured and cheery, her face had of late habitually worn a constant expression of worry and discontent.

Now, shortly before this date a novel method of treating such sores had been tried and found very efficient, but the labour and skill necessary to employ the new proceeding placed it beyond the reach of poor patients not residing in a hospital—the very class by whom it was most required. It consisted in rendering the whole limb immovable by enveloping it in a thick bandage of starch, so that the patient could walk, with a stiff limb, of course, but the evil effect of movement on the diseased part being neutralized, the sore would heal, after which the stiff casing was removed. It had to be worn six or eight weeks, during which time a fresh casing might be necessary. Allison and I had determined to cure this poor woman if possible, by undertaking to make the application in question; and we explained it to her as well as we could.

“Dear sars, o’ mind, sir, and I’m a-going to stump about like Jim Watson with his wooden

leg, I s'pose; an' I'm sore afeard I shall be good for nawin ta dew any cleanin' an' that like. My biggest mawther, she as goes ta the skule, she must stop and hope me a bit; she hev got some gumption, she hev, thank God, and 'ull make a tidy gal bine bine, when she's a little owder. Well, sir, ta can't be hoped; an' if it dew but cure it, I shall be werry thankful to yeow, gentlemen, that I shall, and so 'ull Will," said Mrs. Barber.

Accordingly we arranged to bring all the necessary materials to "put her up in starch," as the hospital phrase has it, the day after to-morrow;—"in the afternoon about four o'clock, Mrs. Barber, which will suit you better, I daresay, than the morning," I added.

"Yes, sir, thank yeow kindly. I shall 'a cleaned myself, and got the place tidy by then, and more fit like to see a gentleman, than 'tis now; for what 'ith the dogs, and what 'ith the children—six on 'em, sir—and the wittals—for they've all to be cooked an' done for jest like human critturs—I'm ollus in a muddle o' the forenoon;" and as we were leaving, "And prayh, sir, give my

humble dewty to the Rector and his lady, if I may make so bowld, sir."

So we bade her good-bye and be cheerful, for we would certainly make a sound cure of the sore leg if she would have a little patience.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. DICKSON'S LEGACY AND LAST APPEARANCE.

It is now high time to turn our attention to the progress which the family business has been making in London during our pursuit of rural sports and other occupations at Laxenford.

On our return from Barber's cottage, my father summoned me to his study to inform me that Mr. Westerham had called on him for the purpose of reporting that all the necessary arrangements had been completed preliminary to the next visit to town, the object of which would be to prove the will. He proposed to accompany my father on Monday, the 7th, if agreeable to him, for that purpose, going and returning in the day. The London agents had obtained a valuation of the securities, and felt themselves justified in estimating the personalty,—and there was no real

estate,—at a sum not exceeding £60,000. They further advised, and this, indeed, had been a subject of discussion and inquiry in the hands of Mr. Westerham on my father's behalf, and of consultation also with our own country bankers, and all had agreed that the American securities should be sold, and the proceeds partly invested in first-class British securities, such as English railway debentures and first preference stocks, which could at this period be bought to pay $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 per cent., reserving a good moiety to be lent on mortgage on landed estates, which could be had at about $3\frac{3}{4}$ to 4 per cent. The latter proceeding would naturally have the effect of bringing some business to the office of the solicitor, while at the same time it was advice of the most judicious kind for the client.

And here it may be stated that the application which had been made some time ago to the lawyers in Cleveland, U.S., had been duly responded to, those gentlemen having forwarded a list of the securities which had within their knowledge been recently held by Captain Parkinson, and subsequently by his widow. And this list was found to correspond in every particular with the bonds

and certificates which we had acquired ; and it was thus proved that we had become possessed of the whole of the fortune which my aunt had to leave. And we further decided that the time had arrived, that is, as soon as the will should have been proved, for Mr. Westerham to communicate with the police authorities in Scotland Yard, and inform them of the chief particulars in relation to the finding of the property.

My father reported, on his return on Monday evening, that all preliminaries having been arranged, his duty had been a very simple one, and that the will being proved, the facts connected therewith would soon be known. Hence he requested me to see Mrs. Dickson on the following morning to communicate to her such facts regarding the history of my aunt's residence in London, and the discovery of her will, as it was needless to withhold, at the same time avoiding any allusion to the most painful circumstances, a knowledge of which would neither render a service nor afford gratification to a single person. Moreover, I was of course to leave to my father the duty of communicating the circumstance of the legacy to Mrs. Dickson, to learn which would, indeed, be

the chief object of her visit to my father in his official capacity of executor.

Accordingly, on the next morning, soon after breakfast, I found my way to the shop, and inquired for Mrs. Dickson, who invited me to follow her into the counting-house, already known to my reader by a previous visit.

"Mrs. Dickson," said I, "I have come to redeem my promise of giving you news of our poor old friend's affairs. It is about three or four weeks ago only that we found the first trace of her property, together with her will, very fortunately at the same time. My father went to London only yesterday to prove it, and you are the very first person to whom the fact is made known, so I hope you will see that I have lost no time; and I have come to ask whether you will do my father the favour to come up and see him, as he particularly wishes to speak to you about it."

Mrs. Dickson graciously assented, and after giving her a few particulars of the steps of the inquiry which led to our discovering it, an arrangement was made that she should call at three o'clock in the afternoon, on which I took my leave.

At the hour appointed Mrs. Dickson arrived, looking particularly spruce, and was ushered into my father's study. He rose to receive her, and desired her to take a seat, which she acknowledged with a deferential curtsy.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mrs. Dickson," said my father, "for being so good as to come and see me thus. My son here, I believe, has given you some information about the curious circumstances which have led to our becoming acquainted with the very painful history of our poor relative's recent residence and last illness in this country."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Kingston told me something of it this morning; very painful indeed, sir; so grievous to think the poor creatur' should never hev her senses sufficient to remember the old place, and all her friends here—quite uncommon, I should think, sir."

"No doubt it is so," said the rector; "but one of my objects in seeking this interview, and a very agreeable one it is to me, Mrs. Dickson, is to tell you that the forgetfulness of her old friends, which you refer to, was a temporary aberration only, and that she faithfully recollected

them until that fatal malady destroyed her memory. Her will was made so lately as October last, and as you had afforded her so much aid and counsel in her business matters during her residence here, I wished to place that will," giving her the document, "as it is a very brief one, in your own hands, that you may see precisely how she disposed of her property."

"Indeed, this is very kind and condescendin' of you, sir," said she, putting on a pair of spectacles, taken from a black silk bag which hung on her arm. On reading the document, she soon learned her own interest in the estate; when she put down the parchment, took off her glasses, and hastily withdrew a pocket-handkerchief from the aforesaid bag, under pretext of wiping them, an evident excuse for counteracting a temporary dimness of vision, which was probably as much due to the natural as to the artificial lenses.

Then after a pause, she said—

"I hope yew'll excuse me, feelin' quite lost like, sir, and not knowin' how to express myself; so little tew as it were, sir, that I iver done for the poor, dear lady; and she so grateful and considerate! And yew, sir, tew, to be so kind, and

so soon a lettin' 'a me know of it. And I'm so thankful, if I may say so, for the young people, sir, dear Miss Janet, and partikler for Mr. Charles, sir, who've took up the business all along so very keen. I call to mind, sir, how he sit and heerd me tell all I could think on; tew arternoons we was o' puttin' down everything I could recklect about her. Poor dear, what trials she must hev had! Well, she's happy now, there een't a doubt. So sparin' and savin' she was, and no indulgin' herself onnessarily. Ah, sir, 'tis for we to thank the Lord and all His mussies who hev took her to Himself, and brought everything to light, as one may say, at last; after all her afflictions here, as is sent with some wise purpose, sir, no doubt, all onbeknown to us, poor blind sinners, as we are at the best, askin' your pardon all the same, sir. And Mr. Charles, tew, how clever he hev been, sir, hev he not? 'Tis he hev routed everything up; and I dew think he 'a done his part. There's no doubt he'll succeed whatever Providence call on him to dew. Let's hope and pray he may, sir, both here and hereafter."

"My son Charles has a great respect for you,

Mrs. Dickson," said my father, "and will be gratified by hearing your good opinion. Now I have only one more favour to ask of you, and that is, to suit your own convenience entirely in calling on Mr. Westerham, who tells me he is prepared to pay the legacy at once, and will be happy to see you for the purpose whenever it suits you." Mrs. Dickson being apparently about to remonstrate, my father continued—"I beg you won't say another word. We all feel that if our poor friend had not made some slight acknowledgment of your great attention to her, she would have left us a task which would not have been an easy one to accomplish." And thus, with a parting formality or two, the interview terminated; and Mrs. Dickson left, feeling happy and self-complacent in accepting solely for herself this valuable addition to her capital, seeing that hitherto the "New Meetin'" had reaped all the fruits of her long-continued exertions in my aunt's behalf.

"Ah," said she to herself, as she walked homeward, "are we not told to cast our bread upon the waters. What a true saying that is, sure-ly!"

The Clavering picnic at Sibton went off well, and Sir George gave us another day at the par-

tridges almost immediately afterwards. On that day my father called upon the Colonel and acquainted him with the accession of fortune which the family had acquired, together with the history appertaining thereto. And having done so, he proceeded to express the gratification he himself should experience if a proposal on behalf of his son, who had long been deeply attached to Miss Clavering, to offer her marriage, not immediately, but at a date which might be dictated by prudence, could be entertained by the Colonel, provided that the young lady's affections responded to the offer. He stated further that Charles desired to spend another year at least in studies, to be pursued partly in this country and partly abroad, before entering on the marriage state with the view of subsequently continuing the scientific pursuit of his profession for a few years to come in connection with the hospital to which he belonged, if possible. At the same time he would be able to commence his career by taking a house in a good quarter of the West-end of London, as a preparation for consulting practice, when time and opportunity should pave the way for his obtaining it. Charles' own view, if my father

might be permitted to express at so early a stage any idea of his relating to the future, was that his marriage with Katie, if it could be realized, should not necessitate a separation between the father and the daughter, inasmuch as the plan which had been sketched above, would enable them to share a house together in London, should the Colonel be agreeable to do so. "For my own part," said my father, "I will not hesitate to say in conclusion that on the day of his marriage I engage to place one-half of the Parkinson fortune at his disposal; the remaining half, in addition to my own little property, being ample for the wants of my family, including all future provision for my wife and daughter. To such early participation in its benefits I feel that his conduct and skill entitle him in such circumstances as these we are now considering. The income thus furnished would defray all the expenses he could possibly incur, with prudent and economic management, during the first seven years of married life, at the end of which time he would probably commence to reap some pecuniary results from his experience and study."

Such is the brief *resumé* of the proposal placed

by my father at considerable length before Colonel Clavering; and it was one which could only be received in a spirit of courtesy and consideration. Indeed it was impossible that the Colonel could be otherwise than flattered by the manner in which my father had approached him, or that he could fail to give careful attention to the matter of the proposal itself, since it was one which offered, so far as human foresight might be trusted, a substantial and promising future for the young couple.

The Colonel thanked his old friend and neighbour for the frankness and kindness he had manifested in the negotiation, and said he should naturally require a few days to think over the terms of the proposition, and especially to acquaint himself thoroughly, if he could, with Katie's views respecting it.

The particulars of this interview were fully reported to me by my father, and I was not a little touched by his generosity in offering to make so ample a provision in order to obtain the realization of my hopes. That I warmly and gratefully thanked him need scarcely be said. It was deemed necessary that no communication of

any kind should be made either by me or by him to the Claverings until the Colonel had signified his desire to reply to my father. Several days passed without his making any sign, a period of painful suspense for me which I supported with some impatience, and not without anxiety. Allison and I, however, occupied ourselves fully in various ways. Among other tasks we had "put up in starch" Mary Barber's leg, to the great astonishment of the neighbours, and to the great discomfort of herself. The former had called to see her, coming in considerable numbers, rather, I fancy, to gratify their curiosity than from any deep interest in Mary's welfare, for the proceeding had become a common topic of talk for the village.

"Bless yer, my dear, them young doctors turned up their shirtsleeves and rubbed Mary Barber all over wi' starch, and then done her up tight in bandages, and starched her agin, till at last she were that stiff she couldn't stir hand nor foot; and they dew say Will hev to feed her with a spune." Such at least was the account which Hannah Binks the washerwoman, wife of Joe Binks, night watcher under Will Barber, gave to

the servants when working at the washtub at the fortnightly great wash of that large family of Mr. Johnston, the ironmonger, in the High Street. "And the sight o' starch—and the werry best tew—which them young min went and spiled, was enouw ta make yer sick ta see't; as much as 'ud last the Squire's larndry for the matter o' tew months at the lessest! Well, 'tis ta be hoped she'll hev the use of her leg arter that. And they dew say she'll hev ta be done agin, once anyhouw, 'haps maybe twice!"

Such was the enlargement which the account received at its first re-telling after issue from the original source. What the story became when the fourth or fifth edition appeared, with fresh improvements and embellishments accruing at each stage, those who best know the ways of life in a country village are best qualified to imagine. It was an illustration, not less instructive than amusing, of the process by which, through the ordinary working of uncultivated minds, a simple statement might become so changed and complicated by repetition, that scarcely a semblance exists between the original story and the product which was ultimately arrived at.

CHAPTER XIX.

A WEDDING AND A HONEYMOON.

ON the fourth day after my father's call, the Colonel returned it, and a conference followed. The result was favourable. Katie had declared her wishes in no uncertain terms, and the arrangements proposed by my father and myself were approved. It also appeared that Katie herself would inherit a moderate fortune at her father's death, and the question of settlements and other matters related thereto was to be left for future consideration. I might now, therefore, at once present myself as her accepted lover; I was not long in availing myself of my new privilege, and was soon at Katie's side. A family meeting or two on each part took place in honour of the great event, and made us all very merry; finding

two of us in a frame of mind to describe which adequately both agreed that no word in the language has yet been invented.

A recognized engagement at my age, with prospects so unexpectedly promising, to one whom I had known from childhood and now devotedly loved, opened out to me a most happy if not a brilliant future. I shall not be content without saying here one word as to the course which I had taken in soliciting Katie's consent to a proposal of marriage, perhaps in defiance of what I believed to be the wishes of her father. Katie and I had lived almost as brother and sister from childhood; we had had no secrets from each other; hence it was impossible to say at what moment the first promptings of early love could, or ought to have been recognized and understood by us, or at all events by me; so that I should have been able—to say nothing of being sufficiently resolute—to declare, thus far may we go and no farther. We had no experience of the condition under which, in nineteen instances out of twenty, young people encounter each other for the first time after entering society; an attraction arising on one side, rarely perhaps on both, after

some three or four opportunities of meeting only, or even less.

When, however, through arrangements made by their respective parents, a boy and a girl have been associates from infancy upwards, it is highly improbable, as a general rule, that they should become lovers hereafter. But it is impossible not to foresee that if the intimacy of early life should imperceptibly develop into tenderer feelings as age advances, it is scarcely possible to ask permission from parents until after that development has been realized. I trust, then, that I shall be acquitted of having greatly failed in my duty towards Colonel Clavering in following the course which circumstances forced upon me. If the Colonel had blamed my conduct when he first became acquainted with the relations between Katie and myself, he speedily overlooked the fault, since he now received me with the utmost cordiality, entered into my plans with intelligence, and occupied himself in furthering our joint interests in every way.

The vacation was now waning ; in about a fortnight's time the new term would commence, namely, on Thursday, the 1st of October. Ac-

cordingly, it was arranged that Allison and I should leave on the 30th inst. A little more sport with Sir George and with a neighbouring squire whom we met on our second invitation to the Hall, together with an occasional dinner party, filled up the time quite sufficiently at least for me, who devoted as much as possible to Katie. We cultivated our loves assiduously, and those who know how luxuriously such growth may take place under suitable environments will understand how much we were astonished, if not alarmed, when we came to realize what our condition must be when the inevitable parting came which my journey to London rendered necessary. We then discovered what a void in our lives the loss of our daily association involved, and we proposed to soothe our shattered affections and to repair as far as possible the ruthless violence which our tenderest feelings were about to suffer, by the one panacea for such lover's trials — a torrent of correspondence.

Allison's term at the hospital having expired, he went into rooms not far from my former quarters, to which I returned. The next three months were spent in the usual routine of labour,

and I returned to Laxenford for the Christmas vacation. I spent there three weeks of supreme enjoyment. Katie had kept me fully informed of village news, including an assurance that the treatment of Mary Barber's leg had been successful, that she was perfectly well, and that Will and the family were happier than they had been for a long time past. And in the daily exercise we took together in the keen winter air we called on all our old friends, and a visit to the gamekeeper's cottage was not one of the least pleasant objects we thus found for the morning's walk. There was to be a dance for the servants and dependants at the Hall on the last night of the year, and Mary intended to take a full share of the gaiety on that occasion.

My intention was to visit Paris in March, 1858, and this I fulfilled. Thanks to the help of an old fellow-student who was studying there, I found myself provided, on arriving, with a little suite of rooms *au troisième* in the Rue de Seine, a locality in the Quartier Latin suitable for my purpose. There the early morning habits of student life offer a marked contrast with our routine in London. Close attendance on the

chiefs in their visits to La Charité, Hotel Dieu, La Pitié, and other hospitals involved attendance at half-past eight, or before, in the morning, the visit being generally not concluded till eleven by which time we considered that a substantial *déjeuner* had been fairly earned. By no means the least advantage gained by such residence is the opportunity of acquiring some facility in the practice of French conversation which is cultivated on these occasions, and in other ways, which used to include a not unfrequent resort to the neighbouring Odéon, a favourite theatre among students in those days.

I remained in Paris the greater part of the summer. It is needless to afford any other details of a history which issued, after the fulfilment of all our plans and wishes, in my marriage with Katie in the beginning of September. I shall briefly say that the two families made it their business to find and furnish a comfortable house in a well-known street, situate in the region marked by the sites of Grosvenor and Berkeley Squares; and that it was ready to receive us on our return from the wedding tour, in Southern Europe, shortly before Christmas. The Colonel did not

accept our proposal to occupy a little suite of rooms for his sole and separate use in the house, but found snug chambers for himself at no great distance.

His loss was felt at Laxenford by the Rector, because in a small country parish every individual counts for something in a society so small as ours, but there were no very close ties broken by the removal. The Colonel had been a near, but a very unobtrusive acquaintance; he was quiet, uncommunicative, and lived chiefly for his daughter. My sister, more than anyone else, felt Katie's absence, but there were reasons for believing that my father was gradually making up his mind to resign the living before long, in order to reside near to us in town, and for the purpose of devoting himself more fully than before to his archaeological work, for which access to metropolitan sources of information was at the present stage of his labours desirable.

The marriage solemnities and festivities were conducted with all the honours, ecclesiastical and social, which were appropriate to the occasion. Immediately afterwards we left for the Continent, arriving at North Italy by easy stages. We

posted the old Simplon route, making our final and grand stage from the "Trois Couronnes," at Brieg, to descend at the Hotel Bellevue, at Baveno, at about five o'clock on a brilliant afternoon in the second week of September. We were received at the entry, in the back of the house, by its courteous proprietor, the well-known Mr. Pedretti; and we do not forget at this day the impression which, after being conducted to our rooms situate in the front, we received, when from their windows the magnificent view of the Lago Maggiore burst upon us for the first time. The sun was gradually sinking towards the west behind us, soon to disappear behind the lofty ridge of Monte Motterone, which, at a somewhat early hour, cuts off the direct rays from the lake. The noble outlines of the Sasso del Ferro mountain group, about five miles distant, rise before us a little to the right, glorious in colour with evening light, and reflected almost to our feet in the broad expanse of tranquil waters which wash the opposite shore, and ripple on the margin of the hotel garden beneath. To the front also, but more to the left, and somewhat nearer, the town of Pallanza, with its tall campanili, fringe the

shore, while scattered villas dot the heights, bright and sparkling, and looking almost within hail in this clear atmosphere. The richly-wooded Borromean Isles, the Madre, the Isola dei Pescatori, and the Isola Bella, lend their many-coloured aspects to the mirror beneath, all bathed in warmer tints as the sunset approaches, and lying in a glow of genial heat, especially grateful to us who had shivered in the frosty night air on the barren mountain pass of the Simplon. The little balcony of our sitting-room hung over the scene, changing its hue every minute through tints of orange to deep red, and almost crimson; and then the cool purple rose gradually from below upon the scene, chasing the red tint upwards, which lingered last of all on the mountain tops and finally disappeared, when the stars stole softly out by twos and threes, faintly twinkling at first in the dark blue ether on every side. And then a few hours afterwards a wholly fresh aspect of this fairy land was revealed, when a nearly full moon appeared over the mountains, bringing all the chief outlines into view again, reflecting them in the water, which was just rippled enough by the light

airs of evening to mark a luminous, floating, flickering track, as of brilliant molten silver, across the lake.

Never was a more fitting spot for young lovers to revel in the new delights of unfettered and undisturbed possession! Here we could enjoy, during midday heat, the deep shade of the gardens beneath, rich with luxuriant growth of semi-tropical shrubs, interspaced with moving glimpses of bright blue water; or we might wander on the wooded slopes which overhang the Stresa road for fresh aspects of the lovely lake; or, borne on its placid surface, we might lovingly recline together on the soft cushions of a canopied bark, lulled by the musical plash of oars as they lazily floated us, now in one direction now in another, under pretext of carrying us to some new point of view. Or, as we reposed fondly on the couch before the glass front doors of our room, wide opening on the balcony at the close of the day, watching the brief twilight's rapid change, we might find ourselves surprised by night's approach and sudden darkness; when light is lost without regret, and the tale of love is told in soft whispers, and repeated in subtler and yet

more thrilling accents than the tenderest words can supply.

Thus luxuriously we passed our days and nights, while the moon left and came again, and until chilly evenings warned us to follow the sun in our travel. It was with a long look of regret that we bade adieu to our Capua, and we embarked on the duty of sight-seeing in the cities of the south. And when at last we returned in after time to London, we still emphatically said, "But the best of all was Baveno!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE "SILVER WEDDING," AND WHAT IT LED TO.

NEARLY twenty-five years have elapsed since the visit to Baveno was made, a brief account of which was given in the preceding chapter.

The London season of 1883 is drawing to a close, and hard-worked men amuse themselves, occupying short intervals of leisure in planning the holiday which follows it. Katie and I have a peculiar interest in shaping a scheme this year, to which we have resolved that two months at least shall be devoted. This is a liberal proportion for a consulting physician of my age and standing, and hitherto I have not permitted myself at any time so great an indulgence; indeed, with my various duties of a public and private nature, a prolonged absence from town has been impossible, and my usual vacation term has been

limited to about four weeks in the autumn. But the reason is a special one this time, and is doubtless sufficiently obvious. It is the twenty-fifth anniversary of our marriage, in common phrase, "our silver wedding." We intend to give ourselves an unusual opportunity for leisure and enjoyment; and as we still are happier when enjoying each other's society and that of our children than in any other circumstances, we intend to have an exceptionally long vacation, for the occupations of professional life and the claims of society leave us now but little of the quiet intercourse we so greatly enjoyed during the first few years of married life. Our plans are at present not matured; we discuss from time to time how we may best secure the rest we need, and the undisturbed association which we believe would be so delightful to both of us. Before, however, I present my wife and myself to the reader, changed as we necessarily must be by innumerable influences, after the lapse of a quarter of a century, I propose to acquaint him in brief terms with the chief events which have happened during that period to affect the interests of our respective families.

In the course of the first seven years of our life, my wife presented me with three children, two boys and a girl. The eldest boy is twenty-three years of age, and left Cambridge last year; the girl is twenty, and the youngest is at a German University at present, to which he went on leaving Winchester.

Colonel Clavering lived to see two grand children, as well as to witness and enjoy his daughter's happiness for some years, terminating his career at seventy-eight, from causes due to the ordinary decay of nature. My father and mother still live; neither have reached seventy-five, although my father, at all events, is approaching that term closely. They reside in a western suburb, within easy reach of us. My sister married a London barrister, who has recently taken silk. They both rank among our most frequently seen and best-loved friends. My old fellow-student Allison is a surgical colleague at the hospital—a bachelor still—and our friendship is not less prized now by both of us, than it ever was in our early days. He is godfather to my only girl, and takes the greatest interest in the second, or “diamond edition” of the original Katie, as he has been pleased

to call her; but Katiet he second's capability of physical growth developed itself so greatly about three or four years ago, that the word "diamond" has disappeared, and he at all events cannot with accuracy now use any diminutive term to distinguish the second edition from the original one.

Regarding my wife and myself personally, let me, then, premise that our experience of twenty-five years reveals no changes of so striking a kind as those which, for the sake of dramatic effect, are invariably represented on the stage as the natural and necessary result of the lapse of twenty-five years of middle life—for example, those which Rip Van Winkle passed in so profound a slumber. The young and vigorous yeoman rises from his couch a venerable, hoary-headed patriarch, and the inference which cannot be resisted is—contrary to the usual and probably not incorrect opinion that sound sleep conduces to reparation of the body, and not to its rapid degradation and decay—that Rip Van Winkle's sleep must have been of an extremely exhausting nature. Perhaps the healthiest condition of body and mind attainable is acquired by the habitual active exercise of their respective functions; and when all these

powers are occupied to an extent which it is customary to describe by the term "hard work." At all events such conditions of activity are those under which my life has been spent, and to whatever extent they have been responsible for my present state of body and mind, it is by no means one at all resembling that of the aforesaid Rip Van Winkle of the stage.

I am in the full enjoyment of my mental and bodily faculties, which, as far as I can judge, are at their prime, the latter perhaps slightly beneath the highest standard they have at one time touched. Katie is not quite the slim and supple creature I described at the outset of my story. She has gradually ripened both in body and mind, and those features which were perfect in beauty and delicate in outline have gradually ceased to claim those qualities as their predominating character; but, on the other hand, they now contribute to produce loveliness of facial expression, and to add new grace to intelligent speech and action. Her health has been good, and her natural disposition has been to err, supposing an error to exist, on the side of activity, not on that of inertia or indolence.

During the whole of our married life we have thus far occupied the same house. I determined, early in my career, to follow medicine, and not operative surgery, for which I at first supposed myself to have a bias ; hence I became a Fellow of the College of Physicians as soon as permission to do so was attainable. My standing is good and my engagements are increasing. I have been compelled to engage in the literature as well as in the practice of my profession, and to take my share in those labours which the Royal College so wisely distributes among the younger men in its ranks. During ten years after my marriage, of unremitting labour in my own hospital, I became one of its physicians, and have filled that arduous post about fifteen years. Four years later I obtained a professor's chair in the college associated with the hospital, a much-coveted appointment, but one which entails duties of a very onerous character, including a course of almost daily lectures to students during six months of the year. I design, wherever I go for my forthcoming vacation, to carry with me a few materials for such literary work as these engagements entail, if only to occupy an occasional wet

day or two, if we meet with them. My wife has long found some of her greatest pleasures in helping me with some portions of this labour, for which she has a remarkable talent, and she is not less pleased than myself when she is summoned to aid me in such home occupations of my private study as these naturally are.

We were seated at breakfast on the first Sunday in August, together with the elder boy and the girl, when my wife remarked that it was quite time to settle our plans ; that she thought I was looking fagged with London work, and she hoped I would agree to a speedy start.

"Well," said I, "I think I could arrange my affairs to leave London within a week. I have just obtained special permission to enter on my duties on the 15th of October next instead of the 1st, on which day I should, in obedience to an almost invariable rule, commence work. That will give us the two months we have so long looked forward to."

"In that case," replied Katie, "I make you a proposal. We have never been able to visit Italy since our wedding trip—what say you to go there for the 'silver' one? What say you to

spend the real anniversary at Baveno—dear old Baveno !” .

After a profound examination of the bottom of my second egg, which had been nearly emptied, thus gaining a brief period for reflection, and with a cursory but unperceived glance at the two young faces opposite, whose expression might offer some indication of an opinion as to the sense in which I might be hoped to answer, I gave my complete adhesion to the scheme. I agreed to be ready to start in a week's time, adding that we should be delighted to take with us our two young companions, making arrangements for the German student to come over the Brenner and join us at Venice after our visit to the lakes. Thus we should bring the three children together for their first view of that unrivalled city, and have the happiness of enjoying their first impressions, besides renewing those which we ourselves had before received.

We passed a few days at Lucerne, leaving it by the St. Gothard line for Locarno, then down the lake by steamer to Baveno, arriving there in the third week of August. This time we were received by one of the sons of our former host, Mr.

Pedretti, to whom I had written for rooms, and who allotted to us an excellent suite in front, commanding from their windows the magnificent view which had so enchanted us at first. Mr. Pedretti, senior, now more venerable than before, still active, enjoys his post as head of the house, the capabilities of which we found increased, and its old reputation sustained. A large saloon had been added on the north side, while a capacious glass verandah on the front, affording shade, and cover, equally from undue sunlight and from rain, had replaced the chairs and benches where formerly reclined after-dinner loungers over their coffee, cigars, and the musical service such as it is, which natives and strolling artists are still wont to supply. It is early in the season for North Italy, no doubt, according to the general estimate, but the air is light and fresh, without closeness, and wholly enjoyable for those who love heat, and, being English, can live, when in Italy, chiefly on the diet and after the manners of the country, rather than on the heavier dishes of their dear native island, which Mr. Pedretti is nevertheless quite ready to furnish, of course, to any extent. And at this season the weather continues uninter-

ruptedly fine, while midday repose and closed shutters leave forenoons and afternoons of ample length for activity.

Thus during a stay of a fortnight Nature unfolded to us the ancient glories, varying as they do with the different times of day and aspects of the sky, such as that of early morning with its cool light and perfect tranquillity before sunrise, followed by the ample wealth and fulness of brilliant sunlight, penetrating all things during the middle hours of the day; and this, later on, gradually giving way to the glowing colours of sunset, flooding the whole expanse, but seeming to be concentrated perhaps on a magnificent cumulus, filling half the eastern and southern sky, rising by rounded curves into domes of vast proportion surmounting the whole, which, still spreading and widening, bathed in hues of brilliant yellow, gold and orange, reflects the same tints, not merely in the sheet of polished lake below, but on every object around, and penetrates even the shadows with warm light. I think this is one of the most striking and beautiful aspects of the sky which one meets with even in this region of atmospheric pageant.

We had been enjoying our stay here upwards

of a week, when early one afternoon Katie and I went to the parapet at the bottom of the garden, from whence descend the steps leading to the narrow beach or shore where the pleasure-boats lie. Our object was to see Charles embark with his sister in one of them, which they had retained for rowing by themselves. They were going for two or three hours to a spot for sketching which had fascinated them, namely, the Isola dei Pescatori, that inexhaustible store of picturesque subjects for the artist.

Its one long, irregular street of old houses, with only a narrow zig-zag ribbon of blue sky between their lofty and close approaching roofs ; a street from which all sunlight is shut out, except where a rare and occasional narrow slit-like opening lets in a thin but brilliant gleam, and all the rest is cool, dark shade. At every step is offered a new perspective of striking objects, overhanging balconies in old wood, galleries, signs, quaint windows, fishermen's nets, and, interwreathing all, some climbing creepers ; while stray shoots of oleander in full blossom from a sunny side-passage, or a long straggling growth of vine, strayed far away from parent stem, has

clambered into view. And as one passes over the rough pebble-paved ground, with here and there a step, able to touch with an extended hand a house on either side, a lateral opening, lane-like, now and again shows a strip of the quay and of blue lake beyond, and of the brightly habited fishermen and fishermen's wives, busied about their nets, their boats, or their children, or merely grouped for gossip in the setting sunlight. From the north end under the low pollards, where they meet to sing and dance in the evening, up to the opposite end where the church and the restaurant look over and face their more pretentious, but infinitely less picturesque neighbour, the Isola Bella—chosen resort of tourists from every nation—the long, diversified thoroughfare of the Pescatori affords a series of studies worthy of any pencil.

We took our seats beneath the shade of an overhanging tree, and watched the little boat ploughing the clear water in a straight line for the island as the two pulled steadily together, the pupil Kate doing justice to her brother's training. We had indulged a long silence, each content to traverse with dreamy gaze the scene before us, to breathe the pure, soft air, to revel

in the genial warmth, and doubtless to carry back our memories to that luxurious month of our first visit here.

"Dear little woman," I said, "I hope you are as happy here as I am; only I am sure I need not ask you; since if I don't know myself, which is probable seeing that this branch of learning is so difficult, I think I know you; and the converse thereof being probably true, I ought to ask you if I want to know whether I am really enjoying this second visit of ours."

"I can easily tell you if you don't know, Charley," (it may possibly be remembered that on a notable occasion an agreement had been made that "Charley" I was to be to the end of the chapter); "I don't think I have ever seen you enjoy yourself more thoroughly than you have been doing here."

"I fancy you are right, and yet it is not the least like that first time in '58," said I; "that was a glorious time, Katie—in its way! and——"

She stopped me:

"Yes, in its way; and while it lasted it was a lovely dream; one scarcely thinks of it now as real. Two people so wrapped up in each other,

Charley ; nothing in the whole world but their mutual love and their enjoyment of it. But it was the very essence of selfishness, wasn't it ? A splendid form of it too ; when each self is living for the other self, and thinks itself so utterly unselfish ! But you might just as well aim at continuing to live so, as to feed perpetually on that delicious '*mousse au chocolat*' and champagne *frappé* which came at the end of the dinner your friend the Professor at Paris gave us at St. Cloud last Sunday fortnight ; you might take more of it than was good for you, but you couldn't live on it, although you might like to try ! Pray forgive my somewhat sensual illustration, only, as your head-housekeeper, I made a special note of that '*mousse*.' "

" And you were quite right," said I. " But to return ; then, you think this is as good as the old time, Katie ? "

" Better, Charley, much better ; we are happier now, I think, because we have more outside us to live for. For some time, you know, I had only you—you need not look indignant—and you had only me—that makes us even. But then when the little ones came, there were fresh objects for

us to care for; and then of course we could not help being happier, because the self-indulging love gradually fades away and the other comes in its place."

"You could not have put it better, Katie. Yes, no doubt our interests in life, and consequently our happiness therein, are trebled by the existence of the three bairns. It is an old doctrine, and never was a truer one, that the direct pursuit of our own personal gratification brings little happiness, but in seeking that of others we indirectly, and often unsuspectedly, find a considerable share."

"That is true as a sermon," said she; "and a little bit like one, you dear old proser. Yet I am afraid sometimes that loving and looking after one's own children so much is only one degree less selfish than loving you, Charley, my other self; but still, inasmuch as it is so, it is a step in the right direction!" . . . "But I have something else to say to you. I have been thinking of quite another subject lately," she continued.

"Some new dream, eh? Am I to give you a penny for your thoughts?"

"No, I don't desire to lead you into any act

of extravagance. But seriously, since I have been here, I have been thinking over an old history—what a curious one it is—and what an age it seems since it happened!—that old history which sometimes we speak of together, and which we never talk of to our friends—the tragic history of your old aunt!”

“Well, Katie, what of it?”

“It is now twenty-five years ago, you know, and all the people concerned in it, but your father and mother and you and I, are gone. My poor father—dear old father, he hadn’t much to do with it—well, who are the others? Old Mrs. Dickson, she is gone; and our old friend Westerham, too; good Sir George, ah! he has been dead more than twenty years, and the family has left the Hall; Allison—well, he is like us, and won’t count; we can take him into our confidence. Ah! there’s your friend, Fanny Henderson; I leave her to you, although neither of us can ever forget our dues in that quarter. There is no one else to reckon with. Now, Charley, what I want you to do is this,—write a short history of it all, and tell the story exactly as it took place. Don’t alter a single fact, nor a

date, nor the places; tell a plain, unvarnished tale, paint a picture of it all as well as you can, in simple, truthful colour, drawn as nearly as you can from the life. I give you leave to make one exception only to these instructions. Change the names and publish it anonymously."

I had listened attentively to this long speech of Katie's, spoken with care and deliberation, showing me that she had thought over this proposal well before she made it me, and I replied,—

"There is something very tempting in what you say—I have never thought of it so before, and I can't answer you at once; so busy, too, as I always am. Still, I will sleep over it, and think of it further."

Twenty-four hours after, I said to Katie,—

"I have thought, and if it is only to please you, I will try; and I really think it might become an amusing occupation, and may answer the purpose of an agreeable relief sometimes from heavier labours. I shall begin at once by making some notes, and you shall help me to recollect."

The rest of our holiday afforded me the opportunity of making a beginning. Then came London

work; but in the intervals thereof, few and far between, the story was continued precisely on the principles laid down above, and each portion, as it was finished, was read aloud to Katie, who criticized, supplemented, and suggested. At last, in the summer of 1884, it was finished. Then we went through it together, and at the end of the reading I said to her—

“This is the last time of asking: do you see any just cause or impediment why this manuscript should not be carried to the press and be printed?”

Said Katie—

“There is one chapter I almost think you might as well leave out.”

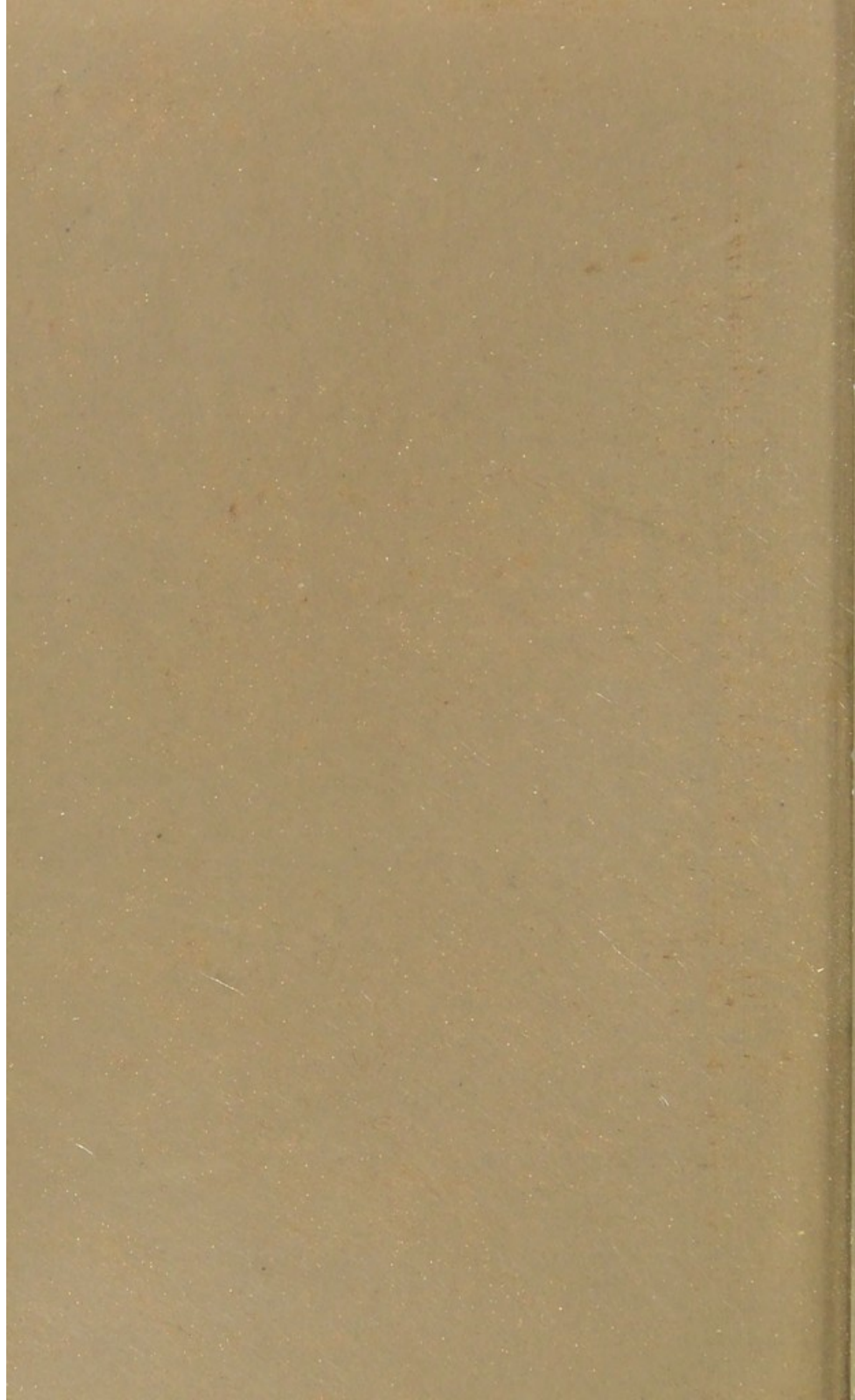
“Only one?” said I.

“Only one that—well, that I hesitate just a little about, Charley; it’s that chapter where we—”

“You needn’t explain, I know; if that is all, my dearest Katie, then let it go as it is, and—take its chance!”

THE END.





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