

searching too; and there is a laggard mist a little way up in the air. It is a fine steaming night to turn the slaughter-houses, the unwholesome trades, the sewerage, bad water, and burial grounds to account, and give the Registrar of Deaths some extra business. It may be something in the air—there is plenty in it—or it may be something in himself, that is in fault; but Mr. Weevle, otherwise Jobling, is very ill at ease. He comes and goes, between his own room and the open street door, twenty times an hour. He has been doing so, ever since it fell dark. Since the Chancellor shut up his shop, which he did very early to-night, Mr. Weevle has been down and up, and down and up (with a cheap tight velvet skull-cap on his head, making his whiskers look out of all proportion), oftener than before.

It is no phenomenon that Mr. Snagsby should be ill at ease too; for he always is so, more or less, under the oppressive influence of the secret that is upon him. Impelled by the mystery, of which he is a partaker, and yet in which he is not a sharer, Mr. Snagsby haunts what seems to be its fountain-head—the rag and bottle shop in the court. It has an irresistible attraction for him. Even now, coming round by the “Sol’s Arms” with the intention of passing down the court, and out at the Chancery Lane end, and so terminating his unpremeditated after-supper stroll of ten minutes long from his own door and back again, Mr. Snagsby approaches.

“What, Mr. Weevle?” says the stationer, stopping to speak. “Are you there?”

“Ay!” says Weevle. “Here I am, Mr. Snagsby.”

“Airing yourself, as I am doing, before you go to bed?” the stationer enquires.

“Why, there’s not much air to be got here; and what there is, is not very freshening,” Weevle answers, glancing up and down the court.

“Very true, sir. Don’t you observe,” says Mr. Snagsby, pausing to sniff and taste the air a little; “don’t you observe, Mr. Weevle, that you’re—not to put too fine a point upon it—that you’re rather greasy here, sir?”

“Why, I have noticed myself that there is a queer kind of flavor in the place to-night,” Mr. Weevle rejoins. “I suppose it’s chops at the ‘Sol’s Arms.’”

“Chops, do you think? Oh!—Chops, eh?” Mr. Snagsby sniffs and tastes again. “Well, sir, I suppose it is. But I should say their cook at the ‘Sol’ wanted a little looking after. She has been burning ‘em, sir! And I don’t think;” Mr. Snagsby sniffs and tastes again, and then spits and wipes his mouth; “I don’t think—not to put too fine a point upon it—that they were quite fresh, when they were shown the gridiron.”

“That’s very likely. It’s a tainting sort of weather.”

“It is a tainting sort of weather,” says Mr. Snagsby; “and I find it sinking to the spirits.”

“By George! I find it gives me the horrors,” returns Mr. Weevle.

“Then, you see, you live in a lonesome way, and in a lonesome room, with a black circumstance hanging over it,” says Mr. Snagsby, looking in past the other’s shoulder along the dark passage, and then falling back a step to look up at the house. “I couldn’t live in that room alone, as you do, sir. I should get so fidgetty and worried of an evening, sometimes, that I should be driven to come to the door, and stand here, sooner than sit there. But then it’s very true that you didn’t see, in your room, what I saw there. That makes a difference.”

“I know quite enough about it,” returns Tony. “It’s not agreeable, is it?” pursues Mr. Snagsby, coughing his cough of mild persuasion behind his hand. “Mr. Krook ought to consider it in the rent. I hope he does, I am sure.”

“I hope he does,” says Tony. “But I doubt it!” “You find the rent high, do you, sir?” returns the stationer. “Rents are high about here. I don’t know how it is exactly, but the law seems to put things up in price. Not,” adds Mr. Snagsby, with his apologetic cough, “that I mean to say a word against the profession I get my living by.”

Mr. Weevle again glances up and down the court, and then looks at the stationer. Mr. Snagsby, blankly catching his eye, looks upward for a star or so, and coughs a cough expressive of not exactly seeing his way out of this conversation.

“It’s a curious fact, sir,” he observes, slowly rubbing his hands, “that he should have been——”

“Who’s he?” interrupts Mr. Weevle.

“The deceased, you know,” says Mr. Snagsby, twitching his head and right eyebrow towards the staircase, and tapping his acquaintance on the button.

“Ah to be sure!” returns the other, as if he were not over-fond of the subject. “I thought we had done with him.”

“I was only going to say, it’s a curious fact, sir, that he should have come and lived here, and been one of my writers, and then that you should come and live here, and be one of my writers, too. Which there is nothing derogatory, but far from it in the appellation,” says Mr. Snagsby, breaking off with a mistrust that he may have unpolitely asserted a kind of proprietorship in Mr. Weevle, “because I have known writers that have gone into Brewers’ houses and done really very respectable indeed. Eminently respectable, sir,” adds Mr. Snagsby, with a misgiving that he has not improved the matter.

“It’s a curious coincidence, as you say,” answers Weevle, once more glancing up and down the court.

“Seems a Fate in it, don’t there?” suggests the stationer.

“There does.”

“Just so,” observes the stationer, with his confirmatory cough. “Quite a Fate in it. Quite a Fate. Well, Mr. Weevle, I am afraid I must bid you good night;” Mr. Snagsby speaks as if it made him desolate to go, though he has been casting about for any means of escape ever since he stopped to speak; “my little woman will be looking for me, else. Good night, sir!”

If Mr. Snagsby hastens home to save his little woman the trouble of looking for him, he might set his mind at rest on that score. His little woman has had her eye upon him round the “Sol’s Arms” all this time, and now glides after him with a pocket-handkerchief wrapped over her head; honoring Mr. Weevle and his doorway with a searching glance as she goes past.

“You’ll know me again, ma’am, at all events,” says Mr. Weevle to himself; “and I can’t compliment you on your appearance, whoever you are, with your head tied up in a bundle. Is this fellow *never* coming?”

This fellow approaches as he speaks. Mr. Weevle softly holds up his finger, and draws him into the passage, and closes the street door. Then they go up stairs; Mr. Weevle heavily, and Mr. Guppy (for it is he) very lightly indeed. When they are shut into the back room, they speak low.

“I thought you had gone to Jericho at least, instead of coming here,” says Tony.

"Why, I said about ten."

"You said about ten," Tony repeats. "Yes, so you did say about ten. But, according to my count, it's ten times ten—it's a hundred o'clock. I never had such a night in my life!"

"What has been the matter?"

"That's it!" says Tony. "Nothing has been the matter. But, here I have been stewing and fuming in this jolly old crib, till I have had the horrors falling on me as thick as hail. *There's a blessed-looking candle!*" says Tony, pointing to the heavily-burning taper on his table with a great cabbage head and a long winding-sheet.

"That's easily improved," Mr. Guppy observes, as he takes the snuffers in hand.

"Is it?" returns his friend. "Not so easily as you think. It has been smouldering like that ever since it was lighted."

"Why, what's the matter with you, Tony?" enquires Mr. Guppy, looking at him, snuffers in hand, as he sits down with his elbow on the table.

"William Guppy," replies the other, "I am in the Downs. It's this unbearably dull, suicidal room—and old Boguey down-stairs, I suppose." Mr. Weevle moodily pushes the snuffer-tray from him with his elbow, leans his head on his hand, puts his feet on the fender, and looks at the fire. Mr. Guppy, observing him, slightly tosses his head, and sits down on the other side of the table in an easy attitude.

"Wasn't that Snagsby talking to you, Tony?"

"Yes, and he—yes, it was Snagsby," says Mr. Weevle, altering the construction of his sentence.

"On business?"

"No. No business. He was only sauntering by, and stopped to prose."

"I thought it was Snagsby," says Mr. Guppy, "and thought it as well that he shouldn't see me; so I waited till he was gone."

"There we go again, William G.!" cries Tony, looking up for an instant. "So mysterious and secret! By George, if we were going to commit a murder, we couldn't have more mystery about it!"

Mr. Guppy affects to smile; and with the view of changing the conversation, looks with an admiration, real or pretended, round the room at the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty; terminating his survey with the portrait of Lady Dedlock over the mantel-shelf, in which she is represented on a terrace, with a pedestal upon the terrace, and a vase upon the pedestal, and her shawl upon the vase, and a prodigious piece of fur upon the shawl, and her arm on the prodigious piece of fur, and a bracelet on her arm.

"That's very like Lady Dedlock," says Mr. Guppy.

"It's a speaking likeness."

"I wish it was," growls Tony, without changing his position. "I should have some fashionable conversation here, then."

Finding, by this time, that his friend is not to be wheedled into a more sociable humour, Mr. Guppy puts about upon the ill-used tack, and remonstrates with him.

"Tony," says he, "I can make allowances for lowness of spirits, for no man knows what it is when it does come upon a man, better than I do; and no man perhaps has a better right to know it, than a man who has an unrequited image imprinted on his 'art. But there are bounds to these things when an unoffending party is in question, and I will acknowledge to you, Tony, that I don't think your manner on the present occasion is hospitable or quite gentlemanly."

"This is strong language, William Guppy," returns Mr. Weevle.

"Sir, it may be," retorts Mr. William Guppy, "but I feel strongly when I use it."

Mr. Weevle admits that he has been wrong, and begs Mr. William Guppy to think no more about it. Mr. William Guppy, however, having got the advantage, cannot quite release it without a little more injured remonstrance.

"No! Dash it, Tony," says that gentleman, "you really ought to be careful how you wound the feelings of a man, who has an unrequited image imprinted on his 'art, and who is *not* altogether happy in those chords which vibrate to the tenderest emotions. You, Tony, possess in yourself all that is calculated to charm the eye, and allure the taste. It is not—happily for you, perhaps, and I may wish that I could say the same—it is not your character to hover around one flower. The ole garden is open to you, and your airy pinions carry you through it. Still, Tony, far be it from me, I am sure, to wound even your feelings without a cause!"

Tony again entreats that the subject may be no longer pursued, saying emphatically, "William Guppy, drop it!" Mr. Guppy acquiesces, with the reply, "I should never have taken it up, Tony, of my own accord."

"And now," says Tony, stirring the fire, "touching this same bundle of letters. Isn't it an extraordinary thing of Krook to have appointed twelve o'clock to-night to hand 'em over to me?"

"Very. What did he do it for?"

"What does he do anything for? *He* don't know. Said, to-day was his birthday, and he'd hand 'em over to-night at twelve o'clock. He'll have drunk himself blind by that time. He has been at it all day."

"He hasn't forgotten the appointment, I hope?"

"Forgotten? Trust him for that. He never forgets anything. I saw him to-night, about eight, helped him to shut up his shop—and he had got the letters then in his hairy cap. He pulled it off, and and shewed 'em me. When the shop was closed, he took them out of his cap, hung his cap on the chair-back, and stood turning them over before the fire. I heard him a little while afterwards through the floor here, humming, like the wind, the only song he knows—about Bibo, and old Charon, and Bibo being drunk when he died, or something or other. He has been as quiet, since, as an old rat asleep in his hole."

"And you are to go down at twelve?"

"At twelve. And, as I tell you, when you came it seemed to me a hundred."

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy, after considering a little with his legs crossed, "he can't read yet, can he?"

"Read! He'll never read. He can make all the letters separately, and he knows most of them separately when he sees them; he has got on that much, under me; but he can't put them together. He's too old to acquire the knack of it now. And too drunk."

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy, uncrossing and re-crossing his legs; "how do you suppose he spelt out that name of Hawdon?"

"He never spelt it out. You know what a curious power of eye he has, and how he has been used to employ himself in copying things by eye alone. He imitated it—evidently from the direction of a letter; and asked me what it meant."

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy, uncrossing and re-crossing his legs again; "should you say that the original was a man's writing or a woman's?"

"A woman's. Fifty to one a lady's—slopes &

good deal, and the end of the letter 'n,' long and hasty."

Mr. Guppy has been biting his thumb-nail during this dialogue, generally changing the thumb when he has changed the crossed leg. As he is going to do so again, he happens to look at his coat-sleeve. It takes his attention. He stares at it, aghast.

"Why, Tony, what on earth is going on in this house to-night? It there a chimney on fire?"

"Chimney on fire!"

"Ah!" returns Mr. Guppy. "See how the soot's falling. See here, on my arm! See again, on the table here! Confound the stuff, it won't blow off—smears, like black fat!"

They look at one another, and Tony goes listening to the door, and a little way up stairs, and a little way down stairs. Comes back, and says it's all right, and all quiet; and quotes the remark he lately made to Mr. Snagsby, about their cooking chops at the "Sol's Arms."

"And it was then," resumes Mr. Guppy, still glancing with remarkable aversion at his coat-sleeve, as they pursue their conversation before the fire, leaning on opposite sides of the table with their heads very near together, "that he told you of his having taken the bundle of letters from his lodger's portmanteau?"

"That was the time, sir," answers Tony, faintly adjusting his whiskers. "Whereupon I wrote a line to my dear boy, the Honourable William Guppy, informing him of the appointment for to-night, and advising him not to call before: Boguey being a Slyboots."

The light vivacious tone of fashionable life which is usually assumed by Mr. Weevle, sits so ill upon him to-night, that he abandons that and his whiskers together; and, after looking over his shoulder, appears to yield himself up, a prey to the horrors again.

"You are to bring the letters to your room to read and compare, and to get yourself into a position to tell him all about them. That's the arrangement, isn't it, Tony?" asks Mr. Guppy, anxiously biting his thumb-nail.

"You can't speak too low. Yes. That's what he and I agreed."

"I tell you what, Tony——"

"You can't speak too low," says Tony once more. Mr. Guppy nods his sagacious head, advances it yet closer, and drops into a whisper.

"I tell you what. The first thing to be done is, to make another packet, like the real one; so that, if he should ask to see the real one while it's in my possession, you can show him the dummy."

"And suppose he detects the dummy as soon as he sees it—which with his biting screw of an eye is about five hundred times more likely than not," suggests Tony.

"Then we'll face it out. They don't belong to him, and they never did. You found that; and you placed them in my hands—a legal friend of yours—for security. If he forces us to it, they'll be producible, won't they?"

"Ye-es," is Mr. Weevle's reluctant admission.

"Why, Tony," remonstrates his friend, "how you look! You don't doubt William Guppy? You don't suspect any harm?"

"I don't suspect anything more than I know, William," returns the other, gravely.

"And what do you know?" urges Mr. Guppy, raising his voice a little; but on his friend's once more warning him, "I tell you, you can't speak too low," he repeats his question without any sound at all; forming with his lips only the words, "What do you know?"

"I know three things. First, I know that here we are whispering in secrecy; a pair of conspirators."

"Well!" says Mr. Guppy, "and we had better be that, than a pair of noodles, which we should be, if we were doing any thing else; for it's the only way of doing what we want to do. Secondly?"

"Secondly, it's not made out to me how it's to be profitable, after all."

Mr. Guppy casts up his eyes at the portrait of Lady Dedlock over the mantel-shelf, and replies, "Tony, you are asked to leave that to the honor of your friend. Besides its being calculated to serve that friend, in those chords of the human mind which—which need not be called into agonising vibration on the present occasion—your friend is no fool. What's that?"

"It's eleven o'clock striking by the bell of Saint Paul's. Listen, and you'll hear all the bells in the city jangling."

Both sit silent, listening to the metal voices, near and distant, resounding from towers of various heights, in tones more various than their situations. When these at length cease, all seems more mysterious and quiet than before. One disagreeable result of whispering is, that it seems to evoke an atmosphere of silence, haunted by the ghosts of sound—strange cracks and tickings, the rustling of garments that have no substance in them, and the tread of dreadful feet, that would leave no mark on the sea-sand or the winter snow. So sensitive the two friends happen to be, that the air is full of these phantoms; and the two look over their shoulders by one consent, to see that the door is shut.

"Yes, Tony?" says Mr. Guppy, drawing nearer to the fire, and biting his unsteady thumb-nail. "You were going to say, thirdly?"

"It's far from a pleasant thing to be plotting about a dead man in the room where he died, especially when you happen to live in it."

"But we are plotting nothing against him, Tony."

"May be not, still I don't like it. Live here by yourself, and see how *you* like it."

"As to dead men, Tony," proceeds Mr. Guppy, evading this proposal, "there have been dead men in most rooms."

"I know there have; but in most rooms you let them alone, and—and they let you alone," Tony answers.

The two look at each other again. Mr. Guppy makes a hurried remark to the effect that they may be doing the deceased a service; that he hopes so. There is an oppressive blank, until Mr. Weevle, by stirring the fire suddenly, makes Mr. Guppy start as if his heart had been stirred instead.

"Fah! Here's more of this hateful soot hanging about," says he. "Let us open the window a bit, and get a mouthful of air. It's too close."

He raises the sash, and they both rest on the window-sill, half in and half out of the room. The neighboring houses are too near, to admit of their seeing any sky without craning their necks and looking up; but lights in frowsy windows here and there, and the rolling of distant carriages, and the new expression that there is of the stir of men, they find to be comfortable. Mr. Guppy, noiselessly tapping on the window-sill, resumes his whispering in quite a light-comedy tone.

"By the bye, Tony, don't forget old Smallweed;" meaning the Younger of that name. "I have not let him into this, you know. That grandfather of his is too keen by half. It runs in the family."

"I remember," says Tony. "I am up to all that."

"And as to Krook," resumes Mr. Guppy. "Now, do you suppose he really has got hold of any other papers of importance, as he has boasted to you, since you have been such allies?"

Tony shakes his head. "I don't know. Can't imagine. If we get through this business without rousing his suspicions, I shall be better informed no doubt. How can I know, without seeing them, when he don't know himself? He is always spelling out words from them, and chalking them over the table and the shop-wall, and asking what this is, and what that is; but his whole stock, from beginning to end, may easily be the waste paper he bought it as, for anything I can say. It's a monomania with him, to think he is possessed of documents. He has been going to learn to read them this last quarter of a century, I should judge, from what he tells me."

"How did he first come by that idea, though? that's the question," Mr. Guppy suggests with one eye shut, after a little forensic meditation. "He may have found papers in something he bought, where papers were not supposed to be; and may have got it into his shrewd head, from the manner and place of their concealment, that they are worth something."

"Or he may have been taken in, in some pretended bargain. Or he may have been muddled altogether, by long staring at whatever he has got, and by drink, and by hanging about the Lord Chancellor's court, and hearing of documents for ever," returns Mr. Weevle.

Mr. Guppy sitting on the window-sill, nodding his head and balancing all these possibilities in his mind, continues thoughtfully to tap it, and clasp it, and measure it with his hand, until he hastily draws his hand away.

"What, in the Devil's name," he says, "is this! Look at my fingers!"

"A thick, yellow liquor defiles them, which is offensive to the touch and sight, and more offensive to the smell. A stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it that makes them both shudder."

"What have you been doing here? What have you been pouring out of window?"

"I pouring out of window! Nothing, I swear! Never, since I have been here!" cries the lodger.

And yet look here—and look here! When he brings the candle, here, from the corner of the window-sill, it slowly drips and creeps away down the bricks; here, lies in a little thick nauseous pool.

"This is a horrible house," says Mr. Guppy, shutting down the window. "Give me some water, or I shall cut my hand off."

He so washes, and rubs, and scrubs, and smells, and washes, that he has not long restored himself with a glass of brandy, and stood silently before the fire, when Saint Paul's bell strikes twelve, and all those other bells strike twelve from their towers of various heights in the dark air, and in their many tones. When all is quiet again, the lodger says:

"It's the appointed time at last. Shall I go?"

Mr. Guppy nods, and gives him a "lucky touch" on the back; but not with the washed hand, though it is his right hand.

He goes down-stairs; and Mr. Guppy tries to compose himself, before the fire, for waiting a long time. But in no more than a minute or two the stairs creak, and Tony comes swiftly back.

"Have you got the last?"

"Got them! No. The old man's not there."

He has been so horribly frightened in the short interval, that his terror seizes the ether, who makes a rush at him, and asks loudly, "What's the matter?"

"I couldn't make him hear, and I softly opened the door and looked in. And the burning smell is there—and the soot is there, and the oil is there—and he is not there!"—Tony ends this with a groan.

Mr. Guppy takes the light. They go down, more dead than alive, and holding one another, push open the door of the back shop. The cat has retreated close to it, and stands snarling—not at them; at something on the ground, before the fire. There is very little fire left in the grate, but there is a smouldering suffocating vapor in the room, and a dark greasy coating on the walls and ceiling. The chairs and table, and the bottle so rarely absent from the table, all stand as usual. On one chair-back, hang the old man's hairy cap and coat.

"Look!" whispers the lodger, pointing his friend's attention to these objects with a trembling finger. "I told you so. When I saw him last, he took his cap off, took out the little bundle of old letters, hung his cap on the back of the chair—his coat was there already, for he had pulled that off, before he went to put the shutters up—and I left him turning the letters over in his hand, standing just where that crumbled black thing is upon the floor."

Is he hanging somewhere? They look up. No.

"See!" whispers Tony. "At the foot of the same chair, there lies a dirty bit of thin red cord that they tie up pens with. That went round the letters. He undid it slowly, leering and laughing at me, before he began to turn them over, and threw it there. I saw it fall."

"What's the matter with the cat?" says Mr. Guppy. "Look at her!"

"Mad, I think. And no wonder, in this evil place."

They advance slowly, looking at all these things. The cat remains where they found her, still snarling at the something on the ground, before the fire and between the two chairs. What is it? Hold up the light?

Here is a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, but not so light as usual, seeming to be steeped in something; and here is—is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? O Horror, he is here! and this, from which we run away, striking out the light and overturning one another into the street, is all that represents him.

Help, help, help! come into this house for Heaven's sake!

Plenty will come in, but none can help. The Lord Chancellor of that Court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name Your Highness will, attribute it to whom you will, or say it might have been prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally—inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only—Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### INTERLOPERS.

Now do those two gentlemen not very neat about the cuffs and buttons who attended the last

Coroner's Inquest at the "Sol's Arms," reappear in the precincts with surprising swiftness (being, in fact, breathlessly fetched by the active and intelligent beadle), and institute perquisitions through the court, and dive into the "Sol's" parlour, and write with ravenous little pens on tissue-paper. Now do they note down, in the watches of the night, how the neighbourhood of Chancery Lane was yesterday, at about midnight, thrown into a state of the most intense agitation and excitement by the following alarming and horrible discovery. Now do they set forth how it will doubtless be remembered, that some time back a painful sensation was created in the public mind, by a case of mysterious death from opium occurring in the first floor of the house occupied as a rag, bottle, and general marine store-shop, by an eccentric individual of intemperate habits, far advanced in life, named Krook; and how, by a remarkable coincidence, Krook was examined at the inquest, which it may be recollected was held on that occasion at the "Sol's Arms," a well-conducted tavern, immediately adjoining the premises in question, on the west side, and licensed to a highly respectable landlord, Mr. James George Bogsby. Now do they show (in as many words as possible), how during some hours of yesterday evening a very peculiar smell was observed by the inhabitants of the court, in which the tragical occurrence which forms the subject of that present account transpired; and which odour was at one time so powerful, that Mr. Swills, a comic vocalist, professionally engaged by Mr. J. G. Bogsby, has himself stated to our reporter that he mentioned to Miss M. Melvilson, a lady of some pretensions to musical ability, likewise engaged by Mr. J. G. Bogsby to sing at a series of concerts called Harmonic Assemblies or Meetings, which it would appear are held at the "Sol's Arms," under Mr. Bogsby's direction, pursuant to the Act of George the Second, that he (Mr. Swills) found his voice seriously affected by the impure state of the atmosphere; his jocose expression, at the time, being, "that he was like an empty post-office, for he hadn't a single note in him." How this account of Mr. Swills is entirely corroborated by two intelligent married females residing in the same court, and known respectively by the names of Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins; both of whom observed the foetid effluvia, and regarded them as being emitted from the premises in the occupation of Krook, the unfortunate deceased. All this and a great deal more, the two gentlemen, who have formed an amicable partnership in the melancholy catastrophe, write down on the spot; and the boy population of the court (out of bed in a moment) swarm up the shutters of the "Sol's Arms" parlor, to behold the tops of their heads, while they are about it.

The whole court, adult as well as boy, is sleepless for that night, and can do nothing but wrap up its many heads, and talk of the ill-fated house, and look at it. Miss Flite has been bravely rescued from her chamber, as if it were in flames, and accommodated with a bed at the "Sol's Arms." The "Sol" neither turns off its gas nor shuts its door, all night; for any kind of public excitement makes good for the "Sol," and causes the court to stand in need of comfort. The house has not done so much in the stomachic article of cloves, or in brandy and water warm, since the Inquest. The moment the potboy heard what had happened, he rolled up his shirt-sleeves tight to his shoulders, and said, "There'll be a run upon us!" In the first outcry Young Piper dashed off for the fire-engines; and returned in triumph at a jolting gallop, perched up aloft on the Phoenix, and holding on to that fabulous creature with all his might in the midst of helmets and torches. One

helmet remains behind, after careful investigation of all chinks and crannies; and slowly paces up and down before the house, in company with one of the two policemen who have been likewise left in charge thereof. To this trio, everybody in the court possessed of sixpence, has an insatiate desire to exhibit hospitality in a liquid form.

Mr. Weevle and his friend Mr. Guppy are within the bar at the "Sol," and are worth anything to the "Sol" that the bar contains, if they will only stay there. "This is not a time," says Mr. Bogsby, "to haggle about money," though he looks something sharply after it, over the counter; "give your orders, you two gentlemen, and you're welcome to whatever you put a name to."

Thus entreated, the two gentlemen (Mr. Weevle especially) put names to so many things, that in course of time they find it difficult to put a name to anything quite distinctly; though they still relate, to all new comers, some version of the night they have had of it, and of what they said, and what they thought, and what they saw. Meanwhile, one or other of the policemen often fits about the door, and pushing it open a little way at the full length of his arm, looks in from outer gloom. Not that he has any suspicions, but that he may as well know what they are up to, in there.

Thus, night pursues its leaden course; finding the court still out of bed through the unwonted hours, still treating and being treated, still conducting itself similarly to a court that has had a little money left it unexpectedly. Thus, night at length with slow-retreating steps departs, and the lamplighter going his rounds, like an executioner to a despotic king, strikes off the little heads of fire that have aspired to lessen the darkness. Thus, the day cometh, whether or no.

And the day may discern, even with its dim London eye, that the court has been up all night. Over and above the faces that have fallen drowsily on tables, and the heels that lie prone on hard floors instead of beds, the brick and mortar physiognomy of the very court itself looks worn and jaded. And now the neighbourhood waking up, and beginning to hear of what has happened, comes streaming in, half-dressed, to ask questions; and the two policemen and the helmet (who are far less impressible externally than the court) have enough to do to keep the door.

"Good gracious, gentlemen!" says Mr. Snagsby, coming up. "What's this I hear!"

"Why, it's true," returns one of the policemen. "That's what it is. Now move on here, come!"

"Why, good gracious, gentlemen," says Mr. Snagsby, somewhat promptly backed away, "I was at this door last night betwixt ten and eleven o'clock, in conversation with the young man who lodges here."

"Indeed?" returns the policeman. "You will find the young man next door then. Now move on here, some of you."

"Not hurt, I hope?" says Mr. Snagsby.

"Hurt? No. What's to hurt him!"

Mr. Snagsby, wholly unable to answer this, or any other question, in his troubled mind, repairs to the "Sol's Arms," and finds Mr. Weevle languishing over tea and toast; with a considerable expression on him of exhausted excitement, and exhausted tobacco-smoke.

"And Mr. Guppy likewise!" quoth Mr. Snagsby. "Dear, dear, dear! What a fate there seems in all this! And my lit—"

Mr. Snagsby's power of speech deserts him in the formation of the words "my little woman." For, to see that injured female walk into the "Sol's

Arms" at that hour of the morning and stand before the beer-engine, with her eyes fixed upon him like an accusing spirit, strikes him dumb.

"My dear," says Mr. Snagsby, when his tongue is loosened, "will you take anything? A little—not to put too fine a point upon it—drop of shrub?"

"No," says Mrs. Snagsby.

"My love, you know these two gentlemen?"

"Yes!" says Mrs. Snagsby; and in a rigid manner acknowledges their presence, still fixing Mr. Snagsby with her eye.

The devoted Mr. Snagsby cannot bear this treatment. He takes Mrs. Snagsby by the hand, and leads her aside to an adjacent cask.

"My little woman, why do you look at me in that way? Pray don't do it."

"I can't help my looks," says Mrs. Snagsby, "and if I could I wouldn't."

Mr. Snagsby, with his cough of meekness, rejoins,—“Wouldn't you really, my dear?” and meditates. Then coughs his cough of trouble, and says, “This is a dreadful mystery, my love!” still fearfully disconcerted by Mrs. Snagsby's eye.

"It is," returns Mrs. Snagsby, shaking her head, "a dreadful mystery."

"My little woman," urges Mr. Snagsby, in a piteous manner, "don't, for goodness sake, speak to me with that bitter expression, and look at me in that searching way! I beg and entreat of you not to do it. Good Lord, you don't suppose that I would go spontaneously combusting any person, my dear?"

"I can't say," returns Mrs. Snagsby.

On a hasty review of his unfortunate position, Mr. Snagsby "can't say," either. He is not prepared positively to deny that he may have had something to do with it. He has had something—he don't know what—to do with so much in this connexion that is mysterious, that it is possible he may even be implicated, without knowing it, in the present transaction. He faintly wipes his forehead with his handkerchief, and gasps.

"My life," says the unhappy stationer, "would you have any objections to mention why, being in general so delicately circumspect in your conduct, you come into a Wine Vaults before breakfast?"

"Why do you come here?" inquires Mrs. Snagsby.

"My dear, merely to know the rights of the fatal accident which has happened to the venerable party who has been—combusted." Mr. Snagsby has made a pause to suppress a groan. "I should then have related them to you, my love, over your French roll."

"I dare say you would! You relate everything to me, Mr. Snagsby."

"Every—my lit—"

"I should be glad," says Mrs. Snagsby, after contemplating his increased confusion with a severe and sinister smile, "if you would come home with me; I think you may be safer there, Mr. Snagsby, than anywhere else."

"My love, I don't know but what I may be, I am sure. I am ready to go."

Mr. Snagsby casts his eyes forlornly round the bar, gives Messrs. Weevle and Guppy good morning, assures them of the satisfaction with which he sees them uninjured, and accompanies Mrs. Snagsby from the "Sol's Arms." Before night, his doubt whether he may not be responsible for some inconceivable part in the catastrophe which is the talk of the whole neighbourhood, is almost resolved into certainty by Mrs. Snagsby's pertinacity in that fixed gaze. His mental sufferings are so great, that he entertains wandering ideas of delivering himself up to

justice, and requiring to be cleared, if innocent, and punished with the utmost rigour of the law, if guilty.

Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy, having taken their breakfast, step into Lincoln's Inn, to take a little walk about the square, and clear as many of the dark cobwebs out of their brains as a little walk may.

"There can be no more favourable time than the present, Tony," says Mr. Guppy, after they have broodingly made out the four sides of the square, "for a word or two between us, upon a point on which we must, with very little delay, come to an understanding."

"Now, I tell you what, William G.!" returns the other, eyeing his companion with a bloodshot eye. "If it's a point of conspiracy, you needn't take the trouble to mention it. I have had enough of that, and I ain't going to have any more. We shall have you taking fire next, or blowing up with a bang."

The supposititious phenomenon is so very disagreeable to Mr. Guppy that his voice quakes, as he says in a moral way, "Tony, I should have thought that what we went through last night would have been a lesson to you never to be personal any more as long as you lived." To which Mr. Weevle returns, "William, I should have thought it would have been a lesson to you never to conspire any more as long as you lived." To which Mr. Guppy says, "Who's conspiring?" To which Mr. Jobling replies, "Why, you are!" To which Mr. Guppy retorts, "No, I am not." To which Mr. Jobling retorts again, "Yes, you are!" To which Mr. Guppy retorts, "Who says so?" To which Mr. Jobling retorts, "I say so!" To which Mr. Guppy retorts, "Oh, indeed?" To which Mr. Jobling retorts, "Yes, indeed!" And both being now in a heated state, they walk on silently for a while, to cool down again.

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy, then, "if you heard your friend out, instead of flying at him, you wouldn't fall into mistakes. But your temper is hasty, and you are not considerate. Possessing in yourself, Tony, all that is calculated to charm the eye—"

"Oh! Blow the eye!" cries Mr. Weevle, cutting him short. "Say what you have got to say!"

Finding his friend in this morose and material condition, Mr. Guppy only expresses the finer feelings of his soul through the tone of injury in which he recommences:

"Tony, when I say there is a point on which we must come to an understanding pretty soon, I say so quite apart from any kind of conspiring, however innocent. You know it is professionally arranged beforehand, in all cases that are tried, what facts the witnesses are to prove. Is it, or is it not, desirable that we should know what facts we are to prove, on the inquiry into the death of this unfortunate old Mo—gentleman?" (Mr. Guppy was going to say, Mogul, but thinks gentleman better suited to the circumstances.)

"What facts? The facts."

"The facts bearing on that inquiry. Those are—" Mr. Guppy tells them off on his fingers—"what we knew of his habits; when you saw him last; what his condition was then; the discovery that we made, and how we made it."

"Yes," says Mr. Weevle. "Those are about the facts."

"We made the discovery, in consequence of his having, in his eccentric way, an appointment with you for twelve o'clock at night, when you were to explain some writing to him, as you had often done

before, on account of his not being able to read. I, spending the evening with you, was called down—and so forth. The inquiry being only into the circumstances touching the death of the deceased, it's not necessary to go beyond these facts, I suppose you'll agree?"

"No!" returns Mr. Weevle. "I suppose not."

"And this is not a conspiracy, perhaps?" says the injured Guppy.

"No," returned his friend; "if it's nothing worse than this, I withdraw the observation."

"Now, Tony," says Mr. Guppy, taking his arm again, and walking him slowly on, "I should like to know, in a friendly way, whether you have yet thought over the many advantages of your continuing to live at that place?"

"What do you mean?" says Tony, stopping.

"Whether you have yet thought over the many advantages of your continuing to live at that place?" repeats Mr. Guppy, walking him on again.

"At what place? *That* place?" pointing in the direction of the rag and bottle shop.

Mr. Guppy nods.

"Why, I wouldn't pass another night there, for any consideration that you could offer me," says Mr. Weevle, haggardly staring.

"Do you mean it though, Tony?"

"Mean it! Do I look as if I mean it? I feel as if I do; I know that," says Mr. Weevle, with a very genuine shudder.

"Then the possibility, or probability—for such it must be considered—of your never being disturbed in possession of those effects, lately belonging to a lone old man who seemed to have no relation in the world; and the certainty of your being able to find out what he really had got stored up there; don't weigh with you at all against last night, Tony, if I understand you?" says Mr. Guppy, biting his thumb with the appetite of vexation.

"Certainly not. Talk in that cool way of a fellow's living there?" cries Mr. Weevle, indignantly. "Go and live there yourself."

"O! I, Tony!" says Mr. Guppy, soothing him. "I have never lived there, and couldn't get a lodging there now; whereas you have got one."

"You are welcome to it," rejoins his friend, "and—ugh!—you may make yourself at home in it."

"Then you really and truly at this point," says Mr. Guppy, "give up the whole thing, if I understand you, Tony?"

"You never," returns Tony, with a most convincing steadfastness, "said a truer word in all your life. I do!"

While they are so conversing, a hackney-coach drives into the square, on the box of which vehicle a very tall hat makes itself manifest to the public. Inside the coach, and consequently not so manifest to the multitude, though sufficiently so to the two friends, for the coach stops almost at their feet, are the venerable Mr. Smallweed and Mrs. Smallweed, accompanied by their grand-daughter Judy. An air of haste and excitement pervades the party; and as the tall hat (surmounting Mr. Smallweed the younger) alights, Mr. Smallweed the elder pokes his head out of window, and bawls to Mr. Guppy, "How de do, sir! How de do!"

"What do Chick and his family want here at this time of the morning, I wonder!" says Mr. Guppy, nodding to his familiar.

"My dear sir," cries Grandfather Smallweed, "would you do me a favor? Would you and your friend be so very obleging as to carry me into the public-house in the court, while Bart and his sister bring their grandmother along? Would you do an old man that good turn, sir?"

Mr. Guppy looks at his friend, repeating inquiringly, "the public-house in the court?" And they prepare to bear the venerable burden to the "Sol's Arms."

"There's your fare!" says the Patriarch to the coachman with a fierce grin, and shaking his incapable fist at him. "Ask me for a penny more, and I'll have my lawful revenge upon you. My dear young men, be easy with me, if you please. Allow me to catch you round the neck. I won't squeeze you tighter than I can help. O Lord! O dear me! O my bones!"

It is well that the "Sol" is not far off, for Mr. Weevle presents an apoplectic appearance before half the distance is accomplished. With no worse aggravation of his symptoms, however, than the utterance of divers croaking sounds, expressive of obstructed respiration, he fulfils his share of the portorage, and the benevolent old gentleman is deposited by his own desire in the parlor of the "Sol's Arms."

"O Lord!" gasps Mr. Smallweed, looking about him, breathless, from an arm-chair. "O dear me! O my bones and back! O my aches and pains! Sit down, you dancing, prancing, shambling, scrambling poll parrot! Sit down!"

This little apostrophe to Mrs. Smallweed is occasioned by a propensity on the part of that unlucky old lady, whenever she finds herself on her feet, to amble about, and "set" to inanimate objects, accompanying herself with a chattering noise, as in a witch dance. A nervous affection has probably as much to do with these demonstrations, as any imbecile intention in the poor old woman; but on the present occasion they are so particularly lively in connexion with a Windsor arm-chair, fellow to that in which Mr. Smallweed is seated, that she only quite desists when her grandchildren have held her down in it; her lord in the meanwhile bestowing upon her, with great volubility, the endearing epithet of a "pig-headed Jackdaw," repeated a surprising number of times.

"My dear sir," Grandfather Smallweed then proceeds, addressing Mr. Guppy, "there has been a calamity here. Have you heard of it, either of you?"

"Heard of it, sir! Why we discovered it."

"You discovered it. You two discovered it! Bart, *they* discovered it!"

The two discoverers stare at the Smallweeds, who return the compliment.

"My dear friends," whines Grandfather Smallweed, putting out both his hands, "I owe you a thousand thanks for discharging the melancholy office of discovering the ashes of Mrs. Smallweed's brother."

"Eh?" says Mr. Guppy.

"Mrs. Smallweed's brother, my dear friend—her only relation. We were not on terms, which is to be deplored now, but he never *would* be on terms. He was not fond of us. He was eccentric—he was very eccentric. Unless he has left a will (which is not at all likely) I shall take out letters of administration. I have come down to look after the property; it must be sealed up, it must be protected. I have come down," repeats Grandfather Smallweed, hooking the air towards him with his ten fingers at once, "to look after the property."

"I think, Small," says the disconsolate Mr. Guppy, "you might have mentioned that the old man was your uncle."

"You two were so close about him that I thought you would like me to be the same," returns that old bird, with a secretly glistening eye. "Besides, I wasn't proud of him."

"Besides which, it was nothing to you, you know, whether he was or not," says Judy. Also with a secretly glistening eye.

"He never saw me in his life, to know me," observes Small; "I don't know why I should introduce *him*, I'm sure!"

"No, he never communicated with us—which is to be deplored," the old gentleman strikes in; "but I have come to look after the property—to look over the papers, and to look after the property. We shall make good our title. It is in the hands of my

Seventy-six hundred thousand million of parcels of bank notes!"

"Will somebody give me a quart pot?" exclaims her exasperated husband, looking helplessly about him, and finding no missile within his reach. "Will somebody oblige me with a spittoon? Will somebody hand me anything hard and bruising to pelt at her? You hag, you cat, you dog, you brimstone barker!" Here Mr. Smallweed, wrought up to the highest pitch by his own eloquence, actually throws Judy at her grandmother in default of any-



THE OLD MAN OF THE NAME OF TULKINGHORN.

solicitor. Mr. Tulkinghorn, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, over the way there, is so good as to act as my solicitor; and grass don't grow under *his* feet, I can tell ye. Krook was Mrs. Smallweed's only brother; she had no relation but Krook, and Krook had no relation but Mrs. Smallweed. I am speaking of your brother, you brimstone black-beetle, that was seventy-six years of age."

Mrs. Smallweed instantly begins to shake her head, and pipe up, "Seventy-six pound seven and sevenpence! Seventy-six thousand bags of money!

thing else, by butting that young virgin at the old lady with such force as he can muster, and then dropping into his chair in a heap.

"Shake me up, somebody, if you'll be so good," says the voice from within the faintly struggling bundle into which he has collapsed. "I have come to look after the property. Shake me up, and call in the police on duty at the next house, to be explained to about the property. My solicitor will be here to protect the property. Transportation or the gallows for anybody who shall touch the pro-



perty!" As his dutiful grandchildren set him up, panting, and putting him through the usual restorative process of shaking and punching, he still repeats like an echo, "the—the property. The property—the property!"

Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy look at each other; the former as having relinquished the whole affair; the latter with a discomfited countenance, as having entertained some lingering expectations yet. But there is nothing to be done in opposition to the Smallweed interest. Mr. Tulkinghorn's clerk comes down from his official pew in the chambers, to mention to the police that Mr. Tulkinghorn is answerable for its being all correct about the next of kin, and that the papers and effects will be formally taken possession of in due time and course. Mr. Smallweed is at once permitted so far to assert his supremacy as to be carried on a visit of sentiment into the next house, and upstairs into Miss Flite's deserted room, where he looks like a hideous bird of prey newly added to her aviary.

The arrival of this unexpected heir soon taking wind in the court, still makes good for the "Sol," and keeps the court upon its mettle. Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins think it hard upon the young man if there really is no will, and consider that a handsome present ought to be made out of the estate. Young Piper and Young Perkins, as members of that restless juvenile circle which is the terror of the foot-passengers in Chancery Lane, crumble into ashes behind the pump and under the archway all day long; where wild yells and hootings take place over their remains. Little Swills and Miss M. Melvilson enter into affable conversation with their patrons, feeling that these unusual occurrences level the barriers between professionals and non-professionals. Mr. Bogsby puts up "The popular song of KING DEATH! with chorus by the whole strength of the company," as the great Harmonic feature of the week; and announces in the bill that "J. G. B. is induced to do so at a considerable extra expense, in consequence of a wish which has been very generally expressed at the bar by a large body of respectable individuals and in homage to a late melancholy event which has aroused so much sensation." There is one point connected with the deceased, upon which the court is particularly anxious; namely, that the fiction of a full-sized coffin should be preserved, though there is so little to put in it. Upon the undertaker's stating in the "Sol's" bar in the course of the day that he has received orders to construct "a six-footer," the general solicitude is much relieved, and it is considered that Mr. Smallweed's conduct does him great honour.

Out of the court, and a long way out of it, there is considerable excitement too; for men of science and philosophy come to look, and carriages set down doctors at the corner who arrive with the same intent, and there is more learned talk about inflammable gases and phosphuretted hydrogen than the court has ever imagined. Some of these authorities (of course the wisest) hold with indignation that the deceased had no business to die in the alleged manner; and being reminded by other authorities of a certain inquiry into the evidence for such deaths, reprinted in the sixth volume of the Philosophical Transactions; and also of a book not quite unknown, on English Medical Jurisprudence; and likewise of the Italian case of the Countess Cornelia Baudi as set forth in detail by one Bianchini, prebendary of Verona, who wrote a scholarly work or so, and was occasionally heard of in his time as having gleams of reason in him; and also of the testimony of Messrs. Foderé and Mere,

two pestilent Frenchmen who would investigate the subject; and further, of the corroborative testimony of Monsieur Le Cat, a rather celebrated French surgeon once upon a time, who had the unpoliteness to live in a house where such a case occurred, and even to write an account of it;—still they regard the late Mr. Krook's obstinacy, in going out of the world by any such byeway, as wholly unjustifiable and personally offensive. The less the court understands of all this, the more the court likes it; and the greater enjoyment it has in the stock in trade of the "Sol's Arms." Then, there comes the artist of a picture newspaper, with a foreground and figures ready drawn for anything, from a wreck on the Cornish coast to a review in Hyde Park, or a meeting at Manchester,—and in Mrs. Perkins's own room, memorable evermore, he then and there throws in upon the block, Mr. Krook's house, as large as life; in fact, considerably larger, making a very Temple of it. Similarly, being permitted to look in at the door of the fatal chamber, he depicts that apartment as three quarters of a mile long, by fifty yards high; at which the court is particularly charmed. All this time, the two gentlemen before mentioned pop in and out of every house, and assist at the philosophical disputations,—go everywhere, and listen to everybody,—and yet are always diving into the "Sol's" parlour, and writing with the ravenous little pens on the tissue-paper.

At last come the coroner and his inquiry, like as before, except that the coroner cherishes this case as being out of the common way, and tells the gentlemen of the Jury, in his private capacity, that "that would seem to be an unlucky house next door, gentlemen, a destined house; but so we sometimes find it, and these are mysteries we can't account for!"

After which the six-footer comes into action, and is much admired.

In all these proceedings Mr. Guppy has so slight a part, except when he gives his evidence, that he is moved on like a private individual, and can only haunt the secret house on the outside; where he has the mortification of seeing Mr. Smallweed padlocking the door, and of bitterly knowing himself to be shut out. But before these proceedings draw to a close, that is to say, on the night next after the catastrophe, Mr. Guppy has a thing to say that must be said to Lady Dedlock.

For which reason, with a sinking heart, and with that hangdog sense of guilt upon him, which dread and watching, enfolded in the "Sol's Arms," have produced, the young man of the name of Guppy presents himself at the town mansion at about seven o'clock in the evening, and requests to see her ladyship. Mercury replies that she is going out to dinner; don't he see the carriage at the door? Yes, he does see the carriage at the door; but he wants to see my lady too.

Mercury is disposed, as he will presently declare to a fellow gentleman in waiting, "to pitch into the young man;" but his instructions are positive. Therefore he sulkily supposes that the young man must come up into the library. There he leaves the young man in a large room, not over-light, while he makes report of him.

Mr. Guppy looks into the shade in all directions, discovering everywhere a certain charred and whitened little heap of coal or wood. Presently he hears a rustling. Is it—? No, it's no ghost; but fair flesh and blood, most brilliantly dressed.

"I have to beg your ladyship's pardon," Mr. Guppy stammers, very downcast. "This is an inconvenient time——"

"I told you, you could come at any time," She

takes a chair, looking straight at him as on the last occasion.

"Thank your ladyship. Your ladyship is very affable."

"You can sit down." There is not much affability in her tone.

"I don't know, your ladyship, that it's worth while my sitting down and detaining you, for I—I have not got the letters that I mentioned when I had the honour of waiting on your ladyship."

"Have you come merely to say so?"

"Merely to say so, your ladyship." Mr. Guppy, besides being depressed, disappointed, and uneasy, is put at a further disadvantage by the splendour and beauty of her appearance. She knows its influence perfectly; has studied it too well to miss a grain of its effect on any one. As she looks at him so steadily and coldly, he not only feels conscious that he has no guide, in the least perception of what is really the complexion of her thoughts; but also that he is being every moment, as it were, removed further and further from her.

She will not speak, it is plain. So he must.

"In short, your ladyship," says Mr. Guppy, like a meanly penitent thief, "the person to whom I was to have had the letters of, has come to a sudden end, and——" He stops. Lady Dedlock calmly finishes the sentence.

"And the letters are destroyed with the person?"

Mr. Guppy would say no, if he could—as he is unable to hide.

"I believe so, your ladyship."

If he could see the least sparkle of relief in her face now? No, he could see no such thing, even if that brave outside did not utterly put him away, and he were not looking beyond it and about it.

He falters an awkward excuse or two for his failure.

"Is this all you have to say?" inquires Lady Dedlock, having heard him out—or as nearly out as he can stumble. Mr. Guppy thinks that's all.

"You had better be sure that you wish to say nothing more to me; this being the last time you will have the opportunity."

Mr. Guppy is quite sure. And indeed he has no such wish at present, by any means.

"That is enough. I will dispense with excuses. Good evening to you!" and she rings for Mercury to show the young man of the name of Guppy out.

But in that house, in that same moment, there happens to be an old man of the name of Tulkinghorn. And that old man, coming with his quiet footstep to the library, has his hand at that moment on the handle of the door—comes in—and comes face to face with the young man as he is leaving the room.

One glance between the old man and the lady; and for an instant the blind that is always down flies up. Suspicion, eager and sharp, looks out. Another instant; close again.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Dedlock. I beg your pardon a thousand times. It is so very unusual to find you here at this hour. I supposed the room was empty. I beg your pardon!"

"Stay!" She negligently calls him back. "Remain here, I beg. I am going out to dinner. I have nothing more to say to this young man!"

The disconcerted young man bows, as he goes out, and cringingly hopes that Mr. Tulkinghorn of the Fields is well.

"Aye, aye?" says the lawyer, looking at him from under his bent brows; though he has no need to look again—not he. "From Kenge and Carboy's, surely?"

"Kenge and Carboy's, Mr. Tulkinghorn. Name of Guppy, sir."

"To be sure. Why, thank you, Mr. Guppy, I am very well!"

"Happy to hear it, sir. You can't be too well, sir, for the credit of the profession."

"Thank you, Mr. Guppy!"

Mr. Guppy sneaks away. Mr. Tulkinghorn, such a foil in his old-fashioned rusty black to Lady Dedlock's brightness, hands her down the staircase to her carriage. He returns rubbing his chin, and rubs it a good deal in the course of the evening.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### A TURN OF THE SCREW.

"Now, what," says Mr. George, "may this be? Is it blank cartridge, or ball? A flash in the pan, or a shot?"

An open letter is the subject of the trooper's speculations, and it seems to perplex him mightily. He looks at it at arm's length, brings it close to him, holds it in his right hand, holds it in his left hand, reads it with his head on this side, with his head on that side, contracts his eyebrows, elevates them; still, cannot satisfy himself. He smoothes it out upon the table with his heavy palm, and thoughtfully walking up and down the gallery, makes a halt before it every now and then, to come upon it with a fresh eye. Even that won't do. "Is it," Mr. George still muses, "blank cartridge or ball?"

Phil Squod, with the aid of a brush and paint-pot, is employed in the distance, whitening the targets; softly whistling, in quick-march time, and in drum-and-fife manner, that he must and he will go back to the girl he left behind him.

"Phil!" The trooper beckons as he calls him.

Phil approaches in his usual way; sidling off at first as if he were going anywhere else, and then bearing down upon his commander like a bayonet-charge. Certain splashes of white show in high relief upon his dirty face, and he scrapes his one eyebrow with the handle of his brush.

"Attention, Phil! Listen to this."

"Steady, commander, steady."

"Sir. Allow me to remind you (though there is no legal necessity for my doing so, as you are aware) that the bill at two months' date, drawn on yourself by Mr. Matthew Bagnet, and by you accepted, for the sum of ninety-seven pounds four shillings and ninepence, will become due to-morrow, when you will please be prepared to take up the same on presentation. Yours, JOSHUA SMALLWEED.—What do you make of that, Phil?"

"Mischief, Guv'ner."

"Why?"

"I think," replies Phil, after pensively tracing out a cross-wrinkle in his forehead with the brush-handle, "that mischeevous consequences is always meant when money's asked for."

"Lookye, Phil," says the trooper, sitting on the table. "First and last, I have paid, I may say, half as much again as this principal, in interest and one thing and another."

Phil intimated, by sidling back a pace or two, with a very unaccountable wrench of his wry face, that he does not regard the transaction as being made more promising by this incident.

"And lookye further, Phil," says the trooper, staying his premature conclusions with a wave of his hand. "There has always been an understanding that this bill was to be what they call Renewed. And it has been renewed, no end of times. What do you say now?"

"I say that I think it has come to a end at last."

"You do? Humph! I am much of the same mind myself."

"Joshua Smallweed is him what was brought here in a chair?"

"The same."

"Guv'ner," says Phil, with exceeding gravity, "he's a leech in his dispositions, he's a screw and a wice in his actions, a snake in his twistings, and a lobster in his claws."

Having thus expressively uttered his sentiments, Mr. Squod, after waiting a little to ascertain if any further remark be expected of him, gets back, by his usual series of movements, to the target he has in hand; and vigorously signifies, through his former musical medium, that he must and he will return to that ideal young lady. George having folded the letter walks in that direction.

"There is a way, commander," says Phil, looking cunningly at him, "of settling this."

"Paying the money, I suppose? I wish I could."

Phil shakes his head. "No, guv'ner, no; not so bad as that. There is a way," says Phil, with a highly artistic turn of his brush—"what I'm a doing at present."

"Whitewashing?"

Phil nods.

"A pretty way that would be! Do you know what would become of the Bagnets in that case? Do you know they would be ruined to pay off my old scores? You're a moral character," says the trooper, eyeing him in his large way with no small indignation, "upon my life you are, Phil!"

Phil, on one knee at the target, is in course of protesting earnestly, though not without many allegorical scoops of his brush, and smoothings of the white surface round the rim with his thumb, that he had forgotten the Bagnet responsibility, and would not so much as injure a hair of the head of any member of that worthy family, when steps are audible in the long passage without, and a cheerful voice is heard to wonder whether George is at home. Phil, with a look at his master, hobbles up, saying, "Here's the guv'ner, Mrs. Bagnet! Here he is!" and the old girl herself, accompanied by Mr. Bagnet, appears.

The old girl never appears in walking trim, in any season of the year, without a grey cloth cloak, coarse and much worn but very clean, which is, undoubtedly, the identical garment rendered so interesting to Mr. Bagnet by having made its way home to Europe from another quarter of the globe, in company with Mrs. Bagnet and an umbrella. The latter faithful appendage is also invariably a part of the old girl's presence out of doors. It is of no color known in this life, and has a corrugated wooden crook for a handle, with a metallic object let into its prow or peak, resembling a little model of a fan-light over a street door, or one of the oval glasses out of a pair of spectacles: which ornamental object has not that tenacious capacity of sticking to its post that might be desired in an article long associated with the British army. The old girl's umbrella is of a flabby habit of waist, and seems to be in need of stays—an appearance that is possibly referable to its having served, through a series of years, at home as a cupboard, and on journeys as a carpet bag. She never puts it up, having the greatest reliance on her well-proved cloak with its capacious hood; but generally uses the instrument as a wand with which to point out joints of meat or bunches of greens in marketing, or to arrest the attention of tradesmen by a friendly poke. Without her market-

basket, which is a sort of wicker well with two flapping lids, she never stirs abroad. Attended by these her trusty companions, therefore, her honest sunburnt face looking cheerily out of a rough straw bonnet, Mrs. Bagnet now arrives, fresh-colored and bright, in George's Shooting Gallery.

"Well, George, old fellow," says she, "and how do you do, this sunshiny morning?"

Giving him a friendly shake of the hand, Mrs. Bagnet draws a long breath after her walk, and sits down to enjoy a rest. Having a faculty, matured on the tops of baggage-wagons, and in other such positions, of resting easily anywhere, she perches on a rough bench, unties her bonnet-strings, pushes back her bonnet, crosses her arms, and looks perfectly comfortable.

Mr. Bagnet, in the mean time, has shaken hands with his old comrade, and with Phil: on whom Mrs. Bagnet likewise bestows a good-humoured nod and smile.

"Now, George," says Mrs. Bagnet, briskly, "here we are, Lignum and myself;" she often speaks of her husband by this appellation, on account, as it is supposed, of Lignum Vitæ having been his old regimental nickname when they first became acquainted, in compliment to the extreme hardness and toughness of his physiognomy; "just looked in, we have, to make it all correct as usual about that security. Give him the new bill to sign, George, and he'll sign it like a man."

"I was coming to you this morning," observes the trooper, reluctantly.

"Yes, we thought you'd come to us this morning, but we turned out early, and left Woolwich, the best of boys, to mind his sisters, and came to you instead—as you see! For Lignum, he's tied so close now, and gets so little exercise, that a walk does him good. But what's the matter, George?" asks Mrs. Bagnet, stopping in her cheerful talk. "You don't look yourself."

"I am not quite myself," returns the trooper; "I have been a little put out, Mrs. Bagnet."

Her quick bright eye catches the truth directly. "George!" holding up her forefinger. "Don't tell me there's anything wrong about that security of Lignum's! Don't do it, George, on account of the children!"

The trooper looks at her with a troubled visage.

"George," says Mrs. Bagnet, using both her arms for emphasis, and occasionally bringing down her open hands upon her knees. "If you have allowed anything wrong to come to that security of Lignum's, and if you have let him in for it, and if you have put us in danger of being sold up—and I see sold up in your face, George, as plain as print—you have done a shameful action, and have deceived us cruelly. I tell you, cruelly, George. There!"

Mr. Bagnet, otherwise as immovable as a pump or a lamp-post, puts his large right hand on the top of his bald head, as if to defend it from a shower-bath, and looks with great uneasiness at Mrs. Bagnet.

"George!" says that old girl. "I wonder at you! George, I am ashamed of you! George, I couldn't have believed you would have done it! I always knew you to be a rolling stone that gathered no moss; but I never thought you would have taken away what little moss there was for Bagnet and the children to lie upon. You know what a hard-working, steady-going chap he is. You know what Quebec and Malta and Woolwich are—and I never did think you would, or could, have had the heart to serve us so. O George!" Mrs. Bagnet gathers up her cloak to wipe her eyes on, in a very genuine manner, "How could you do it?"

Mrs. Bagnet ceasing, Mr. Bagnet removes his hand from his head as if the shower-bath were over, and looks disconsolately at Mr. George; who has turned quite white, and looks distressfully at the grey cloak and straw bonnet.

"Mat," says the trooper, in a subdued voice, addressing him, but still looking at his wife; "I am sorry you take it so much to heart, because I do hope it's not so bad as that comes to. I certainly have, this morning, received this letter;" which he reads aloud; "but I hope it may be set right yet. As to a rolling stone, why, what you say is true. I *am* a rolling stone; and I never rolled in anybody's way, I fully believe, that I rolled the least good to. But it's impossible for an old vagabond comrade to like your wife and family better than I like 'em, Mat, and I trust you'll look upon me as forgivingly as you can. Don't think I've kept anything from you. I haven't had the letter more than a quarter of an hour."

"Old girl!" murmurs Mr. Bagnet, after a short silence, "will you tell him my opinion?"

"Oh! Why didn't he marry," Mrs. Bagnet answers, half laughing and half crying, "Joe Pouch's widder in North America? Then he wouldn't have got himself into these troubles."

"The old girl," said Mr. Bagnet, "puts it correct—why didn't you?"

"Well, she has a better husband by this time, I hope," returns the trooper. "Anyhow, here I stand, this present day, *not* married to Joe Pouch's widder. What shall I do? You see all I have got about me. It's not mine; it's yours. Give the word, and I'll sell off every morsel. If I could have hoped it would have brought in nearly the sum wanted, I'd have sold all long ago. Don't believe that I'll leave you or yours in the lurch, Mat. I'd sell myself first. I only wish," said the trooper, giving himself a disparaging blow in the chest, "that I knew of anyone who'd buy such a second-hand piece of old stores."

"Old girl," murmurs Mr. Bagnet, "give him another bit of my mind."

"George," says the old girl, "you are not so much to be blamed, on full consideration, except for ever taking this business without the means."

"And that was like me!" observed the penitent trooper, shaking his head. "Like me, I know."

"Silence! The old girl," says Mr. Bagnet, "is correct—in her way of giving my opinions—hear me out!"

"That was when you never ought to have asked for the security, George, and when you never ought to have got it, all things considered. But what's done can't be undone. You are always an honourable and straightforward fellow, as far as lays in you power, though a little flighty. On the other hand, you can't admit but what it's natural in us to be anxious, with such a thing hanging over our heads. So forget and forgive all round, George. Come! Forget and forgive all round!"

Mrs. Bagnet giving him one of her honest hands, and giving her husband the other, Mr. George gives each of them one of his, and holds them while he speaks.

"I do assure you both, there's nothing I wouldn't do to discharge this obligation. But whatever I have been able to scrape together, has gone every two months in keeping it up. We have lived plainly enough here, Phil and I. But the Gallery don't quite do what was expected of it, and it's not—in short, it's not the Mint. It was wrong in me to take it? Well, so it was. But I was in a manner drawn into that step, and I thought it might steady me, and set me up, and you'll try to overlook my

having such expectations, and upon my soul, I am very much obliged to you, and very much ashamed of myself." With these concluding words, Mr. George gives a shake to each of the hands he holds, and relinquishing them, backs a pace or two, in a broad-chested, upright attitude, as if he had made a final confession, and were immediately going to be shot with all military honours.

"George, hear me out!" says Mr. Bagnet, glancing at his wife. "Old girl, go on!"

Mr. Bagnet, being in this singular manner heard out, has merely to observe that the letter must be attended to without any delay; that it is advisable that George and he should immediately wait on Mr. Smallweed in person; and that the primary object is to save and hold harmless Mr. Bagnet, who had none of the money. Mr. George entirely assenting, puts on his hat, and prepares to march with Mr. Bagnet to the enemy's camp.

"Don't you mind a woman's hasty word, George," says Mrs. Bagnet, patting him on the shoulder. "I trust my old Lignum to you, and I am sure you'll bring him through it."

The trooper returns, that this is kindly said, and that he *will* bring Lignum through it somehow. Upon which Mrs. Bagnet, with her cloak, basket, and umbrella, goes home, bright-eyed again, to the rest of her family; and the comrades sally forth on the hopeful errand of mollifying Mr. Smallweed.

Whether there are two people in England less likely to come satisfactorily out of any negotiation with Mr. Smallweed than Mr. George and Mr. Matthew Bagnet, may be very reasonably questioned. Also, notwithstanding their martial appearance, broad square shoulders, and heavy tread, whether there are, within the same limits, two more simple and unaccustomed children, in all the Smallweedy affairs of life. As they proceed with great gravity through the streets towards the region of Mount Pleasant, Mr. Bagnet, observing his companion to be thoughtful, considers it a friendly part to refer to Mrs. Bagnet's late sally.

"George, you know the old girl—she's as sweet and as mild as milk. But touch her on the children—or myself—and she's off like gunpowder."

"It does her credit, Mat!"

"George," says Mr. Bagnet, looking straight before him, "the old girl—can't do anything—that don't do her credit. More or less. I never say so. Discipline must be maintained."

"She's worth her weight in gold," returns the trooper.

"In gold?" says Mr. Bagnet. "I'll tell you what. The old girl's weight—is twelve stone six. Would I take that weight—in any metal—for the old girl? No. Why not? Because the old girl's metal is far more precious—than the preciouslest metal. And she's *all* metal!"

"You are right, Mat!"

"When she took me—and accepted of the ring—she 'listed under me and the children—heart and head; for life. She's that earnest," says Mr. Bagnet, "and that true to her colors—that, touch us with a finger—and she turns out—and stands to her arms. If the old girl fires wide—once in a way—at the call of duty—look over it, George. For she's loyal!"

"Why bless her, Mat!" returns the trooper, "I think the higher of her for it!"

"You are right!" says Mr. Bagnet, with the warmest enthusiasm, though without relaxing the rigidity of a single muscle. "Think as high of the old girl—as the rock of Gibraltar—and still you'll be thinking low—of such merits. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained."

These encomiums bring them to Mount Pleasant, and to Grandfather Smallweed's house. The door is opened by the perennial Judy, who, having surveyed them from top to toe with no particular favor, but indeed with a malignant sneer, leaves them standing there, while she consults the oracle as to their admission. The oracle may be inferred to give consent, from the circumstance of her returning with the words on her honey lips "that they can come in if they want to it." Thus privileged they come in, and find Mr. Smallweed with his feet in the drawer of his chair as if it were a paper foot-bath, and Mrs. Smallweed obscured with the cushion like a bird that is not to sing.

"My dear friend," says Grandfather Smallweed, with those two lean, affectionate arms of his stretched forth. "How de do? How de do? Who is our friend, my dear friend?"

"Why this," returns George, not able to be very conciliatory at first, "is Mathew Bagnet, who has obliged me in that matter of ours, you know."

"Oh! Mr. Bagnet? Surely!" The old man looks at him under his hand. "Hope you're well, Mr. Bagnet? Fine man, Mr. George! Military air, sir!"

No chairs being offered, Mr. George brings one forward for Bagnet, and one for himself. They sit down; Mr. Bagnet as if he had no power of bending himself, except at the hips for that purpose.

"Judy," says Mr. Smallweed, "bring the pipe."

"Why, I don't know," Mr. George interposes, "that the young woman need give herself that trouble, for, to tell you the truth, I am not inclined to smoke it to-day."

"Ain't you?" returns the old man. "Judy, bring the pipe."

"The fact is, Mr. Smallweed," proceeds George, "that I find myself in rather an unpleasant state of mind. It appears to me, sir, that your friend in the city has been playing tricks."

"O dear no!" says Grandfather Smallweed. "He never does that!"

"Don't he? Well, I am glad to hear it, because I thought it might be *his* doing. This, you know, I am speaking of. This letter."

Grandfather Smallweed smiles in a very ugly way, in recognition of the letter.

"What does it mean?" asked Mr. George.

"Judy," says the old man. "Have you got the pipe? Give it to me. Did you say what does it mean, my good friend?"

"Aye! Now, come, come, you know, Mr. Smallweed," urges the trooper, constraining himself to speak as smoothly and confidentially as he can, holding the open letter in one hand, and resting the broad knuckles of the other on his thigh; "a good lot of money has passed between us, and we are face to face at the present moment, and are both well aware of the understanding there has always been. I am prepared to do the usual thing which I have done regularly, and to keep this matter going. I never got a letter like this from you before, and I have been a little put about by it this morning; because here's my friend Matthew Bagnet, who, you know, had none of the money —"

"I don't know it, you know," says the old man, quietly.

"Why, con-found you—it, I mean—I tell you so; don't I?"

"Oh, yes, you tell me so," returns Grandfather Smallweed. "But I don't know it."

"Well!" says the trooper, swallowing his fire. "I know it."

Mr. Smallweed replies with excellent temper.

"Ah! that's quite another thing!" And adds, "but it don't matter. Mr. Bagnet's situation is all one, whether or no."

The unfortunate George makes a great effort to arrange the affair comfortably, and to propitiate Mr. Smallweed by taking him upon his own terms.

"That's just what I mean. As you say, Mr. Smallweed, here's Matthew Bagnet liable to be fixed whether or no. Now, you see, that makes his good lady very uneasy in her mind, and me too; for, whereas I'm a harum-scarum sort of a good-for-nought, that more kicks than half-pence come natural to, why he's a steady family man, don't you see? Now, Mr. Smallweed," says the trooper, gaining confidence as he proceeds in this soldierly mode of doing business; "although you and I are good friends enough in a certain sort of a way, I am well aware that I can't ask you to let my friend Bagnet off entirely."

"O dear, you are too modest. You can ask me anything, Mr. George." (There is an Ogreish kind of jocularity in Grandfather Smallweed to-day.)

"And you can refuse, you mean, eh? Or not you so much, perhaps, as your friend in the city? Ha ha ha!"

"Ha ha ha!" echoes Grandfather Smallweed. In such a very hard manner, and with eyes so particularly green, that Mr. Bagnet's natural gravity is much deepened by the contemplation of that venerable man.

"Come!" says the sanguine George, "I am glad to find we can be pleasant, because I want to arrange this pleasantly. Here's my friend Bagnet, and here am I. We'll settle the matter on the spot, if you please, Mr. Smallweed, in the usual way. And you'll ease my friend Bagnet's mind, and his family's mind, a good deal, if you'll just mention to him what our understanding is."

Here some shrill spectre cries out in a mocking manner, "O good gracious! O!"—unless, indeed, it be the sportive Judy, who is found to be silent when the startled visitors look round, but whose chin has received a recent toss, expressive of derision and contempt. Mr. Bagnet's gravity becomes yet more profound.

"But I think you asked me, Mr. George;" old Smallweed, who all this time has had the pipe in his hand, is the speaker now; "I think you asked me, what did the letter mean?"

"Why, yes, I did," returns the trooper, in his off-hand way: "but I don't care to know particularly, if it's all correct and pleasant."

Mr. Smallweed, purposely balking himself in an aim at the trooper's head, throws the pipe on the ground and breaks it to pieces.

"That's what it means, my dear friend. I'll smash you. I'll crumble you. I'll powder you. Go to the devil!"

The two friends rise and look at one another. Mr. Bagnet's gravity has now attained its profoundest point.

"Go to the devil!" repeats the old man. "I'll have no more of your pipe-smokings and swaggerings. What? You're an independent dragoon, too! Go to my lawyer (you remember where; you have been there before), and show your independence now, will you? Come, my dear friend, there's a chance for you. Open the street door, Judy; put these blusterers out! Call in help if they don't go. Put 'em out!"

He vociferates this so loudly, that Mr. Bagnet, laying his hands on the shoulders of his comrade, before the latter can recover from his amazement, gets him on the outside of the street door; which is instantly slammed by the triumphant Judy. Utterly

confounded, Mr. George awhile stands looking at the knocker. Mr. Bagnet, in a perfect abyss of gravity, walks up and down before the little parlor window, like a sentry, and looks in, every time he passes; apparently revolving something in his mind.

"Come, Mat!" says Mr. George, when he has recovered himself, "we must try the lawyer. Now, what do you think of this rascal?"

Mr. Bagnet, stopping to take a farewell look into the parlor, replies, with one shake of his head directed at the interior, "If my old girl had been here—I'd have told him!" Having so discharged himself of the subject of his cogitations, he falls into step, and marches off with the trooper, shoulder to shoulder.

When they present themselves in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Mr. Tulkinghorn is engaged, and not to be seen. He is not at all willing to see them; for when they have waited a full hour, and the clerk, on his bell being rung, takes the opportunity of mentioning as much, he brings forth no more encouraging message than that Mr. Tulkinghorn has nothing to say to them, and they had better not wait. They do wait, however, with the perseverance of military tactics; and at last the bell rings again, and the client in possession comes out of Mr. Tulkinghorn's room.

The client is a handsome old lady; no other than Mrs. Rouncewell, housekeeper at Chesney Wold. She comes out of the sanctuary with a fair old-fashioned curtsey, and softly shuts the door. She is treated with some distinction there; for the clerk steps out of his pew to show her through the outer office, and to let her out. The old lady is thanking him for his attention, when she observes the comrades in waiting.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I think those gentlemen are military?"

The clerk referring the question to them with his eye, and Mr. George not turning round from the almanack over the fire-place, Mr. Bagnet takes upon himself to reply, "Yes, ma'am. Formerly."

"I thought so. I was sure of it. My heart warms, gentlemen, at the sight of you. It always does at the sight of such. God bless you, gentlemen! You'll excuse an old woman; but I had a son once who went for a soldier. A fine handsome youth he was, and good in his bold way, though some people did disparage him to his poor mother. I ask your pardon for troubling you, sir. God bless you, gentlemen!"

"Same to you, ma'am!" returns Mr. Bagnet, with right good will.

There is something very touching in the earnestness of the old lady's voice, and in the tremble that goes through her quaint old figure. But Mr. George is so occupied with the almanack over the fire-place (calculating the coming months by it perhaps), that he does not look round until she has gone away, and the door is closed upon her.

"George," Mr. Bagnet gruffly whispers, when he does turn from the almanack at last. "Don't be cast down! 'Why soldiers, why—should we be melancholy boys?' Cheer up, my hearty!"

The clerk having now again gone in to say that they are still there, and Mr. Tulkinghorn being heard to return with some irascibility, "Let 'em come in then!" they pass into the great room with the painted ceiling, and find him standing before the fire.

"Now you men, what do you want? Serjeant, I told you the last time I saw you that I don't desire your company here."

Serjeant replies—dashed within the last few

minutes as to his usual manner of speech, and even as to his usual carriage—that he has received this letter, has been to Mr. Smallweed about it, and has been referred there.

"I have nothing to say to you," rejoins Mr. Tulkinghorn. "If you get into debt, you must pay your debts, or take the consequences. You have no occasion to come here to learn that, I suppose?"

Serjeant is sorry to say that he is not prepared with the money.

"Very well! Then the other man—this man, if this is he—must pay it for you."

Serjeant is sorry to add that the other man is not prepared with the money either.

"Very well! Then you must pay it between you, or you must both be sued for it, and both suffer. You have had the money and must refund it. You are not to pocket other people's pounds, shillings, and pence, and escape scot free."

The lawyer sits down in his easy chair and stirs the fire. Mr. George hopes he will have the goodness to—

"I tell you, Serjeant, I have nothing to say to you. I don't like your associates, and don't want you here. This matter is not at all in my course of practice, and is not in my office. Mr. Smallweed is good enough to offer these affairs to me, but they are not in my way. You must go to Melchisedech's in Clifford's Inn."

"I must make an apology to you, sir," says Mr. George, "for pressing myself upon you with so little encouragement—which is almost as unpleasant to me as it can be to you; but would you let me say a private word to you?"

Mr. Tulkinghorn rises with his hands in his pockets, and walks into one of the window recesses. "Now! I have no time to waste." In the midst of his perfect assumption of indifference, he directs a sharp look at the trooper; taking care to stand with his own back to the light, and to have the other with his face towards it.

"Well, sir," says Mr. George, "this man with me is the other party implicated in this unfortunate affair—nominally, only nominally—and my sole object is to prevent his getting into trouble on my account. He is a most respectable man with a wife and family; formerly in the Royal Artillery—"

"My friend, I don't care a pinch of snuff for the whole Royal Artillery establishment—officers, men, tumbrils, wagons, horses, guns, and ammunition."

"'Tis likely, sir. But I care a good deal for Bagnet and his wife and family being injured on my account. But if I could bring them through this matter, I should have no help for it but to give up without any other consideration, what you wanted of me the other day."

"Have you got it here?"

"I have got it here, sir."

"Serjeant," the lawyer proceeds in his dry, passionless manner, far more hopeless in the dealing with, than any amount of vehemence, "make up your mind, while I speak to you, for this is final. After I have finished speaking I have closed the subject, and I won't re-open it. Understand that. You can leave here, for a few days, what you say you have brought here, if you choose; you can take it away at once, if you choose. In case you choose to leave it here, I can do this for you—I can replace this matter on its old footing, and I can go so far besides as to give you a written undertaking that this man Bagnet shall never be troubled in any way until you have been proceeded against to the utmost—that your means shall be exhausted before the creditor looks to his. This is in fact all but freeing him. Have you decided?"

The trooper puts his hand into his breast, and answers with a long breath, "I must do it, sir."

So Mr. Tulkinghorn, putting on his spectacles, sits down and writes the undertaking; which he slowly reads and explains to Bagnet, who has all this time been staring at the ceiling, and who puts his hand on his bald head again, under this new verbal shower-bath, and seems exceedingly in need of the old girl through whom to express his sentiments. The trooper then takes from his breast-pocket a folded paper, which he lays with an unwilling hand at the lawyer's elbow. "'Tis only a letter of instructions, sir. The last I ever had from him."

Look at a millstone, Mr. George, for some change in its expression, and you will find it quite as soon as in the face of Mr. Tulkinghorn when he opens and reads the letter! He re-folds it, and lays it in his desk, with a countenance as imperturbable as Death.

Nor has he anything more to say or do, but to nod once in the same frigid and discourteous manner, and to say briefly, "You can go. Show these men out, there!" Being shown out, they repair to Mr. Bagnet's residence to dine.

Boiled beef and greens constitute the day's variety on the former repast of boiled pork and greens; and Mrs. Bagnet serves out the meal in the same way, and seasons it with the best of temper: being that rare sort of old girl that she receives Good to her arms without a hint that it might be Better; and catches light from any little spot of darkness near her. The spot on this occasion is the darkened brow of Mr. George; he is unusually thoughtful and depressed. At first Mrs. Bagnet trusts to the combined endearments of Quebec and Malta to restore him; but finding those young ladies sensible that their existing Bluffy is not the Bluffy of their usual frolicsome acquaintance, she winks off the light infantry, and leaves him to deploy at leisure on the open ground of the domestic hearth.

But he does not. He remains in close order, clouded and depressed. During the lengthy cleaning up and pattering process, when he and Mr. Bagnet are supplied with their pipes, he is no better than he was at dinner. He forgets to smoke, looks at the fire and ponders, lets his pipe out, fills the breast of Mr. Bagnet with perturbation and dismay, by showing that he has no enjoyment of tobacco.

Therefore when Mrs. Bagnet at last appears, rosy from the invigorating pail, and sits down to her work, Mr. Bagnet growls "Old girl!" and winks monitions to her to find out what's the matter.

"Why, George!" says Mrs. Bagnet, quietly threading her needle. "How low you are!"

"Am I? Not good company? Well, I am afraid I am not."

"He ain't at all like Bluffy, mother!" cries little Malta.

"Because he ain't well, I think, mother!" adds Quebec.

"Sure that's a bad sign not to be like Bluffy, too!" returns the trooper, kissing the young damsels. "But it's true," with a sigh—"true, I am afraid. These little ones are always right!"

"George," says Mrs. Bagnet, working busily, "if I thought you cross enough to think of anything that a shrill old soldier's wife—who could have bitten her tongue off afterwards, and ought to have done it almost—said this morning, I don't know what I shouldn't say to you now."

"My kind soul of a darling," returns the trooper. "Not a morsel of it."

"Because really and truly, George, what I said

and meant to say, was that I trusted Lignum to you, and was sure you'd bring him through it. And you *have* brought him through it, noble!"

"Thank'ee, my dear," says George. "I am glad of your good opinion."

In giving Mrs. Bagnet's hand, with her work in it, a friendly shake—for she took her seat beside him—the trooper's attention is attracted to her face. After looking at it for a little while as she plies her needle, he looks to young Woolwich, sitting on his stool in the corner, and beckons that fifer to him.

"See there, my boy," says George, very gently smoothing the mother's hair with his hand, "there's a good loving forehead for you! All bright with love of you, my boy. A little touched by the sun and the weather through following your father about and taking care of you, but as fresh and wholesome as a ripe apple on a tree."

Mr. Bagnet's face expresses, so far as in its wooden material lies, the highest approbation and acquiescence.

"The time will come, my boy," pursues the trooper, "when this hair of your mother's will be grey, and this forehead all crossed and re-crossed with wrinkles—and a fine old lady she'll be then. Take care, while you are young, that you can think in those days, 'I never whitened a hair of her dead head, I never marked a sorrowful line in her face!' For of all the many things that you can think of when you are a man, you had better have *that* by you, Woolwich!"

Mr. George concludes by rising from his chair, seating the boy beside his mother in it, and saying, with something of a hurry about him, that he'll smoke his pipe in the street a bit.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### ESTHER'S NARRATIVE.

I LAY ill through several weeks, and the usual tenor of my life became like an old remembrance. But, this was not the effect of time, so much as of the change in all my habits, made by the helplessness and inaction of a sick room. Before I had been confined to it many days, everything else seemed to have retired into a remote distance, where there was little or no separation between the various stages of my life which had been really divided by years. In falling ill, I seemed to have crossed a dark lake, and to have left all my experiences mingled together by the great distance, on the healthy shore.

My housekeeping duties, though at first it caused me great anxiety to think that they were unperformed, were soon as far off as the oldest of the old duties at Greenleaf, or the summer afternoons when I went home from school with my portfolio under my arm, and my childish shadow at my side, to my godmother's house. I had never known before how short life really was, and into how small a space the mind could put it.

While I was very ill, the way in which these divisions of time became confused with one another, distressed my mind exceedingly. At once a child, an elder girl, and the little woman I had been so happy as, I was not only oppressed by cares and difficulties adapted to each station, but by the great perplexity of endlessly trying to reconcile them. I suppose that few who have not been in such a condition can quite understand what I mean, or what painful unrest arose from this source.

For the same reason I am almost afraid to hint at that time in my disorder—it seemed one long night, but I believe there were both nights and days

in it—when I laboured up colossal staircases, ever striving to reach the top, and ever turned, as I have seen a worm in a garden path, by some obstruction, and labouring again. I knew perfectly at intervals, and I think vaguely at most times, that I was in my bed; and I talked with Charley, and felt her touch, and knew her very well; yet I would find myself complaining “O more of these never-ending

Perhaps the less I say of these sick experiences, the less tedious and the more intelligible I shall be. I do not recall them to make others unhappy, or because I am now the least unhappy in remembering them. It may be that if we knew more of such strange afflictions, we might be better able to alleviate their intensity.

The repose that succeeded, the long delicious

MR. SMALLWHEED BREAKS THE PIPE OF PEACOCK.



stairs, Charley,—more and more—piled up to the sky, I think!” and labouring on again.

Dare I hint at that worse time when, strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest, and when it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be a part of the dreadful thing?

sleep, the blissful rest, when in my weakness I was too calm to have any care for myself, and could have heard (or so I think now) that I was dying; with no other emotion than with a pitying love for those I left behind—this state can be perhaps more widely understood. I was in this state when I first shrank from the light as it twinkled on me once more, and knew with a boundless joy for which no words are rapturous enough, that I should see again.



I had heard my Ada crying at the door, day and night; I had heard her calling to me that I was cruel and did not love her; I had heard her praying and imploring to be let in to nurse and comfort me, and to leave my bedside no more; but I had only said, when I could speak, "Never, my sweet girl, never!" and I had over and over again reminded Charley that she was to keep my darling from the room, whether I lived or died. Charley had been true to me in that time of need, and with her little hand and her great heart had kept the door fast.

But now, my sight strengthening, and the glorious light coming every day more fully and brightly on me, I could read the letters that my dear wrote to me every morning and evening, and could put them to my lips and lay my cheek upon them with no fear of hurting her. I could see my little maid, so tender and so careful, going about the two rooms setting every thing in order, and speaking cheerfully to Ada from the open window again. I could understand the stillness in the house, and the thoughtfulness it expressed on the part of all those who had always been so good to me. I could weep in the exquisite felicity of my heart, and be as happy in my weakness as ever I had been in my strength.

By and by, my strength began to be restored. Instead of lying, with so strange a calmness, watching what was done for me, as if it were done for some one else whom I was quietly sorry for, I helped it a little, and so on to a little more and much more, until I became useful to myself, and interested, and attached to life again.

How well I remember the pleasant afternoon when I was raised in bed with pillows for the first time, to enjoy a great tea-drinking with Charley! The little creature—sent into the world, surely, to minister to the weak and sick—was so happy, and so busy, and stopped so often in her preparations to lay her head upon my bosom, and fondle me, and cry with joyful tears she was so glad, she was so glad! that I was obliged to say, "Charley, if you go on in this way, I must lie down again, my darling, for I am weaker than I thought I was!" So Charley became as quiet as a mouse, and took her bright face here and there, across and across the two rooms, out of the shade into the divine sunshine, and out of the sunshine into the shade, while I watched her peacefully. When all her preparations were concluded and the pretty tea-table with its little delicacies to tempt me, and its white cloth, and its flowers, and everything so lovingly and beautifully arranged for me by Ada down-stairs, was ready at the bed-side, I felt sure I was steady enough to say something to Charley that was not new to my thoughts.

First, I complimented Charley on the room; and indeed, it was so fresh and airy, so spotless and neat, that I could scarce believe I had been lying there so long. This delighted Charley, and her face was brighter than before.

"Yet, Charley," said I looking round, "I miss something, surely, that I am accustomed to?"

Poor little Charley looked round too, and pretended to shake her head, as if there were nothing absent.

"Are the pictures all as they used to be?" I asked her.

"Every one of them, miss," said Charley.

"And the furniture, Charley?"

"Except where I have moved it about, to make more room, miss."

"And yet," said I, "I miss some familiar object. Ah, I know what it is, Charley! It's the looking-glass."

Charley got up from the table, making as if she

had forgotten something, and went into the next room; and I heard her sob there.

I had thought of this very often. I was now certain of it. I could thank God that it was not a shock to me now. I called Charley back; and when she came—at first pretending to smile, but as she drew nearer to me, looking grieved—I took her in my arms, and said, "It matters very little, Charley. I hope I can do without my old face very well."

I was presently so far advanced as to be able to sit up in a great chair, and even giddily to walk into the adjoining room, leaning on Charley. The mirror was gone from its usual place in that room too; but what I had to bear, was none the harder to bear for that.

My guardian had throughout been earnest to visit me, and there was now no good reason why I should deny myself that happiness. He came one morning; and when he first came in, could only hold me in his embrace, and say, "My dear, dear girl!" I had long known—who could know better!—what a deep fountain of affection and generosity his heart was; and was it not worth my trivial suffering and change to fill such a place in it? "O yes!" I thought. "He has seen me, and he loves me better than he did; he has seen me, and is even fonder of me than he was before; and what have I to mourn for!"

He sat down by me on the sofa, supporting me with his arm. For a little while he sat with his hand over his face, but when he removed it, fell into his usual manner. There never can have been, there never can be, a pleasanter manner.

"My little woman," said he, "what a sad time this has been. Such an inflexible little woman, too, through all!"

"Only for the best, guardian," said I.

"For the best?" he repeated, tenderly. "Of course, for the best. But here have Ada and I been perfectly forlorn and miserable; here has your friend Caddy been coming and going late and early; here has everyone about the house been utterly lost and dejected; here has even poor Rick been writing—to me too—in his anxiety for you!"

I had read of Caddy in Ada's letters, but not of Richard. I told him so.

"Why no, my dear," he replied. "I have thought it better not to mention it to her."

"And you speak of his writing to you," said I, repeating his emphasis. "As if it were not natural for him to do so, guardian; as if he could write to a better friend!"

"He thinks he could, my love," returned my guardian, "and to many a better. The truth is, he wrote to me under a sort of protest, while unable to write to you with any hope of an answer—wrote coldly, haughtily, distantly, resentfully. Well, dearest little woman, we must look forbearingly on it. He is not to blame. Jarndyce and Jarndyce has warped him out of himself, and perverted me in his eyes. I have known it to do as bad deeds, and worse, many a time. If two angels could be concerned in it, I believe it would change their nature."

"It has not changed yours, guardian."

"Oh yes, it has, my dear," he said, laughingly.

"It has made the south wind easterly, I don't know how often. Rick mistrusts and suspects me—goes to lawyers, and is taught to mistrust and suspect me. Hears I have conflicting interests; claims clashing against his, and what not. Whereas, Heaven knows, that if I could get out of the mountains of Wiglomeration on which my unfortunate name has been so long bestowed (which I

can't), or could level them by the extinction of my own original right (which I can't, either, and no human power ever can, anyhow, I believe, to such a pass have we got), I would do it this hour. I would rather restore to poor Rick his proper nature, than be endowed with all the money that dead suitors, broken, heart and soul, upon the wheel of Chancery, have left unclaimed with the Accountant-General—and that's money enough, my dear, to be cast into a pyramid, in memory of Chancery's transcendent wickedness."

"Is it possible, guardian," I asked, amazed, "that Richard can be suspicious of you?"

"Ah, my love, my love," he said, "it is in the subtle poison of such abuses to breed such diseases. His blood is infected, and objects lose their natural aspects in his sight. It is not *his* fault."

"But it is a terrible misfortune, guardian."

"It is a terrible misfortune, little woman, to be ever drawn within the influences of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. I know nothing greater. By little and little he has been induced to trust in that rotten reed, and it communicates some portion of its rottenness to everything around him. But again, I say, with all my soul, we must be patient with poor Rick, and not blame him. What a troop of fine fresh hearts, like his, have I seen in my time turned by the same means!"

I could not help expressing something of my wonder and regret that his benevolent disinterested intentions had prospered so little.

"We must not say so, Dame Durden," he cheerfully replied; "Ada is the happier, I hope; and that is much. I did think that I and both these young creatures might be friends, instead of distrustful foes, and that we might so far counteract the suit, and prove too strong for it. But it was too much to expect. Jarndyce and Jarndyce was the curtain of Rick's cradle."

"But, guardian, may we not hope that a little experience will teach him what a false and wretched thing it is?"

"We *will* hope so, my Esther," said Mr. Jarndyce, "and that it may not teach him so too late. In any case we must not be hard on him. There are not many grown and matured men living while we speak, good men too, who, if they were thrown into this same court as suitors, would not be vitally changed and depreciated within three years—within two—within one. How can we stand amazed at poor Rick? A young man so unfortunate," here he fell into a lower tone, as if he were thinking aloud, "cannot at first believe (who could?) that Chancery is what it is. He looks to it, flushed and fitfully, to do something with his interests, and bring them to some settlement. It procrastinates, disappoints, tries, tortures him; wears out his sanguine hopes and patience, thread by thread; but he still looks to it, and hankers after it, and finds his whole world treacherous and hollow. Well, well, well! Enough of this, my dear!"

He had supported me, as at first, all this time; and his tenderness was so precious to me, that I leaned my head upon his shoulder and loved him as if he had been my father. I resolved in my own mind in this little pause, by some means, to see Richard when I grew strong, and try to set him right.

"There are better subjects than these," said my guardian, "for such a joyful time as the time of our dear girl's recovery. And I had a commission to broach one of them, as soon as I should begin to talk. When shall Ada come to see you, my love?"

I had been thinking of that too. A little in connexion with the absent mirrors, but not much; for

I knew my loving girl would be changed by no change in my looks.

"Dear guardian," said I, "as I have shut her out so long—though indeed, indeed, she is like the light to me——"

"I know it well, Dame Durden, well."

He was so good, his touch expressed such endearing compassion and affection, and the tone of his voice carried such comfort into my heart, that I stopped for a little while, quite unable to go on. "Yes, yes, you are tired," said he. "Rest a little."

"As I have kept Ada out so long," I began afresh after a short while, "I think I should like to have my own way a little longer, guardian. It would be best to be away from here before I see her. If Charley and I were to go to some country lodging as soon as I can move, and if I had a week there, in which to grow stronger and to be revived by the sweet air, and to look forward to the happiness of having Ada with me again, I think it would be better for us."

I hope it was not a poor thing in me to wish to be a little more used to my altered self, before I met the eyes of the dear girl I longed so ardently to see; but it is the truth. I did. He understood me, I was sure; but I was not afraid of that. If it were a poor thing, I knew he would pass it over.

"Our spoilt little woman," said my guardian, "shall have her own way even in her flexibility, though at the price, I know, of tears down-stairs. And see here! Here is Boythorn, heart of chivalry, breathing such ferocious vows as never were breathed on paper before, that if you don't go and occupy his whole house, he having already turned out of it expressly for that purpose, by Heaven and by earth he'll pull it down, and not leave one brick standing on another!"

And my guardian put a letter in my hand; without any ordinary beginning such as "My dear Jarndyce," but rushing at once into the words, "I swear if Miss Summerson do not come down and take possession of my house, which I vacate for her this day at one o'clock, p.m.," and then with the utmost seriousness, and in the most emphatic terms, going on to make the extraordinary declaration he had quoted. We did not appreciate the writer the less, for laughing heartily over it; and we settled that I should send him a letter of thanks on the morrow, and accept his offer.

It was a most agreeable one to me; for of all the places I could have thought of, I should have liked to go to none so well as Chesney Wold.

"Now, little housewife," said my guardian, looking at his watch, "I was strictly timed before I came up-stairs, for you must not be tired too soon; and my time has waned away to the last minute. I have one other petition. Little Miss Flite, hearing a rumour that you were ill, made nothing of walking down here—twenty miles, poor soul, in a pair of dancing shoes—to inquire. It was Heaven's mercy we were at home, or she would have walked back again."

The old conspiracy to make me happy! Everybody seemed to be in it!

"Now, pet," said my guardian, "if it would not be irksome to you to admit the harmless little creature one afternoon, before you save Boythorn's otherwise devoted house from demolition, I believe you would make her prouder and better pleased with herself than I—though my eminent name is Jarndyce—could do in a lifetime."

I have no doubt he knew there would be something in the simple image of the poor afflicted creature, that would fall like a gentle lesson on my

mind at that time. I felt it as he spoke to me. I could not tell him heartily enough how ready I was to receive her. I had always pitied her; never so much as now. I had always been glad of my little power to soothe her under her calamity; but never, never, half so glad before.

We arranged a time for Miss Flite to come out by the coach, and share my early dinner. When my guardian left me, I turned my face away upon my couch, and prayed to be forgiven if I, surrounded by such blessings, had magnified to myself the little trial that I had to undergo. The childish prayer of that old birthday, when I had aspired to be industrious, contented, and true-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could, came back into my mind with a reproachful sense of all the happiness I had since enjoyed, and all the affectionate hearts that had been turned towards me. If I were weak now, what had I profited by those mercies? I repeated the old childish prayer in its old childish words, and found that its old peace had not departed from it.

My guardian now came every day. In a week or so more, I could walk about our rooms, and hold long talks with Ada from behind the window-curtain. Yet I never saw her; for I had not as yet the courage to look at the dear face, though I could have done so easily without her seeing me.

On the appointed day Miss Flite arrived. The poor little creature ran into my room quite forgetful of her usual dignity, and, crying from her very heart of hearts, "My dear Fitz Jarndyce!" fell upon my neck and kissed me twenty times.

"Dear me!" said she, putting her hand into her reticule, "I have nothing here but documents, my dear Fitz Jarndyce; I must borrow a pocket-handkerchief."

Charley gave her one, and the good creature certainly made use of it, for she held it to her eyes with both hands, and sat so shedding tears for the next ten minutes.

"With pleasure, my dear Fitz Jarndyce," she was careful to explain. "Not the least pain. Pleasure to see you well again. Pleasure at having the honor of being admitted to see you. I am so much fonder of you, my love, than of the Chancellor. Though I do attend court regularly. By the by, my dear, mentioning pocket-handkerchiefs—"

Miss Flite here looked at Charley, who had been to meet her at the place where the coach stopped. Charley glanced at me, and looked unwilling to pursue the suggestion.

"Ve-ry right!" said Miss Flite, "ve-ry correct. Truly! Highly indiscreet of me to mention it; but, my dear Miss Fitz Jarndyce, I am afraid I am at times (between ourselves, you wouldn't think it) a little—rambling you know," said Miss Flite, touching her forehead. "Nothing more."

"What were you going to tell me?" said I, smiling, for I saw she wanted to go on. "You have roused my curiosity, and now you must gratify it."

Miss Flite looked to Charley for advice in this important crisis, who said, "If you please, ma'am, you had better tell then," and therein gratified Miss Flite beyond measure.

"So sagacious, our young friend," said she to me, in her mysterious way. "Diminutive. But ve-ry sagacious! Well, my dear, it's a pretty anecdote. Nothing more. Still I think it charming. Who should follow us down the road from the coach, my dear, but a poor person in a very ungentle bonnet—"

"Jenny, if you please, miss," said Charley.

"Just so!" Miss Flite acquiesced with great suavity. "Jenny. Ye-es! And what does she tell our young friend, but that there has been a lady with a veil inquiring at her cottage after my dear Fitz Jarndyce's health, and taking a handkerchief away with her as a little keepsake, merely because it was my amiable Fitz Jarndyce's! Now, you know, so very prepossessing in the lady with the veil!"

"If you please, miss," said Charley to whom I looked in some astonishment, "Jenny says that when her baby died, you left a handkerchief there, and that she put it away and kept it with the baby's little things. I think, if you please, partly because it was yours, miss, and partly because it had covered the baby."

"Diminutive," whispered Miss Flite, making a variety of motions about her own forehead to express intellect in Charley. "But ex-ceedingly sagacious! And so clear! My love, she's clearer than any Counsel I ever heard!"

"Yes, Charley," I returned. "I remember it. Well?"

"Well, miss," said Charley, "and that's the handkerchief the lady took. And Jenny wants you to know that she wouldn't have made away with it herself for a heap of money, but that the lady took it, and left some money instead. Jenny don't know her at all, if you please, miss?"

"Why, who can she be?" said I.

"My love," Miss Flite suggested, advancing her lips to my ear, with her most mysterious look, "in my opinion—don't mention this to our diminutive friend—she's the Lord Chancellor's wife. He's married, you know. And I understand she leads him a terrible life. Throws his lordship's papers into the fire, my dear, if he won't pay the jeweller!"

I did not think very much about this lady then, for I had an impression that it might be Caddy. Besides, my attention was diverted by my visitor, who was cold after her ride, and looked hungry; and who, our dinner being brought in, required some little assistance in arraying herself with great satisfaction in a pitiable old scarf and a much-worn and often-mended pair of gloves, which she had brought down in a paper parcel. I had to preside, too, over the entertainment, consisting of a dish of fish, a roast fowl, a sweetbread, vegetables, pudding, and Madeira; and it was so pleasant to see how she enjoyed it, and with what state and ceremony she did honor to it, that I was soon thinking of nothing else.

When we had finished, and had our little dessert before us, embellished by the hands of my dear, who would yield the superintendence of everything prepared for me to no one; Miss Flite was so very chatty and happy, that I thought I would lead her to her own history, as she was always pleased to talk about herself. I began by saying "You have attended on the Lord Chancellor many years, Miss Flite?"

"O many, many, many years, my dear. But I expect a judgment. Shortly."

There was an anxiety even in her hopefulness, that made me doubtful if I had done right in approaching the subject. I thought I would say no more about it.

"My father expected a Judgment," said Miss Flite. "My brother. My sister. They all expected a Judgment. The same that I expect."

"They are all—"

"Ye-es. Dead of course, my dear," said she.

As I saw she would go on, I thought it best to try to be serviceable to her by meeting the theme, rather than avoiding it.

"Would it not be wiser," said I, "to expect this Judgment no more?"

"Why, my dear," she answered promptly, "of course it would!"

"And to attend the court no more?"

"Equally of course," said she. "Very wearing to be always in expectation of what never comes, my dear Fitz Jarndyce! Wearing, I assure you, to the bone!"

She slightly showed me her arm, and it was fearfully thin indeed.

"But, my dear," she went on, in her mysterious way, "there's a dreadful attraction in the place. Hush! Don't mention it to our diminutive friend, when she comes in. Or it may frighten her. With good reason. There's a cruel attraction in the place. You *can't* leave it. And you *must* expect."

I tried to assure her that this was not so. She heard me patiently and smilingly, but was ready with her own answer.

"Aye, aye, aye! You think so, because I am a little rambling. Ve-ry absurd, to be a little rambling, is it not? Ve-ry confusing, too. To the head. I find it so. But, my dear, I have been there many years, and I have noticed. It's the Mace and Seal upon the table."

What could they do, did she think? I mildly asked her.

"Draw," returned Miss Flite. "Draw people on, my dear. Draw peace out of them. Sense out of them. Good looks out of them. Good qualities out of them. I have felt them even drawing my rest away in the night. Cold and glittering devils!"

She tapped me several times upon the arm, and nodded good-humouredly, as if she were anxious that I should understand that I had no cause to fear her, though she spoke so gloomily and confided these awful secrets to me.

"Let me see," said she. "I'll tell you my own case. Before they ever drew me—before I had ever seen them—what was it I used to do? Tambourine playing? No. Tambour work. I and my sister worked at tambour work. Our father and our brother had a builder's business. We all lived together. Ve-ry respectably, my dear! First, our father was drawn—slowly. Home was drawn with him. In a few years, he was a fierce, sour, angry bankrupt, without a kind word or a kind look for any one. He had been so different, Fitz Jarndyce. He was drawn to a debtor's prison. There he died. Then our brother was drawn—swiftly—to drunkenness. And rags. And death. Then my sister was drawn. Hush! Never ask to what! Then I was ill, and in misery; and heard, as I had often heard before, that this was all the work of Chancery. When I got better, I went to look at the Monster. And then I found out how it was, and I was drawn to stay there."

Having got over her own short narrative, in the delivery of which she had spoken in a low, strained voice, as if the shock were fresh upon her, she gradually resumed her usual air of amiable importance.

"You don't quite credit me, my dear! Well, well! You will, some day. I am a little rambling. But I have noticed. I have seen many new faces come, unsuspecting, within the influence of the Mace and Seal, in these many years. As my father's came there. As my brother's. As my sister's. As my own. I hear Conversation Kenge, and the rest of them, say to the new faces, 'Here's little Miss Flite. O you are new here; and you must come and be presented to little Miss Flite!' Ve-ry good. Proud I am sure to have the honor! And we all laugh.

But, Fitz Jarndyce, I know what will happen. I know, far better than they do, when the attraction has begun. I know the signs, my dear. I saw them begin in Gridley. And I saw them end. Fitz Jarndyce, my love," speaking low again, "I saw them beginning in our friend the Ward in Jarndyce. Let someone hold him back. Or he'll be drawn to ruin."

She looked at me in silence for some moments, with her face gradually softening into a smile. Seeming to fear that she had been too gloomy, and seeming also to lose the connexion in her mind, she said, politely, as she sipped her glass of wine, "Yes, my dear, as I was saying, I expect a Judgment. Shortly. Then I shall release my birds, you know, and confer estates."

I was much impressed by her allusion to Richard, and by the sad meaning, so sadly illustrated in her poor pinched form, that made its way through all her incoherence. But happily for her, she was quite complacent again now, and beamed with nods and smiles.

"But, my dear," she said, gaily, reaching another hand to put it upon mine. "You have not congratulated me on my physician. Positively not once, yet!"

I was obliged to confess that I did not quite know what she meant.

"My physician, Mr. Woodcourt, my dear, who was so exceedingly attentive to me. Though his services were rendered quite gratuitously. Until the Day of Judgment. I mean *the* judgment that will dissolve the spell upon me of the Mace and Seal."

"Mr. Woodcourt is so far away, now," said I, "that I thought the time for such congratulation was past, Miss Flite."

"But, my child," she returned, "is it possible that you don't know what has happened?"

"No," said I.

"Not what everybody has been talking of, my beloved Fitz Jarndyce?"

"No," said I. "You forget how long I have been here."

"True! My dear, for the moment—true. I blame myself. But my memory has been drawn out of me, with everything else, by what I mentioned. Ve-ry strong influence, is it not? Well, my dear, there has been a terrible shipwreck over in those East-Indian seas."

"Mr. Woodcourt shipwrecked!"

"Don't be agitated, my dear. He is safe. An awful scene. Death in all shapes. Hundreds of dead and dying. Fire, storm, and darkness. Numbers of the drowning thrown upon a rock. There, and through it all, my dear physician was hero. Calm and brave, through everything. Saved many lives, never complained in hunger and thirst, wrapped naked people in his spare clothes, took the lead, showed them what to do, governed them, tended the sick, buried the dead, and brought the poor survivors safely off at last! My dear, the poor emaciated creatures all but worshipped him. They fell down at his feet, when they got to the land, and blessed him. The whole country rings with it. Stay! Where's my bag of documents? I have got it there, and you shall read it, you shall read it!"

And I *did* read all the noble history; though very slowly and imperfectly then, for my eyes were so dimmed that I could not see the words, and I cried so much that I was many times obliged to lay down the long account she had cut out of the newspaper. I felt so triumphant ever to have known the man who had done such generous and gallant deeds; I

felt such glowing exultation in his renown; I so admired and loved what he had done; that I envied the storm-worn people who had fallen at his feet and blessed him as their preserver. I could myself have kneeled down then, so far away, and blessed him in my rapture that he should be so truly good and brave. I felt that no one—mother, sister, wife—could honor him more than I. I did, indeed!

My poor little visitor made me a present of the account, and when, as the evening began to close in, she rose to take her leave, lest she should miss the coach by which she was to return, she was still full of the shipwreck, which I had not yet sufficiently composed myself to understand in all its details.

"My dear," said she, as she carefully folded up her scarf and gloves, "my brave physician ought to have a Title bestowed upon him. And no doubt he will. You are of that opinion?"

That he well deserved one, yes. That he would ever have one, no.

"Why not, Fitz Jarndyce?" she asked, rather sharply.

I said it was not the custom in England to confer titles on men distinguished by peaceful services, however good and great; unless, occasionally, when they consisted of the accumulation of some very large amount of money.

"Why, good gracious," said Miss Flite, "how can you say that? Surely you know, my dear, that all the greatest ornaments of England, in knowledge, imagination, active humanity, and improvement of every sort, are added to its nobility! Look round you, my dear, and consider. You must be rambling a little now, I think, if you don't know that this is the great reason why titles will always last in the land!"

I am afraid she believed what she said; for there were moments when she was very mad indeed.

And now I must part with the little secret I have thus far tried to keep. I had thought, sometimes, that Mr. Woodcourt loved me: and that if he had been richer, he would perhaps have told me that he loved me, before he went away. I had thought, sometimes, that if he had done so, I should have been glad of it. But, how much better it was now, that this had never happened! What should I have suffered, if I had had to write to him, and tell him that the poor face he had known as mine was quite gone from me, and that I freely released him from his bondage to one whom he had never seen!

O, it was so much better as it was! With a great pang mercifully spared me, I could take back to my heart my childish prayer to be all he had so brightly shown himself; and there was nothing to be undone: no chain for me to break, or for him to drag; and I could go, please God, my lowly way along the path of duty, and he could go his nobler way upon its broader road; and though we were apart upon the journey, I might aspire to meet him, unselfishly, innocently, better far than he had thought me when I found some favor in his eyes, at the journey's end.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### CHESNEY WOLD.

CHARLEY and I did not set off alone upon our expedition into Lincolnshire. My guardian had made up his mind not to lose sight of me until I was safe in Mr. Boythorn's house; so he accompanied us, and we were two days upon the road. I found every breath of air, and every scent, and every flower and leaf and blade of grass, and every

passing cloud, and everything in nature, more beautiful and wonderful to me than I had ever found it yet. This was my first gain from my illness. How little I had lost, when the wide world was so full of delight for me.

My guardian intending to go back immediately, we appointed, on our way down, a day when my dear girl should come. I wrote her a letter, of which he took charge; and he left us within half an hour of our arrival at our destination, on a delightful evening in the early summer time.

If a good fairy had built the house for me with a wave of her wand, and I had been a princess and her favored godchild, I could not have been more considered in it. So many preparations were made for me, and such an endearing remembrance was shown of all my little tastes and likings, that I could have sat down, overcome, a dozen times, before I had revisited half the rooms. I did better than that, however, by showing them all to Charley instead. Charley's delight calmed mine; and after we had had a walk in the garden, and Charley had exhausted her whole vocabulary of admiring expressions, I was as tranquilly happy as I ought to have been. It was a great comfort to be able to say to myself after tea, "Esther, my dear, I think you are quite sensible enough to sit down now, and write a note of thanks to your host." He had left a note of welcome for me, as sunny as his own face, and had confided his bird to my care, which I knew to be his highest mark of confidence. Accordingly I wrote a little note to him in London, telling him how all his favorite plants and trees were looking, and how the most astonishing of birds had chirped the honors of the house to me in the most hospitable manner, and how, after singing on my shoulder, to the inconceivable rapture of my little maid, he was then at roost in the usual corner of his cage, but whether dreaming or no I could not report. My note finished and sent off to the post, I made myself very busy in unpacking and arranging; and I sent Charley to bed in good time, and told her I should want her no more that night.

For I had not yet looked in the glass, and had never asked to have my own restored to me. I knew this to be a weakness which must be overcome; but I had always said to myself that I would begin afresh, when I got to where I now was. Therefore I had wanted to be alone, and therefore I said, now alone, in my own room, "Esther, if you are to be happy, if you are to have any right to pray to be true-hearted, you must keep your word, my dear." I was quite resolved to keep it; but I sat down for a little while first, to reflect upon all my blessings. And then I said my prayers, and thought a little more.

My hair had not been cut off, though it had been in danger more than once. It was long and thick. I let it down, and shook it out, and went up to the glass upon the dressing-table. There was a little muslin curtain drawn across it. I drew it back; and stood for a moment looking through such a veil of my own hair, that I could see nothing else. Then I put my hair aside, and looked at the reflection in the mirror: encouraged by seeing how placidly it looked at me. I was very much changed—O very, very much. At first, my face was so strange to me, that I think I should have put my hands before it, and started back, but for the encouragement I have mentioned. Very soon it became more familiar, and then I knew the extent of the alteration in it better than I had done at first. It was not like what I had expected; but I had expected nothing definite, and I dare say anything definite would have surprised me.

I had never been a beauty, and had never thought myself one; but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now. Heaven was so good to me, that I could let it go with a few not bitter tears, and could stand there arranging my hair for the night quite thankfully.

One thing troubled me, and I considered it for a long time before I went to sleep. I had kept Mr. Woodcourt's flowers. When they were withered I had dried them, and put them in a book that I was fond of. Nobody knew this, not even Ada. I was doubtful whether I had a right to preserve what he had sent to one so different—whether it was generous towards him to do it. I wished to be generous to him, even in the secret depths of my heart, which he would never know, because I could have loved him—could have been devoted to him. At last I came to the conclusion that I might keep them; if I treasured them only as a remembrance of what was irrevocably past and gone, never to be looked back on any more, in any other light. I hope this may not seem trivial. I was very much in earnest.

I took care to be up early in the morning, and to be before the glass when Charley came in on tiptoe.

"Dear, dear, miss!" cried Charley, starting. "Is that you?"

"Yes, Charley," said I, quietly putting up my hair. "And I am very well indeed, and very happy."

I saw it was a weight off Charley's mind, but it was a greater weight off mine. I knew the worst now, and was composed to it. I shall not conceal, as I go on, the weaknesses I could not quite conquer; but they always passed from me soon, and the happier frame of mind stayed by me faithfully.

Wishing to be fully re-established in my strength and my good spirits before Ada came, I now laid down a little series of plans with Charley for being in the fresh air all day long. We were to be out before breakfast, and were to dine early, and were to be out again before and after dinner, and were to walk in the garden after tea, and were to go to rest betimes, and were to climb every hill and explore every road, lane, and field in the neighbourhood. As to restoratives and strengthening delicacies, Mr. Boythorn's good housekeeper was for ever trotting about with something to eat or drink in her hand; I could not even be heard of as resting in the Park, but she would come trotting after me with a basket, her cheerful face shining with a lecture on the importance of frequent nourishment. Then there was a pony expressly for my riding, a chubby pony, with a short neck and a mane all over his eyes, who could canter—when he would—so easily and quietly, that he was a treasure. In a very few days, he would come to me in the paddock when I called him, and eat out of my hand, and follow me about. We arrived at such a capital understanding, that when he was jogging with me lazily, and rather obstinately, down some shady lane, if I patted his neck, and said, "Stubbs, I am surprised you don't canter when you know how much I like it; and I think you might oblige me, for you are only getting stupid and going to sleep," he would give his head a comical shake or two, and set off directly; while Charley would stand still and laugh with such enjoyment, that her laughter was like music. I don't know who had given Stubbs his name, but it seemed to belong to him as naturally as his rough coat. Once we put him in a little chaise, and drove him triumphantly through the green lanes for five miles; but all at once, as we were extolling him to the skies, he seemed to take it ill that he should have been accompanied so far by the circle of tantalizing little gnats, that had been hovering round and round his

ears the whole way without appearing to advance an inch; and stopped to think about it. I suppose he came to the decision that it was not to be borne; for he steadily refused to move, until I gave the reins to Charley and got out and walked; when he followed me with a sturdy sort of good humour, putting his head under my arm, and rubbing his ear against my sleeve. It was in vain for me to say, "Now, Stubbs, I feel quite sure from what I know of you, that you will go on if I ride a little while;" for the moment I left him, he stood stock still again. Consequently, I was obliged to lead the way, as before; and in this order we returned home, to the great delight of the village.

Charley and I had reason to call it the most friendly of villages, I am sure; for in a week's time the people were so glad to see us go by, though ever so frequently in the course of a day, that there were faces of greeting in every cottage. I had known many of the grown people before, and almost all the children; but now the very steeple began to wear a familiar and affectionate look. Among my new friends was an old old woman who lived in such a little thatched and whitewashed dwelling, that when the outside shutter was turned up on its hinges, it shut up the whole house-front. This old lady had a grandson who was a sailor; and I wrote a letter to him for her, and drew at the top of it the chimney-corner in which she had brought him up, and where his old stool yet occupied its old place. This was considered by the whole village the most wonderful achievement in the world; but when an answer came back all the way from Plymouth, in which he mentioned that he was going to take the picture all the way to America, and from America would write again, I got all the credit that ought to have been given to the Post-office, and was invested with the merit of the whole system.

Thus, what with being so much in the air, playing with so many children, gossiping with so many people, sitting on invitation in so many cottages, going on with Charley's education, and writing long letters to Ada every day, I had scarcely any time to think about that loss of mine, and was almost always cheerful. If I did think of it at odd moments now and then, I had only to be busy and forget it. I felt it more than I had hoped I should, once, when a child said "Mother, why is the lady not a pretty lady now, like she used to be?" But when I found the child was not less fond of me, and drew its soft hand over my face with a kind of pitying protection in its touch, that soon set me up again. There were many little occurrences which suggested to me, with great consolation, how natural it is to gentle hearts to be considerate and delicate towards any inferiority. One of these particularly touched me. I happened to stroll into the little church when a marriage was just concluded, and the young couple had to sign the register. The bridegroom, to whom the pen was handed first, made a rude cross for his mark; the bride, who came next, did the same. Now, I had known the bride when I was last there, not only as the prettiest girl in the place, but as having quite distinguished herself in the school; and I could not help looking at her with some surprise. She came aside and whispered to me, while tears of honest love and admiration stood in her bright eyes, "He's a dear good fellow, miss; but he can't write, yet—he's going to learn of me—and I wouldn't shame him for the world!" Why, what had I to fear, I thought, when there was this nobility in the soul of a labouring man's daughter!

The air blew as freshly and revivingly upon me

as it had ever blown, and the healthy colour came into my new face as it had come into my old one. Charley was wonderful to see, she was so radiant and so rosy; and we both enjoyed the whole day, and slept soundly the whole night.

There was a favourite spot of mine in the park-woods of Chesney Wold, where a seat had been erected commanding a lovely view. The wood had been cleared and opened, to improve this point of sight; and the bright sunny landscape beyond, was so beautiful that I rested there at least once every day. A picturesque part of the Hall, called The Ghost's Walk, was seen to advantage from this higher ground; and the startling name, and the old legend in the Dedlock family which I had heard from Mr. Boythorn, accounting for it, mingled with the view and gave it something of a mysterious interest, in addition to its real charms. There was a bank here, too, which was a famous one for violets; and as it was a daily delight of Charley's to gather wild flowers, she took as much to the spot as I did.

It would be idle to enquire now why I never went close to the house, or never went inside it. The family were not there, I had heard on my arrival, and were not expected. I was far from being incurious or uninterested about the building; on the contrary, I often sat in this place, wondering how the rooms ranged, and whether any echo like a footstep really did resound at times, as the story said, upon the lonely Ghost's Walk. The indefinable feeling with which Lady Dedlock had impressed me, may have had some influence in keeping me from the house even when she was absent. I am not sure. Her face and figure were associated with it, naturally; but I cannot say that they repelled me from it, though something did. For whatever reason or no reason, I had never once gone near it, down to the day at which the story now arrives.

I was resting at my favourite point, after a long ramble, and Charley was gathering violets at a little distance from me. I had been looking at the Ghost's Walk lying in a deep shade of masonry afar off, and picturing to myself the female shape that was said to haunt it, when I became aware of a figure approaching through the wood. The perspective was so long, and so darkened by leaves, and the shadows of the branches on the ground made it so much more intricate to the eye, that at first I could not discern what figure it was. By little and little, it revealed itself to be a woman's—a lady's—Lady Dedlock's. She was alone, and coming to where I sat with a much quicker step, I observed to my surprise, than was usual with her.

I was fluttered by her being unexpectedly so near (she was almost within speaking distance before I knew her), and would have risen to continue my walk. But I could not. I was rendered motionless. Not so much by her hurried gesture of entreaty, not so much by her quick advance and outstretched hands, not so much by the great change in her manner and the absence of her haughty self-restraint, as by a something in her face that I had pined for and dreamed of when I was a little child; something I had never seen in any face; something I had never seen in hers before.

A dread and faintness fell upon me, and I called to Charley. Lady Dedlock stopped upon the instant, and changed back almost to what I had known her.

"Miss Summerson, I am afraid I have startled you," she said, now advancing slowly. "You can scarcely be strong yet. You have been very ill, I know. I have been much concerned to hear it."

I could no more have removed my eyes from her pale face, than I could have stirred from the bench

on which I sat. She gave me her hand; and its deadly coldness, so at variance with the enforced composure of her features, deepened the fascination that overpowered me. I cannot say what was in my whirling thoughts.

"You are recovering again?" she asked, kindly. "I was quite well but a moment ago, Lady Dedlock."

"Is this your young attendant?"

"Yes."

"Will you send her on before, and walk towards your house with me?"

"Charley," said I, "take your flowers home, and I will follow you directly."

Charley, with her best curtsey, blushing tied on her bonnet, and went her way. When she was gone, Lady Dedlock sat down on the seat beside me.

I cannot tell in any words what the state of my mind was when I saw in her hand my handkerchief, with which I had covered the dead baby.

I looked at her; but I could not see her, I could not hear her, I could not draw my breath. The beating of my heart was so violent and wild, that I felt as if my life were breaking from me. But when she caught me to her breast, kissed me, wept over me, compassionated me, and called me back to myself; when she fell down on her knees and cried to me, "O my child, my child, I am your wicked and unhappy mother! O try to forgive me!"—when I saw her at my feet on the bare earth in her great agony of mind, I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness; as that nobody could even now look at me, and look at her, and remotely think of any near tie between us.

I raised my mother up, praying and beseeching her not to stoop before me in such affliction and humiliation. I did so, in broken incoherent words; for, besides the trouble I was in, it frightened me to see her at *my* feet. I told her—or I tried to tell her—that if it were for me, her child, under any circumstances to take upon me to forgive her, I did it, and had done it, many, many years. I told her that my heart overflowed with love for her; that it was natural love, which nothing in the past had changed, or could change. That it was not for me, then resting for the first time on my mother's bosom, to take her to account for having given me life; but that my duty was to bless her and receive her, though the whole world turned from her, and that I only asked her leave to do it. I held my mother in my embrace, and she held me in hers; and among the still woods in the silence of the summer day, there seemed to be nothing but our two troubled minds that was not at peace.

"To bless and receive me," groaned my mother, "it is far too late. I must travel my dark road alone, and it will lead me where it will. From day to day, sometimes from hour to hour, I do not see the way before my guilty feet. This is the earthly punishment I have brought upon myself. I bear it, and I hide it."

Even in the thinking of her endurance, she drew her habitual air of proud indifference about her like a veil, though she soon cast it off again.

"I must keep this secret, if by any means it can be kept, not wholly for myself. I have a husband, wretched and dishonoring creature that I am!"

These words she uttered with a suppressed cry of despair, more terrible in its sound than any shriek. Covering her face with her hands, she shrank down in my embrace as if she were unwilling that I should touch her; nor could I, by my utmost per-

suasions, or by any endearments I could use, prevail upon her to rise. She said, No, no, no, she could only speak to me so; she must be proud and disdainful everywhere else; she would be humbled and ashamed there, in the only natural moments of her life.

My unhappy mother told me that in my illness

She put into my hands a letter she had written for my reading only; and said, when I had read it, and destroyed it—but not so much for her sake, since she asked nothing, as for her husband's and my own—I must evermore consider her as dead. If I could believe that she loved me, in this agony in which I saw her, with a mother's love she asked me



LADY DEBLOCK IN THE WOOD.

she had been nearly frantic. She had but then known that her child was living. She could not have suspected me to be that child before. She had followed me down here, to speak to me but once in all her life. We never could associate, never could communicate, never probably from that time forth could interchange another word, on earth.

to do that; for then I might think of her with a greater pity, imagining what she suffered. She had put herself beyond all hope, and beyond all help. Whether she preserved her secret until death, or it came to be discovered and she brought dishonor and disgrace upon the name she had taken, it was her solitary struggle always; and no affection could



come near her, and no human creature could render her any aid.

"But is the secret safe so far?" I asked. "Is it safe now, dearest mother?"

"No," replied my mother. "It has been very near discovery. It was saved by an accident. It may be lost by another accident—to-morrow, any day."

"Do you dread a particular person?"

"Hush! Do not tremble and cry so much for me. I am not worthy of these tears," said my mother, kissing my hands. "I dread one person very much."

"An enemy?"

"Not a friend. One who is too passionless to be either. He is Sir Leicester Dedlock's lawyer; mechanically faithful without attachment, and very jealous of the profit, privilege, and reputation of being master of the mysteries of great houses."

"Has he any suspicions?"

"Many."

"Not of you?" I said alarmed.

"Yes! He is always vigilant, and always near me. I may keep him at a stand still, but I can never shake him off."

"Has he so little pity or compunction?"

"He has none, and no anger. He is indifferent to everything but his calling. His calling is the acquisition of secrets, and the holding possession of such power as they give him, with no sharer or opponent in it."

"Could you trust in him?"

"I shall never try. The dark road I have trodden for so many years will end where it will. I follow it alone to the end, whatever the end be. It may be near, it may be distant; while the road lasts, nothing turns me."

"Dear mother, are you so resolved?"

"I am resolved. I have long outbidden folly with folly, pride with pride, scorn with scorn, insolence with insolence, and have outlived many vanities with many more. I will outlive this danger, and outdie it, if I can. It has closed around me, almost as awfully as if these woods of Chesney Wold had closed around the house; but my course through it is the same. I have but one; I can have but one."

"Mr. Jarndyce—" I was beginning, when my mother hurriedly enquired:

"Does he suspect?"

"No," said I. "No, indeed! Be assured that he does not!" And I told her what he had related to me as his knowledge of my story. "But he is so good and sensible," said I, "that perhaps if he knew—"

My mother, who until this time had made no change in her position, raised her hand up to my lips, and stopped me.

"Confide fully in him," she said, after a little while. "You have my free consent—a small gift from such a mother to her injured child!—but do not tell me of it. Some pride is left in me, even yet."

I explained, as nearly as I could then, or can recall now—for my agitation and distress throughout were so great that I scarcely understood myself, though every word that was uttered in the mother's voice, so unfamiliar and so melancholy to me; which in my childhood I had never learned to love and recognise, had never been sung to sleep with, had never heard a blessing from, had never had a hope inspired by; made an enduring impression on my memory—I say I explained, or tried to do it, how I had only hoped that Mr. Jarndyce, who had been the best of fathers to me, might be able to afford some counsel

and support to her. But my mother answered no it was impossible; no one could help her. Through the desert that lay before her, she must go alone.

"My child, my child!" she said. "For the last time! These kisses for the last time! These arms upon my neck for the last time! We shall meet no more. To hope to do what I seek to do, I must be what I have been so long. Such is my reward and doom. If you hear of Lady Dedlock, brilliant, prosperous, and flattered; think of your wretched mother, conscience-stricken, underneath that mask! Think that the reality is in her suffering, in her useless remorse, in her murdering within her breast the only love and truth of which it is capable! And then forgive her, if you can; and cry to Heaven to forgive her, which it never can!"

We held one another for a little space yet, but she was so firm, that she took my hands away, and put them back against my breast, and, with a last kiss as she held them there, released them, and went from me into the wood. I was alone; and, calm and quiet below me in the sun and shade, lay the old house, with its terraces and turrets, on which there had seemed to me to be such complete repose when I first saw it, but which now looked like the obdurate and un pitying watcher of my mother's misery.

Stunned as I was, as weak and helpless at first as I had ever been in my sick chamber, the necessity of guarding against the danger of discovery, or even of the remotest suspicion, did me service. I took such precautions as I could to hide from Charley that I had been crying; and I constrained myself to think of every sacred obligation that there was upon me to be careful and collected. It was not a little while before I could succeed, or could even restrain bursts of grief; but after an hour or so, I was better, and felt that I might return. I went home very slowly, and told Charley, whom I found at the gate looking for me, that I had been tempted to extend my walk after Lady Dedlock had left me, and that I was over-tired, and would lie down. Safe in my own room, I read the letter. I clearly derived from it—and that was much then—that I had not been abandoned by my mother. Her elder and only sister, the godmother of my childhood, discovering signs of life in me when I had been laid aside as dead, had, in her stern sense of duty, with no desire or willingness that I should live, reared me in rigid secrecy, and had never again beheld my mother's face from within a few hours of my birth. So strangely did I hold my place in this world, that, until within a short time back, I had never, to my own mother's knowledge, breathed—had been buried—had never been endowed with life—had never borne a name. When she had first seen me in the church, she had been startled; and had thought of what would have been like me, if it had ever lived, and had lived on; but that was all, then.

What more the letter told me, needs not to be repeated here. It has its own times and places in my story.

My first care was to burn what my mother had written, and to consume even its ashes. I hope it may not appear very unnatural or bad in me, that I then became heavily sorrowful to think I had ever been reared. That I felt as if I knew it would have been better and happier for many people, if indeed I had never breathed. That I had a terror of myself, as the danger and the possible disgrace of my own mother, and of a proud family name. That I was so confused and shaken, as to be possessed by a belief that it was right, and had been intended, that I should die in my birth; and that it was

wrong, and not intended, that I should be then alive.

These are the real feelings that I had. I fell asleep, worn out; and when I awoke, I cried afresh to think that I was back in the world, with my load of trouble for others. I was more than ever frightened of myself, thinking anew of her, against whom I was a witness; of the owner of Chesney Wold; of the new and terrible meaning of the old words, now moaning in my ear like a surge upon the shore, "Your mother, Esther, was your disgrace, and you are hers. The time will come—and soon enough—when you will understand this better, and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can." With them, those other words returned, "Pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head." I could not disentangle all that was about me; and I felt as if the blame and the shame were all in me, and the visitation had come down.

The day waned into a gloomy evening, overcast and sad, and I still contended with the same distress. I went out alone; and, after walking a little in the park, watching the dark shades falling on the trees, and the fitful flight of the bats, which sometimes almost touched me, was attracted to the house for the first time. Perhaps I might not have gone near it, if I had been in a stronger frame of mind. As it was, I took the path that led close by it.

I did not dare to linger or to look up, but I passed before the terrace garden with its fragrant odors, and its broad walks, and its well-kept beds and smooth turf; and I saw how beautiful and grave it was, and how the old stone balustrades and parapets, and wide flights of shallow steps, were seamed by time and weather; and how the trained moss and ivy grew about them, and around the old stone pedestal of the sun-dial; and I heard the fountain falling. Then the way went by long lines of dark windows, diversified by turreted towers, and porches, of eccentric shapes, where old stone lions and grotesque monsters bristled outside dens of shadow, and snarled at the evening gloom over the escutcheons they held in their grip. Thence the path wound underneath a gateway, and through a courtyard where the principal entrance was (I hurried quickly on), and by the stables where none but deep voices seemed to be, whether in the murmuring of the wind through the strong mass of ivy holding to a high red wall, or in the low complaining of the weathercock, or in the barking of the dogs, or in the slow striking of a clock. So, encountering presently a sweet smell of limes whose rustling I could hear, I turned with the turning of the path, to the south front; and there, above me, were the balustrades of the Ghost's Walk, and one lighted window that might be my mother's.

The way was paved here, like the terrace overhead, and my footsteps from being noiseless made an echoing sound upon the flags. Stopping to look at nothing, but seeing all I did see as I went, I was passing quickly on, and in a few moments should have passed the lighted window, when my echoing footsteps brought it suddenly into my mind that there was a dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost's Walk; that it was I, who was to bring calamity upon the stately house; and that my warning feet were haunting it even then. Seized with an augmented terror of myself which turned me cold, I ran from myself and everything, retraced the way by which I had come, and never paused until I had gained the lodge-gate, and the park lay sullen and black behind me.

Not before I was alone in my own room for the night, and had again been dejected and unhappy

there, did I begin to know how wrong and thankless this state was. But, from my darling who was coming on the morrow, I found a joyful letter, full of such loving anticipation that I must have been of marble if it had not moved me; from my guardian too I found another letter, asking me to tell Dame Durden, if I should see that little woman anywhere, that they had moped most pitiably without her, that the housekeeping was going to rack and ruin, that nobody else could manage the keys, and that everybody in and about the house declared it was not the same house, and was becoming rebellious for her return. Two such letters together made me think how far beyond my deserts I was beloved, and how happy I ought to be. That made me think of all my past life; and that brought me, as it ought to have done before, into a better condition.

For, I saw very well that I could not have been intended to die, or I should never have lived: not to say should never have been reserved for such a happy life. I saw very well how many things had worked together, for my welfare; and that if the sins of the fathers were sometimes visited upon the children, the phrase did not mean what I had in the morning feared it meant. I knew I was as innocent of my birth, as a queen of hers; and that before my Heavenly Father I should not be punished for birth, nor a queen rewarded for it. I had had experience, in the shock of that very day, that I could, even thus soon, find comforting reconcilements to the change that had fallen on me. I renewed my resolutions, and prayed to be strengthened in them; pouring out my heart for myself, and for my unhappy mother, and feeling that the darkness of the morning was passing away. It was not upon my sleep; and when the next day's light awoke me, it was gone.

My dear girl was to arrive at five o'clock in the afternoon. How to help myself through the intermediate time better than by taking a long walk along the road by which she was to come, I did not know; so Charley and I and Stubbs—Stubbs, saddled, for we never drove him after the one great occasion—made a long expedition along that road, and back. On our return, we held a great review of the house and gardens; and saw that everything was in its prettiest condition, and had the bird out ready as an important part of the establishment.

There were more than two full hours yet to elapse, before she could come; and in that interval, which seemed a long one, I must confess I was nervously anxious about my altered looks. I loved my darling so well that I was more concerned for their effect on her than on any one. I was not in this slight distress because I at all repined—I am quite certain I did not, that day—but, I thought, would she be wholly prepared? When she first saw me, might she not be a little shocked and disappointed? Might it not prove a little worse than she had expected? Might she not look for her old Esther, and not find her? Might she not have to grow used to me, and to begin all over again?

I knew the various expressions of my sweet girl's face so well, and it was such an honest face in its loveliness, that I was sure, beforehand, she could not hide that first look from me. And I considered whether, if it should signify any one of these meanings, which was so very likely, could I quite answer for myself?

Well, I thought I could. After last night, I thought I could. But to wait and wait, and expect and expect, and think and think, was such bad preparation, that I resolved to go along the road again, and meet her.

So I said to Charley, "Charley, I will go by my-

self and walk along the road until she comes." Charley highly approving of anything that pleased me, I went, and left her at home.

But before I got to the second mile-stone, I had been in so many palpitations from seeing dust in the distance (though I knew it was not, and could not be, the coach yet), that I resolved to turn back and go home again. And when I had turned, I was in such fear of the coach coming up behind me (though I still knew that it neither would, nor could, do any such thing), that I ran the greater part of the way, to avoid being overtaken.

Then, I considered, when I had got safe back again, this was a nice thing to have done! Now I was hot, and had made the worst of it, instead of the best.

At last, when I believed there was at least a quarter of an hour more yet, Charley all at once cried out to me as I was trembling in the garden, "Here she comes, miss! Here she is!"

I did not mean to do it, but I ran up-stairs into my room, and hid myself behind the door. There I stood, trembling, even when I heard my darling calling as she came up-stairs, "Esther, my dear, my love, where are you? Little woman, dear Dame Durden!"

She ran in, and was running out again when she saw me. Ah, my angel girl! the old dear look, all love, all fondness, all affection. Nothing else in it—no, nothing, nothing!

O how happy I was, down upon the floor, with my sweet beautiful girl down upon the floor too, holding my scarred face to her lovely cheek, bathing it with tears and kisses, rocking me to and fro like a child, calling me by every tender name that she could think of, and pressing me to her faithful heart.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### JARNDYCE AND JARNDYCE.

IF the secret that I had to keep had been mine, I must have confided it to Ada before we had been long together. But it was not mine; and I did not feel that I had a right to tell it, even to my guardian, unless some great emergency arose. It was a weight to bear alone; still my present duty appeared to be plain, and, blest in the attachment of my dear, I did not want an impulse and encouragement to do it. Though often when she was asleep and all was quiet, the remembrance of my mother kept me waking, and made the night sorrowful, I did not yield to it at another time; and Ada found me what I used to be—except, of course, in that particular of which I have said enough, and which I have no intention of mentioning any more, just now, if I can help it.

The difficulty that I felt in being quite composed that first evening, when Ada asked me, over our work, if the family were at the House, and when I was obliged to answer yes, I believed so, for Lady Dedlock had spoken to me in the woods the day before yesterday, was great. Greater still, when Ada asked me what she had said, and when I replied that she had been kind and interested; and when Ada, while admitting her beauty and elegance, remarked upon her proud manner, and her imperious chilling air. But Charley helped me through unconsciously, by telling us that Lady Dedlock had only stayed at the House two nights, on her way from London to visit at some other great house in the next county; and that she had left early on the morning after we had seen her at our view, as we called it. Charley verified the adage

about little pitchers, I am sure; for she heard of more sayings and doings, in a day, than would have come to my ears in a month.

We were to stay a month at Mr. Boythorn's. My pet had scarcely been there a bright week, as I recollect the time, when one evening after we had finished helping the gardener in watering his flowers, and just as the candles were lighted, Charley, appearing with a very important air behind Ada's chair, beckoned me mysteriously out of the room.

"Oh! if you please, miss," said Charley, in a whisper, with her eyes at their roundest and largest. "You're wanted at the 'Dedlock Arms.'"

"Why, Charley," said I, "who can possibly want me at the public-house?"

"I don't know, miss," returned Charley, putting her head forward, and folding her hands tight upon the band of her little apron; which she always did, in the enjoyment of anything mysterious or confidential, "but it's a gentleman, miss, and his compliments, and will you please to come without saying anything about it."

"Whose compliments, Charley?"

"His'n, miss, returned Charley: whose grammatical education was advancing, but not very rapidly.

"And how do you come to be the messenger, Charley?"

"I am not the messenger, if you please, miss," returned my little maid. "It was W. Grubble, miss."

"And who is W. Grubble, Charley?"

"Mister Grubble, miss," returned Charley. "Don't you know, miss? The 'Dedlock Arms,' by W. Grubble," which Charley delivered as if she were slowly spelling out the sign.

"Aye? The landlord, Charley?"

"Yes, miss. If you please, miss, his wife is a beautiful woman, but she broke her ankle and it never joined. And her brother's the sawyer, that was put in the cage, miss, and they expect he'll drink himself to death entirely on beer," said Charley.

Not knowing what might be the matter, and being easily apprehensive now, I thought it best to go to this place by myself. I bade Charley be quick with my bonnet and veil, and my shawl; and having put them on, went away down the little hilly street, where I was as much at home as in Mr. Boythorn's garden.

Mr. Grubble was standing in his shirt sleeves at the door of his very clean little tavern, waiting for me. He lifted off his hat with both hands when he saw me coming, and carrying it so, as if it were an iron vessel (it looked as heavy), preceded me along the sanded passage to his best parlour: a neat carpeted room, with more plants in it than were quiet convenient, a colored print of Queen Caroline, several shells, a good many tea-trays, two stuffed and dried fish in glass cases, and either a curious egg or a curious pumpkin (but I don't know which, and I doubt if many people did) hanging from the ceiling. I knew Mr. Grubble very well by sight, from his often standing at his door. A pleasant-looking, stoutish, middle-aged man, who never seemed to consider himself cosily dressed for his own fireside without his hat and top-boots, but who never wore a coat except at church.

He snuffed the candle, and backing away a little to see how it looked, backed out of the room—unexpectedly to me, for I was going to ask him by whom he had been sent. The door of the opposite parlour being then opened, I heard some voices, familiar in my ears I thought, which stopped. A

quick light step approached the room in which I was, and who should stand before me but Richard!

"My dear Esther!" he said, "my best friend!" and he really was so warm-hearted and earnest, that in the first surprise and pleasure of his brotherly greeting, I could scarcely find breath to tell him that Ada was well.

"Answering my very thoughts—always the same dear girl!" said Richard, leading me to a chair, and seating himself beside me.

I put my veil up, but not quite.

"Always the same dear girl!" said Richard, just as heartily as before.

I put my veil up altogether, and laying my hand on Richard's sleeve, and looking in his face, told him how much I thanked him for his kind welcome, and how greatly I rejoiced to see him; the more so, because of the determination I had made in my illness, which I now conveyed to him.

"My love," said Richard, "there is no one with whom I have greater wish to talk, than you, for I want you to understand me."

"And I want you, Richard," said I, shaking my head, "to understand some one else."

"Since you refer so immediately to John Jarndyce," said Richard—"I suppose you mean him?"

"Of course I do."

"Then, I may say at once that I am glad of it, because it is on that subject that I am anxious to be understood. By you, mind—you, my dear! I am not accountable to Mr. Jarndyce, or Mr. Anybody."

I was pained to find him taking this tone, and he observed it.

"Well, well, my dear," said Richard, "we won't go into that, now. I want to appear quietly in your country house here, with you under my arm, and give my charming cousin a surprise. I suppose your loyalty to John Jarndyce will allow that?"

"My dear Richard," I returned, "you know you would be heartily welcome at his house—your home, if you will but consider it so; and you are as heartily welcome here."

"Spoken like the best of little women!" cried Richard, gaily.

I asked him how he liked his profession?

"Oh, I like it well enough!" said Richard. "It's all right. It does as well as anything else, for a time. I don't know that I shall care about it when I come to be settled; but I can sell out then, and—however, never mind all that botheration at present."

So young and handsome, and in all respects so perfectly the opposite of Miss Flite! And yet, in the clouded, eager, seeking look that passed over him, so dreadfully like her!

"I am in town on leave, just now," said Richard.

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I have run over to look after my—my Chancery interests, before the long vacation," said Richard, forcing a careless laugh. "We are beginning to spin along with that old suit at last, I promise you."

No wonder that I shook my head!

"As you say, it's not a pleasant subject." Richard spoke with the same shade crossing his face as before. "Let it go to the four winds for to-night.—Puff! Gone!—Who do you suppose is with me?"

"Was it Mr. Skimpole's voice I heard?"

That's the man! He does me more good than anybody. What a fascinating child it is!"

I asked Richard if anyone knew of their coming down together? He answered, No, nobody. He

had been to call upon the dear old infant—so he called Mr. Skimpole—and the dear old infant had told him where we were, and he had told the dear old infant he was bent on coming to see us, and the dear old infant had directly wanted to come too; and so he had brought him. "And he is worth—not to say his sordid expenses—but thrice his weight in gold," said Richard. "He is such a cheery fellow. No worldliness about him. Fresh and green-hearted!"

I certainly did not see the proof of Mr. Skimpole's unworldliness in his having his expenses paid by Richard; but I made no remark about that. Indeed, he came in, and turned our conversation. He was charmed to see me; said he had been shedding delicious tears of joy and sympathy, at intervals for six weeks, on my account; had never been so happy as in hearing of my progress; began to understand the mixture of good and evil in the world now; felt that he appreciated health the more, when somebody else was ill; didn't know but what it might be in the scheme of things that A should squint to make B happier in looking straight; or that C should carry a wooden leg, to make D better satisfied with his flesh and blood in a silk stocking.

"My dear Miss Summerson, here is our friend Richard," said Mr. Skimpole, "full of the brightest visions of the future, which he evokes out of the darkness of Chancery. Now that's delightful, that's inspiriting, that's full of poetry! In old times, the woods and solitudes were made joyous to the shepherd by the imaginary piping and dancing of Pan and the Nymphs. This present shepherd, our pastoral Richard, brightens the dull Inns of Court by making Fortune and her train sport through them to the melodious notes of a judgment from the bench. That's very pleasant you know! Some ill-conditioned growling fellow may say to me, "What's the use of these legal and equitable abuses? How do you defend them?" I reply, "My growling friend, I don't defend them, but they are very agreeable to me. There is a shepherd-youth, a friend of mine, who transmutes them into something highly fascinating to my simplicity. I don't say it is for this that they exist—for I am a child among you worldly grumblers, and not called upon to account to you or myself for anything—but it may be so."

I began seriously to think that Richard could scarcely have found a worse friend than this. It made me uneasy that at such a time, when he most required some right principle and purpose, he should have this captivating looseness and putting off of everything, this airy dispensing with all principle and purpose, at his elbow. I thought I could understand how such a nature as my guardian's, experienced in the world, and forced to contemplate the miserable evasions and contentions of the family misfortune, found an immense relief in Mr. Skimpole's avowal of his weaknesses and display of guileless candor; but I could not satisfy myself that it was as artless as it seemed; or that it did not serve Mr. Skimpole's idle turn quite as well as any other part, and with less trouble.

They both walked back with me; and Mr. Skimpole leaving us at the gate, I walked softly in with Richard, and said, "Ada, my love, I have brought a gentleman to visit you." It was not difficult to read the blushing, startled face. She loved him dearly, and he knew it, and I knew it. It was a very transparent business, that meeting as cousins only.

I almost mistrusted myself, as growing quite wicked in my suspicions, but I was not so sure that Richard loved her dearly. He admired her very

much—anyone must have done that—and I dare say, would have renewed their youthful engagement with great pride and ardor, but that he knew how she would respect her promise to my guardian. Still, I had a tormenting idea that the influence upon him extended even here: that he was postponing his best truth and earnestness, in this as in all things, until Jarndyce and Jarndyce should be off his mind. Ah me! what Richard would have been without that blight, I never shall know now!

He told Ada, in his most ingenuous way, that he had not come to make any secret inroad on the terms she had accepted (rather too implicitly and confidingly, he thought) from Mr. Jarndyce; that he had come openly to see her, and to see me, and to justify himself for the present terms on which he stood with Mr. Jarndyce. As the dear old infant would be with us directly, he begged that I would make an appointment for the morning, when he might set himself right, through the means of an unreserved conversation with me. I proposed to walk with him in the park at seven o'clock, and this was arranged. Mr. Skimpole soon afterwards appeared, and made us merry for an hour. He particularly requested to see Little Coavines (meaning Charley), and told her, with a patriarchal air, that he had given her late father all the business in his power; and that if one of her little brothers would make haste to get set-up in the same profession, he hoped he should still be able to put a good deal of employment in his way.

"For I am constantly being taken in these nets," said Mr. Skimpole, looking beamingly at us over a glass of wine-and-water, "and am constantly being bailed out—like a boat. Or paid of—like a ship's company. Somebody always does it for me. I can't do it, you know, for I never have any money. But Somebody does it. I get out by Somebody's means; I am not like the starling; I get out. If you were to ask me who Somebody is, upon my word, I couldn't tell you. Let us drink to Somebody. God bless him!"

Richard was a little late in the morning, but I had not to wait for him long, and we turned into the park. The air was bright and dewy, and the sky without a cloud. The birds sang delightfully; the sparkles in the fern, the grass, and trees, were exquisite to see; the richness of the woods seemed to have increased twenty-fold since yesterday, as if, in the still night when they had looked so massively hushed in sleep, Nature, through all the minute details of every wonderful leaf, had been more wakeful than usual for the glory of that day.

"This is a lovely place," said Richard, looking round. "None of the jar and discord of law-suits here!"

But there was other trouble.

"I tell you what, my dear girl," said Richard, "when I get affairs in general settled, I shall come down here, I think, and rest."

"Would it not be better to rest now?" I asked.

"Oh, as to resting *now*," said Richard, "or as to doing anything very definite *now*, that's not easy. In short, it can't be done; I can't do it, at least."

"Why not?" said I.

"You know why not, Esther. If you were living in an unfinished house, liable to have the roof put on or taken off—to be from top to bottom pulled down or built up—to-morrow, next day, next week, next month, next year—you would find it hard to rest or settle. So do I. Now? There's no now for us suitors."

I could almost have believed in the attraction on which my poor little wandering friend had ex-

patiated, when I saw again the darkened look of last night. Terrible to think, it had in it also, a shade of that unfortunate man who had died.

"My dear Richard," said I, "this is a bad beginning of our conversation."

"I knew you would tell me so, Dame Durden."

"And not I alone, dear Richard. It was not I who cautioned you once, never to found a hope or expectation on the family curse."

"There you come back to John Jarndyce!" said Richard, impatiently. "Well! We must approach him sooner or later, for he is the staple of what I have to say; and it's as well at once. My dear Esther, how can you be so blind? Don't you see that he is an interested party, and that it may be very well for him to wish me to know nothing of the suit, and care nothing about it, but that it may not be quite so well for me?"

"O Richard," I remonstrated, "is it possible that you can ever have seen him and heard him, that you can ever have lived under his roof and known him, and can yet breathe, even to me in this solitary place where there is no one to hear us, such unworthy suspicions?"

He reddened deeply, as if his natural generosity felt a pang of reproach. He was silent for a little while, before he replied in a subdued voice:

"Esther, I am sure you know that I am not a mean fellow, and that I have some sense of suspicion and distrust being poor qualities in one of my years."

"I knew it very well," said I. "I am not more sure of anything."

"That's a dear girl!" retorted Richard, "and like you, because it gives me comfort. I had need to get some scrap of comfort out of all this business, for it's a bad one at the best, as I have no occasion to tell you."

"I know perfectly," said I, "I know as well, Richard—what shall I say? as well as you do—that such misconstructions are foreign to your nature. And I know, as well as you know, what so changes it."

"Come, sister, come," said Richard, a little more gaily, "you will be fair with me at all events. If I have the misfortune to be under that influence, so has he. If it has a little twisted me, it may have a little twisted him, too. I don't say that he is not an honorable man, out of all this complication and uncertainty; I am sure he is. But it taints everybody. You know it taints everybody. You have heard him say so fifty times. Then why should *he* escape?"

"Because," said I, "he is an uncommon character, and he has resolutely kept himself outside the circle, Richard."

"Oh, because and because!" replied Richard, in his vivacious way. "I am not sure, my dear girl, but that it may be wise and specious to preserve that outward indifference. It may cause other parties interested to become lax about their interests; and people may die off, and points may drag themselves out of memory, and many things may smoothly happen that are convenient enough."

I was so touched with pity for Richard, that I could not reproach him any more, even by a look. I remembered my guardian's gentleness towards his errors, and with what perfect freedom from resentment he had spoken of him.

"Esther," Richard resumed, "you are not to suppose that I have come here to make under-handed charges against John Jarndyce. I have only come to justify myself. What I say is, it was all very well, and we got on very well, while I was a boy, utterly regardless of this same suit; but as

soon as I began to take an interest in it, and to look into it, then it was quite another thing. Then John Jarndyce discovers that Ada and I must break off, and that if I don't amend that very objectionable course, I am not fit for her. Now, Esther, I don't mean to amend that very objectionable course: I will not hold John Jarndyce's favor on those unfair terms of compromise, which he has no right to dictate. Whether it pleases him or displeases him, I must maintain my rights, and Ada's. I have been thinking about it a good deal, and this is the conclusion I have come to."

Poor dear Richard! He had indeed been thinking about it a good deal. His face, his voice, his manner all showed that, too plainly.

"So I tell him honorably (you are to know I have written to him about all this), that we are at issue, and that we had better be at issue openly than covertly. I thank him for his good-will and his protection, and he goes his road, and I go mine. The fact is, our roads are not the same. Under one of the wills in dispute, I should take much more than he. I don't mean to say that it is the one to be established; but there it is, and it has its chance."

"I have not to learn from you, my dear Richard," said I, "of your letter. I had heard of it already, without an offended or angry word."

"Indeed?" replied Richard, softening. "I am glad I said he was an honorable man, out of all this wretched affair. But I always say that, and have never doubted it. Now, my dear Esther, I know these views of mine appear extremely harsh to you, and will to Ada when you tell her what has passed between us. But if you had gone into the case as I have, if you had only applied yourself to the papers as I did when I was at Kenge's, if you only knew what an accumulation of charges and counter-charges, and suspicions and cross-suspicions, they involve, you would think me moderate in comparison."

"Perhaps so," said I. "But do you think that, among those many papers, there is much truth and justice, Richard?"

"There is truth and justice somewhere in the case, Esther——"

"Or was once, long ago," said I.

"Is—is—must be somewhere," pursued Richard, impetuously, "and must be brought out. To allow Ada to be made a bribe and hush-money of, is not the way to bring it out. You say the suit is changing me; John Jarndyce says it changes, has changed, and will change, everybody who has any share in it. Then the greater right I have on my side, when I resolve to do all I can to bring it to an end."

"All you can, Richard! Do you think that in these many years no others have done all they could? Has the difficulty grown easier because of so many failures?"

"It can't last for ever," returned Richard, with a fierceness kindling in him which again presented to me that last sad reminder. "I am young and earnest; and energy and determination have done wonders many a time. Others have only half thrown themselves into it. I devote myself to it. I make it the object of my life."

"O, Richard, my dear, so much the worse, so much the worse!"

"No, no, no, don't you be afraid for me," he returned, affectionately. "You're a dear, good, wise, quiet, blessed girl; but you have your prepossessions. So I come round to John Jarndyce. I tell you, my good Esther, when he and I were on those terms which he found so convenient, we were not on natural terms."

"Are division and animosity your natural terms, Richard?"

"No, I don't say that. I mean that all this business puts us on unnatural terms, with which natural relations are incompatible. See another reason for urging it on! I may find out, when it's over, that I have been mistaken in John Jarndyce. My head may be clearer when I am free of it, and I may then agree with what you say to-day. Very well. Then I shall acknowledge it, and make him reparation."

Everything postponed to that imaginary time! Everything held in confusion and indecision until then!

"Now, my best of confidantes," said Richard, "I want my cousin Ada, to understand that I am not captious, fickle, and wilful about John Jarndyce; but that I have this purpose and reason at my back. I wish to represent myself to her through you, because she has a great esteem and respect for her cousin John; and I know you will soften the course I take, even though you disapprove of it; and—and in short," said Richard, who had been hesitating through these words, "I—I don't like to represent myself in this litigious, contentious, doubting character, to a confiding girl like Ada."

I told him that he was more like himself in those latter words, than in anything he had said yet.

"Why," acknowledged Richard, "that may be true enough, my love. I rather feel it to be so. But I shall be able to give myself fair-play by and by. I shall come all right again, then, don't you be afraid."

I asked him if this were all he wished me to tell Ada?

"Not quite," said Richard. "I am bound not to withhold from her that John Jarndyce answered my letter in his usual manner, addressing me as 'My dear Rick,' trying to argue me out of my opinions, and telling me that they should make no difference in him. (All very well of course, but not altering the case.) I also want Ada to know, that if I see her seldom just now, I am looking after her interests as well as my own—we two being in the same boat exactly—and that I hope she will not suppose, from any flying rumours she may hear, that I am at all light-headed or imprudent; on the contrary, I am always looking forward to the termination of the suit, and always planning in that direction. Being of age now, and having taken the step I have taken, I consider myself free from any accountability to John Jarndyce; but Ada being still a ward of the Court, I don't yet ask her to renew our engagement. When she is free to act for herself, I shall be myself once more, and we shall both be in very different worldly circumstances, I believe. If you will tell her all this with the advantage of your considerate way, you will do me a very great and a very kind service, my dear Esther; and I shall knock Jarndyce and Jarndyce on the head with greater vigor. Of course I ask for no secrecy at Bleak House."

"Richard," said I, "you place great confidence in me, but I fear you will not take advice from me?"

"It's impossible that I can on this subject, my dear girl. On any other readily."

As if there were any other in his life! As if his whole career and character were not being dyed one color!

"But I may ask you a question, Richard?"

"I think so," said he, laughing. "I don't know who may not, if you may not."

"You say, yourself, you are not leading a very settled life?"

"How can I, my dear Esther, with nothing settled!"

"Are you in debt again?"

"Why of course I am," said Richard, astonished at my simplicity.

"Is it of course?"

"My dear child, certainly. I can't throw myself into an object so completely, without expense. You forget, or perhaps you don't know, that under either of the wills Ada and I take something. It's only a question between the larger sum and the smaller. I shall be within the mark any way. Bless your heart, my excellent girl," said Richard, quite amused with me. "I shall be all right! I shall pull through, my dear!"

I felt so deeply sensible of the danger in which he stood, that I tried, in Ada's name, in my guardian's, in my own, by every fervent means that I could think of, to warn him of it, and to show him some of his mistakes. He received everything I said with patience and gentleness, but it all rebounded from him without taking the least effect. I could not wonder at this, after the reception his pre-occupied mind had given to my guardian's letter; but I determined to try Ada's influence yet.

So, when our walk brought us round to the village again, and I went home to breakfast, I prepared Ada for the account I was going to give her, and told her exactly what reason we had to dread that Richard was losing himself, and scattering his whole life to the winds. It made her very unhappy, of course; though she had a far, far greater reliance on his correcting his errors than I could have—which was so natural and loving in my dear!—and she presently wrote him this letter:

MY DEAREST COUSIN—

Esther has told me all you said to her this morning. I write this, to repeat most earnestly for myself all that she said to you, and to let you know how sure I am that you will sooner or later find our cousin John a pattern of truth, sincerity and goodness, when you will deeply deeply grieve to have done him (without intending it) so much wrong.

I do not quite know how to write what I wish to say next, but I trust you will understand it as I mean it. I have some fears, my dearest cousin, that it may be partly for my sake you are now laying up so much unhappiness for yourself—and, if for yourself, for me. In case this should be so, or in case you should entertain much thought of me in what you are doing, I most earnestly entreat and beg you to desist. You can do nothing for my sake that will make me half so happy, as for ever turning your back upon the shadow in which we both were born. Do not be angry with me for saying this. Pray, pray, dear Richard, for my sake, and for your own, and in a natural repugnance for that source of trouble which had its share in making us both orphans when we were very young, pray, pray, let it go for ever. We have reason to know, by this time, that there is no good in it, and no hope; that there is nothing to be got from it but sorrow.

My dearest cousin, it is needless for me to say that you are quite free, and that it is very likely you may find some one whom you will love much better than your first fancy. I am quite sure, if you will let me say so, that the object of your choice would greatly prefer to follow your fortunes far and wide, however moderate or poor, and see you happy, doing your duty and pursuing your chosen way; than to have the hope of being, or even to be, very rich with you (if such a thing were possible,) at the cost of dragging years of procrastination and anxiety, and of your indifference to other aims. You may wonder at my saying this so confidently

with so little knowledge or experience, but I know it for a certainty from my own heart.

Ever, my dearest cousin,  
Your most affectionate,  
ADA.

This note brought Richard to us very soon, but it made little change in him, if any. We would fairly try, he said, who was right and who was wrong—he would show us—we should see. He was animated and glowing, as if Ada's tenderness had gratified him; but I could only hope, with a sigh, that the letter might have some stronger effect upon his mind on re-perusal, than it assuredly had then.

As they were to remain with us that day, and had taken their places to return by the coach next morning, I sought an opportunity of speaking to Mr. Skimpole. Our out-of-door life easily threw one in my way; and I delicately said, that there was a responsibility in encouraging Richard.

"Responsibility, my dear Miss Summerson?" he repeated, catching at the word with the pleasantest smile, "I am the last man in the world for such a thing. I never was responsible in my life—I can't be."

"I am afraid everybody is obliged to be," said I, timidly enough: he being so much older and more clever than I.

"No, really?" said Mr. Skimpole, receiving this new light with a most agreeable jocularity of surprise. "But every man's not obliged to be solvent? I am not. I never was. See, my dear Miss Summerson," he took a handful of loose silver and half-pence from his pocket, "there's so much money. I have not an idea how much. I have not the power of counting. Call it four and ninepence—call it four pound nine. They tell me I owe more than that. I dare say I do. I dare say I owe as much as good-natured people will let me owe. If they don't stop, why should I? There you have Harold Skimpole in little. If that's responsibility, I am responsible."

The perfect ease of manner with which he put the money up again, and looked at me with a smile on his refined face, as if he had been mentioning a curious little fact about somebody else, almost made me feel as if he really had nothing to do with it.

"Now when you mention responsibility," he resumed, "I am disposed to say, that I never had the happiness of knowing any one whom I should consider so refreshingly responsible as yourself. You appear to me to be the very touchstone of responsibility. When I see you, my dear Miss Summerson, intent upon the perfect working of the whole little orderly system of which you are the centre, I feel inclined to say to myself—in fact I do say to myself, very often—*that's responsibility!*"

It was difficult, after this, to explain what I meant; but I persisted so far as to say, that we all hoped he would check and not confirm Richard in the sanguine views he entertained just then.

"Most willingly," he retorted, "if I could. But, my dear Miss Summerson, I have no art, no disguise. If he takes me by the hand, and leads me through Westminster Hall in an airy procession after Fortune, I must go. If he says, 'Skimpole, join the dance!' I must join it. Common sense wouldn't, I know; but I have no common sense."

"It was very unfortunate for Richard," I said.

"Do you think so?" returned Mr. Skimpole. "Don't say that, don't say that. Let us suppose him keeping company with Common Sense—an excellent man—a good deal wrinkled—dreadfully practical—change for a ten-pound note in every

pocket—ruled account-book in his hand—say, upon the whole, resembling a tax-gatherer. Our dear Richard, sanguine, ardent, overleaping obstacles, bursting with poetry like a young bud, says to this highly respectable companion, 'I see a golden prospect before me; it's very bright, it's very beautiful, it's very joyous; here I go, bounding over the landscape to come at it!' The respectable companion instantly knocks him down with the ruled account-book: tells

It was idle to say more; so I proposed that we should join Ada and Richard, who were a little in advance, and I gave up Mr. Skimpole in despair. He had been over the Hall in the course of the morning, and whimsically described the family pictures as we walked. There were such portentous shepherdesses among the Ladies Dedlock dead and gone, he told us, that peaceful crooks became weapons of assault in their hands. They tended



#### THE GHOST'S WALK

him, in a literal prosaic way, that he sees no such thing; shows him it's nothing but fees, fraud, horsehair wigs, and black gowns. Now you know that's a painful change;—sensible in the last degree, I have no doubt, but disagreeable. I can't do it. I haven't got the ruled account-book, I have none of the tax-gathering elements in my composition, I am not at all respectable, and I don't want to be. Odd perhaps, but so it is!"

their flocks severely in buckram and powder, and put their sticking-plaster patches on to terrify commoners, as the chiefs of some other tribes put on their war-paint. There was a Sir Somebody Dedlock, with a battle, a sprung-mine, volumes of smoke, flashes of lightning, a town on fire, and a stormed fort, all in full action between his horse's two hind legs; showing, he supposed, how little a Dedlock made of such trifles. The whole race he



represented as having evidently been, in life, what he called "stuffed people,"—a large collection, glassy eyed, set up in the most approved manner on their various twigs and perches, very correct, perfectly free from animation, and always in glass cases.

I was not so easy now, during any reference to the name, but that I felt it a relief when Richard, with an exclamation of surprise, hurried away to meet a stranger, whom he first descried coming slowly towards us.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Skimpole. "Vholes!"

We asked if that were a friend of Richard's?

"Friend and legal adviser," said Mr. Skimpole. "Now, my dear Miss Summerson, if you want common sense, responsibility, and respectability, all united—if you want an exemplary man—Vholes is *the* man."

We had not known, we said, that Richard was assisted by any gentleman of that name.

"When he emerged from legal infancy," returned Mr. Skimpole, "he parted from our conversational friend Kenge, and took up, I believe, with Vholes. Indeed, I know he did, because I introduced him to Vholes."

"Had you known him long?" asked Ada.

"Vholes? My dear Miss Clare, I had had that kind of acquaintance with him, which I have had with several gentlemen of his profession. He had done something or other, in a very agreeable, civil manner—taken proceedings, I think, is the expression—which ended in the proceeding of his taking *me*. Somebody was so good as to step in and pay the money—something and fourpence was the amount; I forget the pounds and shillings, but I know it ended with four pence, because it struck me at the time as being so odd that I could owe anybody fourpence—and after that, I brought them together. Vholes asked me for the introduction, and I gave it. Now I come to think of it," he looked enquiringly at us with his frankest smile as he made the discovery, "Vholes bribed me, perhaps? He gave me something, and called it commission. Was it a five-pound note? Do you know, I think it *must* have been a five-pound note!"

His further consideration of the point was prevented by Richard's coming back to us in an excited state, and hastily presenting Mr. Vholes—a sallow man with pinched lips that looked as if they were cold, a red eruption here and there upon his face, tall and thin, about fifty years of age, high-shouldered, and stooping. Dressed in black, black-gloved, and buttoned to the chin, there was nothing so remarkable in him as a lifeless manner, and a slow fixed way he had of looking at Richard.

"I hope I don't disturb you, ladies," said Mr. Vholes; and now I observed that he was further remarkable for an inward manner of speaking. "I arranged with Mr. Carstone that he should always know when his cause was in the Chancellor's paper, and being informed by one of my clerks last night after post time that it stood, rather unexpectedly, in the paper for to-morrow, I put myself into the coach early this morning and came down to confer with him."

"Yes!" said Richard, flushed, and looking triumphantly at Ada and me, "we don't do these things in the old slow way, now. We spin along, now! Mr. Vholes, we must hire something to get over to the post town in, and catch the mail to-night, and go up by it!"

"Anything you please, sir," returned Mr. Vholes. "I am quite at your service."

"Let me see!" said Richard, looking at his watch. "If I run down to the 'Dedlock,' and get

my portmanteau fastened up, and order a gig, or a chaise, or whatever's to be got, we shall have an hour then before starting. I'll come back to tea. Cousin Ada, will you and Esther take care of Mr. Vholes while I am gone?"

He was away directly, in his heat and hurry, and was soon lost in the dusk of evening. We who were left walked on towards the house.

"Is Mr. Carstone's presence necessary to-morrow, sir?" said I. "Can it do any good?"

"No, miss," Mr. Vholes replied. "I'm not aware that it can."

Both Ada and I expressed our regret that he should go, then, only to be disappointed.

"Mr. Carstone has laid down the principle of watching his own interests," said Mr. Vholes, "and when a client lays down his own principle, and it is not immoral, it devolves upon me to carry it out. I wish in business to be exact and open. I am a widower with three daughters—Emma, Jane, and Caroline—and my desire is so to discharge the duties of life as to leave them a good name. This appears to be a pleasant spot, miss."

The remark being made to me, in consequence of my being next him as we walked, I assented, and enumerated its chief attractions.

"Indeed?" said Mr. Vholes. "I have the privilege of supporting an aged father in the Vale of Taunton—his native place—and I admire that country very much. I had no idea there was anything so attractive here."

To keep up the conversation, I asked Mr. Vholes if he would like to live altogether in the country?

"There, miss," said he, "you touch me on a tender string. My health is not good, (my digestion being much impaired,) and if I had only myself to consider, I should take refuge in rural habits; especially as the cares of business have prevented me from ever coming much into contact with general society, and particularly with ladies' society, which I have most wished to mix in. But with my three daughters, Emma, Jane, and Caroline—and my aged father—I cannot afford to be selfish. It is true, I have no longer to maintain a dear grandmother who died in her hundred-and-second year; but enough remains to render it indispensable that the mill should be always going."

It required some attention to hear him, on account of his inward speaking and his lifeless manner.

"You will excuse my having mentioned my daughters," he said. "They are my weak point. I wish to leave the poor girls some little independence, as well as a good name."

We now arrived at Mr. Boythorn's house, where the tea-table, all prepared, was awaiting us. Richard came in, restless and hurried, shortly afterwards, and leaning over Mr. Vholes's chair, whispered something in his ear. Mr. Vholes replied aloud—or as nearly aloud I suppose as he ever replied to anything—"You will drive me, will you, sir? It is all the same to me, sir. Anything you please. I am quite at your service."

We understood from what followed that Mr. Skimpole was to be left until the morning to occupy the two places which had been already paid for. As Ada and I were both in low spirits concerning Richard, and very sorry so to part with him, we made it as plain as we politely could that we should leave Mr. Skimpole to the "Dedlock Arms," and retire when the night-travellers were gone.

Richard's high spirits carrying everything before them, we all went out together to the top of the hill above the village, where he had ordered a gig to wait; and where we found a man with a lantern

standing at the head of the gaunt pale horse that had been harnessed to it.

I never shall forget those two seated side by side in the lantern's light; Richard, all flush and fire and laughter, with the reins in his hand; Mr. Vholes, quite still, black-gloved, and buttoned up, looking at him as if he were looking at his prey and charming it. I have before me the whole picture of the warm dark night, the summer lightning, the dusty track of road closed in by hedgerows and high trees, the gaunt pale horse with his ears pricked up, and the driving away at speed to Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

My dear girl told me, that night, how Richard's being thereafter prosperous or ruined, befriended or deserted, could only make this difference to her, that the more he needed love from one unchanging heart, the more love that unchanging heart would have to give him; how he thought of her through his present errors, and she would think of him at all times: never of herself, if she could devote herself to him: never of her own delight, if she could minister to his.

And she kept her word?

I look along the road before me, where the distance already shortens and the journey's end is growing visible; and, true and good above the dead sea of the Chancery suit, and all the ashey fruit it casts ashore, I think I see my darling.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### A STRUGGLE.

WHEN our time came for returning to Bleak House again, we were punctual to the day, and were received with an overpowering welcome. I was perfectly restored to health and strength; and finding my housekeeping keys laid ready for me in my room, rang myself in as if I had been a new year, with a merry little peal. "Once more, duty, duty, Esther," said I; "and if you are not overjoyed to do it, more than cheerfully and contentedly, through anything and everything, you ought to be. That's all I have to say to *you*, my dear!"

The first few mornings were mornings of so much bustle and business, devoted to such settlements of accounts, such repeated journeys to and fro between the Growlery and all other parts of the house, so many re-arrangements of drawers and presses, and such a general new beginning altogether, that I had not a moment's leisure. But when these arrangements were completed, and everything was in order, I paid a visit of a few hours to London, which something in the letter I had destroyed at Chesney Wold had induced me to decide upon in my own mind.

I made Caddy Jellyby—her maiden name was so natural to me that I always called her by it—the pretext for this visit; and wrote her a note previously, asking the favor of her company on a little business expedition. Leaving home very early in the morning, I got to London by stage-coach in such good time, that I walked to Newman Street with the day before me.

Caddy, who had not seen me since her wedding-day, was so glad and so affectionate that I was half inclined to fear I should make her husband jealous. But he was, in his way, just as bad—I mean as good; and in short it was the old story, and nobody would leave me any possibility of doing anything meritorious.

The elder Mr. Turveydrop was in bed, I found, and Caddy was milling his chocolate, which a melancholy little boy who was an apprentice—it seemed such a curious thing to be apprenticed to the trade of dancing—was waiting to carry up-stairs. Her

father-in-law was extremely kind and considerate, Caddy told me, and they lived most happily together. (When she spoke of their living together, she meant that the old gentleman had all the good things and all the good lodging, while she and her husband had what they could get, and were poked into two corner rooms over the Mews.)

"And how is your mama, Caddy?" said I.

"Why, I hear of her, Esther," replied Caddy, "through Pa; but I see very little of her. We are good friends, I am glad to say; but Ma thinks there is something absurd in my having married a dancing-master, and she is rather afraid of its extending to her."

It struck me that if Mrs. Jellyby had discharged her own natural duties and obligations, before she swept the horizon with a telescope in search of others, she would have taken the best precautions against becoming absurd; but I need scarcely observe that I kept this to myself.

"And your papa, Caddy?"

"He comes here every evening," returned Caddy, "and is so fond of sitting in the corner there, that it's a treat to see him."

Looking at the corner, I plainly perceived the mark of Mr. Jellyby's head against the wall. It was consolatory to know that he had found such a resting-place for it.

"And you, Caddy," said I, "you are always busy, I'll be bound?"

"Well, my dear," returned Caddy, "I am indeed; for to tell you a grand secret, I am qualifying myself to give lessons. Prince's health is not strong, and I want to be able to assist him. What with schools, and classes here, and private pupils, and the apprentices, he really has too much to do, poor fellow!"

The notion of the apprentices was still so odd to me, that I asked Caddy if there were many of them?

"Four," said Caddy. "One in-door, and three out. They are very good children; only when they get together they *will* play—children-like—instead of attending to their work. So the little boy you saw just now waltzes by himself in the empty kitchen, and we distribute the others over the house as well as we can."

"That is only for their steps, of course?" said I.

"Only for their steps," said Caddy. "In that way they practise, so many hours at a time, whatever steps they happen to be upon. They dance in the academy; and at this time of year we do Figures at five every morning."

"Why, what a laborious life!" I exclaimed.

"I assure you, my dear," returned Caddy, smiling, "when the out-door apprentices ring us up in the morning (the bell rings into our room, not to disturb old Mr. Turveydrop), and when I put up the window, and see them standing on the door-step with their little pumps under their arms, I am actually reminded of the sweeps."

All this presented the art to me in a singular light, to be sure. Caddy enjoyed the effect of her communication, and cheerfully recounted the particulars of her own studies.

"You see, my dear, to save expense, I ought to know something of the Piano, and I ought to know something of the Kit too, and consequently I have to practise those two instruments as well as the details of our profession. If Ma had been like anybody else, I might have had some little musical knowledge to begin upon. However, I hadn't any; and that part of the work is, at first, a little discouraging, I must allow. But I have a very good ear, and I am used to drudgery—I have to thank

Ma for that, at all events—and where there's a will there's a way, you know, Esther, the world over." Saying these words, Caddy laughingly sat down at a little jingling square piano, and really rattled off a quadrille with great spirit. Then she good-humoredly and blushing got up again, and while she still laughed herself, said, "Don't laugh at me, please; that's a dear girl!"

I would sooner have cried, but I did neither. I encouraged her, and praised her with all my heart. For I conscientiously believed, dancing-master's wife though she was, and dancing-mistress though in her limited ambition she aspired to be, she had struck out a natural, wholesome, loving course of industry and perseverance that was quite as good as a Mission.

"My dear," said Caddy, delighted, "you can't think how you cheer me. I shall owe you, you don't know how much. What changes, Esther, even in my small world! You recollect that first night, when I was so unpolite and inky? Who would have thought, then, of my ever teaching people to dance, of all other possibilities and impossibilities!"

Her husband, who had left us while we had this chat, now coming back, preparatory to exercising the apprentices in the ball-room, Caddy informed me she was quite at my disposal. But it was not my time yet, I was glad to tell her; for I should have been vexed to take her away then. Therefore we three adjourned to the apprentices together, and I made one in the dance.

The apprentices were the queerest little people. Besides the melancholy boy, who I hoped had not been made so by waltzing alone in the empty kitchen, there were two other boys, and one dirty little limp girl in a gauzy dress. Such a precocious little girl, with such a dowdy bonnet on (that, too, of a gauzy texture), who brought her sandalled shoes in an old threadbare velvet reticule. Such mean little boys, when they were not dancing, with string, and marbles, and cramp-bones in their pockets, and the most untidy legs and feet—and heels particularly. I asked Caddy what had made their parents choose this profession for them? Caddy said she didn't know; perhaps they were designed for teachers; perhaps for the stage. They were all people in humble circumstances, and the melancholy boy's mother kept a ginger-beer shop.

We danced for an hour with great gravity; the melancholy child doing wonders with his lower extremities, in which there appeared to be some sense of enjoyment though it never rose above his waist. Caddy, while she was observant of her husband, and was evidently founded upon him, had acquired a grace and self-possession of her own, which, united to her pretty face and figure, was uncommonly agreeable. She already relieved him of much of the instruction of these young people; and he seldom interfered, except to walk his part in the figure if he had anything to do in it. He always played the tune. The affectation of the gauzy child, and her condescension to the boys, was a sight. And thus we danced an hour by the clock.

When the practice was concluded, Caddy's husband made himself ready to go out of town to a school, and Caddy ran away to get ready to go out with me. I sat in the ball-room in the interval, contemplating the apprentices. The two out-door boys went upon the staircase to put on their half-boots, and pull the in-door boy's hair: as I judged from the nature of his objections. Returning with their jackets buttoned, and their pumps stuck in them, they then produced packets of cold bread and meat, and bivouacked under a painted lyre on the wall. The little gauzy child, having whisked her sandals

into the reticule and put on a trodden down pair of shoes, shook her head into the dowdy bonnet at one shake; and answering my inquiry whether she liked dancing, by replying, "not with boys," tied it across her chin and went home contemptuous.

"Old Mr. Turveydrop is so sorry," said Caddy, "that he has not finished dressing yet, and cannot have the pleasure of seeing you before you go. You are such a favourite of his, Esther."

I expressed myself much obliged to him, but did not think it necessary to add that I readily dispensed with this attention.

"It takes him a long time to dress," said Caddy, "because he is very much looked up to in such things, you know, and has a reputation to support. You can't think how kind he is to Pa. He talks to Pa, of an evening, about the Prince Regent, and I never saw Pa so interested."

There was something in the picture of Mr. Turveydrop bestowing his Department on Mr. Jellyby, that quite took my fancy. I asked Caddy if he brought her papa out much?

"No," said Caddy, "I don't know that he does that; but he talks to Pa, and Pa greatly admires him, and listens, and likes it. Of course I am aware that Pa has hardly any claims to Department, but they get on together delightfully. You can't think what good companions they make. I never saw Pa take snuff before in my life; but he takes one pinch out of Mr. Turveydrop's box regularly, and keeps putting it to his nose and taking it away again, all the evening."

That old Mr. Turveydrop should ever, in the chances and changes of life, have come to the rescue of Mr. Jellyby from Borrioboola Gha, appeared to me to be one of the pleasantest of oddities.

"As to Peepy," said Caddy, with a little hesitation, "whom I was most afraid of—next to having any family of my own, Esther—as an inconvenience to Mr. Turveydrop, the kindness of the old gentleman to that child is beyond everything. He asks to see him, my dear! He lets him take the newspaper up to him in bed; he gives him the crusts of his toast to eat; he sends him on little errands about the house; he tells him to come to me for sixpences. In short," said Caddy, cheerily, "and not to prose, I am a very fortunate girl, and ought to be very grateful. Where are we going, Esther?"

"To the Old Street Road," said I; "where I have a few words to say to the solicitor's clerk, who was sent to meet me at the coach-office on the very day when I came to London, and first saw you, my dear. Now I think of it, the gentleman who brought us to your house."

"Then, indeed, I seem to be naturally the person to go with you," returned Caddy.

To the Old Street Road we went, and there inquired at Mrs. Guppy's residence for Mrs. Guppy. Mrs. Guppy occupying the parlors, and having indeed been visibly in danger of cracking herself like a nut in the front parlor door by peeping out before she was asked for, immediately presented herself, and requested us to walk in. She was an old lady in a large cap, with rather a red nose and rather an unsteady eye, but smiling all over. Her close little sitting-room was prepared for a visit; and there was a portrait of her son in it, which, I had almost written here, was more like than life: it insisted upon him with such obstinacy, and was so determined not to let him off.

Not only was the portrait there, but we found the original there too. He was dressed in a great many colours, and was discovered at a table reading law-papers with his forefinger to his forehead.

"Miss Summerson," said Mr. Guppy, rising.

"this is indeed an Oasis. Mother, will you be so good as to put a chair for the other lady, and get out of the gang-way."

Mrs. Guppy, whose incessant smiling gave her quite a waggish appearance, did as her son requested; and then sat down in a corner, holding her pocket-handkerchief to her chest, like a fomentation, with both hands.

I presented Caddy, and Mr. Guppy said that any friend of mine was more than welcome. I then proceeded to the object of my visit.

"I took the liberty of sending you a note, sir," said I.

Mr. Guppy acknowledged its receipt by taking it out of his breast-pocket, putting it to his lips, and returning it to his pocket with a bow. Mr. Guppy's mother was so diverted that she rolled her head as she smiled, and made a silent appeal to Caddy with her elbow.

"Could I speak to you alone for a moment?" said I.

Anything like the jocoseness of Mr. Guppy's mother now, I think I never saw. She made no sound of laughter; but she rolled her head, and shook it, and put her handkerchief to her mouth, and appealed to Caddy with her elbow, and her hand, and her shoulder, and was so unspeakably entertained altogether that it was with some difficulty she could marshal Caddy through the little folding-door into her bed-room adjoining.

"Miss Summerson," said Mr. Guppy, "you will excuse the waywardness of a parent ever mindful of a son's appiness. My mother, though highly exasperating to the feelings, is actuated by maternal dictates."

I could hardly have believed that anybody could in a moment have turned so red, or changed so much, as Mr. Guppy did when I now put up my veil.

"I asked the favor of seeing you for a few moments here," said I, "in preference to calling at Mr. Kenge's, because, remembering what you said on an occasion when you spoke to me in confidence, I feared I might otherwise cause you some embarrassment, Mr. Guppy."

I caused him embarrassment enough as it was, I am sure. I never saw such faltering, such confusion, such amazement and apprehension.

"Miss Summerson," stammered Mr. Guppy, "I—I—beg your pardon, but in our profession—we—we—find it necessary to be explicit. You have referred to an occasion, miss, when I—when I did myself the honor of making a declaration which—"

Something seemed to rise in his throat that he could not possibly swallow. He put his hand there, coughed, made faces, tried again to swallow it, coughed again, made faces again, looked all round the room, and fluttered his papers.

"A kind of a giddy sensation has come upon me, miss," he explained, "which rather knocks me over. I—er—a little subject to this sort of thing—er—By George!"

I gave him a little time to recover. He consumed it in putting his hand to his forehead and taking it away again, and in backing his chair into the corner behind him.

"My intention was to remark, miss," said Mr. Guppy, "—dear me—something bronchial, I think—hem!—to remark that you was so good on that occasion as to repel and repudiate that declaration. You—you wouldn't perhaps object to admit that? Though no witnesses are present, it might be a satisfaction to—to your mind—if you was to put in that admission."

"There can be no doubt," said I, "that I declined your proposal without any reservation or qualification whatever, Mr. Guppy."

"Thank you, miss," he returned, measuring the table with his troubled hands. "So far that's satisfactory, and it does you credit. Er—this is certainly bronchial!—must be in the tubes—er—you wouldn't perhaps be offended if I was to mention—not that it's necessary, for your own good sense or any person's sense must shew 'em that—if I was to mention that such declaration on my part was final, and there terminated."

"I quite understand that," said I.

"Perhaps—er—it may not be worth the form, but it might be a satisfaction to your mind—perhaps you wouldn't object to admit that, miss?" said Mr. Guppy.

"I admit it most fully and freely," said I.

"Thank you," returned Mr. Guppy. "Very honorable, I am sure. I regret that my arrangements in life, combined with circumstances over which I have no control, will put it out of my power ever to fall back upon that offer, or to renew it in any shape or form whatever; but it will ever be a retrospect entwined—er—with friendship's bowers." Mr. Guppy's bronchitis came to his relief, and stopped his measurement of the table.

"I may now perhaps mention what I wished to say to you?" I began.

"I shall be honored, I am sure," said Mr. Guppy. "I am so persuaded that your own good sense and right feeling, miss, will—will keep you as square as possible—that I can have nothing but pleasure, I am sure, in hearing any observations you may wish to offer."

"You were so good as to imply, on that occasion—"

"Excuse me, miss," said Mr. Guppy, "but we had better not travel out of the record into implication. I cannot admit that I implied anything."

"You said on that occasion," I recommenced, "that you might possibly have the means of advancing my interests, and promoting my fortunes, by making discoveries of which I should be the subject. I presume that you founded that belief upon your general knowledge of my being an orphan girl, indebted for everything to the benevolence of Mr. Jarndyce. Now, the beginning and the end of what I have come to beg of you is, Mr. Guppy, that you will have the kindness to relinquish all idea of so serving me. I have thought of this sometimes, and I have thought of it most, lately—since I have been ill. At length I have decided, in case you should at any time recall that purpose, and act upon it in any way, to come to you, and assure you that you are altogether mistaken. You could make no discovery in reference to me that would do me the least service, or give me the least pleasure. I am acquainted with my personal history; and I have it in my power to assure you that you never can advance my welfare by such means. You may, perhaps, have abandoned this project a long time. If so, excuse my giving you unnecessary trouble. If not, I entreat you, on the assurance I have given you, henceforth to lay it aside. I beg you to do this, for my peace."

"I am bound to confess," said Mr. Guppy, "that you express yourself, miss, with that good sense and right feeling for which I gave you credit. Nothing can be more satisfactory than such right feeling, and if I mistook any intentions on your part just now, I am prepared to tender a full apology. I should wish to be understood, miss, as hereby offering that apology—limiting it, as your

own good sense and right feeling will point out the necessity of, to the present proceedings."

I must say for Mr. Guppy that the shuffling manner he had had upon him improved very much. He seemed truly glad to be able to do something I asked, and he looked ashamed.

"If you will allow me to finish what I have to say at once, so that I may have no occasion to resume," I went on, seeing him about to speak, "you will do me a kindness sir. I come to you as privately as possible, because you announced this impression of yours to me in a confidence which I have really wished to respect—and which I always have respected, as you remember. I have mentioned my illness. There really is no reason why I should hesitate to say I know very well that any little delicacy I might have had in making a request to you, is quite removed. Therefore I make the entreaty I have now preferred; and I hope you will have sufficient consideration for me, to accede to it."

I must do Mr. Guppy the further justice of saying that he had looked more and more ashamed, and that he looked most ashamed, and very earnest, when he now replied with a burning face:

"Upon my word and honour, upon my life, upon my soul, Miss Summerson, as I am a living man, I'll act according to your wish! I'll never go another step in opposition to it. I'll take my oath to it, if it will be any satisfaction to you. In what I promise at this present time touching the matters now in question," continued Mr. Guppy, rapidly, as if he were repeating a familiar form of words, "I speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so——"

"I am quite satisfied," said I, rising at this point, "and I thank you very much. Caddy, my dear, I am ready!"

Mr. Guppy's mother returned with Caddy (now making me the recipient of her silent laughter and her nudges), and we took our leave. Mr. Guppy saw us to the door with the air of one who was either imperfectly awake or walking in his sleep; and we left him there, staring.

But in a minute he came after us down the street without any hat, and with his long hair all blown about, and stopped us, saying fervently:

"Miss Summerson, upon my honour and soul, you may depend upon me!"

"I do," said I, "quite confidently."

"I beg your pardon, miss," said Mr. Guppy, going with one leg and staying with the other, "but this lady being present—your own witness—it might be a satisfaction to your mind (which I should wish to set at rest) if you was to repeat those admissions."

"Well, Caddy," said I, turning to her, "perhaps you will not be surprised when I tell you, my dear, that there never has been any engagement——"

"No proposal or promise of marriage whatsoever," suggested Mr. Guppy.

"No proposal or promise of marriage whatsoever," said I, "between this gentleman——"

"William Guppy of Penton Place, Pentonville, in the county of Middlesex," he murmured.

"Between this gentleman, Mr. William Guppy of Penton Place, Pentonville, in the county of Middlesex, and myself."

"Thank you, miss," said Mr. Guppy. "Very full,—er—excuse me—lady's name, christian and surname both?"

I gave them.

"Married woman, I believe?" said Mr. Guppy.

"Married woman. Thank you. Formerly Caroline Jellyby, spinster, then of Thavies Inn, within the

city of London, but extra-parochial; now of Newman-street, Oxford-street. Much obliged."

He ran home and came running back again.

"Touching that matter, you know, I really and truly am very sorry that my arrangements in life, combined with circumstances over which I have no control, should prevent a renewal of what was wholly terminated some time back," said Mr. Guppy to me, forlornly and despondently, "but it couldn't be. Now *could* it, you know! I only put it to you."

I replied it certainly could not. The subject did not admit of a doubt. He thanked me, and ran to his mother again—and back again.

"It's very honorable of you, miss, I am sure," said Mr. Guppy. "If an altar could be erected in the bowers of friendship—but, upon my soul, you may rely upon me in every respect, save and except the tender passion only!"

The struggle in Mr. Guppy's breast, and the numerous oscillations it occasioned him between his mother's door and us, were sufficiently conspicuous in the windy street (particularly as his hair wanted cutting), to make us hurry away. I did so with a lightened heart; but when we last looked back, Mr. Guppy was still oscillating in the same troubled state of mind.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### ATTORNEY AND CLIENT.

THE name of MR. VHOLES, preceded by the legend GROUND FLOOR, is inscribed upon a doorpost in Symond's Inn, Chancery Lane: a little, pale, wall-eyed, woe-begone inn, like a large dustbinn of two compartments and a sifter. It looks as if Symond were a sparing man in his day, and constructed his inn of old building materials, which took kindly to the dry rot and to dirt and all things decaying and dismal, and perpetuated Symond's memory with congenial shabbiness. Quartered in this dingy hatchment commemorative of Symond, are the legal bearings of Mr. Vholes.

Mr. Vholes's office, in disposition retiring and in situation retired, is squeezed up in a corner, and blinks at a dead wall. Three feet of knotty floored dark passage bring the client to Mr. Vholes's jet black door, in an angle profoundly dark on the brightest midsummer morning, and encumbered by a black bulk-head of cellarage staircase, against which belated civilians generally strike their brows. Mr. Vholes's chambers are on so small a scale, that one clerk can open the door without getting off his stool, while the other who elbows him at the same desk has equal facilities for poking the fire. A smell as of unwholesome sheep, blending with the smell of must and dust, is referable to the nightly (and often daily) consumption of mutton fat in candles, and to the fretting of parchment forms and skins in greasy drawers. The atmosphere is otherwise stale and close. The place was last painted or whitewashed beyond the memory of man, and the two chimneys smoke, and there is a loose outer surface of soot everywhere, and the dull cracked windows in their heavy frames have but one piece of character in them, which is a determination to be always dirty, and always shut, unless coerced. This accounts for the phenomenon of the weaker of the two usually having a bundle of firewood thrust between its jaws in hot weather.

Mr. Vholes is a very respectable man. He has not a large business, but he is a very respectable man. He is allowed by the greater attorneys who have made good fortunes, or are making them, to be a most respectable man. He never misses a

chance in his practice; which is a mark of respectability. He never takes any pleasure; which is another mark of respectability. He is reserved and serious; which is another mark of respectability. His digestion is impaired, which is highly respectable. And he is making hay of the grass which is flesh, for his three daughters. And his father is dependent on him in the Vale of Taunton.

The one great principle of the English law is, to make business for itself. There is no other principle distinctly, certainly, and consistently maintained through all its narrow turnings. Viewed by this light it becomes a coherent scheme, and not the monstrous maze the laity are apt to think it. Let them but once clearly perceive that its grand principle is to make business for itself at their expense, and surely they will cease to grumble.

But, not perceiving this quite plainly—only seeing it by halves in a confused way—the laity sometimes suffer in peace and pocket, with a bad grace, and *do* grumble very much. Then this respectability of Mr. Vholes is brought into powerful play against them. “Repeal this statute, my good sir?” says Mr. Kenge, to a smarting client, “repeal it, my dear sir? Never, with my consent. Alter this law, sir, and what will be the effect of your rash proceeding on a class of practitioners very worthily represented, allow me to say to you, by the opposite attorney in the case, Mr. Vholes? Sir, that class of practitioners would be swept from the face of the earth. Now you cannot afford—I would say, the social system cannot afford—to lose an order of men like Mr. Vholes. Diligent, persevering, steady, acute in business. My dear sir, I understand your present feelings against the existing state of things, which I grant to be a little hard in your case; but I can never raise my voice for the demolition of a class of men like Mr. Vholes.” The respectability of Mr. Vholes has even been cited with crushing effect before Parliamentary committees, as in the following blue minutes of a distinguished attorney’s evidence. “Question (number five hundred and seventeen thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine). If I understand you, these forms of practice indisputably occasion delay? Answer. Yes, some delay. Question. And great expense? Answer. Most assuredly they cannot be gone through for nothing. Question. And unspeakable vexation? Answer. I am not prepared to say that. They have never given *me* any vexation; quite the contrary. Question. But you think that their abolition would damage a class of practitioners? Answer. I have no doubt of it. Question. Can you instance any type of that class? Answer. Yes. I would unhesitatingly mention Mr. Vholes. He would be ruined. Question. Mr. Vholes is considered, in the profession, a respectable man? Answer”—which proved fatal to the enquiry for ten years—“Mr. Vholes is considered, in the profession, a *most* respectable man.”

So in familiar conversation, private authorities no less disinterested will remark that they don’t know what this age is coming to; that we are plunging down precipices; that now here is something else gone; that these changes are death to people like Vholes: a man of undoubted respectability, with a father in the Vale of Taunton, and three daughters at home. Take a few steps more in this direction, say they, and what is to become of Vholes’s father? Is he to perish? And of Vholes’s daughters? Are they to be shirt-makers, or governesses? As though, Mr. Vholes and his relations being minor cannibal chiefs, and it being proposed to abolish cannibalism, indignant champions were to put the case thus: Make man-eating unlawful, and you starve the Vholeses!

In a word, Mr. Vholes, with his three daughters and his father in the Vale of Taunton, is continually doing duty, like a piece of timber, to shore up some decayed foundation that has become a pit-fall and a nuisance. And with a great many people, in a great many instances, the question is never one of a change from Wrong to Right (which is quite an extraneous consideration), but is always one of injury or advantage to that eminently respectable legion, Vholes.

The Chancellor is, within these ten minutes, “up” for the long vacation. Mr. Vholes, and his young client, and several blue bags hastily stuffed, out of all regularity of form, as the larger sort of serpents are in their first gorged state, have returned to the official den. Mr. Vholes, quiet and unmoved, as a man of so much respectability ought to be, takes off his close black gloves as if he were skinning his hands, lifts off his tight hat as if he were scalping himself, and sits down at his desk. The client throws his hat and gloves upon the ground—tosses them anywhere, without looking after them or caring where they go; flings himself into a chair, half sighing and half groaning; rests his aching head upon his hand, and looks the portrait of Young Despair.

“Again nothing done!” says Richard. “Nothing, nothing done!”

“Don’t say nothing done, sir,” returns the placid Vholes. “That is scarcely fair, sir, scarcely fair!”

“Why, what is done!” says Richard, turning gloomily upon him.

“That may not be the whole question,” returns Vholes. “The question may branch off into what is doing, what is doing?”

“And what is doing?” asks the moody client.

Vholes, sitting with his arms on his desk, quietly bringing the tips of his five right fingers to meet the tips of his five left fingers, and quietly separating them again, and fixedly and slowly looking at his client, replies:

“A good deal is doing, sir. We have put our shoulders to the wheel, Mr. Carstone, and the wheel is going round.”

“Yes, with Ixion on it. How am I to get through the next four or five accursed months?” exclaims the young man, rising from his chair and walking about the room.

“Mr. C,” returns Vholes, following him close with his eyes wherever he goes, “your spirits are hasty, and I am sorry for it on your account. Excuse me if I recommend you not to chafe so much, not to be so impetuous, not to wear yourself out so. You should have more patience. You should sustain yourself better.”

“I ought to imitate you, in fact, Mr. Vholes?” says Richard, sitting down again with an impatient laugh, and beating the Devil’s Tattoo with his boot on the patternless carpet.

“Sir,” returns Vholes, always looking at the client, as if he were making a lingering meal of him with his eyes as well as with his professional appetite. “Sir,” returns Vholes, with his inward manner of speech and his bloodless quietude; “I should not have had the presumption to propose myself as a model, for your imitation or any man’s. Let me but leave a good name to my three daughters, and that is enough for me; but I am not a self-seeker. But, since you mention me so pointedly, I will acknowledge that I should like to impart to you a little of my—come sir, you are disposed to call it insensibility, and I am sure I have no objection—say insensibility—a little of my insensibility.”

“Mr. Vholes,” explains the client, somewhat abashed, “I had no intention to accuse you of insensibility.”

"I think you had, sir, without knowing it," returns the equable Vholes. "Very naturally. It is my duty to attend to your interests with a cool head, and I can quite understand that to your excited feelings I may appear, at such times as the present, insensible. My daughters may know me better; my aged father may know me better. But they have known me much longer than you have, and the confiding eye of affection is not the distrustful eye of business. Not that I complain, sir, of the eye of business being distrustful; quite the contrary. In attending to your interests, I wish to have all possible checks upon me; it is right that I should have them; I court inquiry. But your interests demand that I should be cool and methodical, Mr. Carstone; and I cannot be otherwise—no sir, not even to please you."

Mr. Vholes, after glancing at the official cat who is patiently watching a mouse's hole, fixes his charmed gaze again on his young client, and proceeds in his buttoned-up half-audible voice, as if there were an unclean spirit in him that will neither come out nor speak out:

"What are you to do, sir, you inquire, during the vacation. I should hope you gentlemen of the army may find many means of amusing yourselves, if you give your minds to it. If you had asked me what I was to do, during the vacation, I could have answered you more readily. I am to attend to your interests. I am to be found here, day by day, attending to your interests. That is my duty, Mr. C; and term time or vacation makes no difference to me. If you wish to consult me as to your interests, you will find me here at all times alike. Other professional men go out of town. I don't. Not that I blame them for going; I merely say, I don't go. This desk is your rock, sir!"

Mr. Vholes gives it a rap, and it sounds as hollow as a coffin. Not to Richard, though. There is encouragement in the sound to him. Perhaps Mr. Vholes knows there is.

"I am perfectly aware, Mr. Vholes," says Richard, more familiarly and good-humouredly, "that you are the most reliable fellow in the world; and that to have to do with you, is to have to do with a man of business who is not to be hoodwinked. But put yourself in my case, dragging on this dislocated life, sinking deeper and deeper into difficulty every day, continually hoping and continually disappointed, conscious of change upon change for the worst in myself, and of no change for the better in anything else; and you will find it a dark-looking case sometimes, as I do."

"You know," says Mr. Vholes, "that I never give hopes, sir. I told you from the first, Mr. C, that I never give hopes. Particularly in a case like this, where the greater part of the costs comes out of the estate, I should not be considerate of my good name, if I gave hopes. It might seem as if costs were my object. Still, when you say there is no change for the better, I must, as a bare matter of fact, deny that."

"Aye?" returns Richard, brightening. "But how do you make it out?"

"Mr. Carstone, you are represented by——"

"You said just now—a rock."

"Yes, sir," says Mr. Vholes, gently shaking his head and rapping the hollow desk, with a sound as if ashes were falling on ashes, and dust on dust, "a rock. That's something. You are separately represented, and no longer hidden and lost in the interests of others. That's something. The suit does not sleep; we wake it up, we air it, we walk it about. That's something. It's not all Jarndyce, in fact as well as in name. That's something. No-

body has it all his own way now, sir. And that's something, surely."

Richard, his face flushing suddenly, strikes the desk with his clenched hand.

"Mr. Vholes! If any man had told me, when I first went to John Jarndyce's house, that he was anything but the disinterested friend he seemed—that he was what he has gradually turned out to be—I could have found no words strong enough to repel the slander; I could not have defended him too ardently. So little did I know of the world! Whereas, now, I do declare to you that he becomes to me the embodiment of the suit; that, in place of its being an abstraction, it is John Jarndyce; that the more I suffer, the more indignant I am with him; that every new delay, and every new disappointment, is only a new injury from John Jarndyce's hand."

"No, no," says Vholes. "Don't say so. We ought to have patience, all of us. Besides, I never disparage, sir. I never disparage."

"Mr. Vholes," returns the angry client. "You know as well as I, that he would have strangled the suit if he could."

"He was not active in it," Mr. Vholes admits, with an appearance of reluctance. "He certainly was not active in it. But however, but however, he might have had amiable intentions. Who can read the heart, Mr. C!"

"You can," returns Richard.

"I, Mr. C?"

"Well enough to know what his intentions were. Are, or are not, our interests conflicting? Tell—me—that!" says Richard, accompanying his last three words with three raps on his rock of trust.

"Mr. C," returns Vholes, immovable in attitude and never winking his hungry eyes, "I should be wanting in my duty as your professional adviser, I should be departing from my fidelity to your interests, if I represented those interests as identical with the interests of Mr. Jarndyce. They are no such thing, sir. I never impute motives; I both have, and am, a father, and I never impute motives. But I must not shrink from a professional duty, even if it sows dissension in families. I understand you to be now consulting me professionally, as to your interests? You are so? I reply then, they are not identical with those of Mr. Jarndyce."

"Of course they are not!" cries Richard. "You found that out, long ago."

"Mr. C," returns Vholes, "I wish to say no more of any third party than is necessary. I wish to leave my good name unsullied, together with any little property of which I may become possessed through industry and perseverance, to my daughters Emma, Jane, and Caroline. I also desire to live in amity with my professional brethren. When Mr. Skimpole did me the honor, sir—I will not say the very high honor, for I never stoop to flattery—of bringing us together in this room, I mentioned to you that I could offer no opinion or advice as to your interests, while those interests were intrusted to another member of the profession. And I spoke in such terms as I was bound to speak, of Kenge and Carboy's office, which stands high. You, sir, thought fit to withdraw your interests from that keeping nevertheless, and to offer them to me. You brought them with clean hands, sir, and I accepted them with clean hands. Those interests are now paramount in this office. My digestive functions, as you may have heard me mention, are not in a good state, and rest might improve them; but I shall not rest, sir, while I am your representative. Whenever you want me, you will find me here. Summon me anywhere, and I will come.

During the long vacation, sir, I shall devote my leisure to studying your interests more and more closely, and to making arrangements for moving heaven and earth (including, of course, the Chancellor) after Michaelmas Term; and when I ultimately congratulate you, sir," says Mr. Vholes, with the severity of a determined man, "when I ultimately congratulate you, sir, with all my heart, on your accession to fortune—which, but that I

claration of his principles, that as Mr. Carstone is about to rejoin his regiment, perhaps Mr. C will favor him with an order on his agent for twenty pounds on account.

"For there have been many little consultations and attendances of late, sir," observes Vholes, turning over the leaves of his Diary, "and these things mount up, and I don't profess to be a man of capital. When we first entered on our present relations, I



▲ ATTORNEY AND CLIENT, FORTITUDE AND IMPATIENCE.

never give hopes, I might say something further about—you will owe me nothing, beyond whatever little balance may be then outstanding of the costs as between solicitor and client, not included in the taxed costs allowed out of the estate. I pretend to no claim upon you, Mr. C, but for the zealous and active discharge—not the languid and routine discharge, sir: that much credit I stipulate for—of my professional duty. My duty prosperously ended, all between us is ended."

Vholes finally adds, by way of rider to this de-

stated to you openly—it is a principle of mine that there never can be too much openness between solicitor and client—that I was not a man of capital; and that if capital was your object, you had better leave your papers in Kenge's office. No, Mr. C, you will find none of the advantages, or disadvantages, of capital here, sir. This," Vholes gives the desk one hollow blow again, "is your rock; it pretends to be nothing more."

The client, with his dejection insensibly relieved, and his vague hopes rekindled, takes pen and ink



and writes the draft: not without perplexed consideration and calculation of the date it may bear, implying scant effects in the agent's hands. All the while, Vholes, buttoned up in body and mind, looks at him attentively. All the while, Vholes's official cat watches the mouse's hole.

Lastly, the client, shaking hands, beseeches Mr. Vholes, for Heaven's sake and Earth's sake, to do his utmost, to "pull him through" the Court of Chancery. Mr. Vholes, who never gives hopes, lays his palm upon the client's shoulder, and answers with a smile, "Always here, sir. Personally, or by letter, you will always find me here, sir, with my shoulder to the wheel." Thus they part; and Vholes, left alone, employs himself in carrying sundry little matters out of his Diary into his draft bill book, for the ultimate behoof of his three daughters. So might an industrious fox, or bear, make up his account of chickens or stray travellers with an eye to his cubs; not to disparage by that word the three raw-visaged, lank, and buttoned-up maidens, who dwell with the parent Vholes in an earthy cottage situated in a damp garden at Kennington.

Richard, emerging from the heavy shade of Symond's Inn into the sunshine of Chancery Lane—for there happens to be sunshine there to-day—walks thoughtfully on, and turns into Lincoln's Inn, and passes under the shadow of the Lincoln's Inn trees. On many such loungers have the speckled shadows of those trees often fallen; on the like bent head, the bitten nail, the lowering eye, the lingering step, the purposeless and dreamy air, the good consuming and consumed, the life turned sour. This lounge is not shabby yet, but that may come. Chancery, which knows no wisdom but in Precedent, is very rich in such Precedents; and why should one be different from ten thousand?

Yet the time is so short since his depreciation began, that as he saunters away, reluctant to leave the spot for some long months together, though he hates it, Richard himself may feel his own case as if it were a startling one. While his heart is heavy with corroding care, suspense, distrust, and doubt, it may have room for some sorrowful wonder when he recalls how different his first visit there, how different he, how different all the colors of his mind. But injustice breeds injustice; the fighting with shadows and being defeated by them, necessitates the setting up of substances to combat; from the impalpable suit which no man alive can understand, the time for that being long gone by, it has become a gloomy relief to turn to the palpable figure of the friend who would have saved him from this ruin, and make *him* his enemy. Richard has told Vholes the truth. Is he in a hardened or softened mood, he still lays his injuries equally at that door; he was thwarted in that quarter, of a set purpose, and that purpose could only originate in the one subject that is resolving his existence into itself; besides, it is a justification to him in his own eyes to have an embodied antagonist and oppressor.

Is Richard a monster in all this,—or would Chancery be found rich in such Precedents too, if they could be got for citation from the Recording Angel?

Two pairs of eyes not unused to such people look after him, as, biting his nails and brooding, he crosses the square, and is swallowed up by the shadow of the southern gateway. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle are the possessors of those eyes, and they have been leaning in conversation against the low stone parapet under the trees. He passed close by them, seeing nothing but the ground.

"William," says Mr. Weevle, adjusting his

whiskers; "there's combustion going on there! It's not a case of Spontaneous, but its smouldering combustion it is."

"Ah!" says Mr. Guppy, "he wouldn't keep out of Jarndyce, and I suppose he's over head and ears in debt. I never knew much of him. He was as high as the Monument when he was on trial at our place. A good riddance to me, whether as clerk or client! Well, Tony, that as I was mentioning is what they're up to."

Mr. Guppy, refolding his arms, resettles himself against the parapet, as resuming a conversation of interest.

"They are still up to it, sir," says Mr. Guppy, "still taking stock, still examining papers, still going over the heaps and heaps of rubbish. At this rate they'll be at it these seven years."

"And Small is helping?"

"Small left us at a week's notice. Told Kenge, his grandfather's business was too much for the old gentleman, and he could better himself by undertaking it. There had been a coolness between myself and Small on account of his being so close. But he said you and I began it; and as he had me there—for we did—I put our acquaintance on the old footing. That's how I came to know what they're up to."

"You haven't looked in at all?"

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy, a little disconcerted, "to be unreserved with you, I don't greatly relish the house, except in your company, and therefore I have not; and therefore I proposed this little appointment for our fetching away your things. There goes the hour by the clock! Tony;" Mr. Guppy becomes mysteriously and tenderly eloquent; "it is necessary that I should impress upon your mind once more, that circumstances over which I have no control, have made a melancholy alteration in my most cherished plans, and in that unrequited image which I formerly mentioned to you as a friend. That image is shattered, and that idol is laid low. My only wish now, in connexion with the objects which I had an idea of carrying out in the court, with your aid as a friend, is to let 'em alone and bury 'em in oblivion. Do you think it possible, do you think it at all likely (I put it to you, Tony, as a friend), from your knowledge of that capricious and deep old character who fell a prey to the Spontaneous element; do you, Tony, think it at all likely that, on second thoughts, he put those letters away anywhere, after you saw him alive, and that they were not destroyed that night?"

Mr. Weevle reflects for some time. Shakes his head. Decidedly thinks not.

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy, as they walk towards the court, "once again understand me, as a friend. Without entering into further explanations, I may repeat that the idol is down. I have no purpose to serve now, but burial in oblivion. To that I have pledged myself. I owe it to myself, and I owe it to the shattered image, as also to the circumstances over which I have no control. If you was to express to me by a gesture, by a wink, that you saw lying anywhere in your late lodgings, any papers that so much as looked like the papers in question, I would pitch them into the fire, sir, on my own responsibility."

Mr. Weevle nods. Mr. Guppy, much elevated in his own opinion by having delivered these observations, with an air in part forensic and in part romantic—this gentleman having a passion for conducting anything in the form of an examination, or delivering anything in the form of a summing up or a speech—accompanies his friend with dignity to the court.