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ADVENTURES
OF
BILBERRY THURLAND.

His bus'ness was to pump and wheedle.
And men with their own keys unriddle;
To fetch and carry intelligence
Of whom, and what, and where, and whence;
And all discoveries disperse
Among the whole pack of conjurors.
HUDIBRAS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

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1836.

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THE LIFE
OF
BILBERRY THURLAND

CHAPTER I.

DISHCLOTH'S STRATAGEMS TO OBTAIN BILBERRY'S LOVE. – HER REVENGE. – A STRANGE CUSTOMER IN THE KITCHEN. – THE CIRCUMVENTIONS OF DISHCLOTH. – THEIR CONSEQUENCES TO MISS GRUEL, HER LOVER, BILBERRY, AND HERSELF.

THROUGHOUT the long period of time which passed during the above transactions, it must not be supposed that Dishcloth in the least abandoned her original design of captivating and marrying Bilberry. That indeed was the main object for which she had used her influence in getting him into the house; and, in order to accomplish it, she neglected no opportunity of following up the delicate hint contained in her correspondence with that hero, by putting herself

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accidentally in his way at the corner of every passage, and introducing the subject in her conversation at every individual breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper, that they took together.

It was not, then, through any remissness in the prosecution of her siege that the final triumph of the besieged could justly be attributed; other causes must have determined him so stoutly to resist her assaults. But the combined powers of all his art and strength became necessary in order to his holding out, for she plyed him so vigorously both in front and flank, and approached him so near by the well-contrived *trenchers* which she brought to bear full upon his face so as many times to open a breach there which he as quickly closed again, that once or twice it became a doubt whether he would not lay down arms and come to a capitulation. Happy, however, are we to state that he still held out until General Dishcloth, finding him unconquerable by open attack, altered her plan of operations, and endeavoured to starve him out by cutting off his supplies. This device, too, failed, though her army lay

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about him a long period. At length she gave up the design, drew off all her forces, and retired inglorious from the field.

After that day, when all hope of taking him had vanished, Miss Dishcloth began to hate him even more violently than she had before admired. She annoyed him in all the various ways within her power, and they were many, besides endeavouring to prejudice Miss Gruel, her mistress, against him. Yet, even amid all this, a few kind words from him would cause her momentarily to relent, and treat him better, just so long as the ephemeral hope of his receiving her addresses sprung up, flourished a brief hour, and died. At last, more for aggravation than love, she fairly tried to make Bilberry jealous, by accepting the attentions of a young man who came regularly about half past seven of an evening and whistled her out through the palisadings of the area. Bilberry even had the mortification on one occasion — for Dishcloth made a designed display of it — to see her carry him out a large lump of cold plum-pudding, sauced with brandy: but this mortification

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arose not from jealousy, as she might have imagined, but simply because that was the identical piece of pudding which he himself ought to have had for supper. However, an incident happened the next night which enabled Bilberry most fully to revenge himself upon the eater.

Miss Gruel had sent our hero on an errand to Captain Flunks, which detained him some time, so that he chanced to return home about the same hour in the evening when Dishcloth's lover usually paid his visits. Taking advantage of Bilberry's absence, that damsel had carried him down into the kitchen, on entering which, Bilberry found him comfortably seated at the dresser, and tippling the thick end of a bottle of port, which Dishcloth had carried from her master's table and reserved for this gentleman's especial use. Seeing him suddenly enter, Susan hid the bottle under the table, and her admirer hastily rose from his seat and endeavoured to make his exit by the back-door, without saying good night. Bilberry thought he had seen him

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somewhere before, and wishing to satisfy himself, seized him by the collar and turned his face to the candle. It was the very scoundrel who, in the disguise of a clown, had feigned an attack on Miss Cucumber in the fields, brought Bilberry thereby into a scrape, and afterwards assisted that treacherous young woman in robbing him of his clothes and money. He, too, soon perceived into whose hands he had fallen, as evident

by the desperate effort he made to escape; but Mr. Thurland being, as related on the occasion of that catastrophe, the tallest and best boned of the two, retained a firm hold of him with one hand, while with the other he laid about him with excellent taste and discrimination. Miss Dishcloth was at first confounded; but soon a new light broke upon her. She fancied that nothing but jealousy had caused young Thurland to fall upon her admirer, and therefore, willing to second his design, to win upon his love, and to evince how much after all she should prefer him to the one who was now upon a visit to her, she seized

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a pretty large gravy-spoon from the wall, and, very ungratefully to her beau, began to assist Bilberry in basting him.

The clamour raised by this assault soon was overheard up stairs; Sir Robert Gruel frightened himself half out of his wits under the notion that the disturbance he heard below was no other than the commencement of a revolution; an event, by the by, for which he had some time been on the look out; while Miss Lucinda, who happened at that moment to be engaged in painting another mysterious landscape, in her hurry to get down stairs and quell the riot, upset her glass of water into the old gentleman her father's shoes, broke her china palette against his coat collar, which, together with his face, she smeared with a deep blue intended for distances, and finally kicked from one landing to the other a favourite old poodle of her mother's, that happened to be lying asleep in a flannel-box at the top of the stairs.

Meantime, Mr. Thurland had given the hypocritical rogue in the kitchen a very severe and

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well-deserved thrashing, after which he assisted him up the back-area steps with several of those able kicks for which his length of limb rendered him particularly famous; and, what renders this incident altogether rather singular, by an extraordinary coincidence not entirely attributable to blind chance, at the moment when Bilberry was giving him a last push out of the palisade-gate, who should be passing by but Miss Jemima Cucumber herself. She appeared to be on the look out for some other gentleman; but perceiving her old friend at her elbow, and (without recognising Bilberry in his new livery), suspecting that prowler to have been visiting other ladies, she also fell upon him

both with tongue and fists; and thus, cuffing him as he retreated along the pavement, gave an admirable finishing stroke to the work which young Thurland had so well begun.

Returning to the kitchen, he found Miss Lucinda in a great heat, inquiring of Dishcloth concerning the cause of this disturbance; but that maid being somewhat puzzled in her explanations, he took the business on his own

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hands. Having satisfied Miss Gruel touching the matter, and also delivered to her a very kind note from Captain Flunks, she became easily pacified, and returned up stairs to her father.

During the after-supper conversation between Bilberry and Susan, the latter soon became undeceived as to the motives by which her fellow-servant had been actuated in falling upon the rogue who had paid his visits there; for, instead of making love to her himself, as she confidently anticipated he would, Mr. Thurland only gave her a very sharp and unlover-like reprimand for introducing into the house, under the mask of a gallant, a fellow in all probability not a whit preferable to a common thief.

This unkindness sharpened Susan's fangs against him more and more; and determining, if possible, to throw him out of the situation he held, by misrepresenting him to Lucinda Gruel, she fell upon the following stratagem for effecting her purpose.

Judging from the state of her own mind that a feeling of jealousy was one of the most effective

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instruments in the world to work with, Dishcloth, one morning when Bilberry was engaged with his master, and Miss Lucinda had gone down into the kitchen for the purpose of superintending the construction of a pie, seized the opportunity to draw that clever girl to the end of the dresser, and ask her whether Bilberry had ever told her, as in duty he ought, anything about Captain Flunks?

Lucinda made no reply to her question, as not wishing to have a confidant in her own servant; but inquired of Dishcloth what she knew about him, if anything, or whether Bilberry had been talking to her upon the subject.

"What, miss! — haven't he told you, then?" exclaimed Dishcloth, with affected surprise; "why, law! that's just what I thought. He's the most deceitful young man as iver I did knows."

"Never," said Lucinda emphatically, "never, Susan, let me hear another word like this against the captain."

"Lauk, ma'am! I mean Bilberry, to be sure; though, for that matter, Mr. Flunks — — "

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"CAPTAIN Flunks, Susan."

"Well, captain, or what else, if Bilberry speaks truth, he tells I the captain — — But you not hear I say a word about him."

"Oh yes, Susan, tell me all you know," added Lucinda hastily, at the same moment becoming on one side her face the colour of the rose of York, and on the other that of the house of Lancaster.

Dishcloth then sat down, and from the fertile ground of her own invention sprung up as healthy and plentiful a bed of green falsehoods as any *lie*culturist could wish to see.

Some of these, however, were not much to the purpose. The principal one with which we have to do was, that the captain actually corresponded with another young lady; that Bilberry was entirely privy to it, as he not unfrequently carried the letters; and that he had received bribes from the captain to keep the whole a profound secret from his mistress.

The classical reason which Dishcloth assigned, in order to make her story more probable, for

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this conduct of Lucinda's lover, was, that he wished to have two strings to his bow, in order that he might use which one he liked best, and make a cat's-paw of the other. As for Bilberry, she added, that, for his deception in not telling Miss Lucinda all about it, he would be rightly served if turned neck-and-crop out of the house that very night.

Lucinda had heard few or none of her maid's last reflections; her senses were all lost in the unhappy thoughts that now thronged her brain. She sat some minutes like a sculptor's clay model, save that a slight tremor, which shook the folds of her dress like the waving of a gusty brook, evinced how much of feeling and passion raged within that

apparently quiet breast. At length she raised her eyes, and, fixing them as fiercely as a loving maid's eyes may fix, on the features of her servant, she asked emphatically,

"Susan, have you told me the TRUTH?"

"Law! ma'am, I hope you don't think I go about inventing lies about either he or anybody else?" replied Dishcloth; "though, for all that,

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I know as well as if it was now, that when you call Bilberry and question he about it, it will all be denied as flat as a flounder."

"Then who told you this?" asked the unhappy Lucinda.

"Oh, miss," observed Dishcloth, "I knows more folks than comes here, or else I shouldn't know many, I think; but he that told me said as how I must not tell who it was; and so said I to he, — 'No' said I, 'you may warrant me for keeping a secret.' Though, as far as that goes, Miss Lucinda, you know the captain keeps his man-servant as well as yourself; and I can say he be a deal better, and do a deal more of what's honest, than Bilberry, though I did incommend him to you myself. But *I* was deceived in him as much as you are, miss."

Lucinda Victoria Gruel rose from the kitchen-chair, in which she had unconsciously degraded herself by sitting, and, sweeping her flowing gown round like the twist of a summer whirlwind, hastened up stairs, with no tears in her eyes, but a passionate resolve in her bosom to write to the captain immediately, and let him

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know pretty plainly that she was aware of all his perfidy.

This was a step which Dishcloth had not contemplated might be taken; nor did she at all suspect it, when her mistress thus abruptly hastened to her sitting-room.

On the landing of the stairs Lucinda met Bilberry just returning from the passage, where he had been swinging Sir Robert, in order to get him an appetite for dinner.

"Follow me, sir, directly!" she exclaimed, in a tone our hero had never before heard from her lips. It told him he was out of favour, and made him tremble at the unconscious crime of which he had been guilty.

Lucinda sat down to her table, and began to write. The first line she indited displeased her, and the sheet went into the fire; the next proceeded about half a paragraph, with the rapidity of an arrow rather than a quill, and then came to a full stop,

as though stuck fast in the object at which it aimed. This was first read over, and then likewise committed to the flames. The third essay was allowed to remain.

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During the writing of it, Bilberry observed Miss Gruel sprinkle on the wet ink various drops of water from her painting brush, to represent those tears which refused to be wrung from any other source. Green wax and a head of Janus sealed this melancholy note. Bilberry was despatched with it instantly; but unluckily the captain happened to be from home, so that Miss Lucinda had to wait in the most miserable anxiety until evening.

Scarcely were the lamps lit when a loud and aristocratical rap was heard at the door. Lucinda shut up her book convulsively, and exclaimed, "Oh, it's the captain!" The tread of a well-turned sole, the jingle of spurs, and occasionally the poke of an iron scabbard against the stone stairs, declared that she was right.

Bilberry opened the door, and Captain George Flunks stalked in. Twice he bowed profoundly, — Lucinda but once raised her eyes as high as his elbow, and then contemplated the floor. The captain took her hand, which Lucinda allowed to be raised inanimately from her side like a pump-handle, and helplessly let fall again.

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The military hero put himself into the attitude of Napoleon, hemmed twice, and then drew from his courageous bosom Lucinda's note. Deliberately spreading it open in one hand, he placed upon it the fore finger of the other, and fixing his eyes on Miss Gruel, slowly pronounced, "Madam, — *this* note. What does it mean? Can it be, — is it possible, that my dear Lucinda has written this?" Here he stopped short, and took from his pocket a perfumed snow-white linen handkerchief, upon which he blew with his nose something approximating to the morning trumpet-call.

"I fear, sir," replied Lucinda, "there is too much truth in it. I am wrong in granting you this interview."

"No, no, by Heaven!" cried the captain, "an order to march to-morrow to the seat of war, — in which case, for your sake, I should have thrown up my commission instantly, — could not have astonished me more than this. Truth in it! — Who was your informant? This is not of your own knowledge. What villain has dared to taint your ears with such atrocious

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falsehoods? If he be a man, he shall atone at the point of this sword before to-morrow's sun: if a woman, I — I — you have listened to one totally unworthy your confidence. Before my honoured friend Sir Robert, your father, and yourself, I swear that not one word of this is true. I never dealt doubly in my life — it is unworthy a man and a soldier. Above all, I vow before God that I never wrote one single line to Miss Winnipeg, as here charged upon me!"

Lucinda raised her face to an angle of forty-five degrees backwards, and, gazing full at Flunks, asked — nothing at all, for her admiration and surprise would not allow her to speak.

"Yes," continued the captain, raising a magnificent leg from the ground and placing its foot on the bars of the firegrate, "I deny it syllable with syllable, from end to end. Now, my dear Lucinda, I beg the name of your informant."

Miss Gruel, half ashamed, as every young lady ought to be, of listening to the tales of

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her own servant, gave the captain an evasive answer, and swept out of the room, leaving her scarlet Ajax to talk Sir Robert into a nervous fever; the old gentleman, when left alone with him, always being dreadfully frightened at the captain's mighty figure, his pompous manner, and his powers of doing mischief.

Below stairs Miss Gruel called Bilberry and Susan together, and then put to the former various questions as to his having carried letters for, or received money from, the captain. To these of course our hero replied most positively in the negative. Lucinda looked at Susan, and Susan fixed her eyes on the nearest dish-cover; but said nothing. She stood convicted.

The oatmeal complexion of Miss Gruel now became flushed with rising indignation to think she should have been made to act so ridiculously by the tales of such a creature as Dishcloth; so that in few but angry words she gave this rampant maid to understand that unless she made her charge good, and gave up the name of the person from whom her information came, she should quit that house on

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the morrow. Susan began to cry first; but in the course of another minute blubbered out the name of the captain's own servant as her informant. Bilberry declared the whole

affair to be an invention of either one or the other; while Lucinda hastened up-stairs to inform the captain that the libel originally came from his own man. Flunks knit his brows like a crumpled stocking, threw open his legs after the fashion of a one-lap clothes-horse, and rung the bell violently for the purpose of despatching Bilberry to his own house to summon the offender before him.

When that young man returned and informed the captain that his servant waited in the hall below, he rose majestically from his seat, seized Sir Robert's walking-cane, and, striding down stairs, without waiting to ask a single question, fell upon the unfortunate flunkie and gave him a sound drubbing. Such a commencement soon brought on the explanation which ought to have gone before: — the three servants were again confronted, — Dishcloth was proved beyond doubt to have contrived

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the whole story, and Miss Lucinda discharged her from the premises that very night. Flunks presented his man with three guineas to purchase a plaster for his injured honour; Bilberry was higher in favour with his mistress than ever before, and thus out of a device intended for his ruin, did he reap great profit and advantage.

This chapter is both longer than the author intended, and drier than the reader likes. But perhaps in both these respects he will find the next a considerable improvement.

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CHAPTER II.

OUR HERO IS DISTURBED IN HIS SLEEP BY A VERY REMARKABLE CREATURE; WITH A DESCRIPTION OF THE MEANS WHICH HE ADOPTED IN ORDER TO RID HIMSELF OF THE NUISANCE.

SOME pages back we had occasion to insert a specimen of Mr. Thurland's powers in epistolary correspondence, from which it must have been seen that, though not educated in any public school, always excepting his mother's own college of Brazen-nose, Bilberry yet possessed some tact in the combination of words, and ability in expressing himself with distinctness and brevity. We have now to add to that specimen another, upon a totally different subject, and of a very superior description. The former was intended to excite pity, the present is calculated to produce terror; and pity and terror, being, according to the poetics of Aristotle, the

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prime objects to be attained by a good author, we shall endeavour to display the abilities of Mr. Thurland, in these two productions touching pity and terror, to the best advantage.

It so happened that Bilberry's lodging-room, beneath Sir Robert Gruel's roof, was at the back of the house, the window looking down on to the flat leads of a neighbouring tenement that stood behind Sir Robert's, like a low-headed footman behind his master. It chanced to be unoccupied at the time of young Thurland's entering the Knight of Wenborough's service, and so it remained up to within a fortnight of the time of which we are about to speak.

Who the new tenants were, Bilberry knew not; but amongst them was a strange bachelor, who had an odd habit of coming out on to the aforementioned leads, close under the window of the room where Bilberry slept, regularly every night about ten o'clock, just as our hero was going to bed, for the purpose of practising on an instrument called a French horn. This he did invariably, for he appeared to be an enthusiast in his profession, whether it rained or blew

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a hurricane: and many a time has Bilberry overheard him striving against the blast which should make the biggest noise, until he could no longer get a single breath out in consequence of the force of the wind which rushed by the other end of his trumpet, while he himself, buttoned tightly up from the *os pubis* to the chin, with a scraggy pair of coat-tails like the ends of two dead rushes, striving to disengage themselves from their tether behind him, displayed a figure akin in many respects to that of a demon in mourning. All this might at first amuse rather than aggravate; but eight or ten nights of it proved too much: for in truth he was after all a miserable blower, producing bass where he meant it to be tenor, and neither one nor the other, nor anything else with a musical name, where it should have been treble. In short, the sound of his horn, in point of melody, was precisely similar to the voice of some man-lad, whose voice is cracked during its transition from youth to puberty; and who consequently squeaks, croaks, and splutters, after a modulation the most preposterous and inopportune.

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Having previously prepared a document of which the following is a correct copy, Bilberry one night watched his opportunity, and just as this musician was about to

commence operations, opened his window, and, with a stone attached to give it weight, flung the letter at him for immediate perusal. It was so well aimed as to hit him on the ribs; and from the manner in which he conducted himself, it appears most probable that at first he supposed it to be the amorous epistle of some young lady whom his music had charmed from her midnight pillow, and who had taken this romantic method of divulging her attachment; for no sooner did he observe something white lying at his feet, than he picked it up, and, finding it to be a letter, disengaged it from the stone, and turning round towards Bilberry's window, with his horn tucked under his arm, kissed it devoutly several times, merely on the strength of the loving suppositions he had formed touching its contents. He then in pure gratitude blew a noise intended for the tune of "Ever thine, my lady fair," and in a most impatient, but heroic mood, bowed towards

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the casement and retired. What was his disappointment and consternation on reading, instead of a sheet of sighs and admiration, this severely critical epistle.

"Sir, — Although a perfect stranger to your person, if not to your habits, allow me to inform you that, however agreeable your blowing may be to your own infernal ears, it is a most horrible nuisance to every one of your neighbours all round. Not long ago, I was under the necessity of rising in the night to empty upon a conclave of serenading tom and tabby cats, assembled on the very leads where you yourself now exercise your musical abilities, the contents of a jug of water, and having by that means rid myself and my neighbours of a most infamous disturbance, which, after all, appears to have been but to be succeeded by another no less worrying, — I beg most respectfully and firmly to assure you, that, unless you adopt another course, and select some less Christian situation in which to improve yourself on the French horn, I shall, after three nights' notice, feel myself under the unpleasant necessity of

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putting a stop to your noise also, in precisely the same manner as the aforesaid.

"With every honour,

"Your good friend,

"BILBERRY THURLAND."

That very same night, within a few minutes after our hero had fallen asleep in the comfortable belief that the musician was effectually and for ever silenced, he was suddenly awakened by the blast of a trumpet.

It sung a note of loud defiance from the leads below, similar to that heard from the walls of a mighty city when in a state of siege. Bilberry crept to the corner of his window, and by aid of a lamp in an adjoining back street, beheld the correspondent to whom his last letter was addressed, blowing — not over the parapet as usual, but straight in front of the house, with his horn elevated to such an angle, that had what passed through been shot instead of wind, it must inevitably have hit the casement. On perceiving this singular illustration of the dark spirit of revenge, our hero could

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not forbear laughing most heartily; and instead of taking up cudgels of opposition immediately, as some foolish people in his case would have done, he quietly allowed the enraged musician in peace and quietness to blow himself satisfied. This, however, occupied more time than Bilberry had calculated upon; for this midnight Orpheus did not retire until he had played over in his strongest style every scrap and odd end of all the tunes with which his imagination had got stored since the days of his childhood; and these were so numerous, that the grey sky of morning began to look coldly over the silent house-tops ere his last tune of "Croppies lie down" was finished. Before this, Mr. Thurland had long retired again to his bedtick; so that he at length succeeded in obtaining a sound though short nap until seven o'clock.

But Bilberry had not yet received the full measure of this Apollo's wrath. In the dusk of the evening a letter was delivered at Sir Robert Gruel's kitchen door by the very individual himself who wrote it, and who thus enacted at once the parts of scribe and postman.

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By an unhappy accident (the letter being without direction) it was carried up-stairs and delivered to Sir Robert, who in great nervous excitement opened it, and read as follows:

"SIR, — The insolent and hignerant manner that you hav seed proper to tell me you do not like my music, and to compear it to tomcats, only shows as you haven't no taste, and is beneath my most despickable notis. If you had not such a impedant countenance on your face it would be all the better, let me tell you. Howiver, I do warrant it, if you

should hav the barefacedness to throw water upon me, and spoil my instrument, I shall sarternly treat you as a gentleman should. So I remane

"Your inflated enemy,

"JOSEPH RATBY,

"The French Horn Blower."

The old knight shivered from head to foot when he had read this dreadful philippic. Without being able exactly to understand its scope and tendency, or to what circumstances and

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events it alluded, he yet conceived it to contain against him some terrible denunciations and threatenings, clothed in language highly metaphorical and studiously shrouded in mystery.

The phrases — "impedant countenance on your face, — tom-cats, — and inflated enemy," gave him especial trouble.

He rapped the thick end of his walking-cane violently on the table, for his daughter Lucinda, to whom, on her appearance — after cautiously observing that all the doors were shut, lest any one should overhear the treason that had been uttered against him — he communicated, with a trembling hand, Mr. Ratby's epistle.

Now it so chanced that although Miss Gruel's apartments were in front of the house, she also had in part been disturbed these several nights by the very same musical nuisance; consequently her insight into the matter was something more distinct than that of the old boy her father.

Judging pretty correctly how the affair stood, she lost no time in re-stringing Sir Robert's

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nerves by assuring him that the whole business was founded in mistake, the letter being without address, and most probably intended for his man Bilberry, instead of himself Sir Robert shook his head doubtingly, as thinking Lucinda's interpretation to be a fabrication devised on purpose for his consolement; and, regarding that damsel with an eye of very equivocal faith, hinted his fears that the matter might terminate fatally to himself.

Lucinda carried away the letter, and, having summoned Bilberry before her, soon received from him the assurance that her conjectures were just. She expressed her entire concurrence in the plan he had formed for getting rid of the horn blower, if possible; so that our hero, supported in his plans by the sanction of his mistress, proceeded to carry them into execution with additional alacrity.

Having provided himself with a tin tube half an inch in diameter and two feet in length, together with a peck of peas in a bag, which he tied to his waist, a little after nine o'clock Bilberry hastened up-stairs in the dark, and poking

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his way through a wilderness of lumber in the garrets, scrambled through a trap-door on to the roof of Sir Robert's house. From thence he climbed over various eaves of adjoining buildings, slipped down leaden gutters, and crept along spouts, until he came to a stack of chimneys, which appeared convenient for his purpose. It consisted of four funnels together, with niches between big enough to admit a human body. From this situation he commanded an excellent view of Mr. Ratby's leads; and, also, from their immediate proximity, could direct his fire upon the enemy with the same advantages as did those who, in more heroic times, occupied the position of Bunker's Hill. It likewise recommended itself to Bilberry's taste by being so far removed from Sir Robert Gruel's house, that Joseph Ratby the musician would never suspect the same gentleman who threatened him so terribly from the back window of that place of abode, to be identical with him who was now preparing to shower down upon his head a storm of autumnal peas.

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On the other hand, it soon became evident that Mr. Ratby also had prepared himself for a regular campaign. Fully determined not to be checked in his sounding career by the reflections of any man, in however great a house he might reside, the musician stepped gallantly forth from his skylight on to the leads, about half an hour earlier than his usual time, and within ten or fifteen minutes after our hero had ensconced himself behind the bulwark above described. He had wrapped himself in a prodigious great-coat, which hung about him in idle folds like the skin of a rhinoceros. A large lantern he had likewise brought up, and left burning just within the skylight, in readiness to light himself to bed when his blowing had all blown over. Bilberry also observed him set

down by his side a small basket of pebble-stones, with which, in all likelihood, he intended to defend himself, should either Bilberry Thurland, or any other rogue of a neighbour, attempt again to molest him. First, he took a cautious survey of Bilberry's casement, and, perceiving no signs of immediate danger, erected himself

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in a commanding attitude, like that in which the chivalrous and epic reader might imagine the bold Hector himself once stood on the towers of Troy, he gave his horn a few flourishes, and instantly clapping it to his mouth, drove through its rifted passage a blast sufficient to shake the walls of Jericho.

At the same moment Bilberry, who had cautiously watched these proceedings, directed the funnel, and poured a charge of peas in his rear. This diverted the attention of Mr. Ratby, who soon perceived by the rattling of the vegetable shot upon the leads that he was assailed by some unseen hand. He immediately fetched out the lantern from his skylight, and holding it up, scrutinized as well as he could every window that overlooked his arena all round. During this search, Bilberry found several other very favourable opportunities, of which he took excellent advantage, for following up the attack. He ejected his peas like chain-shot in a regular string, until the musician became almost confounded to know from whence they came. At length, in spite of all Bilberry's variations, he found

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out the general direction of the fire so sufficiently as to be able to trace it to the individual house our hero was upon; but, of course, he never suspected it came from the roof, where now Bilberry sat laughing at him from between the chimneys. His eyes were fiercely and wholly directed to an unlucky window, about ten or twelve feet below the roof, and almost immediately under the stack of funnels where young Thurland was ensconced.

Mr. Ratby appeared to have very fully made up his mind that all the insult he received came from some mysterious corner-hole in that suspected casement; for in great fury did he snatch up his basket of pebble-stones, and open upon the panes one of the most destructive fires recorded in warlike history. A minute or two sufficed to demolish the lot; while Bilberry behind the chimneys above, rejoiced most heartily at the odd turn which his adventure appeared to be taking.

The jingle of broken glass and rattle of stones soon aroused the inmates, several of whom appeared at other windows calling to one another

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to know what was the matter; while, to Bilberry's great consternation, from a skylight in the roof on which he stood suddenly emerged a gentleman in his night-gown and slippers, who placed himself at the corner of the very stack of chimneys amongst which Mr. Thurland was hidden. There he waited several awful minutes, anxious to ascertain the cause of this extraordinary and untimely disturbance; but, very satisfactorily to Bilberry, a raw gusty wind, which happened then to be blowing from the north, soon compelled him to return to his garret.

Meantime, from the leads below, Bilberry could hear the voice of the enraged musician as he railed in good round terms at the neighbours whose window he had broken, pronouncing them villains and liars, if they denied any knowledge of the insults he had received, besides threatening to demolish the whole house, if the least molestation should be offered him again.

Bilberry overheard this; so, pointing his tube at the head of the speaker, blew down upon him another salute of peas. This drove

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him half-frantic; he threw the whole of his pebbles, basket and all, at the house together; while the tenants within, now aggravated to a pitch only inferior to that enjoyed, by Mr. Rat-by, began to fling at him from the inside any kind of missile that chance put in their way. In the blind fury of this engagement, Bilberry kept up an incessant discharge at the person of his enemy, while he, enraged still more and more by what he felt, though unable to discriminate from whence it came, and believing that his antagonists were only tantalizing him on purpose, ran about his leads in a perfect fury. Everything they threw at him he returned with greater impetuosity, until at last, ammunition running slack, and Ratby having not much abated his wrath, without thinking or caring about consequences, he fairly finished up by hurling even his French horn itself at a fierce artilleryman, who had been pretty active against him from a neighbouring casement. This indignity was returned by a small old round table being thrust through the window at him. At the same moment Bilberry observed an amorous

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tom-cat stealing down one of the gutters; so, seizing him by the back, he gave a grand conclusion to his share in the battle by flinging that astonished animal itself at the head of Mr. Ratby.

How the affair terminated was not in its particulars known to our hero, for he now found it convenient to hide himself very closely until the last of the storm should be spent, fearing as he did that a search might by some possibility be made on the roof ere he could escape. While in this situation, Bilberry heard something like a second disturbance in the garret beneath his feet; some one or other having apparently come up stairs and charged the gentleman of the night-gown and slippers with having himself thrown missiles from the roof. Mr. Thurland thought it about time to decamp; so first looking out for a clear course, he went down on his hands and feet and crept back again to the top of Sir Robert Gruel's house, rejoicing to his soul in the success of his mischievous adventure.

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Early in the morning hostilities were renewed between Ratby and his neighbours.

But it not being so much our duty to relate this as some other matters more immediately concerning us, yet remaining behind, we will briefly observe, that eventually the musician was about cured, he never venturing out to blow his horn, except on occasion of the king's birth-day, the fifth of November, and the like, when he appeared to trust to the loyalty and faith of those around him for security. Bilberry remained ever undiscovered, besides receiving a considerable present from his mistress, and the hearty thanks of Sir Robert for having effectually drubbed one whose letter had frightened him so dreadfully.

But another event was at hand in which Sir Robert himself was destined to make a conspicuous figure.

Since the little quarrel between Miss Lucinda and Captain Flunks, which the reader will recollect arose in consequence of the fabrications of Dishcloth, this pair had been more happy

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than ever, till even a certain ceremony, which usually concludes these affairs, began to be anticipated in the household. At length the very day was appointed when Miss Gruel and Flunks were to be married. Sir Robert had given his consent in consequence of the

captain having threatened to go to war if he did not; but now the event was finally determined on, the old knight privately resolved to celebrate it after a new fashion and one peculiar to himself. His design was communicated to no one save Bilberry, whose assistance and wit were necessary to its execution; but the old chap bound him down by oath not to divulge anything before it was fully ripe.

We however, being under no such restrictions, shall proceed to discover the plot immediately.

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CHAPTER III.

A FREAK OF SIR ROBERT GRUEL'S ON HIS DAUGHTER'S WEDDING DAY. — THE DISASTER WHICH HAPPENS THEREON — BILBERRY EXHIBITS BEFORE THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CODGERS. — DEATH OF SIR ROBERT.

THE reader already knows something of the kind of British sports in which Sir Robert Gruel was accustomed to indulge himself.

We have now to add to that catalogue another rather odd game at which he played for the first time on the day of his daughter's wedding. Providing, also, the reader should discover something else of a humorous nature appended to the following account, he need not feel much astonished.

About three weeks before Miss Lucinda's wedding day, Sir Robert one afternoon rang the bell very suddenly, as though some violent crotchet had all at once laid forcible hands

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upon him. He commanded Mr. Thurland to be sent up to him immediately.

When this young man appeared, "Now, Bilberry," said Sir Robert, "sit down a bit, — come, come." And he pushed him the fellow stool to that on which he rested his own feet. Bilberry sat down with his knees propped into his eyes, so miserably were his fine limbs crumpled up, while his master proceeded to inform him —

"A new thing, Bil, has just come into my head, and I am in a hurry to tell it you directly for fear I should forget it again."

"Indeed, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Thurland, much rejoiced to find Sir Robert's head had taken a turn of some sort; "I am very glad to hear it."

"Stop a bit, I shall never remember it if you interrupt me this way! I have been thinking whether, instead of that unpleasant swing yonder, I could not have a nice big rocking-horse to exercise on; one, you know, about fourteen hands high, or so, and saddled like a live one."

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"Certainly, sir," observed Bilberry, "only I am afraid there are none made so big."

For a moment Sir Robert's designs seemed knocked on the head by this answer; and as he pored philosophically on the floor, a small tear crept like a mouse from the inner corner of his right eye; the other remained as dry as an old fossil. By and bye he recovered himself and observed, "Yes, yes, I think I have seen such in the shops."

"And if not, Sir Robert," replied Bilberry encouragingly, "you could have one made."

"Truly, truly; now I did not think of that; oh, certainly, to be sure I could. Well, that is very clever."

And then the old chap smiled pleasingly during the space of several minutes, after which he presented Bilberry with half-a-guinea in gold as a piece of encouragement for the ability he had displayed in his last answer.

The conclusion of this matter was, that Bilberry should order a rocking-horse the size of life, to be constructed on the best principles, and delivered within eighteen days at Sir Robert's

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house; while the old child himself determined to astonish the company on the day of Lucinda's wedding with a first sight of this wooden Pegasus and himself mounted thereon.

The reader we suppose will have no objection with us to jump over the joiner's shop, and go forward to that glorious time when this mighty foal, this lineal descendant of the Trojan steed, was brought forth.

In order to keep the affair more secret the horse was privately introduced on to the premises in a dark night, just as its immortal predecessor also was inveigled within the walls of Troy town. Sir Robert had gone to bed previously, leaving Bilberry up to manage the whole affair himself; but the old boy could not sleep a wink for expectation; and when at last he heard, by the noise made, of its arrival, he got up again, and putting

on only his dressing-gown, went out as soon as the men were gone, to try it as it stood in the room below stairs, where on the morrow he intended to exhibit. Mounted on rockers as big as an inverted bridge, it appeared truly a gigantic charger.

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Sir Robert had to ascend the kitchen-maid's steps before he could get on to it; but when on and in motion he pronounced its swing most delightful. This exercise he kept up a very considerable time with great vigour, until at length Bilberry observed the motion to be gradually subsiding; yet the old man said nothing but remained sitting very quietly.

When it had finally settled to the point of rest, Mr. Thurland laughed heartily to find that Sir Robert had actually rocked himself sound asleep. He had been an excellent horseman in his day: Bilberry did not much fear his falling off; and having besides been on some former occasions strictly charged never on any account to awake his master from sleep, for fear of shocking his nerves, he silently sneaked off to bed, and left Sir Robert sitting in the same position till morning.

Waking before daylight, however, through dreaming about his horse, the old gentleman discovered his situation. Having first said his prayers, and thanked Providence for holding him on all night, he slid down one of the hind

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legs and mizzled away to his bed-room before the house was stirring.

Next morning the important ceremony was performed, by which she who last night was Lucinda Gruel became suddenly metamorphosed into Lady Flunks. A magnificent party of the glory of Wen borough was present, excepting only that Miss Winnipeg, of whom a short time before Lucinda had been so jealous.

Sir Robert was rejoiced to the toe ends. He flew his kite that morning in honour of the event, besides tying his shoes with blue ribbon, and putting on a pair of scarlet velvet breeches which once clothed the limbs of his great grandfather.

In the afternoon, when all the company were in the height of enjoyment, Sir Robert contrived to steal off to his stable; soon after which he sent Bilberry before the company to announce the commencement of the knight's performances on the rocking-horse. The bride and bridegroom led the way, followed by Colonel and Mrs. Albatross, Lady Ironing, Captain Broth, Miss Louisa Frankincense, Belinda

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Cauliflower, besides Commodore Trump, his wife, and a small family of the Trumps.

The window of the room in which Sir Robert was about to display his agility looked into a pleasant garden, which extended before the house, while a considerably large pond, intended for gold fish, was made within about eight yards, and directly in front, of the window.

When all the company were on the green, the curtain was suddenly withdrawn, and Sir Robert was discovered in full swing on his magnificent steed, with the head turned towards the light. The sashes, however, had been removed, so as to present between him and the pond that which most good people desire — a clear stage and no favour. Determined on showing off to advantage, the old knight rocked with increasing speed, until at length he got into a most furious gallop. The ladies turned pale, and cried, "Stop him! stop him!" Captain Flunks exclaimed, "By Heavens! but this is most extraordinary!"

Mrs. Albatross looked at that "ancient mariner," Commodore Trump, very supernaturally;

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while the commodore himself held that wedding guest his wife by the button, and pinned her to the spot with his eye. At this moment Sir Robert flew over the head of his horse like a bat. Everybody screamed, and about half the company were soused into the pond along with the rider. The wooden tail of the steed stuck fast in the ceiling.

So far from this being a disastrous occurrence, we are inclined to regard it as most fortunate; for, had the old knight fallen on dry ground, life must necessarily have been pushed out of him by the concussion. As it was, nobody received much more material damage than in general results from an unanticipated ducking. Sir Robert was taken out of the water in a fit. His face resembled that of the creature sometimes exhibited as a mermaid; and his coat was covered with a quantity of ducksmeat which had been suffered to accumulate on the water. He was carried to bed, while the remaining part of the unfortunates hastened home. The wedding-day was spoiled. Mrs. Flunks cried most bitterly; the captain, Colonel Albatross,

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and Commodore Trump, acted like three stoic philosophers, and drank their wine together in peace.

Whether through the operation of the liquor, or in consequence of conversation growing stale, is not known; but from some cause or other, however mysterious, certain it is, that later in the evening these three worthies enjoyed one another's company so much as to fall together into a sound sleep. After about an hour and a half of this mutual communion, Commodore Trump opened his eyes, and seeing his two friends asleep, judged it not an inopportune moment to retire to his own home. He accordingly stole out, and fancying himself upstairs instead of on the ground-floor, opened a door, with the intention of descending below, and walked, very well pleased with himself, into a closet under the stairs. On turning round, however, he soon discovered his mistake; but anxious to get out again without being perceived by any one, lest he should be suspected of criminal intentions in having thrust himself into a stranger's closet, he pulled

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off his boots, listened if any soul was stirring, and then was about to creep back out again, when he heard footsteps in the hall. The commodore shrunk in and held the door to; but the individual outside did not retire so immediately as could have been wished, in consequence of which the commodore sat down on an old scraper, which had been thrown by, to rest himself. Overcome by the wedding wine, before long he fell asleep again. Now it was Sisera the maid whom the commodore had heard, as that damsel trimmed a lamp at the foot of the stairs.

After he had fallen asleep, she, on the other hand, happened to overhear some slight noise that he made in the closet. Without more to do, she ran down into the kitchen, and clasping Mr. Thurland round the neck in an agony, shrieked out that there was either a ghost or a rat in the closet under the stairs.

Bilberry, being no believer in ghosts, thought it most likely to be a rat; so without more ado he fetched old Gruel's mastiff out of the yard, and, taking the poker in his hand, conveyed

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the dog up stairs into the hall. No sooner had this four-legged guardian put his nose to the nick under the door than he smelt Commodore Trump, and gave a suspicious growl. At the same moment the old sailor drew a long breath through that musical snuffbox, his nose, as if in defiance of those outside; and after a modulation which led Bilberry to

believe that some strange animal or other had got into the place, very different to an ordinary rat. He began to think the poker not sufficient, and therefore returned to the kitchen for an old blunderbuss that hung over the fireplace for the defence of that quarter of the premises.

The muzzle of this piece Bilberry very cautiously introduced between the door and doorpost, and, pointing it downward, let fly. The report shook the whole house-side to its foundation; frightened Sir Robert Gruel so dreadfully in his bed that he crept altogether under the clothes, and refused to be coaxed out again till daylight; wakened Captain Flunks and his friend Albatross from their nap, and brought
them down stairs with the impetuosity of a couple of wild men: while the concussion of the blunderbuss knocked Bilberry himself flat on his back; and at the same moment he heard a voice from the closet exclaim, “Avast, lubber! I’m the commodore!”

At all events, then, he was not killed outright. But to finish the business, if possible, at the same instant the mastiff dashed into the closet, and furiously attacked the occupant. Bilberry jumped up in a terrible fright and rushed after him. The place was filled with smoke so as entirely to blind everything; but by the powers of touch our hero was enabled to find the dog, and get a firm hold of his tail. By this member, then did Bilberry draw him forth; the dog in turn having fast hold of the commodore’s coat-collar, and pulling him just as he himself was pulled. Captain Flunks soon saw that Bilberry required assistance, and therefore seized him round the waist, and likewise commenced pulling, while Colonel Albatross in turn took the captain by the coat-tails; and thus they succeeded in drawing the commodore
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to light. Luckily, he had sustained little damage, and no fright at all; but, for all that, he set to blowing a stiff gale of abuse at Bilberry for not spying colours before he fired.

Nor ever, from that hour to the last that Mr. Thurland remained in his present situation, did the commodore visit at the house without giving him a new hash of the old dish of abuse at the first opportunity.

If it be asked why these two incidents of the rocking-horse and the closet, so unconnected as they are with each other, have been introduced in this biography, our reason is, that through their medium we may farther introduce a remarkable illustration

of the strange comments which the world in general indulges itself in making on the private affairs of other people.

In the evening of the following day, Bilberry took the opportunity, while out on an errand, of dropping slyly into a small public-house in the neighbourhood of Sir Robert's, for the purpose of half an hour's recreation. Thinking himself sufficiently respectable, he walked into the parlour without asking questions, and immediately

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found himself in the midst of a very silent and grave assembly of philosophers, who might have been mistaken for so many Roman senators, had not each man, in a very unsenator-like manner, got a pipe stuck in his mouth, and a pot of ale before him. Several turned their eyes on Mr. Thurland, as though some strange tom-cat had entered 'the room, but none spoke. Bilberry on his part drank his glass, and said nothing.

At length a new member entered, recognised all the company except Bilberry, and took his seat. He was the first to open his mouth.

"Gentlemen," said he, "have any of you heard what happened to Sir Robert Gruel yesterday?" Nobody spoke, and the querist himself was obliged to add, "Because, I understand, he tumbled down stairs, or something of the kind, and is not expected to recover."

"Well, I don't know," observed another; "your story may be true, but *I* was told he fell out of the chamber-window."

"That's different to what *I* heard," said a third. "If my information be correct, he tried

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to kill himself by jumping off the house-top into his fish-pond."

"And mine is different to you all!" exclaimed another very triumphantly. "I have every reason to believe that he only tumbled over a stone and hurt his finger; but people are so fond of making out a great deal about nothing." "Brother Simons — " added a fifth, who was about proceeding to give his illustration of the matter, when several voices of reprehension broke out all of a sudden.

"Silence! silence, gentlemen! — Mr. Ratby speaks!"

Their eyes had seen that president's mouth preparing for action, and instant silence was enjoined until the oracle should be delivered.

"No, no," said he; "I tell you, you know nothing at all about it, none on you. I tell you, Sir Robert" — here he lit his pipe — "Sir Robert has got a sort of swing put up in his house: well, he was swinging on it; Commodore Trump was swinging him, when he purposely broke it down, and pitched Sir Robert clean out of the chamber-window. He fell into his horse-pond,

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and dashed his brains out against the water; and his man-servant afterwards shot the commodore."

Several present would have disputed this, if delivered by any other lips; but before the mouth of President Ratby all were silent.

Bilberry looked across the table, and beheld the French-horn blower in the person of this Delphic oracle. He, however, had little or no knowledge of Mr. Thurland, when that hero rose to speak, as thinking he could enlighten the assembly a little.

"Gentlemen!" said he.

But at once Mr. Ratby rose, and stopped him by asking,

"Are you, sir, a member of this society?"

"Certainly," replied Bilberry; "so long as I remain present, I presume I am one of the society."

"Have you paid threepence to speak?" asked the same officer.

"No," replied Mr. Thurland, "nor ever will to any man."

"Then, sir," Mr. Ratby observed, "it is

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against the tenth rule of this society that you should speak."

"And it is against all the rules of common society," Bilberry again added, in spite of the efforts to put him down, "that you should blow your horn at midnight."

A brother now pulled Mr. Thurland's laps very forcibly, while two others seized him by an arm each, and squeezed him down.

Mr. Ratby then reached from the wall a large board, on which was pasted a sheet of rules for the club, and read at Mr. Thurland as follows: "'Whereas we, the undersigned, have constituted ourselves into a club or society, called the Royal Society of Codgers, for the purposes of mutual information on all and any subjects" — Such is part of the preamble. The tenth rule applies to you, sir. — 'And though we meet every night for the

purposes of collecting knowledge, yet if any stranger enters this room during the times of the society's sittings, and presumes to speak or to enlighten our minds on any subject, without first paying threepence for a jug of ale to the president, he shall by unanimous

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consent be considered unfit to remain, and the president shall request him to withdraw. If he prove refractory, it shall remain with the society to act as then and there shall seem to them most proper.' — Now, sir," continued the musical president, "the unpleasant duty involves upon me of requesting that, in concord with this rule, you do withdraw. The eleventh rule allows you five minutes to finish your ale." "And that five minutes — " shouted Bilberry, while the codgers present, to drown his voice, cried 'No, no, no!" whistled, groaned, hissed, bellowed, and brayed like a fold of asses.

But Bilberry jumped manfully on to his chair, and insisted on continuing his speech.

"That five minutes I will use in telling you that' it is no denial to me to withdraw from a parcel of ignorant noisy blackguards like you. I never in my life went into a company of bigger fools than you are, and that I tell you to your faces. As to that president, I'll fight — pint of ale — "

But the noise and stamping increased so much that we can report no more of Mr. Thurland's

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address. Suffice it that he stood on his legs ten minutes, and then very deliberately put on his hat and walked out. Just as he had reached the outside of the door, three or four pots came against the panels; while, ere the door closed, the matter of about a pint of ale was hurled through the nick slap into the face of the landlord, who had just pushed by Mr. Thurland, and was entering the room to know what could be the matter.

Several of the enraged brethren followed Bilberry into the street; but, instead of falling upon him, as he confidently anticipated, they sneaked round the house on other duties.

When Bilberry got back home, to his great consternation and sorrow he found his master, Sir Robert, lying, as was believed, at the point of death. Since being thrown from his horse he had become so excessively nervous as to fancy himself all in pieces; and, under the belief that his mouth was no bigger than a button-hole, had refused food unless administered with a tea-spoon.

Under these circumstances Captain Flunks

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had taken up his residence in the house for the present, until it should be known how this disastrous piece of fun might terminate.

During the night, Bilberry was called up by the nurse. Sir Robert wished to see him. Very strangely, he shook hands with Mr. Thurland when he appeared by his bed-side; told him how glad he was to see him, and that he had taken a fancy to have a game of marbles. A tea-board was placed on the bed-clothes, and upon it Sir Robert and Bilberry played. The most unhappy circumstance was, that the old boy felt very dissatisfied unless Bilberry rapped his knuckles keenly whenever he had occasion to shoot at them.

This play revived his spirits, but exhausted his body. He lay down on his back and cried bitterly. The nurse wiped his cheeks, but they become not dry. A fresh flood rolled down them ever and ever like a stream, until Bilberry half wondered whether it could be tears or only common water. The physician, who lived next door, was instantly summoned. Captain Flunks and his lady, who had not long retired in weariness,

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were again called up; but before any of these were around him, Sir Robert asked for a large doll which had been dressed on purpose for him, squeezed it a little between his hands, muttered about half of the Lord's prayer, and expired so calmly that they knew not at what moment he was gone.

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CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH ARE MANY GRAVE REFLECTIONS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS; TOGETHER WITH SOME CIRCUMSTANCES OF IMPORTANCE TO ALL WHO FEEL INTERESTED IN THIS HISTORY.

IT is a hard case when Death treads so keenly on the heel of Marriage. But, since — as the great philosophers of the earth have long ago discovered, and are yet every day engaged in discovering — Death stops neither for times nor seasons, nor knocks to ask if it be convenient for those whom he would see, to see him; but walks straight in, and carries away his victims; let us suspend our wonder that he has stepped into this book at an unexpected and inopportune moment. It is in keeping with his character, and therefore no matter for astonishment.

Let us bear it as did the old knight's own

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daughter Lucinda, who, thus oddly surprised between Death and Marriage, like Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy, cried on one side her face, and looked agreeable on the other.

Nor need we enter into the particulars of the funeral and all its concomitants, while a much more important affair is waiting to be discussed; for everybody must be aware, that in those circles of society in which such characters as the Gruels generally move, the mere death and burial of a father is not half so important an event to the hearts of the survivors as that of reading his will. To the reading of the will then let us come. Yet first it is proper to state that no sooner was the old gentleman's death publicly announced, than several score of hitherto unknown and very remote relations of his, all branches, twigs, and fibres of the Gruels, came flocking about the house in anxious desire to be allowed to onion their eyes over the corpse. At least nineteen out of every twenty of these had never in their lives before entered the premises, or even so much as asked once about Sir Robert's health. But now, like a flight of carrion

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crows that scent the dead from afar, did they darken the air by their numbers as they settled down around the corpse in hopes of getting one peck at least out of what remained. Very justly however, as it eventually proved, Sir Robert had thought no more of them than heretofore had they of him, for not a single farthing was there for ever an one of them.

As to Mrs. Lucinda Flunks, whether from her dislike to see her father's bones picked in that fashion, or that she feared any of them might try to carry off a little property, we shall not say; but certain it is, from some good cause or other, she became highly offended by the visits of so many obscurities, and eventually ordered the door to be shut in their faces; remarking at the same time to her husband the captain, "Really, my dear, if we were to acknowledge everybody as relations who choose to call themselves Gruels, we might literally be at the head of a ragged army. On such an occasion as this, we are continually hearing of one new Gruel or another, — all poor, — till I am wearied

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to death of it. Gruel, Gruel, Gruel; there is nothing but Gruel."

At length all other affairs were settled, and the will was read. Sir Robert had left all his dwellings, lands, and personal possessions, amounting to about twenty-five thousand pounds, to his daughter Lucinda Victoria; besides seven thousand in mortgages and the like. Having no other immediate relatives except one damsel of whom we shall speak directly, and five nephews' sons, to them, with the first exception, he bequeathed fifty pounds a-piece. But to that girl just alluded to, and of whom Mrs. Lucinda had never before heard, he left, as his natural daughter, if she were alive and could be found, the sum of three thousand in money. Her name was Elizabeth Bunting; and, as it was thought, proper directions were given the executors where to find her out. When Mr. Thurland heard this, he changed colour, — red and pale. Why, we shall know in time; but soon were his spirits raised when informed in the next breath that Sir Robert had

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left Bilberry himself a legacy of seventy-five pounds. The rest is of little consequence to us, and therefore we will pass it over. Lest the reader should imagine it strange that the old knight did not very well know what had become of his daughter Miss Bunting, we must state, that she being the child of a poor woman whom he had seen on some one of his rambles in the country about that town of Wetherton spoken of by Mr. Pogson on a former occasion, he had thought it beneath him to take any further notice of her, more than by occasionally submitting to be informed she was in existence, and now and then transmitting a trifle of money to her mother through secret channels. Most likely some compunctious visitings had disturbed his latter hours on this account, and so induced him to make the best reparation now remaining in his power. Perhaps, even the incident of his caressing the doll in his last moments might have arisen from some tender recollection yet lingering in his mind concerning this girl, whom he had never seen since she was an infant.

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Omitting farther reflections and conjectures, we must now beg to state, that, although during the above period of Mr. Thurland's stay at Sir Robert's, his heart and mind had not altogether abandoned the anchors by which they were kept from drifting too far from the unfortunate Bessy, yet did this season of death and mourning lead him to regard still more seriously the circumstances existing between himself and her.

Very sincerely did he at heart regret the incident which, though far from being entirely criminal on his part, was the immediate cause of her so abruptly quitting him. His thoughts had often recurred to it between that time and this, and as often had he wished for that explanation with her which only he felt was necessary to a perfect reconciliation. For though, at the moment when first he learned how she had left him, a slight pleasure at the thoughts of being once more free did passingly cross his bosom, yet it soon died, and that real spark of affection, which before seemed rapidly growing dim, quickly began, now she was gone from him perhaps

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for ever, to glow brighter and brighter as the period of absence increased.

Various times had he called at widow Thornton's in the vain hope of learning where and by what means she lived. All that he could learn was, that Bessy had been there but twice since her departure, that she appeared sufficiently respectable, and that her child was, like all other children, the finest in the world.

On the occasion of every call, Bilberry had left what money he could wring from himself in the hands of widow Thornton to be given to Bessy whenever she might visit there; but whether that unhappy creature ever received it, or whether, instead, the old lady appropriated it to her own private use, of course he had no means of ascertaining.

As to what may have appeared the rather remarkable fact of Bilberry's having changed colour when, during his attendance on his mistress at the reading of Sir Robert's will, he heard mentioned the name of an unknown daughter, with the sum bequeathed to her, it really arose in consequence of one of those sudden

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hopes of advancing himself, to which like fits he was rather subject, springing up all at once in his bosom. He thought what a pleasant match might be made if he could but meet with that daughter and obtain her consent.

At the same time, his whole soul was filled with thoughts and conjectures concerning her he already loved, and who should have been his wife. Nor in this was there either fickleness or cause for wonder. The feelings of our hero were perfectly consistent, as will .in a while be seen; for although at present these circumstances may appear somewhat involved in doubt, the reader may be assured that at the end of this book he shall part perfectly satisfied.

Late in the evening of the same day on which Sir Robert's will was read, Bilberry paid another visit to Cinder-alley. Widow Thornton happened to be gone to bed; but, without heeding that circumstance, Mr. Thurland knocked her up again for the purpose of making some inquiries about Bessy. Answering him from the chamber-window, the old lady again stated that she knew nothing whatever of her late lodger's

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residence, not even whether it was in the same town or miles away; and as Bessy herself had not called upon her again since his last visit, she could give him no additional information concerning her. Bilberry was unsatisfied; he half suspected the widow of purposely keeping the secret at Bessy's request, and therefore, offered her a bribe of five shillings to discover the truth to him. It was in vain; she answered that she should like the money well enough, God knew; but if he were to offer her the whole world, she could tell him no more.

Dejected, yet more resolute, and even more loving, through opposition, he returned home, revolving in his mind a hundred plans for finding her out. All were in turn approved and then rejected; until, everything appearing impossible, he at length began to quarrel with himself for having acted in so unjust and foolish a manner with one who, whatever else she might be, at least had loved him well, and would have done him right, had he acted better and done the same to her.

Thoughts like these continually obtruded

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themselves upon him, day and night; and during the space of even several weeks he remained in a very serious, if not rather a melancholy frame of mind. It was evident that something had occurred, or some new and more favourable reflections had been formed in his mind respecting her whom he had led away, and in one sense deceived. But what they were he at that time communicated to no one, and therefore we in turn cannot communicate them to the reader. He became evidently unhappy; he meditated some sort of change or other, as evinced in the fact of his even hesitating to accept the offer made him by Mrs. Lucinda, after her father's death, to continue him in his present situation, with a full livery and a higher salary. Instead of accepting it, as a short time previously he would joyfully have done, he actually requested the space of a week to consider of it.

Ere that week was expired, an event occurred, most unexpected by him, but not on that account the less cheering and agreeable. It was the means not only of raising his spirits, but

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also of changing back his fortunes and adventures to something of the complexion they had borne in his early life.

That event was no other than of accidentally meeting again, after some years of separation, with that immortal woman, his mother.

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CHAPTER V.

A PEEP AT A COUNTRY FAIR. — BILBERRY VERY UNEXPECTEDLY MEETS WITH HIS MOTHER, HIS FATHER AND HALF-A-DOZEN BROTHERS AND SISTERS. — THEIR INTERVIEW. — AFTERWARDS HE IS DISCHARGED FROM HIS SERVICE. — RESOLVES ON JOINING HIS FATHER AS AN ITINERANT PLAYER.

MOST people, we presume, have been at a country fair. They have waked in their beds while yet it was dark in the morning, and listened dreamingly to the heavy creaking of waggons of cheese, the cracking of whips, the rural tinkling of the chimes of horse-bells, the shouting of hedgerow bumpkins to their cattle and to one another. Mayhap also they have seen the flitting light across their window, cast from some dim old lantern hung at the wagon-shafts to guide either Dobbin or his master up the ruts; while the subdued tramping of unshod horses, tied head to tail with one another

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in a string, and the occasional lowing of discontented oxen, driven from their native fields to the hard streets of a strange town, lulled them again to a pleasant sleep and a sweet dream of the joys of to-morrow.

In the day-time, likewise, they must have remarked the in-rush from all country roads, of top-boot farmers, leggined horse-dealers, fresh and sweet country damsels, with their awkward smockfrock sweethearts, cheek by jowl, who now and then, perhaps, emboldened by a cup of ale, will seize their fair ones even in the street, and perforce implant a smacking kiss upon their turned-away and glowing cheeks. Whoever has not observed this is nut-deaf and sand-blind.

Neither can ever have been overlooked a numerous tribe of the members of that very particular fraternity to which MRS. THURLAND had the honour to belong. These usually post themselves in the rear and at the sides of great shows, where they either retail their wares in the ordinary way of trade, with the pavement for a shopboard, or else, with a spinning thing

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on a three-legged stool, run the hazard of a turn with those adventurous souls who prefer to gamble for a cast-iron pocket-knife or a twopenny tea-caddy, rather than purchase directly.

Something of a scene like this, then, occurred at Wenborough during that week when, as recently observed, the melancholy Bilberry was considering whether he should remain in the service of Mrs. Lucinda and the captain, or, with old Gruel's legacy of seventy-five pounds in his pocket, again "cast his bread upon the waters," and go forth in quest of his — Bessy. At all events, to lighten and compose his mind a little in this emergency, he one afternoon obtained a holiday, and took a stroll into the fair. Nor is it at all improbable that in directing his footsteps thither he was guided by some secret hope, springing from his knowledge of his mother's method of doing business, that amongst the crowds of pedlars, tinkers, trinket-sellers, and vagrants of a similar description, who throng to every fair, he might by chance happen to meet with her, if she were still alive and able to travel.

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Some time did he ramble amongst the back settlements of the fair and all its exhibitors without recognising her, until his thoughts were diverted suddenly from their present object by the shouting of one of those itinerant fellows who usually contrive to attract and retain a small close crowd about them, either through force of their own wit, or by the magic of those invaluable wares of which they are disposing at a price next unto nothing. On the front of this fellow's hat Bilberry observed a printed paper, bearing the words, "Spowage's American Philophloblowgisticono;" while the wearer himself was proclaiming his medicine as "one of the simplest, safest, and certainest of anything ever discovered, for the removal of coughs and colds, however tough, or even of a hundred years' standing."

"Last night," said he, "I got cold myself by sleeping in a field, and forgetting to shut the gate after me; and this morning I couldn't eat my breakfast for coughing, nor cough because I couldn't speak. I swallowed a bit of this candy, and in three minutes my voice was as

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clear as this pretty young woman's here close by me. Come, my dear, ask for three penn'orth, and let us hear you."

The bumpkins laughed at this vulgar romancing; while Bilberry, whose taste had grown rather too delicate to wish being recognised in the middle of a crowd by such an acquaintance, — for it was of course the redoubtable William Spowage himself, — passed on into the heart of the fair, despairing of meeting with his mother any more.

Looking round the circle of shows, what was his astonishment on beholding, in letters of gold, two feet high, and on a canvass ten yards long, stretched from side to side of a travelling theatrical erection, "THURLAND'S PAVILION." Around were scattered about fifty melancholy-looking unlit variegated lamps; in front stood two fierce armed warriors cut out of plank; and along the stage walked a company of nine spangled and painted damsels, one quarter finery, and the other three parts sickly dirt. Besides these, were three Don Alphonsos in cap and feathers, flesh-tights, and slashed sleeves;

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one dreadful scaramouch in black, with horsehair moustaches, and a slouched hat; a ghost in a bloody robe; and a person wearing a cap with ears to it, and having his face painted in red, white, and blue figures, — his business was to talk nonsense, make grimaces, and receive all the kicks, and cuffs, and lashes which the rest of the company pleased to bestow upon him, for the amusement and edification of the assembled crowd.

Could this, thought Bilberry, as he gazed in some amazement, be his own *father's*? He pushed nearer, so as to examine the features of the assembled performers. There was one, and but one, of all that he knew, and that was one of the nine females; in her he discovered his mother. A strange transformation, truly; but so it was. A hitherto unknown sensation pervaded his breast; his eyes could not leave her, and his heart throbbed hastily in his bosom.

Anxious to have their first meeting in private, he instantly repaired to a small pot-house hard by the "pavilion,"' and, calling for pen and ink along with his liquor, wrote a few lines to his

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mother, stating, what she would readily believe, that he was quite alive, and should be glad to see her at the Griffin, where he was waiting. Lest, also, in her present flourishing condition, she should take it into her head to despise him, he forgot not to add that, besides doing well, he was master of seventy-five pounds.

This note he despatched to the show, and in great impatience awaited the result. Shortly his messenger returned with the intelligence that Mrs. Thurland would see him directly; but whether affection, or the prospect of having a finger in Bilberry's fortune, attracted most, will best appear in the sequel. Within ten minutes she was by his side; having only thrown an old gown over her shoulders by way of shawl, to hide the habit of a princess, which now she wore beneath.

That, after so long an absence, the first moments of their meeting were in a slight degree pathetic, is certain; for, though there was but, little nature of the kind left in either of them, yet such as did survive in their bosoms could not fail to be stirred on such an occasion as this.

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However, it was altogether so slight, and of so doubtful a nature, that were we to attempt to record it, the reader would only think us joking. The first words of Mrs. Thurland's which we shall venture to put on record were these:

"Why, Bilberry, what a handsome fellow you have got! 'Od bless me! if you were not my own son, I should be tempted to marry you directly!"

She then rang the bell, and ordered a stiff glass of gin and water, the charge to be put down to Bilberry; because, said she, they were both the same vessel.

Afterwards, of course, the whole stories of their lives since that unfortunate parting recorded in an early part of this history, were mutually told and heard with great satisfaction. Besides this, Mrs. Thurland informed Bilberry that it was his own father who owned the theatre; that she and he now agreed very well for a bit, after being separated some x time, but how long it would last nobody knew; and farther, — which piece of information surprised him more than all the rest, — that three of the damsels

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he had seen on the stage, and two of the principal male characters, were his own true sisters and brothers.

"As to the rest, Bilberry," said she, "you must not judge us by these spangles. Look here;" and she very pathetically displayed under her princess's robe the skirt of a most tattered old petticoat; "this is the true state of the case. But the fact is, my lad, that when I am with Thurland, he will make me act like all the rest; though, God knows, it is ten times worse than begging and. my old basket. That is the reason I don't like to stop with him. Afore long I shall bid him good-b'ye again, and follow my own trade in my own way. Here, but this very day, we have been obliged to come out on to the stage by daylight, — which is very bad, because people see the dirt so well, — only because we had nothing to buy a dinner, until a few shillings could be 'ticed inside."

"Then you have had nothing to eat to-day? asked Bilberry, at the same moment pulling the bell.

"God bless you, no; not a bit since morning,"

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replied his mother; "no more has Thurland, or any one of us that I know of. It's very pleasant, so fine as we look by candle-light, to march up and down before a market-place full of people; but, Bilberry, I assure you, we all very often have a bad belly-ache at the same time.'

Though a small public-house, being fairtime, it was ready provided with a roasted round of beef, which soon furnished the table to the great satisfaction of Mrs. Thurland.

Neither, as it soon appeared, was she so selfish as to forget her friends; for, having slipped out a short time, and returned again without telling her errand, she sat down as though nothing had happened. Very soon there was heard a knock at the room-door; Mr. Thurland, the three Misses Thurland, and one brother entered. Thus, then, for the first time in his life was Bilberry introduced to his father. From this fact it was evident that intelligence of the round of beef had reached the "pavilion" by some secret channel, and that this family visit was as much in honour of the beef as of Bilberry.

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However, they all made very much indeed of him; his sisters kissed him most affectingly, though they had never seen him before; while his father and brother shook

his hand heartily, and quoted Shakspeare's sentiments on the occasion instead of expressing their own. They all sat down to the table, and Mrs. Thurland carved. Having helped her husband to three or four slices in a heap, that gentleman fixed his eyes deeply upon them, lifted up his hands, and in the language of his profession exclaimed, —

"Plate — O! thou reasonest well!"

This was an old joke with him, though the occasions for calling it forth occurred so seldom as almost to give it the air of a new one.

They all drank Bilberry's health, each garnishing the pledge with such theatrical phrases as the memory of the moment might supply.

About half-an-hour later, it being now rather dusk, the ghost introduced himself, and took a plate of beef. He was followed by harlequin, who also dined, and afterwards spun the plate

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on his finger-end and balanced it on his nose by way of amusement.

Bilberry's brother and one of the sisters now returned to the pavilion; but it was only to relieve guard. Their places at the table were quickly supplied by others of the undined, until the round of beef, half a cheese, and three loaves, had totally disappeared. Good grog was then ordered in, and the party made themselves perfectly at home.

In the midst of their revel, information was brought that the time announced for the commencement of the performances had arrived, and therefore the presence of all was required at the pavilion. Neither master nor men seemed willing to move. Mrs. Thurland declared she would see all the princesses drowned in ditch-water before she should stir a peg. Her husband appeared much of the same opinion; yet something must be done.

"I've hit on it, — I'll tell you what," said he, calling the ghost to his side; "do you go and announce, that, in consequence of the very extensive

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preparations that the performers are making to produce a superior entertainment, the play is unavoidably postponed for an hour longer."

This was carried into execution; the mob were satisfied, and perhaps eventually even the receipts of the night were thereby benefited.

When the time at length came, and the dinner bill was to be paid, Bilberry kindly offered to discharge the whole, having plenty of money in his pocket; but this his father would by no means allow.

"No, no," said he, "I shall pay for us all; we did not come here to eat you up. Let me see. Well, all I shall allow you to do, will be just to lend me the money till tomorrow, for we have not a farthing amongst us; and we'll settle it, good my lord, at our best leisure."

Bilberry gave him a guinea, with which he discharged the bill. Then putting the change into his own pocket, on purpose, as he said, to make the debt even money, they all returned

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through a private nick between the boards and canvass at the back of the theatre, to their respective duties.

Bilberry went to witness the entertainment from behind the scenes, and was there admitted into various secrets which he never knew before, but of a kind we do not care to describe. Suffice it to say that very foolishly he was persuaded to tarry in the u pavilion" all night.

He returned early in the morning, and while yet inflamed by the liquor he had drunk the night before, to his home, where he hoped to get in before any one save the servant was stirring; but unfortunately he met Mrs. Lucinda in the hall, and the first thing he received in three words was, his instant discharge.

He offered to explain and apologize, but his lady would not hear him. She walked hastily into her room; shut the door, as he followed her imploringly, in his face; and he never saw her after. His wages were sent out to him by the servant, and at twelve o'clock that day he found himself once more free. Bilberry did not much regret this event however, seeing that

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even before he was in doubt as to remaining. It had saved him, as similar actions have saved many ministers of state, the trouble of sending in his resignation; although the reflection it cast upon his character did not sit so easily on his shoulders as did all the rest.

Nevertheless, he did not consider it worth while to trouble his mind much on any account, as he should want no recommendation to his next place; and the legacy he had got, together with his wages, being sufficient to maintain himself a long time.

In this position of affairs his thoughts again recurred to the unfortunate Bessy. He pleased himself with the reflection that if he could but discover whither she had fled, and succeed in once more reconciling her to receive him back, he would rightly marry her, and with the money they should still have left endeavour to do well and get on in the world together. Full of these imaginary projects, he again repaired to widow Thornton's, in hopes that she might meantime have heard of Bessy, and ascertained, as he had last directed her, where

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that unhappy creature could be met with. But the widow knew nothing more, as the object of his inquiry had not called there since his last visit.

Vexed and disappointed, Bilberry resolved to remain no longer than should be necessary in a town where he had met with so much unhappiness, although not unaccompanied with good fortune. His project of fairly marrying and settling with Bessy was completely destroyed in consequence of the apparent impossibility of discovering her retreat; although some private reasons, with which the reader is not now, but shall in proper time be made acquainted, induced him to neglect no endeavours for the attainment of that object.

All, however, proved ineffectual; so that, in a fit of mingled disappointment and despair, he determined to join his father's company of performers, commence itinerant tragedian, and, in the eventful changes and excitement of that alternating and chance life, bury for ever, if possible, the memory of all that he had suffered and all that he had lost.

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This resolve he eventually carried into execution, — at least partly so; for, as will subsequently be discovered, his career was cut short in the middle by one of the most strange and agreeable accidents recorded in this book.

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CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH BILBERRY'S MOTHER RELATES IN PART THE ADVENTURES OF HER LIFE SINCE THAT UNFORTUNATE SEPARATION FROM HIM RECORDED IN AN EARLY CHAPTER OF THIS HISTORY.

BEFORE we follow up our hero's fortunes to the last, the reader will by no means be displeased — so, at least, let us hope — to find that the brief and compendious history of Mrs. Thurland's life, alluded to in the middle of the last chapter as having been related by her to Bilberry while they sat in the pot-house, we intend to repeat here in her own words.

It has indeed been cause of great grief to us, this long, this painful, this anxious and protracted separation!

But whom have we to thank for it save that pitiful fellow Alderman Snoars? — who, in the

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exercise of his contemptible authority, incarcerated her within the walls of a dungeon at the very moment when most we expected to see her entering on a field of glorious action and stirring adventure.

The majority of these country magistrates are in truth paltry fellows.

But let us hear Mrs. Thurland's opinion of one of them.

"I'll tell you what, Bilberry," said she, stirring round her gin and water, and during a momentary pause swallowing two-thirds of the glass at a draught; "I never in my life was in such a rage as when that trumpery mundungus-dealer ordered us off there to eat bread and water for six months together, till we were more like pullets with the pip than Christian women. Dang it! I could have slapped his face for him as soon as looked at it. What under the hedge had I done? If everybody was put in prison that eats pig, Bilberry, we should soon have more culprits than constables, I think. However, as he had ordered it, there was no use in grumbling; so away we went. Well, and I do declare

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to you, that we hardly saw a single man except the parson as preached to us, and three or four fusty old fellows that used to poke their noses between the bars once a fortnight, all the while we were there.

"I was heartily glad when the six months were up and we got loose again, for my eyes felt like stones with staring at dead walls such a while, and my legs were turned

into a pair of crutches for want of use and exercise. But, even after I was out and clear away, I dreamed of being in the same place every night for a fortnight after. Well, you remember that big basket of mine, Bilberry, I dare say? — how they took it from me when we were hauled up to the police-office on that pig-concern? Then just hear this. When they let me out of prison, I called out for my basket, but it was not forthcoming; so I tucked up my gown, and went off to Alderman Snoars's snuff-shop, to let him know all about it. I made up the very best tale for myself imaginable; and yet, do you know, that mean wretch would not let me have it back again, because he said it was such a

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long while ago, and the article was not worth much in at the bargain: just as if the principle of the thing was not the same, whether it was worth nine pence or nine guineas!"

Upon the delivery of this excellent sentiment, Mrs. Thurland emptied her glass, and replaced it on the table, bottom upwards.

Bilberry now asked what next step she took; whereupon this talkative woman resumed, — "Bless you, child! when I walked out of that rotten-hearted town, my pocket was so empty that I could not jingle two halfpence together in it; but, as I made a hearty breakfast before leaving prison that morning, it did not signify much just then.

"One thing was very odd after I got into the country again: for three or four times I stopped people on the road to ask if they wanted any tapes, cotton-balls, or laces, — quite forgetting at the moment that I had not got a single ha'p'orth of anything about me. I really believe, besides, that for want of that basket on my arm to balance me as usual, I walked for a while one-sided, like a crab, along the causeway.

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"Not knowing what else to do for a living, I set about — as I could not tell my own — telling other people's fortunes; and gave away every day a great deal more money, Bilberry, than ever I saw in my whole life put together. Besides that, I disposed of an amazing number of very excellent husbands at sixpence a-piece: if all the wenches get as good as I promised them, the world will be a great deal better in the next generation than it ever has been before, that I'll be bound to say.

"A good bit of money ran through my fingers this way, which enabled me to save enough in a month or two to set up again in my own trade, which I did as soon as possible; though the new basket did not fit me half so well as the old one, nor ever will as long as I carry it. Well, I went on then as usual a long while that way, thinking now and then what in the world could have become of you in all that time; for I do assure you, Bilberry, after I began to walk the country again, I felt the loss of you down to my toe-ends. But as to looking for you, I knew it would be just as much use to look for a flea

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in a feather-bag, and so I did not trouble myself to go half a dozen yards out of my road on that account; though, to tell the truth, I would have given a couple of shillings or so to have found you out, and had you along with me again.

"By that time it was getting far into autumn, and I had rambled a good way into the west country; but, for all that, as I had not been into Wales for three or four — or it might be five or six — years, I soon made up my mind to go there. It is not a place where one can sell much, Bilberry, for it often happens that you may walk eight or ten miles from one door to the next; though, after all, there's many parts of the country a deal worse in other respects than that place is. If one's rather poorly off for money and victuals there, at all events there is plenty of room to ramble about in, without danger of your dirty gamekeepers, and such like varmen, pushing their heads over every hedge at you.

"Well, I got down at last, or rather up I should say, into the mountains, and for the first

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week or so did not sell above nine pennyworth altogether. However, with what bits of victuals I picked up on the road, I managed to keep my legs agoing, till, in about three or four more weeks, the turnpike took me down to a little round-shouldered sort of town, at the far end of the land, called Pullhelly, or some such a name, looking straight out to the sea, that comes roaring up there as if the water was full of thunder.

"I made a pretty good market at that place, and sold almost everything of all sorts that I had got. But, just as I was making ready to get back again, the winter set in so

sharp and hard, that I was obliged to change my mind, and stop like a mole where I was, till the ground softened.

"At first, I hardly knew what I should do for a living all the while, till I asked the old woman where I lodged about it, and inquired what kind of work was useful in that town. It was a sort of fishing-place, along with all the rest; and this woman herself lived mostly by making and mending nets. Now, you know

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very well, Bilberry, that nobody in England can knit cabbage-nets better than me; so it jumped into my head in a moment that I could very sharply get hold of the other. Why not? I told Mrs. Owen so — that was her name; and as I was determined to stop there till the frost was gone, but could not afford to pay my rent if I earned nothing, for her own sake she got me a little of that sort of work to do along with herself and her daughter; and there we sat in that little hole of a hut, like three pismires in a hill, knitting away, making and patching, for about four months together. Many a night, Bilberry, we've sat till twelve and two o'clock, hearing the wind and sea roar as if the earth was going to be swallowed up, and pretending to be making nets, in case anybody should come in, while in fact we were only waiting for Mrs. Owen's son, who was a fisherman and a bit of a smuggler, coming home with a few kegs of stuff from over the water. If at any time it happened to be very late, we put the lamp out, and sat by the fire-light, to hinder anything being seen.

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"It is coarse work smuggling in winter nights, Bilberry; but long and dark, you see, is enough to tempt men to anything. I've known him come creeping home in the dead of night, when his clothes were frozen on his back as stiff as glass, and icicles hung to the fringe of his jacket from the spray of the sea, like rows of radishes. However, it suited his mother and me very well, for we got brandy and 'bacco for next to nothing; and, as it happened to be such a miserable winter in at the bargain, I believe I did as much smoking in them four months as in any twelve of my life before.

"But such times as those, Bilberry, do not last long enough, that's the worst of it. They are not made for such folks as us to have a bellyful of; though I can give myself the credit of having spun them out as long as possible, that shall be true. I stopped quite as long as Mrs. Owen could do with me; and a bit longer,

I dare say, if the plain truth was known. But it is a very bad plan, my lad, to take people's hints too soon; for that is the way many folks shove themselves out of a good concern almost

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as soon as they have got into it, and long before there has been half time enough for them to make their best of it. It has always been my way from the very beginning, whenever I got into anything of a place that suited me, to stop there like a fly in a sugar-tub, till it was either emptied, or I could not manage any more myself. And, — to speak under the hedge, — if it had not been for that rule of mine, it's a doubt whether I should not either have starved, or perhaps not been alive at all this very blessed day. If you always walk off when people tell you, you may keep your legs at work from January to December; for a more niggardly concern than this world is altogether, I could not wish to set my eyes on. Lord! they make one go down on one's knees even to eat other folks's scraps and leavings. I say to you, as I have done myself, stand your own ground like a man. We have all got our way to make in the world, one like another; and I don't see why, as I have got a head on my shoulders and calves to my legs like other folks, my right to do my best for a meal's meat is not as good as

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theirs. Well, that was the reason, you know, which made me stick at Mrs. Owen's as long as I could; for you see, Bilberry, when I haven't a mind to understand people's hints and remarks, — no matter how broad they are, — it is just as much use talking to so much wood as to me. So I kept sticking to it, and getting as much brandy and 'bacco as possible, because I knew the chance would soon be over; though, for all that, the time for going did come at last, and I was obliged to turn out at any rate. I bid them good-b'ye, with ever so many God-bless-'ems in at the bargain, because I wanted at the last minute to beg a keepsake of 'bacco from them, and I knew that would make them more inclined to give it me. Well, they didn't know how to refuse me; so that what they pottered out, added to a lot that I myself had contrived to save while I was under the roof, made enough to last me five or six months of the next summer.

"From there I walked all round till I got down into England again, when I filled my basket at the first big town; for everything

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was very dear in Wales; and once more got myself a-going among these hollow lanes and pretty villages.

"After all, Bilberry, there's no place, take it all together, that I like so well as England. To be sure, there's many people in it that are a great nuisance to folks in my line of life, such as your beadles and justices and all that varmen; but then we know that every sweet has its sour, and all hedges their thorns. What we have to do is, to take it as it is, and make the best on't.

"Well, in that old-fashioned way I went on a year or two longer, changing tapes into money, and money back again into tapes, without anything particular happening at all. Many and many a time I've wished for you, Bilberry, to be along with me again. I consoled myself, however, by thinking that if we ever were to come together again, we should do so in spite of anything; it is a great chance whether we should have seen one another even now, if it had not so happened that Thurland fell in with me beforehand, and brought me to this fair along with all the rest of his crew. We've been together about

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this two month or so now, but I begin to get tired of him already. If the truth was known, I dare say I care as much about him as he does about me; and that is not much, I warrant. I'd sell you all our love for sixpence, Bilberry, though I could not recommend you to buy it even at that price.

"But long before we two came together this last time, I turned my hand to several different things as occasion required; sometimes filling my basket-top with spring-flowers, and turning a halfpenny that way; or else plaiting a few rush-door-mats. However, I really think I should very soon have gone back to my basket again if some thief or other had not stole it of me one night when I was gone off to sleep. You see, I happened that afternoon before to meet one or two folks that I had a knowledge of; so we got a drop of something and a pipe together at one of the village pot-houses on the road. I didn't get too much, Bilberry, as you know I never do; but, for all that, somehow or other it made me very sleepy; and as I did not want to pay for a nap, I took up my basket, bid them good night, and walked off to the outside

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of the village, where I got into a cart that stood under a shed, put my basket alongside of me, and in two minutes was as dead asleep as a stone. I did not wake of all night, nor should have opened my eyes even at the time I did, if it had not so happened that some straw-yard or other came to fetch the cart away about daylight, and, in lifting the shafts ever so high to tackle his horse to, shot me out behind all of a heap.

"I expected everything to be spilled; but, on looking about, my basket and all it had in it was clean gone. I first of all suspected my friends, — for that Hodge seemed to know no more about it than a bull-calf, — and so went back to the village to inquire after them. However, as I found them all there asleep in the pot-house stable, without ever having stirred a peg since last night, it was clear it could not be them. But in the course of the inquiry it came out by accident that some great duke or other, who had a hall not many miles off, went through the village and past my shed in his carriage rather late in the night; so that I have

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not the least doubt in the world it was him that took it."

Mr. Thurland could scarcely repress a smile at this conceit of his mother's, which, producing a slight interruption in the stream of that woman's eloquence, he seized the advantageous opportunity to propose, as related in the preceding chapter, that she should now take a little dinner, and, if time allowed, tell him the rest of her story afterwards. To this Mrs. Thurland at once agreed, with this observation, — "Well, Bilberry, to be sure it is pleasanter to eat than to talk so much when one is hungry: suppose we have a bit, and after that I shall feel in better cue for finishing what I have to tell you."

This was accordingly done; but in the mean time, as the reader is already aware, Mr. Thurland senior and his company were introduced to the dining-table; and thus were his lady's intentions entirely defeated.

We are therefore under the necessity of returning immediately to the right course of our history.

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CHAPTER VII.

BILBERRY'S APPEARANCE ON THE STAGE CREATES AN UNHAPPY DISTURBANCE, WHICH COMPELS HIS FATHER TO DISCHARGE HIS

PERFORMERS AND DECAMP IN THE NIGHT. — BILBERRY AND THE GHOST TRAVEL TOGETHER.

HAVING first received back from Widow Thornton all the money which on former occasions he had left with her for Bessy, but which that unhappy young woman had never called to receive, Bilberry hastened to the pavilion to acquaint his mother and father with the intentions he had formed of becoming an actor, and travelling the kingdom with them. And although Mrs. Thurland had complained so heavily to him but the previous afternoon of the poverty and miseries inseparable from that profession, yet no sooner to-day did she hear his objects explained, than she lauded them to

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the skies, expressed her delight to have him once more with herself, and represented how much pleasanter it was to be one's own master, and continually going about to the fairs of every town in the country, even though accompanied by some inconveniencies, than to be another man's servant, however well fed and well paid for it.

This conversion of hers was in great part attributable to the influence of that comparatively large sum which Bilberry possessed, and of the benefits of which she naturally expected to partake.

A short time, then, found young Thurland metamorphosed from a man-servant into a prince. He took his walks on the platform in character, even while the company stayed at Wenborough; although he would not be persuaded to appear on the stage in any part, lest he should be recognised by those who had known him in his former capacities of sand-man and servant.

Having pretty tolerable success, however, the company remained in the town a fortnight

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longer than the fair lasted; by which time the habit of gazing on a multitude so frequently from the platform had inspired Bilberry with so much confidence, that, aided by the entreaties and hollow flatteries of those around him, he was persuaded, on the last night of their stay, to make his *debut* on the stage in character, and, between the acts of a play, entertain the audience with a song, — Nature having gifted him, amongst all her other favours, with a very respectable voice.

Doubtless he would have succeeded very well, the announcement of his appearance having drawn a very respectable audience, — we mean in point of numbers, not quality, — had not his mother, in a violent desire to strengthen and support him for the undertaking, just before he went on to the stage, given him so large a dose of bad sherry (purchased of course with his own money), that it totally took away his memory of the second verse of the song.

In vain she prompted him in a voice as loud as that of a parish-clerk; Bilberry could only repeat one line after her, and forget the next.

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Yet he hated the thoughts of making a failure, and would by no means listen to the voice of his father on one side calling him off, while that of his mother bid him stick to it on the other.

At length the forbearance of the audience was exhausted, and they began to hiss. This highly excited Bilberry's anger, and, instead of producing the effect desired, made him more resolute to sing, in spite of them. They had come to hear him, thought he, and hear him they should.

The audience, on the contrary, determined to be master; so that his opposition only called forth such yelling, groaning, hissing, hooting, and stamping, that not a word or a note could be heard, though Bilberry bellowed something or other in grand style. In the midst of this uproar, three or four turnips were hurled at him from the back of the pit; after which quickly followed a matter of some ten or twenty potatoes, together with a small-fry of nut-shells and rotten apples. Bilberry felt now in a dreadful rage; and looking fiercely at the spectators,

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shook his fist, and swore that if they fetched a legion of devils to help them, he would not be driven from his present position. Another shower of missiles was the only answer he received; upon which, now driven frantic, he picked up the turnips and potatoes lying about him, and began to hurl them back into the midst of the pit with terrible velocity. His father now rushed on to the stage, and attempted to drag him away; but Bilberry struck him an ingenious blow on the stomach, which sent him staggering backwards until he fell into a witch's caldron that stood behind.

Broken benches and stones — for the insulted spectators had found their way under the seats to the paved floor on which the booth was erected — now flew rapidly about, demolishing scenery and lamps at a dreadful rate. This destruction excited the ire of the proprietor, Bilberry's father; he rushed out by a back way, and ran down to the police-office for constables. Meantime, the demons of the pit did not slacken their ^fire, nor Bilberry the returning of it, until the whole stage looked in a fair

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way for being demolished. Mrs. Thurland and four of the male actors now rushed on, in defiance of danger, to Bilberry's assistance and the protection of their property. Each one shouted to the top of his voice; but to obtain a hearing was impossible. They therefore were reduced to the necessity of making an impression in another manner, which they did by all following Bilberry's example, and trying, if possible, to pelt the pit empty.

Thus was a regular war carried on, until a great part of the audience had retreated, and Mr. Thurland, with five constables, returned, and secured the remainder. They were carried away, and Mr. Thurland promised to appear against them in the morning. On subsequent consideration, however, he thought it more advisable to retreat altogether, and leave each offended party mutually to pocket their affronts.

Submitting, then, like a philosopher to all that had happened, he gave orders for the taking down of the pavilion immediately. Kings, heroes, knights, and ladies, were instantly transformed into common labourers.

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The men pulled down the boards, while the women packed up dresses, coronets, and scenery.

This proved to be a most judicious move; for in the early part of the morning, just as our company were decamping, a body of the audience and their friends appeared in the market-place, highly excited both by liquor and rage, for the purpose of revenging themselves on the pavilion at a time when, as they anticipated, the inmates would be asleep. As it was, a slight skirmish did ensue, though not of sufficient importance to demand particular notice.

This affair, together with the blow that Bilberry had inflicted on his father, would not have been passed over by that gentleman so easily, had it not been for the consideration

of the money which he hoped to get out of him when else his company might be starving. This was very lucky for our hero, who perfectly well understood where his strength lay, and secretly determined not to be shorn of it either by that Philistine his mother, or that no less cunning foe her husband. Sorry, however, are we to

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say, that this gallant determination of his was formed just too late. Already had they spent for him more than half; and on feeling in his pocket, on the eventful morning of their evacuation of Wenborough, for the purpose of consoling his fingers' ends with a touch of the remainder, he found it gone; not a single sixpence was left: he stood as shorn as a clipped wether. His heart sank in his breast, and his bands sank into all his pockets; but it was gone.

Whether he had lost it during the preceding day, or some one of his brother tragedians had slipped behind his dressing-curtain and abstracted it from his unoccupied breeches while he was singing his song last night, he knew not; although his suspicions more strongly inclined to the latter belief. But, however it might be, he dared not inquire, lest his father should discover him to be now a mere shell without an oyster, and therefore not worth keeping. While that gentleman believed him to have money, it was evident he would treat him with respect; if he found out that he was robbed of

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every farthing, it was most probable he would discharge him instantly: and what, under those circumstances, could he do, having not even the means to purchase a halfpenny loaf? Bilberry therefore very wisely constrained himself to keep the uneasy secret in his own breast, and pocket up the loss with as good a grace as possible.

Now it is very probable the reader never travelled the country with an itinerant theatre, and therefore is ignorant of the system of economy practised by some of those establishments. On that account, then, it is necessary to mention here, that no sooner are the performances at one fair finished, and the establishment broken up, than the proprietor summons his company together, and gives all such as he can dispense with on the road leave to go away and get their livings as well as they can; observing only to be at a certain town on such a day, — both of which he names, — where another fair is held and the next performances are to be given. Sometimes, however, when places lie too remote, or fairs are too widely held to allow of

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the profit gained from the last time to maintain them till the next, they are driven to the necessity of voluntarily setting up in some little removed country town or village, and making up a fair or wake entirely by their own abilities.

Their unusual drum and untimely visit then generally set a parish by the ears; cause sundry desertions from school, neglect of the cow-yard and ploughing, gadding about of admiring country wenches in an evening, besides frightening the parson's crows, and affording the parson himself an excellent opportunity for lecturing his parishioners the following Sunday on the vanities of life, and the lewdness of plays and players.

On the present occasion, no sooner were all things packed up and made ready for starting, than Mr. Thurland summoned together his company, both male and female; gave three of the men, the ghost, and seven of the girls, their discharges for nine days; expecting on the tenth to meet them all again at Gamham races. As for Bilberry, his father expressed a very tender solicitude to keep him along with the caravan,

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— that youth knew pretty well on what account. But knowing also his utter inability to give his father on that point any satisfaction whatever, he very resolutely refused to stay, on the ground that he had much rather walk to Gamham, for the purpose of seeing and enjoying the country as he passed along. Not easily to be denied, old Thurland told him he promised to become a first-rate actor, notwithstanding his recent defeat; that all clever men failed at first, insomuch that it was the best sign in the world of rising genius; that he had a care of him, and wished to keep him in good trim until their arrival at Gamham, where he intended to bring him out in a first-rate character. Bilberry was too deep not to see through all this; and too clever, too critically circumstanced, not to know how to exculpate himself. He declared that his ability had always thriven best in the open air; and that, if he permitted himself to be cooped in a caravan, it would pine his genius to a skeleton.

Finding persuasion useless, this kind parent concluded his efforts by at last endeavouring to

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borrow of Bilberry the sum of ten pounds. Without in the least betraying that he was not worth even ten pence, this youthful pleader replied that he had already spent so much

during Wenborough fair, that he could not very comfortably to himself spare the money, — not knowing scarcely how he should even carry himself through his journey to Gamham.

Literally, this was very true; but Mr. Thurland took it in a different sense, and, making light of the denial, observed that he hoped to see him arrive safe with the rest of his company at the appointed time. Bilberry replied that he should endeavour to do so; and then, if it lay in his power to assist him, he would be most happy to tender that assistance. . The father then stalked very solemnly towards his travelling vehicle; cried, with Hamlet's ghost, "Adieu, adieu, adieu! — remember me!" and vanished into his caravan.

Bilberry was not even yet delivered from these devourers. No sooner had his father disappeared, than all the discharged performers, male and female, surrounded him in a body,

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demanding small loans of money until they should see him again at Gamham. Our hero replied that he was not to be gammoned that way, for he would not part with a single farthing to any one of them; and at the same moment he made a rush through the ring they had formed around him, and escaped, followed nevertheless by the various exclamations of "Shabby fellow! — stingy muck-worm! — Shylock!" and a variety of others, which fell stillborn upon the air.

The faithful ghost, whom he had accommodated with a plate of beef at the sign of the Griffin, alone followed him. The rest dispersed themselves wherever they thought proper, — the men to morning public-houses, the ladies to pick up such stragglers of the streets as might afford them a glass of gin, or some similar trifle.

Bilberry had no objection to one companion; so that he waited the coming up of the ghost, who accosted him civilly, and wished, if agreeable, that they might travel the way to Gamham together. Young Thurland assured him

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he should be glad of his company, and on they went very companion ably.

A sudden suspicion for the first time now came across Bilberry's mind, which the reader will regret to hear. He bethought himself that his mother, amongst all the rest, had not asked him for money. Could she have taken it from his pocket?

He hoped not; but the suspicion clung to him from that moment until the very last, before the matter was explained.

To beguile the time as they walked along, Bilberry and his companion soon entered into conversation upon various topics, changing from one to another, until they fell upon themselves, when, after a few preliminary remarks, the ghost very confidingly gave young Thurland the following unique scrap of his autobiography.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE LIFE OF A THEATRICAL GHOST; TOGETHER WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE INGENIOUS METHOD BY WHICH OUR TRAVELLERS OBTAINED A DINNER WITHOUT COST.

"MACDUFF," he began, u as everybody knows, was born before his time, which fitted him to subdue the hero of a tragedy. I, on the contrary, was born so long after my time, that many seers prophesied I should never be born at all. When at last I did make my appearance, my father recalled the incident of Macduff's birth to recollection, and, on contrasting it with my own, which was, as I have said, exactly the other way on, he discovered — for he was a man of reading and a philosopher — that the analogy between the two was sufficiently close to warrant him in the opinion that the

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stage and tragedy would be my forte when I grew up. It was evident, he argued with my mother, by the superior time and pains which Nature had employed in making me, that she intended me for something or other out of the common line; for Nature, said he, never labours in vain.

"On this account, as well as because my mother was a middle-aged woman at the time of my birth (having married late), and expected not any other addition to her present family of one, I was regarded as a strange wonder. Everything that I did was very uncommon; and all friends who came to see us were entertained from breakfast until sunset with accounts of the remarkable manner in which I opened my mouth, winked, laughed, and crowed; the ability I displayed in sucking, mumbling breadcrumbs, nay, in all the looks, movements, and operations of my body. At five years old I was allowed to take my share in the conversation at table, whoever might be

present; because my parents considered me a very sharp and queer little creature, with whose observations and wise

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remarks everybody must be as pleased as they were themselves. And many a time have I kept a whole company of grown-up people as silent as an assembly of church-mice for a couple of hours together, while I related to them the pleasing information of what other children had prattled to me, and what I had in turn replied to them. Once or twice, I believe, attempts were made by daring and adventurous friends to put me down, that they might talk something rational amongst themselves; but I only became peevish, and then cried in the loudest possible voice, until my good parents were as enraged as tigers against those who had reproved me, and only fondled and caressed me the more, until I would begin to gabble again.

"At this day, I believe a stout rod would have saved me much grown-up trouble; but those who governed me thought otherwise, and I was permitted to do as I pleased. By the time I was seven years old, I had succeeded to a wonderful extent, by force of my oratorical abilities, in driving away nearly all old visitors

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to the house, and rendering those who yet continued to stick by us as dumb as fishes, whenever they constrained themselves to make a call. Nothing was to be heard but my voice and my mother's praises. At ten, though I could but just read, I conceived myself to be far superior, not only to my own father and mother, but to everybody else in the world. I had been drilled in the belief of my own extraordinary powers from so early a period, that any other language than that of wonder and admiration I scarcely understood.

"At twelve, I was universally known amongst all our friends and acquaintance as ' The Little Nuisance.' My parents heard of it, attributed it entirely to sheer envy of so promising a child, and again assured me I was a wonderful little fellow.

"But, as I grew up stronger and more wilful, their eyes began to open a little; for at the time when boys are usually put to some business or other, and my father was industriously hunting about both day and night to procure me a place, I informed him at once that I knew

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a great deal better than he did what would suit me. I should not follow any mean trade; but, as he had once thought me fit for the stage, I intended to become an actor when I was old enough.

"This answer, which ought to have been severely reprimanded, only revived those old and dead hopes of my becoming a tragedian, which he had long ago laid aside, in consequence of the little progress which he observed me make in books, and the small taste I evinced for any kind of poetry. Nothing excited my feelings. I could hear my father read the best passages of the best authors, and whistle a catch at the end; or I could read them myself with as much indifference as an ancient stoic would wipe his nose. Nor has time in this respect altered me. My father was mortified at first; but eventually he contrived to persuade himself and my mother too, that my naturally philosophical turn of mind set me above the emotions of the heart.

"However, to return to my tale, seeing my bent, my father accordingly abandoned the idea

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of putting me apprentice; and, instead, had a nice room in his house fitted up especially for my use, with a large glass at one end, before which I might study action and expression. He also gave me cash to purchase the works of Shakspeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Ben Jonson; but, as I knew better what was fit for myself than he did, I repaired to a neighbouring tavern, where my companions were in the habit of meeting each other; and, leaving Beaumont and Fletcher to take their repose on the bookseller's shelf, drank and played away the money.

"Every evening we employed in dancing attendance about our little town theatre, ingratiating ourselves with the attendants and the proprietor, getting introductions to actors and actresses behind the scenes, and, in short, in running that round of folly which others are still doing even with us, and of which, God knows, I have since seen far more than enough. Would my parents had been wiser, or that I had never been born! I am sick and weary to look back on what I have had, on what I have been, on all

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that once was in my power; and then on what I am, — a poor wandering ghost to a vagabond travelling company!"

The unhappy actor struck his knuckles on his thigh, and for the space of a minute was silent. At length he raised his head.

"I beg your pardon," said he, "for those last words. The proprietor, our master, is your father."

"Oh, never mind," replied Bilberry; "people are none the less vagabonds because they happen to be related to me."

The ghost smiled grimly, but continued his story.

"I cannot go through every particular of my life; it would be almost as bad as living it over again. Were it pleasant, I would dwell on every single day, and draw out every hour to its full length; but a painful story we must cut short, — it could else only prolong my misery. Be satisfied to know, that at length my parents discovered that all the money I had received from them was spent in waste, instead of improvement; and that even the room they had

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fitted up for me beneath their own roof, I had secretly made the theatre of my debaucheries. Their feelings were exhausted, — their kindness was overcome. Having made me what I was by their folly, they now made me worse by their wisdom: they thought, like unwise physicians, to cure me with one dose, and, from previously allowing me every indulgence, they actually suffered me to go penniless from their doors.

I was turned out, with the insinuation that I might return again when I had become respectable. I felt, when those words were uttered, as if my heart was on fire. I would have replied, but my tongue had c forgot its cunning,' and in silence I turned my back on my own home. I hurried away to a river that flowed not far from the town, determined to commit suicide, and at least teach my parents that lesson in my death, which they had failed to gather from all the circumstances of my twenty years' existence. But, before I reached the bank, the recollection of my old haunts, my companions, drink, and play, came strong upon me, and seemed to say, that in the dregs of these there

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yet remained another drop of pleasure undrained. I turned back, and in the next half-hour was again rejoicing in the midst of all that had been my ruin.

"Within two months after that, I snuffed candles and shifted scenes at the very theatre where, but a quarter of a year before I had nightly spent more than now fell to my portion in a week. The performers, with whom before I had bowed in the streets, all — with one exception, and that one was a woman — all refused to know me, even in the secrecy of the theatre, where no one could observe their acquaintance. But one, I repeat, did not abandon me; on the contrary, she evinced more feeling in my misfortune than during my prosperity. Oh, how I did then but feel that the kindness of a woman is above all other happinesses beneath the sun!

"She interested herself in my behalf, applied to the manager for me with success, and I was raised to take a silent part on the stage amongst those soldiers whose only business is to walk on and walk off again. Eventually, I tried an

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inferior character in an afterpiece, and I believe, from the applause of part of the audience, succeeded very well for the first time. After the play was over, I chanced — as it still remained part of my duty to see after the safety of the theatre — to open the door of my benefactress's dressing-room, under the impression that she was gone home, when the coat-tail of a man rapidly whisked by, and at the same moment she had just time to see me, and put the door in my face, before I could retreat. Next morning I received my discharge in writing from the manager, who refused to allow me an interview, but had enclosed half-a-crown in the letter.

"I became a complete houseless vagabond during the space of two months, for I would not apply again at home; and by the end of that time our town fair came on. Your father brought his company thither; I applied to him, and he engaged me at nine shillings per week. I have travelled with him eleven months, and at the present hour I continue to thank him for that small assistance. May there never be another

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so ruined, so foolish, and so wretchedly punished by those who ruined him, as I have been!"

The actor dashed two tears from his eyelashes, and said no more.

Bilberry looked serious, but offered no reply; for even on this poor dejected creature had he himself to depend, if possible, for his next meal. Long did young Thurland

cogitate within himself how best to break this matter to his companion; for that in some way or other it soon must be broken to him, his stomach now rather loudly declared.

Concluding honesty, to be the best policy Bilberry finally remarked to the ghost, that, if he would but keep counsel, he had a secret to communicate to him.

"Truly," replied he, "'it shall be tenable in my silence still.'"

"You think, then," said Bilberry, "that I have money; but I am as ignorant how my next crust will be procured as the poorest beggar in the world. I have not a single farthing."

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He then proceeded to relate how he had lost everything that he owned yesterday, and fallen from the possession of more than thirty pounds to the wanting of a penny.

His companion expressed great amazement, and at first would not believe but that Bilberry was trying to deceive him. The sorrowful manner and repeated assurances of that young man, however, confirmed to him the truth of the story.

"Well, then," said he, "as you are so candid with me, I will be equally so with you. Know, then, that neither have I a single stiver. All my salary I drew from your father during the fair, so that when we parted I had nothing to receive. And, to be plain, I came out entirely on the strength of *your* pocket."

"And I picked you up," replied Bilberry, "very much on the same account."

"Excellent, i' faith!" cried the ghost. "Well, no offence. As we have deceived one another, we will try next to deceive somebody else. We'll catch a dinner somehow, I'll swear. It

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will not be the first time neither, by some hundreds, that I've dined well, and paid for it out of my wit, instead of halfpence."

So saying, he took Bilberry's arm, and on they went together as merrily as two empty bellies could go.

About mid-day they were passing a village public-house, when the ghost stopped short.

"Come," said he, "let us go in here, and try what we can do. I must have something soon, or I shall be in my coffin before dark-hour." Bilberry was very reluctant, but at length consented. They went into the front-room, called for two glasses of ale, and,

sitting down, entered into conversation with a poor starved old man, who had been fishing in some neighbouring water, but for lack of sport had put up his baits, and, instead, come to take a bait himself in the pot-house.

When the landlady opened the kitchen-door on bringing in their liquor, our actor espied a fine leg of mutton at the fire, nearly roasted, and ready for being taken up. That sight

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seemed to sharpen his wits; for, instantly whispering in Bilberry's ear, said he,

"A thought has struck me just now how we may dine on that mutton yonder. Our old friend here, the fisherman, looks about as starved as Romeo's apothecary. Suppose we try to bribe him?"

Bilberry could not comprehend his companion's meaning; but, having no objection to either a dinner, or a lesson how to procure one without paying for it, he observed that he should be very agreeable indeed to anything of the kind. The ghost accordingly entered again into conversation with the old man, gradually drawing the subject round until he could pop the question all at once, and inquire whether he had dined?

"Bless your good soul, no!" he replied. "Don't you see I haven't took a single fin this morning?"

"Never care," observed the ghost; "if you like to dine on that leg of mutton, you shall, and cost you nothing except what I ask you for, which shall not be a single penny."

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The old chap was delighted, as thinking his friend meant to pay for him; so at once agreed to the proposal.

"Now, then," said the actor, "lend me your box of maggots for five minutes."

Having obtained it, he took up his glass, and repaired to the kitchen-fire, on pretence of warming himself. Bilberry followed, and took his seat on the opposite side, while the fisherman modestly remained behind, in anticipation of being asked to dinner when it was ready. While the landlady's back was turned, the actor seized his opportunity, and sprinkled some dozen or more of the maggots into the dripping-pan, and, again pocketing the box, took no farther notice.

The trick fully succeeded: the landlady could not eat her dinner; and eventually the leg of mutton was given to our two heroes, who possessed less delicate appetites, to

make their best of. They invited the old fisherman to join them; and, having charged him not to utter a word or ask a question, all three sat down and

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picked it to the bone, the landlady giving them their bread and ale in to help the meat off.

Having thanked the good woman for her present, and the old man for the loan of his baits, Bilberry and his companion pursued their journey, both well fed and well satisfied.

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CHAPTER IX.

OUR HERO AND HIS GHOSTLY COMPANION ARRIVE AT THE SMALL TOWN OF UPFIELD DURING THE HOLDING OF THE WAKES. — ADVENTURES THERE.

ABOUT that period in the afternoon which by our country people is very significantly termed "tea-time," Bilberry and his friend were passing a green hill-side, which on one hand rose into a woody summit, and on the other sloped down into a wide and long-drawn valley intersected with hedge-rows, resembling the boundaries of counties and departments on a map; when, at some distance below, the sight of a small cluster of household chimneys, red, grey, and weatherworn, with here and there some aspiring gable-end or elevated mossy roof peeping above the otherwise unbroken foliage, reminded them of the proximity of one of those quiet rural settlements which, squatted down in the heart of

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almost every English landscape like nests in corn-fields, scarcely discover themselves to the eye of the traveller until his foot is almost on their roofs. At the same time, confused sounds of merriment, with now and then a louder burst of shouting laughter, as some better joke was told, or some more excelling feat performed, told quite as unequivocally that the rustic inhabitants were enjoying an evening of rest and gaiety. Nothing, in their then condition, could have been more agreeable than this to both young Thurland and his companion; for, of old experience, Bilberry well knew that whatever difficulty a penniless man may find during ordinary times in obtaining assistance, the case is considerably altered for the better when men's hearts are more free, and their pockets

stand wider open, at a holiday. Thus, the farmer who refuses you even a single ear out of his barn, throws his fields wide open to your gleaning when the gathering of a bounteous harvest has liberalized and made happy his soul.

Mr. Thurland and the ghost accordingly hastened down a bye path which appeared to

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offer a more direct route to the village, and very shortly found themselves in the middle of what the natives themselves usually term the Town-street. On one hand, hanging in glorious relief against the western sky, rose a broad sign, from which that hero of our fathers' generation, "General Wolfe," looked grimly down, as from the heights of another Quebec, upon various of his conquered foes, who were staggering and reeling below, and, to speak technically, who had now become completely disabled from their length of service. On the other side, in farther perspective down the street, appeared another happy sign, — the George and Dragon by name, — whereon the artist, in imitation of the device on his Majesty's crown-pieces, had, to the great scandal of the village, represented his saintship fighting without stockings or shirt, and introducing his spear very carefully into the dragon's mouth, which, by the by, that sensible beast very kindly held open for the operation as considerately as doth an unfledged blackbird gaping for his food, or as might the reader's self when about to have a tooth drawn:

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while immediately before their eyes — for the village was big enough to support three pothouses, and therefore, as may be supposed, a place of "some reckoning" — nailed up to the house wall, appeared that now ancient and scarce sign, 64 The Struggler." It represented a map of the hemisphere, with the legs of a man at the bottom, and a head and shoulders at the top, struggling to get extricated, as might a chicken from its shell.

The moral intended to be conveyed was very obvious, while the picture itself struck Bilberry as an admirable illustration of the difficulties and hardships attendant upon man's passage through the world; the more especially so, as he himself had long ago experienced, and was even at that very hour *enjoying*, a practical demonstration of the severe truths thereby implied.

The street itself was all rustic life and jollity; the weather at that time being so mild and agreeable, that nearly the whole inhabitants of the place had turned out of their houses to enjoy their holiday in the open air. Chairs,

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forms, and tables were arranged in admirable disorder before all the alehouse doors: while upon and around them sat a devil-may-care sort of assembly of hinds, of all degrees of age, size, and complexion; whose especial employment it was to drink huge pots of ale; smoke tobacco until the whole place appeared as if in a state of siege; and, amid much shouting, thumping, and laughing, to sing, every now and then, some such a song as this:

The bell tolls two. — 'Tis dark and still.
Far off, beside yon lonely hill,
The cock, awake ere morning light,
His clarion blows to scare the night.
None answer him from hill or plain;
He sleeps beneath his wing again.
    Go forth, go forth, your wires to set,
    The prowling keeper comes not yet!

So, nothing fearing, out I creep,
The ditch, the gate, the hedge I leap;
In every gap I set a snare
To twinge by stealth the skulking hare.
If coward thoughts should terrors bring,
I lowly to my soul thus sing, —
    Take heed, take heed! — your wires well set;
    The prowling keeper comes not yet!
Unheeding nettle, brier, or thorn,
I make the ditch my bed till morn:

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And if I doze, but ill at ease,
I dream of jails and penalties.
But dreams unto the winds I fling,
And lowly to my soul thus sing, —

Your lord, who shoots and hunts his hares,

Deserves as much as him who snares!

But long before the daydawn breaks,

Or yonder cock again awakes,

Along the rimy grass I trail,

Nor care for penalty nor jail.

In catching hares no crime can fall,

Since Nature made them free to all.

So, back I creep, take up my snares,

And carry home a load of hares!

Then followed five thousand thumps of applause, dealt by pot-valiant fists, until the tables danced, the glasses rung, and various incontinent cans of ale, unable to retain their liquor, ran over on to the board for very joyousness.

In other parts, with their house-windows and doors wide open, so as to afford a commanding view of teapots, kettles, and many glorious stacks of home-made bread and butter, sat mothers and maids sipping and nibbling in as well-kept time as even an orchestra of musicians themselves could desire; while the youngsters

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also might be observed eagerly blowing their tea, in impatience to have done, and to join the sports and fun outside.

For some time our heroes rambled idly about the village, unknowing exactly what first to set about, and rather in hopes that chance might throw something in their way, than with any definite idea how their next sixpence was to be procured. Now they passed a slovenly halfhour in marking the chances of a knot of bumpkins, who, in the true rustic and English fashion, were tossing for halfpence in some bye corner of the road; and then again in watching the dexterity of certain clever fellows, who were pitching their respective abilities against one another, over a game of nine-pins, or at the more difficult and ingenious sport vulgarly denominated “knacks.”

These, and such as these, were not, however, the only amusements going forward at the wakes of Upfield. There were others of a more primitive and pastoral, if not of a higher kind; such, we may suppose, as in ages past, when the world, as Ovid telleth us, was pure and

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free from crime, the shepherds and shepherdesses amused themselves with during their hours of leisure, when their sheep and kine, swine and goats, were at rest and peace on the hillside or in the meadow. We may suppose so, let us repeat: for, though nothing of the kind is to be found recorded in the Idyllia of Theocritus, the Bucolics of Virgil, or the dyllia or colics of any other person; yet since, as the learned tell us, mankind is alike in all ages and under all climates, it requires no unusual tension of the intellect to comprehend how the Menalcases and Mopsuses of the golden age might amuse and emulate one another much after the same manner as do our Lobbins and Hobbinols of the present day. Nor need the reader — if as polite and well-bred as we flatter ourselves he is — feel at all surprised should we, on the present occasion, introduce to his notice a few sports, of which hitherto he has unhappily been entirely ignorant; for, by some unaccountable fatality or other, it not unfrequently happens that the poor and obscure part of society invents and retains especially within its

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own body various games and amusements, which, from their very nature, the philosopher would at once pronounce as far better calculated for the especial use and enjoyment of the high and truly great people of the earth.

Foremost of these, and that which demands our earliest attention, from the encouragement which it holds out to the cultivation of personal beauty and of expression, — that delightful quality in the divine human countenance, is the truly pastoral amusement — doubtless deduced down from the patriarchal times — of putting the most manly countenances in competition for a prize; in other words, of grinning through a horse-collar.

As to what age or nation posterity stands indebted for the invention of this kingly pastime, but little certainty exists. The researches of our most learned antiquaries, however praiseworthy in themselves, have thrown but a very feeble light upon the subject; so that, though in later times a great deal more has been done than we could ever have dared to hope for, yet a variety of contending opinions still exists,

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and the learned world may, in short, be said to stand irreconcilably divided upon this great point. The furious heat and zeal which on all sides the respective partisans have

displayed, is a matter much to be lamented, and one which we record more in sorrow than in anger; especially as, to an impartial observer like ourselves, it cannot but be evident, after a careful examination of the respective evidences adduced by each party, that an amazing deal of very unanswerable stuff, and stuff of equal weight too, is certainly advanced in support of twenty contending opinions.

For ourselves, we are inclined to join those who make the silence of all ancient writers, both civil and ecclesiastical, and the paucity of antique human monuments, touching the subject, a sufficient excuse for abandoning this chaos of learning altogether, and substituting the pure lights of reason and common sense instead. Livy, Tacitus, Suetonius, — even the learned and impartial Josephus himself hath not a word nor an allusion in point. This, we confess, appears the more extraordinary in him,

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when we reflect that, according to his own history of the wars of his nation, the unhappy Jews were so often placed in a position, or pickle, calculated to make them grin more than any other people of whom record exists; and therefore, one might reasonably have imagined, were a likely nation to have been the inventors, though perhaps in a very simple form, of the practice to which we are alluding. Some, however, have ventured so far as to insinuate, with reference to written as well as to oral communications, that silence gives assent: in which case our view of writers will be considerably changed, and we shall regard a man as the author, not only of what he has written, but likewise of all that he never wrote nor ever thought of writing. To anything of this kind we shall never give in; and consequently, as Josephus maintains a profound historical silence on the matter, we completely exonerate him from the charge of having intended anything of the kind.

Others, again, of the conjectural learned have taken up a very secure footing in the following

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proposition: — That whereas no man could grin through a collar before collars were invented, therefore the people or tribe who invented horse-collars were also, in all human probability, the inventors of the art of grinning through them. And as, even to this day we designate the natives of tropical countries as men of colour, or *collar*, — for

the words are nearly synonymous in point of sound, — the credit of having originated this pleasing amusement is considerably in favour of the dark nations.

But it is not our province to attempt the elucidation of obscure and knotty points in history or in antiquities; and therefore we cheerfully turn this part of the question entirely over to the consideration of those profound common labourers round the temple of knowledge, whose especial employment it is to riddle the fallen rubbish of by-gone ages, in search of such scraps and mutilations as may prove of utility in rearing the new fabric of truth. F.S.A.'s! we make you a present of the debateable question

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of horse-collars, their invention, antiquity, and subsequent history.

And now, reader, let us hasten to inform you that, after rambling up and down this dispersed village of Upfield a considerable period of time, Bilberry and the ghost at length arrived in front of the George and Dragon inn, where a slight stageing was erected, and a number of gentlemen — to look at, one would judge very able and efficient for the purpose — were assembled in competition for the prize, — a prodigious pair of corduroy breeches, — about to be awarded to the best grinner through a triumphal horse-collar, which, fastened at a convenient height between two posts, appeared like an antique oval frame waiting for its picture.

The body of competitors was not, as may naturally be supposed, composed of the greatest beauties in the parish of Upfield. On the contrary, taking them altogether just as they appeared, they seemed much more like a gathering of the scraps and odd ends of humanity; such pranks, such whimsical larks, had Nature played upon

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their visages. Some had noses that monopolised two-thirds of the superficial contents of their faces; some opened mouths which, in point of size and irregularity of shape, were little inferior to the gap of an earthquake; while others, all face, appeared to have squeezed those two features almost entirely out of their consideration. But, lest the very respectable reader should foolishly imagine this affair somewhat beneath his notice, it will be as well to observe beforehand, that it was distinguished by one very noble circumstance, which we take a pride in recording, and which, could the same be said of one half the great projects daily set afoot amongst us, would not only redound greatly to their own credit, but operate as an inducement and stimulant to obscure and modest

merit to put itself forward in a manner by which it would get distinguished and rewarded. The circumstance alluded to is this: — there was no monopoly, no favour either for or against any living soul; but the grinning-collar was liberally left open to all the world. You yourself, sir, had you been there, might have tried with the best;

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nor, providing you are really as ugly as you appear to us at this moment, is it at all unlikely — excuse the compliment — that you might have borne away the breeches. However that might in reality have proved, certain it is that in lack of other means of advancement, our two heroes resolved to enter the arena, and try their fortune against the assembled natives of the district.

A loud burst of laughter proclaimed the commencement of the sport. Each candidate was allowed two minutes to figure in, and during that time he produced as great a variety of distortions of countenance as the delicacy of his taste and the flexibility of his facial muscles combined would allow. Fifteen or sixteen candidates thus went through this highly interesting competition, much to the satisfaction and entertainment of the assembled crowd. The ghost and Bilberry alone remained. The former took precedence, occupied the allotted space of time, and assuredly produced a more refinedly ugly countenance than any of those who had gone before him. But this was lost upon both

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the judges and the crowd, who, for the most part, could be made little impression upon, except by the thoroughly coarse and vulgar; just as your thick-skinned asses can be made to feel only by laying the cudgel broadly and hardly on.

Young Mr. Thurland came next; and, to our own satisfaction, and the credit of that hero's beauty, be it said, his attempt most thoroughly and signally failed.

It is not often that the historian feels himself called upon to rejoice over the ill successes of favourite heroes; but here does it afford us unfeigned pleasure — if the brethren of the "contemporary press" will allow us to take the loan of so elegant a phrase — to record Mr. Thurland's utter discomfiture and defeat; for, in good truth, there was scarcely a single male person throughout that whole country side whom Nature had so completely disabled from making an ugly face as Bilberry.

We cannot record, however, that he himself was equally pleased. One consideration alone consoled him. It soon became very evident that the same face which had lost him the

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breeches had won that far greater prize, several pretty petticoats amongst the crowd; for not long had he quitted the stage, and once more mingled with the rustic assembly, than many eyes were turned upon him, and chiefly those of four or five pretty damsels, who apparently had gathered together into one female knot for the purposes of mutual protection and encouragement.

When speaking of Mr. Thurland's personal qualities, we have before found occasion to remark, that the last thing which could be laid to his charge was any want of attention to the ladies. A more gallant cavalier never laid leg over saddle, or spit through the bars of his visor, than was our hero Bilberry; although, alack and well-a-day! he had never crossed any beast more magnificent than a jackass, nor covered his face with any visor of a more costly material than the accumulated dirt and dinginess of the highways.

The reader, then, will be prepared to receive without much astonishment the announcement of the following intelligence.

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No sooner did Bilberry perceive eight or ten most intelligibly speaking eyes upon him, than he communicated to his friend the ghost his belief that, if they could but get within speaking distance of these damsels, in all probability something or other might be done towards putting themselves in the way of either picking up a few halfpence, or of filling that tomb of all the omelets, the belly; for it must be observed that Mr. Thurland’s faith in the charity and tenderness of womankind was far greater than in that stouter and more obtuse animal, man. With these thoughts and intentions, then, our two heroes endeavoured to approach the beautiful objects whose attention they had attracted, and who now, like five of nine rustical muses on their homely Parnassus, the farm-yard dung-heap, stood with arms entwined over each other’s shoulders, just as the excellent Canova, catching some flying hint like the present from unadorned nature, hath represented in his statuary of those three amiable misses, the Graces. No sooner, however, did they perceive Bilberry and the ghost approaching them, with their errand

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written in their eyes, than, in seeming alarm, the damsels took to flight, giggling as they flew, and ever and anon stopping a moment to look back, to giggle again, and again to take to flight. Thus, when pursued by the treacherous sportsman or gamekeeper, doth a herd of timid does fly from the face of designing man, stop short, turn back and gaze, snuff up a breeze that smelleth of the enemy, and again bound forward. But. alas! as our divines and moralists discovered long ago, though does and damsels must alike surrender, man pursueth a vain shadow all the days of his life. Thus found Bilberry and the ghost on the present occasion: those vain shadows, the wenches, fled too fast to be overtaken, unless our heroes had chosen to take more trouble than at that moment they felt inclined for; and therefore they hesitated not long ere giving up the pursuit. Besides, what influenced Mr. Thurland to abandon his design was partly this: — he observed that the masters of the ceremonies on the before-mentioned stage were preparing for a new competition, in which he wished again to join; the

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former affair having concluded by the breeches being awarded unanimously to a certain gentleman, who, to the surprise of the crowd, was considered well entitled to the prize even by nature; for, without one single attempt at distortion, his face no sooner appeared in the collar, than it was pronounced far superior in point of ugliness, by its original construction, to anything that any other person had previously produced upon the stage: thus illustrating with what judicious effect the ingenious Mr. Thompson has asked, “Who can paint like Nature?” Nobody, certainly; nor draw either.

The prize next about to be offered, Bilberry found to be a new hat, valued at about fourteen pence, to the person who could succeed in first swallowing a bowl of hot hasty-pudding, one of which was handed round to each competitor as it came boiling from the fire. Mr. Thurland and his companion again entered the arena, but not with the same intention as formerly.

We have before observed that they both were

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about prepared to take their suppers, providing any could be obtained; and therefore, thinking this a most admirable opening, obtained a basin each along with the rest; but, instead of hastening to swallow it, with the most philosophical steadiness and composure they deliberately blew it to cool before the faces of the multitude, sipped it

at their leisure, and thus contrived to conclude a very comfortable meal about a quarter of an hour after their victorious competitors had finished and retired.

After this followed a variety of other rural pastimes of a similar description, such as jumping in bags, climbing (or swarming) a greasy pole, hunting a pig with a soaped tail, and the like pleasing and instructive amusements; which, for the benefit of the rising generation, we hope ere long to see introduced into the public schools and various charitable foundations of the country, amongst other equally sweet and useful accomplishments already adopted in many of those praiseworthy and valuable institutions.

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In particular, would we recommend to the attention of the masters of Harrow the greasy pole and the soaped pig, as affording two exercises peculiarly calculated to initiate expectant young statesmen in the art of ascending with ease and certainty the slippery mast of the state, and of seizing and retaining with greater security the tail of that difficult game denominated place and office.

What can be more needed, when almost daily before our eyes is presented the melancholy spectacle of gentlemen, in other respects possessed of sufficient learning, ability, and cunning, no sooner reaching, after great exertion, the top of the pole, than, ere the prize can be laid hands on, down they go again with astonishing velocity to the very bottom? While others, after equal pains, equally unfortunate, have no sooner succeeded in grasping by his nether appendage the official pig, than, regarding too much the soap that comes into their hands, while the creature himself is totally neglected, he naturally enough contrives almost

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instantaneously to slip again through their fingers.

Heads of Harrow! — Professors of Eton, Oxford, and Cambridge! — erect a pole each in the centre of your school-rooms, and turn swine at random in the court-yards of your universities!

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CHAPTER X.

LIKE MANY YOUNG LADIES, IS REMARKABLE ONLY FOR ITS EXTREME SHORTNESS.

ON the conclusion of the sports and the hot supper recorded in the last chapter, Bilberry, and the ghost his companion, feeling considerably refreshed, their bodies recruited and their spirits enlivened by the meal they had made, began to consider whether, as the population of the place appeared given up to holydaying, it would not be advisable to strike up a song in the street, and endeavour, like greater men, to collect a few halfpence by their vocal abilities. Having arranged the matter, they first, by way of bait to gather a crowd round, broke out in a short duet, which they had practised previously

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in the pavilion, though the subject of it was withal too insignificant to be worthy of notice here, any farther than as it entirely answered the purpose intended, by attracting a world of bumpkin attention to themselves.

Hereupon Mr. Thurland, who possessed the best voice of the two, very shortly after the conclusion of the duet, and before even the outskirts of the crowd in which they were imbedded thought of dispersing again, struck up, unaccompanied, the following song, which, we may passingly remark, is the very same one he attempted and failed in on the preceding night at Wenborough.

The name of the poet who wrote it hath not descended to us, any more than the names of the poets who write songs now-a-days will descend to our grandchildren. All we know about it is, that it existed in that staple collection of poems, martial, comic, amatory, and miscellaneous, which his father carried about with him from fair to fair as part of his theatrical stock in trade.

If the reader do not approve of it, we earnestly

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press him not to distress himself by singing it on any occasion against his own inclination.

The ladies, however, if they have any affection for Bilberry, we do hope will patronize him by taking his song under their especial protection; more particularly as he himself, though his whiskers met and tied under his chin, sung it in the character of an unhappy and desponding damsel.

How long have I watch'd, how long have I woke,
How long and how lone have I waited him now!

Yet nothing I hear save the leaves from yon oak,
The fall of its acorns, the creak of its bough.
My father and mother, too deeply confiding,
Believe me all warm nestled closely asleep,
While, chilly and sad, 'mong these autumn leaves hiding,
In darkness I wait for my lover, and weep.

Ah! why should a maiden, by nature too tender,
So easily trust, and so loving believe?
No innocence strong enough found to defend her,
No virtue so pure that man will not deceive!
His words were all flattery, — faithless his vows,
While the glories of hope that he raised are all fled;
And his promised protection's as false as these boughs,
Which hang wither'd and leafless in vain o'er my head!

Applause to the value of threepence half-penny,
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which the ghost collected in his hat, repaid Bilberry's attempt, and, like three medals and a half from the Society of Arts, encouraged his genius to renewed exertion. Walking up and down the village, a mere "wandering voice," like Mr. Wordsworth's cuckoo, he repeated his song again and again, the ghost likewise repeating his collections, until night closed in quite dark, Bilberry grew somewhat rusty, and his companion counted eightpence lying in the crown of his hat.

With this booty divided between them, our heroes immediately repaired to the sign of the Struggler; and, first ordering two cans of ale as they passed the front of the bar, entered a spacious room, little inferior in size to an ordinary paddock, and which, though on the present occasion "full to the bung," would most probably during all the rest of the year remain as silent and deserted as, at this day, are the melancholy sites of those once joyful places, Balbec, Palmyra, and Babylon.

Here they remained talking, drinking, and singing with the company, until daylight; at
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which time they set forwards on their journey towards Gamham.

At the next town they sold part of their garments, in order to obtain a little ready money, which, in addition to a few halfpence picked up by singing as before through the villages, and practising a few tricks of legerdemain, eventually carried them to the appointed place, on the day previously fixed, where again they met with Mr. and Mrs. Thurland, and all their company, and for the second time Bilberry made his appearance before the public.

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CHAPTER XI.

BILBERRY IS ILL-TREATED BY HIS FATHER, AND RESOLVES TO LEAVE HIM. — - GRATITUDE OF THE GHOST. — - AN ACCIDENT, BY WHICH OUR HERO PROFITS CONSIDERABLY.

No sooner had Bilberry once more joined the company than he watched the first opportunity for inquiring of his mother whether she knew anything of the money he had lost. After expressing great surprise, this good woman denied all knowledge whatever of it, made one of her loquacious harangues upon the subject, and concluded by advising him most cautiously to keep the secret of his loss from Mr. Thurland, until he should find himself in a condition to depend upon him no longer.

"Take my word for it, Bilberry," said she, —

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"and I have known him longer than you have, — if he were aware all the money is gone, you would be kicked out here before dinner-time."

Bilberry thanked his mother for the information, adding, that he had very good reason to believe as much, although he was very sorry to say it.

But, in spite of these precautions, and the great circumspection with which Bilberry observed them, old Thurland found out before two days were over that things were not with Bilberry as they used to be. He suspected the young man's money was all spent, and accordingly began to treat him after the style our hero had been led to anticipate; obliging him to take any mean office about the theatre, abusing him on occasions when previously he would not have uttered a word, and, in short, sparing no pains to mortify him in every way possible.

Bilberry hereupon conceived a great hatred of the man, not only because his own disposition was so extremely different, but also from reflecting that the liberality with which he had

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spent his money upon them all when he possessed it ought to have insured him against anything like this.

One evening he went privately to his mother, and told her he was resolved to go away again that night, for he could bear with this no longer. Tears filled his eyes as he spoke, and, without waiting her answer, he turned away, unheeding her calls, to go out of the booth and search his fortune elsewhere. At the back entrance he met his old friend the ghost, in high spirits, just coming in. Without at the moment observing Bilberry's dejection, he ran up to him.

"Give us hold of your hand!" said he. "I've met my father and mother! Going home again! Be at home to-morrow night! They've repented over and over; so have I, by Jove! — Glad enough now, though."

"What! are you going to leave us?" asked Bilberry.

"I shall bid your dad good-b'ye in five minutes, and I wish the old buck luck with the next ghost he gets."

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So saying, he vanished behind some pasteboard mists, which were reared up to hide the interior.

Our hero waited his return, and then informed him that he also was going away.

"But why — what — what's amiss?" asked he.

Bilberry clapped his hand significantly to his empty pocket.

"Ah! I know him! Excuse me, but he's a d — d old scrub, after all. Never mind, my lad: I've had a dad of my own, you know; but he's better than him, at any rate. Here, take that. You gave me a plate of beef once, and now I'll pay you for it. Good-b'ye, and God bless you, if I never see you no more!"

He shook Bilberry's hand most passionately in his delight, left a five-pound note in the palm, and, before our hero could thank him, had disappeared in the darkness which now shrouded the race-ground.

Young Thurland's feelings were not at that moment in a very stoical mood; therefore there is no wonder that the tears, which before stood in his eyes for grief, now gushed out in gratitude.

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He hastened in to his mother, and threw the note down before her, as he exclaimed, "Look! there's a man worth a hundred fathers!"

Mrs. Thurland cast her sharp eye upon it, and replied, "Well, this'll buy a hundred of yours, at any time."

Eventually Bilberry was persuaded to abandon his design of going away, and, for the present, to remain with the company; but this was only through the representations of his mother, and on an understanding that for the future he should be better treated, and also paid his salary like the others.

That very night, instead of starving in the street, he took upon him the vacant office of ghost to the company; and not only on that occasion, but for some time afterwards, filled it with great satisfaction.

In this manner, then, journeying from fair to fair in a continual round of noise and excitement, idleness and play, — for well might he be said to be at play even when he worked, — did Bilberry pass a considerable time, diversified

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by the changing circumstances of all complexions incident to his profession, by many serious thoughts of Bessy, and many regrets that they had ever parted, or, having parted, might never meet again.

How, throughout this long period, his father might have kept the promise made to treat him better, can only be conjectured; as, very luckily, an incident occurred during one of their exhibitions which put the old chap's faith beyond the necessity of a trial. Bilberry had been engaged to appear in a respectable character, and was taking out the dress he wore on the memorable night of his giving a song at Wenborough, when suddenly a purse dropped out. It was his own, with thirty pounds in it, which he had suspected was stolen; but that now appeared to have fallen from him unperceived, and been accidentally rolled up in the hurry of their decampment and put into the box, where it had lain unsuspected until this moment, in consequence of the dress not having before been wanted.

Ere this money was spent, a great and most

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happy circumstance occurred, — one for which the reader has some time been on the look-out, and which eventually was the cause of a termination being put to the difficulties and vicissitudes of Bilberry Thurland's wandering life; consequently, also, which must prove fatal to our book, by bringing it to its latter end.

This circumstance will be found related in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER XII.

OUR THEATRICAL COMPANY ARRIVE AT WETHERTON. — BILBERRY PAYS A VISIT TO SAM POGSON'S AT STRAGGLETHORPE. — OBTAINS INFORMATION OF BESSY'S RETREAT.

In this manner, succeeding neither very well nor very ill in his profession, did Bilberry pass a long period of time; until at length the course of events, or rather the round of country fairs, brought his company to that identical market-town of Wetherton, which the reader will remember being mentioned, in the famous courtship of Samuel Pogson, and not far from whence that valiant and original character resided. Bilberry had never before visited Wetherton, although he perfectly well recollected both the name and the occasion on which he first heard it mentioned.

Ever intent in his most secret thoughts upon

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the unhappy Bessy, he no sooner arrived with his company in the town, than he resolved at the earliest opportunity to steal privately over to Samuel Pogson's, for the purpose of making some inquiries of him respecting her; as thinking she might have returned to the neighbourhood of the place from whence at first he had eloped with her. With almost a certainty, then, in his bosom of gaining the much-desired intelligence, Bilberry one afternoon dressed himself in his best clothes; and, having inquired the way to Stragglethorpe, the village where Pogson resided, set forward with a beating heart and high hopes that his inquiries after her would no longer prove vain, as heretofore.

Eager and impatient, he viewed every fresh milestone with a brighter face, until, passing the last almost at a trot, he entered the old village about half an hour before sunset. A thousand recollections of the past thronged vividly on his mind, almost like

the re-enacting of old realities. Many changes had occurred to him since last he stood on that ground; while the things around him had also visibly changed
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along with them. He looked up, and beheld that famous sign of the Cock, which he had formerly seen suspended in all its freshness and glory, now so weather-worn and storm-battered, that only one leg, the tail, and a dim shadow of the body, like a ghost, remained to assure him he was right.

Entering the house, he sat down, for the sake of old recollections, on the same bench as he had formerly occupied, and called for a glass of ale. It was served him by Mrs. Pogson, who of course could not be expected to recognise him, and to whom Bilberry did not think fit at present to discover himself. He looked anxiously round, but the landlord was absent. On inquiring for him, Mr. Thurland was much mortified and disappointed to be informed that he was gone to Wetherton fair; "But," added Mrs. P. "I'm expecting him home ivery minnit, for he seldom stops out much after dark."

This consoled Bilberry's feelings, and determined him to wait the landlord's return. About eight o'clock, — that is, full two hours after, — to our hero's great satisfaction, Samuel walked in.
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He had taken a sup of ale at Wetherton, but was nevertheless in a very good humour.

"Come, Sam," observed Mrs. P., as he entered the bar, "you 're a deal later than you said you'd be. I knowed that would be it."

"Blame it! ne'er mind, Kitty," he replied, looking her very kindly full in the face; "one can't go to a fair, and not stop a bit, ony how. Come, gie me a kiss, and then I've got summut for you."

"Ay," replied the landlady, "I can tell by that you've had your ale, as usual."

"I know I have," said he; "what then? It would be a dom'd odd thing if I hadn't, I think. Look here; I've boat you a new gown for a fairin': come, put us on one of your best looks for it, at ony rate. And here's a pair of razhors for myself."

"I wouldn't have spent so much money, Sam, if I'd bin you," observed Mrs. P. very miserly.

"No, no," he replied; "so long as it goes in gowns and bonnets, and sich like, it's all right — here's ne'er a word said; but if I happen

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to lay out a penny on my own chin, all th' world goes wrong in a minnit. Dom it! I think my face has bin like a scrubbing-brush long enough; and if *you* like to put up wi' it, I don't: so there's a end to 't altogether. Bring me a glass of gin and watter, and a pipe, and then look at your gown; — I know you'll like th' pattern on't."

Saying which, the landlord walked into the kitchen, and placed himself in the corner of the chimney opposite Bilberry.

Not long was it ere these two worthies entered into conversation; although Mr. Pogson no more than his wife had the least suspicion of whom he had got for a guest.

Very anxious to ascertain whether his host knew anything of Bessy, Mr. Thurland let not many minutes slip by before he introduced the subject by putting the question plain and plump to the landlord.

"Bessy — Bessy?" replied the latter consideringly, "why, you see, we've had sich a mony on 'em one time or another; — do you mean her as interloped wi' that young rascad? — consarn it

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as I don't remember his name now! — Well! I thought I know'd that name as well as my own!"

"Thurland," suggested Bilberry.

"Ah! that's it, — Thirland; that's the name for sartin. But how comes you to find it out, let me ax? — do you know him?"

"Very well indeed," replied our hero.

"Do you indeed? — But you don't say so? Why, I say, missis, here's a man here knows that young Thirland as run awey wi' that first old Bess of arn!"

Then turning again towards Bilberry, and staring him right into the eyes, he continued,

"And where is he? — what is he doing? — do you know? Ar parish wanted to find him, for, you see, he act'ally went off wi' her ten or twelve month, and then sent her back agen over here wi' a great big child in her arms enough for *mae* to carry."

"What, then, she is here now, is she?" asked Bilberry, with the rising blood in his cheeks, and a leaping heart.

"No, no," exclaimed Pogson; "she's gone

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agen. What could wae do wi' her, do you think? When she first corned back, it so happened as Mrs. Wild, ar parson's wife, was took ill of a lyin'-in; so, very lucky for Bessy, they took her, as they wanted a sort of a what they call a wet nurse I think it is; though, as for that matter, all nurses is wet enough now and then. But says Missis Wild to her, says she, 'You know, Bessy, we arn't going to sancktion ony o' your doings; but for all I take you into this place, I hope to see you repent, and humble yourself afore God for your wickedness. Mr. Wild,' said she, 'I'll show you where to read th' Script ur'; and I hope the Lord 'll have a bit of marcy on you when th' time comes as you'll be called on for your account.' That advice," continued Samuel, "I understood, at th' time made her cry a gret deal; and I raelly believe she did repent, and has bin a very good wench iver since. But, poor crater! as I have larnt lately, there was some excuse for her, as she was born same way herself; so it was only what some folks calls heredittary to her. Her faither, we 're toud, is a

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gret man somewhere or other; though her mother put her to us, and niver said noat about it, as she ought to hae done."

All this was very refreshing intelligence to Bilberry; yet he had not arrived at the first and final question, — where was she now?

To this Mr. Pogson replied,

"She's now down at Wetherton, i' sarvis to a nice old lady as niver had no child'en of her own, and so has took to Bessy's, as it is one o' th' prittiest little wenches I iver clapped eye on. I don't know exactly whereabout th' house is; but, if you're partikler, I could larn, I dar' to say."

Bilberry would have spoken, but the words choked him. He put his hands before his face and burst into tears. This astonished the landlord: he flung his pipe on to the floor, and, rising from his seat, exclaimed, "Consarn it! what's amiss? Missis! — here, here! — come here!" Mrs. P. was instantly at his side.

"Here's one o' th' oddest things," he continued, "as iver happened i' this house sin' I was born under it. Mae and this young man

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was on'y talking about that Bessy, you know; and just as I was telling him where she lives, he goes and bursts right out a-crying like a child, just as you see."

Hereupon Mr. Pogson opened his eyes in a vacant stare, like that of an owl by daylight.

The landlady began to ask Bilberry very soothingly what was amiss, and who he was. When our hero had recovered his speech and summoned up a more manly spirit, he raised his head, and, looking at both, observed,

"I wonder you don't know me again. I am that same Thurland."

Mrs. Pogson started back, and her husband leaped a foot high from the floor.

"You that Thirland!" cried Samuel: "well, dom it, if this isn't a merrykle. I don't know you again, neither. Houd your head up an' let's look at you; — well, I fancy you do look a little like him, too. I dar' to say you are; but four or five years at your age maks sich a difference. What, then, you've comed after Bessy agen? And do you mean to tak' her i' lawful padlock?"

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Bilberry replied, that if she would have him, he should marry her before the week was out.

"Have you! — ah, that she will, I'm sartin! You're too good-lookin for ony woman to turn up her nose at wi' impewnity."

And with this compliment to Bilberry's figure the host sat down. But instantly he got up again, observing, "Well, this plazes mae more than onythink as has happened of some time. Who could ha' thought it? Come, missis, mix him a glass of gin and watter, and tak' one yourself o'er it, an' all; and then gie mae another sup, just for luck to him."

Our host and Bilberry eventually discoursed together till midnight; the latter relating many of his past adventures, to the no small amusement of both Pogson and his lady. But when these worthy people were finally informed by Bilberry that at this very time he was performing at Thurland's pavilion in Wetherton market-place, their admiration became extreme; and also, as he could easily perceive, their respect for him was amazingly increased. He

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had unwittingly made himself out to be, in their opinions, a mighty great man.

They persuaded him to sleep there free of charge, and early on the morrow he returned to the town; though not without first having obtained Pogson's promise to come down to Wetherton in the afternoon, and call upon him at the theatre, from whence they should proceed to the house where Bessy now resided.

This agreeable project of theirs, however, was ultimately defeated in the following most unexpected manner. But it is worthy of a new chapter.

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CHAPTER XIII.

BILBERRY AND BESSY MEET AGAIN. — A PLEASING PIECE OF INTELLIGENCE CONCERNING THAT YOUNG WOMAN. — THEY ARE MARRIED AT STRAGGLETHORPE. — SAM POGSON'S HEREDITARY SONG.

On the eventful afternoon of this day, then, Bilberry appeared on the platform, where Mr. Pogson had engaged to meet him, in a new private dress, which set off his figure and features to great advantage.

Most impatiently did he await the coming of his host; for, as the time drew nearer and nearer when he felt certain of again meeting his Bessy, so did his eager desires grow stronger and stronger.

At length friend Samuel arrived, and in few words communicated the agreeable intelligence to Bilberry that he had ascertained exactly

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where Bessy dwelt. But, instead of going down with him immediately, as our hero desired, Pogson insisted on waiting a few minutes to see the performances of the fool, whose wit and skill every now and then drew bursts of laughter in an involuntary chorus from the assembled multitude. These few minutes, however, served to ruin their project of visiting Bessy at the house of her mistress; for ere they had expired, and Mr. Pogson felt himself at liberty to go, a very remarkable circumstance occurred.

In a mood of mind widely apart from that which is requisite to the enjoyment of folly, Bilberry was leaning against a pillar at the back of the platform, gazing vacantly at the spectators, who now were crowding up the steps on to the stage, — for his mind was away on an object far different to the things around him, — when the countenance of one young woman amongst all the rest of the visitors suddenly caught his eye. She

was neatly dressed, and had a beautiful little girl by the hand. Scarcely had she attained the platform ere Bilberry

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rushed forward with his arms outspread, almost shrieking,

"Bessy! Bessy!" and in the next moment clasped her wildly to his breast.

The performers around him seemed struck with astonishment. The fool ceased his antics, the extended and dense crowd before them sank to instantaneous silence; while every mouth was open in breathless wonder and expectation, and a thousand eager and inquiring eyes were directed anxiously upon that young couple, who thus, in the midst of farce, had so unexpectedly introduced a bit of the truly pathetic. The multitude appeared at first to think it a professional scene, and as such, to mark their sense of its being very admirably acted, simultaneously greeted it with two distinct rounds of applause. The fool had made them laugh; but this alone could inspire so uncouth and rugged an assemblage with feeling sufficient to cause so open and enthusiastic a demonstration.

Meantime, regardless of so many spectators, Bilberry kissed her over and over; while the little girl cried bitterly, and at last the unhappy

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Bessy herself fainted in our hero's arms. The performers now crowded round to render her assistance, and, amidst another louder and more long-continued shout of approbation from the people, these three real actors were taken into the interior of the theatre.

No sooner were they gone, and the momentary excitement of the scene had partially passed, so as to leave opportunity for an instant's reflection, than some amongst the multitude remarked that neither of our heroes wore theatrical dresses, and must therefore have been private people. Inquiries instantly arose concerning what had just passed; and rising calls of "What are they? — Who are they?" and the like, began to be heard in various parts of the crowd.

Samuel Pogson, being the only person then present who knew anything about it, was induced by the performers round him, though little persuasion was at that moment necessary, to advance to the front of the stage, and briefly deliver what he knew in explanation of the event. Being, as the reader from experience is

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aware, gifted with an excellent tongue, though rather broadly set in his native dialect, this task Samuel immediately undertook, and discharged with his accustomed eloquence so much to the satisfaction of the audience, that another round of applause followed the conclusion of his speech.

So pleased were the hearers with the rare proof of affection evinced on this occasion, that simultaneously many began to call for these two faithful lovers to appear again on the stage. This was not at first complied with; but the shouts increasing both in frequency and vehemence, and Bessy being by this time recovered through the attentions of Mrs. and the Misses Thurland, she and Bilberry, hand in hand, were eventually led on to the platform. An universal huzza, and waving of hats and handkerchiefs, instantly commenced, mingled with loud cries from those close under the platform for the prosperity and happiness of the young couple. This subsiding, they again withdrew, to unburden in retirement those feelings of the over-excited bosom, the expression of which no

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eye might see nor ear might hear. Some mind, however, might venture to conjecture, and. therefore we will suppose that Bilberry exerted all his powers of demonstration to prove that the unhappy circumstance which had caused her so suddenly to leave him, involved on his part more misfortune than guilt; while Bessy, who had heard the story of it from some slanderous lips, doubtless highly exaggerated, in all probability found the cause infinitely less in reality than it had been represented to her, and now regretted having so hastily taken the steps she had done. At all events, she must have been convinced that Bilberry's affection for her had never died, from the fact of his having left money at Widow Thornton's; and part of which, he was now most happy to find, had proved a sufficient assistance in the period of her greatest need.

It will not have been forgotten in what manner Bilberry was affected on occasion of the reading of his late master's will, when the name of a natural daughter of the old gentleman's, Miss Elizabeth Bunting, was mentioned, together

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with the legacy bequeathed to her. It was then assigned as a reason for his emotion on hearing mentioned the name of this daughter, that some sudden hope sprung in his

bosom of one day meeting with her, and endeavouring to obtain her for his wife. But the reason for that hope was, that in Elizabeth Bunting he discovered his own Bessy. The conversation he had lately heard from the veritable mouth of Samuel Pogson appeared to confirm the truth of that discovery. Now was the time finally to ascertain from Bessy herself whether she was or was not the individual mentioned. Without troubling ourselves with needless particulars, let it suffice to say, that this was easily decided. Bessy at once declared her name, to be the same; that she believed her father to be a man of property; but what his name, her mother would never tell, having perhaps deemed it most prudent, on account of both parties, to keep that secret.

Bessy, of course then, had not heard of her good fortune. The executors of old Sir Robert had either taken no trouble to find her out, or, if

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so, their search had failed. But, feeling anxious — whether truly or deceptively, or perhaps partly both, the reader must judge — to make Bessy believe that not interest so much as affection had induced him to search her out, Bilberry first plainly told Bessy of all her good fortune before he asked her to marry;

"Thinking," he added, "that now you have so much money, this might make some difference, and weigh with you to accept some other one more worthy and deserving than me."

"No, never, never, Bilberry!" she exclaimed; "I shall never have any one but you. Take all the money; I know you will do right to me now. We have seen a deal of bad luck; but we will be happy at last."

Mrs. Thurland, who stood by during this interview, now whispered behind Bilberry's head, "Take her directly, my lad. I told you at first I should bring you up to a good trade, and you'd live to do something for your mother when she got old. Make me a nice present when you get married, and I'll not trouble you any more."

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While Sara Pogson, who also, as an especial acquaintance, was in the room, no sooner heard Bessy's last speech, than he turned sharp round to Bilberry, exclaiming,

"There! you hear that, don't you? Dom it! I know'd no wimmin wi' eyes in their heads could houd out long agen sich a face as yourn. After you were gone that other night, I swore to my missis, as she was drawin' th' bed-cuttains, that Bessy 'd have you

as soon as iver you liked to ax, — I know'd she would; and here you are, you see, just as I said. But, consarn it, though; at one time, when you an' her interloped from ar house, I niver thoat I should live to see this dey. Well, it's better to be married a bit too late than not at all. I've seen mony a bad job patch'd up till it wer' as good or perhaps a bit better than a new un. As for you, Bessy," and he turned to the other side, "now you've got sich a fortin, I reckon you'll excuse mae turning you out o' th' house i' sich a hurry as I did; for you see, after all, at that time you wasn't one o' th' best wenches i' th' world. Dom your sly tricks! you had your

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eye upo' young Thirland that very night, I raelly belave, since I've seed what's corned on't. But, howiver, I don't wonder at it; for sartinly, if *I*'d bin a wench, I should have done same myself."

That Bessy was extremely surprised at the singular fact of Bilberry's having by mere chance gone to service in the house of her own father, she did not fail to express, although we omitted before to mention it. Indeed, as she herself remarked, it was very probable, that but for that circumstance, she should never have known of her bequest at all, nor received a farthing of the money; since, from the time already elapsed, it appeared sufficiently evident that the executors did not trouble themselves to fulfil Sir Robert's will; under the idea, perhaps, that even if the money were never paid, the parties who ought to receive it were too obscure and humble to obtain justice, or might possibly never know even that it had been bequeathed.

Under these circumstances, Bessy seemed to

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consider that Bilberry had as good a title to it as herself.

The young couple lost no time in communicating the information to Bessy's mother, who luckily still lived to support her daughter's title to the legacy. Within a few days, all three went down to Wenborough, where, without Bilberry again making his appearance at Captain Flunks's house, Bessy put in her claim; and, after some legal difficulty, — for the law always rides pick-a-back on one sort of difficulty or another, — had it allowed. Her birth was fully proved, and the legacy paid over. Thus, then, masters of three thousand pounds, Bilberry and Bessy returned happily to Wetherton to be married. They were impatient to have the ceremony performed that same day; but on

second thoughts it occurred to them whether, as Mrs. Wild had once behaved so kindly to Bessy when in her greatest necessity, it would not be better, and more satisfactory to that lady, to see them married at Stragglethorpe by Mr. Wild himself.

This matter was mentioned by Bilberry to

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Mr. Pogson, who, since the late happy events, had not failed coining down to Wetherton every day to see them. On hearing the proposition, Samuel exclaimed,

"Oh, sartinly, sartinly! For my part, if it had bin mae that was to be married, I should niver ha' thoat of noat-else. To be sure, — that's th' best thing you can do; and then — wae 'll keep th' weddin' at ar house. I not let nobody obtrude theirselves on you; and I know my missis'll do her best i' kewking, and that way, to mak' you as comfortable as sheep i' wool. We Ml have all th' best joints i' Wetherton, — as I reckon you mean to ax your faither and mother, and all them fine folks along wi' 'em, — and then, dom mae! if I don't get drunk o'er it for once, as it's a thing that may niver happen agen i' my life-time; for, you mind, I look on myself as having a bit of a finger i' th' consarn, one how or another, at all events. It shall go hard wi' me an' all, but I'll sing you a song just to finish off wi', as I know one o' th' best in Ingland, though it's older than my grandfaither's dey. He used to sing it ivery

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night of his life; and I've heard him say it was that as first broat custom to ar house so much. My faither, like a gret soft as he was i' mony things, didn't sing it above three times in his life; but as for mae, I tak' care to have it over ivery time ony body partikler comes under th' roof, and that-a-way I fancy wae 've got more folks together since Kitty and mae took to the house. Besides, I think it's raither too good to be let drop all together; though, for that matter, who'll larn it next I don't know, for it seems pritty sartin now as I shall niver have not the least bit of a family i' th' world."

The last clause of his sentence Mr. Pogson uttered in a somewhat unusually dejected mood, and for a moment ceased to speak. This afforded Bilberry an opportunity to reply — for who of woman born could resist the landlord's temptation? — that he himself did, and he felt certain Bessy would, perfectly acquiesce in the proposition. Nor in this opinion was he mistaken: that happy damsel at once assented,

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and this arrangement was eventually carried into effect.

The next morning beheld the "pavilion" closed; while Mr. Thurland senior, that gentleman's lady, accompanied by her abundant family, and the remaining part of their company, went over as a kind of escort or bodyguard with Bilberry and Bessy to Stragglethorpe, in the church of which village the latter were married by Mr. Wild.

The ceremony being completed, that gentleman took an opportunity of addressing them both in a kind tone of reprehension for the folly and crime of which they had been guilty in running away and setting at nought the express commands of the holy Scriptures; but at the same time he expressed his great satisfaction that they had at length come to a proper sense of their errors, and, by thus repairing them as far as they were able, had made that atonement which he trusted would obtain them mercy and forgiveness on that awful day when they should be finally called upon to render an account of their actions in the past life. At

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this discourse Bessy dropped a few repentant tears, and Bilberry looked as grave and thunder-struck as could be expected from a young man of his character on such an occasion. But as for the landlord, he by no means approved of the clergyman's discourse.

"Now, I want to ax yo', missis," said he, turning to Mrs. Thurland, "what in the world is he going on preaching them a sarment now for? — going here and setting that new-married Bessy a crying like a pump, when i'stead she ought to be as brisk as a robin wi' worms?"

"Everybody to his trade, you know," replied that lady: "we all try to push a penn'orth off where we can, whether folks want it or not."

Samuel regarded her with a look of disapprobation; and, turning his back upon her, muttered pretty loudly,

"Dom it! if I'd knowed yo' had sich a 'pinion as that, I'd ne'er hae spent a word in axing you about it."

It was evident that Mrs. Thurland and the

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landlord were not chickens of the same hatch, nor of any similarity of feather; Sam took too much after the goose, and Mrs. Thurland after the game-fowl.

We are happy to state, nevertheless, that their difference was not so great as to interrupt the harmony and enjoyment of the occasion.

The whole party returned to Mr. Pogson's pot-house, and, under the heroical protection of "ar Cock," promised themselves a pleasant season of festivity.

The landlord was never known to appear so busy and important as on that day; never was he known in reality to do less. He appeared to be agitated by some unusual interior spring, which, like mercury in a dumpling, made him fly from place to place continually. Now he watched the composition of a pudding; then thrust in between the cook and her meat his superfluous directions as to the place and position of skewers and hooks; and again, for the twentieth time, put the poker into the fire, stirred up the cinders, and blew the dust

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away, in preparation for the approaching roastings.

"*Do*, Sam, get out of one's way, will you!" cried Mrs. Pogson very sourly for the fiftieth time. The maid *looked* the same thing again, and again; the company set him down as a tiresome fellow. But Sam stood as much in the way as ever; and while he refused to do anything of consequence himself, because he had resolved to have a holiday, he hindered everybody else by seeing that they did their business properly.

In the afternoon, a splendid company, the representatives of kings, queens, and nobles, sat down to dinner very condescendingly with those two obscure persons, the host and hostess; while, afterwards, the musicians to the pavilion assisted the gaiety with now and then a specimen of their several instruments. Mirth and jollity increased as the ale was poured out, until at length Mr. Pogson, finding himself in good condition for the task, proposed to introduce the song he had formerly promised for the

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occasion. All seconded the proposition; whereupon Sam laid down his pipe, slackened his waistcoat, and observing to himself, as if calling up his own courage, "Come, then, let's try what wae can do," commenced that song, to the precepts of which he had himself already so fully conformed.

THE PRAISE OF ALE.

The Lord at his table may tipple his wine,
His champaigns, his sherries, and hocks, superfine;

He may smack at their flavour, and stupidly boast
They are drink for the gods up above, in his toast, —
He may talk of their vintage, their age, and such stuff,.
But give me strong ale, boys, and give me enough!
For of all the good liquors this world doth produce,
No liquor can equal our old barley juice!
We English have drunk it a thousand years o'er,
And nightly we'll drink it a thousand years more.

Go, look in the closet where Wiseacre thinks, —
Where he writes, with his gruels and waters for drinks;
If you read him, and ask why his wit is as thin
As the waters and gruels he washeth within, —
I answer, he writes all this terrible stuff
By not drinking strong ale, or not drinking enough!
For of all the good liquors, &c. &c.
But go to the cabin where Roger doth sit, —
How happy his heart is! how brilliant his wit!"
He jokes and he gabbles so well, that the elf
By his own clever sayings amazes himself.

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But the truth is, he utters such excellent stuff,
By drinking strong ale, boys, and drinking enough!
So of all the good liquors, &c. &c.
What liquor can equal, &c. &c.
Then what under heaven should hinder a man
From drinking of ale, boys, as much as he can?
It makes him, 'tis clear, much more clever than they
Who with all their book-learning drink water all day.
If you'd think, write, look, sing, or say, capital stuff,
You must drink of strong ale, boys, and drink it enough!

For of all the good liquors, &c. &c.

"There, — you call that as good a song o' th' sort as you iver heard in your lives, don't you?" asked the landlord, as soon as he had blown the last note out, and caught another breath. "Howiver, if yo' don't, why, let ony man here sing mae a better, — that's all."

And again the pipe found its way between his lips, as he waited for the answer of the company. Every one was in too excellent an humour to find fault, although Samuel's voice could not be pronounced the most delectable in the world; while the music to which his song was set appeared in great part to be an original composition of his own.

Mrs. Thurland was the first to accept the landlord's challenge.

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"Well," said she, in allusion to Pogson's song, "I've heard worse, to be sure; though I can hardly tell you when nor where, it's so long since. However, as he wants somebody to sing a better, let me try what *I* can do."

Mrs. Thurland first rapped her fist upon the table, cried "Silence, silence there! Thurland, keep your squad quiet, will you? I'm going to sing a song, and beat the landlord"

And then, in a sharp shrill voice, which reverberated along the rafters, and shook the paper fly-cage hanging from the beam as with a tertian ague, gave out as follows:

Pish! pish! — what the world in its folly believes! —
In truth we 're all hypocrites, beggars, and thieves.
With a good honest man should we chance to be blest,
He's obliged to turn knave to keep up with the rest.
In spite of all seeming, cant, humbug, and such,
The world, on my soul! is not worth very much.
Truth, honesty, justice, together go fling,
I would not give sixpence for all you could bring!

CHORUS.

Then, under the rose, let none turn up his nose
At us who eat scraps and wear tatter'd trunk-hose!
We have much in our mouths about right and 'bout wrong,
While the sweet oil of-piety softens the tongue;

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We lick, and we coax, and we pray, and we whine,
And we put on a face that looks next to divine,
And we quote from the Scripture, from 'postle and saint,
And we roll up our eyes as if ready to faint;
But, Lord! — and I swear it because I have tried, —
Like a grubby old nut it is nought but outside!

CHORUS.

Then, under the rose, let none turn up his nose
At us who eat scraps and wear tatter'd trunk-hose!

Another loud thumping on the table, performed by Mrs. Thurland herself, announced the conclusion, in like manner as it had ushered in the commencement, of her song.

When this had subsided, Mr. Pogson, whose eyes had been fixed on Mrs. Thurland throughout the progress of her ditty, asked, somewhat triumphantly,

"And yo' call that better than mine and my faither's, do you? — cos, dom your impedance if you do, or onythink like it. I'll repeal to ivery head round this table if I haven't left yo' a long, long way behind. Yo' haven't hardly reach'd th' distance-post, I tell you; much more licked me, as you talked of doing."

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though, like the teller of the House of Commons, he would ascertain the majority of ayes or noes upon the question.

"Never mind, good man," cried Mrs. Thurland; "it will be of no consequence to-morrow morning which was best, for they'll both be forgot, I dare say. Come, come, some of you lads try your hand. It is a sad pity if I'm to have had all the trouble of being your mother, without getting a song or two out of you at last of all. Now, Nossy, you 're the boy, I think."

The individual thus addressed was one of Bilberry's brethren, Nossy Thurland by name, a heavy-souled dolorous gentleman, whose business in his father's establishment it was to do all the horrible, the painful, and the pathetic.

Without a second invitation he began; and in a rumbling voice and tune, not unlike the dash of a torrent under ground, sung, however inappropriate to the occasion, the following words, from some romantic little opera or other belonging to the company:

And Samuel cast a questionable and canvassing glance at each individual of his company, as

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Oh, BLESSED be the maiden who fills my eyes with light!
But cursed be her brother, who cross'd our love in spite!
May his hands all wither'd fail him, — may his eyes in youth grow dim, —
May he pine in grief and misery, with none to succour him!
Or if Fortune seem to favour, and promise peace and rest,
May her smile prove full of treachery, like his own deceitful breast!
Oh, BLESSED be the maiden who fills my eyes with light,
But CURSED be her brother, who crossed our love in spite!
For seven long years I lov'd him; he was my bosom's joy:
But the man doth prove a viper, whom I succour'd when a boy.
Age worketh many changes; — but, alas! it is the worst
When him we bless'd in childhood, in manhood must be curs'd.
Yet I would not curse him deeper than to wish the world may be
To him as heartless, dark, and base, as he hath been to me.
Oh, BLESSED be the maiden who fills my eyes with light!
But CURSED be her brother, who cross'd our love in spite!

"Come, that isn't a bad un," observed the landlord, "only it's raither too high-larnt. I can't see exactly what it means."

The singer looked across the table, and observed,

"Nor can I tell you what, just now; but it means more than it looks." Then turning towards

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his father, as one who understood the language of his profession, he continued, — "'Marry, this is *miching mallecho*; — it means mischief.'"

But why, or to whom, remains, like the authorship of Junius, a mystery.

In this manner, drinking, talking, and singing, our party passed a long day and evening.

About nine o'clock, Sam Pogson began to grow somewhat solicitous on account of Bessy and her spouse, as may be judged from one of his usual plain-spoken opinions, addressed to Bilberry.

"Come, come, Mr. Thirland, I begin to think it's about time yo' and Bessy was off altogether; it's getting late enough for ony-think. And raelly, if I am to speak for myself, I do feel quite consarned upon boath your accounts. We'll exqueeze you at once. Don't stop for us, nor noat o' th' sort; we've all larnt how to eat and drink wi'out your company; so I recommend you to be off wi'out ony more ceremony"

Mrs. Thurland senior seconded the landlord's

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motion in a neat speech, which, we are happy to say, caused it to be finally carried by a considerable majority.

Afterwards, the mirth and jollity of the meeting were kept up with undiminished spirit; and our wedding-guests remained upon the ground so late, that Mr. Pogson was eventually obliged to accommodate them for the night under his own roof. This he did in an original manner. Not having beds enough, he placed a pole upright in the centre of the kitchen, spread the floor with straw, and arranged the whole company of gentlemen players round it, with their feet to the axle, like so many spokes of a wheel. The ladies were similarly accommodated elsewhere; and thus was that merry day of their lives "*rounded* with a sleep and a long one, too, for they did not arise to go back to Wetherton until the morrow afternoon.

Having taken their farewell of Bilberry and his wife, old Thurland and his company packed up their theatre that same evening, — the fair being over, — and went away to try their fortune elsewhere. But Mrs. Thurland only would not

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be persuaded to accompany them. True to her promise, made some time before, not to continue long with Mr. Thurland, she chose this opportunity for carrying it into effect. Her reason for so doing now was principally because she had obtained a handsome present from her son, and wished to enjoy the fruits of it undivided. Accordingly, she resumed her basket and former dress; and, first presenting Bilberry and his wife, as a marriage present, with the cheapest thing she had about her, — a great blessing on both their heads, went forth rejoicing on her travels as before, when we first met with her.

As for Bilberry himself, some time he spent in considering with Bessy how best they might dispose of their fortune. Various projects were formed but to be abandoned. At last, as our hero knew something of farming and garden-craft, and his wife also understood poultry, pigs, and the dairy, they resolved to reside in the country rather than the town, and accordingly purchased a neat little homestead in the very village of Stragglethorpe at which they

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were married, and where they might have Mr. Pogson for a neighbour.

Thus was Bilberry Thurland finally settled down to that quiet adventureless married life, which, having so often been represented as a dry affair, it would not suit our object to meddle with or describe. That Bilberry himself contrived, during a long series of years, to diversify it a little by now and then passing a few hours with Mr. Pogson, and listening, as in former days, to that gentleman's comical tales, is very certain.

While at home, he enjoyed as much happiness as a married man could do, (and that, ye married men, you know to be' the greatest under the sun,) in the contemplation of his rural thriving homestead, in the confirmed good opinions of his wife, and in the rearing up of that lovely little girl, — to say nothing of three others of later date, — who was born under such unhappy circumstances, as the reader already knows; but whose beauty and abilities caused her to be continually sought after by the beaux

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of Stragglethorpe, until, most happy are we to record, she at length fell into one of their hands, and, having married, subsequently turned Bilberry into a grandfather.

Many years after this, — for the happiest lives must end; the day passes over, and man dies, — Mr. Thurland was peacefully gathered to the dust. Bessy remained a widow only two years, and then was carried after him. Their bones lie together in the green yard of Stragglethorpe church, dividing the honour of one head-stone between them.

Honoured or unhonoured, remembered or forgotten, relics of mortality, may you ever rest there in peace! Be your bed undug for other tenants! In life you have made us joyful; in death let us not gaze upon the place of your repose without some thought becoming our humanity!

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L' ENVOI.

I.

READER, let us not yet part! Stand by us while we dig the graves and bury a few more of our old friends. It is what some day others shall do for you; then stay thou and do likewise for others.

Our tale is ended. But during those latter and concluding years of Mr. Thurland's life, which at once closed his career and ours with him together, many changes happened, many chances came, to those with whom, in a passing manner, it was our fortune to meet during the

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course of this history. Changes and chances, which, common though they are, have been, and ever will be, to all pilgrims between the cradle and the coffin, are yet too seldom told, too seldom listened to, too seldom even known. We pass through the world, we see ten thousand human beings possessed of the same passions, the same feelings, and surrounded by similar circumstances with ourselves; but how little do we reflect that the life of each individual of all these offers, — would we but seek into it, — if not a whole new story, at least many new and unexpected passages.

In a similar manner have we passed through this book. We have met with many, glanced our eyes across them in a crowd, laughed at their peculiarities, or mayhap wet our eyes with a tear over their misfortunes, — passed by, and thought of them no more.

Yet all this was very natural. Had we. at that time attended to their business, we must have neglected our own; had we delayed for the purpose of telling their stories, we must have

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overpassed the story of Mr. Thurland; for the mind, like the weaver's reel, must take but one thread at a time, to keep itself unravelled. Now, however, we may be permitted to turn our attention for a brief half-hour to a few of those characters whom we were under the necessity of dropping, "sadly and silently," into a temporary oblivion, as we pursued our course; just as the late Mr. Sadler, or rather as that other equally high character, the present Mr. Green, lets fall his ballast to the ground when it becomes too heavy for him, and is likely to impede his course. Unlike him, however, we intend to gather ours up again. Here is a specimen of it.

Is there any one of our readers, man or woman, who has the heart to turn either male or female nose up at the fate of that admirable and kind character Mr. James Blunt? — him whom we left singly supporting his mother, when all her other descendants would have quartered her like a parish pauper upon one another alternately, and thus have converted their own

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dwellings into so many temporary workhouses, merely for the sake of avoiding the expense of providing their venerable progenitor with her last few earthly crumbs of bread? If so, we desire neither for ourselves nor our book the pollution of either his or her company; for there can be no good heart in that breast which feels not both warmed and interested in the good-hearted amongst others.

It so happened, very unhappily, that though Zachary, as will be remembered, died possessed of something worth considering while it remained in a lump, yet, when divided amongst so many as he left behind him, it vanished comparatively to a mere nothing; while the share which remained, after the disposal of the property, for his beloved mother, was, though more than sufficient to keep her from starving, at least not enough to serve as a bait for any of her hungry relations to catch at and swallow her. These effects arose in consequence of a very characteristic act of her good son Zachary's when upon his death-bed, — one which,

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at the time of describing that scene and subsequent events, we could not tarry long enough to relate, but which we purposely reserved for this place.

It will be remembered, then, that during the pathetic night-conversation between the dying Zachary and Mr. James Blunt, the former, in allusion to his property, observed that he had divided it all amongst them. Subsequently, however, to the great discomfiture of all parties except James, who valued the dead more than what he had left behind him, it was discovered that Zachary had not only divided all amongst them, but absolutely likewise *much more* than all; for, out of an extraordinary superabundance of good-nature, and without once reflecting whether his possessions were equal to his generosity, he had given away a prodigious deal of property and cash, which existed nowhere save in his own imagination, if indeed he ever employed his imagination about

it; for the most probable case is, that Zachary took it all for granted as a common matter of fact, and

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disposed of just what his heart dictated to him, without for a moment considering whether his pockets were equal to it. Thus his will proved very like a golden dream, and his surviving relatives like so many sleepers, who, after gathering bags full in a vision, wake to find their hands as empty as their heads. When this sad fact became known, a new adjustment took place; but, owing to the combined circumstances of this depreciated fund, and the amazing number of people amongst whom Zachary had divided it, — for his bounty had extended to the farthest outposts of his acquaintance, — very little indeed could be portioned out to each individual. Some, to whom Blunt had bequeathed a hundred pounds each, satisfied themselves with a dividend of about forty shillings or two pounds ten a-piece; while others, whose legacies had been made conditional, on this odd turn in the deceased's affairs, found themselves with nothing at all, — not enough even to reward them for the pains they had been at in forcing themselves to tears, or to pay

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for the remnants of rusty crape which, like so many solitary hoops of a barrel, adorned their beavers.

Under these circumstances it was, then, that old Mrs. Blunt had been deemed by Zachary's sons-in-law too unpromising and unprofitable a subject to be worth taking into their houses, and, instead, had fallen into the better hands of her own tender-hearted James.

No sooner were Zachary's affairs properly adjusted, and all things concerning his survivors had resumed their original level, than, like another Æneas forsaking Troy, James Blunt bore that antique prize, his mother, away on his shoulders back to Stragglecoats, deeming himself more happy in the possession of her than if he had carried back instead all his brother's farm and stock together.

Remembering the dying charge given him by Zac, to use her well and carefully, James directed all his thoughts for a while to that sole purpose, and, we have pleasure in recording, succeeded so well as actually to make the old

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lady half forget she had ever been removed from the former place of her abode. She appeared to distinguish little difference between the old village of Briarhill and this of Stragglecoats, or between Zachary's house at the former and James's at the latter. And even such changes as did manifest themselves to her benumbed and dying faculties, she seemed inclined to attribute to some recent alterations and repairs which the old house had undergone, some pulling down and building up, rather than to an entire change in the residence itself; while, not unfrequently, she even went so far as to complain against the imaginary bricklayers, whom she supposed to have been at work on the house, for so altering the localities of the place, that she had a difficulty sometimes in finding her way to the respective departments of the premises.

But what, with respect to anything of this kind, most troubled Mr. James Blunt was, that, after the lapse of a few months, his mother appeared to become occasionally quite unconscious

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of her late son's decease, as evinced by the fact that not unfrequently, when seated at the table, she would raise her head, as though a brighter gleam of consciousness had suddenly flashed upon her mind, and ask very seriously where Zachary was, and why he did not come to his dinner before it got cold? These unhappy incidents never failed to fill James's eyes with tears. He laid down his knife and fork, put his plate aside, and bowed his head beneath the tablecloth and his hand; for his eye beheld Zachary mouldering in the grave instead of still gladding the earth with a good and useful existence. "He can never come here again, mother," thought he, though he seldom felt capable of expressing a single word of those thoughts.

No, Zachary could never come there to see his mother again. But, at last, — these things must be, — Death piped his flute of bone, his last weary serenade, and bade *her* away to visit *him*. This event occurred within three years of the death of Zachary.

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During the last four or five months of her existence, Mrs. Blunt had gradually become more attenuated, dry, and lifeless, without any ailment more than ordinary having shown itself. Life died imperceptibly within her; just as the reader — if a creature of any observation — must have remarked it die in the branch of some old tree; beginning to fail you know not exactly when, declining by a progress none can mark,

and *dying* in an hour which betrays nothing different from that which preceded, or. the one that follows after it. She was found by the servants sitting up in her chair, apparently having fallen asleep while in the act of clipping her finger-nails.

In this there was nothing remarkable, and the old lady was suffered to sleep on undisturbed. Not waking, however, after a lapse of four or five hours, she was examined; when, to the great consternation of all present, it was discovered that she was dead; her soul having very silently and unexpectedly given her the slip before she could finish the trifling operation

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upon which at the moment she chanced to be engaged.

But, some time before this curious event occurred, it so happened that a solitary relation, on Mrs. Blunt's own side, departed this life, and, to the astonishment of many people, left the old lady a large share of her property. When this became known at Briarhill, Zachary's daughters and their husbands, who hitherto had avoided the expense of laying out even a crust of bread upon their mother, came over to Stragglecoats twice or thrice a week to pay their duties of affection to her; not neglecting by the way to bring various baskets of strawberries which the old lady could not taste, nuts which she could not crack, and new cheese that served only to impede her digestion.

The time was gone by. Kindness, when shown only as a point of interest, is the most disgusting though the most common of human petty vices. Would that it oftener met with that which alone it deserves — the reward of disappointment! In this case Mrs. Blunt died, and left her all to James.

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This gentleman felt the loss of his mother very severely, though not so violently as that of brother Zachary. How should he, — seeing that Mrs. Blunt might be esteemed as next to dead during several years before she died? His kindness, however, to her was well rewarded. She left him almost seven thousand pounds in money. This he subsequently invested in his farm and stock to such advantage, that, at the age of fifty-five, he found himself in condition to purchase the manor of Stragglecoats, then offered for sale in consequence of the last heir having very generously and patriotically distributed about the world again nearly all which his ancestors for several generations

had been scraping together. Thus it is; — the chain of misers is ever found connected here and there by some solitary link of the spendthrift.

Another thing also, no less important, did Mr. James Blunt find when arrived at the age of fifty-five. He found himself in a condition to marry. Up to fifty-five he lived a bachelor; and hence — as the principles of moral philosophy

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lay it down — it came about, that all the affection which nature originally designed him to offer to one female creature only, he diffused at large upon the various branches of his family, in that loving sort of which the reader is already in two or three instances informed. But when death had deprived him of those objects, and thus diverted the stream of his love from its ancient channel, James poured himself with redoubled strength against a certain widow of Stragglecoats, towards whom — as upon a distant landmark which he hoped some day to reach — his eye had long been directed.

Mr. Blunt chose this pretty widow for several reasons, doubtless very good and cogent, did we know all their points and bearings; but mainly did he choose her upon this principle, that, if a man at fifty-five meditate a wife at all, he had better take a widow than an old maid, — a young maid of course would not have him, — because old maids are unchangeable. They are fixed and set, and can never be converted into what is in the best sense emphatically

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termed a wife. You may marry them, to be sure; — that will not do. A genuine old maid is, save in one particular, as much an old maid after marriage as before. You cannot brush the old maid from her features, her conversation, her habits, her manners. She is ever uneasy in her new situation; and, in the majority of cases, it is nine to one but she either regards her husband as a tyrant, or treats him as a lapdog.

Never marry an old maid, — not but that we have a great veneration for the sisterhood, — they are at once the most vexatious and useless creatures upon the face of the earth; — but never marry an old maid, simply because it will be found impossible to convert her into that most morally beautiful of created beings — a wife.

If you live till forty-five or fifty-five, and cannot prevail — (alas that you should!) — upon a young maid to have you, fly to a widow. Now, a widow is, in other words, a wife ready made to your hands. She knows her business,

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— can take her situation, like an apprentice out of his time, on her own account: she hath accumulated knowledge beforehand; and, having nothing new to learn, knows how to make use of it. A second-time married widow is only like a transplanted tree; but a married old maid is a dead stick, stuck up in hopes that it may flourish.

Thus thought Mr. James Blunt; and, thus thinking, he correspondingly acted. Fifteen months after his mother's death, he and a certain lady were observed walking to church together: before twelve o'clock, Widow Tidmarsh, after the fashion of an American snake, cast off her old slough, and emerged from the aisle, bright and new, as Mrs. Blunt.

Thus, lord of the manor of Stragglecoats, did the kind-hearted James Blunt survive and prosper many years, to the great vexation and disappointment of his brother Zachary's unfeeling sons-in-law and daughters. Having lived until, to a heart like his, the world had nothing more left in it to promise or bestow,

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he lay down on his last bed, ordered himself to be buried alongside his mother under their own pew near the chancel in the village church, and then very willingly made a return-present of that life which he had worn completely out, to Him who gave it. Behind him he left Mrs. Blunt and a fry of three young children — young enough, indeed, to have been his grandchildren rather than his sons and daughters. But, considering that he left property enough behind him to provide for all and each a competency, we shall not complain against him as otherwise we might be tempted: though it strikes us very forcibly as a general principle — and we explain it for your benefit, reader, be you male or female — that man and woman cannot in this world be guilty of a more ridiculous act than that of marrying so late in life as to run the hazard of surrounding their own grey hairs — or, worse still, no hairs at all — their own bald pates — with a hatch of goslings so young as to be just as bald as themselves. Do this, and your own children will mistake you

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for their grandfather; and mayhap, when grown to years of romphood, will tumble and push your crazy old frame about, trample on your gouty feet, laugh at the quivering

drop which dangles from the end of your nose, and, in short, bemaul and shake you from side to side so much, that at last they will fairly elbow you into your coffin.

Yet this did Mr. James Blunt; and, though better luck came of it, we by no means recommend his example to the bachelors and old unmarried men of the passing generation.

His eldest son inherited the estate, and the Blunts remain lords of the manor of Straggle-coats to this hour.

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II.

TOUCHING the last days of that other early acquaintance of ours, Mr. William Spowage, the following incidents remain to be recorded.

During several years after we last parted with him at Wenborough fair, William continued to walk the world after his accustomed manner, and under various professional appearances, until age crept stealthily upon him, shortened his steps, loaded him with a double weight, and — as if resolved that he should die musical — added several "extra-additional" quavers to his voice, and many "shakes" to his hands.

Gradually was the range of his professional changes contracted, as first one and then another fell away from the list, in consequence of

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his growing incapacity to follow them as of old; until at last, feeble, tottering, and ragged, with his hat looped on to his waistcoat button in front, as receiver-general of scraps and halfpence, and a rough supporting stick in each hand, he might be seen still haunting those villages and woodland districts in which he had spent the greater part of his life, begging in charity those last little mercies which might just enable him to finish in nature's good time the rough journey of this world.

That spirit which before Justice Barton had boasted of never having received sixpence from any parish in England, was all gone, broken down, quite forgotten, under the infirmities and oppression of years; and a crust or a farthing was a gift received with many thanks.

Friends, be not hard-hearted. Man may be a hypocrite, a villain, a fool, — we ourselves may be one or the other of these before we die; — who knows what he shall

yet come to? — Man may be old and poor with all his hypocrisy and folly, but man is man for all that; and as

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such, while life is in him, Nature loudly declares to us that between his kind and him the cord of sympathy shall not be broken. In the contemplation of the present, the past, if not totally forgotten, is and ought to be obscured by the veil of human charity.

For me, I cannot look on an old man, whatever he may have been, without Tenderness, and Pity, and Veneration, at once rising up and demanding their places in my bosom. If he be poor and helpless, Charity also asks to be admitted and to intercede for him.

Creation hath ten thousand things that demand our veneration, — the bare and hoary mountain, the ever-enduring sea, the unchangeable heavens over our heads, even the fading yet majestic old oak of the moor: but of all things beneath the sun, MAN in his decline is infinitely the most venerable. To think how the mind has been broken, the heart has been subdued! How the delights of childhood and youth have passed! How the world in which we rejoice has become a blank to him! To

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think of all the joys that are passed, — of all the misery that is now! ,

Nature gives us all good hearts at our birth; but the world meddles therewith, and sends them back to the grave ruined.

“William Spowage, I give thee my last groat!” As I said this, I passed the old man by a thorn hedge-side, as he was hobbling along through one of the most rural and beautiful parts of England. It was south of the Trent, not more than five miles from the old town of Nottingham. Little did it enter my mind at that moment that I should never see him again; that he would never reach his destination that night. But so it was.

This was about sunsetting. I had been enjoying a country ramble since shortly after daybreak the same morning. I had passed through many villages, through many pastoral districts, through valley, field, and over mountain; but amongst them all did I find nothing to be compared for beauty of situation and variety of scenery to this delightful village of Clifton,

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which was destined to be the last reposing-place of the bones of William Spowage. And though in himself no very elevated character, I had found him too closely woven with the story of Mrs. Thurland not to excite in my mind some slight interest as to his subsequent fate.

At the time of which I am speaking, there stood a rustic pot-house in the village, where many a country rambler, and many a weary admirer of nature, found repose and recreation; but which now is entirely done away, through the petty tyranny and ill-exercised influence of the proprietor of Clifton, who, though in no respect — moral or mental, that we can discover — superior to the rustics around him, or to the poor weary artisans of the neighbouring town who were accustomed occasionally to take a few hours' holiday there, yet could not endure, that either one or the other should be found with his pot of ale — a pleasant summer eve's refreshment, — within sight or hearing of that domain which even now reminds one more of the solitary lair of some scourge of the woods

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than of that kind of retreat which a right-hearted and benevolent human being would desire. Hence the pot-house was done away, the enjoyments of the humble were destroyed, and at present the admirers of nature and pastoral scenery in great part are deprived of a most delightful retreat, unless they choose to undergo considerable exhaustion for the sake of enjoying it; and all this for the want of a little common-sense discrimination between uses and abuses on the part of those from whom, if in anything differing from the conduct of ordinary men, we have a right to expect benevolence and generous consideration, rather than meanness and oppression.

At that time, however, the public-house existed; and, save upon one solitary occasion afterwards, that evening was the last upon which I ever entered it.

A beautiful evening it was, too; and one which the events of the night that followed served to impress more fully on my memory.

I sat on an old bench at the door, the church

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on one hand, a wide grove of mast-like trees on the other, from the depths of which the melancholy wood-pigeon cooed hollowly and mournfully, while the blackbird and linnet from some far low hedge-top sent their evening songs along the uplands, like the

voice of Nature herself bidding the soul of the dweller there be at rest and peace. Before me, and far below, at the foot of the high precipitous hill on which the grove is situated, swept the broad waters of the river Trent, while over its quiet surface flew a thousand swallows and sand-martins, which annually make their homes in the high bare precipice that terminates the western end of the grove. Overhead, between the parted branches, the eye caught a few glimpses of the warm and bright blue zenith; while below, level with the sight, the extremity of the western sky shone between a hundred §lender stems, like a chequered work of jet and gold. Everything amid this scene was perfectly still: even the gentle wind, which, while the sun was up, had tempered the heat of the day, had now

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died all away, and left the leaves drooping from the beech and sycamore unstirred, and the tall seed-stems of the rank grass beneath as quiet and untrembling as though they were carved in alabaster.

An eternal sabbath seemed to reign there, but for the ploughman or the sower seen on the surrounding hill-sides, or the resounding of the woodman's axe being heard now and then from the depths of some far-off plantation.

It was an hour for reflection; and, influenced in the train of my thoughts by the unhappy object I had shortly before passed on the hedgerow side, I considered pensively on the life of man, the fate to which he is born, the end and purpose of his whole existence.

In the lives of many I could account for much good to themselves and to society; in the talented, the great, and the actively useful, I could discover an object and a purpose. But when I considered the miserable poor, the creatures born in wretchedness far below the natural lot of man, — whose whole lives, useless

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to others, offer only a series of painful struggles to preserve even an animal existence, and whose deaths leave no gap, — those whose incoming few welcome, and whose exit none deplore, — I found something utterly unaccountable upon the common principles of human understanding, and in amazement asked of myself for why doth Providence permit to feeling and intellectual man all this misery, when the very beasts of the field, without toil or pain, are fully provided?

Thoughts like these, though natural, whatever they might have been then, are not fitting here.

Yet as my thoughts ran thus, the object who had excited them came along the village, cottage after cottage, begging his bread.

Still I felt the weight of sorrowful thoughts.

They of whom he begged were little better than he.

It is hard to beg; it is harder to turn away the beggar. The heart can more easily be subdued to humility than hardened to unkindness.

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A beautiful truth, this, in the page of natural humanity. May it ever be so!

I watched him so long as the disposition of the cottages and the direction of the road allowed him to remain in sight; sat musing another hour in the gathering gloom, while the bat flitted awkwardly along the air, and the owlet screamed from the steeps of the grove; and then retired for the night to an humble pallet prepared for me beneath the roof of that rustic inn.

On arising early next morning, the first intelligence I received was, that one of the villagers, having gone down to the Trent at daybreak to water his horses, had discovered the body of the old beggar, who was asking charity in the village the preceding day, lying in very shallow water, quite dead. Such, then, was the end of William Spowage.

On hearing this, I immediately hastened down to the place, and fortunately arrived there before the body had been removed from the situation in which it was found. The singular position

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in which it lay, together with the extreme shallowness of the water where William had met his death, at once excited my curiosity, and induced me to examine him. Alas! I found poor Will had fallen a victim to his wooden leg. That which had long supported him, at last had thrown him down. It had carried him well through life; but, like some good old servant who proves treacherous at last, had failed at the moment when most trusted. He lay in a swampy part of the river, to the left of a narrow lane cut through the hill whereon the grove stands, and which, as every one who knows the place will remember, leads directly down from the church and village to the water-side.

That spot has been marked in my memory ever since. I never see it without, I had almost said, a sigh; only I fear the polite reader might blush to find such a creature as Bill Spowage worth anybody's sighing over.

From subsequent inquiries I learned, that the old man had been suddenly taken ill while begging round the village on the previous night.

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Some few extra-charitable souls had offered him victuals and drink, of which he was totally unable to make use; but none — not one — would admit him into his cottage, through fear, perhaps, of being burdened with a corpse, or something worse.

The days of the Good Samaritan are gone by.

In this disastrous dilemma, poor Spowage had laid himself down on a green bank by the churchyard fence, and, as a last request, begged of the standers-by to leave him at rest for the present, and bury him on the other side of the wall against which he leaned, should they find him dead on the morrow.

Even this miserable dying bed was denied him. An account of his case had mean time reached the parish authorities; whereupon, with the accustomed humanity of those petty officials, some one was sent down after dark-hour to remove him, and thus save at once any future expense and trouble. William got up, and staggered away; but mistaking the roads, which he

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did not know, it appeared that, instead of taking the direct one for the town, he went down the narrow lane before mentioned, and, in his endeavours to pursue a slight half-worn path which conducts by the Trent side, had lost himself, and got into the shallow waters. This was no great matter, had it not very unfortunately happened that the bottom was of deep soft mud, and that the unfortunate fellow himself Carried a wooden leg. The sharp end of that supporter instantly sunk up to the thigh, upset him, and so pegged him down in the water, that, though upon ordinary occasions scarcely deep enough to terminate the existence of a dog, he became unable to help himself, and thus, before morning came and assistance might arrive, he was drowned.

An inquest was shortly afterwards held over the body, and the above facts were elicited. But who the deceased was, or where he came from, could not by any means be

ascertained. Nobody, save myself, knew anything at all about him; and I deemed it most prudent,
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after that fashion which the world taught me long ago, to keep my mouth shut; being not only heartily ashamed of confessing any acquaintance with so poor and miserable a reptile, but also afraid, in case I opened my budget of knowledge, that my own dignity would considerably suffer by that silent comparison, which in all cases, people are very apt to make between yourself and your acquaintances. "Tell me what company you keep, and I will tell you what you are yourself," is a proverbial saying, which was repeated to me as far back as I can remember. I have never forgotten it yet, and, Heaven willing, I never will forget it, or its application either. But since it always happens with every individual in the world, at one time or another, to keep some sort of company, or fall in with some kind of acquaintances, of whom he does not find himself very well able to boast, the really prudent part of the affair lies in having ingenuity enough, remembering the above apothegm, to say nothing at all about them. Do this, and then, like myself on the above
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occasion, you will be pretty certain of always maintaining in the eyes of the world your true dignity.

On the following day, the remains of Mr. Spowage were put into a coffin scarcely so respectable as an Irish egg-box, — anything serves to bury your poor corpses in, — and committed to a hole on the north and shadowed side of Clifton churchyard, where no sunshine might ever come to warm his dust. A clipping of the Christian service was read at a galloping rate over him; the sexton shovelled in his dirt to the tune of "Gaffer is gone to the dust, heigh-ho!" and William Spowage was shut out by the last door of clay from this world for ever.

Be not indifferent to his end, your worships; seeing how the greatest philosophers — men upon whose veracity we are bound to place the strictest dependence — very confidently assure us that we also shall some day or other — (be that day far off!) — come to precisely the same conclusion. I firmly rely upon their word; and therefore recommend that no one sniff his nose at another's
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panniers, when in turn he must carry crates himself.

And now I shall presume to offer your honour, or my lady, whichever it be, a little seasonable advice. Should you at any time chance to visit Clifton, and, as every finite being ought to do, walk into the churchyard to peruse that brief history of the rustic dead, written on tables of stone, which ever standeth with its pages open there, it is perhaps more than probable that you may feel inclined to search, out Mr. Spowage's grave. Your motive is laudable and good. I commend it from the bottom of my soul; for, though living he might be unworthy your notice, forget not that, dead, he is equal with the best. At the same time, I cannot but advise you, should such a visit be ever taken, and such a search for William's resting-place be ever made, not to waste your precious time any more than you can conveniently help; for, search as long as you will, I beg most respectfully bat firmly to assert that you will never find it. Many changeful seasons have

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passed, many others have gone down to lie beside him, much grass hath grown since then. The place, sir, hath become too populous. When dust is flung to dust, who shall pick it out again, and say this is it? We may remember the spot, but the old dead tenant again *dies* into inoffensive dust; the sexton's pick and spade are there, and another occupieth his place. The tenants change, but the house remaineth.

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III.

As the historian and vindicator of that extensive class of people to which both Bilberry Thurland and his mother essentially belonged, we are now called upon to utter a few sentences concerning that perpetual terror of their race, the indefatigable Squire Barton.

True it is, that the whole tribe of vagabondizing pedestrian merchants, of all denominations comprehended in the whole class, would very willingly have kept themselves as far as possible completely out of the power of that insignificant-looking magistrate, had not the erring and fiery Mrs. Burton, his village landlady, almost continually provided the justice with a fresh supply. In the very teeth of the warnings and

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severe admonitions which the squire frequently found himself under the necessity of giving her, she still insisted on having the sword of justice wielded against all those — and they were many — who found it necessary to conclude their potations at her house by a disturbance of one sort or another.

In vain the justice declared over and over, as on the occasion of Mrs. Thurland and her company being summoned by the same lady before him, that he would never again listen to Mrs. Burton's complaints; she still carried her culprits to his table, with as much zeal as though instead he had offered her a premium per head for all she brought. In vain he threatened to deprive her pot-house of its licence, if she continued to teaze him any longer in the same manner. Mrs. Burton was for a moment terrified into an ague, but still found it impossible to settle accounts with her customers without the aid of the justice.

At last, in utter despair, Squire Barton was compelled, in sheer self-defence, totally to

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change his tactics. From having abstained almost from punishing anybody at the landlady's instigation, he veered about one day, and in a very irritable mood vowed for the future to imprison every soul she might bring, and herself likewise, if possible, until either his prison was full to the door, or Mrs. Burton should grow weary of laying her complaints.

His very first attempt at carrying out this principle was made within a fortnight afterwards; and, as ill luck would have it, upon an individual whom it pains us deeply to re-introduce to the reader under such inglorious circumstances. That individual —" Oh, pity and shame!" cried Mr. Coleridge, when he heard of it — was the frank and generous Farmer Grimsby himself.

The quarrel between Bilberry Thurland's earliest benefactor and Mrs. Burton arose, like most other very important quarrels, out of a circumstance most insignificant in itself, and was as follows.

It was during "the war," when, as everybody

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knows, the farmers reaped rare harvests (of money we mean), when they charged what price best pleased them for corn, rolled rounds of beef about their houses like

wheelbarrow trundles, and twice or thrice a-week rode on horseback dead-drunk from their neighbouring markets, swearing d — nation to the people, and glory to the duke, — it chanced that an "agricultural" meeting was appointed to be held at the sign of the Pilot, at Long Netherby, — in other words, at the redoubtable Mrs. Burton's. Mr. Grimsby of course was there; being, we are happy to say, of the right religion, the right politics, and the right profession.

Without these qualifications, all might have gone wrong together; even as it was, everything did not go right.

The chairman, as every chairman ought to be, was a gentleman of much land, but little knowledge. He expounded the object of the meeting in an "agricultural" speech, — very good, considering that it came from the hedges; and, as a mere orator, succeeded so far — which, by-the-bye,

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is all that any modern orator need care about — as to convince the already convinced, that what they met about was a most important subject (to themselves), and that their own peculiar view of it was the most true and just that could be taken. To be sure, he made much more of his own speech than we are at all able to make of it; but that, good reader, was his business, not ours. We have nothing to do with doubling any man's tediousness upon any subject.

Very well: — he spoke during full three quarters of an hour, at the end of which time his audience knew just as much as we have told you above, and no more. However, what he had stated so entirely hit the taste and sentiments of the company, that, on the conclusion of his address, the whole body rose in a mass, and, thumping their fists upon the table, ordered in a tankard more ale for each individual.

Various other attempts were made during the evening by young adventurous orators to add to and embellish the subject; but it unluckily

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happened for them, that the company was so fully convinced by the able argument and the clear exposition which had gone before, that all other argument had become superfluous, and they refused to hear them. Ale and tobacco were the only things now worthy of consideration, and towards these therefore every one directed his attention. The agricultural meeting slid, by a very rapid declivity, into what has very

characteristically, and, we must add, very politely too, been designated a “smoke and spit” meeting. The chairman, without vacating his seat, sunk from “the chairman” into an ordinary drinker and smoker; the members of the meeting itself remained, what they were at first, mere drinkers and smokers; and, before the night was ended, all got reasonably and loyally jolly together.

When accounts came to be settled with the landlady, and the respective members of the convocation were staggering away through every place of egress that the house afforded, it so happened that Farmer Grimsby alone disputed

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his charge; whether right or wrong, we shall not attempt to determine. All we know about the matter is, that he was the most sober man of the company. Many, without doubt, as is usual upon all tipsy occasions, had paid for much more than they had taken; but what was that to Mr. Grimsby? If drunk and sober are to be alike imposed upon, there is no inducement left to sobriety. Thus argued Grimsby within the debating-place of his own cranium; and, thus strengthened by his own reflections, he resolved to resist, even to the death, Mrs. Burton’s overcharge for two tankards of ale, which he felt convinced yet remained in her own barrel.

As Grimsby’s resistance became more desperate, the landlady’s determination also waxed stronger and stronger, and her indignation rose higher and higher, until at length, in an unhappy moment of extraordinary transport, when Mrs. Burton was literally carried beyond herself, she very unadvisedly ejected into the middle of Grimsby’s face, and with unexampled

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velocity, the drainings of one of the aforesaid tankards which she chanced to hold in her hand. This washed away every iota of philosophy from the farmer’s head. His dignity was touched in one of the two tenderest places about the body, — a man’s honour always peeps out at his nose and in the rear, — so that, utterly forgetting himself, Grimsby cried,

“Dom thee! though t’ou art a woman, I’ll hit thee!”

And immediately let drive at her across the bar. He was, however, by no means so good as his word; for, instead of hitting her, his fist fell like a destroying cudgel amongst a crowd of ale-glasses which stood on a teaboard within reach, and, as

mischievous man is said to have done by that ancient bird the dodo, "utterly exterminated the race."

At this dreadful sight Mrs. Burton's personal courage sunk to that of a mere chicken, and all her own individual feelings were swallowed up in the one sole feeling for her glasses. She almost shrieked her determination to have

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Grimsby before Justice Barton, and make him pay every farthing of his damages.

"Well, well," cried Grimsby, "t'ou needn't put theeself in sich a passion. I'll go wi' thee to-night, this minnit, if t'ou likes. I'll meet thee there to-morrow morning, or at dinnertime, or breakfast, or even afore daylight, if t'ou's in sich a hurry about it. Dom thee! I'm not going to run away, t'ou needn't be afraid. What I We done I'll stand by, — and would do it agen as soon as look at thee!"

And the enraged farmer clenched his fist, and shook it in the landlady's face like a trembling big-drum stick.

"Would you? But I'd hinder you!" replied Mrs. Burton very savagely, — "I'd show you who should be *your* mester."

"*My* mester!" interrupted Grimsby, — "*my* mester, dost t'ou say? Poo, poo, woman, I laugh at thee, — I tell thee I laugh at thee." And then, with a hand applied to each, he divided his coat-laps into the figure of an A, and

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walked out. But, ere he had left the door-step, he returned again, shouting very loudly,

"If t'ou wants me to-morrow morning, I shall be ready ony time. Go afore th' squire, dost t'ou say? Ay, sartinly will I, and mak' thee ashamed of thy airs when t'ou gets there!" And for the second and last time, Grimsby disappeared.

Next morning, accordingly, both landlady and Grimsby made their appearance at Squire Barton's, each equally certain of being in the right, and each positive of coming off victorious. This happened, as we have stated, within a very short period after the little justice had formed the terrible resolution of sending to prison all and every one whom Mrs. Burton might thenceforth bring before him. On this identical morning he looked prodigiously cruel, having, as our country folks term it, got out of bed the wrong end first. He knit his brows like a pair of pincers at the landlady, expressed great surprise indeed at seeing so respectable a person as Mr. Grimsby brought

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before him, but added, that nevertheless he was fully resolved to put a stop to all goings on of the kind at that woman's house, and to let the full stream of justice have its course, sweep down whoever it might.

Grimsby trembled sadly, and in great hurry and trepidation entered upon his defence before the charge against him was made. The landlady endeavoured to interrupt him, and Squire Barton was about bidding him be silent, when, unexpectedly, the clock struck ten. The justice looked up, and out of his window. The hounds were already on a neighbouring hill, and the huntsmen were assembling. His own horse at the same instant was brought to the door. He looked sternly at Mrs. Burton, caught her eye, and sharply observed,

"Can't hear the case now: come to-morrow. I'll punish to your heart's content for the future."

But the landlady was not satisfied. She endeavoured to peg the squire down to her case at the present moment.

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"Hold your tongue, woman; do hold your tongue! I shall not hear a word of it!" — striding towards the door in order, as it seemed, to make his escape; for, in good truth, the justice was nearly expelled his own house. Then, addressing the servant, "John," said he, "show these people the street."

At the same moment he mounted his horse, and rode away to the hunt.

Thus did Grimsby escape that morning; and, before the next dawn broke, an event happened which freed him from all fear.

While pushing his hunter to the extremity in order to be in at the death, Squire Barton was thrown in taking a hedge, and, to his great astonishment doubtless, found himself very unexpectedly "in at" his own death instead. He had pitched on the wrong end, and dislocated a joint of his neck. The stream of justice in those parts was stopped, and thus Bilberry's old benefactor escaped the threatened terrors of a heavy fine or of Bridewell. Mrs. Burton, too, felt that she had lost her right-hand refuge;

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and, for the time being, became much milder and more christianized. So that, eventually, the quarrel between herself and the old farmer, which once promised so unpropitiously, was suffered to be settled by arbitration.

Considering the death Squire Barton died, it is nothing surprising that he went off without making his will: there was not spare time for it.

He was a married man, and, during his days of earth, had found himself blessed with one son, who, though an only surviving child, made up in some measure in his own person the family deficiency, being sufficiently tall and stout to have made two children, if it had so happened that Nature in her wisdom had originally seen proper to divide him. He was now full twenty-two years of age, and in local dimensions so far superior in every respect to his father, that, when in company together, and seen from behind, it was ten to one that the spectator, ignorant of their actual relationship, mistook the squire himself for nothing more than his own son's little boy.

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The fact can be by no means extraordinary, — it is too often observed. It is not unnatural, — since Nature usually makes the plant bigger than the seed.

To this young gentleman the squire's whole estate consequently descended. He generously allowed his mother almost the entire enjoyment of it during her life-time, and only upon her decease erected himself upon that pedestal whereof the law had given him full command some years before.

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IV.

THOUGH within myself pretty well inoculated with a stoical indifference to indifferent things, I could scarcely forbear laughing when one of my most good-natured readers put to me so strange a question. To think only how a man of sense could have been so easily misled! — and by such a character, too! "Is it possible," thought I, "that anybody should for a moment have seriously believed her? — placed confidence in the word of a woman who scrupled not to cheat her own son, and whose actual employment it was professionally to cheat all the rest of the world besides with whom she might chance to come in contact.

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"Alas!" cried I, "though you are discerning, wary, and circumspect enough, what avails your discernment, your wariness, your circumspection! Blame not me. I warned you sufficiently at the outsetting of what you had to expect: nothing did I keep in the dark. All would not avail. You must still go reading on and on, — laughing, complaining, or yawning, — anything rather than keeping my counsel. Why, sir," continued I, hitching my elbow-chair towards the fire, and crossing my legs upon the fender, "you have given the woman opportunities for anything. She might have tweaked your ears, pulled your pigtail, or picked your pocket twenty times, (if it be rich enough,) without your knowing anything in the world about the matter; and, after all, she has rankly deceived you long ago without your perceiving it until this moment."

He turned to the table, ran over the leaves of my first volume, and, at page one hundred and sixty-six, pointed out the identical paragraph in which Mrs. Thurland had promised,

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on some future occasion, to relate the comical story of William Spowage's losing his leg.

"But," said I, "what matters it? Your vagabonds are ever liars; and would that lying was confined there! The spirit of truth, sir, seldom enters a man's carcase until his own is preparing to abandon it. Your deathbeds are about the only places on earth where truth finds a pillow; for man seldom speaks truth until the necessity for lying is at an end. Besides," I added, "what is the value of her promise now? Mrs. Thurland has given us the slip, — escaped out of our fingers. She is beyond reach, — gone out upon her travels again; and by this time, I dare say, is driving some yard-long bargain of tape in the heart of a simple country village, blowing her cloud of smoke by the fire of some rustic inn kitchen, or, mayhap, lies dozing on a truss of straw beneath a hut of hoops and blanket, in the green corner of some tree-covered lane, amid the quiet depths of Leicester, Lincoln, or Berkshire."

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My friend looked grave, and wished again and again that I had adopted the example of the cc ancient mariner," and held Mrs. Thurland by the button until her story was told.

"Well," said I, "if she hath not told that story, she has told something else quite as good, — perhaps a great deal better: for what is there to be said about a man's losing his leg? — a merely insignificant concern, which happens every day. Legs, sir," — and I spread both my own across the hearthrug, as if, by a natural instinct, to illustrate my position, — "legs," said I, "are blown and cut off every day, and nobody, — not even the men whose property they are, — care to know what becomes of them, much less to trouble the world with their biographies, Look at your accidents, your hospital-work, your battle-fields, where legs are gathered together and stacked like so many bundles of winter fuel. Yet who cares about all this? Who cares?" cried I: "the world doth march as well as ever. St. Crispin is the only one throughout the calendar who smarts

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for it. There are exceptions, nevertheless, sir.

"In the case of a lady, now, for example. The subject is a delicate one to handle, I own: it has its difficulties, too. But only," continued I, "for a moment consider; raise the curtain — nay, if it be only one-eighth of an inch, raise it, and consider. The loss of a limb there, my friend, becomes a serious affair.

"A mutilated antique, sir, an armless or a legless Venus, marble though she be, is enough to make one's heart ache. A female torso actually demands our tears. But alive, alive, my friend! — one plump round limb of beauty gone!

"Well, your men may fling their legs away on land, at sea, or when or how best pleases them; but Lord preserve the ladies entire from head to heel, whatever other plague befal us! Excuse me, sir," I added; "any man must be warm who feels as much as he ought of the subject under discussion. What said my grandfather touching this very matter?

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"I see him sitting in that old arm-chair, upright as if blessed with an oaken and jointless spine, leaning both hands on the top of his tall stick, his hat on, and his handkerchief tied round his chin, even within doors, while a wheezing old asthma breaks from him ever and anon, like forewarning cracks which bespeak approaching dissolution.

"His hand fell open-palmed from its elevation, with a loud slap on the bony knee beneath, and with a sigh, whose very sound told of fourscore, he exclaimed,

"Ay, Charlie, Charlie! *thy* legs, — young as thou art, and stiff enough now, — thy legs'll ache and tingle many a good day afore they get as old as mine.'

"My grandfather passed his hand slowly down the back of a sinewy calfless pillar of bone, from the knee-joint to the ankle.

"'Look here. Yet forty-five year ago, this filled the best silk stocking in Derbyshire: we'd none of your petticoat trowsers then. Your calves ha'n't room to grow, I tell thee.
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This was as full and plump as a bullock's heart, forty year ago. Thy grandmother, Charlie, began to admire me at that end first, and so it went on, upward and upward — '

"My grandfather coughed at that moment, and never finished his sentence. I cannot say it was greatly to be regretted.

"You'll never be much of lady-killers,' he continued, pursuing the *thought*, if not the paragraph, 'till you get back again to knee-breeches. The footmen now have got the upper hand of their masters: your lady mistresses fall in love with 'em easier. And natural enough it is: look at their calves and white silk stockings! I tell them, if they wish to save their wives, and daughters, and servant-maids, they must cover up their footmen's legs, or — show their own'"

Nature made my grandfather passingly sensible; but a by-gone fashion had befooled him. Yet cast no blame on him, good reader, for thy fashion also hath made as great a fool of thee. Thou likewise shalt become of the
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third generation, and talk folly to thy grandchild.

But as for William Spowage's leg, if we had Mrs. Thurland here, she should tell thee all about it. Nay, I would do it myself, were it not for the consideration that she knew much more about his leg than I do. She, sir, was well acquainted with it, — the story, of course, is meant. She, sir, —

Well, I'll say no more about it; but leave it to thee, whenever thou shalt see her next, to make thine own inquiries.

It was a strange story, verily. His leg was most oddly lopped, — of that there is no doubt: and, therefore, as I think it cannot fail to interest your honour, as it will surely make you cry now and then, and laugh between; and as I have already kept you in some suspense concerning it; under these considerations I say, added to the facts that our

introduction is already long enough, and your worship has been particularly patient, I will proceed to give you as able an account as my abilities will allow, of

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the whole affair from beginning to end. I will proceed, I say again, to give your worshipful honour a full description thereof — *the next time* we have the pleasure of meeting again.

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V.

But when shall we meet again? Alas! I know not.

Is your honour not tired of me by now? Have I not made your eyes ache? — Have I not fatigued your attention? — Do you not wish me away, — my book at an end?

It is time we parted. My heart knocks heavily from within, reminding me that all our friends have fallen from us. Zachary and James are gone, — Bilberry, too, is dead, — Mrs. Thurland has departed. We are left alone.

Sir, I feel that we have been together long enough, — too long, perhaps. Yet, Heaven

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knows, I have done my best to amuse your highness.

No matter. We cannot laugh for ever; nor, when we are heavy-hearted, laugh when we would. The soul at length grows wilful, and can no longer be diverted from seeking her repose in solitude and serious contemplation.

Life and humanity afford much matter for mirth; but ere our laugh is over, the cloud rises, the scene is darkened, and the tears which sprung in our eyes from merriment, gather and fall in sorrow.

But should I have entertained your honour a little longer? The most that any man can do at once is little compared with what another may desire; and even of that little the toil is unknown by him who never put his hand to the same plough. Mentally, as well as physically, the ground is cursed for our sakes, and will bring forth thorns and thistles.

The labour of weeding even our own minds, sir, is not one of the least of human toils.

We must part. But, ere that, let me add,

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my only regret is, that you and I know so little of each other. We might be good friends; why not? We never have met, we never may meet. Are you pleased with these trifles? Then I tell thee, that, however far apart thou and I may be, the invisible cord which links mind to mind is not, and shall not be, broken! We are not therefore strangers because we never met. The world hath ten thousand souls like thine and mine, and spiritually these are friends.

Have I, amongst such, lightened one sad heart? driven from the mind one unhappy thought? taken one thorn from the bosom of pain?

Come, then, that at least is something.

But even if so, forget not — for thou knowest what the world is — that some thorns may yet have been left behind. We may take them from another's breast; but he is a good physician who can pluck them from his own.

My bosom, sir, no more than thine, is free from human distresses; and thus it is wherever

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man is found. The penalties which Nature lays upon us all, the taxes we pay to the Creator for existence, are pretty equally distributed. If from Nature we receive much, much doth the heart pay back in additional disquietude and pains; if little, our return is small. Thus the peasant and the philosopher, if unequal in their gifts, are unequal also in their tribute.

The scheme of creation, with reference to man, is a scheme of beautiful equality. But man, the great enemy of himself, in search of greater happiness than the general law points out, destroys the balance, and still disappoints himself. It is too true.

However great our possessions, Nature, sir, will claim her interest of all.

Yet once more, when shall we meet again? It may be never, and perhaps better never than again; for though, while life is in me, I shall be within your honour's call, yet the grave lies between us, and may soon ask for thee or me. Of thee I know nothing — would that I did! But, for me, already I seem to hear the echo of

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Nature's warning bell within my soul, telling in melancholy tones that I must soon away. The gulf of oblivion, the silent shore beyond, the first dim gleam of another world's light, begin to appear indistinctly before mine eyes.

Your honour hath a heart as well as I; and the meanest human creature that God hath placed upon the earth, in the most deserted solitude, hath a heart the same as thee and me. Is this nothing to the matter? Remember it, sir, when next he shall want your assistance, and your honour will be none the worse for what I have told you.

It is only through disregarding this most certain of all truths — that every and each living soul is at heart the very same as ourselves, that all the evil and injustice done by man to man derive their origin. We first learn to look on man as our inferior, and then we treat him as a beast. But, if we be Christian, let us take the Christian part. — Cut his heart out, banish his sensibility, make him verily brute, before we esteem him such.

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But shall I ever meet your honour again? Alas, alas! when I think of this little attenuated body of mine, this frail and wrecking shell, that seems even now ready to part with its freight of a soul, and go down; when I remember the painful breath it draws, its labouring and beating to bear up a little longer; when I look at this withered and bony hand, more like the ghost of what it ought to be than the thing for which Nature designed it, tracing the line which now your honour reads; when the grave-clothes seem to my imagination as ever ready, — how can I hope we shall ever meet again?

The work is up. It cannot last for ever.

Mortality, sir, unlike the widow's oil, cannot increase as it is poured out. The flask fails, where Charity with all her power cannot renew it.

Nature, in good truth, doth sometimes put human souls into strange carcases. We live to wear them out too soon, and depart ere half our labour is finished. It is a thankless task, I know; since man is more inclined to find fault with what is done, than to receive it imperfect

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in peace, and to regret with him who did it that death gave not time for more and better. He sees little in the early plant; it dies half grown, and he wastes not a single wish upon the flower.

I am not talking of myself. Alas! there are thousands in the world like this, to furnish us enough with sorrowful matter, without our casting an inward eye for an illustration upon that most wretched of all subjects, one's self.

Meet again or not, sir, we must now part, that is certain; nevertheless, I shall not cry about it; you may do as you please. Nor will we — I speak for both of us — go off in dudgeon with each other. I entertain not the least ill-will against you — why should I? Nor do you against me — why should you? If you be a bachelor, I wish you well married, recommending one of my female readers for a wife; convinced as I am that a married life, conducted upon any the most common system of mutual right and mutual honour, opens to us the only glimpse of Eden remaining in this world. Besides,

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upon the ordinary notions of mere value and beauty, earth hath nothing which I could recommend to you, at once of higher value or so delightful to look upon, as a young lady. However, as a proof positive that my recommendation is in earnest, I can only assert, that if you will get married within a reasonable time, I will myself most assuredly follow your example. My dear fellow! — let us try it at all events!

If, on the other hand, you be married already, you have shown yourself wiser than I was aware of. If you be happy therein, long may you continue so! If not happy, and you find it utterly impossible to become so, why, then, sir, — then, — in that case, sir, (I say only what *you think*,) better had you remained a bachelor!

That wish is, I believe, about the only consolation the law allows you. Most assuredly it is the cheapest, and that is some consideration now-a-days; since you are at full liberty to *enjoy* it every hour of the day, and seven days

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in a week, without its either costing you anything in the production, or your being in any danger of wearing it out.

It is a kind of mushroom consolation, sir, which grows as fast as you consume it.

If you be in trade, let me hope you every success therein, whereby you will perhaps be enabled to purchase what now, probably, you have only borrowed.

If you are not in trade, I heartily wish you never may be. Rely on my word, sir, to a man of your temperament, it is the most perplexing thing that could be meddled with.

Lastly. If the man whom all this time I have been addressing should happen — for how can I tell the reader's gender? — to be a maid, she will perhaps first of all pardon me for having, in this dark confessional, mistaken her sex, and then favour me with her attention a few moments, while I advise her, as a friend, at once to accept the addresses

of the gentleman whom I begged leave, a page or two back, to introduce to her society. Match-making, in general,

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is the most detestable and mischievous vice of modern society. What occasion is there for it, when Nature herself hath so fully and considerately provided all young people with the requisite instinct to discover the most fitting mate, in a much better manner than anybody else can do it for them?

Match-making, I repeat, is in general a most odious piece of business. It denies our nymphs and swains the liberty enjoyed by even sparrows and ring-doves; notwithstanding which, however, I shall venture to make up the present match, if possible. Why not? Pray, Miss Chemise, attend to good advice. Always seize the first opportunity, lest your evil star prevent a second. Remember it is only your great beauties that, like great towns, get often besieged. A common village should surrender on the appearance of the first soldier. Not that by any means I would be understood as considering your ladyship ill-looking; — be such heresy far from my thoughts! — but then, you know, if you know anything at all, and I presume I am not

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talking to a simpleton, these gentlemen entertain such opposite ideas of beauty. A girl is never safe, save on the first attack. Her business should always be to surrender *at discretion,* on the first summons.

Yes, indeed, our gentlemen entertain very opposite ideas of beauty. Bodily, mental, acquired, and household beauty, are all sought after, and each in turn is preferred. No damsel need despair; for I should entertain a far inferior opinion of the ladies of all shapes, complexions, features, and rank, than at this moment I am willing to allow, did I for a moment believe that any girl on the face of the earth was defective in *all* these respects together; — did I think that she who has neither face nor proportions to recommend her, endeavoured not to excel in the moral acquirements proper to a wife; or that she who was without these virtues and acquirements, endeavoured not to set off her features to the highest advantage.

Are you still fearful? Pluck up your spirits, and look around you. What description or

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variety of ladies do you not already find in the married world? Their forms are infinite; their features, in point of variety, inexhaustible; their respective virtues of a thousand different kinds and points of value. What has been, then, must be again: as many varieties will be found in the succeeding married generation as in the present.

I am anxious to keep you maids in heart and hope. Remember our bachelors are none of the handsomest. Where do you see a thoroughly pretty fellow? Your wenchified man, who most commonly obtains the title, I consider a disgrace to both sexes; my pen touches not him. But when do you see a good specimen of the beauty of manliness?

If none save the handsome of both sexes ever got married, verily the ring-maker would lose his occupation, and the service itself would be forgotten through disuse. Thou world of ugliness! here are crumbs of comfort for thee!

Besides which, — I must beg leave once more to translate from the "vulgar," — it is said in a

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very excellent old proverb, that "every Jack finds his Gill." True enough. Bilberry Thurland and Bessy Bunting were an illustration of it. The saying requires only this following commentary: That every Jack should endeavour to find the best Gill, and every Gill the best Jack, it may be possible to lay hands on.

And now, good readers, male and female, we *must* part.

Reluctant to utter that last word, which possibly may mark the boundary between us for ever, I have dallied with these trifles, — delayed, resolved to go, to shut my book, to close the account, — and have yet again delayed, and lost my resolution.

A last word is hard to utter. Friends, kinsmen, lovers! the sadness of your hearts has many times confessed this truth. The last word of friendship leaves the heart with pain; it struggles hardly, yet reluctantly, to get free; it dies upon the lips, but it telleth more, *unheard*, than man with all his eloquence could tell beside.

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This I found when my grandfather Leggit died. As his last hour became shorter and shorter, and his breath ebbed weaker and softlier within him, he found all the more to tell us. The blood rushed feverishly to his cheeks, ran back, leaving them white as ashes, while he strove yet more and more to speak.

My grandmother straightened the bed-clothes, laid the little household Bible in a fold of the coverlet beside his feet, and, while she covered her eyes with a handkerchief, wet as a handful of leaves in autumn rain, she leaned down with her ear to his mouth. But he could not be heard.

My grandmother wept more over that fact than at all which he had *said* to her throughout his lifetime.

The last words we could gather were these,

“I am very imperfect; but, as my last wish, judge with charity!”

Be that sentiment mine also!

Readers, good-night!

THE END.

[NP]

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