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VNiVERSITAS  
STVDII  
SALAMANTIINI

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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. I.

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1836.

The Salamanca Corpus: *Bilberry Thurland. I. (1836)*

[NP]

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[NP]

DEDICATION.

To him whom I am indebted for my earliest introduction to public notice, and to whose subsequent kindness and disinterested friendship my literary success must be attributed,

With the most grateful feelings of esteem,

These Volumes  
are respectfully inscribed.

THE AUTHOR.

[NP]

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TO  
BILBERRY THURLAND.

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[1]

**THE LIFE**  
**OF**  
**BILBERRY THURLAND.**

CHAPTER I.

CONTAINS MUCH GRAVE ADVICE, WELL WORTHY THE  
PERUSAL OF THOSE WHO REQUIRE IT.

OF what were Mr. Thurland's birth and parentage but little is for certain known, though we have reason to believe they were not much of which to boast; however, we need feel no more anxiety about them than about the wind of yesterday: for whether he was born under the cobwebbed rafters of a cart-shed, or beneath the dimity of a bedstead, is all the same to him, so that we need not trouble ourselves to make out his genealogy.

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Men, we suppose, like fruit, are best judged by their soundness and flavour, and not according to the straightness or the crookedness of the branches from which they spring. Let it suffice that the first years of his life which Bilberry could remember were passed very much in the open air, on the highways, in hedges, and under tents; blessed by being spent beneath the immediate eye of heaven.

By the time he had learned to walk, his constitution was as fixed and strong as that of a wolf — nothing hurt him. Rain above, bare ground beneath, were as good to him as a roof and a carpet — he was born to them. Accustomed from the very first to wash all the year round, hot or cold, in the first pool or river at hand, with clay for soap and a tuft of rushes for a towel, what should he be but as hard as flint?

Breathing fresh air the four-and-twenty hours through every day, from New-year's day to Christmas, it was impossible that he should ever be sick; and as for size — why, in comparison with your town-bred people, he was born as big as a cuckoo-chick in a sparrow's nest,

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that takes up all the room himself. He grew like a spring carrot. At ten years old he overtopped his mother, and at eighteen stood five feet ten without his shoes. Will you, then, talk about low birth? you, who look like stunted sucklings when your heads are grey? For what are your advantages compared with his?

Who his father was. Bilberry himself did not yet know. He presumed he had one, though hitherto he had never seen him in his life.

This we cannot account for, unless it be that he and Mrs. Thurland had from the very first, for peace sake, agreed always to travel in contrary directions; for Bilberry's mother was a sensible woman, and knew that even that plan, odd as it may seem, was better than the one adopted by many people, who get married, and all their lives after travel in contrary directions together.

As for Mrs. Thurland herself, she was an excellent heathen; and, considering that she had never in her life read "The whole Duty of Man," — nor any other Christian books, — she

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really knew how to manage her matters rarely. She had never perused the maxims and truths of Solomon and the prophets, as most of your rich and proud people pretend to have done, and from whence one might suppose comes the difference between her station and theirs, but she was nevertheless a clever body.

To speak out at once, Mrs. Thurland was a merchant: for, although she did not trade to places beyond the seas, yet her business called upon her to be continually travelling to the foreign parts of her own country. She was an excellent trader, always taking care to embark her merchandise in a safe bottom. She never employed any servants, for fear of being robbed or defrauded; it being a favourite saying of hers, that in this world there is never above one person that can be trusted, and that is one's self.

Knowing, too, that excellent secret, so valuable to all commercial people, that the greatest profits are often made in little matters, she very wisely turned it to her own advantage, and dealt

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in nothing but little matters; and, moreover, she always travelled on foot, because to people in business, economy is everything.

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But we need not feel surprised at all these instances of wisdom, since her knowledge and range of information were very extensive. She knew every turnpike road in England and Wales from end to end, and from one side to the other, as perfectly as people in general know the streets of their own town; and as she seldom rested in any one place long together, but was here, there, and somewhere else, within a week, it is ten chances to one but you, reader, whoever you are, have seen her in some one or other of your walks about your own locality.

Should you not know her individually, we may be bound to say, at least, you have seen somebody very much like her, and that is almost the same thing. She is a woman of a middle size, — (for we believe she is living yet, and therefore, when next you see one answering this description, you may set her down for Bilberry Thurland's mother,) — looks firm, composed of sound stuff, and is as bold as a butcher's heifer

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that sets you straight across a field. She stares in your face, but never blushes. Her cheeks and neck are all of the same colour, — a sort of healthful brown tan. The sides of her nose are freckled like a peggy whitethroat's egg; her eyes are sharp and black, her nose pointed till it threatens to prick you: — both of which are certain signs of a brisk tart woman, and that she is. If you slap her on one cheek, she slaps you on both; knows how to say boh to a goose, and always has a ready knock-down answer to an impudent question. In fact, no man can deal with her, and that may be another reason why Bilberry had never seen his father. She wears a daggled blue gown, with two inches of black skirt below it in the rear; a flexible beaver bonnet, bent in the tip till it flaps up and down on her forehead as she walks along; black ribbed stockings, of which, most likely, you may see about up to the calves; for she has a way of jerking up her petticoats now and then like a horse's hind leg with the twitch in it. But above all, and that which you shall most know her by, she carries on her arm a huge flat basket, four

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inches deep and a yard square, which project to the other side of the causeway, so that you cannot get past her without walking into the channel.

This wicker warehouse contains the various profitable small matters of merchandise before spoken about. Tin tea-caddies, lackered ware of most kinds, combs, cotton-balls, pins, needles, bodkins, tapes, stay-laces, bone-buttons, poppets, and braces, compose

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some part of her stock; — the latter, if the weather be fine, usually dangle outside. Nightcaps, too, she dealt in some time, but they did not answer; — experience convinced her how your johnny-raws mostly sleep with their heads bare; nay, it would hardly be thought, though it is no less true, that some of the remotest of them, to whom she has offered her caps, actually did not know for what they were intended; so that once she sold one to a Suffolk plough-lad as a French purse, and which he told her he meant to make a present of to Mary Crabshaw.

The last nightcap she had, hung on hand a long time, — a customer could not anywhere be

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met with. It lay in the far corner of her basket like an oyster; so that whenever she set her eye on it, and that was pretty often, she used to say what a shameful House of Commons we had, because it did not encourage trade better.

“Here,” she would observe, “I have hugged this divil from London to Newcastle three or four times over,” and then she seized it by the tassel. “I have offered him cheaper than the dirt on your feet, and after all it seems I shall have to wear him out myself. Dang your parliaments, if this be the work of them!” And then she dabbed it into its corner again, as if she were flapping dirt off her fingers’ ends. At last Mrs. Thurland grew desperate about “him” — for, it must be observed, she always mentioned that cap as though it were of the masculine gender; and well she might, since it had stuck to her elbow more faithfully than had her husband; — she grew desperate one afternoon and in a fit of temporary insanity she put a huge stone into it, and sunk the whole to the bottom of a river. Bilberry burst out laughing at her,

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and for his reward got a knock which sent him into the hedge bottom. It must not be imagined from the serious turn which Mrs. Thurland gave to the above incident, that upon the whole her conduct to Bilberry, while a child, was anything save tender and affectionate; so much the contrary indeed, that, as will shortly be seen, if there were one woman in the world better than all others, this youth did not, without reason, believe his mother was the best alive. To be sure, we all are apt to appreciate our own most highly; but let facts speak.

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From the very day of his birth she was always extremely careful not to load his little back with too much clothing, lest thereby he should not attain his proper stature: and even that which she did venture to put on him, she was very solicitous not to have too whole and close-fitting, to make him sickly. He always had the bottoms of his trousers kept at a decent distance from the ground, to prevent them dipping in the mud; and large rents at his knees,

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elbows, and nether end, that his body might be well ventilated, according to his mother's maxim, that ventilation was everything for health. Nor would she ever so far let her maternal affection overcome her better reason, as to cramp his legs and feet in shoes and stockings.

If he ever said anything about them, she used to observe, that for little lads like him, the skins of their legs were the best stockings in the world, because they required no tying up with garters, and it was the study of a good mother to save her children all the trouble she could. "What use, child, is there in wearing things that are always wearing out?" she would again say when he spoke about shoes. "Leather soles go like rotten ice; but the soles of your feet will grow as fast as you wear them out, and that is the kind of shoes for poor people."

"Why then," said he, "do you wear black ribbed stockings and lace-up boots yourself?"

"I wear them," she replied, "to save myself paying the penalty; for women cannot go barelegged in this country, as they can in some places. You are not yet old enough to understand

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the act of parliament that obliges us women to keep our feet always warm and dry. How could I pay a great penalty for such a trifle? 'od dang it, no! it is worse than the tax on 'bacco."

Whenever his mother mentioned the tax on tobacco. Bilberry knew she was getting into a passion, so that he then had nothing more to say; for she used to smoke like a stopped-up chimney, and that was the reason the tax made her smart so much. In the article of victuals, she restricted him much oftener to the bones than the meat, lest his belly should grow of unseemly dimensions, and because a feature of that description

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would be likely to impede his future progress in life. And then she ate up all the nutritious bits herself, because she was so old as to be past all danger of that kind.

Of course it must be evident that Mrs. Thurland's habit of life was such as would not well allow of her sending Bilberry to school; for by the time that boy would have said his first A, B, C, his mother would have travelled too

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far out of reach to pay the schoolmaster's shot. Besides, she would argue, if he were sent to school, in all probability he would be spoiled as many poor children are; for schoolmasters measure their instruction according to the pay they receive; and as destitute children cannot pay above a penny per week, and it costs a pennyworth of broom a-piece to keep them in order, that is the reason they get nothing but rod.

On these considerations, and with a true parental solicitude which we can never sufficiently admire, Bilberry's mother affectionately undertook the additional heavy charge of his education herself. This, all are well aware, must principally be regulated by the profession for which a youth is designed: so it was in this case; and as Mrs. Thurland intended to bring her son up to the profession of a beggar, she educated him accordingly; for, like other crafts, that of begging is not without its art and mystery.

She did not instruct him in old and commonplace themes of morality and religion, nor drill him to remember maxims like those we see

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pasted on boards, and hung up at every conspicuous angle of a charity-school. Her instructions were not such as you read on worsted samplers stitched by Martha Blounts and Polly Hopkines in the thirteenth year of their ages, framed and glazed by their country grandmothers, and hung up like dried kitchen herbs, for standing use: they were quite original, and the result of her own observation and experience.

She must, indeed, have been a very careful mother, for, as far back as Bilberry's recollection could carry him, he knew how to cry voluntarily, and therefore that must have been taught him in the cradle, if he ever had one. He could also affect lameness to admiration, entirely through her instructions; and, to make one thing the better help another, for one while his mother kept a raw upon his ankle as a sort of point to which people's pity might gravitate. This helped to draw out the humours of their pockets; but



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as it was solely at Bilberry's expense, and when lying idle he experienced a good deal of pain for nothing, he no sooner grew big enough to conquer his mother in battle,

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than he peremptorily insisted on having the sore healed. This gave rise to a disturbance between them, and in the end Bilberry was obliged to lay hands on his mother to obtain her consent.

It was the first time he had attempted to do such a tiling; but when she found he was too much for her, she spread him a plaster, though swearing all the while that he was cutting off half her income, and threatening that if ever he dared to touch her again, she would pull his ears as long as her garters.

When Bilberry Thurland began life, England was not half so full of beggars and sharpers as it is at present. Most probably his mother would attribute this change entirely to the House of Commons; but there is no telling for a certainty. Tricks which answered then have now become as stale as yesterday morning's skimmed milk; so that what his mother taught him at that time, is in this worth no man's teaching. A beggar's chief care, if he would thrive by his profession, is to increase in wit and invention as the country he inhabits increases

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in knowledge. That is the first commandment of the beggar's law, and whoever can act up to the letter of it is on the high road to independence — supposing at the same time that he takes care not to disgrace himself by the commission of any palpably dishonest acts; for it must not be overlooked that there is a wide difference between a beggar and a pilferer or thief; and hence, those painted boards which ignorant magistrates cause to be nailed up at the entrance of villages, beginning with “Notice to Vagrants,” are as public an insult upon the general body of beggars, properly so called, as could possibly be offered. In fact, no honest beggar ever passes by one of these painted slanders without expressing his indignation, and vindicating his injured honour by hurling at it a good handful of mud from the neighbouring horsepond; always, of course, providing a fit opportunity presents itself, since, however keenly they may feel, none but the inexperienced will resent these public calumnies at the risk of being seen and carried before the neighbouring justice.

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One of Bilberry's earliest accomplishments, and which he continued to practise as long as his years would permit, was that of whining as though he was sick, and at the same time, in a lisping childish accent, of begging all tenderhearted Christians to take pity, for God's sake, on a poor little fatherless child. This he usually did while his mother, at some distance out of sight, drove a bargain in her own way of trade.

Generally, his abilities procured them something, though he not unfrequently met with those unfeeling vulgar brutes who, instead of taking pity, cracked a joke upon him — one which by nature seemed common to them all, until at last it grew so familiar to his ears as to produce no effect: for the bumpkins very often told him with a huge laugh, he did not know what he was talking about, since, instead of being fatherless, they dashed their wigs if he had not half a dozen fathers. That joke was indigenous alike in Cornwall and Northumberland.

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In a few years the pathetic wore off this tale; though of that Bilberry had no reason to complain, since from first to last it earned him and his mother a grand total of not less than a hundred quartern loaves, several fitches of bacon, and pounds of other meats, besides a sum of money which, had it all been put together in halfpence, would have looked like a little fortune.

It failed at last, not so much from being itself worn out, as because Bilberry grew too big for it: for towards the conclusion of its use he found very few indeed, except tender susceptible misses and glad-hearted holiday damsels, inclined to regard as a helpless pitiable orphan, a red-faced strapping lad, almost tall enough to have an orphan of his own.

His mother, who had years of hard experience and long observation over her head, very early perceived that a change was requisite to continued success; and as by this time her boy's own natural faculties began to develop

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themselves, she, who hitherto had taught him only as you teach a jackdaw, now began to inform his understanding.

They were one day passing down a green bylane, all cartruts and puddle, when his mother, twitching up her gown and shifting her basket on to the other arm, began to talk to him after a more rational manner, giving him to understand that the worldly old

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proverb of a rolling-stone gathering no moss was exactly reversed amongst people of their line of business; — with them it was. Lie still and rot.

“We must circulate,” said she, “or we cannot live. If you would do well, not only shift your place, but change yourself according to times and circumstances, and then, like a variable wind, you will sweep into every corner. I have known beggars who, through their bad judgment, have been beggars on their deathbeds; though, such a dog's life as it is, a man ought to be worth a Jew's eye in a few years. If you prove a steady youth, I shall expect to see you in a situation to do something for your mother when she gets old. You must

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have your eyes about you,” said she earnestly; “remember your brains are behind your eyes, and what is that for? Take notice how all sorts of people are to be best managed. It is not by always telling the same tale, nor by cringing and sneaking like a whelp with his tail cut off, that most is to be got. Some folks give away in one manner and some in another, and they all want humouring to their fancies. You get it of some by being very humble; of others in the way of a great favour, as though you were ashamed of asking for it; while now and then there is an odd one or two that pay best on demand. I knew a man” — while Bilberry wondered whether she could mean his father — “as clever a fellow as I ever set eyes on, who could tell, at full twenty yards off, whether anybody was likely to give or not; and if he were, which was the best way of asking him. When he saw one of those straight old gentlemen coming down the causeway, who walk with sticks turned in a lathe, and hold themselves as upright as a victual-bag, he knew at a glance that nothing

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was to be got there but the threat of a commitment to the round-house; and of those slim old maids who walk on the breadth of a curbstone he never asked at all, for they only spit on the ground at the smell of you, and say ‘Get away!’ These you must avoid altogether.”

She gave him similar instructions respecting the principal conspicuous characters of mankind; and, finally, made Bilberry thank her for her seasonable advice, which made such an impression on his mind that he never once forgot it.

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Afterwards she informed him, that as people had grown so stingy and uncharitable that it was almost impossible to live amongst them in a common way, it would be well, now he had arrived at years sufficient to enable him to distinguish between stealing a thing and finding one, if, in addition to all the rest, he was to be continually on the look-out for what he could find.

“In this world,” she observed, “nothing is certain; it is full of change, and people are [21] always losing something. If we could but find everything that is lost, I should bid goodbye to this basket: but things cannot be found if people do not look for them; and what harm is there in looking for them?” She then told him it would not be amiss if, when he chanced to alight by mere accident upon any little matter left by the washerwomen on the hedges or the grass, which, after being washed and brought out to dry, was not worth carrying home again, he should be sure to put it into his pocket for her, as she could make many of those little worthless matters come in, though everybody else turned up their noses at them: at the same time, with the most considerate caution, she warned him not to take up the least trifle if any person observed him, because the world was such a wicked place for judging by appearances and putting the worst construction upon people’s actions; and therefore, he being but a ragged boy, they would be certain to construe it into robbery.

“Hens, too,” she continued, “sometimes [22] lay eggs in the hedge bottoms and about stackyards; — if Providence should ever direct you to any of those unknown nests where the eggs would be liable to go rotten and get wasted, bring them to me, as it would be pitiable to have good Christian meat spoiled for want of being eaten. It often happens also that barndoor fowls, when they have strayed far from the roost, get winged or otherwise maimed so as to be unable to get back again. It is very cruel to leave the poor things dying in the fields, — catch all you can of that sort, and twist their necks round to put them out of their misery; but be sure not to fling them away again for rats and fowmarts, because to people that can stomach them, they are as good eating as if regularly killed. And now. Bilberry, “she observed after a pause, “as I am about telling you these things, let me point out another matter of the same kind; though you must be particularly careful indeed how you manage it, for

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people have got to that pass now that one can hardly do them a kindness, unless it be behind their backs, without

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bringing one's self into trouble. And yet I am naturally of such a good disposition that I cannot persuade myself to leave a good action undone, when the opportunity for it falls in my way, though I should run the risk of being misunderstood and abused for it. You have the advantage of a good mother to point out right and wrong to you, which at your age I had not. I wish to make you very tender-hearted, especially towards brute beasts; for I have seen such abominable cruelty practised during my time that my heart aches to think on it.

“I dare say, when we have been going over the fields early in the morning and late in the afternoon, you have seen cows that wanted milking very much, waiting against the gates, or looking over the hedges, and lowing for the milkmaid. This is very cruel. Milkmaids are the laziest people in the world, and nothing can be worse than to keep a poor thing in such anxiety because of people's idleness. When you see anything of that sort again, make bold, if there be nobody about, to relieve

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the poor creatures a little. So useful as they are, and to serve them in that manner! But, my lad, you are not obliged to milk them on to the ground, because that would be making waste where there is no occasion. Always tell me when you see a cow in that state, and I will give you one of these tin tea-caddies of mine, which will catch enough to ease her till the milkmaid comes, and the sup of milk will just and barely pay us for our trouble: because when we have got it we might as well drink it as fling it away.”

Bilberry thought his mother very kind, and extremely considerate to prevent the farmers having any of their substance wasted; especially when he reflected that it could be for no interest of her own that she ran all these risks; but, on the contrary, that she was actuated solely by a pure feeling of benevolence to man and beast; and benevolence of a first-rate quality too, for, in the midst of all her designed good actions, there shone very conspicuously that most liberal sentiment of doing

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them without letting the persons benefited know anything about it.

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The more he saw and understood of his mother, the more he admired her excellencies, and became fixed in his resolve to follow her advice as far as he was able in everything.

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CHAPTER II

WHICH WE RECOMMEND TO THE READER'S PARTICULAR ATTENTION.

WE need not disguise the fact that Bilberry had something of a genius for following up his mother's advice. Young, thoughtless, and headstrong, he felt eager to seize the first opportunity of showing, by his alacrity in the performance of his new duties, that she had not sown the seed of her instructions upon sand. They seemed very congenial to his natural propensities, and therefore nothing was wanting to make him exert himself to the utmost.

By good fortune, upon the whole, he acquitted himself so well, that scarcely a fortnight had elapsed from the time at which Mrs. Thurland put this new wisdom into his

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head, before all the spare room of her basket was crammed tolerably full of stray caps and neckerchiefs, which the village wenches, in the honest simplicity of their hearts, had either forgotten or not cared to give themselves the trouble of fetching off the palings before dark. Some of them his mother thought too good to have been altogether abandoned by their owners; and she again warned him not to find anything save what was positively lost. But, in spite of her suspicions, he maintained they all were castaways, because he found every one of them blown into ditches and corners; with which his mother seemed satisfied, without ever asking whether they were anywhere in the neighbourhood of a clothesline. By tacit consent, that point was always let alone.

Both Mrs. Thurland and her son soon found in each other's face an alteration for the better, after they began to live on new milk and eggs. The yolks shone in their cheeks with a nice golden tan, and in the matter of flesh they thrived like pullets in a thrashing-barn;

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for hitherto Bilberry had found an immense number of eggs, which, but for his enterprising spirit, would most certainly have gone either rotten or to market without

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any man, woman, or child, having found out in what way this ingenious youth exercised his abilities. In fact, it is probable he was not even so much as suspected, though in all likelihood at every farm-house in his track he left behind him a firm conviction that their respective yards were sadly infested with weasels, — a nasty species of animal which sucks eggs whenever it can get at them; while, for their parts, neither his mother nor himself felt sorry at the idea of these unseen depredations being thus comfortably shifted from their own shoulders on to the back of that mischievous vermin.

Unluckily, good fortune does not last for ever; and especially with people like these, whose lives are as doubtful as the weather. They get a snack of it now and then, just often enough to keep body and soul together, and all between is doubt and dismal uncertainty. The wind changed, and fortune's weathercock turned his tail directly in their teeth; for

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one afternoon they received such a conclusive proof of the ingratitude of mankind towards those who endeavour to do them ever so disinterested a kindness, that they determined never again, — no, not if they should live to be five hundred, — to do anything for other people except mischief.

It was summer time, and, to avoid the dusty turnpike, Mrs. Thurland and Bilberry had taken a cut across the fields to a village which stood about two miles off, the church-spire of which they had some time observed above the trees. The foot-path led them over a long and crooked mown field, on the side of a hill; at the bottom of which were a number of men and women very busily engaged in haymaking. Beside a haycock not far from the path. Bilberry observed a number of jackets thrown together, and against them a basket covered with a clean cloth, and a small keg having a handle over the bung-hole. There had been a dog sitting by to keep them company, but he was now engaged in mouse-hunting amongst the stubble.

Approaching nearer, a strange buzzing and

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fizzing reached their ears, which they could not at the moment account for. “Bless me!” exclaimed Mrs. Thurland, “what is that? — We must take care, Bilberry, for there is a hornet's nest somewhere about, and we shall get our eyes stung up. “The youth replied that he thought it was the barrel. “Is it?” said his mother, casting her sharp eyes on it;

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“then, for God's sake, boy, go and take the cork out, or it will burst before these poor people can get up to save it; and, so hot and dry as they must be, I should be sorry to see their ale spilled: I am sure they must want every drop of it. But, here, here, “she added, giving Bilberry her biggest caddy,” it is of no use easing the cork and sticking it in again, for it will go off the same directly after. Take a sup out, that it may have room to work, and I will walk forwards the while; but bring the caddy full after me.” Saying which, Mrs. Thurland walked away very rapidly. She had got nearly half across the next field, while Bilberry, who had almost concluded his job, was preparing to follow her,

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when the haymakers at the bottom of the field perceived him. Several of the men instantly began to run up the hill, bawling all the while louder than twenty bellmen. In the fright and hurry of the moment Bilberry inconsiderately attempted to make off, — a circumstance which of course did not say much for the honesty of his intentions: though still it is very probable he would have succeeded in effecting his escape had not the watchful dog, alarmed by the cries of his friends, joined in the pursuit at a speed which soon enabled him to take upon himself the office of parish constable, and arrest Bilberry by serving upon the lap of his jacket a warrant of apprehension. The lad now strove most vigorously to disengage himself, but his antagonist was of too active and energetic a disposition to allow those efforts to be crowned with success. On the contrary, all that resulted from these exertions was the loss of his jacket, which, we are sorry to say, was torn completely from his back during the struggle. Perhaps his skin itself might have

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been next invaded, had not at that critical moment the haymakers arrived to succor him.

While some examined both barrel and basket in order to ascertain the extent of Bilberry's depredations, the others deliberated amongst themselves what proportion and kind of chastisement was due to him: and although quite a selection of punishments was eventually offered him, the youth declined them all; protesting that the loss of his jacket, which now lay in fragments at their feet, was of itself a more than sufficient atonement. The pilfering proved to be very small in its extent, and therefore many of them inclined to listen to his prayers for mercy, though a few surly ones still insisted on his being well thrashed, by way of warning for the time to come; when, very fortunately for our hero, in the midst of this debate, the master of the field strode over the stile, and,



**The Salamanca Corpus: *Bilberry Thurland. I. (1836)***

advancing towards them, inquired the occasion of this gathering. All present were so impatient to tell the story, that he was politely favoured with half a dozen copies of it at once; while the

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offender himself added such illustrative notes and comments as might tend both to clear up the text and soften the master's sentence.

When, out of so many relations, he had sifted himself something like an intelligible account of the matter, turning to Bilberry, "Ay, dom thee!" said he, "t'ou art a pratty young divil, to be sure! What, t'ou wanted a bit of bread and cheese, and a sup of ale, didst t'ou? Who brought thee up, eh?"

"My mother," answered the boy.

"Your mother?" repeated the farmer. "And who is your mother? — I reckon thy mother is summut like some other folks's mothers, — war't a legacy to th' parish?"

Bilberry replied that he had been with his mother into almost every parish in England.

"Ay, ay," observed his judge, interrupting him, and laughing, "t'at I'll trust thee for. — T'ou wast born extra-parochial, and ha'n't got a settlement, most like."

Farther conversation of the same kind ensued; but the result of all was, that, upon promise of never repeating the offence, the boy

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should this time be forgiven. The easy-hearted old farmer then told his men to drink up what sup of ale Bilberry had left in the barrel, and send for another; at the same time adding as an appendix, "And, Bob, do ye hear, — this youngster's lost his jacket, see ye. Tell missis to send one of my old waistcoats by you"

The man departed on his double errand: while, during the barren interval that followed, Bilberry cast many a searching eye across the fields and hedges, in hopes of seeing his mother; but that excellent general had gone clear off, and left him to get out of the scrape, which she herself had got him into, as well as he could. That, indeed, was just her principle: he always insisted it was better to have one of the two safe, rather than neither.

When the man returned with the keg of ale and the waistcoat, our old farmer seized hold of the latter, and held it at arm's length, spread out like the wings of a bat rampant,

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while he surveyed it with a very scrutinizing eye, and, as that excellent gentleman Marc Anthony well saith, “like one who takes his leave.” Then,

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casting a momentary glance at Bilberry, he observed, “Ay, this’ll do; but I see yo’ ar’n’t exactly made for it.” Then he began to soliloquize. “I’ve had more wear out of this one waistcoat than any hafe dozen agen. Blame my skin if it isn’t a shame to gie it ye!”

And with that observation he handed the article over. Bilberry thanked the old man for his present; and, feeling most anxious to quit the scene of his disaster, hastily bade all present a good morning, and walked away.

At the turn of every hedge he expected to find his mother waiting for him, but at every turn was disappointed. She had made as wise and perfect a retreat from the field, as in later times, copying from her example, did the famous Sir John Moore to the walls of Corunna. Nor did our hero see anything of her until he reached the village. Arriving there, he looked about for some time, and at length observed her trying to drive a bargain with a country girl who wanted a new comb.

Mrs. Thurland had an excellent method of selling an article, and this was it. If she sold

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to the lasses, she always contrived to joke agreeably with them about the lads; if to the lads, then she talked as pleasantly about the lasses: and when, on the other hand, she dealt with old folks of either sex, who, after wearing the world down to the very stumps, become all of a sudden very philosophical, and fond of preaching up the emptiness of its vanities, then she had a happy knack of looking back on the hardships of her own life, and not caring when she should be fairly brought to the end of it.

“See you, my dear,” said she, picking out a nice comb from her lot, and holding it up to the gaze of the fair bumpkiness, “this is a very good one — very good. I assure you I can hardly persuade myself to part with it; only I had it amongst a lot that were brought to me very cheap by a man who smuggled them, or else it is worth three or four times the sum I am asking. You could not buy it for double the money in the place where it was made; and here I have carried it all this way, and at last of all am obliged to sell at less than prime

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cost. Take off your bonnet, my dear. Why it would look beautiful in your hair. You have the finest head of hair I ever did see. What a pity you do not set it off with a good comb! And really this is the best and the cheapest I have. I do not think the fellow to it has been sold these months, — I am sure not in this neighbourhood. Your sweetheart would be struck with it; and I should not wonder if, with that pretty face of yours and this comb, he would want to marry you next morning. But, when he asks you, take my advice and say ‘no;’ for they like us women all the better, my dear, when they have had some trouble to get at us."

“But this is only horn,” objected the damsel; her face, which at palest was the hue of a cabbage-rose, blushing still deeper at Mrs. Thurland's remarks.

“Bless you!” exclaimed that lady, “what are you thinking about? *This* horn! who told you so, my dear? You are not used to these things as I am, or else you would know what it is in a moment. Tortoise-shell and horn are

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quite different things, as you may always tell by the streaks and stains. It takes a man a very long time indeed to make a comb like this. They are very badly paid, poor fellows, or else how could I offer it at such a trifle as eighteen pence? If it is not worth that, why I do not know the value of an old shoe. If it does not go readily at that price it is a burning shame, and I do not care a pin's head whether I sell it or not. I never can lose by keeping it; and if you do not buy it, ten to one but I shall sell it to the next customer for half-a-crown at least; only I am in want of a little ready money just now, and eighteen pence in hand would be worth more to me to-night than the prospect of half-a-crown to-morrow. That is all I have to say about it.” And then Mrs. Thurland seemed as if returning the comb to its place in her basket. This was her last, best pull: the girl, like a young fish, could not resist the drawing away of the bait, but felt in her pocket and brought out two shillings. When Mrs. Thurland had got the money into her hand, “I do not think I have a sixpence to give you

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in change,” said she: “let me sell you six pennyworth of cotton-balls, tapes, laces, pins, needles, bodkins, or anything you may want. It is very unlucky for me that I have not change, for I shall make you eight pennyworth at least, just that you may not think I have said so on purpose.” But the damsel protested she had plenty of all those things,

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and could not do with any more at any price. "Well," observed Mrs. Thurland, "I can feel at all events;" at the same instant diving her fist to the darkest abyss of her pocket. "Ah!" she exclaimed, fishing up a sixpence, "if I had known this was in my pocket, I would never have sold you that comb for eighteen pence, I assure you." The simple but good-natured girl, believing Mrs. Thurland to the letter, offered in that case to let her have it again. "No, no," she replied; "I could not find in my heart to do anything of the sort. A bargain is a bargain, and I will stick by it, though I be a great loser in the upshot. Good afternoon, my dear, and I am very much obliged to you.

"The bargain thus concluded, Mrs. Thurland,

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with a broad smile on her face, went up to Bilberry, who waited a short distance off, inquiring in what manner the haymakers rewarded him for so kindly attending to their ale. "I suppose, Bilberry, they gave you that nice big waistcoat for your trouble?"

On his relating the real facts of the case, she affected great indignation and surprise: "Lord! what a world this is! who could have thought it? I heard them shouting very loud after you, but I made certain it was to give you something, and so I made haste away, thinking if they found I was your mother, they would, perhaps, have given me something too; and that would not have been right, for I do not like to see people too generous." She then comforted Bilberry with the reflection that at least he had got an excellent garment by it. But, notwithstanding the clever manner in which he had come off, this being the first time he had ever fallen into anybody's hands, it sank very deep into his heart, and caused him inwardly to form a determined resolution

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never again to endeavour to do a kindness for any living soul.

By the time they had canvassed the village and neighbouring farms in pursuit of their vocation, evening drew round apace, so that Mrs. Thurland resolved not to proceed any further that night; though, as it proved in the sequel, it would have been well had she formed a different resolution.

Accordingly, about dusk-hour, she and her son retired to the only public-house in the place, with a full intention of making themselves comfortable for the night, had not a strange and most unexpected, though, from what has gone before, assuredly a very natural adventure happened, to disturb their tranquillity.

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CHAPTER III.

DESCRIBES, AMONGST OTHER MATTERS, A MOST TERRIFIC FIGHT,  
INFERIOR ONLY TO THE BATTLE OF MARATHON OR OF  
THERMOPYLAE.

ON entering the pot-house, Bilberry went forward into the kitchen, and, according to his quality, instinctively took a seat in the meanest part of the room; while his mother sought out the landlady for the purpose of making arrangements about their lodgings.

Low-roofed, and with windows very much the colour of a black bottle, aided too by the deepness of the evening, the kitchen looked so gloomy, that for some time the young man could not see whether there was any person in it beside himself or not. A single red coal peeping out of the ashes between the bottom bars, like the pupil of old Hornie's eye, and a smoked balk projecting out halfway between the roof and the chimney-piece, were the only

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things at first visible. By-and-by the shadows cleared, and he observed a three-legged table, slopped on the top, and curiously rimmed with the impressions of departed cans of ale.

As the range of vision extended, he could just discern, beyond the table, a dull pewter pot standing on the hob, with two pieces of pipe lying beside it; and in the chimney-corner — he could not decide whether it was imagination or not — there seemed to be something of a shape which, as his fancy led him, served equally well for man or beast. It maintained the most profound silence, until, after the lapse of a few minutes, a little girl, who by her ragged hair and dress might easily have passed for Bilberry's sister, brought in a lighted candle, or to speak more correctly, let us say, a wick stiffened with tallow; as it required a roll of brown paper, like an invalid in a blanket, to keep it upright in the socket. This being placed upon the table, young Thurland was enabled to perceive an old man in the corner. He had been asleep; and doubtless would have slept still longer had not the glimmering of the tallow grenadier crept under

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**The Salamanca Corpus: Bilberry Thurland. I. (1836)**

his eyelids and set him stirring. He rubbed his head, stared round him half a second as if to make certain of his locality, took up his can and tried to drink out of it, but got nothing save a smell of the dregs, smacked the can down atop of the broken pipes, and then cast his eye across the room at Bilberry. "Fine night," said he, without knowing whether it rained or the moon shone. "Very fine," was Bilberry's reply; for, like all wise men, he made a point of never contradicting anybody concerning the weather. "Rare hay-time," the old man rejoined, in a tone more as though he were telling that news to himself than to Bilberry, and at the same time knocking the edge of his can on the table. At this moment he chanced to obtain a nearer glance of the young man's stomach: the light fell full upon it, and he looked steadily a few moments as though he recognised an old friend of his. "You'll excuse me, young man," he remarked; "but, for satisfaction's sake, I should just like to ask you how you comed by that waistcoat? I don't mean no offence, only

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it runs in my mind I've seen it on old Grimsby's body many a long day afore this."

Bilberry gave him to understand it was his own, although certainly it had belonged to a farmer of the neighbourhood, who had made him a present thereof that very day. On hearing this, the old man smiled at his own sagacity, and observed, "Ay, I thought I could no' be mistaken. I know it too well for that. But I'll tell you what, young chap, you have not got such stuffing to put into it as he has. I knowed that waistcoat as soon as I see'd it; and you need not feel surprised at that neither, for you may take my word for 't, you must get out of all this county afore you meet anybody that *don't* know it."

At this point of the conversation Mrs. Thurland entered, bringing in her own ale, and a plate of bread and cheese. Now it must not be imagined that Bilberry felt ashamed at thus having another man's garments found upon his person. Experience, and his mother, had taught him better than that long ago. No, indeed: so far from it,

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he would on the contrary have felt very thankful if he had had on the waistcoats of every man in the parish. Though we must confess in that case he would have liked them upon somewhat different terms; for, as the reader will shortly have occasion to know, he had not yet got to the last nor the worst peril in which the present one involved him.

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While he and his mother were yet at their meal, the latch of the outer door clicked up in a hurry, and there entered three or four of those useful and popular men who go about the country repairing chair-bottoms and umbrellas; and close in their rear followed two bold-looking women, as nearly resembling Mrs. Thurland as three peas resemble one another.

Exactly in the same manner as Bilberry had done, they instinctively made their way into the kitchen. At sight of the first face, Mrs. Thurland got on to her legs, and thrust out her hand for a salutation: but, in her hurry, she quite forgot to lay the lump of bread and cheese out of it first; so that the gentleman, who was very glad to see her.

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naturally thought she was making him a present of it. Under that impression he took it out of her hand, and was about to transfer it to his chest, when Mrs. Thurland instantly explained the mistake, and had it restored.

The whole party being now come in, such congratulations ensued as Bilberry did not recollect ever before to have heard the like of.

The whole were his mother's old acquaintances: and though people of their description are poor and very independent of one another; though they travel far apart, and, for aught they can tell, may never meet again in their lives; yet, for all that, their memories do not change with every county, — there is a kind of bindweed friendship amongst them as well as amongst their betters. Perhaps it is quite as sincere also, if not more so; for in their annual peregrinations and returns they meet just often enough to keep memory alive, and not too often to deaden the spirit of acquaintance: and that is, after all, the foundation of true friendship. No sooner had Mrs. Thurland sat down

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again, than she whispered Bilberry to make haste and eat his victuals, lest any of her friends should want a bit; and, following her precept by example, she made away with what remained of her own share as rapidly as by a trick in conjuration.

All now gathered round the table; plenty of ale was ordered in to do honour to the meeting, and the whole company drank in common. In ten minutes the room was so full of tobacco smoke, that whoever wished to see his neighbour had first to blow a tunnel through it to look down; while the adventures, the tales, the good and bad successes of trade, told by one or another, would, if repeated here, prove mighty jocular and

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entertaining; only we have other matter to rehearse, more true perhaps, and, let us hope, not less diverting. The company talked, and laughed, and passed time so easily, that they were struck with astonishment on hearing a phlegmatic old Dutch clock, which hung on the wall, suddenly begin to wheeze and spit as if yet troubled with the dregs of a last

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winter's cold, and at length join chorus with them by striking twelve. Not that the real hour was twelve, for the more sober church had not long rung ten; but this clock was one of a kind occasionally to be met with, having by his age acquired a licence to do as he liked, and, at any time when his spirits were elated, to strike such hours as in his own wisdom he should think fit.

After drinking to the amount of three pints each, one with another, and nearly getting into an uproar with the landlady through having injudiciously charged that respectable person with mixing small beer along with several of the latter jugs, they agreed to have a glass of spirits round. The mistress, though very willing to accept the order, resolutely refused to fulfil it until the ale was paid for, and the spirits in advance. Upon this, several voices at once broke forth in a style which afforded very conclusive evidence of something besides small beer having been drunk, demanding of the landlady whether she meant to doubt their honesty? "Because in that case,"

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bellowed one of the men in the voice of a trombone, backed by a ponderous drunken thump which well-nigh upset the table, "I'm smashed if we pay a farthing!" Then he flung himself stoutly back in his chair, and clapping one thigh across the other in triumph, valiantly poked his wooden leg straight out like the nose of a bellows.

The agitated landlady disclaimed any intention of insinuating such a thing to so respectable a company; for though sometimes she did find it necessary to take the money in one hand while she served her ale with the other, yet with such guests as themselves a precaution of that kind was out of the question. "I only wish, ladies and gentlemen," she observed, in a very mild tone, — "I only wish to prevent mistakes. You have now had ten quarts; let them be paid for, and then go on again as hard as you like. Short reckonings make long friends, as you have heard say afore now." But they one



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and all protested they had never heard that proverb before; and perhaps you, reader, are in the same predicament.

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Mrs. Thurland declared, if she had known as much as that, they would have paid jug by jug, for there were no persons in the world with whom she desired longer to be friends than with the landladies of pothouses. And here she passed a high eulogium upon the present specimen of that sisterhood, which she concluded by a very moving address to the landlady herself to fill her tobacco-box again; handing across the table a steel box, in size not much inferior to the head of a warming-pan.

The compliments with which it was accompanied almost shut out refusals from any susceptible soul; although Mrs. Thurland afterwards declared, with something like an oathlet, that what the mistress put into her box was miserable mundungus, half stalks and cabbage-leaves. However, it was good enough to give away; for, in the confusion which afterwards ensued, it is believed by all historians on the subject that Mrs. Thurland quite forgot to pay for it.

The amount of the landlady's charge, spirits included, was six shillings and ninepence. When

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the contributions of the whole company were added together, they would by no means balance the bill; and, after a very protracted search, during which a few more stray halfpence were added to the first sum, it was found that there still remained a default of one shilling and fivepence halfpenny. The landlady grew first serious, and then passionate; the men pulled their pockets inside out, and left them hanging there like fins; the women declared, if they were searched to their toe-ends, there could not be another farthing found upon them; so that altogether there appeared every probability of the pleasures of the night concluding with a tumult.

At this juncture, unconsciously to himself, though no doubt imperceptibly acted upon by existing circumstances, Bilberry for the first time thrust both his hands to the bottom of his new waistcoat pockets, and to the no small astonishment of himself, and the delight of the company, in one of them a coin touched his fingers' ends. Instantaneously put to the candle, what should it prove but an old half-guinea.

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They rung it on the table, and not an ear could doubt it; yet each one round examined and rung it over again; and, last of all, the landlady rung it, weighed it, and sent Dolly with it to the parson, as a good judge of gold, for his final stamp of approbation.

All was right; the landlady took her amount, and they resolved to have the value of all the change in spirits.

They who were before jovial now went mad. And as Mrs. Thurland considered herself by right entitled to a considerable share of the product of her son's windfall, she poured in the liquor until her spirits became so hilarious that she could no longer restrain her inclination to sing several very humorous songs, which she did much to the general satisfaction.

While they were in the heat and fury of the third glass, an incident happened of a somewhat different complexion to the agreeable one which had just released them from debt, and, if possible, quite as unexpected an one also.

Their mirth was suddenly stilled like the instantaneous stopping of some deafening machinery,

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by a heavy rapping at the door, which, without invitation, was then opened, and a tall stout fellow in a blue smock-frock, with a huge stick in his hand, presented himself to view; while over his shoulders beyond were perceptible the faces and hats of several others, whose bodies were totally eclipsed by him who stood in the -doorway. In the features of this man Bilberry instantly recognised one of his old friends the haymakers. This ambassador opened his business with them by inquiring whether there was not present a young man who had that afternoon received the present of a waistcoat from Mr. Grimsby.

“And what do you want with him if there is?” asked Mrs. Thurland, whose temper, at all times easily lighted, was now like tinder, ready to catch fire at a spark.

“Because,” the man continued, “there is a mistake in it. You see, when mester sent Bob home, missis was out of the way, and Mary — a great soft calf her! — thinking as he wanted it for his own use, she sent him th' wrong one. There's somethink in th' pockets that mester

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wants, as he quite forgot to empty 'em when he turn'd th' waistcoat off last week. We must have it again, if you please."

"There is always two to a bargain," replied Mrs. Thurland, as she crammed her son safe between her own chair-back and the wall. "This article," she continued, addressing the assembly at large, "this waistcoat was given to him in fair open daylight, — the sun shining so that everybody could see what they were about a deal better than we can now, — as clear and stand-up a gift as ever was in this world. If people are to give things away in that manner, and then ask for them back again whenever they like, it is worse than child's play. We are never safe; we never know when we have got our own. There is no security for property; and we might as well have a revolution at once, when nobody owns nothing, and everybody owns everything. It is a mere paltry shuffle to get it back again. I'll tell you what, Strawyard, I do not believe there is a single farthing in either pockets. Feel, Bilberry; and if there is, give it him back. But as to the waistcoat itself, no

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man shall take that off your back, while I have a leg to stand on."

Her companions, whose participation in the fruits of the half-guinea furnished them with a very good private reason for resisting any attempt at restoration or recovery, unanimously took the part of Mrs. Thurland, and in one voice declared the demand unjust: while the landlady, whose profit and interest lay in the same quarter, had an equally forcible argument in her own mind for keeping the secret of the half-guinea which had just before been abstracted from the pocket. In vain the sturdy labourer attempted to reason, or to back his reasons by another waistcoat which he produced, and pronounced to be in every respect better than that Bilberry had on. His mother in a loud voice declared she was quite satisfied with the present one; and that if the other which the man held in his hand was really a much superior as it was represented, it would all the more become Mr. Grimsby to wear it himself. "In fact," she added, "once for all.

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Chopsticks, if you wait there till to-morrow morning, you shall not have it."

Upon this the countryman, raising his cudgel, exclaimed, "Then I'm dom'd if we don't!" and rushed headlong into the midst of them, followed by three or, four others,

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who without doubt had been provided as his assistants in anticipation of this terrible result.

They first directed their attack against Bilberry, in hopes of seizing him singly, and stripping the object of contention from his breast; but his mother stood before him, with her wings spread out like a brood-hen, and with equal valour received them manfully upon both her fists, which she played away with the vigour of a drummer beating up quick-march; while Bilberry judiciously skulked down, so that the blows aimed at him fell mostly on his mother's shoulders and the chair-back.

Meantime, their companions were not idle spectators of the fray. They first gulped their spirits and water like whales; the landlady's little girl rushed in at all hazards, and swept

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away the glasses; and then began a most dreadful attack in the rear of Mrs. Thurland's enemies. While these latter were stretching over to lay hands on Bilberry, the two tinkers' women behind seized one man each by the coat, and began to kick away with a most determined resolution. This soon had the effect of diverting their attention; so that turning round on a sudden to avenge themselves, the coat-tails of each were left in the hands of their female assailants, who immediately doubled them up and flung them into their owners' faces. Themselves in turn were now attacked by the men, who dashed their arms about like flails, and would most certainly have thrashed the women into chaff, had not Mr. William Spowage seen their danger, and, in lack of other warlike instrument, taken off' his wooden leg, and laid about him with the thick end in a style which made everybody grin who got a specimen of it.

Warm work was now going forward; but as the light had been knocked out, and the battlefield was only half illumined by the partial rays which streamed through the doorway, it was

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not easy to tell in what relative position the respective armies stood; though it rather appeared that the regiment commanded by General Mrs. Thurland was on the side of victory, for, besides that her men in their present strength of drink were about an equal match for Mr. Grimsby's, she was over and above strengthened on her right wing by two of those violent women who are most formidable in battle.

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The round table, amidst much rocking to and fro, and great pushing from one side to the other, had hitherto weathered the storm; but now it got upset, and fairly turned on its face, legs upwards. These legs, three in number, presented such excellent weapons of offence, that a sudden rush at them was made, and without more ado they were broken from the body as you might break off a lobster's claws; when there immediately followed such rattling of pates, that, in the opinion of those not personally engaged, the affray began to wear a serious visage.

During all this time Mrs. Thurland had been contesting singly with the tall fellow who acted

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as ambassador in the beginning of this affair; and, after receiving and returning some very forcible blows, she at length succeeded, by the assistance of the wall at her back, in giving him such a straight-out thump on the stomach as sent him staggering backwards. In the act of falling, he involuntarily caught hold of the bottom of a corner cupboard, which happened to be within reach, under the natural instinct of saving himself; but, not having been designed for any such purpose as that to which the falling man strove to appropriate it, the cupboard, unable to maintain its position, gave way in the brackets, and went down on the top of him, the door flying open in the passage, and pouring out by way of plaster on to his prostrate person a whole Sunday service of crockery, together with sundry bottles of elixirs, and compounds, and ketchups. No sooner, however, was he down, than snatching violently at Mrs. Thurland's legs, in a couple of minutes he succeeded in pulling her also to the floor.

The smashing of the cupboard furniture doubly excited the already ferocious landlady.

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She yelped like a jackal from the interior of the house, and the next moment presented herself at the door. Being an industrious woman, it so chanced that, notwithstanding the disturbance going on in her house, at the very instant the corner cupboard fell she was employing herself in rolling some paste to cover a potato-pie for the next day's dinner; so that running immediately from thence to the scene of action, without considering a moment, she now presented herself amongst them with a large sheet of paste, about the size of a tea-board, across her hands. No sooner did the wreck of her cupboard and the

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dismembered corpse of her round table meet her eye, than in plain terms wishing every soul present at the devil, she bounced over every impediment, and making up to Mrs. Thurland, who was still struggling on the floor with her enemy, as the ringleader of the riot, she charged her, paste in hand, tore off her cap, and in the twinkling of an eye plastered instead the virgin crust completely over her head and face. For an instant Mrs. Thurland looked a very excellent pie; but feeling herself not quite

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ready for the oven, she snatched off the ammunition dough, and moulding it into cannon-balls with her fists, fired away at the landlady with such effect that the latter saw it advisable to retreat. Mrs. Thurland's fury, however, was not to be evaded in that manner; she followed her out of the kitchen into the house, and from thence again into the street, allowing the unfortunate landlady no time to arm herself with any weapon better than the rolling-pin, which she seized from the dresser in her passage. But this was no despicable tool, as may be imagined from its size, having in all probability, at some former period of its history, served the office of prop to a cart-shaft: a sufficient guarantee that it was capable of breathing mischief.

Bilberry's mother had scarcely left the doorstep in pursuit of her flying enemy, ere the latter, who now had reached the other side of the road, suddenly turned sharp round, and let fly the rolling-pin at her pursuer with a fury not easily described. Never was woman known to take a good aim. In a passion especially, when she seems most anxiously solicitous to hit,

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her missiles perversely fly farther off than ever; as, in the present instance, the paste-pin missed Mrs. Thurland by a trifle of about twenty yards, but, instead of hitting her, very satisfactorily drove through the hostess's own chamber window, and demolished half a casement in its flight.

Having vanquished one assailant, Mrs. Thurland, invigorated by her present victory, returned to aid her fellow-combatants in the kitchen. Unfortunately for her ambition, three or four of them were struggling so desperately behind the door, that she could not gain admittance, and thus was constrained to pour out what remained of her vial of wrath upon the panels.

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During all this tumult, young Bilberry, who, if not sole, was the principal occasion of it, unlike the originators of many wars, did not wholly escape; for though, while his mother remained to keep down his most determined assailant, whose overthrow has already been described, he succeeded in eluding his antagonist's clutches, yet, no sooner had she turned her

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back in pursuit of the flying hostess, than that prostrate foe seized the propitious moment to regain his feet, and, making a last desperate thrust at Bilberry across the fallen corner cupboard, he gave the young man a poke not to be withstood. In staggering, he caught his heel against the table-top, which lay on the floor like a pancake, and instantly fell backwards. But what made bad luck still worse was this. At the same instant that young Thurland fell, Mr. William Spowage, who was fighting behind him, had taken aim, and was whirling his wooden leg at one of his enemies with the velocity of a smith's hammer, when, unluckily for poor Bilberry, he fell between one combatant and the other, so that his head crossing the circle described by Corporal Spowage's weapon, came in for what should have fallen to another man's share. It was enough. He fell stone dead, and knew no more about what followed than did the walls themselves.

The first thing of which Bilberry again became conscious was, that a little water sprinkled his face, and a sup of brandy moistened his

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throat, both which liquors he thought very properly disposed. The engagement had terminated, the combatants were as quiet as scarecrows, and a melancholy gloom overspread the whole field of battle.

Opening his eyes, he beheld his mother and all her valiant company seated round the room, very crestfallen and cowardly, some on chairs, some on the overthrown furniture; but all kept stern watch over by two men of authority, with each a blue painted staff in his hand. This ensign of power was sufficient of itself to explain into whose custody they had fallen.

That despicable woman the landlady, on finding herself worsted by Mrs. Thurland, had scampered down to the village, as her house stood quite on the outskirts, and in a

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frantic fit had summoned both the parish constables; it being on the average too refractory a place to be kept in order by only one.

Those who were watching Bilberry, seeing him open his eyes, and that his colour returned, observed immediately that he might be removed; and upon this the whole pedlar company

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were secured and carried to the village roundhouse, there to be lodged until on the morrow they could be carried before the Squire Justice. Bilberry by no means relished the thought of such a place of destination, and determined within himself that if they would take him there, at least he would ride like other invalids; and therefore, when set on an end, his legs refused to support his body. Consequently, two hodges, whom in the name of the King the constable charged to assist him, placed the boy upright on the broken table-top, and conveyed him after his friends.

On the road to their lodging, Mrs. Thurland waked half the town by calling out for her big basket; but the constables over and over again assured her it would be taken care of: upon which she replied, that was the very thing of which she felt afraid, because whenever goods of that kind were taken care of, loss and damage were sure to come; whereas, if they would only let her basket alone, it would take care of itself.

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CHAPTER IV.

A DELECTABLE NIGHT-SCENE IN THE DUNGEON, WHITHER OUR HEROES  
WERE TAKEN AFTER THEIR DEFEAT.

THE roundhouse they found a very agreeable place to pass a summer's night in. It was built much in the shape of a lime-kiln, or, if this will be better understood, in the same fashion as ancient sugar-loaf hats were made, the sides tapering regularly upwards, with a flat crown about the size of a trencher, by way of roof. In the centre of it now figured the iron leg of a weathercock, the body of the bird having long since deserted its swivel limb, and perhaps afforded a meal's meat to some travelling tinker, by furnishing him with copper patches for old kettles. Very high up the walls were several slits for the admission of light and air, and, as our company afterwards found, of stones too;

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for the village boys had very plentifully supplied the interior with that kind of ammunition. The inside had once been provided with a bench extending from each side of the door quite round; but great part of this had disappeared, and the fragments yet remaining were whittled so narrow by the industrious spuds of former prisoners, that none save a very thin person could effect a lodgment upon them.

As soon as they got in, and one of the constables threw the light of his lantern round, — “Well,” said Mrs. Thurland, casting her eyes in a circle, “there might be a good nap taken here, if it were but possible to coil one's self round like a dog.”

But somehow or other nobody seemed to relish the observation; for beyond forcing out half a laugh, which was as suddenly extinguished, it had no effect. With the exception of Mrs. Thurland herself, the spirits of every one present appeared to be depressed by tonight's confinement, and the prospect of punishment to-morrow.

While the constables remained with the light, Bilberry took a glance at himself, and observed

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that the disputed waistcoat had been skinned from his body during his temporary insensibility, and another put on in its place.

Although it was so fine a summer's night that even at that late hour a little light from the north-west might be traced halfway up the sky, yet no sooner had the gaolers withdrawn themselves, and turned the rusty bolt upon their prisoners, than the latter found themselves in almost total darkness; the slits in the walls being too narrow and too few in number to admit any material degree of light.

When the constables were gone clear off, Mrs. Thurland tried the door after them to see that they had made all safe. It was very fast; and on examination she found that the bolt was quite buried in the stone, to prevent its being got at inside. Neither did the key-hole come through, so as to afford any hope of the lock being picked. Perceiving freedom was not to be obtained that way, she began to make use of the only liberty now left, that of the tongue, by cursing her son and his waistcoat half a dozen times over for having brought them into the present pickle. And when in self-defence

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Bilberry began to mutter, and very significantly to allude to his head, she overthrew that argument by adding, that if he had only been sharp enough to have come down to the

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village in his shirt-sleeves, there would have been none of this; which logical speech of hers was ably supported by Mr. William Spowage, who in great wrath immediately observed how that very blow had cost him not a farthing less than six shillings, the value of his wooden leg, which had snapped in two by it, and now was good for nothing but for kindling. He complained and swore heavily at being obliged either to lie down or to stand on one leg, and that, as himself declared, not the best of the pair; for if he had only had the wooden one left instead of the live one, he could have stood on it until Christmas, and never been tired.

Notwithstanding the unpleasantness of their present situation, and the uneasy thoughts that disturbed their minds touching the doubtful conclusion of the next day's events, the quantity of liquor which most of the prisoners had imbibed soon caused several of them to fall asleep

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on the floor; though the disaster which Bilberry had met with prevented that poor youth himself obtaining a wink. He spent the whole night in wishing for daylight, as he counted every hour struck from the neighbouring church-tower, and in aggravating his heart by looking through the slits in the walls of their dungeon, on to shreds of the deep blue sky, sprinkled here and there, as he shifted his uneasy position, with beautiful clear stars as bright as water. He knew those summer nights were very short, and therefore kept expecting soon to see the end of this; but it drew out to appearance much longer than before he could have believed.

At last he heard a cock crow in a roost not far off: that was something, though he could not perceive in the sky any greater light. Then the cock crowed again; and directly after him three or four young aspirants, as Bilberry judged, in the same roost, broke out all at once. But they were young men just beginning to try their hands at a stave, and at present rather cawed than crowed. However, they were

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enough to excite emulation in their tribe; for presently after, and indeed before they themselves had time to draw another breath, the cock family of the whole parish was set agoing. The first roost must have been very near; for after the old chap had a third time crowed with all his vigour, by drawing it out to the very bottom of his lungs, and the ambitious cockrels again tried to imitate him, Bilberry could distinctly hear them cry

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out and flutter their wings, as the father bird soused them on the back of the head, and knocked them off their perches into the dirt below, for their consummate impudence and presumption.

Having thus sounded their morning trumpets through the village, and done every hen the favour of being awakened all on a sudden out of her sleep, Bilberry fancied the cocks must have tucked their heads under their wings again for an additional nap, as the crowing somewhat abruptly ceased, with the exception at least of one or two factious radicals afar off, who continued to shout for some time after

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every other gentleman had concluded his argument.

Overcome with watching and weariness, the lad now dozed just deep enough to make him forget where he was, and to fill his brain with a thousand strange things between thoughts and dreams, when he was startled wide awake again by the church-bell striking three. It rang in his ears strangely; and, for a moment, the place, the people around him, the events of the night, rushed like something new upon his mind. Some time after, — it might be half an hour, — he had the satisfaction of overhearing a ploughman talking to his horses, as he brought them from the stables and put on their gearing in an adjacent farm-yard, which seemed to him something like a proof that the time of their liberation was at hand.

It was now light enough to enable him to distinguish everything within the roundhouse. But the odd disposition of his company, who were all fast asleep on the floor, producing by their combined voices a very excellent concert,

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not unlike that which issues from a slumbering hog-sty, first took his attention.

On the side opposite to where Bilberry himself sat, — for he had succeeded in effecting a lodgment upon the remnant of settle which skirted the walls, — the two chair-bottom menders, and the couple of women, whom he imagined to be their wives, looking haggard and miserable after the previous evening's carouse, were lying in feverish sleep. Here an arm and there a leg stuck out from the general mass of bodies, though in such a mixed manner as totally to defy any attempt at discovering to whom they respectively belonged; while the smothered half-stifled snore of those who lay undermost, forcing its way out somewhat in the interrupted manner of a broken-winded

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bagpipe, now coming in a powerful gust that carried all before it, and then dying off first into a groan, then a penny whistle, then into a squeak, as if the breath were squeezed quite flat, and at last subsiding like a partially stopped-up keyhole, altogether afforded him a momentary laugh, in spite of his sore head and

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gloomy situation. But most was Bilberry amused at the predicament in which were placed his mother and the heroic William Spowage, who had made their bed not far from where the youth himself sat. It so happened that on their side the roundhouse the floor lay in a considerable hollow, which no doubt Mr. Spowage had, during the darkness overnight, considered a very comfortable substitute for a mattress, and under that impression had laid himself down in it, not perceiving, from the quantity of liquor he had previously absorbed, that the drenchings of some contiguous ponds had forced a way through the foundation, and occupied the place before him, turning the cradle of the floor into a little swamp, of a texture most probably very pleasant to lie on, only it had not the equally desirable qualities of dryness and cleanliness. Mr. Spowage had now lain in it some hours, quite long enough to have sucked up as much of the superfluous moisture into the back of his spongy coat as that garment could well hold; for, unfortunately, during his sleep, he had been at some

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pains to fit himself very compactly into the inequalities of the hollow; while he had also materially assisted the process of absorption, by rolling over several times, and snugly nestling himself into the nooks and crannies of his bedstead.

Happily, Mrs. Thurland had escaped taking any share in this delectable couch, as her head, the only part in danger, was just saved from it by being laid upon the stump of William Spowage's leg; which, to speak the truth, was, both by its thickness and appropriate length, really no contemptible substitute for a pillow.

From this view of their situation, it must by no means be inferred that Bilberry felt in the least inclined to awaken his mother and Mr. Spowage: so much the contrary, indeed, that when he considered the sour rap that gentleman had inflicted on him the night preceding, and coupled it with his unfeeling observations afterwards, wherein he expressed more concern at the breaking of his own wooden leg than at Bilberry's broken head, the youth really felt

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happy to behold him thus unconsciously figuring away on his back in the drainage of the village pond, by way of providential punishment.

Afterwards he spent some time in examining and trying to decipher the various hieroglyphical scratches, and distichs, and letters, with which the refractory bumpkins who heretofore had occupied the roundhouse, had plentifully decorated the walls; but as most of them — though to a certain degree capable of contributing to the reader's entertainment, if told — were very deficient in point of moral, that prime quality in all works like the present, and moreover were not couched in the most classical language imaginable, we must humbly beg leave to omit giving any illustrative specimens.

About five o'clock, Mrs. Thurland turned over, and in the effort opened her eyes. They fell straight upon her son Bilberry, as he sat bolt upright against the wall. She appeared to be taken very much by surprise, kept her eyes in a dull dead set for half a minute, and then, raising her head to look what it had lain on, in

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some astonishment inquired, "Bilberry, where are we?"

He laughed, and asked whether she had forgotten last night.

"Od bless me!" she again exclaimed, at the same time rearing herself on to an end; "and where is my basket?"

And then she instinctively felt about both aside and behind her for it; but, instead of the accustomed basket, her hand happened to take a pretty firm hold of the nose and face of Mr. William Spowage. That gentleman, being thus suddenly surprised in the midst of a very delicious sleep, bounded up at once like a foot-ball, roaring out in a voice of thunder,

"Confound it, Sal! what are you about?" at the same moment turning to Mrs. Thurland, when, to his infinite surprise, he found she was not exactly the person for whom he had taken her.

His vehement exclamation startled the whole company from slumber; each one, both man and woman, in the first instance, and by way of morning sacrifice, breathing a pretty strong

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curse upon the noisy rascal who had wakened them. But when, a few minutes afterwards, they had come to their everyday senses, and consequently also to a full perception of their situation, they began to consider it a fortunate thing they were waked so soon.

And now for the first time, as the stupifying effects of the liquor were in some degree worn away, they began to talk about devising, if possible, some means of escape, before the constables should return to carry them to the neighbouring magistrate. Mrs. Thurland thought it was far too late in the morning for success to attend any effort of that kind; though her suggestion in this, as similar suggestions often are in greater affairs, was overruled, not so much because it involved a falsehood, as because the truth it told was not palatable to the company.

Before she had half argued her point, one of the chair-menders was hoisted on to the shoulders of the rest, high enough to enable him to reach one of the narrow slits in the wall. This he thrust his arm through, and, thus suspending  
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self, began with a great pocket-knife to pick out the mortar from between the bricks, in the remote hope of ultimately making the hole large enough to get through; while the expectants below watched his operations with as much interest and solicitude as though half a kingdom depended upon their success.

“If the first brick could be got out,” was an observation often repeated with variations, “then we should be as good as clear off.” But, alas! the first brick could not be got out, though they tried a long time to achieve that desideratum; nor was it until each in turn, under the assurance of doing it better than the last, had by actual picking convinced himself of his own presumption, that they all felt satisfied it could not be done, and sat down with nothing except the arm-ache to reward their pains.

Six o'clock struck; and from that hour to half past nine, when one of the constables came to conduct them before the village squire, Mr. Spowage did nothing but abuse young Bilberry

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for having broken his wooden leg, and pronounce himself a blind drunken fool for having lain down to sleep in a puddle, which had soaked him to the skin.

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In all his after experience, Bilberry never knew any three hours and a half to appear so long and tedious as did these; heightened, too, as that tedium was, by the continually recurring observation on those without the walls, as they went about their occupations, or stopped a moment to gossip, or to congratulate each other upon the fineness of a morning which he was not permitted to enjoy.

At length the prisoners heard the agreeable sound of the key withdrawing the ponderous bolt, and in five more minutes were released from their dungeon, glad as an unpenning flock of sheep; for, in reality, they were not altogether without hope of having their night's lodging considered a sufficient punishment, and so obtaining their discharge immediately.

But a sudden damp succeeded these sanguine expectations, when the constable applied his

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handcuffs to the two chair-menders, — the only pair likely to prove refractory, — and then conducted the whole party to the house of Squire Barton, a justice of peace and custos rotularum for the county.

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CHAPTER V.

BILBERRY, HIS MOTHER, AND HER COMPANIONS, ARE CARRIED BEFORE  
JUSTICE BARTON. — THEIR EXAMINATION, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

JUDGING from appearances as they went along the road, Squire Barton was a man of some quality and consideration in his hundred. His house stood about a mile from the village, on a pleasant flat between the highroad and a great river, which thereabout made a broad elbow, as it turned to the sun under a steep precipice covered with elms and pines. The party readily judged when they had entered on the squire's territory, from observing the hedges by the road-side clipped on the top into the shape of a coping-stone, and lined inside with a narrow plantation of young trees running their whole length, which made the road itself very shady and agreeable.

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Having turned from the highroad down a narrower one, which for distinction's sake had lately been scattered over with a genteel seasoning of red gravel, they came to a little hut half buried in trees, where a round-barred white gate stood across the way, in

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the manner of a toll-gate. What was the use of it none of them could discover, for neither on one side nor the other was there anything to be shut either in or out. Nevertheless, a tall old man, bent into the shape of a fishing-rod, lived at this hut, apparently for the important purpose of opening and shutting the aforesaid gate whenever people of consideration passed through. He came out and leaned his back — or at least the bottom of it, for that was the only part that touched — against the door-post, watched the company through like a mastiff, without a word, or anything beyond a mere nod of recognition to the constable, and then went in again. It seemed to be not the first time by many he had seen such visitors as the present paying their morning respects to the squire.

They now proceeded up a bare carriage-road across some several hundred uninclosed acres,

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at the far side of which rose to their fearful view the residence of Justice Barton. As they drew nearer and nearer, every step bringing more and more of the squire's grandeur and authority into view, Bilberry began to feel something like a sweat of fear distilling through his skin.

The horrors of a month or six weeks passed in a prison ten times more dreary than the village roundhouse, presented themselves to his mind with all the aggravations of an affrighted imagination, until actually he felt as though the mere sight of the portentous *custos rotulorum* would throw him into hysterics. Not so his mother, nor any other of the company. They all were people of age and experience; and, either that these two things had rendered them less sensitive than was Bilberry, or because they had not so strong an anticipation of being heavily punished, we know not which; but, from some good cause or other, they appeared to consider their present situation in no other light than as a casualty incident to their profession and line of life.

The constable conducted them behind the

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squire's house into a large square yard, walled and surrounded by various offices necessary to so great a mansion; while in one corner stood a dog-kennel, almost as big as the hut they had passed at the white gate; for it is a common principle at great houses to entertain and lodge the dogs as respectably as the out-door servants.



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In this yard the culprits found already assembled the whole of those who were to be either witnesses against them or their accusers. The man who had demanded the restoration of the disputed waistcoat was there in a clean smock-frock, bearing in his face some considerable signs of the tussle he had had the previous night with Mrs. Thurland. The landlady too was there, with the fragments of her round table for proof positive to the squire; the three legs being tied together and tucked under her arm, and the top reared up against an adjoining wall, like the lid of a brewing copper. This latter piece of evidence she had trundled up from the village after the manner of a boy's hoop.

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On looking round, Bilberry also very shortly observed, standing in the kitchen, and holding some agreeable conversation with the housemaid, his great benefactor, the never-to-be-forgotten Mr. Grimsby himself. Casting his eye on the youth, that gentleman fell a-laughing; and pointing him out to the maid, by way of illustration to the story which he apparently had been telling her, burst into another fit of laughter louder than the first.

Meantime Mrs. Thurland had worked herself into a kind and soothing conversation with the indignant landlady and the black-eyed haymaker, hoping to take advantage of the propitious opportunity which presented itself before the appearance of the justice, to soften the tempers of these two powerful accusers. As for the evidence of those subordinate characters who had taken part in or beheld the fray, she cared not a whistle, providing the principal parties could be licked into something like the shape of reconciliation. But, even after many eloquent appeals from this judicious lady, they remained so inexorable, and seemed so resolutely bent on

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having justice executed, that she would in all probability have come to no terms whatever with them, had she not at last begun to assume a little authority, and in an under-tone (to keep it from other ears) very closely threatened the landlady with a full disclosure of the affair of the half-guinea, unless she consented to moderate the virulence of her feelings before the justice as much as possible. This eventually brought her down to something like reason, for it was easy to observe that she by no means liked the notion of refunding that coin, the value of which had already been drunk in spirits and water, and for which, if once given up, she might never receive any recompense

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whatever. And as, up to this moment, nobody except she and the culprits knew anything about that circumstance, of course she lay in this respect quite at their mercy; for it must be observed in this place, that though Mr. Grimsby afterwards recollected, to the best of his belief, that he had left something in the pockets of his waistcoat, he could not tell what, because he never kept a reckoning of loose money.

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While Mrs. Thurland and the landlady were debating the merits and damages of their respective cases, their dialogue was suddenly broken off by the appearance of a servant-man, or rather, from his age and look, we should say a human cockerel, dressed in a style neither exactly in nor out of livery, who came to summon them before the justice in his breakfast-room.

As they were entering the house, one of the chair-bottom menders pressed forward, as the constable thought, rather too unceremoniously, for that officer immediately gave him a violent push back again, in order that Farmer Grimsby might take precedence in order of march. This latter gentleman then advancing, turned to the aspiring culprit as he passed him, —

“Ay, dom thee!” said he, “let thy betters go afore thee.” And then he strode forward along the passage, taking off his hat as he advanced, and just running his fingers down his face and neckcloth, to make all smooth and fit to go before the magistrate.

Mr. Grimsby knocked at the breakfast-room

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door, opened it just wide enough to squeeze himself through the nick, and then, perceiving the squire inside, made a profound and original reverence, the execution of which strongly inclined young Bilberry to laugh, notwithstanding all his fears; for, keeping his legs quite perpendicular, the farmer suddenly bent all the rest of his body, from the hip-joint upwards, straight forward all in a piece, like the blade of a scythe. Those who followed highly admired his example, and tried to imitate it as near as possible; so did Bilberry, and so did his mother Mrs. Thurland, who, in the hurry of the moment, forgot to make a courtesy instead of a prodigious bow, like that by Mr. Grimsby.

The whole party having entered, they found Squire Barton behind a table upon which stood the remains of the breakfast he had so recently taken, consisting now of little else

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beside an empty tea-pot, a slopped cup and saucer, almost big enough for a jug and ewer, being the largest young Thurland had ever had the satisfaction of beholding, a few burnt fragments of buttered toast grown cold, and two egg-shells. Happily,  
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however, in consequence of last night's carouse having taken away their appetites, our company felt but little longings, or else it is much to be feared an attack might have been commenced upon the skin and bones of Squire Barton's breakfast.

The sight of the squire himself proved not so terrible to young Bilberry as that poor chicken had at first anticipated it would be; for it must be observed, that while imagination always lends her aid in giving a fearful and portentous look to people in authority, nature herself has in many instances failed to endow them with the looks characteristic of the terrors of their respective offices. On the contrary, all philosophical persons must have observed that she not unfrequently delights in conferring a mean and rubbishing aspect upon gentlemen whom the civil and military authorities of the country have afterwards selected as fit and proper bipeds to uphold the dignity of their respective professions. In the law especially is this observation most applicable: and while the author speaks with the most profound reverence and solemnity,  
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he yet must be allowed to say, that he has seen at the bar more utterly shabby and despicable physiognomies than at any other place whatever where ordinary decency is at all attempted to be maintained.

In personal appearance, Squire Barton cut a very contemptible figure; so much so, indeed, for a man of his worldly dignity, that the sight of him, instead of increasing that awe and dread which might very reasonably have been anticipated, inspired the whole party with additional confidence; for, notwithstanding that he was justice of peace and *custos rotulorum* for the county, — two titles of very considerable honour, — his figure was of a most mean order, being in width not more than a door-post, and in height but four feet ten without his shoes. His head was as bald as a hen-egg; and the shell of it shone, whenever he chanced to turn towards the light, as if it were varnished like a dining-table, all except just on the top, where was scattered some portion of wheaten flour, to confer on it, if possible, a little more importance than by nature it possessed. And certainly, if

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any of the arts of man can confer an aspect of importance upon those to whom nature has stingily denied it, this one of the dredging-box ought in all conscience so to do; for in such high estimation is it held, that whoever adopts it pays a certain tax to the greatest man in the state, — no less a person than the king himself, — for this liberty of putting flour upon his head.

The squire wore a plum-coloured coat like a magnum bonum, and a cock-robin's waistcoat, of a pattern in taste neither exactly civilised nor wholly savage. His lower extremities were clothed in white corduroy wrinkled breeches; and at the moment when Mrs. Thurland, Mr. Spowage, and company, were ushered into his presence, he was pulling all the blood of his body into his face, in the endeavour to get his shanks into a pair of diminutive top-boots.

No sooner had they entered than, without straightening himself, he turned his red veiny face half round, and addressing the constable,

“What! more vagrants?” said he. And having now got into his boots, he stood upright,

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jerked down his waistcoat, and faced about exactly fronting the culprits, fixing upon them two eyes which at once demonstrated there was much more thunder and lightning in him than had at first appeared.

Mrs. Thurland privately pinched her son Bilberry on the arm; and that ready youth, quickly taking the signal, commenced crying. At the same time also, Mr. Hutchinson, the constable, began to relate to the squire the offence of which they all had been guilty; but, before he had half done, Squire Barton interrupted him, —

“Yes, yes, — you need not tell me a word more. I see what it is, — a public-house row; that is the long and the short of it. Now, Hutchinson, how many times have I told you before that I will have no more to do with these drunken disturbances? I may punish, punish, punish to eternity, and here you are the very next day again.”

“But, sir —” Mr. Hutchinson was about to object, when the squire again interrupted him.

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“ ‘But, sir’ — ‘but, sir’ — there is no ‘but, sir,’ in the matter. There is no difference in them; they are all alike from one end —”

“They’ve broke this table all to smash!” exclaimed the landlady, in a frenzy lest her cause should be lost; at the same time holding up three amputated table-legs for the squire’s inspection.

“Do not interrupt me, woman!” cried that gentleman, as if conscious that his dignity was being invaded. “I tell you I care nothing at all about it. People know what they have to expect, as I have told you before; and if you will fill liquor till everybody gets as drunk as a sow, you must take the consequences. I say you deserve all you have got; for this is not the first nor the fiftieth time I have had you before me on such occasions as this. Hutchinson!” — and the squire turned his face towards the constable, — “have not I convicted that woman for keeping house open after twelve, and selling ale in church-time?”

The landlady stepped back, looking grave;

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and Mr. Hutchinson reluctantly admitted that a conviction or two of the kind mentioned had certainly taken place against her.

“And the full penalties levied? — aggravated cases?” asked the squire, glancing his eye across the landlady’s face; — “it is Mrs. Burton, is not it?”

To both these questions the constable replied in the affirmative.

“Ay,” observed the justice, “I thought so. Hear me, woman: — I shall do nothing for you; so you may bear your own loss, and learn better for the future. If you see people bent on getting drunk, you can guess the consequences; and if you do not like them, refuse to fill them liquor: — for that you have my authority. Your remedy lies in your own hands, but you will not use it; and then here you come irritating me to send people to prison. What do I care for your table? I say, you like to have your tables broken, your cupboards pulled down, and your windows smashed; if you did not, why do you sell men liquor after they have had plenty? You know what men are when

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they get drunk; and if you choose to let them, the consequences very properly fall on your own shoulders. Never let me see your face before me again on any drunken squabble of this kind. I have done with you — Go along.”

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The disappointed landlady instantly turned her back on the justice in a pet, and walked straight out of the room without making any courtesy. Mrs. Thurland, Bilberry, and Co., gladly taking the squire at his word, were also following the example of their hostess, when that gentleman very sharply called them back, again.

“No, no,” said he, “not you. I have not done with you yet, for I think you are vagabonds of another description.” And then all the fears of punishment, which but the instant before had been so triumphantly put to flight, returned with additional horror upon their astonished minds.

“What are these people?” asked Squire Barton of Mr. Hutchinson: “vagrants, as usual, I suppose?”

Whereupon, before the constable could answer  
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his question, the squire reached down a volume of the statute laws, in order, as the expectant culprits imagined, to seek out a proper punishment for them. Several times, while reading, he hesitated a moment to cast up his eyes at them, and again proceeded. At length his voice was again heard:

“They come under the seventeenth George Second, chapter five, where it says, speaking of rogues and vagabonds —”

And here the justice hesitated a moment, while he found the identical line with his finger — “It says — Eleven — Persons who run away and leave their families chargeable to the parish. — Twelve — *Unlicensed pedlars.*”

“That’s *her*, sir!” cried the constable, pointing to Mrs. Thurland; “she carries a basket as big as a cart-bottom, without a licence.”

“You’re a liar!” replied Mrs. Thurland; “I *have* a licence, and here it is, number thirty-four thousand and forty-two.”

Saying which, with great indignation she drew a greasy bit of parchment from her bosom,

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wrapped in a very small square, and laid it open before the justice. He glanced across it.

“Do not be in a passion, good woman; I see it is all right. I shall not convict you without something to go upon. I know Mrs. Burton well.”

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Hereupon that much-injured lady, Mrs. Thurland, took her parchment safeguard up again, and, restoring it to its place of repose, regarded the constable with an eye which, while it betrayed her triumph, also threatened him in very unequivocal language with the good-will of a sound drubbing for his libel on her character.

The squire then continued his reading:

“Thirteen — Persons who wander abroad, and lodge in alehouses, outhouses, or in the open air, without giving a good account of themselves, pretending to be soldiers, mariners, or sea-faring men.”

And here again he stood upright; and momentarily fixing his eye on Mr. Spowage, whose body only appeared above the breakfast-table,

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inquired if he had not lost a leg. William happened at that instant to be engaged with a quid, which prevented him speaking immediately, and afforded the officious constable an opportunity of replying for him, which he very eagerly did in the affirmative; adding, that therefore, according to the words of the act just quoted, he was a rogue and vagabond. But Squire Barton reproved this officer for so suddenly jumping to his conclusions, and in a warm and very learned dissertation proceeded to explain that the words of the act implied no such thing as that a man must necessarily be a rogue and vagabond because he had lost a leg. However, as the reader will subsequently find, he was not himself the less resolved to be satisfied whether Mr. Spowage really did or did not come under the act by pretending himself to be a soldier, mariner, or sea-faring man. But at present we must forbear the examination of this maimed hero, in order to describe a certain other scene, which very unexpectedly thrust itself in between him and the justice.

While the above events were passing, that

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good-natured person Farmer Grimsby had been sitting perfectly silent, hanging his head, and very industriously tapping his fingers upon the caps of his knees; but no sooner did the squire cease his dissertation on law, and thus leave a gap in the conversation, than, anxious to return to his farm, with great alacrity Grimsby seized the opportunity to inquire of that important official whether he should be required as a witness against the accused?

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The squire, who appeared, either through forgetfulness, or because he had not really noticed him before, to be almost unconscious of his presence until he spoke, was somewhat startled to hear all at once in his room the voice of a man who, for aught he dreamed, might have been half a dozen miles off, and, instead of answering the question, made this exclamation,

“Ah! Mr. Grimsby! Are you here?”

“T’at I am, sir,” replied the farmer; and then, as though he had suddenly detected himself in the commission of a breach of manners, he grew very awkward, and, like a crab on a

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fish-stall, appeared as if he did not know how to manage his limbs. Desirous, however, of making a hurried reparation, he addressed himself to the squire in the following manner, as though he had not seen him before,

“Good morning, sir! — How do you do this morning, sir? — I hope you find yourself very well, sir? — Fine morning, sir!” — and, as if looking about for proof of his strange assertion, Mr. Grimsby then cast his eyes sixteen or eighteen miles across the country which extended before the window.

Squire Barton smiled at Mr. Grimsby’s simplicity, but instantly added his own indisputable evidence in confirmation of the exceeding beauty of the weather.

Having settled this point very amicably between them, Mr. Grimsby repeated his former question. Squire Barton, who had learned from the previous statement of the constable in how far Mr. Grimsby was concerned in the present affair, gave him to understand, that, as he had undoubtedly made a present of the waistcoat to one of the prisoners, there was no statute law to

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compel that person to give it up again. But if unknowingly he had given away something of value in the pockets of the said waistcoat, in that case he ought to have it restored. To all this the farmer replied, that he had no desire to take the garment back on its own account, but only because he really believed there was something in the pockets; though what, or to what amount, he could not on his solemn word declare. He had caused them to be strictly scrutinised since the recovery of the article by force, and several parish papers of some importance had been found crumpled up at the bottom of



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one pocket; but whether those were the whole contents or not, he could not positively say, though most probably they were.

This in some degree appeared to satisfy the justice; but, for verification of it, he inquired of Bilberry himself whether he had taken anything whatever out of the pockets whilst he had the waistcoat on. The poor youth felt so alarmed at being spoken to by so sharp a gentleman, that, aided by another pinch from his mother, he began to cry excessively, insomuch that he could not

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speak. Therefore Mrs. Thurland took upon herself the office of spokesman for him, and interpreter of sobs and broken sighs.

“Bless you, sir!” she ejaculated, trying to give effect to her words by making a very profound courtesy to the squire, only, in the act of doing so, she chanced to bend her legs so very much that she lost the power of recovering herself, and accordingly inadvertently fell upon her knees; but quickly getting up again, she proceeded: “God have no mercy on your soul, sir, if I did not myself insist upon my son putting his hands into his pockets, when this gentleman here” — and she directed her hand towards the haymaker, who stood close by, — “when this gentleman here came for the waistcoat. I told Bilberry to put his hands into the pockets, and give him all there was in. But, as I am a living soul, sir, speaking afore you, sir, there was not a single farthing in either of them; — was there, Bilberry?”

To which plain appeal that sapling replied, “No, mother!” in a voice between shrieking and sobbing, so great was his present agony.

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“No, that there was not, sir, as every one of these ladies and gentlemen could testify on their dying beds.” And then joined in a chorus of negatives from the mouths of the remaining two women and the chair-menders. But Mrs. Thurland quite forgot to add how, luckily for themselves, the pockets had been emptied just beforehand; and the landlady, who was the only person at all likely to have refreshed her memory upon that particular, had very fortunately been ordered out of the way by the justice himself.

The kind old Farmer Grimsby here expressed doubts as to the truth of his own conceptions upon this point, and his entire faith in the representations of these poor

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people; adding, that he should be very sorry for the squire to inflict any punishment upon them on his account.

To which that immaculate judge replied, by informing Mr. Grimsby that punishment was intended to serve two purposes: — Firstly, it was inflicted upon the offender, not because he had committed a crime, but that such punishment might serve as a warning to all men to

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forbear the commission of the same or of similar offences; and, secondly, that it was sometimes dealt as a compensation for the damages received or sustained by the parties against or upon whom those offences had been committed. But as, in the present instance, Mr. Grimsby declared himself to have sustained no perceptible damage, the laws would not justify him in inflicting punishment under that head; and for the other, as there were no persons present to whom such punishment could prove a warning, unless it might be considered as such to Mr. Grimsby himself, neither on that account did the squire feel at liberty to commit the culprits to prison.

“Nevertheless, woman,” said he, laying his finger towards Mrs. Thurland, as principal of the party, “I do not consider any of you innocent. Can you give a good account of yourself?”

Mrs. Thurland hereupon wiped her mouth with the palm of her hand, in preparation for this noble answer.

“That I can, sir, — thank God for it, — and

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without telling any lies either, in such a way, sir, as shall satisfy the greatest bedtick,” — which word she chanced to confound with its cousin-german, “sceptic,” — “the biggest bed-tick, sir, that I am an injured and abused woman. I do not know whether you know me, sir, but I am myself very well known all over England; and so is my boy Bilberry, who always goes along with me. I am a licensed pedlar, sir, — female, sir, you understand, — and I have been in the same business these now going on for fourteen year. I walk in the long run about fifteen miles a day, one day with another; and I always go to the same places again where I have been before: so, sir, you are very sure that nobody can say wrong I do, or else I should be afraid of seeing the same face twice. On the other hand, sir, the oftener I go to a place, the more they want me; for I sell at

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small profits, sir, and take care my articles are as good as any going. Why, sir, to tell you the truth, though *you* may not remember it, but I have been in this same neighbourhood ten or eleven times before this, and I know it as well as I know

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my own grandfather. But nobody ever before thought of bringing me into such a disgraceful piece of business as this; for I have always strove, with God's help, to maintain myself and my family, — I have nineteen in different places, sir, beside this one here, — in the best manner such poor folks as we are can do; though, sir, you know better than I can tell you, that where there is not much, much cannot be expected. In fact, sir, upon my word and honour, I can assure you, that once when I was in this neighbourhood I did something for you, sir, though you did not know it, which was a very good action in its way, sir, though nothing but right for one poor woman to do to another, neither. It is about five years ago, sir, —”

“Pooh, pooh! woman,” observed the justice, “now you are telling tales. I did not reside here at that time.”

“Didn't you, sir?” said Mrs. Thurland. “Well, then, sir, it must have been the gentleman that lived here afore you; for it is plain I could not speak to your person, sir.”

“No, no, woman,” replied the squire sharply,

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“you are altogether mistaken. This house was not built five years ago. Besides, if it had been, I am at a loss to know what you could have done for me” And the little justice smiled at her relation like a perfect “bedtick” to its truth.

“Not built, sir!” exclaimed Mrs. Thurland. “Well, that is astonishing. So well as I thought I knew the place again! But the truth is, sir, such people as me, sir, that see so many things, and so many great gentlemen's houses all alike, their memories get confused, and they are apt to confound one place with another without knowing it. At all events, sir, I am sure it was somewhere in this part of the country, — I cannot be mistaken in that, — I did a very kind action for a gentleman about your size, sir, five years ago.”

“Say nothing about it, woman,” observed the squire; “for really your tongue does rattle at such a rate, it quite confounds me. Stand aside, and keep your mouth shut.”

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she stepped behind them, that they in turn might take their examination, and, if possible, give a good account of themselves.

Gladly would we relate their defences too, were they likely to afford any information or entertainment to the reader; but, with the single exception of Mr. Spowage, they proved themselves to be such poor barren souls in comparison with that talented person Mrs. Thurland, that, after her excellent explanation, those which they gave, if repeated here, would certainly lay the author under the heavy charge of striving to fill up paper. Wishing by all means to avoid deserving such a reflection, we will pass them over, and endeavour to keep upon as good terms as possible with the reader, by proceeding at once to the examination of our one-legged culprit.

Squire Barton, in the first place, commanded Mr. Spowage to place himself in a position fronting himself; which being done, he then inquired of the culprit whether he pretended to be a soldier, mariner, or sea-faring man? Mr. Spowage replied that he was neither.

In nowise abashed by these remarks, Mrs. Thurland smiled archly to her companions as

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“What!” the justice exclaimed, “lost a leg, and been in neither of the services?”

“No, sir,” said the cripple, “I never let a gun off in my life, nor never see’d the sea, as true as I stand here. There’s ninety-nine legs in a hundred lost in battle; but this of mine it went in a way that’s not common. You must know, sir —”

“Well, well, my man,” interrupted Squire Barton, “I do not want a history of your losing your leg. Let me hear what sort of an account you can give of yourself. What trade, craft, or profession are you?”

“Why, sir,” Mr. Spowage replied, “I have been so many things in my life, that I hardly know what to say to that. I am almost anything in a low way that you like to name, sir.” “What was you put apprentice to; that is what I want to know?”

“I was never put to nothing, sir; for I am obligated to say, sir, I never had anybody to put me to anything. I perceived myself to be in the world amongst other folks of my sort, and that’s the first thing I can remember.”

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“What, had you no father nor mother, then?” asked Justice Barton.

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“I don’t know that I ever had,” replied William; “and so it is most likely I had not: as I understand, sir, according to law, there is a kind of people that come up of their own accord, and I guess I am one of them.”

“No jokes here,” observed the squire, very severely, “or I will commit you for contempt at once.”

To which threat Mr. Spowage replied, that he hoped to give no offence; but, before his apology was concluded, the hasty squire interrupted him:

“Tell me, man,” said he, “without more to do, what it is you follow for a living?”

“As to that, sir,” answered Mr. Spowage, “I am mending chair-bottoms and tinkering at this time; but it may so happen that I shall not be of the same trade next week; for you see, sir, — only you don’t know anything about it, or else you would see, sir, — that if such people as me did not turn our hands to what comes upmost, we should do very badly, and sometimes

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starve altogether. Last week, or it might be the week before, I sold windmills and lambs for children; and it may so turn up that next week I shall have a round with corn-salve, as I know how to make some beautiful, sir. If you are troubled at all that way, either for hard corns or soft, sir, no matter which, — and I know it is innocent, — as innocent as new milk, for I gather every herb myself, and make it all with my own hands, so that the delicatest lady as is need not be afraid of using it, and only sixpence a box, neither; for I hate spongeing upon people. And then at times I can make a few shillings by drops for the toothache, or earache, or rheumatiz, or any ills of that kind; and better drops man never made, for they cure th’ worst toothache in five minutes, and make your ears, sir, as pleasant as honey aside of your head. But you mind, sir, these things is regulated a good deal by the weather and the time of the year, though it might not occur to you, sir, that such as this made any difference. In summer, or now about, as I may say, I could sell comparatively none of these drops,

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and so I don’t make them. Who do you see with th’ toothache or th’ earache now? But in autumn, when damp days and fogs come on, I lay most of other things on one side, and take almost all to going about the country with them. And I do assure you, sir, there is them people living at this blessed time that glorifies my coming, I have done them so

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much good. But, upon the whole, sir, if that is what you want to know, you need not doubt for a minute that I get an honest living one way or another, without encumbering any parish in this country. Though I am only half a man in th' legs, and have but one to stand on. sir, I should be ashamed for anybody to say I took parish relief, or were ever helped once in my life with a night's lodging and sixpence by any vagrant office in any town in England. If I am a poor maimed man, sir, I'm not going to cry about that. I'll have my spirit as long as I live, and when that's gone, let me go and wear parish pepper-and-salt, and be d — d to me; that's all, sir. I have no more to say, sir, if you ax me till dark-hour."

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With which patriotic and manly conclusion Mr. Spowage faced about, and with the most perfect indifference began to whistle in a voice nearly as loud as that of a blackbird.

Squire Barton smiled as he turned towards the six other culprits, who were standing aside; but, suddenly checking himself, he cast a stern eye upon them while he addressed them, in the first place by expressing his doubts whether they were half so innocent as they had represented themselves to be; but nevertheless, whatever might be his own suspicions, as they had not been proved guilty of anything particularly criminal, he would for once extend the mercy of the law towards them, under the hope that their present escape might act as a serious warning to them to prevent bringing themselves into any the like dangerous circumstances again. Because, he added, should any one then present appear before him a second time, he would at once commit him as a rogue and vagabond, whether any particular charges against him should be proved or not. And he then peremptorily, ordered Hutchinson the constable to conduct

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them all beyond the boundaries of the parish, and set them at liberty.

Mrs. Thurland felt so overjoyed at their deliverance, that she was about to return the squire the thanks of the whole company in a very eloquent speech, had not that worthy gentleman anticipated her intention, and, to avoid the confusion of her tongue, again commanded Hutchinson instantly to remove them. However, she would not be altogether disappointed in her expressions of thankfulness; for, on reaching the door, she turned sharp round, and making another of those admirable bows which a little

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while before she had learned from Farmer Grimsby, wished the squire a very excellent good morning, and many of them.

On reaching the village, Mr. Hutchinson was obliged to call again at the alehouse which was the scene of last night's engagement, for the purpose of restoring to Mrs. Thurland her basket, which had been left there. Another skirmish had like to have been the consequence; for when this lady took it again into her hand, she instantly pronounced it much lighter than

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it was last night, and, lifting up the oil-cloth lid, perceived that during her absence some person had confiscated a considerable quantity of the wares once contained therein. At sight of this, she all in a moment flew into a raging passion; and, fastening the theft upon the respectable landlady, Mrs. Burton, began to give such a vigorous and forcible description of that woman's character, as showed her up in a much dirtier light than either herself or her neighbours had hitherto been accustomed to the contemplation of: while, on the other hand, Mrs. Burton, who by her disgrace before the justice had been pretty well prepared for discharging her venom in words, as the only reparation left her, entered upon her own vindication with a spirit in no way inferior to that displayed by Mrs. Thurland; but, at the same time, as if careful to guard against a repetition of her last night's defeat, she now presented herself in the doorway, armed with a huge ham, which she was about to cook, and with many terrible menaces, not to be represented in words, threatened to fell Mrs. Thurland to the earth, unless

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she made a speedy retreat from before her door. This last-named lady treated all these threats with contempt the most profound, and very valiantly dared the landlady to touch her at her peril; and thus between them were exchanged a pleasing variety of hard names and dishonourable epithets, which my muse — if there be one to superintend prose works of this description — disdains to repeat here. She allows me only to add, for the satisfaction of the reader, that at length the debate ran so high, as to render even the strongest language ineffectual fully to express the feelings of both parties, and therefore, after the example of greater philosophers, the more conclusive argument of blows would have been resorted to, had not Mr. Hutchinson interposed his authority, and hurried Mrs. Thurland from the scene of action; though, in the opinions of the

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peaceably disposed, this was not done quite so soon as it ought to have been, for already the just-mentioned lady had highly excited her antagonist, Mrs. Burton, by applying to her that rude epithet, which even she who best deserves it cannot hear without indignation.

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For a moment, while her ire yet stood at a white heat, Mrs. Burton cast about for another epithet of equal strength to confer on Mrs. Thurland; but, finding that her native tongue afforded no other at all adequate to the one by which she herself had been distinguished, she felt there was no resource whatever left to repel the charge, and to vindicate her injured honour, than by returning the same word, and giving it the additional weight of compound interest, by also hurling the ham she held in her hand with all her strength at Mrs. Thurland's head.

This accordingly she did, as carrying with it the most positive proof she had to offer that her widowed purity was entirely untainted. Happily, however, this dreadful missile failed in its intended effect, and fell short of the person at whom it was aimed by several yards. At this ineffectual effort, Mrs. Thurland burst into a loud laugh, in which she was heartily joined by all present; but, since nothing so much provokes passionate persons as the being laughed at in what themselves consider very serious

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matters, it is not surprising that the landlady should hereupon grow more outrageous still, and seizing a pitchfork, which a carter had laid down at the door while he took a can of ale, threaten to stick Mrs. Thurland on to it like a red herring. At which critical juncture, as before observed, the constable very properly prevented farther proceedings, by pushing and pulling the obstinate and injured female pedlar out of danger.

In accordance with the instructions of Squire Barton, Mr. Hutchinson then conducted the whole party, with the exception of William Spowage, who stayed behind until he could obtain a new leg to proceed on, down the road they wished to go, until they reached the boundary of the parish. This was conspicuously pointed out by a kind of finger-post, on opposite arms of which were painted the names of two adjoining townships. There the attentive Mr. Hutchinson left his charge, and returned home; though not without giving, before he went, a severe admonition to every one present not to be seen in those parts again for some



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time to come. How much his instructions were likely to be regarded was soon made evident from the testimony they gave at parting of their respect for his authority; for scarcely had he turned his back, before the whole company, being now out of his power, began to laugh at and deride him, accompanying their music with a shower of small pebbles and bits of baked mud from the cart-ruts; but to all which he, being alone, and consequently on the weak side, thought fit to make no reply.

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CHAPTER VI.

BILBERRY PLANS A MOST HEROIC ENTERPRISE; BUT, LIKE THE GREAT HANNIBAL, IS AT LAST DEFEATED.

HAVING thus luckily escaped the threatened terrors of a month's confinement, our company travelled forwards with an elation of spirits greater than might have been anticipated, considering that they were yet far from having recovered the deadening effects of the previous night's excesses.

It was now mid-day, and from that hour until evening no incidents occurred worth relating here; unless we except as such the fact of Mrs. Thurland's effecting several sales by the roadside, which again put her into a little ready money; and that in the afternoon her chair-mending companions obtained the job of repairing half a dozen chair-bottoms, which induced

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them to halt, and, turning a ditch by the way-side into a workshop, fall to also to earn themselves as much as would buy them a breakfast; for, though so late in the day, they had yet eaten nothing, nor, as it so happened, did these highly fashionable people eventually take breakfast until dark-hour; since we do not imagine any one will account as a meal the great abundance of water which both the warmth of the weather and the internal drunken heat and thirst of their stomachs caused them to soak up at every spring which they passed in the course of their journey.

Evening was drawing on when they arrived in the neighbourhood of a pleasant-looking village of which the individual farm-houses appeared as if only scattered amongst a greater village of stacks and luxuriant fields of fruit-trees.

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As none of the company cared to spend a groat on a lodging in the village, even if one could have been procured, which was doubtful; and the spot where they now were was very enticing from the abundance of old trees near it,

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over the bare roots of which, from a high bank above, ran a pleasant rivulet obscured by docks and water-cress; they agreed to strike up a tent there, and pass the night together with as much comfort as five or six people could mutually give and receive. A slight tent was soon erected by aid of the branches above, and the poles which the chair-menders carried; the covering being supplied from the superfluous petticoats of the women, of which they kindly divested themselves for the occasion. A fire also was made, and abundantly supplied with fuel from the neighbouring dry fences; for even in midsummer, after walking warm all day, the body is apt to turn chilly with the night-dews if not cherished by a fire.

Nothing, however, could be done without a supper, for their appetites were now recovered, and the contributions of their collected wallets were found insufficient for the whole, and not at all adequate to do justice to this meeting of old friends, who might part again to-morrow for another year, or for ever, none might guess which. They saw that by hook or by crook

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something more must be raised before they could account themselves blessed, and various were the plans devised for raising it; for though they had a little money amongst them, it is a standing rule with people of their description never to buy while they can beg, and to steal only when they can do neither. Besides, they had but just enough to purchase drink, which never can be either begged or stolen; and hence came the necessity of raising a snack of victual by one or the other of the latter means.

Wits went to work, and one made one proposition and another another, proportioned to their respective geniuses and degrees of impudence, that very requisite ingredient in the members of their profession. While Bilberry himself, though the youngest of them, inwardly felt certain that that part of their supper which might lie to his providing was now pecking corn somewhere in the neighbouring stack-yards, or roosting in insecurity upon a stick, and only wanted a messenger sending to fetch it.

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After much deliberation, the only two men remaining in the company since Mr. Spowage was left behind, set out together in the dusk, vowing to come back with meat; but first charging Mrs. Thurland to send her boy Bilberry into the village to beg bread enough to eat with it. While, therefore, they were absent on their particular expedition, Bilberry was despatched on his errand, bearing in his mind this strict injunction from his mother, that if he did not come back with something, he had better not come back at all; and the stern shaking of her fist in his face at the same time gave him a more than sufficient insight into what he had to expect on his return, should he fail to obtain some provender. Yet whatever he should get must be obtained by his own raw talents, for not a single farthing had he even to buy baits. With this understanding he set out.

Bilberry was not without a boyish ambition; and on his way to the village he bethought himself that if, instead of taking back some saucy housewife's musty broken victuals, he were to

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surprise his mother and her company with a nice fresh-killed chicken, it would not only be more agreeable to them, but also exhibit the prowess of so young an adventurer in a very praiseworthy and favourable light. He also felt flushed with his former success in the hen-egg and cap business, and the consideration of that partly incited him to attempt the attainment of something greater.

In pursuance of his design, he had no sooner got within the precincts of the village, than he made a sudden stand, and cast a scrutinising eye both roads to assure himself that he was not observed. Neither seeing nor hearing any one, — for in such pastoral districts the rustics generally retire to rest before the last light of the sun is gone, — Bilberry leapt the fence of a large farm-yard hard by, and crept close and silent under cover of the new-made stacks in hopes of seeing one or two of those miserable barn-door fowls, to which it will be recollected his mother had particularly charged him always to direct his attention. At first he observed nothing, and began to fear they had all retired safe and

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sound to their respective roosts; but, advancing farther in, by and by he detected an old cock, with wattles as big as the tails of a soldier's jacket, about to creep through a hole in the wall of a hay-chamber. Without doubt he had already seen every individual

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member of his family safely housed before him, so that Bilberry had little hope of catching a bird more tender and delicate. And though he would much rather have had any one of the feathered hero's children in preference to himself, yet, as all these appeared to be out of the way, Bilberry thought that even he, however tough and sinewy, would prove more acceptable than none; especially considering that none of the company for whom he was catering were very particular in the furniture of the stomach.

Meantime, the old gentleman kept pecking about the hole, now putting his neck half in and drawing it back again, and then picking up a few stray corns or a chip of straw, or else standing still while with his beak he squeezed a little moisture out of the oil-tap above his tail, and

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greased his wings with it in readiness for the morrow.

Altogether he behaved with so much ceremony, and was so long a time making up his mind to retire for the night, that Bilberry had ample leisure to steal behind a stack which stood yet nearer, and to pick up a billet of wood with intent to hurl it at him. In half another minute Bilberry let fly his grape-shot with what he hoped would prove a dead aim. Unluckily, the old cock perceived it coming; and when the billet rattled close to his legs, he flew and flustered and kicked up such a disturbance that he set all the dogs barking from one end of the farm to the other, and these in turn brought half a dozen ploughboys out of the house in a moment.

All was now over; but Bilberry had been too well bred from the beginning, and had the experience of his last adventure too strongly before his mind, to be again flushed past discretion, even in his present hair-breadth situation. He knew that to run would be at once to proclaim

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himself an offender without perhaps any great chance of escaping while both dogs and men were on the alert for him; yet, as the farmer's lads would in all probability be quickly about him, some instantaneous excuse must be forged for his being found loitering in their stack-yard. It was a case of emergency, and something must be done. His wits did not fail him on this any more than on some former occasions, and he determined to face it like a man. But, ere his excuse could form itself in words he was surrounded by three young fellows in blue frocks, and, on being questioned by them,

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stoutly denied that he was bent on any mischief, declaring that the old cock was startled at something else and not at him. But that excuse was of little avail, for the fowl was lamed, and the billet which had been thrown at him was produced in proof. Bilberry then pronounced positively that some other person had done it, for he heard him run away. This was not in the least credited, and therefore punishment was resolved on. Accordingly, while two of the

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ploughmen held him by force, the third laid on with a hand as big and heavy as a spread-out shoulder of mutton; nor, notwithstanding all his struggles and fighting, did he obtain his freedom until his body thrilled with the punishment it had undergone from one end to the other.

No sooner had he got safe back into the road again, than he fired some six or eight heavy boulders at random into the scene of his disaster and disgrace, with a thorough hearty hope that some of his cowardly tormentors might catch what fell; but he had not the satisfaction of hearing a single squeal or groan.

Thus defeated in the self-projected object of his ambition, Bilberry now turned his attention to the fulfilment of the legitimate purpose of his errand, and walked down to the village very disappointed and crest-fallen. But he endeavoured to console himself with the reflection that the affair was strictly private and unknown to any of his party; and, therefore, it could not at all

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events, — which was what he most dreaded, — be made a subject of ridicule on his return if he only kept his own counsel.

Partly owing to vexation at his present defeat, and partly to certain tingling pains not yet effectually shaken off, he felt in an admirable cue for crying; and thus, with a commendable philosophy, turned even his disasters to advantage. As he advanced into the village, he took care to roll some considerable quantity of tears, as big as the drops of a thundershower, into the dust; holding up his face at the same time, that none of them might be lost on passers-by. One or two now and then stood still to look at him; but, for the most part, people appeared satisfied with a passing gaze, and perhaps an after turn of the head, as if of opinion that to look and pity, without relieving, was sufficiently Christian and charitable.

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But this, however satisfactory to themselves, was not answerable to Bilberry's expectations; he had his bread to earn before he went back, and some other method must be tried, since this one appeared to fail.

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Observing a nice prim clean-looking brick house, with about a yard of pallisaded garden before it, flourishing plants in green boxes on the window-sills, and clean blinds, beneath which he could perceive in the gloom two or three formal-looking ladies sitting opposite the panes, he guessed that charity might perhaps reside within, if but a proper object presented itself. Without more hesitation, he went and sat down on the step, sobbing very deeply, and now and then casting a longing eye into the parlour-window.

Not many seconds had elapsed before a servant-girl, red and round as a German sausage, opened the door and informed him that he must not bring his dirt there, because the step had been lately cleaned; the old ladies of the house then placing their faces against the glass to watch proceedings.

Bilberry did not evince any great readiness to comply with the damsel's wishes; so that by way of stimulant she applied the end of her toe very gently indeed to his back. Although he could scarcely perceive that she did so, he made

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it an excuse for instantaneously roaring out most lustily: this brought forth the maiden inmates, who, deserting the window, hastened to the door, and with all three tongues let drive like fury at Jane for hurting the poor child.

One of them then stooped down to look at him, inquired where he came from, who he belonged to, if he had nowhere to sleep, and what caused him to cry so much? To all these questions Bilberry made the most forlorn and desolate replies, every one of which drew from his female interrogators some fresh exclamation of pity or horror. They then considered and chewed over the case amongst themselves; the result of which was, that one of them, having again questioned him as to whether Jane had hurt him much, put her hand in her pocket and very generously gave him a halfpenny.

But what, thought Bilberry, is this amongst five or six? He let it slip through his fingers on to the pavement, and gathered strength enough to mutter that he wanted victuals. He told the benevolent cats that he had not tasted bread since the night before, which for once

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was literally true. They looked at one another half amazed; mutually exclaimed “poor lamb!” stood musing for a moment, as if to consider whether they could spare it or not, and then told Jane to fetch up the cold pudding.

When the pudding arrived, Bilberry eyed it like a street-fed puppy when he sees a butcher’s basket on the floor. The old ladies told him to take it all if he could eat it; but instead of stuffing it into his mouth, as they expected, he rolled the whole lump into his pocket; excusing himself by saying that he had eight or nine brothers and sisters outside the village, who stood as much in need of it as he did. This unexpected proof of brotherly affection brought a tear of caustic into the eye of one of them, and upon her own authority she immediately ordered fat Jane to clear out the larder of every thing cooked, and tie it up in a paper for him. This spontaneous burst of generosity, promising so extensively as it did, assisted much in the boy’s recovery; and his benefactors had the satisfaction of hearing him thank them for their kindness in a voice not half so faltering and pitiful as it had been.

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Fortunately, it must have been one of the old maids’ birthdays, for, after waiting a quarter of an hour, the ruddle-coloured damsel emerged from the pantry, and loaded Bilberry’s head with a brown-paper cargo of such a bulk that he could but just carry it away. He verily believed there must be a half-stone loaf in it at least.

This admirable piece of luck restored his spirits, and, half forgetting his treatment in the stack-yard, he hastened back rejoicing.

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## CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY IS MADE. WITH OTHER MATTERS  
VERY NATURAL, BUT HITHERTO UNHEARD OF.

ARRIVING at the encampment, Bilberry found that the other two purveyors had returned before him, and were now throwing the company into high mirth by the entertaining relation of their expedition.

Very willing to lose the remembrance of his own disastrous attempt in the recital of their apparently more successful one, Bilberry prepared himself beforehand to laugh along with the rest as well as he could; but scarcely did he appear within the mirthful

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circle before their laughter was redoubled, and mingled with simultaneous inquiries of the youth himself whether his limbs had recovered from the blows he had, received.

Bilberry was struck dumb, and

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became in a moment crimson in the face. To be thus exposed and laughed at by his own party was less endurable than the disaster itself; and between vexation, shame, and astonishment how they had discovered it, he stood for several minutes the passive brunt of every one. But the mystery was soon cleared up. The two full-grown emissaries had paid a back-road visit to the very same yard selected by Bilberry himself, but, more experienced and cautious, had come off with far better luck; for, watching their opportunity, while the three rustics were engaged in administering honesty to Bilberry in the shape of a basting, they seized the favourable moment to enter an adjoining sty and cut the throat of a sucking pig, the faint cries of which passed unobserved amidst the uproar occasioned by the former operation.

The fruit of their enterprise now lay upon the fire; and, together with what they could raise amongst themselves, — the bottle of gin which one of the women had fetched from the village inn, (for on these occasions the male

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part of the company is always kept as much out of the way of observation as possible,) — aided by the magnificent gift of the old maiden ladies, promised a full and savoury meal to all.

On opening the latter parcel, brought by Bilberry, a remarkable display of fragments was made. First, there were three bones of the sticking end of a neck of mutton, picked as clean as if they had already been under the hands of a half-starved cat, for nothing eatable was visible upon them, save a narrow strip of pith, which lay like a worm in the hollow at the bottom end; although these bones had without doubt been put by to serve again for a kind of sucking lunch to a crumb of bread next morning. Without more ceremony, these were sent into the hedge bottom, — a savoury morsel for some lank-bellied weasel.

Next came the gristle of a beef-steak, smothered in about half a sauce boat of melted butter, which hung and stuck to the paper like paste; five sad potatoes, distilling water;



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and a pound and a half of mouldy bread-crusts, as hard as the mutton bones, — some toasted, some

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nibbled to the edge as far as they had been eatable, and not a few having all their holes stopped with rancid butter: while, at the bottom of all, by way of ground to build on, lay about half an acre of sad and heavy Yorkshire pudding, like a leaden pancake, which in all human probability the old maids had feared to venture on, lest they should die without ever having digested it.

Not knowing how to separate this mess in a manner to do justice to all parties, and no single volunteer being found to take the whole to his own cheek, they at length tied it all up again into a convenient parcel, and laid it in the road, — a glorious godsend for some early ploughman or pretty milkmaid the following sunrise. However, from what remained, in addition to the broiled pig, they made a very passable meal, assisted as it was by that good quart of gin before mentioned.

Supper being concluded, the bundles of rushes, which formed the company's stock in trade, were laid along the ground for bedding, but not in sufficient quantity to allow each individual

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to lie flat out. How this part of the night's arrangement was conducted Bilberry could not tell; for, at an early stage of the proceedings, they compelled him to take such a dose of liquor as very effectually induced a nap out of which there was little probability of his awakening again until called for.

He felt to have been asleep scarcely two hours, his eyes were yet heavy and sandy, when some one aroused him by a violent shaking, and shouting in his ear that he must get up if he did not wish to be left behind.

The whole camp was in motion, breaking up, and preparing to depart before daylight. Bilberry found that the pig they had eaten overnight lay too heavy on their consciences to allow them to sleep. They entertained a strong fear of detection should they remain where they now were till day-break; and, to get as far as possible out of jeopardy, they thought that the wisest way was to decamp before the farmer should arise and count the litter of his sow.

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It was yet dark, if a summer's night can ever be called so; a deep transparent shadow involving

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the whole face of nature. The bat was yet upon the wing; and the rabbits, wet with the fresh dew upon the grass, would now and then leap hurriedly from their burrows on the woody hill behind them, and race wildly down the sandy road in a straight line of some hundred yards, or sprit across to the field-sides in search of better herbage.

At the feet of our company the scene was of a different character. The fragments of their feast were scattered all about; the gin-bottle lay drawn and quartered amid a little heap of stones, which most probably, after it was emptied, had been pelted at it for amusement; and the rich savour of the baked crackling yet curled up by fits from the warm embers.

Bilberry was then commissioned to set open half a dozen gates across the fields in a direction immediately the contrary of that which they were going, and also to strew a few broken rushes on his path, in order to put their pursuers, should they have any, upon a wrong scent. This done, the poles were taken up, the

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petticoats put on, rushes and old chairs shouldered, and away they went.

On the road they often stopped to listen if behind them they could hear the sound of any one coming after; for the consciousness of having, by the last evening's proceedings, laid themselves beneath the grasp of the law, caused them to feel ever suspicious lest the first footsteps should be those of justice.

After daybreak, when an occasional early farmer rode by to some far-off market, or to his distant fields, they marked his coming up with suspense, and his passing by as a deliverance; and on some occasions, if two or three came together, the men would hide behind the hedges, or under the brushwood by the roadside, until they had gone by without accosting the women, and thus proved that they were not in search of them. But, as day advanced, the frequency of these occurrences wore away fear; and, being now some miles from the night's encampment, they at length proceeded without particular concern or regard of any one.

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Before noon they arrived at a spot where the road branched into two legs, and there they parted company; the chair-bottomers and their wives taking the most indirect of the two roads, and Mrs. Thurland and Bilberry the other, which, from a dim cloud of smoke lying on the horizon before them, they imagined led to some considerable town.

After they were again left alone, Bilberry's mother almost wholly employed the next hour in extolling the good qualities of her departed companions, and in informing that young man where she first became acquainted with them; and as along with their story she mingled up some few fragments of individual history, which tended to throw a little light upon her own original, we may put her discourse into the next chapter.

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CHAPTER VIII.

AS her first, dearest, and most ancient friend in the party, Mrs. Thurland began by giving some account of that worthy, of whom the reader has already seen a little, Mr. William Spowage.

"I have known that Bill Spowage," she observed to Bilberry, "ever since he was a lad not so big as you. We lived in the same neighbourhood together till he grew up to a young man, and I got a forward lass; and I dare say after that we should have kept house and gone and lived together, only — he was about nineteen then — a very serious thing happened, that set it all out of the question in a moment; and after that I lost sight of him for a long time, and did not know what in the world had become

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of him, or whether he was not dead, till I met him by accident, just in the same way as we met them yesterday, or the day before — which was it? I had not seen him for five or six years; but he knew me again directly. And, ay! what tales that man did but tell me! — I thought he never would have done; though I could not help but listen to him, poor fellow, he was so earnest. — 'Ay, Suke,' he kept saying every now and then, 'who thought I should ever see you again?' If he said that once, I believe he said it fifty times. At that time we were at — Pshaw! that I should forget the place's name; — but it was one of the great races, and Bill had got three sticks, with snuffboxes, and such like things, on the top, to throw at — you have seen them play at that — and I had a stall behind one of the shows with such things as these," — and she gave a significant hitch to her basket, — "and Thurland he had a thimble. At that time Bill sadly wanted to

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persuade me to go with him; but Thurland was upon the ground, as I told him, or else, if it had not been for that, I felt as if he

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might for once have persuaded me. We are too old for such frolics now, or else —” and Mrs. Thurland stopped suddenly short, and sighed.

“But what I was going to tell you was this. You see, Bilberry, when him and me lived in the same yard, as young folks will get together, there were eight or nine of us that used to make regular companions of one another; and one night we had had a dancing amongst a few of us at a public-house in the neighbourhood: — there was me, and Bill, and Jack Swan wick, and Bob Lowe, — who were both hanged for what they did that same night, — and Nancy Flint, and Bess Marsh, and — ay, ever so many more, that you would not know if I were to tell you their names. But about ten o’clock, after we had had some bread and cheese, and the men had got their ears warmed with ale, nothing would serve them but we must take a walk with them as far as the Trent bridge and back, which was full a mile outside the town — we lived at Northam then — though it was as dark a night as ever soul went out in. A young

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fellow, named Esau Wilson, was the first that proposed it; though, poor lad, he little thought what was coming on him, or else he would have stopped where he was, as we women wanted them. But they were headstrong, and would go; and, as we were afraid they should get into some mischief or other if they went by themselves, me, and Nancy, and Bess Marsh, and Eliza Hammond, who was Wilson’s sweetheart, — and he would not go without her, — we all agreed to go with them, if they would come back from the bridge without calling anywhere else.

“The town-clocks were striking eleven as we went along the road. The men seemed half drunk when we got them into the open air, and they went on in a very random manner, till we threatened to go back again if they were not quiet. A long while before we got to the bridge, it began to rain and hail very fast; and, as there were no houses about, we women determined to turn back. They were not for letting us, and there we stood arguing about it till I was almost wet through. Wilson would have

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gone back with 'Liza, only Bill Spowage, and Jack Swamwick, and Lowe, swore that, as they had said they would go to the bridge, go they would, if it rained fire and brimstone; and they abused Esau for being ready to go back again with us.

“But it kept coming heavier and heavier, and the wind blew terrible rough in our faces, so that we would not wait any longer, but left them all four to go to the bridge by themselves; with an understanding that we women would go back to the public-house where we had come from, and wait there till they came to us again. For, you mind, they said so much to Wilson about bringing them there at his own wish, and then sneaking out of it now they wanted to go forward, that at last of all, when it came to the proof, he was ashamed to turn again, and so we went back by ourselves. When we got into the town again, we had hardly a dry thread about us: as for my shawl, I could wring the wet out of it like a mop, and you could hardly see the colour of our gowns for the mud. But we had a big fire

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to ourselves in the dancing-room, and there we dried us as well as we could before they should come back again.

“Half an hour was quite long enough for them to have gone where they said they should go, and walked back, almost twice over; but time went on, and one o'clock struck, and they did not come. We felt certain they had gone over the bridge, — as there was a public-house on the other side called the Horse-shoes, — and either stopped drinking, or else waited till the rain should be over. That was what most of us thought; but 'Liza Hammond was so much in love with Wilson that she could think of nothing else but that they had missed their road with having so much to drink before they started, and got into the water. To be sure, we said there might be a chance of that, as it was flood-time and the Trent was very high; but then I knew Bill Spowage could swim if nobody else could; and I said, if that was it, they would come back a good deal soberer than they went, and that would make it all the

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pleasanter. But 'Liza was thinking if Wilson should be drowned what should she do.

“About two o'clock Will Spowage and Lowe and Swanwick came in, — we heard them lumbering up stairs, — but Wilson was not along with them. When they had shut the door, and 'Liza saw by that he was not behind, she looked at them all three and

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asked where Esau was? Bill Spowage looked at me, and the other two looked on the floor, but never a one of them spoke. ‘Where have you left him?’ said she again. ‘He is gone home,’ was Swanwick’s reply to that. ‘Ay, he *is* gone home,’ said Spowage close to my ear that nobody else might hear it. Well, I thought he meant just what he said, and that they were trying to frighten Eliza Hammond for sport, by pretending that something had happened: and if that was what they wanted, why frightened enough she was, for if ever anybody turned like death, she did. She got up, and said she would go and find him then. But Jack Swanwick laid hold of her, and swore she should not

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go; ‘for,’ says he, ‘if you go, you will never find him where he is gone to, and I know he will not be very long before he comes in. So, sit you down, and you shall have a glass of brandy; and I’m d — d if he is not here in half an hour.’ But she said, if he was at home, she could find him. ‘Then,’ says he, ‘I tell you once for all he is not gone home, and if you look the country round you’ll not find him.’ It rains hard, and you shall not go out of this room till he comes to fetch you. He told me — I had forgot that, — he told me to tell you to be sure to stop here till he came; so, sit you down, and make yourself comfortable. There is nothing amiss as I stand here. We left him not far off the bottom of the street; so, if you can guess now where he is, be quiet till he comes.’

“I could see for all this that things had not gone right. Lowe was as quiet as a lamb, and Jack Swanwick seemed determined to get drunk if he could; but sure I never saw a man in this world drink as he did, and not be drunk after all. He could not get drunk; his mind would not let him.

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“Bill Spowage, — the same you have seen to-day, though he had not lost a leg at that time, and was a good-looking young fellow, — Bill kept looking at me as if he had something to say to me, but durst not till we were by ourselves; so, as I wanted to know what it was, and felt afraid they had been doing Wilson some harm, I would make an excuse for going; and about three o’clock we got off, though we left Swanwick and Lowe by their two selves drinking till they were blind. When we got away from them, as everybody was going home, I persuaded ’Liza Hammond there was nothing amiss, and told her she would be sure to see Esau the next day; so that, with some trouble, we got her to go quietly home to bed.

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“When me and Bill were left to ourselves, I was turning towards our house; but says he, ‘Nay, Suke, I am not going home to-night, — I could not sleep for a thousand pounds!’ ‘Why,’ says I, ‘what has been amiss?’ ‘Don’t say anything about it for all the world!’ said Bill again; ‘but if you had seen what I have

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seen, you would never go to sleep any more. I feel as if my eyes could never shut. I was drunk when we came out of th’ Horse-shoes t’other side the bridge yonder; but, my God! if that sight did not turn me sober in a moment! They flung Wilson over the bridge-wall. But *I* had no hand in it: no, not if I was going to be judged before God this moment, I never touched him. He would have been a live man now for me. They fell out about paying for the ale we had there, and then when we got on to the bridge coming back again they scuffled: I was a little distance behind them; and, before I could get up, I saw both of them lift him up and fling him over. He shouted to me to tell ’Liza something, — I don’t know what; but what can I tell her? My God, my mouth is shut now, or else there is more men’s blood on my hands than I like to think on.’

“I shall never forget his words on that occasion,” added Mrs. Thurland, “as long as I breathe: I thought I never heard anything like them. But I told Bill, if he was an honest man, and really did see what he said he had seen

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he should go to the authorities in the morning and tell them all about it, for I would not have such a secret as that on my mind if they hung fifty Swanwicks through it. Well, for all I could say, he would not consent to do it. Said he, they would find it out themselves; and if he was called on, then it would be time enough to tell all he knew. And though he had told me everything about it, as I had not seen anything myself, I did not think it was any business of mine; so I kept all as close as if it had never gone beyond their own mouths, till I should see what came of it; especially as Bill said, if it came to be known, it was sure to bring some of them to the gallows, and perhaps send him across the water though he had nothing to do with it.

“About a week after, there comes up news that his body had been fished out of the water nine or ten miles below the bridge, but nobody scarcely could tell whose it was. The surgeons said the man had been murdered, and a great uproar was raised to find out who had done it. Lowe and Jack Swanwick were almost frightened

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to death; and that same night, as I was with Bill Spowage in another house that we sometimes called at, those two came in to look for him. They got him out of my company into a little dark back-room that we used to call Sots' Hole, and there they 'ticed him to swear never to say anything about it, because he was the only man that knew who it was done by; and, as he told me all about it afterwards, they gave him to understand that they had got 'Liza Hammond out of the way before, by pretending that Esau was gone about two hundred miles off all of a sudden for fear of being put in prison for debt, and wanted her to go after him. She did not require much persuasion, and they paid all the expenses.

“By that means it passed off, and nobody found out what was the real end of him, though Swanwick had many hints about it at one time or another; for everybody knew him for a rough fellow, and one that would not stickle at a bloody job if it crossed his way. Bill Spowage has told me many a time what a bitter thing it was for him to sit in company and hear that

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murder talked about, — as it was almost every night, at one place or another, for a while, — knowing what he did about it, and durst not tell. He has gone away and left his ale often and often again, because he could not bear to sit and hear Wilson talked about. But at last people seemed to forget it, and nobody neither wondered nor cared who did it, or who did not.

“In that way it lay in the dark two years; but Jack Swanwick kept getting worse and worse all the while. He cared for nothing, and got to robbing shops and gardens, and doing anything in the world for money and drink; till at last he was taken up for housebreaking. They put him in prison, and he was tried for it, and sentenced to be transported for life. But while he was in gaol, this matter of Esau Wilson's lay so heavy on his mind, he could not keep it any longer; and, as he thought he could not be hanged after they had once transported him, he sent for the gaoler one morning, and confessed every circumstance to him. He heard it, and then got another man, a parson, to come and take it down from Swanwick's

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own mouth, while he told it again; and the consequence of all this was, that Bob Lowe and Bill Spowage were both taken up, and kept in prison till the assizes.

“When the trial came on, there was a curious thing came out about Bob Lowe. You see, Bilberry, he was a brickmaker by trade, and sometimes at night, when they were burning bricks, he had to be there with another man or two watching the kilns all night. When some of these men were brought up to witness what they knew about him, three or four of them said, that when they had been up watching with Lowe, he very often seemed to be frightened, and would not go anywhere about the kilns nor the brick-yard without another man was there along with him; and that led them to suspect he knew something about Wilson, for he had never done so before that young fellow was missing; but they never could get him to say a word about what it was that he felt frightened at. Him and Swan wick had the black cap put on for them, and Bill Spowage was acquitted. Well, after those two were sent back to prison,

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without any hope of being reprieved, they both turned very penitent; and, the night before they were hanged, Bob Lowe told the parson that prayed for them everything about it. Says he, ‘I have had no peace nor rest these two years; ever since that night, I have been a miserable fellow as ever lived,’ said he; ‘that Wilson has appeared before my eyes many times.’ The parson told him that was his evil conscience; but Bob told him again he did not know what he was talking about, because he had not seen it. Says Lowe, ‘If you had seen it as I have, as plain as I see you at this blessed moment, you would not say it was my conscience, any more than you yourself are my conscience.

“ ‘On dark rainy nights particularly,’ said he, ‘it used to come up when I was watching the kiln, and stand before me as if it was alive; and if I had not known it was Wilson, I should have thought it was somebody belonging to the place. It used to come and look at me a little time, and then seem as if it wanted to warm its hands by the fire and dry itself. But it never

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could; for it stayed all night before the kiln, and seemed to be always dropping wet, like as if it had been just got out of the Trent. Sometimes I thought it moaned, and said the same as Wilson said about ’Liza Hammond when we flung him over; and that hurt me more and more, so that I used to shut my eyes, and put my fingers in my ears, and get

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somebody to sit down close to me in the blaze of the kiln, to see if we could not frighten it away. But what use was that? It was under my eyelids directly; and I did not know whether they were shut or open, till I felt of them with my fingers. And then it seemed to come closer and closer, and I could see water run out of its eyes, and it would say, 'Why hadn't you some pity?' And sometimes, when the wind blew hard, and drifted round the kiln in a stream, it was blown all about like smoke; but it came back again, and settled over against me, and shivered, and wrung the wet off its hands, as if it were starved to death.

“ ‘At last,’ said he, ‘I got tired of seeing it, and I felt as if it would crumble my heart to dust. I took no pleasure in drinking ale, as I

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used to do; and I said to Jack Swanwick, one time when we had been talking about it together, said I, ‘Jack, I am sick of my life such as it is — Will you throw me over?’ For, do you know, I durst not do it myself; because when I thought of such a thing sometimes, — as I did often stand on the kiln-wall and think I would throw myself into the fire, because I was only fit for hell, — it would come up directly as bright as silver, and cry like a child before me.

“ ‘So I put my hands before my face, and went down to the clay-pools to wash my forehead cold. I never could think of killing myself, but there it was, as if it wanted me to live till God should call me. So I turned to my work like a man, and took to going to church of a Sunday, as I never had done in my life before. But I used to see it for all that, till I asked Jack Swanwick to fling me over the wall in the same place as we had flung Wilson. I told him, if he would do it, I would make no more resistance than a lamb; and I would be sure never to haunt him after, and make him such a miserable devil as I was. But, you know,

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Swanwick was harder than me, and he never saw anything of that sort; so he laughed at me, and says he, ‘Throw you over? — ay, to be sure; I’ll throw you over, if you’ll give me a pint of ale for the job.’ D — n if that did not make me cry. So he called me a fool, and took me off to the public-house, where we had a game at skittles. We stopped there till towards dark-hour, and got more drink than did us good; but, as we were a good deal flushed, Swanwick says to me, ‘Bob, will you take a walk to the Horse-shoes, at th’ brig

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yonder?’ ‘Will I?’ ay,’ says I, ‘that I will; and we will look whereabouts poor Wilson fell over’ For I felt as if I should like to see the place again. We went to the Horse-shoes, and had four more pints of ale; though Jack drank three quarters of it, and got very fresh. While we were there, says I, ‘Jack, do you remember when we were here last what Esau Wilson did?’ ‘No,’ says he, ‘I remember nothing about him, and I don’t care neither.’ ‘Well, then,’ said I, ‘he paid two shilling out of three, and you abused him for not paying the other.’ ‘I don’t care if

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I did,’ was his reply. ‘I paid him better than that back again; for I sent him to heaven, and that’s worth above two shilling of any man’s money. He is better off now than you and me, Bob,’ said he, ‘for we have a poor life of it, after all.’

“ ‘Jack would have another pint of ale after that, and I could not get him to come away till nine o’clock. It was in the autumn time that was: and when we were getting towards the brig-foot, says I, ‘Jack, will you do for me now?’ ‘I’ll fling you over as soon as look at you, if you like,’ says he, and he laid hold of my arm. But when we were getting against the same place, he stopped all at once, and says he, ‘Bob, what is that on th’ wall?’ Good God! I knew what it was in a moment, and I turned like ice when he said he saw it as well as me. ‘It’s that d — d Esau,’ said he in his drunken courage, ‘and I’ll go and knock him off.’ I caught hold of his arm and held him fast, but I could not speak. Jack was resolute, and pulled hard to go; but when he saw he could not get away, he doubled his fist and held it

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up towards where the thing was; and says he, ‘You devil you, what have you come out of th’ Trent for?’ And then he made a sudden start to get at it; but something came across his mind at that moment, and he fell down on his knees and prayed to the Lord like a preacher.

“ ‘When he got up again, his face dropped sweat; and says he, ‘Bob, let us go away from here, for there is a dead man about, come out of his dust again. He licked my eyes with a tongue like iron; and I can see the stones of that wall, and Wilson’s blood on them, as plain as sunshine, and yet it is as dark as pitch.’

“ ‘So we tried to cross the brig, but it came again, and set a row of fire across from one wall to the other, and stood in the middle itself, with its arms and head hanging

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down as if it were dead. We turned back and got into the Horse-shoes again, and there we stopped till they turned us out at twelve. But we durst not go over the brig again; so we went and stayed under a hedge all that cold night, but we never shut our eyes.

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“ ‘Never have anything to do with a murder,’ said Bob to the parson, though there was not much need for that; ‘it is a dreadful thing, sir, and I am glad Providence has ordered it to be discovered. I shall never be happy till I am hanged for it.’

“All this,” added Mrs. Thurland, “is as true as you are walking on this ground, for it was talked about by everybody for a long time after they were hanged. I went to see them turned off — two fine young fellows they were! — and so well as I knew them both! I thought I should have eaten nothing all that day after; but at night I fell into company with some that had known them as well as I, and we got to talking about them, and running from one thing to another, till at last we finished it all up with a good supper.

“But what I was going to say about Bill Spowage was this. Though he was acquitted in the manner that he was, yet, when he got out of gaol again, they would not have him into the companies at houses where he was used to go,

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for folks are very bad in things of that sort; and they said that he ought to have done something to prevent them murdering Wilson. What he could say was of no use at all, for they would not hear it. So, as this was more than Bill could well bear, he very soon left that part of the country all of a sudden; and though I was then about to have been married to him, or something of that sort, he went off in the dark, without saying a word to me as to where he was going; and, as I said before, I never saw him from that very day till I met him by a miracle on the race-ground. But it was all over then, — too late for him to say anything to me, for Thurland had married me in the meantime; though, if he had not, I do not know that I should have had Spowage for good, as he had lost a leg then.

“The way he lost that leg was one of the oddest things tongue ever told; but, Bilberry, you are not man big enough yet to hear it. I shall perhaps tell it you when you are eight or ten years older: it would make you laugh like a horse.

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“Those other two men with the rushes and chair-bottoms are gipsies, and I lived with their gang a year or two before you were born; but they had ways that did not suit me, so I left them again, and took to this manner of life, because I liked it best.

“I am sorry Bill Spowage ever lost a leg, — it has quite ruined the looks of him. It has run him all up into the body, and thickened him like a porridge-pot. But there is a kind of something good about him after all. I do not see why a man’s heart should be any the worse for the loss of his legs.”

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CHAPTER IX.

DESCRIPTION OF A CERTAIN HOUSE OF ENTERTAINMENT COMMON IN  
EVERY TOWN, BUT VERY LITTLE KNOWN. — ADVENTURES THERE. —  
BILBERRY IS SET UP IN TRADE.

It will be recollected that while Mrs. Thurland held the preceding discourse, she and Bilberry had parted from their companions of the night’s encampment and the sucking-pig, and were now journeying down a branch of highway which led towards some large town. But as this experienced lady generally made a point — except upon especial occasions — of not entering a great town until evening, she therefore now spent the remaining part of the day in winding up and down amongst the green-lane villages and lone farms in the neighbourhood, using all her endeavours and persuasion to drive a few bargains; for this second night’s carouse had

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again completely emptied her pocket, and consequently she had nothing to depend on for providing their next meal and a night’s lodging.

Owing to the proximity of so large a town, where articles like hers could be readily procured at first hand, she transacted very little business; selling nothing except one twopenny tin tea-caddy for sixpence to a young wench, who very probably intended shortly to set up housekeeping. Staying later than otherwise she would have done, under the hope of forcing a market, and carrying a little money with her, they did not arrive in the town before sunset.

Bilberry had no recollection of having seen the place before, although his mother appeared to know it well. Without hesitation, or making any inquiry, she directed her course through a great many streets until they got into a very dirty and obscure part of

**The Salamanca Corpus: *Bilberry Thurland. I. (1836)***

the town; where, after turning in and out and up and down, until, what with the gathering of the night and the intricacy of the road, Bilberry would have been in a riddle to find his way out again, they stopped at last in a narrow lane at a dark dingy house, [170]

which might have been thought untenanted but for the noise and clamour of a great variety of voices, some in dispute, and others in a mad kind of mirth, within. This, Mrs. Thurland said, was the place where they should stay all night, it being a lodging-house for travellers of their description; though, she observed, it would be necessary, before they went in for the night, to endeavour to gather a little more money by a different method than that of selling small-ware, or else they should not enjoy themselves as well as the rest.

The mistress of the house, who knew and shook hands with Mrs. Thurland, and chirped Bilberry under the chin, took them both into a back-room on the second story, where were assembled several women, but no men. Mrs. Thurland set down her basket; and having untied the bundle which she usually carried on her shoulders, took out of it a better gown than the one she had on, and a clean white apron. After washing herself, she put these on in place of her present dress; and adding one of the stray caps which Bilberry had previously found

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for her in the country, she looked altogether very neat, and modest, and respectable, — a perfect picture of some honest labourer's wife, who before the next half-hour would be starving because her husband was ill or out of employment. She had before instructed Bilberry that there were many various methods of raising money, and was now about to give him a practical demonstration of one of them.

Having then caused that boy to wash and clean himself up a little, combed his hair neatly over his forehead, and put a nice white frill round his neck, she bade him leave his cap behind him, and, just as it began to grow rather dark", sallied out into the streets; Mrs. Thurland taking Bilberry by the hand very affectionately all the way. When they had arrived in some of the more busy and good-looking parts of the town, Mrs. Thurland slackened her pace, and modestly casting hurried glances on the crowd before which she was so unaccustomed to appear, made one or two weak efforts to sing, but which were immediately stifled by her extraordinary bashfulness. She then turned, and

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stroked Bilberry on the head, regarding him all the while with the greatest maternal tenderness. Some of the passengers now remarked her, and stood still to gaze for the space of a moment. By-and-by she summoned courage to strike up, and began to sing a very mournful and pathetic ditty, ever and anon casting a sad eye upon her boy; while he in turn, understanding from a look what was expected at his hands, turned up the eggs of his eyes into his mother's face most piteously. Then she stopped in the middle of her song to kiss him, and wipe the tears from his cheeks with the corner of her clean household apron, and tell him not to cry. But he had learned the real meaning of that injunction long before, and immediately burst out afresh like an onion. This drew down from the skies a small shower of halfpence, — three or four heavy drops upon the stones about them. Bilberry picked them up, and his mother went on with her singing; though both of them looked very timid and ashamed when anybody offered a copper. In this manner they proceeded until daylight had

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quite disappeared; by which time, as Bilberry counted the incomings in his pocket, he found they had gleaned nearly another sixpence.

After dark, they stood still in the light of a road-lamp, and for the first half-hour retained a small crowd about them; but it produced very little indeed. Crowds of this kind, in fact, do scarcely ever run to seed; for, throughout the whole course of his experience, Bilberry found that people of any description seldom give after dark. Perhaps they do not fling their pence, through fear lest they should be lost; or perhaps because they like not to put their halfpenny candle of charity under a bushel. A halfpenny worth of bread is sold for a halfpenny, and why not also a halfpenny-worth of the reputation of charitableness? The man who gives his crumbs to a public charity has himself blazoned in the newspaper, that all men may be aware of what both his heart and his pocket are capable; and thus for a false bottom of charity he receives a full measure of pride and self-conceit. He does not give away in the dark, — why then should his more humble neighbours?

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Though the respective amounts may differ, the gratification is of the same kind, and equally proportioned. The charitable of the newspaper and the charitable of the

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pavement are but two differently-sized snips of the same garment. When the former has brought his offering, and been cried through the city by the bellman of charity, while the memory of it lasts, he flounders in the ocean of society a bigger and more conspicuous porpoise than before; — when the latter has bestowed his mite before the eyes of a whole street in the sunshine, he marches off down the causeway like a hero, and for all the time that he remains in sight, or until he turns round the next corner, feels an additional dignity, that almost lifts him off his legs, fully equal in value to the sum bestowed. They are alike in this, and they are alike in that; both also must turn the corner. Hence common charity may be more properly considered as the price paid for an article of merchandise, than that purely one-sided benefit for which it is too often mistaken.

By degrees the crowd dispersed, for Mrs. Thurland was in truth no siren; and she and [175]

Bilberry were left alone, he supplicating to the wind, and his mother singing to the lamp-post. Shortly there came by a man, to appearance a respectable tradesman, not over-sober, but, as well as might be judged, even in that state very fond of singing; for, when arrived opposite our heroes, he stood stock still, and laying hold of the post to steady himself, made a dead set at Mrs. Thurland, who, we may observe, was a pretty woman when seen by lamp-light, and through a pair of drunken eyes. In a broken, though very loving phraseology, he inquired what the dear creature was singing for? Mrs. Thurland regarded him with a most imploring side-glance out of the left tails of her eyes, but made no answer in words. He perceived she was a poor modest woman, resting her cause only on those appearances which spoke for themselves, and put forth his hand to give her sixpence, which she took with seeming diffident reluctance, courtesying very humbly at the same time. This in some degree touched his sensibilities, for he approached nearer, and made some inquiries into their actual circumstances;

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because, as he observed, he felt very certain such a nice young woman as she seemed to be was not used to getting a livelihood in that manner. Mrs. Thurland drew up the corner of her clean apron, and stuffed it into her eyes, as if to sponge up that superfluous moisture which assuredly was not there, and then began to tell her melancholy tale; though the deplorable circumstances of a husband lying dead in the house, a quarter's



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rent in arrear, nothing to pay funeral expenses, and three children less than the one at her hand crying for a bit of bread, being thereby brought fresh into her memory, her narrative, as may naturally be expected, received many interruptions from sobs, sighs, and tears. The toper was evidently one of those kind souls whose hearts as well as wits are so far softened by a little too much drink, that afterwards they easily dissolve altogether. He heard the story with evident emotion; the barriers of discretion, which at a more sober moment would have restrained his generosity within ordinary bounds, were now broken, and in his

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abundant overflow of liberal feeling he gave her half-a-crown.

Both Mrs. Thurland and Bilberry hereupon implored all the blessings of Heaven upon his single head; while he, bidding them not to thank him, staggered down the curbstone.

The moment he had passed out of hearing, Mrs. Thurland, whose perception of whatever came before her would not permit her to allow anything to pass without some observation, good or bad, turned to Bilberry, remarking:

“It is a good thing for us, child; but tomorrow morning he will be feeling for his half-a-crown, and thinking what a fool he has been.”

After this, Mrs. Thurland would not have sung again that night for sixpence an hour, as she seldom cared much to provide for future wants; but left every day, as it provided the appetites, so likewise to provide its own victuals for allaying them.

Hastening back towards their lodging-house, on the way they were met by a crowd of men and boys, who, on a nearer approach, they

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found were proceeding towards the house of correction, along with two constables, having under their protection two men handcuffed together, and two women carefully guarded. Mrs. Thurland got into the crowd to see and inquire more particularly what was the matter. When her eyes fell upon the prisoners, she instantly recognised her late companions, the chair-menders and their wives; and, on asking in the crowd of what crime they were guilty, she was immediately informed that they had been stealing sucking-pigs from a farm-yard.

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Feeling conscious that she herself knew rather more about the same affair than it would be prudent to discover, she very hastily got out of the crowd again, and along with Bilberry made off down the first street they saw leading from the place, lest by any means the constables should get a heavier burden on their hands than they had already; the only words which passed between them before they arrived at their destination being from the mouth of Mrs. Thurland, warning Bilberry that so long as they stayed in that town they were in a rat-trap, and

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therefore it would be advisable to leave it, and get again into the country as early as possible the following day.

At the lodging-house the scene was considerably changed since they were last there. Within two hours there had been a considerable influx of company; so that now, assembled in one large room lit with but a farthing candle, the rays of which barely tinged the opposite walls, and as full of tobacco-smoke as a cabin without a chimney, were upwards of twenty people both men and women of almost every variety of appearance which poverty assumes, mingled together like friends, though perhaps half of them had never seen each other before; and though apparently social over their cups, yet ready on the slightest occasion to rage like wild beasts with the fiercest passions that can possibly reign in the untamed human breast. Never having themselves perhaps experienced the care of parents or the kindness of friends, care and kindness towards each other were unknown. In reality, each one lived for himself and by himself, and only made companions of

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others, the better to ensure his plans of extorting money, or to stimulate the wild enjoyment of their profits.

Bilberry had never beheld such a scene before, and, rough as had been his breeding, it filled his young mind with fear. He felt as though any one of the many about him might half murder him at will without any other in that grand receptacle of a great town's vagabonds taking the least notice or concern. His mother's companions of the previous night were gentle and refined in comparison with these; and what with the sight, the sound, and the confused smell of tobacco, gin, and brimstone from the match-makers, he wished to be out again ere he had remained in half an hour, and expressed to

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his mother a desire to go and pass the night somewhere else; for either a hedge or a hay-stack in the fresh air would have been far preferable to such a place as this. But Mrs. Thurland told him that was life; and he must not be backward, but amuse himself there as well as anywhere else. She then obtained three half-quarters of gin from the landlady;

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and having lit her pipe, to add a few more wreathes to the general volume, took her place amongst the rest. Gin seemed to be the favourite liquor, — the air was almost strong enough with it for ordinary people's drinking if they could have had it dealt out in glasses, though water was in small request; while pots of strong beer sufficed those who, not having sufficient funds to supply themselves with all spirits, meant to finish off with a glass at last.

Mrs. Thurland soon fell into conversation with her neighbours; and Bilberry, being thus left to himself, passed his time by looking round upon this new and strange scene, and noticing the principal of what he saw and heard. In one part were gathered together six or eight blind men, who had thus groped one another out that they might enjoy together a little of the fellowship of congenial conversation. Several of them had miserable dogs between their feet, which, after leading them through the streets all day without any other food than such as they could pick out of the stagnant

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channels as they passed, were brought here at night to receive little save kicks and cuffs from whoever thought fit to bestow any upon them. Several others had each a little half-starved girl or boy beside him, who had served throughout their masters' peregrinations the same office as the aforesaid dogs, and were now also treated much after the same grateful fashion. While the remaining number were men of such experience in blindness, that, throughout their old haunts, they could make their way as surely without eyes as with them. In fact, one of the most practised of them, with a huge oath, declared his belief that eyes were more trouble than they were worth, especially in a sandy summer; and thanked God that his own were ready shut whenever he wanted to go to sleep.

Contrary to the usual method of discourse, these blind villains did not inquire what each other had seen but what they had felt during the day; while their discourse was

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very thickly besprinkled with such wicked varieties of swearing as could only have been picked out of eternal darkness like theirs. This however, we

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may imagine, was done by way of change and recreation after calling so lustily on God and Christian for ten or twelve hours together for help to the sand-blind, and exhausting every form of speech in religious appeals and holy prayers to the benevolent and humane.

Many of the remaining part of the company were travellers like Mrs. Thurland, of various professions; some tinkers, some bone-gatherers, some tarry-handed sailors, who never were off dry land in their lives; and not a few of that flexible quality who take any shape into which the wind of fortune may chance to blow them.

Between eleven and twelve they received a large addition of half-tipsy professional ballad-singers, whose occupation Mrs. Thurland had that evening been invading: and along with them came several of those curious people whose health is continually alternating with the rising and the setting of the sun; or, in other words, who are lame and full of pitiable sores, securely bound up in rags while day-light lasts, but who miraculously recover their health and limbs at the turn of darkness.

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One of these, who had been labouring all day under a dreadful malady which compelled him to go on crutches, took off a monstrous roll of linen from a leg of his as sound and big as an Irish ham, and transferred the wrapping to his female consort in the business, who immediately by unrolling converted it into a shift, and, for safety from her neighbours, slipped it on over her gown till it should be again wanted.

Later at night, when the majority of the company were what is politely termed “in liquor,” — or, more according to the vulgar, when liquor was in them, — the disturbance and confusion grew terrible. Some fought and swore like demons; some joked with the women; while several, more sentimental, and, it might be, more sober than the rest, were trying to compel a little Italian boy to play a tune on his hurdy-gurdy, and make his poor red-jacket monkey dance to it. He refused, and cried until they threatened to beat him if he did not; when, without waiting to know whether he would comply, one of them snatched the instrument

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out of his arms and struck up. Ten thousand oaths from every part of the room were then directed against such an infernal noise; and, ere the next half minute had elapsed, three or four foreign ambassadors in the shape of pewter-pots were sent from the four distant quarters of the room at the head of the player.

Upon this, a general fight ensued. The hurdy-gurdy was broken to shivers, the monkey had one of his hind-legs broken, and the boy owner himself was heartily thrashed in at the bargain for bringing what they termed such a squalling hell-fiddle into the company. The disturbance was only quelled at last by the keeper of the house making his appearance at the door, and roaring in a voice of thunder that, if they were not more quiet, every devil of them should be turned neck and heels into the streets. Even then it subsided very slowly, and with oft-returning gusts of imprecation.

Such are the people, and such the excellent establishments, unknowingly maintained by the publicly tender-hearted, and those who love the applause of street charity.

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After order had been restored, and some had 1 gone to their straw, and some lain down to sleep under the tables and on benches, Bilberry particularly remarked five or six ballad-singers, who were more than ordinarily jovial together, keeping up the fun longer than anybody else. They drank like dust, and for lack of spells lit their pipes with unsold songs. He found by their conversation that they were determined to spend the last penny upon the strength of the next day's income, which they confidently anticipated would be great. The reason was this. On the following morning there was to be a public execution; and the culprit, who was a most notorious scoundrel, would, it was generally understood, make an excellent and very saleable last dying speech and confession. The public mind, like a spuming beer-barrel, was already in a ferment about it; so much so, indeed, that it was believed the people would not have patience to wait until the unfortunate rascal should deliver his own sentiments from the scaffold; and therefore a clever fellow amongst the flying stationers had considerably

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undertaken to gratify the public anxiety as early as possible, by manufacturing the poor man's final speech out of the old materials of former confessions. It was to be put to press and ready for the market long before it should be actually delivered by the culprit himself. Whether the sentiments of the latter should chance to be in agreement with the

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printed ones put into his mouth, was a matter of no consequence, for the sale would be principally over before anybody had time to find out the difference. It was not even known whether the poor fellow would make any dying speech at all: but so much the better then, as, under those circumstances, he would be certain of not contradicting what they put into his mouth.

The speeches were to be ready for delivery an hour after daylight; and it was arranged by the ballad-singers that the supply for the villages and suburbs should be sent out before the criminal was brought from prison, in order to give the salesmen for those parts a little time to reach their respective destinations by the precise moment of the execution; while, for

[188] the town itself, every man should hold himself in readiness to decamp the instant the culprit was turned off. By this speculation they confidently counted on a profit of from two to four shillings per head, according to the individual abilities and good fortune of each. The only reflection that appeared to afford them any cause for regret was, that hangings took place so very seldom. If, said they, it would but please God to bring about an execution every week, they then might have a prospect before them worth a gentleman's looking at.

Mrs. Thurland, as well as Bilberry, had overheard this conversation; and, thinking the circumstances afforded a lucky chance for turning an honest penny, she put in a word for that youth to join them on the morrow.

Numberless objections were started and obstacles raised, — there were too many in the business already, and they had no desire to divide a loaf amongst a thousand. Mrs. Thurland answered all their objections with great strength of rhetoric; put aside their best thrusts of tongue with considerable skill; and so artfully

[189] managed her own weapon, in the use of which it has before been seen she was so very expert, that at last her antagonists gave way, and, under the consideration of receiving for the good-will of the trade a certain share of his profits, they agreed to entrust Bilberry with the disposal of fifty copies of the dying speech and execution.

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SOMETHING NO LESS UNEXPECTED THAN UNFORTUNATE. — A CASE AT  
LAW, WITH THE DECISION OF TWO WISEACRES THEREON.

IN common with most youths of a lively disposition, whenever Bilberry had a fresh piece of business put into his hands, he was extremely prompt in the performance of it. Indeed, it is to this alacrity, aided perhaps by a greater share of natural ability than usually falls to the lot of people in his condition, that we may attribute the comparatively great advancement which he afterwards made in life. His usual promptitude did not slacken on the present occasion. He rose by day-light to join his new fellow-labourers, but, being only a fresh comer into the business, he did not receive that attention which was paid to some others; for they obliged him to wait until the last of all, giving

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him his bills only after every one else was served. By the time he had got them into his hands, preparations were making at the scaffold for the execution, although the prisoner was not yet brought forth. However, Bilberry reflected that whoever intends to get forward in the world must in one sense out-run time, and not hesitate about particulars; so that, without waiting the preconcerted signal, he escaped under cover of the crowd, and set off at a round trot for the outskirts of the town. Judging, from the time occupied in his journey, when about the halter would be round the poor fellow's neck, he began to cry the dying speech and execution to a very crowded and attentive audience. Though it was his first essay, he managed it with such effect as to melt sympathetic hearts by house-rows. The maids wept from the garret-windows, the mothers from the chambers, and the coal-wenches from the cellar-lights. Scarcely a door that did not open with its halfpenny, nor a mouth with its interjections.

Encouragement begat vigour, and at every

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fresh sale he proclaimed his fearful subject with additional feeling and horror, until he made the hair of the whole neighbourhood stand on end like quickset-hedges. The housewives at their doors began to espouse the cause of the culprit, and talk of breaking the judge's windows.

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Nothing was heard amongst their husbands but passionate exclamations against the injustice of jurymen, while they began to collect into formidable knots at corners and alley-ends to discuss the matter more fully. At last Bilberry judged it prudent to lower his tone, lest he should excite a commotion, and get himself apprehended as the originator and ringleader of a sedition. In three quarters of an hour he had disposed of his whole stock, and might have disposed of twice the number had he carried them; so that, regretting the narrow, calculating spirit which had denied him a greater quantity, he turned homewards, leaving all that quarter of the town in hysterics at the miserable man's broken-hearted confession and most horrible execution, the rope having broken [193]

no less than three times before they could get him effectually tied up.

The first news that Bilberry heard on reaching the heart of the city was, that the criminal had not been executed at all, a respite having arrived just as he had swallowed his parting breakfast with the world. It may be imagined young Thurland felt sorry for having so villainously deceived the natives. Nothing of the kind. On the contrary, he laughed and chuckled heartily over his good-fortune in having by his promptitude fallen so exactly into the nick of time. Besides, where was the wrong? Had not both sides benefited? — they 'by a good pennyworth of pleasurable pity, and he by the cash; while from this result they would have the satisfaction of knowing that their virtuous indignation against the execution was perfectly justifiable and right: — a reflection which caused Bilberry to consider that, instead of harm, he had done them all a kindness.

His profits being divided, — not according to the original agreement, for, considering the success he had met with, that would have left too [194]

much in his own hands, but according to a new and improved stipulation, — he yet had the satisfaction of seeing a shilling remaining for himself.

On going down rejoicing to the lodging-house to join his mother, and know what next was to be done, he fell into a most unexpected snare. No sooner had he entered the door than a constable, who, like a spider, had fixed himself in an obscure corner that he might not be observed, sallied out on a sudden, seized poor Bilberry by the collar, and,



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threatening to baste his jacket if he made any disturbance, hurried him out and away towards the office of police. In vain did he call on his mother for assistance; that lady, he was informed, had gone before him, having been seized while asleep in bed, put into her own big basket, and carried off to the house of safety.

To no purpose did the boy protest that he had done nothing wrong, implore to be let go, or inquire what crime was laid to his charge. The constable only told him he should know that soon enough to his sorrow, swore that he

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was a deep young devil, and then gave him another shake by the collar like a dog. Bilberry endeavoured to accommodate himself to his adverse fortune, by drying up his eyes, keeping his mouth shut, and enduring with patience.

Arriving at his place of destination, the police office, he was carried on to the second floor, and put alone into a dark closet of such small dimensions that the walls fitted him like a great-coat. Here he had sufficient leisure to indulge his meditations upon past events, and to speculate upon the probabilities of those yet to come; for he really believed they kept him locked up not less than two hours. But he happened to be more in a mood for thinking of some method of securing his shilling, than for conning over his own morals or his fortune; since, according to the information of his mother, your magistrates appropriate to their own use everything which they find upon the persons of poor people: therefore he endeavoured to find a convenient place for secreting his money, beyond

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the probability of any man's discovery. Anywhere about his clothes he had already learned would be of no use, as they were always stripped off, and strictly scrutinized both inside and out. And as to his mouth and cheeks, he did not know but these might be as familiar hiding-places to the officers of justice as they were to the members of his own tribe, and would possibly undergo as severe an examination as his clothes. At last he bethought him of the plan of placing it at the upper end and between the soles of one of his shoes, and so fixing it there as to render it immovable upon the shoe being shaken; by this means he hoped to save his shilling from the fangs of the constable, who, he was aware, would not use much ceremony with him. There it stayed very fast; so that when shortly after the constable came to examine him, prior to his being taken

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into the next room before the magistrates, though he made the boy strip himself to the skin, though he investigated all his linings, and examined

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that there were no secret pockets in his shoes, he found no property upon him, save two cockle-shells and the handle of an old knife.

When dressed again, Bilberry was led into the hall of justice, and placed over against a green-baize table, on the other side of which sat two profound-looking gentlemen, whom he took to be the sitting magistrates. One, according to the report of the case afterwards given in the town newspaper, was their worthy chief magistrate, William Augustus Snoars, Esq., a sapient legislator, who kept a shop and dealt in the undignified articles of pigtail tobacco and snuffs. From the front window of the room of justice he had a full view of his own shop, and of that classical name which he bore, written characteristically over the door in splendid gold letters. It was his peculiar pride, after serving some tottering smoke-dried old woman with five farthings' worth of long-cut, to doff his apron, and stride across the road to dispense his country's laws; and to the equal pride of his townsmen was it, that in either capacities he displayed equal wisdom. So, at least, it was generally

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admitted, though there were many sensible persons who thought him even more learned behind the counter than on the bench. The other magistrate, his colleague, was John Trattle, alderman; almost as deeply read as the former, and, like him also, a man in business. He sold crockery of all kinds; both breakfast, dinner, tea, and chamber services complete: but his reputation was not equal to that of his brother magistrate, the worthy mayor. Beside these two judges there sat a formidable fellow, with pens, ink, and paper, to take down the miserable stuff about to be pumped out of the day's culprits.

Casting his eye aside the room, Bilberry observed his mother, the two chair-bottom menders, and their wives, who, together with himself, were doubtless brought there all on the same errand; and not far from them stood a great bashful country farmer, without his hat, like a stout green hedge-stake, turning his uneasy eyes anywhere but where they should be. This codger was their accuser; and, every thing being

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now arranged, he was sworn prior to giving his evidence.

While fumbling with one of his hands inside his hat, and alternately pulling the lining out and stuffing it in again, he began to speak. First, he deposed to having had a sucking-pig wilfully and maliciously slaughtered in the sty, under the very nose of its mother, and carried away by some person or persons at the instigation of the devil; and, secondly, also to having had the spurs of a fine old cock knocked off, doubtless by the same incendiary miscreants; both on the night of the seventeenth. His evidence farther went to prove, that on the following day he and one of his men traced the drops of blood from the yard into a lane outside the village, where beside a spring, known as Stone-trough Spring, a party of gipsies, or some such like human varment, had been encamping apparently the preceding night. The deponent furthermore declared, to wit, that a fire had been kindled, lit, burned, or consumed, — all or severally any of the aforesaid, — the ashes of

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which said fire were still visible, ocular, and tangible, and in part smoking, at the time they made their observations. This being taken down, and a most important part of the evidence being now to come on, magistrates Snoars and Trattle seized the opportunity to impress upon the mind of witness the awful necessity he was under by his oath to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. This they did in so solemn a manner as to affect the witness's nerves to such a degree, that he dropped his hat on the floor, and dared not pick it up again.

Recovering himself, however, he was soon enabled to continue. As God should be his judge at the last day, he emphatically declared, that on putting his nose — which at this crisis the magistrates observed between themselves appeared to be a prime one — near to and against the aforesaid ashes, he then and there perceived a smell, scent, or savour, not unlike roast pig; and although the before-mentioned ashes had been watered, with the intention he believed of smothering and stifling the smell of pig, yet was

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he so convinced of the justice and rectitude of his smell, that he raked into those ashes and shortly scraped therefrom a certain cake of crackling.

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This crackling he then produced, wrapped in one of his clean handkerchiefs for gentility, before the magistrates. At sight of it Bilberry could not help laughing; but the dispensers of justice frowned, and peremptorily ordered him aside.

The witness then went on with his evidence to a great length; relating how, immediately on the above discovery, he had sent the parish-constable in search of the thieves, and in what manner that officer had succeeded in apprehending two men and two women now before them; and, though they certainly could not prove that they were the real offenders, yet they had good circumstantial evidence to that effect, because they all had rushes along with them, and the fragments of rushes were abundantly scattered over the ground of encampment.

The town constables deposed to having received notice of the robbery, and such information

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from those who had observed the prisoners on the roads, as induced them to apprehend, as parties in the same offence, the woman Mrs. Thurland, and a boy, of whom she professed herself the mother, called Bilberry. William Snoars, Esq. laughed when he heard the latter name, and inquired of Mrs. Thurland how it was she came to christen her child such a name as Bilberry? Mrs. Thurland replied, that she had had so many children before him, that every regular name was already occupied in her family; and as she did not wish to have two of a sort, she called this one Bilberry, a name of her own making, because he not only happened to be born in bilberry-time, but also his eyes were as black as bilberries from the first. Snoars laughed again nevertheless, and remarked to Alderman Trattle that, though he never took his own name to be one of the handsomest in the world, yet he did really think that Snoars Thurland would have been prettier than Bilberry Thurland.

Trattle smiled; but whether at the mayor

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or at Bilberry, philosophers have not yet determined.

The depositions of all the witnesses being now ended, though not one of them could identify the prisoners as the offenders, the latter 'were called on to make their defences. This they severally did as well as they were able; though, as usual, Mrs. Thurland made

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the best of any. We would lay it word for word before the reader were it not that unfortunately the great number of other matters waiting to be related compels us to suppress it altogether; only we may remark, it was upon the whole of such a nature that Snoars, Esq. felt his dignity much encroached upon by it, and, after reprimanding Mrs. Thurland for her assurance, he ordered the man taking evidence to put her down as an impudent minx and a female vagabond.

This done, the magistrates ordered the room to be cleared, while they deliberated upon the case between themselves.

Now, it either is, or ought to be well known to the reader, that the stuff called justice, dispensed

[204] in country towns by ignorant and interested tradesmen in the guise of magistrates, is no more — no, not a bit of it, — no more the article for which it is sold, and whose name it bears, than London gin is gin, than John Black is a gentleman, or than T — 's tales are of his own invention. There is a certain cream of the valley more excellent than gin; so likewise is there a certain country compound of ignorance, malice, sneaking pride, and brutality, more excellent than justice. In the distilling of this compound, William Snoars, Esq. tobacco-dealer, was a great adept; and various were the instances related amongst his townsmen of his abilities in this art. With these, however, we have nothing to do here. Let it suffice us to know that on the present occasion he dealt out a sample in no degree inferior to those that had gone before: nay, some thought it even superior in many particulars; since, without any conclusive evidence to sanction him, without any of the party being identified as the same individuals who committed the robbery, —

[205] two facts which an ignorant judge is usually at some pains to ascertain, — this sapient magisterial shopman recalled the culprits, and, with the sanction of Alderman Trattle, who in other words might better be called Alderman Old-woman, sentenced the two men to a year's imprisonment, their two wives and Mrs. Thurland to six months with hard labour, and Bilberry himself to nothing at all. — A strange decision!

We can account for the opinions of a philosopher, the demonstrations of a mathematician, or the conclusions of a logician; but he who can account for the decisions of a fool must be more than man.

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Possibly the discerning reader, like Justice Snoars and his colleague, may conceive the punishment very properly applied. Arguing sophistically, that is not the question. It is the duty of all magistrates to punish according to evidence, and not by chance. The sentence might be deserved; but still, as in many counter instances, the judgment was wrong. Nevertheless,

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we should not have quarrelled so much with it, had it not unfortunately turned the whole direction of our story.

After all, Fate is wiser than we, the change may be much for the better; at all events, the reader is at full liberty to inquire for himself in the ensuing chapter.

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CHAPTER XI.

OUR HERO IS TURNED ADRIFT. — MEETS WITH A COMPANION NOT ALTOGETHER STRANGE TO THE READER. — AN OCCURRENCE WHICH ASKS TEARS OF THOSE WHO HAVE ANY TO SPARE. — CONSEQUENCES RESULTING THEREFROM.

WHEN released from the power of the law, Bilberry once more got into the street, and for a moment considered the circumstances and situation in which he was now placed. He at first regretted that they had not imprisoned him along with the rest; he despaired of ever again seeing his mother after a confinement of six months in prison; he knew not a single soul to befriend him, and he had but one shilling and a pair of old shoes in all the world; he knew no useful trade to which he might turn for bread; nor at the present time was he of an appearance, at least in the article of dress, to warrant any

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warm hopes of getting his hand put to an honest job, although in person he was a well-formed and good-looking lad, and would have passed anywhere if but decently set off.

In this forsaken condition his bosom became sensible of an emotion which until then had been almost a stranger there. He sat down on the edge of the footway, and, for the first time in his life on such an occasion, cried in earnest because of his forlorn and friendless situation. Now and then the passengers, touched by his real distress, dropped a few pence on to his knee as they passed by; but, for several long hours that he sat there in total irresolution and almost despair, he felt that a single kind word from any

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Christian heart would be far more welcome to him than money. Yet, either because grief by indulgence exhausts itself, or that Bilberry was naturally not of a desponding temper, after an abundant flow of tears, his heart, like a cloud freed of its rain, grew lighter again, and hopes of being able to make his way in the world, even though alone, began to dawn upon and brighten his mind.

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He wiped his eyes, and in the first place went down to the lodging-house, thinking, as the mistress of it knew his mother, she would perhaps either do something for him herself, or else advise him in what manner he should act, now he was left entirely alone. On arriving at the place, and informing the mistress of his business, she soon made it appear that, in expecting either assistance or advice from her, he had been calculating much too favourably for himself. She told him he might stay there another night, providing he had money enough to pay for his lodging; but, as his mother had proved to be a thief, she could not trust him, and therefore, while the town was big enough to hold him, he might go and find his friends somewhere else, for she herself would not have anything to do with him. Though too young to reply to these hard-hearted observations, Bilberry was old enough to feel them. Such a harsh rebuff made him cry again very bitterly, but that had not the least effect with her: she shut the door upon him, saying, if he wanted a lodging at night, and had money to pay for it,

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he knew where to come to; but she never harboured in her house oyster-shells without meat.

Bilberry looked about the streets as though he were lost. His eyes fell longingly upon the shops and comfortable houses on each side, and he envied every little child that passed him better fed and dressed than himself.

At length he observed the little Italian boy whose hurdy-gurdy had been broken the previous night, asking charity at the bottom of the street; for that mischievous disaster had at once reduced him from a musician to a beggar. His monkey had died in the night from the hurts he received; and the boy had now no means of subsistence, save by exciting pity by the unvarnished tale of his misfortunes.

The moment Bilberry saw him, he felt that adversity had made them friends; while the hand of charity, by which now they both subsisted, seemed to beckon them together.

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He went up to the little foreign stranger, and addressing him almost as though on a sudden he had become his brother, he told him what had happened to his mother and himself. The little

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boy appeared no less glad than Bilberry in having found a companion, and in turn described that he was unaccustomed to beg for nothing, and had gleaned only twopence halfpenny, and had nothing to eat all day but a bit of sugar out of a grocer's tub; as he dared not spend any of his money till he had got a little more, because his lodging would cost threepence. Bilberry offered to divide with the little Italian what money himself had got, so as to make the sums of each equal, providing he would agree that they should go and live together. To this he readily consented; and, as Bilberry took the lead in all their resolutions, he, being of the two the oldest, as well as the most accustomed to that line of life, proposed that they should go into the country, where his mother always used to do the best, and try what they could gather there.

After buying a penny loaf apiece, they accordingly set off with the victuals in their hands — it being yet no later than afternoon — out of the town, where both had been so unfortunate.

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Until this time, Bilberry never knew that he cared anything about his mother; but he could not go away from a place where she, who had never parted from him before, was left behind, without many times turning his head to look back again and again on the roofs which covered her. His little companion had no regret like that. He had come too far to look back upon the place of his parents, and had lived alone in a strange world too long to care for the clouds of to-morrow, if but the present time were fair. There was but one thing which gave him much uneasiness, and that was the death of his monkey, the corpse of which he still carried under his arm. He extolled it as such a good one, as so fond of him! and he dwelt upon its excellences, and on the struggles and the whining it made when dying, until both himself and his auditor cried over the poor animal very sincerely, and that was perhaps as good an epitaph as it could have had. It was with great reluctance its owner persuaded himself to bury it. They dug a hole with their hands in a bank; and when the dead monkey was laid in it, dressed

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as usual in its red jacket and cap, the Italian boy sat down beside the diminutive grave, and kept his eye upon it a long time in a very serious mood before he would scatter the dust upon its comical face for ever. He took a pleasure in laying it nicely out, and straightening the broken limb, which in great part caused its death. A piece of bread, of which it had last eaten and at length refused, he took out of his pocket, and with pathetic simplicity buried along with it.

They then walked forwards into the country, proposing many schemes as they went along, and devising various plans for getting their living. At first they decided upon making matches, and, being arrived at a wood by the roadside, employed themselves very industriously for an hour in breaking down green boughs wherewith to manufacture them; but, when their labour was about completed, they recollected that they had no brimstone, without which matches, especially of green wood, might not find a very ready market. Whereupon they abandoned that idea, and then the Italian boy [214]

proposed that they should beg, and save all their money until they should have enough to purchase a box of white mice; for with a box of mice he said they could earn two shillings a day. The prospect of such an income was precious in their eyes; they wondered at each other for not thinking of it before; and then bustled forward like postmen, in hopes of soon reaching another town, where they might beg, purchase their stock in trade, and commence business that very night. As they settled it, there might be a little time just to begin before dark-hour. By the time they had walked themselves weary and out of breath, their opinions were changed somewhat for the worse. Doubts and fears as to the success of the speculation had meantime gradually crept upon their minds; they turned cool in their anticipations, and at last concluded that this plan would not answer at all.

The evening proved extremely warm; besides that, in this respect, their late exertions to push forward had lent considerable aid to the natural [215]

state of the weather. Nothing would be so pleasant as a bathe, if they could but find any water. This they were not long in doing: a nice narrow river that flowed through the fields, grassed down to the very edge, tempted them at first sight to strip off their clothes; and, as these were neither abundant nor very closely hung on, by the next

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minute they were in the stream. The young Italian, who boasted he could swim, dashed at once into the sullen blackness of the farther side, and in a moment was gone. The undermined bank, and the tangled roots laid bare, seemed to tell of a deep bed and a treacherous current. Bilberry instinctively got back on to the grass, and, helpless himself, shouted in vain for help. The grazing cattle held up their heads a moment at the noise; but neither man nor dwelling could be seen across the silent meadows. He turned again to the stream: there was no cry, — no bubbling on the water, — no struggling against death. Only once, at a long distance down the river, did he see the wavy black hair of the boy

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come up above the surface a moment, as the body apparently was interrupted in its course by the boughs of a fallen tree.

Yet Bilberry stood a long time watching in miserable hope. He could scarcely believe what during the last few minutes had passed before his eyes; and, once or twice, he involuntarily called to his companion by name. But he had heard the call of a greater voice, bidding him come away for ever from a world too unkind. Those who had broken his music and beaten him the other night had done him but little harm. He had no more need of begging; for he had gone to where, for such as him, Mercy unmasked bestows abundantly.

Bilberry felt to have lost one who would have made the new world more pleasant to him; and for a while he sat down upon the bank, as though he might be waiting some one's coming.

When he turned his eye upon the scanty remnant of clothes which lay on the bank beside him, to be wanted no more, Bilberry could not but think, if his little companion was now gone

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to heaven, instead of being clothed in that wretchedness, the exchange was a happy one.

It was towards sunset before he recollected himself, and thought of leaving the place, — there was such a pitiful tale told in twenty-four hours, — the broken music, the dead monkey, and the drowned boy.

Picking up his clothes, for an instant a thought crossed Bilberry's mind of taking back the share of his own money which he had given the boy. But in reality he could not do

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it, — the fate of the owner forbade him: he could not find in his heart the feeling which should prompt him to put his hand into the pocket. To be sure, his mother would have taught him differently; and to do it he needed her instructions, for of himself he could not.

Having rolled them together, and tied all up in the jacket, he made the best of his way down a path across the fields, in hopes of reaching some village where he could make the misfortune known. The road he had taken brought him at length to the church, through the yard of which it led, and from thence again to the

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side of the same fatal river. Lower down was a mill-dam, at the head of which he observed a crowd of men and boys from the village, several of whom were fishing something out of the water, while the others intently watched the operation. He naturally conjectured it to be the body of his recent companion which they were trying to recover from the stream; so that he ran faster towards them, crying out — what, we dare say, they already knew — that he was drowned. He had no sooner approached sufficiently near them than, seeing the bundle of clothes under his arm, they guessed the circumstances, and surrounded him to learn particulars. Bilberry was too anxious to see the boy taken out to stay telling stories; though his anxiety was not of long duration, for very shortly the body was brought to land.

The press to get a sight of it was hot and great. Several of the younger spectators were thrown down; and not a few obtained from their seniors a hearty thrashing for their bold and unceremonious attempts to squeeze into the into the crowd. The old ones were no less anxious to

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give their advice as to the treatment of the drowned boy, than were the young to see the object of that advice itself. Three or four in one breath bawled out to those who carried the body to hold it heels upwards, that it might drain like an inverted bottle; some swore, on the contrary, that would run all the blood into his head, and give him a fit of apoplexy; while a third wanted to know how in the world that could happen when his blood was set like tallow? These last stirred their own bloods up in the dispute concerning which was wisest, and which knew most about it, until a regular quarrel, and ultimately a battle with fists, ensued. The sexton was for having him carried into the

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church until the curate should come; but this was overruled by the old women, who vowed he was cold enough already, and had more need of hot flannels and a sup of warm spirits than of a church-pew. Another recommended that he should be terribly basted with bunches of nettles, to stimulate him into life again; but the gravedigger declared he was already as dead as a nit. In short, whatever

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was proposed for restoring him had some considerable authority to oppose it again; so that in fact nothing could be finally agreed upon, and the last sparks of life, if there were any left, were allowed to go out altogether, while the debate about blowing them in again puffed itself into the most furious flames.

After holding the body in their arms until their jacket-sleeves were soaked completely through, the men who had taken it out of the river laid it down on a flat gravestone, and covered it with the clothes brought by Bilberry.

This latter hero next became the object of curiosity. Every individual asked him a multitude of separate questions, and at the same time, to pave the way for an answer to them, told one another to be quiet with their tongues, and allow the lad to tell the tale in his own way; those thus addressed (being determined not to be put down, because they had as good a right to speak as any body else,) replying again that they were quiet enough if those who talked so much about being quiet would but be quiet

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themselves. Then the sexton, in a loud formal voice, commanded Bilberry, if he knew anything about it, to relate the accident. As he was about to commence, a man all over flour, who belonged to the mill, broke out like a gunshot, swearing that it was quite impossible for a child to tell anything whilst so many people were staring at him; and then, poking his arms straight out on each side through the crowd, he whirled half a hundred of them behind him like chaff. This proceeding called down several sods upon his head, and would without doubt have ended in a general tumult, but for the timely arrival of the curate. At sight of him the most active of the rustics hung their heads half ashamed, he having so far the control of the rural population, that to his authority every one bowed as to an eleventh commandment. Seeing the little body on the gravestone, he ordered it to be carried immediately into his own house, and rubbed in hot blankets.

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Lest his orders should not be properly executed, he himself stayed behind no longer than while he made some severe pastoral observations to the assembly

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upon the great impropriety of not observing the strictest order upon such a solemn occasion as this of the awfully sudden death of a fellow-creature far from his own home, and amongst a land of strangers.

They listened to him with great respect, but so ingeniously pushed the blame about, that though it went the round of all, yet it rested upon the shoulders of none; and when the curate had passed into his house, another sod, sent at the miller by some injured youngster who determined to have his revenge, caused the whole scene to be enacted over again.

As for Bilberry, the landlord of the public-house, knowing he had a good tale to tell, and thinking that, were he to speculate as much as half a pint of ale upon him, he should in the main be himself no loser, because of the custom he would draw, benevolently asked the boy if he could drink a cup of that liquor.

Bilberry did not think it incumbent upon him to starve because his late companion was drowned, and therefore he gave the landlord to understand that he thought he could; while

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everybody present praised the humane publican's disinterested kindness. It was plain to them he could not think of any return from so poor a boy. The kitchen soon filled; and, as a man cannot with any degree of propriety harbour himself in a public-house without calling for a sup of ale, our landlord had the very ready satisfaction of proving that gospel true which says, whoever sows shall reap; though he was not by any means the first person who has got the clear credit of a good action, while in secret he was receiving full pay for his liberality into the bargain.

When Bilberry looked about him, he felt proud to be the hero of such a round audience. He allowed them to hang the space of a few minutes in silent expectation, on purpose to whet their appetites; and then, without note or gloss, gave a pathetic history of the whole affair, such as the reader is already acquainted with, beginning at the unlucky night which his late companion and himself passed at the lodging-house, and bringing it down to the present moment of his speaking; suppressing

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only the disgraceful incident of his mother's imprisonment, because he feared in the minds of the ignorant it might a second time go against him. Instead, he disposed of her in a somewhat more creditable manner than the magistrates had done. The bumpkins pronounced it a pitiable case, and again commended the generosity of the landlord in having given victuals and drink to a poor orphan who stood so much in need of them. But all their admiration of his character suddenly sunk silent when he hinted at a penny subscription amongst the company for Bilberry's benefit. Such a proposal as that from his mouth had not entered into their estimate. The major part drank up their taps, and seized the first opportunity that presented itself of departing out of the backdoor; so that, in ten minutes after the landlord's proposition had been made, there were none left except two or three old aleskins, who, it was notorious to the parish, drank until they had not a penny to give: they did not fly, because they were not in any danger.

Evidently the landlord had disappointed

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himself, and of consequence got out of humour. He appeared not to care how soon Bilberry quitted the premises, though that youth himself had of late learned too well the value of a comfortable roof to abandon the one over his head merely upon hints and appearances. He continued to stay without exhibiting any preparations for transplantation, until perhaps the next thing would have been a plain assurance that his company could very well be dispensed with, had not the gravedigger, who was also the curate's gardener, arrived at an opportune moment to carry him to the parsonage. The curate had heard some account of Bilberry, and now wished to receive an authentic statement of the late misfortune from that youth's own mouth, as well as to secure and prepare him for the inquest to be held on the morrow, since, according to the statement of the bone-man, the Italian boy could not be restored to life.

On their way to the parsonage, the gravedigger took Bilberry down to the river to wash his face, after which he combed his hair out with his garden rake, that he might look more

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of a genteel youth before his master. The good man farther gave him some valuable hints upon bowing, and the art of speaking to superiors in a becoming manner; both

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which pieces of instruction Bilberry found such an aid to his naturally good looks, that he began to entertain hopes of better luck upon those considerations alone.

How he sped with the curate will be best known by him who has curiosity enough to read what follows.

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CHAPTER XII.

BILBERRY HAS AN INTERVIEW WITH A CERTAIN CURATE, AND IS  
SUCCURED BY THAT GENTLEMAN.

THE gravedigger led Bilberry up a long garden behind the curate's house, intending most probably to usher him into the kitchen or scullery, had not the reverend gentleman himself prevented Caleb's good intentions by coming forth to meet them a few yards from his backdoor. According to the gravedigger's recipe, Bilberry bowed to the best of his ability, and, by good fortune, acquitted himself so well that the servant of God and sworn foe of the devil seemed very well pleased to find so much manners in one from whom they might have been least expected.

He appeared afraid of admitting Bilberry's rags into his house, and therefore walked him

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up and down the garden-paths while he told his story, having first charged him, upon the eternal welfare of his soul, to tell him nothing except the truth. Taking these words for his guide, Bilberry repeated as nearly as possible the story which he had so recently told at the public-house, with the single exception of the fate of his mother, which he this time related without misrepresentation. He also, very excusably, enlarged upon his own helpless condition, and expressed a strong desire to be put to work honestly for his bread, instead of begging for it as he had been always taught by his mother.

The curate admired his candour, and commended his very praiseworthy desire of quitting what he termed the highroad to damnation, and betaking himself instead to the narrow path of a Christian. He observed that his looks did not go against him; and, as he felt it to be his duty as a minister of religion to assist as far as lay in his power the unfortunate and helpless in extricating themselves from the evil of their ways, he considered himself bound to use

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all his endeavours to put the boy's honest desires into effect. "In the first place," said he, "you want better garments. These I will provide you with; but let me see good conduct in return. There is no telling what you may do for yourself in the course of a few years, if you conduct yourself throughout in a proper and obliging manner. Make your master's commands your law; at least, until you are arrived at years capable of discrimination and judgment. But, above all things, keep a watchful and continual eye over the welfare of your immortal soul. Attend the church regularly and with sincerity, for without that you attempt to sail without wind and tide. For the present, as you are not particular in your lodging, you may sleep in my stable; it is clean and sweet, and such as I could myself put up with on occasion, for nothing appertaining to a horse from head to tail has been in it these many months. Caleb shall put a fresh wisp of straw in the manger, and you will sleep there like a bishop. In the morning betimes he shall bring you some better clothing; and as for these,"

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said he, seizing hold of a remnant of Bilberry's coat-sleeve, "they will make a mop for the maid."

It may easily be believed how thankful the youth felt towards his clerical benefactor when he heard the above discourse fall from his lips, and with what delight he found himself thus unexpectedly fallen under protection again. He called to mind the loss of his mother with more composure than might have been expected, although he certainly would have contemplated it with a greater degree of satisfaction had that lady been left in a situation more agreeable to herself.

Early the next morning, according to promise, Caleb brought Bilberry a fresh suit of clothes; to him at least they were fresh, although he fancied they must at one time or other have been pretty well known to all the world beside. Nevertheless, they were not only better than his own, but also considerably bigger, (if we except the single article of Mr. Grimsby's waistcoat, which he had worn up to the present time,) allowing him plenty of scope

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and verge to grow without incurring any danger of bursting them like the skin of a growing onion. This will easily be understood when in short we say, they were a suit of the curate's own, and he of course was as yet a much bigger lad than Bilberry. In their



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youth their colour was black; but, having for many years been in a lingering decline, they had now naturally turned of a dusty sallow hue, and were moreover much fallen off in flesh, exhibiting at this protracted period little other than wrinkles and sinews.

On casting aside his corduroy breeches and putting on the parson's trousers, Bilberry encountered an unexpected difficulty, — his legs would not reach to come out at the ends of the sheaths. By the assistance of Caleb they were at length coaxed out, though in such a manner only that it brought the top of the trousers close under his chin instead of at the place where the tailor originally intended. The waistcoat, on the contrary, buttoned half way down his thighs, and the coat-tail touched the ground like a rook's. When fully equipped,

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Bilberry felt as if he were buried, the trousers serving him for coffin, and the coat for a pall. The collar stood close up against the back of his head as high as the crown, like a cold greasy wall; while his arms resembled sticks thrust up soughs. Viewed as a grand whole, Caleb thought he would scarcely look sufficiently imposing before the coroner; but, unable fully to decide upon it on the bare authority of his own taste, he fetched down the curate himself to confirm the doubtful affair. He was of the same opinion as his gravedigger, and, to remedy the matter, ordered Caleb to fetch his garden shears and cut the trousers off at the knees, and let the remainder down; to divide the waistcoat above the pockets, and remove the lower half; to cut the arms of the coat off at the elbows that the lad's extremities might protrude, and to cast away the tail altogether as an useless adjunct; leaving the rest for a jacket. This being done, Bilberry made comparatively a very respectable figure; and having also had the grease hoed off the collar, like turf off a garden-path, he felt comfortable in the extreme.

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CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH WILL BE FOUND AN EXACT MODEL OF MANY GREAT MEN'S  
ORATIONS.

SHOULD the reader feel not in a mood for relishing moving scenes and affecting discourses, we hereby forewarn him not to proceed farther •in the perusal of this chapter than the present sentence. The death of Bilberry's companion was sufficiently touching; but we may venture to assert that the inquest upon his body, and the solemn

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deliberations of the jurymen, will be found beyond comparison to excite pity and terror to a much more fearful degree. So much untutored sapience, so deep a gravity, as were then shown, and so many tender hearts as were there assembled together on such a tragical occasion, surely cannot fail to excite pitiful emotions in the breast of whoever shall peruse this story. And yet we know there are in the

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world a kind of pumpkin-headed witlings who love to make an exhibition of their philosophy by laughing over a corpse, and turning to mirth the collected sagacity and feelings of a whole parish or hundred. If the reader be one of this kidney, we pronounce him a goose beforehand, and recommend him to lay our book down that he may violate no man's pathetics by an unseasonable merriment. For, though it be admitted that some people do clothe their grief in a very odd garment, yet, should he once open his mouth to laugh before the verdict is finally given, he may without farther consideration or inquiry set himself down as a cinder with not a single tear in his tanks.

Throughout the preceding evening the parish constable had been so busily employed in summoning together the brain-pith and marrow of the place, that by half after ten on this melancholy morning there was scarcely a sage head within his jurisdiction that was not in attendance. Noah's Ark was the sign adopted by the benevolent village publican who the evening before had given Bilberry half a pint of ale,

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and whose house was now selected for the holding of the inquest. Many of the sapient parishioners had objected to sitting over the body under such a sign, because it was so directly, and as it were in the teeth of Providence, opposed to a case of drowning; while others of equal philosophic light took the matter in the opposite scale, and pronounced that no sign ever hung by man could be more appropriate to the case in hand, it having a certain connexion with the Great Deluge. And these last logicians were they that carried the day, though their victory is not rashly to be taken as evidence of the better cause; inasmuch as, when the case is fairly and impartially examined, it will be found that the most prevailing argument for holding the inquest there was, because there stood within ten miles round no other house at which it could be held.

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The body having been previously removed from the curate's house to the inn, there was plenty of time, before the arrival of the coroner and jury, for all tender-hearted people to gratify that certain strong curiosity which cannot but  
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be felt on these unfortunate occasions, to inspect the corpse of the deceased. Very early in the morning most of the hangers-on and the idlers of the village had assembled about the door of Noah's Ark, — as curious a company of strange animals as ever entered the door-way of that more ancient vessel from which it took its' name, — and by their numbers plainly pointed out that the place was about to become the scene of something extraordinary. In short, during several hours prior to the sitting of the inquest, it was a complete rendezvous for both the curious and the careless; and might rather have been mistaken for the entrance to a penny show, than judged for what it was in reality. Numberless were the gossips who passed in to take a glance of the body, and came out to prophesy to one another by what means, if they had been tried, his life would in all probability have been restored.

The good landlady herself, who by the great projection of her stomach might have been taken for a near relation to the famous Mrs. Burton, was all morning in a state of uncommon

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agitation in consequence of the recent melancholy event; rising from her breakfast half a score times, and working up and down stairs from the bar to the room in which the corpse was laid, and back again, like a perpetual motion; lamenting all the while that such little things as him should be so suddenly cut off before they had arrived at the age of manhood.

The bar-maid, a pretty creature, — the kitchen-girl, another pretty creature, with red forearms like two mangel-wurzel roots, — and the out-of-door-work wench, a sweet specimen of full-grown female mortality, had never an one of them seen a dead body in their lives; but knowing that they themselves must eventually come to the same condition, they expressed an earnest and serious desire to behold the body, that they might be the more forcibly reminded of their own latter ends: therefore, with permission of their mistress, each one of them severally and respectively took a very alarming look

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at the poor creature on the table. In like manner also, until the assembling of the jurors, was a great body of the virtuosos, curiosos,

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and antiquarians of the village wonderfully gratified.

When the combined brains of the country side were brought to a point, and the coroner for that division of the county had taken his official seat, Bilberry was summoned as a principal witness. When he entered the room, two or three purblind jurors mistook him for one of the curate's scarecrows; since, as he now learned for the first time, that gentleman was in the habit of dressing sticks in his own old clothes just as he had dressed witness, and erecting them like so many clerical students along the borders of his onion-beds and pea-rows. This degrading mistake being rectified, Bilberry was called upon to state what he knew touching the accident by which the poor youth over whom this inquest was held, had lost his life. In answer to which our hero had the surprising satisfaction of telling over again for the third time the same astonishing tale to nearly the same audience; since at least three fourths of the jurymen were present the

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previous evening when he first told it over the landlord's ale, while the remaining few strangers had doubtless heard it repeated by every mouth they had met on the high-roads since. The majority having thus some small previous insight into the facts of the case, he was not troubled with many questions, and was soon dismissed.

Next were called in the men who had fished the body out of the mill-dam, whilst half the population of the village, either as aiders and abettors or spectators, waited in readiness outside to attest if needful the truth of their statement that it was taken out, one of the selected jurymen having previously propagated his belief that the law required much evidence on that particular; so that every charitable soul, wishing to forward the ends of justice, thus generously left his private business at a stand-still in order that he might attend to the business of the public, which would have gone on equally well without him. These men having deposed to the taking out, and by dint of much speaking

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at length satisfactorily answered the interrogations of the learned jury as to whether the head or the heels came first, — if the beating of the heart could be perceived, — and whether the boy spoke after being taken out or not, were dismissed likewise. Then four huge fellows, whose bare words could hardly be taken, deposed on oath that they drained him, and found the body like a bottle of liquor. Various other sequent and less consequential matters having also been attested to, the jurymen felt satisfied with the perfect fulness and truth of what had been adduced, and proceeded to take a view of the body. Then the coroner addressed the jurors in the following eloquent speech, which we give exactly as delivered by the official orator himself:

“Gentlemen,” said he, “on rising to address you on this heart-rending, awful, and most tremendous occasion, I am quite conscious that it is an absolute impossibility for any language, either English, Greek, or Hebrew, to do justice to the most amazing excitement of my own feelings. Feeling as I do, gentlemen,

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— and feeling as you also must do, I think your own feelings will better explain to you how I feel than — than — in fact, gentlemen, to sum it all up in few words, I feel myself to be of the most wretched description.

“Having this poor boy here before us lying dead, and at full length, like a spring-onion pulled at an unexpected moment from its parent earth, — viewing, as we all do, this corpse now before our eyes, stiff in death, and returned to its mother dust, — perceiving, as even the most ignorant of us must perceive, that death in like manner will in all probability one day or other make us no more than the equals of this; what emotions, what sublime and terrific sensations, must fill our minds! For my own part, gentlemen, I must say, — and I speak it with all pomposity, — I feel very grand; and at the same time that I express that sentiment, I shall beg also to be permitted to hope that I may be allowed to express another. And what is this other? It is one, gentlemen, in which I confidently trust to find you all unanimously acqueeze with me. In plain language then, and

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to come at once to the business of this morning, I trust, gentlemen, it will be universally admitted that you have now heard all the evidence which has been delivered in your hearing. That is a position which, let me trust, I may assume with confidence; for I hope

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no doubt remains upon any of your minds of your not having heard what has been advanced by this respectable body of witnesses. However, it still, notwithstanding, yet remains with me as coroner for this northern division of our native county — a county which I may say, without flattery or egotistical insinuations, contains within its own limits some portion of the first intellect of the known world, — a county, gentlemen, in which the best hogs are bred, and which abounds in that pride and ornament of the human race, lovely and delicious women, — a county celebrated in the annals of our island as the scene of some of our most determined and obstinate engagements with those northern barbarous invaders the much-boasted Romans; though, if I am to express my own opinion upon the character of that foreign people, of whom some of the most learned of us have read

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the history of the notorious Doctor Goldsmith, a clever man in his way, but who met with but small encouragement, which I am sorry to say is too often the fate of genius; for — would you believe it, gentlemen? — I have read in some of my books that Mr. Goldsmith lived once in Green-Arbour court, which I am happy to be able to inform you from my own ocular inspection, as I have been in London, is a nasty, dark, contemptible alley against that huge prison the Old Bailey. — The Old Bailey, did I say? — yes, gentlemen, the Old Bailey, that sinkhole of corruption, and all that is abominable in human nature. For surely, gentlemen, it can be no new information to you, that all the scum and off-scouring of society is daily poured into the prison so called; though, for what reason, I believe is not satisfactorily known. If then, gentlemen, as a native of this county, and a subject of these mighty realms, whose dominion of the seas is indisputed from the eastern to the western poles, and from the tropic of Capuchin to the tropic of Crab, — if, as a free-born Englishman, and a loyal subject of the King, I may be allowed to express my private opinion of the

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Roman nation, I shall say, in the beautiful language of one of our own newspapers, it was too contemptible to be worthy of notice. And with that I dismiss that shabby people from my recollection.

“And now, gentlemen of the jury, I am arrived at that part of my present charge in which I feel myself called upon to say a few words upon the subject of my speech. But I

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beg to observe, in the first place, that it is not my intention to occupy much of your very valuable time in dwelling upon that with which you are already so well acquainted. It is needless for me to remark that when the body now before us was taken out of the water, all signs of life had fled. But, gentlemen, I do feel it incumbent on me to observe upon that fact; that though to your well-known ignorance it might appear that therefore the vital spark itself was fled, yet I have to inform you how in some particular cases a man may be drowned and alive at the same time. For this discovery I believe the world is indebted to the great Sir Isaac Newton, or, as he is sometimes poetically

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termed, the Immortal Bard of Avon. He it was, gentlemen, who first demonstrated that animation may be what is philosophically termed, suspended; as, for instance, when a man hangs himself up on a beam. There we have a proof positive of what that great oculist denominated suspended animation. In the same manner, a body like this on the table may appear to your weak eyes to be dead, when at the same time the vital spark is yet alive. Hence it is, that on occasions of this kind the body is blown into, either by bellows or mouth, for the purpose of setting that spark again in a blaze of life and glory. The present case, it appears, was not a case of this kind; though the Reverend Mr. Jagger, our invincible curate, did try every remedy to no purpose. The boy, it appears, voluntarily went into the water; therefore it is not a case of murder. There does not appear to have been any assault and battery committed by which an accident might have occurred: the whole circumstances are clear, and lucid, and translucent. In the last place, then, I hope you will consider amongst yourselves

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what verdict the case may to you seem to require; and with that hope I throw myself with confidence on your integrity and good sense.

“Firmly relying, gentlemen, on the proper discharge of your duties before this neighbourhood, the country, and the world, I leave the matter in your hands, fully convinced that you will speedily come to such a decision as shall seem in all its bearings of a character worthy to emanate from the suns of your superior wisdom.”

The coroner sat down amidst a buzz of admiration and applause.

The jurymen declared they saw the merits of the case exactly as had been described in the excellent speech of their coroner; notwithstanding which, there was an obstacle

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remaining to the giving in of their verdict, — they could not agree in their opinions; almost every man having one peculiar to himself, and which he esteemed as too highly valuable to be surrendered merely for the sake of pleasing his neighbours. One was for a verdict that the deceased

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died by the visitation of God; another, for temporary insanity; a third, for cramp in the stomach; while a fourth long-headed fellow, more deep than all the rest, would neither agree with his friends, nor deliver an opinion of his own beyond this, — that, bring in whatever verdict they might, a deodand of six shillings — the value of the boy, — ought to be laid on the river. This notion was set aside by the coroner himself, who burst into a loud laugh, and inquired of the philosopher who promulgated it, from whence he would get his money.

They argued two hours in the endeavour to reconcile one another to the adoption of one general opinion, but at the expiration of that time they were farther off an agreement than at first; having only talked up their individual bigotry and perverse stupidity, instead of producing mutual conviction: the burden of each one's song being that he had as good a right to his opinion as others had to theirs; they on the contrary replying, that they also had the same right to their opinions as he had to his.

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And thus, between their mutual rights, all went wrong together.

Seeing no prospect of a conclusion, the coroner at length put in: but it was only like stirring up the fire. They flared and flamed ten times fiercer than ever; began to denominate each other the most stupid and bigoted fellows that ever ate cabbage and bacon; and finally would have fallen to a general and indiscriminate basting of one another's hides, had not the coroner interposed with some very severe remarks upon their conduct, and called upon them to remember — what in all probability they had no perception of before — that they were men and Christians; concluding his harangue by informing them that they had better settle their verdict at first, one way or another, for they could not leave the room until they did. True or untrue, no one present was able to doubt his word; and as this alarming statement carried great weight in empty stomachs, — for many were now pining for their beans and beer, — the scale began to turn a little. The village baker, who had been all the morning the most noisy



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and strenuous oppositionist in the room, taking out his watch at this moment, found it was high time his pies and bread were drawn. "Gentlemen," said he, "if I do not go directly, I shall have my oven spoiled; so. for God's sake, bring in some sort of a verdict: I'll agree to anything you like. They are burning now, I know they are: I could almost fancy I smell them. Do let us agree to something." This short but pathetic appeal was not lost upon them: they all expressed their readiness to prevent so dreadful a sacrifice, or else it is not to be conjectured by what happy circumstance their discordant opinions would ever have been reconciled. Five minutes more had scarcely elapsed before they gave in the following verdict: — "Mr. Coroner. We see it is out of the question getting us all of a mind, so me and two or three chaps hereabout have agreed amongst ourselves to say as how we think this young fool went into the watter of his own accord; and as that argues that he drowned hisself of his own voluntary motions, we are datarmined to bring it in as ar vardick that he was

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guilty of a fellow d'ye see." The coroner told them that would not do; they must all be of one mind, and consider whether accidental death was not the most proper verdict. "Well, sur," replied the foreman, "onythink as you think well: we'll say onythink. Put it down as we are all of a mind that it is natteral death from natteral causes." The coroner complied with this, and the investigation ended.

Afterwards, the clothes of the boy were examined, when eightpence halfpenny were discovered by Bilberry to be missing from the breeches-pocket. Inquiry being made, it came out in explanation that Caleb had taken care of them, as a small recompense to himself for the labour of the grave which he expected having to dig. However, much to his sorrow and disgrace, he was obliged to refund, and the halfpence were put down to the parish, the overseers ultimately incurring a charge of one shilling by their conveyance and entry; so that the parish lost threepence halfpenny by the legacy. Nor were there wanting those rebellious paupers who, now an occasion offered, asserted their

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belief that much of the public business was carried on after a similar fashion.

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The curate received a vote of thanks for his humane attempts to restore the boy to life; and then the jury broke up, every man departing to his home in his own opinion a more shining character than he came.

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CHAPTER XIV.

A FUNERAL, WHEREIN THE PARSON IS BURIED INSTEAD OF THE CORPSE.

IN consequence of the hot weather, it so happened that the Reverend Mr. Jagger, the curate, returned from the inquest to his parsonage overcome with a thirst so dusty and deadly in its nature, that nothing could quench it save a drop of fine bottled ale, which he had some time kept cool in sawdust for his own particular consumption during midsummer. Of this, then, he took — as men who are dry most frequently will take — several very deep draughts, without at the moment considering what effect the liquor might eventually have upon his head. In few words, he very inadvertently took rather more than in a person of his cloth and dignity was exactly consistent or judicious, — viz. he

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suddenly got gleamy; though under circumstances which induce us to observe, that if ever man did get nappy by accident, it was the curate on this occasion. Truly he was himself quite unaware of it. He could not believe such a thing of himself; and yet, being rather in a doubt, he called up the servant-maid, and told her to look at him, to watch him walk in a straight line from one side of the room to the other along the carpet pattern, and then say whether in her opinion he was drunk or not. The girl laughed behind her apron, and pronounced that he could walk very straight indeed. On this he ordered up another bottle.

In the cool of the evening, when Caleb came to inform his master that the grave was dug, and everything made ready for the boy's burial, he found the curate asleep in his arm-chair, with two empty bottles before him, and on the table a glass containing about half a pint of that cool ale before mentioned, which he had forgotten to drink before his nap. The considerate Caleb, thinking his master had already imbibed a sufficiency, and feeling himself to be none of

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the moistest, finished up that little sup remaining, before he awoke the parson. This done, he silently set down the glass, and aroused Mr. Jagger from his torpor with the intelligence that everything was quite prepared.

“Coming, Caleb, directly,” said he. That functionary retired; and the curate, after first trying both bottles, leaned back again, and fell asleep.

An hour elapsed, during which time the gravedigger remained in a state of the most impatient anxiety, as the sun was now going down, and closing the evening upon them. Perceiving that his master did not make his appearance, Caleb again rushed into the curate’s presence, and startled that gentleman a second time from his repose, by assuring him it would be dark before they could get the body into the ground, unless it was done instantly, and without Christian service. This lifted the parson on to his legs; but at that moment he discovered, to his great grief, that he could not carry himself exactly upright. However, he assured Caleb he should do his best, beyond which nothing

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could reasonably be expected before God or man.

“Let every man do the same,” said he. “Do you take care to do the same, Caleb, and then you do all that is required of you. This, Caleb, is the true interpretation of the fable — I should say the parable — of the widow’s mite. That widow, Caleb, did not do much, you very well know. What she did was perfectly contemptible in itself; because, Caleb, what is a farthing? But when, in the third place, we consider that she was a widow, and very likely possessed of a great family of small children, — for that is the case with most widows, — then we observe, in the second place, how this mite of hers — picked, no doubt, off of her last scrap of cheese — though, as I before observed, so contemptible in itself, yet, you see, coming from her — a poor widow, with a great shoal of small-fry — it proves that the virtue of charity — the virtue, mind me, the virtue, Caleb — the virtue of charity is measured by the disposition. This widow — though what poor man’s relict she was I cannot tell, but she did all she could. That

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was enough; — so shall I do. Caleb! I am that widow — I am that relict. I feel myself not capable of above a mite on this occasion, but that mite I will do with all the pleasure

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in the whole world; and whoever looks for more than that at any man's hands, I say it, he is fit company for Beelzebub and all his angels."

Saying which, the curate forthwith staggered into the church, and, having put on his gown, sallied from thence into the yard; then, standing by the grave, he opened his book and read. As ill-luck would have it, a slight mistake occurred, for he happened to open in the wrong place; instead of the service for the dead, he fell upon matrimony.

Without in the least perceiving the difference, he proceeded to show them the causes why, and to what end, marriage was instituted; but when he came to stoop down for the purpose of joining the hands of the young couple, he incautiously projected his head beyond its very ticklish centre of gravity, and incontinently fell forwards into the hole.

Caleb, who had long been on the look-out for  
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a fit opportunity to discharge the many small debts of gratitude which he owed the curate, immediately fell to like a ditcher, filling in to the very best of his ability; and that that was not to be despised may be believed, when we say he had passed forty years of his life in the sole practice of filling and emptying. In a short time the ingenious curate would have been as well earthed as a badger in winter, had he not roared out so lustily, that some half-dozen of the rustic spectators rushed up at once to rescue him from jeopardy. Their friendly assistance, however, proved not so welcome as might have been expected, as the weight of so many clodpoles suddenly thrown on to the surrounding earth caused the sides of the hole to give way in an instant, by which the unlucky curate was jammed in faster than ever. He now cursed and swore at a rate which astonished the parishioners, and caused half of them to believe him a heretic to the back-bone. This made Caleb fearful lest the joke should be carried too far; so that, to save appearances, he threw down his shovel in a fury, and vowing

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vengeance on those who bid him fill in the earth, and calling on God to forbid he should ever live to bury his master, seized the parson by the chin and ears, and yerked him upwards several times, in order to loosen his roots. With the assistance of those at hand, he was at length extricated; though not until the loose sand had riddled itself through all the loopholes of his dress, and plentifully powdered the hair of his head over and above.

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The Sunday after this accident Mr. Jagger preached a sermon on the words "Swear not," in which he gave his audience to understand, that though the practice of cursing and swearing was altogether contrary to reason and the established religion, yet, as all humanity is frail and weak, it might sometimes happen that, when suddenly overtaken by accident or surprise, even the best of men might in a moment of passion utter phrases of an unbecoming nature. To such, however, a true Christian knew how to extend that charitable feeling and forgiveness of which every one then present stood so much in need. For himself, he was

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free to confess all his faults openly, as that was the part of a really honest man; he hated disguises and hypocrisy. He had not, it was true, been able at all times to command the devil within him; though perhaps upon the whole he had done it — his cloth allowed him to say without the imputation of vanity, he believed — as much as most men. For his part, occasional transgressions he never very seriously regarded in others, and the same liberality of judgment he was himself fully entitled to expect in return.

The congregation went away highly satisfied; declaring they never heard the curate deliver a sermon the meaning and application of which were more easy to their understandings.

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CHAPTER XV.

WHICH EVERY YOUTH WHO HAS A BEARD COMING WILL DO WELL TO  
READ.

FROM this time Bilberry feared being again cast alone into the world; but, as it proved, better fortune awaited him than he had reason to expect. On the following morning after the disastrous burial of the little Italian, the curate called Bilberry into his library, or rather, from the small number of his books, we should more properly say the closet in which his library stood; and bidding him first to sit down, gave him to understand that as he might now very properly be considered no better than a poor friendless orphan, he did not like to turn him adrift again, and therefore, if Bilberry would promise to be a very good boy and to do everything that his master should tell him, he would

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endeavour to get him a place under some one of the neighbouring farmers, where he might learn to make himself useful, and perhaps in the end, if he continued steady, like many poor youths before him, come to succeed to his master's shoes. Bilberry was not without some share of readiness, for when he heard the curate's observation he began to smile, and, lifting up his feet for that gentleman's inspection, said something to the purport that he had already succeeded to the shoes of several gentlemen, though, as plainly appeared from those he now had on, there were very few indeed of them that were worth getting into.

By the manner in which the Reverend Mr. Jagger received this witticism, it was evident he did not dislike the lad any the worse for his natural intelligence, although he certainly did express his regret that the boy had not been brought up in a sphere of life where the modesty and bashfulness of nature might have been nurtured instead of destroyed.

In this style did the curate continue to address young Thurland until he had preached [262] him no inconsiderable sermon; warning him by the way not only to attend with all his heart and mind to whatever new duties might be enjoined him, but also, above all things, to avoid the sin of drunkenness, and to keep out of ill company, lest he should suffer himself to be led astray by the force of bad example. "I observe too," said he, prying into the pores of Bilberry's face and shaking his head with much solemnity, "I am sorry to say I observe some remote signs that you have got a beard coming."

Bilberry himself was hitherto quite unconscious of that fact; but on hearing such a fearful charge from the mouth of the curate, he blushed and hung down his head.

"Yes, yes," continued Mr. Jagger, "you may well blush, for though at present there is nothing to fear, yet before you quit my roof let me warn you — you may find my observations come true before many years have passed over your head — let me warn you that these straggling hairs, my child, like wicked weeds, denote a rampant soil; they are a random corn

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which promise no good harvest; though yet only in the blade, they seem to warrant by their promised size and strength that you are likely to prove a rank coarse soil that will require much draining and cultivation. Not, Bilberry, that I blame you; no, no, — this is

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the work of nature, and a thing you cannot help; but it is my duty to put you upon your guard, to warn you as you grow up to be watchful over yourself and jealous of your inclinations. Knowing that these shoots, when once they begin to sprout, are but as the leaves before the fruit, you must be particularly cautious. Give no liberty to your eyes to ramble over the village girls; we have some great beauties here, and youth is easily seduced by beauty. It will be high time, quite high time, for you to look at a woman when you are forty, a good sober age; but for many years to come I must advise you totally to eschew that sinful sex which caused the fall of man.”

On hearing this, Bilberry could not restrain himself from laughing.

“I do not like to see this levity,” continued

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the Reverend Mr. Jagger; “on such an occasion as this, it is imperative on a youth like you to observe the most strict decorum. These are not subjects for mirth; still, I am aware they will tickle young fancies, and therefore we must admit a little excuse. Nevertheless, store up in your mind what I have told you; recollect it at the proper time, and then this present thoughtlessness will be of no signification: — I shall quite forgive it.”

Having finished this preliminary discourse, the curate made Bilberry a present of a rusty old razor like a scimitar; though, to common eyes, the youth had no appearance of being likely to require such a tool for some three or four years to come, at least.

The more provident Mr. Jagger told him, if he would but keep it by him, it would be ready against a day of need. Young Thurland not only promised to do this, but also to make use of it at the earliest opportunity. He concluded all by putting the weapon into his coat pocket.

The parson then farther observed, he had already spoken to Mr. Zachary Blunt, one of

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the principal farmers of the parish, about taking Bilberry into his employ; and that he had promised to carry the youth down to that person’s house on the very morning of which we are speaking, to know whether Mr. Blunt would approve of him. He then ordered Bilberry to tell Caleb to furnish him with a better pair of shoes; and to get himself clean washed, and ready to go down to the farmer’s. This the youth instantly set

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about, though eventually he found it much easier to tell Caleb to find him a pair of shoes than it was for that worthy to execute the commission. In truth, Caleb held all his master's old shoes as a perquisite appertaining to himself, for which reason he said he did not care to empty his own stores for the service of such a tinker's brat as Bilberry. But on the youth threatening to go back and inform the parson what his clerk had said, the latter menaced him with a cuff on the head and set about in search of a pair. After half an hour's choosing for the worst pair in the lot, which was far from inconsiderable, they were at length reluctantly given up; but not until their comparative

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merits had been carefully balanced against those of every other pair, and in every instance found wanting: yet they were better than those which Bilberry at present had on; and accordingly he lost no time in exchanging one for the other, and then waiting on the curate to be conducted by him to the house of his future master, Zachary Blunt.

How Bilberry sped with that whimsical character, together with some account of his household, and the ultimate employment of the former, may be found in the next longer chapter.

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CHAPTER XVI.

WHEREIN THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO A NEW CHARACTER, WITH  
WHOM HE CANNOT FAIL TO BE PLEASED.

WE should here make a remark, which might confidently be pronounced the result of our own observation, had we not unfortunately been born into the world so late, that many other men have had time and opportunity to make it before us, and so to hand it down for our own use ready cut and dried. It is this: — that those circumstances of life which at the time of their occurrence we may lament, and consider as the most unfortunate that could have happened, often prove eventually, perhaps, the very foundation-stone of all our future well-doing.

At the time when Bilberry Thurland was so suddenly deprived of his mother, and left entirely

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destitute, that youth could by no means have imagined how those events would prove the cause of his subsequent introduction to a new, and in every respect a better, situation



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in life. Such, however, now appeared to be the case; and with great satisfaction indeed did he follow the curate into the wide and abundant-looking farm-yard, crowded with waggons, and idle cattle, and poultry of all kinds, which lay before the house of Mr. Zachary Blunt.

The curate was proceeding leisurely up to the house, stepping from stone to stone through a swamp of stable-drainings and litter, when, happening to cast his eye into an outhouse as they passed, he espied Mr. Blunt himself engaged in the superintendence of two of his men, who apparently were bleeding a calf that lay upon a bed of straw inside. With both his hands in his coat-pockets, which were made to admit them without the least inconvenience, being placed straight down by his sides like a pair of panniers, Mr. Blunt gave his directions now and then, as things went not exactly to his mind; and between whiles, as he attentively watched

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the operation, he snored nearly as loud as a pig. Perceiving the parson and young Bilberry approaching the door, he turned his whole body about; his neck, it must be observed, being too short and thick, and deeply set in his shoulders, to admit of the least twist. In a tone of the most perfect indifference, and without taking his hands from his pockets, he invited them into the house, himself leading the way across the yard, spreading out his coat-laps as he went like the wings of a beetle, and treading straight through the stable-drainings and splash, which the curate had been so careful to avoid, with as firm and well-pronounced a step as if he were on the clean high-road.

There were several of those luxuriant peony-faced lasses about the house and the doorway, who always do the heart good to look at, scouring milk-tins, or churning, or pumping water. One of these Mr. Blunt sent into the cellar for a jug of ale.

Bilberry's heart gladdened within him at the thought of living there, as he cast a rapid eye over the inside of the houseplace, and marked

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the huge flitches of bacon and the ponderous hams with which the rafters were so abundantly hung, that they almost appeared to shorten the height of the room. And then there was the gun suspended on two nails along the principal beam, and a dry old branch of misletoe in the centre, which had remained there ever since Christmas; and in a far corner, next the fireplace, hung some dozen brown-paper bags, containing various

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dried kitchen herbs, of excellent power in the concoction of those abundant dishes which now thronged on Bilberry's hungry imagination as thick as rain.

After Mr. Blunt had made some remarks to the curate, purporting that Bilberry was what he called "a gain-looking lad enough," and had questioned him a little, to "try his sharpness," he told Mr. Jagger he would keep him, now he was there. Then, in order to afford him' a specimen of the duties he would have to perform, he asked the youth himself if he could eat some bread and cheese. Bilberry replied that he could eat a good deal; upon which old Blunt burst out a-laughing, and bid the girl fetch it

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up. Bilberry's education and training had been such as necessarily rendered him anything but bashful at eating before strangers; so that when his new master had cut a lump of such a size that the lad at first felt almost terrified at it, he fell to at once, without more ceremony than if he had been a cow newly turned from the commons into a field of clover. The parson cared not to take anything beyond a glass of Mr. Blunt's stout ale, of which he spoke in terms of high praise. While tipping this, he and his entertainer — for Mr. Jagger dwelt on very familiar terms with all his flock, especially the good-woolled ones — entered into a discourse upon the forward harvest; from that the conversation expanded upon corn in general; and afterwards, by an easy transition, it fell to a discussion upon the various qualities of bread. Mr. Blunt, in illustration of some of his own observations, soon began to instance the cake upon his table, remarking, that though that was their common bread, he never tasted it from one year's end to another.

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Jagger," said he, "I

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always have a loaf of my own. It is made for myself, and nobody touches it but me. I like a bit of brown bread sweet and good; and as to our folks, they all eat just what suits 'em."

Blunt then bade the maid fetch out his loaf, that the parson might taste of it. When placed on the table beside the other bread, it had much the appearance of a creole beside a white man. "There," Mr. Blunt remarked, taking it up between his fingers and thumb, and handing it to the curate, "that is the bread I have been eating by myself the last twenty year. It is half rye, — I grow a little field on purpose, — and eats as sweet as a nut."

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The curate cut off a bit about the size of a pease-cod to taste of, and, more out of compliment than liking, pronounced it without doubt very good.

“Yet these wenches of mine,” exclaimed Farmer Blunt, “wunna eat that bread! They mun have it fine, like other folks. But I never interfere with ’em — they do as they like.”

Mr. Jagger smiled at the characteristic easiness of temper evinced by the old farmer even

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in so trivial a circumstance as this; the wenches of whom he spoke not being, as might be supposed, his own daughters, but the servants.

Indeed, it was not until he had been fixed in the household some time that Bilberry found out whether or not Mr. Blunt had any daughters of his own; though at last he learned, — not by any particular communication on the subject, but through what he could pick up in common conversation, — that the old man had two daughters, who both were married, and residing in the village. Whether their mother, Mr. Blunt’s wife, was dead or alive, he could not so readily determine; for, though he remarked an old woman, who almost always sat from morning till night in a recess beside the fire-place, and who was addressed and spoken of as Mrs. Blunt, Bilberry was not sufficiently skilled in such matters of judgment as to be able to determine whether she was his master’s wife or his mother. That she was one of the two he felt certain, from the extreme and unusual care with which Zachary Blunt caused her to be always treated, and the violent expressions he would

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make use of if ever he observed any of the girls laughing at her oddities; although to prevent it on every occasion was a somewhat difficult matter with everybody except himself, she being grown not only very whimsical through age, but also stone-deaf, so that the mistaken answers she occasionally made to what was shouted into her ears were of the most ludicrous description.

These characteristics seem naturally to decide that the old woman was Mr. Blunt’s mother, and not his wife; so Bilberry eventually found. And when, the first Sunday after his settlement in that gentleman’s household, he was taken to church along with all the other men-servants to hear Mr. Jagger’s morning sermon, he read the last short chapter

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of the brief history of his master's family on the single page of a gravestone. Close by the south porch of the church stood a tall sculptured slate with a gilt border, and an ornamented line of division down the middle, making the face of the stone like the two columns of a page, on one side of which was an inscription to the memory of Elizabeth Blunt,

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wife of Zachary Blunt, farmer, with a simple tribute to her virtues as a wife and mother; and beneath all was that touching sentiment from the New Testament, so often, but not too often, seen on gravestones, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for their works do follow them." The other side of the division line was blank; but it told who should yet lie there, as well as if already written on. The date of the year in which Mr. Blunt's wife died proved that not more than twelve or fourteen months had passed since that event. And though from the very first the old man had somewhat oddly refused to put on the usual show of mourning, — for he even insisted on going to her funeral in his regular blue worsted stockings and corduroy breeches, — the inward memory and feeling were yet not all exhausted: for after church-time, when the act of worship may be supposed to have given a solemn tone to his mind, and to have awakened again those tender sensibilities which perhaps are to be found the purest in the most uncultivated bosoms, though they sleep during the ordinary

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routine of life as though they did not really exist, Bilberry observed old Blunt as he came out of the porch turn towards his wife's grave; cast, for the thousandth time, a hurried glance along the epitaph; and then, with a quivering lip that betrayed a too full heart, and a quickened step which seemed to bespeak a secret wish to be unseen, he made haste to get back home.

Blunt was a regular English churchman of the right old farmerish religion; that is, he held the Sabbath as a kind of weekly scraper, on which to free the soul from the dirt of the last six days' sin. He went to church with his men in the morning; he had the Bible read to both men and maids for the exact space of an hour in the afternoon; and after that they were free to gossip, sleep, or go a-courting, as best suited their inclinations, till six o'clock. Evening service he made them all attend together; while he himself either

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rambled about his homestead to look after things a little, putting a flake into the gap of a broken fence, or giving the neglected waggon-wheels an occasional lick

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of grease; or else he smoked a pipe, and drank his own ale, — always out of a silver tankard, — until his nose grew ripe, and he slid into a nap to conclude with. In doing thus, he believed he fulfilled the main scope of religion; he put it, like his best coat, on and off with the day; and for the rest of the week he violated some half-dozen of the ten commandments with the most Christian confidence and indifference. Besides this, he was in other respects an odd man. He made his memorandums of business, and chalked up the majority of his accounts, inside his sheds and stables, and on the walls all about his farm-yard. The consequence of keeping so extensive a ledger was this, that not unfrequently after chalking on a particular account, and wishing to refer to it half an hour after, he did not know where to find it, would fly into a great passion with himself, and when, perhaps three months after it had become useless, he happened by chance to detect it placed in some conspicuous situation, on purpose that it might not be overlooked, he would laugh heartily to think he had not found it before.

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Under this gentleman's care, Bilberry learned many of those useful occupations which belong especially to the farmer's boy. He became a generally useful character in the homestead, and eventually lived in this rustic capacity several years.

His first employments were chiefly of the simplest kind. Morning and night, in those seasons when the cows were milked in the farmyard, it was his office to fetch them from the fields and drive them back again; when milked in the fields, to assist the maids in carrying the pails home: to feed the poultry and the pigs: to rise by day-break in spring, and go to the distant fields driving away the rooks from the spring-sown corn; and when in green ear, to take a pole while the morning dew yet lay on the grass so heavy that to walk through it was like wading through a streamlet, and, going round the unsown borders of the fields, to beat out from the hedge-rows the innumerable flocks of sparrows which assemble to invade the yet soft and resistless grain.

By degrees he grew up from these budding

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into more full-blown employments; becoming in turn a waggoner, a ploughman, a reaper — in short, considering his age, a pretty respectable master of most ordinary rural occupations.

During this period, circumstances would sometimes occur which caused him to recollect his mother with regret, and to feel some anxiety about her ultimate fate; for it must be observed, that as Bilberry himself became more accustomed to the pleasures and comforts of his new life, he could not but contrast it the more strongly with what might be the unfortunate fate of her to whom he owed his existence. At the end of the first six months, which he recollected as the expiration of the period of Mrs. Thurland's confinement in the neighbouring town prison, he even ventured to indulge a thought that she might chance on her liberation to direct her steps the same way which he himself had taken after his own discharge from the police-office, and so perhaps again fall in his way while on her rambles through the village wherein he now resided.

But this possibility, however pleasant for  
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him to calculate on, never came to pass. The time went by, accumulating month on month, until the total improbability of her ever appearing in that quarter caused him gradually to think less and less of the circumstance, until at length he regarded it no more.

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CHAPTER XVII.

FARMER BLUNT FALLS ILL. — A STRANGE INTERVIEW BETWEEN HIM  
AND THE DOCTOR.

UNIVERSIFIED by incident, Bilberry thus passed three or four years of a more useful, though, for our purposes, a more dull and uninteresting life than those portions of it which either preceded or followed this period; a circumstance ultimately occurring which caused him to forsake the only useful business he had learned, and betake himself again to that wandering and eventful mode of life in which he had begun the world, and for which it appeared he still retained a secret relish.

This circumstance was of a melancholy nature, being no other than the death of his master, old Zachary.

It was towards the beginning of summer

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when the old farmer first fell ill. He said not a word to any one concerning the change in his health, until, from his altered looks, the members of the household first discovered it themselves; and even then it was with some difficulty he was brought to acknowledge any ailment. Particulars or symptoms he never would, nor, up to the hour of his death, ever did describe to either his own family or the physician. At first, he was recommended by those about him to try some of the domestic medicines with which, and the knowledge of administering them from half a pint to a gallon, most country people are pretty well acquainted. Bitter teas were made for him, and either stood till they went mouldy or were drunk by those whom nothing ailed. Salts were sent for from the town, but he would have none of them; and those who bought, bought only for their own consumption, as he turned the whole lot back upon their hands.

At length Blunt grew so bad that he could no longer attend to the business of his farm, but passed his days very uneasily in creeping about the house and yard. Next, he could

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scarcely move from his chair; and then it was that his two married daughters, who had frequently before been to see him, positively insisted on his having a physician.

“No, no,” replied Mr. Blunt, “I tell you again I wanna have any doctors. You may be doctoring all your life if you will. Once begin with ’em, and you never know when to leave off again. I hate doctors, and I wanna have one. Doctors is only fit for women lying-in.”

The married daughters smiled at the old man’s bigotries, but assured him he was every day getting worse and worse.

“I dunna care,” answered Zachary; “I never was badly in my life before, and I never took physic, bit nor drop. I shall be better soon. Look what an appetite I have gotten; and while I can keep filling in that way, much harm canna come, I’m sure.” And the old boy chuckled as if in the main he felt himself all right.

Two or three other days passed on, and yet with all his eating and drinking he grew no better. The daughters and their husbands,

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and even his deaf mother, endeavoured to prevail on him to have a doctor, but he remained as stubborn as ever. "This is the best physic for me," said he, as, with undiminished appetite, he cut a round of his own loaf with about half a pound of cheese to it, and swallowed another tankard of ale. To such an argument, reply they had none; but, on returning to their own homes, the daughters and their husbands were unanimously of opinion that the old man looked decidedly worse; and fearful lest he should at once fall off the shelf, they determined on their own authority to send him a physician, — not, however, without having first informed that professional character of every circumstance of the case prior to his paying his first visit, in order that he might not be taken unawares should his patient give him a somewhat unusual reception.

The very next morning after his children had formed the above resolution, Zachary was sitting in his accustomed corner of the houseplace, from whence he had a clear survey of the farm-yard, when, looking through the window,

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he suddenly called to one of the servant-girls to shut and bolt both front and back-door instantly: he had seen the physician tying his horse at the gate. Not knowing exactly what to think of this singular order, the lass stood half doubtingly until it was repeated with greater emphasis, and accompanied by a dishcloth that happened to lie within old Zachary's reach, and which to command obedience he sent with all his remaining strength at her head. Barely had she time to fasten the door before the doctor knocked. The lass was about to unbolt it again, had not Mr. Blunt shouted to her quite loud enough for the physician, or even his horse, to hear, to let the door be shut, for he wanted no doctors to come to him. Notwithstanding this, the doctor knocked again still louder. ("Do at your peril!" exclaimed Zachary, shaking his head threateningly at the girl, who again half instinctively was putting her fingers on the bolt.

After several times knocking, and finding no answer made to his summons, the doctor went round to the back of the house; but, mistaking

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the places of entrance, he very gravely knocked at the door of an out-house instead of at the door of the kitchen. On perceiving this remarkable mistake of the doctor's, old Blunt burst into the most hearty laughter, and turning to the girl, who also was most bashfully amused, he told her to let him in there as soon as she liked.



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Having knocked to his heart's content, the physician appeared to conclude that they had no intention of admitting him, for he turned again down the yard, and, to Mr. Blunt's great joy, mounted his horse and rode off.

The old man's last fit of laughter had sorely shaken him. Heretofore, he did not think himself half so bad as he now really felt. He was astonished to find his strength so soon exhausted; he turned sickly, and, before he had time to speak, fainted in his chair. The stoutest maids were called in to support him, while the feeble old woman, his mother, in a quivering voice, piped to them to get a sup of water; though from her extreme age she spoke with no

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more energy than if she were coolly asking for a sup to wash her hands in.

While they were thus engaged, the physician, who had only been to the house of one of Mr. Blunt's daughters for farther instructions, returned with the husband of the lady to assist him in effecting an entrance; but as the doors had been unfastened in the mean time, they accomplished their object without violence. When Mr. Blunt was recovered sufficiently to be enabled to see, the first person he beheld was that arch-enemy of his, the doctor, standing in the middle of the house-floor before him. He had not life enough to discharge him off the premises, though that gentleman certainly anticipated from his patient nothing less. Zachary's first words were addressed to the same girl to whom he had so very recently addressed the dish-cloth.

“Consarn your jacket, Nance! — what did you let him in for?”

From this expression the physician judged it would be necessary to resort to strong measures

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if he were to have any authority with his patient; and as he thought this could by no means be so well attained as by awakening him, if possible, to a sense of his real situation, he at once assured Mr. Blunt that seriously he was in a dangerous state; and, unless he would immediately consent to take what medicines might be ordered, his life could not be ensured for a week. This, the old man took with a more favourable seriousness than they who knew him had ventured to hope. It was evident he had not expected to hear so solemn an opinion; and during the space of some seconds he kept his eyes turned down in the deepest silence. Then, drawing a long half-sighing breath,

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he lifted up his head, and observed, “Well, if I mun die now, I wanna have to die another time; that’s all.”

Nevertheless, Mr. Blunt did not appear to entertain any particular liking to die now instead of at another time, for without any farther observation he allowed the physician to feel his pulse and see his tongue — almost as broad as a neat’s; though he would not answer a single

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question as to the state of his body, thinking that was a subject which no man had a right to inquire into.

“You must go to bed,” said the doctor, “directly, and not get up again on any account without my knowledge.”

“Ay,” observed Zachary, “and that you call doctoring, do you? Then none of it for me. Early to bed and early to rise, — that’s my maxim. I know there isn’t onything like being up in a morning for keeping folks in health. I go to bed regularly at nine o’clock at night, and I shall get up at four o’clock to-morrow morning as sure as you stand there. I haven’t riz by daylight every day of my life to go and lie in bed that fashion at last of all, I’ll awarrant you. When I lie in bed later than four, or five at most, it will be when I dunna know how to get up.”

“You must change your diet,” again remarked the physician, “and quite leave off eating meat and cheese; and you must not touch a drop of ale.”

“Not drink ale! — am I to live?” asked Zachary,

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somewhat indignantly. “I reckon next I munna smoke a bit of ’bacco.”

“No smoking, on any account,” interrupted the doctor.

“No smoking, and no ale!” ejaculated the astonished Mr. Blunt. “Why, I tell you what, John,” turning to his son-in-law, “you’ve sent him to kill me; you mean him to be the end of me. Here I have been drinking ale ever since I was ten year old till now, — that’s how long? — Why, I have been drinking ale these five-and-fifty year, and it never hurt me yet. — I never had onything amiss with me in my life; and now I’m to leave it off, am I? If ale would do me ony harm, I should think five-and-fifty year is time enough to do it in. But it hasn’t yet; so I should think it never will. However, if it will, it may; for I wanna leave it off, now I’m so old, for all th’ doctors in th’ world.”

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The physician smiled, and having written his prescription, and promised to send in the afternoon a mixture, and a blister to be put at the

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back of Mr. Blunt's ears, he bade the old farmer good morning.

No sooner had the doctor departed than, as usual on occasions of disagreement like this, Mr. Blunt began to express his opinions of the physician and his advice in far less measured terms than he had adopted while that professional character was present. On the other side, his son-in-law John, and John's wife, who came in just when the doctor departed, exerted all their eloquence to persuade the old man to submit to the doctor's directions, and take quietly whatever medicines should be ordered for him. But Mr. Blunt grew very turbulent under their advices, and in particular was his indignation aroused when they spoke about the blister.

"He shanna blister my ears like a horse!" he exclaimed; "they want no blistering at my time of life. I have managed so long without blisters, and I think I can manage a bit longer. If it comes, I tell you I wanna have it on, — I wanna use it for nobody. Blister yourselves, if

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you mun buy it. Put it on my mother's ears, — she wants blisters more than I do, and perhaps it may do her good. But as sure as ever it comes under this roof, without it be for somebody else, I'll patch it on to the windows, so I tell you. Him a doctor! Why, he knows no more about it than you do. Did you ever hear onybody talk such nonsense as he does? To think of sending me to bed here afore dinnertime, and never letting me get up no more! And no ale! — If my old missis was here, she'd be worth a hundred of him. Mary, my wench!" — and Blunt called the servant to his side, — "do you remember, I wull have my ale as usual, — a pint at dinner, and a pint after. I dunna care what he says, — he talks like a fool. I wonder what you mun fetch him for. You know I dunna want no doctors. I tell you I wanna make a 'pothecary's shop i' my belly for nobody."

The young lady, formerly Miss Blunt, now addressed the old man her father, telling him he certainly was the most stupid man she ever came near in all her life.

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"Only to think, now —" said she; but he impatiently interrupted her.

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“You may call me stupid if you like; only, if this be stupidity, I wish everybody were as stupid as I am, and then there would not be so many of these doctors maintained as there is. Let natur have her way, I say: she is th’ best doctor ony day. What’s all these foreign physics good for? Trash and stuff! Only folks mun have summut from abroad, if it be only to poison theirselves wi’. Give me a good brown loaf and a sup of ale; and then, if I can’t live without physic, I’ll die, and welcome.”

No persuasions could induce Mr. Blunt to go to bed. He declared he would sit where he was as long as he could stick on an end; because it was much better to be up and knocking about, so long as folks could do it, than to lie in bed till one’s joints were stiff. Unhappily, however, he was obliged to give way to his own feelings, and in the evening to retire two hours sooner than ordinary.

Next morning the physician again paid the  
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old farmer a visit. He found Mr. Blunt taking his usual luncheon of bread and cheese and ale.

“If you are to have my advice, sir,” said he to his patient, “you must not eat and drink these things. It is throwing medicine away.”

Blunt began to laugh, as he remarked that that was the best thing to be done with it.

The doctor now inquired whether the blister had risen favourably.

“It has riz rarely,” replied Mr. Blunt; “higher than any blister you ever saw before.”

The physician was pleased to find that his patient had at least put it on, though it was almost more than he had expected.

“Let me see it?” said he, making as if to peep round the screens of Mr. Blunt’s ears.

“There it is over your head,” replied the old farmer, pointing upwards. “See you, doctor; I said it had riz a good height.”

The doctor turned the eggs of his eyes up, and beheld his blister plastered on to the ceiling.

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At the discovery of this practical joke Blunt began to laugh; and, though evidently the physician felt himself offended, he could scarcely withhold a smile. But he made no farther inquiries; only telling the old man, before he went, that if he would not at once

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conform to his directions, in all probability he would never recover: "I advise you," he concluded, "to send for another physician."

Saying which, he bade his patient good morning, and never came to see him again.

Three days later, and the old farmer was obliged, though very much against his own consent, to keep his bed altogether. His family and friends now became seriously concerned for him; and, as he no longer retained his usual appetite for either victuals or ale, at which he himself felt much astonished, he yielded to their remonstrances and solicitations, and consented both to have another physician and to take his physic; though he still obstinately refused to answer any questions as to his feelings and particular ailings.

At length he became rather delirious, or, to  
[296] speak more properly, we should say slightly insane. Then his strength seemed to return; but it was an unnatural strength, and he insisted on getting up. In this state the physician did not deem it advisable to irritate him by contradictions or opposition, so that the old man was suffered to have his will. He rose about his usual time — four o'clock, although, from the state of his mind, it was evidently more through the force of that habit which had become to him like a natural instinct, than from a real knowledge of the hour; and, for several days together, he seldom would consent to go to bed again before nine at night.

During this period of slight insanity, Mr. Blunt played some rather whimsical antics, which, however in one sense distressing to the mind of an observer, could not fail, when considered apart from the unfortunate agent in them, to excite ludicrous sensations.

In the daytime he would ramble as usual about his farm-yard and home-fields, giving at times pretty sane directions to his men, and

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then again mingling up with his orders the most odd conceits imaginable.

One day when Blunt was in the yard, young Bilberry informed him that one of the waggons was broken. Zachary expressed a wish to see it himself, so that Bilberry led his master to where it stood. His own first interview with the physician seemed to run in the old man's head, for on approaching the vehicle he placed his fingers near the bottom of the only remaining shaft, as if to feel its pulse. Having satisfied himself on that

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particular, he stood erect, and very seriously told it to put its tongue out. This ideal ceremony having been also gone through, he looked full at the front of the waggon, and with great gravity addressed it in the following speech:

“I wull tell you at first, sir, you are in a dangerous state; and if you wanna take my physic, I wanna answer for your life a week longer. You mun go to bed directly, and munna on no account get up again wi’out my orders. Then you munna eat meat and cheese,

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nor drink a drop of ale. No smoking allowed. I shall send you a mixtur this afternoon, and a blister to put behind your ears.”

He then turned to go home, as if for the purpose of preparing his prescription; but when he had proceeded half a dozen yards, he suddenly turned back again, and with his hands scraping together a compound of straw, dung, and stones, he hurled it furiously at the waggon, crying out all the while, “This is the mixtur, sir, this is the mixtur!” Nor did he relax this exercise until a heavy rain drove him to take refuge in the house.

It continued to rain throughout that day, so that during several hours Mr. Blunt remained contented at home; but in the evening no persuasions in the power of those about him to make could prevent his going out amidst the storm. Finding this impossible, his old deaf mother, who of all the members of the household preserved the greatest influence over him, took his great-coat out of a drawer, and giving it to him, observed, “Here, take this; put it on, put it on; it will keep thee warm, my lad.”

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Zachary put it and went into the rain. Next morning, after taking his breakfast, he sat musing in his old corner of the house, when a sudden thought seemed to cross his mind. He rose from his seat, went to the peg on which his great-coat had been suspended, and, taking that garment down, he wrapped it into a compact form and clapped it on to the kitchen fire, repeating at the same moment the words which his mother had addressed to himself the previous evening — “Put it on, put it on; it will keep thee warm, my lad.” One of the girls observed the transaction, and would have rescued the woollen martyr from the flames, but at her approach Mr. Blunt assumed such a menacing aspect that she dared no farther attempt to interfere, and the coat was totally consumed.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

CONTAINS, BESIDES OTHER MATTERS OF IMPORTANCE, A VERY  
PATHETIC INTERVIEW BETWEEN MR. JAMES BLUNT AND HIS MOTHER.

AFTER this unfortunate mad bout, Mr. Blunt became rapidly worse and worse. He no longer had strength to get out of bed; he fell off in rotundity like a frost-bitten turnip; and the physician assured the old man's friends that his patient had delayed too long, and was now not likely to live beyond five or six days at most.

It having also been made known to the departing soul himself that the time was now arrived when he had better consider of putting his affairs in order, and fitting his mind to a final separation with this world, he remarked that, as he had attended church regularly every week since the first hour he could remember, he had not much to balance with anybody, and

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therefore what he had to do might be done in little time.

He expressed a great desire to see a brother of his, Mr. James Blunt, of whom he always had been particularly fond, in his way, and who also was extremely attached to Zachary.

This Mr. James Blunt was, like his brother, a farmer. He lived at the village of Straggle-coats, a distance of thirteen miles from Zachary's residence. And as the old man's life could not be calculated on, it was considered proper to send to the brother immediately. Young Bilberry was selected as a competent messenger, and the same day dispatched on horseback to Stragglecoats, carrying his master's earnest wishes to see his brother.

While riding through the village before reaching Mr. Blunt's house, Bilberry heard a travelling cutler by the roadside crying knives and scissors to grind. The voice struck his ear as one which he had heard at some former time; though where, or whose it could be, he had not at the moment the most remote recollection. When he had passed some obstructing

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buildings and come within sight of the grinder, he observed, as the man stood at his engine, that he had a wooden leg. The truth crossed him instantly; this man was no other than his own mother's old friend and ally, Mr. William Spowage. Apparently he had

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abandoned chair-mending and the practice of medicine alike, and by stress of hard fortune been driven to adopt another of those changes so numerous in his career, and betake himself for a living to sharpening the spuds and scissors of the country lads and damsels.

Bilberry rode up, and asked William how he did; but the noise of his wheel prevented him hearing distinctly what the youth said. Guessing, however, that it must be something about business, he lifted the knife which he was grinding off the stone, and, turning his face up without stopping his wheel, observed, "I'll do it for a penny and then he began to whistle very much after the same manner in which it will be remembered he whistled at Squire Barton's. Bilberry smiled on receiving such a

[303] strange answer; but perceiving that Mr. Spowage did not know him again, in consequence of his improved size, his better dress, and his being on horseback, he repeated his question, asking further whether he did not remember Bilberry Thurland? The hero now looked at him very closely: "Why, is your name Thurland?" Bilberry assured him that it was. "You're right," said William: "I know you now, though I didn't at first;" and he thrust out his hand to salute him. "Why, how come you here? — and on a horse an' all! What! is it one you've prigged? — And where is your mother?"

The youth gave Mr. Spowage to understand that since he last saw him he had been in a different school to what he was in then; and that he had not seen his mother several years, — hardly since the time of their parting at the roundhouse. This very much excited Mr. Spowage's surprise; he stopped his engine altogether, and would not be satisfied until Bilberry had given him a brief account of whatever

[304] principal adventures had occurred between that time and the present. When he had concluded,

"Yes, yes," said William, "you are doing rarely. You are a good deal better off than I am. Can't you do a trifle for an old family friend, now, — just in the way of a little assistance, like?"

Bilberry replied that though he got plenty to eat, drink, and wear, he did not handle much money; a shilling and twopence were all he had about him. Mr. Spowage said that that would be of more use to him than none; and if Bilberry wanted any knives grinding,



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he would grind them for him and welcome. The youth then made William a present of his only shilling; and thinking it somewhat incumbent on him also to encourage the veteran's business, he pulled out of his pocket that remarkable razor which it will not be forgotten was given to him by the Reverend Mr. Jagger, and which from that day up to the present he had used instead of a pocket-knife. Now, however, as he expected shortly getting in his first harvest, he

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wished to turn it to its legitimate uses; and his meeting with William Spowage being very opportune for the purpose, he requested that gentleman to grind it again into a razor, saying that he had to transact a little business farther up the village, and he would take it as he came back again.

Mr. Spowage tried it on his wheel, remarked that it was a piece of capital stuff, and promised it should be quite ready on his return. Bilberry then rode forward to the house of brother Blunt, expecting to see friend Spowage again very shortly.

However, before we accompany him thither, and to avoid returning to the subject again, we may here remark that this interview between these old acquaintances was concluded almost as unexpectedly as it begun; for when Bilberry eventually returned to take his razor and a final adieu, he found that in the mean time Mr. Spowage had seized a convenient opportunity to wheel his engine and himself clear off with the shilling, and the "piece of capital stuff" also, in his possession.

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This incident, however characteristic of an ungrateful spirit, did not occupy Bilberry's thoughts very long. The fearful condition of his master, who was in the main an excellent one, and with whom he had now been long enough really to regret him, soon drove all lesser considerations out of his mind; or, if his thoughts did once or twice revert to the circumstance which had just happened, it was not so much with unpleasant feelings, as with surprise that a man to whom he had behaved so well should have been guilty of such a despicable larceny upon him for so small a value.

Bilberry found Mr. James Blunt to be a gentleman bearing in outward figure a strong resemblance to his brother Zachary, but apparently not quite so original in his inner man. His principal qualities seemed to be great goodness of temper and tenderness of heart.

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When the young man had related to him the condition in which his brother Zachary lay, the desires which he had expressed to see him, and asked finally whether he could make it convenient to ride over, Mr. Jemmy replied, “To  
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be sure, sartinly, that I wull: I wanna lose ony time about it neother. Ay, poor fellow! what a thing it does but seem he wanna tak his physic. But *I* think I can prevail on him if ony body can, I know his ways so well. Why, now I come to consider on’t, I don’t know what’s to hinder me going down to-night. I sadly want to see him, that I do. I *wull* go to-night, dang me if I don’t! and if they canna go on while I’m out of the way a bit, they mun stop and play for what I care.”

An hour after the declaration of this sudden resolution, Mr. James Blunt and Bilberry were jogging on the road together. And if we may be allowed to measure conversation by the same rule that geographers measure distances, we shall say that thirteen miles of very curious discourse passed between them; so curious that we certainly would repeat it here, were we not too anxious to get back to Mr. Zachary Blunt’s, to occupy any time in digressions.

On their arrival there, they found that old Blunt had gone to bed, and his daughters, who had been waiting on him during the day, had  
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now returned to their own homes; so that there was left in the house no member of the family except the deaf mother. It was past dark-hour, and she sat against a round oak table with a large-type folio Bible before her, trying through a pair of owl-eyed spectacles, and by the light of a halfpenny candle, to increase her stock of religious knowledge by spelling out the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japhet.

As Bilberry had grown up, he had also grown more modest, so that his own feelings dictated to him not to be present at what he did not doubt would prove a very affecting interview between Mr. James Blunt and the old woman his mother. He therefore stayed behind amongst the servant-wenches in the kitchen, while that tender-hearted gentleman advanced into the house-place to salute his parent; yet, were these respective rooms situated not so far apart from each other but that what was said in one might readily be overheard in the other. Owing to this lucky disposition of the premises, we are enabled to give the following brief sketch of the scene.

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Mr. James Blunt stepped forward into the room, addressing his mother; while that lady, necessarily not hearing a word of what he said, at the same time addressed him; so that both thus talking together, there was made between them a mingle of conversation which no third person might understand. The first observation that could be distinctly noted was made by Mr. James Blunt.

Bilberry at the time was peeping through the nick of the door, and he saw that great biped putting out his arm to huggle his mother round the neck, as in a very soothing tone he said to her, "Well then, gie me a kiss, my wench." Mrs. Blunt understood the action if she did not hear the words, for in half a second smack it went like the uncorking of a bottle of love; the old woman adding in a very consolatory manner, as if conscious of having achieved a good thing, "*There* then, my lad."

"Now, gie me another," observed Jemmy. Dub it went again on her parchment cheeks like the sound of a slack drum, and again the old woman finished with, "That'll do, my lad."

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But Mr. James Blunt thought otherwise, and added two or three more to stand for seed. He then sat down contented, and began to try a discourse with his mother about brother Zachary. The old lady turned her head, and put her hand behind her ear for a sounding board, observing, "I canna hear you, my lad, I am so *very* deaf."

Mr. Blunt repeated his observation in a louder voice.

"Ay, what ears mine is! — I canna catch it and Mrs. Blunt laid her head down closer and closer. Jemmy again repeated his observation, very near to her porches and in a still stronger voice.

"Ay dear, ay dear! — what a trouble I am to you!" exclaimed the old lady, boring her ear so much closer to Mr. Blunt's face, that his nose half-corked it up.

James now shouted as loud as he could, "I say, mother, what a sad thing it is Zac wanna take his physic better!"

The old woman looked half bewildered. For a moment she appeared as if trying to gather up

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the sense of what had been so repeatedly said; though, from her answer, we verily believe she did not understand it even then. “O — o — o!” was her first long-drawn exclamation; “ay, my lad, so I have heard say. He is a sad rascad to be sure. He is, he is!”

“You dunna understand me yet,” said James. Then again raising his voice, “Zac not take his physic I’m toud!”

While he spoke, his eyes casually fell on a flich of bacon hanging from the beam. Mrs. Blunt interpreted this chance look as explanatory of the words, which even yet she could not hear, and immediately replied, “Sartinly! t’ou shall have a bit in a minute.” And before Mr. James could find any means of explaining away her error, she rang the bell and ordered him a rasher of bacon and a saucepan full of potatoes.

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CHAPTER XIX.

A MOST TEARFUL DEATH-BED SCENE; WITH SOME SUBSEQUENT  
SAMPLES OF HUMAN KINDNESS; BESIDES AN EPITAPH WHICH NEITHER  
POPE NOR JOHNSON EVER EQUALLED.

MR. ZACHARY BLUNT having been in a profound sleep since tea-time, it was thought advisable to defer James’s interview with him until the morning; though that affectionate gentleman felt rather uncomfortable at the idea of being under his brother’s roof a period of twelve hours without going up stairs to see him.

Some time after midnight, however, he was awaked by one of the men with the mournful intelligence that Zachary had turned much worse and wanted to see him directly. James uttered a loud exclamation of sorrow; jumped up, flinging sheets and blankets off his bed on to the floor to clear a passage; and in his consternation

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was scampering off to Zachary’s room in his shirt, when the man fortunately caught hold of his flying laps and drew him back again, tilling him that several of the maids were in Mr. Blunt’s chamber, and therefore it would be quite as respectable if he slipped on his clothes before making his appearance amongst them. James, much astonished, replied that he thought he had put them on, though in a case of life and death like the present he did not believe it was of the least consequence whether he had or not. With persuasion, however, he went back to his room and drew on his small-clothes without

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his stockings, thus exhibiting from the knees downward a pair of cram-calf legs as well fledged with hair as those of a colt.

“Ay, Jim, my lad!” Zachary exclaimed in a failing voice, as soon as he saw his brother enter the room, “I’m going to my old wench. I wanna be long now.”

“Nay, dunna talk so,” replied James, half-choked, “or else you’ll hurt me.”

His last words sank to nothing, and he audibly

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burst out a-crying. Then sitting down by the bedside, he took the departing man’s hand between both his own, and held it there throughout the whole time of his stay. -

“Poor lamb!” ejaculated James three or four times, as he gazed earnestly into his brother’s face, in a tone so truly piteous, and so evidently from the heart, that it brought fresh tears into all eyes; “poor lamb I how art changed! If it wull but please God to spare thee a bit longer —” A renewed burst of grief told all the rest.

“Ay, dear Jim!” said Zachary, who retained the greatest firmness, “thou art a good lad, and *has* been to me ever since I knowed thee. Thou’st a good heart, Jim. I dunna know how I shall part wi’ thee.”

“Don’t say anything about that,” replied James; “we’ll pray to the Lord — as I’m sure I do wi’ all my heart and soul — to let us have thee a little longer.”

“Feel o’ my forehead: gie me houd of thy hand,” said Zachary; “dunna you feel how hot? It canna be — I mun go — I feel as if I

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shanna see to-morrow. Take care of my mother, Jim. Remember there’s nobody left but thee now; and she’s been a good mother and a blessed mother to thee and me. I hope we shall see her in heaven some time. But take care of her, Jim; take care of her, my lad; she wanna trouble nobody long; and then I shall die comfortable. You mun tell her not to make ony trouble when I’m gone: make it as easy wi’ her as you can.”

James could only sob convulsively, and press Zachary’s hand between his own for a token. The dying man continued:

“I’ve set things straight, my lad. I’ve divided it all among you, only a little sum made over to old Frank, poor man — I’ve had him forty year next statute. I felt as if I could not forget him while I am here. I’ve done but badly, but it’s my best.” Blunt hesitated here, and changed the subject. “Come, Mary, my lass, wilt t’ou read a bit out o’ th’

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Bible? It'll perhaps do you all good, and I should like to hear it. I feel as if I was going to sleep. Come, t'ou knows where to begin. You know

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what it is I like. Begin where it says, *Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? Are not his days also like the days of an hireling?* It's the seventh chapter."

The Bible was brought out; Mary dried her eyes, and tried to read; but both she and all her hearers soon found many of the holy words so applicable to their own feelings, and the peculiar circumstances of the time, that it became impossible to go on. Every eye was blinded, and every heart too full to speak farther, when the voice of the reader failed at the conclusion of the same beautiful chapter of Job, — *For now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.*

"Dunna mind it," observed Zachary; "let's have no grieving. I can remember most o' th' rest. Jim, my lad! t'ou knows whereabout my good old woman lies. I toud her on her deathbed — poor blessed creatur! — I toud her nobody should come there but me. Ay, I've done as well as I could. I've used everybody right as far as I knowed; and when I didn't, God'll have mercy. I know how it'll be. When I'm gone, and

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there's nobody i' this farm to do to 'em as I've done, ar lads and lasses'll come into th' churchyard, and they'll say, Here lies ar old mester; he was a good old mester." Poor Zachary would have said more, but here he had talked himself to tears, and could not proceed. This caused all who were in the room, particularly the lads and lasses, who most felt the truth of their master's observation, to renew their grief.

Mr. James Blunt was so affected, that while he regarded Zachary with the most affectionate pity, and the tears ran from his eyes in a stream, he could only utter imploringly the monosyllables, "Don't, don't!"

Before day began to dawn, Mr. Blunt was gone. The village had in it one good man less than yesterday.

To detail what passed between this time and the day of the funeral would add little to our story. A house of mourning, when "the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern," is always the same melancholy scene; "because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets." Like

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many human distresses, it is most known and felt when untold.

When the time arrived at which old Zachary was to be committed to the dust, all the men and maids of his house were prepared to follow their master to his grave, deeply agitated by those feelings by which, though full of sorrow, the heart is made better; for, in truth, there was not a soul upon the ground but sincerely felt that in Zachary was lost, to use his own words, truly “a good old mester.”

The Reverend Mr. Jagger was invited to the house to partake of the funeral cake and wine, previous to the hour fixed for the funeral to set out. Before the procession was formed, and while all the mourners were gathered about him, this gentleman delivered much holy and consolatory discourse; largely descanted on the brevity and vanity of human life, the folly of its hopes, and the uselessness of its sorrows; the fallacy of worldly pleasures, and the eternal benefit of fixing the thoughts upon a future and more glorious existence. While he spoke thus, he also consumed nearly two dishes of cake, [319]

and no inconsiderable quantity of wine; a part he had more ample scope to execute, in consequence of almost every other person being too much affected to taste either. In fact, he sat at his leisure, nibbling and sipping so long after the appointed time, that those to whom the arrangements had been confided found it absolutely necessary plainly to remind him of the fact; but, as half a bottle yet stood upon the table, he remarked that there was not the least occasion to be in a hurry, as plenty of time remained yet; and again he filled his glass, drank rapidly to keep up with their impatience, and filled again.

In this manner he continued to proceed, until, finding it impossible to wait longer, they began to leave the house, and proceed towards the church; imagining that to be their only resource for getting the curate from the table, while a drop remained in the bottle. On this he emptied his glass, and followed them. But he had not left the door-step ere a sudden thought struck him; he hastily turned into the house again, under pretence of seeing how the weatherglass

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stood, drained the remaining drop out of the bottle, and put into his mouth the last cake but one, which he chewed as he went along the road.

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Here it is proper we should remark, that immediately after the death of Mr. Blunt, that poor soul's deaf mother had for convenience been removed from the house of her deceased son to the residence of one of those married daughters before spoken of, who dwelt at a farm situate between her father's and the church. The old lady was much too feeble to follow the corpse, and therefore had been wisely taken out of the way entirely. Indeed, from extreme age and debility, her faculties had become so imperfect, that even the event of Zachary's death made comparatively little impression on her mind. She often spoke about and lamented it, but in language entirely devoid of passion or emotion, as though her senses were so dull as to render her incapable of anything like a perception of the loss she had sustained. Before the day of the funeral arrived, she appeared to have half forgotten what had happened; and

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when, on the afternoon of the burial, the corpse was carried past the house to which she had been removed, she just crept from her seat to the door to see it go by, repeated three or four times an exclamation of "Poor thing!" and directly after, as usual with her in an afternoon, composed herself quietly in her chair, and went to sleep.

What else remains to be told of this melancholy affair is but short. Mr. Jagger performed the very solemn service of the church for the dead with considerable feeling, and in a manner which very sensibly affected even some of those unconcerned and curious spectators who usually gather about to witness a funeral. To the credit of young Bilberry, who was amongst the household mourners, we must say he could not behold his excellent master lowered for ever to the dust, without emotions which he had never before felt so keenly. The rest of the servants, both men and maids, were no less moved; the latter dropping both flowers and tears plentifully on to the coffin together. But most was, poor James affected. While

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the service was reading over the grave, he trembled from head to foot, his lips quivered involuntarily, and his strength so failed him that a man on each side had to support him, lest he should fall. As he looked into the pit, "Ay, my poor fellow!" was his sole but often-repeated exclamation. Afterwards he retired a distance off, and leaned against the churchyard wall, watching the last labour of the sexton until all was filled up. Then his grief, which had lain silent all this while, broke out afresh; tears gushed from his eyes



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abundantly; he advanced to the grave in an uncontrollable fit of lamentation, and directing his eyes into the new-turned earth beneath his feet, pointed downwards, and *spoke* over his brother Zachary this most memorable of all epitaphs —

“HERE LIES A BIT O’ TH’ BEST STUFF IN ALL DARBYSHIRE!”

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CHAPTER XX.

SOME SERIOUS REFLECTIONS OF BILBERRY’S, WITH A SPECIMEN OF  
HUMAN TURPITUDE AND BRUTALITY WHICH WE ARE ASHAMED TO  
RECORD.

It is now time we returned to the individual fortunes of young Mr. Thurland. First let us inform the reader that, owing to his healthful out-of-door employment, and the abundance of excellent victuals always provided at Farmer Blunt’s, Bilberry had thriven so well during the four or five years which he had passed in that gentleman’s service, as at this time to present an appearance very different to that under which he first entered it.

Naturally inclined to grow under even the unfavourable circumstances of his mother’s chance life, he had in that respect made every additional advantage out of the more propitious fortunes of Mr. Blunt that could possibly be

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expected; presenting now the look of one who would be best described by the single phrase of a man-lad. He had the size and strength of a full-grown person with the face of a youth; that is, he would have made a very pleasing boy had he been less bulky, or a most excellent man had he possessed the appendage of a coloured beard: but that production being yet scarcely larger or more tinged than such as may sometimes be observed upon the muzzles of some very strong-constituted young women, who seem unconfirmed in the decision as to which sex they shall ultimately belong, he carried more lad in his face than in any other part of his person.

Mr. Blunt being thus removed for ever, during two or three days, following the affairs of the farm stood still. There was no one to succeed him after the old-fashioned order of father and son; nor did it appear that any one of his more distant kindred could take the whole concern upon his hands with satisfaction to the remaining relatives. Appearances seemed to promise that ultimately the stock would

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be sold, and the labourers and servants be dispersed to find other employment where they might.

In this situation of affairs Bilberry called to mind the probabilities held out to him by Parson Jagger when he first entered Mr. Blunt's service, that with care and attention he might perhaps succeed to his master's business. Should that circumstance ever happen, now, thought he, there is an opportunity. But when he examined his individual pretensions, and reflected that the whole amount of his capital did not much exceed four pounds, yet owing to him for wages, he felt himself not competent to enter upon a farm of any magnitude; and concluded that, if ever the curate's prophecy should come true, it referred to a period in all probability yet considerably in the advance.

It was soon proved quite vain to hope that an arrangement could be made for placing any one individual upon the farm so as to keep the whole together as during Mr. Blunt's life-time. Each had now his individual interests to serve; and, jealous of the infringements of others,

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studied to serve them in a manner which, from their previous conduct while Zachary was amongst them, could not have been easily anticipated. Where had then appeared little or no care, save for the old man himself, was now visible scarcely anything except a selfish anxiety to obtain a full and proper share of what he had left behind him. This gave early occasion to little family animosities even amidst the deepest show of mourning, as though the spirit of Mammon alone could triumph over the grave. To this, however, Mr. James Blunt was a glorious exception. He, like a true child of nature, could not endure that his hours of mourning should be interrupted by disputation, or that the memory of so good a man should so soon be, as it were, buried beneath the contending and unworthy interests of this life. To whatever they addressed to him on this subject, his usual reply was, "Dunna divide him before he's cold."

It was no matter. Ere a fortnight had elapsed, the whole farm, which Zachary had conducted nearly half a century, was suddenly broken up,

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the stock sold, and those who had served upon it, young or old, were scattered and sent to find Other masters.

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In this general distribution, the calculating sons-in-law of Mr. Blunt did not overlook what they considered the charge of maintaining the old lady their grandmother. Neither of them was willing to take this, insignificant as it might be, wholly upon himself; so that, in the absence of Mr. James Blunt, they came to a resolution that his deaf mother should reside successively a month with each; thus changing her place of residence three times every quarter.

This agreement being afterwards communicated to James, that gentleman, instead of sanctioning it, as they expected, rose with the greatest indignation, and in the plainest terms condemning them both for their total want of feeling and sensibility, assured them that they ought to be ashamed of themselves for thinking of such a proceeding; and that instead of calculating the pence she might cost, they ought to feel proud who should best have it in his power to make her last few hours of existence comfortable.

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Having thus vehemently denounced their cold hard-heartedness, he concluded his harangue by assuring both his nieces and their husbands that his mother should never be indebted to any of them for a single spoonful of meat while he himself lived, and had a dish of his own to set before her. As for them, they found no fault with his good-natured resolution, since it spared them that trifling expense which at best would have been felt a burden.

Many of Zachary's old servants soon found employment with the farmers of the village and its neighbourhood; and in like manner also, without doubt, might Bilberry have done, had he not felt irresolute ever since his master's death, and the breaking up of the old man's establishment, as to what course he should next pursue.

Again left free, with the world before him, and four pounds five shillings and tenpence, the amount of his wages, in his pocket, the spirit of change strongly seized him, and inspired him with a powerful desire again to ramble. The

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possibility of somewhere meeting with his mother, whom, if she were yet alive, he much wished to see again, very often crossed his thoughts, and, however in other eyes unlikely to occur, inclined him more and more to resolve on returning to something like his former course of life. Then, as doubts involuntarily came upon his mind, he hesitated whether, in this indecision, he had not better consult his old friend Parson

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Jagger, who perhaps might advise him better than he knew how to conduct himself. But now, as the farm was broken up, and he, along with all the rest, had obtained his wages and his discharge together, there remained not much time for further deliberations.

As a pleasant resource under those circumstances, he at length went to Noah's Ark, and consulted two or three cans of ale; and thus it was finally that, under the influence of their arguments, he came to a firm determination to set out at once in search of his fortune. The earth was free wherever he chose to go; the prospects of advancing himself in something yet unthought on and unknown, were bright beneath

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the light and sunshine of his liquor. Why should he stay? Above all, that hope, ever alive in the humblest breast, of a future good greater than the good now enjoyed, and perhaps too often believed to be easier found far off than at home, — that it was which prompted him again to become an adventurer.

The next day saw him turn his back, possibly for ever, upon the village where, five years before, he had unexpectedly met with so good a master, and from whom, scarcely less unexpectedly, death had now parted him.

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CHAPTER XXI

WHICH, LIKE A FIRST CHILD, IS THE PRIDE OF ITS PARENT; AND WHEREIN THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO AN ORIGINAL CHARACTER, THE LIKE OF WHOM IS TO BE FOUND IN NO BOOK OF ANY TIME OR ANY NATION NOW EXTANT. THE STORY OF "AR COCK."

WE congratulate both ourselves and the reader on having arrived at this part of Mr. Thurland's biography, the few following chapters containing perhaps the cream of the whole book. Especially so will they be regarded by those who best can relish human nature, as it were, rough-hewn and fresh from the quarry, with all its native burs and roughnesses about it. Such, I doubt not, will find in a character, with whom it was young Thurland's fortune to meet very shortly after leaving Mr. Blunt's village, something natural, with which they cannot fail to be well pleased.

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On the afternoon of the same day upon which, as above related, Bilberry recommenced his travels, he happened to feel extremely dry in the mouth, as well as

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particularly weary afoot, for he had now walked full fifteen miles from the place of his late residence; so that, on arriving at a little village which lay in his track, without hesitating a moment to look about him, he marched directly into the first public-house that blessed his sight, and, sitting down on a settle opposite the front window, called for a can of ale.

While the landlady was waiting upon him, Bilberry casually glanced out of the corner casement, which commanded a view of the front-door, and beheld two men who, with a ladder reared against the wall, were endeavouring to hang a new sign upon the hooks of a beam which projected from the wall above the door. This sign had upon it the newly-painted figure of a cock in the act of crowing; at least the artist had so intended, though, not being the most skilful man in his profession, as was sufficiently evident in this specimen, he had inadvertently

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given a more accurate representation of a bird vomiting than of one proclaiming victory.

The landlord, who by his look was exceedingly satisfied with the ornament about to be added to his house, — for he himself appeared as though he were about to crow like his effigy, — stood beneath, with a pipe, not in his mouth, but very near to it, and ready to go in at the first opportunity, watching the proceedings of his men, and at every critical moment, when the hooks were all but slipping into their places, giving such hair-breadth directions for their final accurate adjustment, as caused them to be thrown entirely off again.

Bilberry watched their ineffectual efforts a considerable time, and would have watched them still longer, had not his thirst drawn him again to the other side of the room, where, after drinking three parts of his can at a draught, he sat down to rest himself.

Shortly after, he heard some one outside utter an exclamation, which was repeated by two or three voices, as though one might not be taken

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for surety of the fact, “It’s on, it’s on!” and in another minute the ladder crossed the window as it was lowered to the earth, and then the door opened, and there entered the smiling host, puffing like a whale, followed by the two workmen who had just achieved the difficult business of suspending a sign.

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“Well, we’ve got it up,” said the landlord, with very visible satisfaction, to his wife, as he advanced across the floor; “but it has bin no easy job; has it, Tom?”

Tom, thus appealed to, smiled like a man conscious of a new feather in his cap; and, as he bent himself to take a seat, replied,

“No, I’m dash’d if it has. Sich a thing as that takes more doing than onybody would think.”

It isn’t like hanging a leg of mutton up, missis,” added the second workman, with a laugh, though what about, or what for, it would take a deeper philosopher than the author of this book to determine.

“Did you see it, young man?” asked the host, addressing himself to Bilberry.

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Upon which, this discreet youth gave him to understand that he had some time been watching them through the window.

“And what think you on’t?” he again asked, in a tone which evidently declared, that if he did not think well, the landlord would not give a dust for his opinion.

Bilberry perceived what kind of an answer was expected from him; and, being a young man too wise to offend people about trifles, replied, that indeed it was very well painted.

“Ay,” said the landlord, partly by way of rejoinder, and partly in the manner of a soliloquy, “it is well painted. This person,” directing his finger to one of the men, “this man painted it, — self-taught, and the best thing he ever did in his life.”

“You’re right there, mester,” observed the painter, “so it is, and so it ought to be; for I can tell you I’ve had some anxiety in my mind about it.”

“It does you a deal of credit, sir,” said Bilberry, who observed they were knocking at his

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door for a compliment; “you are not without your talents.”

“Talents!” exclaimed the host, raising his voice to a pitch equal with the occasion, “why, it’s as good a likeness of AR COCK as eyes ever see’d i’ this world. If they were both hung up together, I’ll be boun’ no divil could tell which were which.”

And he clapped himself down beside Bilberry.

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“What! it is a portrait, is it?” inquired the latter gentleman, turning to his friend the host.

“It is a portrait,” replied that satisfied personage, “and as like th’ original as two Cheshire cheeses. A rare cock he was too. I shall ne’er see that cock’s like again, if I live till midday.”

“By which we rather imagine the speaker meant doomsday, though this is but conjecture.

“A famous cock, was he?” asked Bilberry.

“You may be sure of that,” answered the landlord, “or else do you think I should have had his likeness took? Do you think I should

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have changed my sign for him? No, by leddy, I’d see’d him dom’d first. I’m none so fond of new signs to old houses as that comes to. They never hardly do no good. Only, you see, iverybody knowed *him* so well, — that was what confluenced me to alter mine. If you iver passed through this village afore, my sign was th’ Black Bull; but now it’s th’ Cock, and th’ Cock it shall be as long as I live, and my son after me, — if I have one.”

And then he cast his eyes on mistress, who stood in the bar looking at the company. But no sooner did this modest lady hear her husband’s last observation, than she turned completely round, as if on a pivot, and, showing them the back of her stays, muttered, loud enough to be heard by all present,

“Hold your bother, Sam: when you’ve got a sup of ale, you’re so soft.”

The three bachelors present smiled without saying anything; and then Mr. Bilberry Thurland, who felt anxious to hear the history of the cock who had sat for his portrait, again made some insignificant inquiries of his host,

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which, being meant only as a sort of corkscrews to draw the story out, we need not repeat here. The conclusion of the matter was, that while Bilberry, the two workmen, and the host himself, drank their liquor, the last-mentioned gentleman gave the following whimsical account of that valiant bird, which in its rank was now all but deified over the pot-house door.

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“You see,” said he, putting a fresh charge into his pipe, and wedging it down with the end of his little finger, “this cock was one of my own breeding. He was hatched — but that’s of no consequence, or else I could tell to the very day and hour when he corned out o’ th’ egg. Well, I see’d at first he were a big un; so I took him up out o’ th’ nest into my hand, and I carried him into th’ house to my missis. Says I, ‘Kitty, if this don’t prove game down to th’ stumps, I’m mistaen more than ever I was in my life afore. Mark me,’ said I, ‘mark my word if I don’t speak gospel.’ So, you know, I rears him up particularly; I takes care he is not threshed by bigger cocks when he’s larning to crow, as most cocks is, — and that away they lose their sperit, mark me; I feeds him on plenty of bits o’ meat, and grubs and worms; I cuts his comb and wattles off as soon as ever

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I could get hold of ’em; and i’ short — as these gentlemen here beside you knows — I treated him just like a man.”

“That shall be true,” said the painter: “I can speak to that of my own knowledge.”

Sam Pogson continued: “Well, sir, you see, when this cock had come to his full growth, I turns him fairly out into th’ yard to stand his own ends as well as he could agen any other cock about. So, just as I guessed he would, he soon gets into a battle, — it was with Jos Bennet’s cock: Tom, you know’d him; that was the first cock ar cock ever fought; and he licked him i’ five minutes, as clean as ever you see’d anything done i’ this world. Well, you know, that same afternoon, — same afternoon, you know, — who should fly on to th’ top of ar gate but Nat Mills’s cock, and crows just as he used to do afore. As soon as ar cock heard him, he crows again like station, and runs out to look for him. When he see’d him atop o’ th’ gate, he goes bang at him, knocks him slap-bang down on to th’ floor, downs after him, and leathers away at him like a four-year-old. They fought agen the gate till at last ar cock fairly basted Mills’s cock till he couldn’t see; and so th’ poor divil sometimes fought th’ bars

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o’ th’ gate. At last I were just going to part ’em and take Nat Mills’s cock away, when at that very minnit Nat comes up. ‘Dom it,’ says he, ‘Sam, let him have fair play ony how.’ ‘He has had fair play,’ says I, ‘and ar cock’s licked him blind.’ ‘Then I’m dom’d if he has had fair play,’ says he; ‘for I know my cock’s mester of all th’ cocks in th’ parish.’ ‘Well,’ says I, ‘if you think so, turn him down agen, and I’ll back this cock of



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arn to kill him clean out; and if you don't reckon that fair, what do you?' Wasn't that right, young man?" And our host, who was gradually warming by his own argument, turned towards Bilberry for that gentleman's sanction of his conduct. Bilberry replied that nothing could be more fair; whereupon the landlord, pleased to find himself supported by his auditor, continued his narrative.

"Upon that, Nat puts down his cock. He strokes him, and bobs him backwards and forwards at ar cock to make him peck. Then they goes at it; but his cock, — dom if I warn't sorry for him, — he tumbled down first on this side, then on that, becos he hadn't got a leg to stand on; and his wings hung down like rags. 'Nat,' says I, 'you're cruel. Don't

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you see your cock hasn't got the shadder of a chance?' 'Dom you,' says he, lifting his head up, 'if you say I'm cruel, I'll fetch you a rap i' them dom big teeth of yours.' 'Don't be saucy,' says I, 'cos I've got fists as big as yours ony day, though I arn't going to fall out wi' you about this trifle.' Wi' that he said noat no more about it, only he egged his cock on madder and madder; but it was all of no use, for this cock of arn, he knocked him down every fresh time he got up, till Nat got into a rage, and was going to fetch his cock a kick as would have lifted him clean o'er th' pales, only I happened to see what he meant, and I gives him a push back. 'Nat,' says I, 'you shan't do that. Your cock isn't a match for arn, I very well know, but he's game for all that; and if you know no better than to sarve a brute bird that how, when he's done his best, why dom me if I wanna tache thee.' Well, do you know, for all his boasting and bragging afore, he looks frightened when I said that; and says he, 'Thou's sarved me right, Sam; I was in a passion wi' him, but it isn't fair and then he was going to pick him up, when this cock of arn goes at him agen as he lay on th' floor, and all in a moment he runs his spur raight

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into one of his eyes and out o' th' other, as clean as a skewer through a beef-steak. 'Lord!' says I, when I see'd it, 'if this don't beat all.' So I picks 'em both up, one hanging to t'other like a chain. 'Now, Nat,' says I, 'what think you of ar cock?' 'Sam,' says he, 'I don't know what to think; he quite puzzles me: he's Bonaparte,' said he. 'That's well said,' says I; 'he is Bonaparte; and from now I'll call him Bonaparte. It's a

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good name, Nat, and he shall keep it.' So I gied him th' name of Bonaparte from that day to this.

"But after all, somehow or other, do you know, Nat couldn't stomach it. In about a fortnight after what I've toud you, he brings another cock to put down to ar cock, as he felt sartin could lick him, for he had hunted th' country round to find a prime good un. Howiver, this cock of arn he threshed him an' all, and in two or three days drove him clean off o' th' walk. So you see this cock of arn, he comed to be a reg'lar cock o' th' walk, for he whopped all th' cocks they could bring to him, far and near. Upon this, I gets proud of ar cock, you know, as I well might; for if iver there were a cock on earth as a man might be proud on, it was this cock of arn. Well, you

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see, young man, as ar cock was sich a bang-up game, I keeps him, though I were often bid money for him. But, to speak th' truth, I wouldn't at that time have selled this cock of arn at no price. Why, Squire Elksland — he lives at this big house here atop o' th' hill — he once clapped me down a true guinea i' king's goud upon this very table as we are drinking off on, for him, — ay, that he did: but says I, 'should like to 'blige you, squire, only when I look at a cock like this cock of arn, money in a reasonable quantity isn't ony consideration. If I did part wi' him to onybody, it would be to you; but raelly I can't bring my mind to it, — at least not just yet, — though there's no knowing what I may do in a bit: only, squire, if I should, I'll let you know.' 'Ay says th' squire, 'if I live till I hear from you about that cock, I shall wear th' ground out under my feet' 'There's no telling,' said I. But he put th' guinea in his pocket agen directly, and went off in a flush, and I niver see'd him come near my house of six month after. Howiver, I didn't care for that; for, as I said to my missis at th' time, I wasn't going to part wi' ar cock to 'blige nobody as didn't know when to be satisfied."

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And here tire heroic landlord stopped to relight his pipe, which had extinguished itself long ago. This pause also gave the two workmen and Bilberry an opportunity, for which they had some time been upon the look-out, of calling for three more cans of ale.

Each man's respective liquor being placed upon the table, Mr. Thurland, whose curiosity was excited to know the conclusion of this winged champion's career, inquired of his host in what farther engagements the bird had distinguished himself: in answer to

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which, this obliging person proceeded in his history, though there are entertained some doubts whether he did not do so as much to please himself, — he being one of those remarkable people who are mightily delighted in listening to a tale of their own telling, — as to gratify his customer.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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