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A LIFE'S SECRET.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE." ETC, ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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CHARLES W. WOOD, 13 TAVISTOCK ST., STRAND.

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[1]

A LIFE'S SECRET.

PART THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

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A PREMATURE AVOWAL.

DAFFODIL'S DELIGHT was in all the glory of the lock-out. The men, having nothing to do, improved their time by enjoying themselves; they stood about the street or lounged at their doors, smoking short pipes and quaffing draughts of beer. Let money run ever so short, you will generally see that the beer and the pipes can be found. As yet, the evils of being out of work were not felt; for weekly pay, sufficient for support, was supplied them by the Union Committee.

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The men were in high spirits—in that sort of mood implied by the words “Never say die,” which phrase was often in their mouths. They expressed themselves determined to hold out: and this determination was continually fostered by the agents of the Union, of whom Sam Shuck was the chief: chief as regarded Daffodil's Delight, inferior as regarded other agents elsewhere. Many of the more temperate of the men, who had not particularly urged the strike, were warm supporters now of the general opinion, for they regarded the lock-out as an unwarrantable piece of tyranny on the part of the masters. As to the ladies, they were over-warm partisans, generally speaking, making the excitement, the unsettled state of Daffodil's Delight, an excuse for their own idleness (they are only too ready to do so when occasion offers), and collected in groups round the men, or squatted themselves on door-steps, proclaiming their opinion of existing things, and boasting that they'd hold out for their rights till death.

It was almost like a summer's day. Seated

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in a chair at the bottom of her garden, just within the gate, was Mary Baxendale. Not that she was there to join in the gossip of the women, little knots of whom were dotting the street, or had any intention of joining in it: she was simply sitting there for air.

Mary Baxendale was fading. Never very strong, she had, for the last year or two, been gradually declining, and, with the excessive heat of the past summer, her

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remaining strength appeared to have gone out. Her occupation, that of a seamstress, had not tended to keep her in health; she had a great deal of work offered her, her skill being superior, and she had sat at it early and late. Mary was thoughtful and conscientious, and she was anxious to contribute a full share to the home support. Her father had married again, had now two young children, and it almost appeared to Mary as if she were an interloper in the paternal home. Not that the new Mrs. Baxendale made her feel this: she was a bustling, hearty woman, fond of show and spending, and of setting off her babies; but she was kind to Mary.

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The capability of exertion appeared to be past, and Mary's days were chiefly spent in a quiescent state of rest, and in frequently sitting out of doors. This day—it was now the beginning of September—was an unusually bright one, and she drew her invalid shawl round her, and leaned back in her seat, looking out on the lively scene, at the men and women congregating in the road, and inhaling the fresh air. At least, as fresh as it could be got in Daffodil's Delight.,

“How do you feel to-day, Mary?”

The questioner was Mrs. Quale. She had come out of her house in her bonnet and shawl, bent on some errand, and stopped to accost Mary.

“I am pretty well to-day. That is, I should be, if it were not for the weakness.”

“Weakness, ay!” cried Mrs. Quale, in a snapping sort of tone, for she was living in a state of chronic tartness, not approving of matters in general just now. “And what have you had this morning to fortify you against the weakness?”

A faint blush rose to Mary's thin face.

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The subject was a sore one to the mind of Mrs. Quale, and that lady was not one to spare her tongue. The fact was, that at the present moment, and for some little time past, Mary's condition and appetite had required unusual nourishment; but, since the lock-out, this had not been procurable by John Baxendale. Sufficient food the house- hold

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had as yet, but it was of a plain coarse sort, not suitable for Mary; and Mrs. Quale, bitter enough against the existing condition of things before, touching the men and their masters, was not by this rendered less so. Poor Mary, in her patient meekness, would have subsided into her grave with famine, rather than complain of what she saw no help for.

“Did you have an egg at eleven o’clock?”

“Not this morning. I did not feel greatly to care for it.”

“Rubbish!” responded Mrs. Quale. “I may say I don’t care for the moon, because I know I can’t get it.”

“But I really did not feel to have any appetite just then,” repeated Mary.

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“And if you had an appetite, I suppose you couldn’t have been any the nearer satisfying it!” returned Mrs. Quale, in a raised voice. “You let your stomach get empty, and, after a bit, the craving goes off and sickness comes on, and then you say you have no appetite. But, there! it is not your fault; where’s the use of my —”

“Why, Mary, girl, what’s the matter?”

The interruption to Mrs. Quale proceeded from Dr. Bevary. He was passing the gate with Miss Hunter. They stopped, partly at sight of Mary, who was looking strikingly ill, partly at the commotion Mrs. Quale was making. Neither of them had known that Mary was in this state. Mrs. Quale was the first to take up the discourse.

“She don’t look over flourishing, do she, sir?—do she, Miss Florence? She have been as bad as this—oh, for a fortnight, now.”

“Why did you not send my uncle word, Mary?” spoke Florence, impulsive in the cause of kindness; as she had been when a child. “I am sure he would have come to see you.”

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"You are very kind, miss, and Dr. Bevary, also," said Mary. "I could not think of troubling him with my poor ailments, especially as I feel it would be useless. I don't think anybody can do me good on this side the grave, sir."

"Tush, tush!" interposed Dr. Bevary. "That's what many sick people say; but they get well in spite of it. Let us see you a bit closer," he added, going inside the gate. "And now tell me how you feel."

"I am just sinking, sir, as it seems to me; sinking out of life, without much ailment to tell of. I have a great deal of fever at night, and a dry cough. It is not so much consumption as—"

"Who told you it was consumption?" interrupted Dr. Bevary.

"Some of the women about here call it so, sir. My step-mother does: but I should say it was more of a waste."

"Your step-mother is fond of talking of what she knows nothing about, and so are the women," remarked Dr. Bevary. "Have you much appetite?"

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"Yes, and that's the evil of it," struck in Mrs. Quale, determined to lose no opportunity of propounding her view of the case.

"A pretty time this is for folks to have appetites, when there's not a copper being earned. I wish all strikes and lock-outs was put down by law, I do. Nothing comes of 'em but empty cubbarts."

"Your cupboard need not be any the emptier for a lock-out," said Dr. Bevary, who sometimes, when conversing with the women of Daffodil's Delight, would fall familiarly into their mode of speech.

"No, I know that; we have been providenter than that, sir," returned Mrs. Quale. "A pity but what others could say the same. You might take a walk through Daffodil's Delight, sir, from one end of it to the other, and not find half a dozen cubbarts with plenty in 'em just now. Serve 'em right! they should have put by for a rainy day."

"Ah!" returned Dr. Bevary, "rainy days come to most of us as we go through life, in one shape or other. It is well to provide for them when we can."

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“And it’s well to keep out of ‘em where it’s practicable,” wrathfully remarked Mrs. Quale. “There no more need have been this disturbance between masters and men, than there need be one between you and me, sir, this moment, afore you walk away. They be just idiots, are the men; the women be worse, and I am tired of telling ‘em so. Look at ‘em,” added Mrs. Quale, directing the doctor’s attention to the female ornaments of Daffodil’s Delight. “Look at their gowns in jags, and their dirty caps! they make the men’s being out of work an excuse for their idleness, and they just stick themselves out there all day, a crowing and a gossiping.”

“Crowing?” exclaimed the doctor.

“Crowing; every female one of ‘em, like a cock upon its dunghill,” responded Mrs. Quale, who was not given to pick her words when wrath was moving her. “There isn’t one as can see an inch beyond her own nose. If the lock-out lasts, and starvation comes, let ‘em see how they’ll crow then. It’ll be on t’other side their mouths, I fancy!”

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“Money is dealt out to them by the Trades’ Union, sufficient to live,” observed Dr. Bevary.

“Sufficient not to starve,” independently corrected Mrs. Quale. “What is it, sir, the bit of money they get, to them that have enjoyed their thirty-five shillings a-week, and could hardly make that do, some of ‘em? Look at the Baxendales. There’s Mary, wanting more food than she did in health; ay, and craving for it. A good bit of meat once or twice in the day, an egg now and then, a cup of cocoa and milk, or good tea—not your wishy-washy stuff, bought in by the ounce—how is she to get it all? The allowance dealt out to John Baxendale keeps ‘em in bread and cheese; I don’t think it does in much else.”

They were interrupted by John Baxendale himself. He came out of his house, touching his hat to the doctor and to Florence. The latter had been leaning over Mary, inquiring softly into her ailments, and the complaint of Mrs. Quale, touching the shortcomings of Mary’s comforts, had

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not reached her ears; that lady, out of regard to the invalid, having deemed it well to lower her tone.

"I am sorry, sir, you should see her so poorly," said Baxendale, alluding to his daughter. "She'll get better, I hope."

"I must try what a little of my skill will do towards it," replied the doctor. "If she had sent me word she was ill, I would have come before."

"Thank ye, sir. I don't know as I should have been backward in asking you to come round and take a look at her; but a man don't like to ask favours when he has got no money in his pocket; it makes him feel little, and look little. Things are not in a satisfactory state with us all just now."

"They are not indeed."

"I never thought the masters would go to the extreme of a lock-out," resumed Baxendale. "It was a harsh measure."

"On the face of it it does seem so," responded Dr. Bevary. "But what else could they have done? Have kept open their works, that those on strike might have been

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Supported from the wages they paid their men, and probably have found those men also striking at last? If you and others had wanted to escape a lock-out, Baxendale, you should have been cautious not to lend yourselves to the agitation that was smouldering."

"Sir, I know there's a great deal to be said on both sides" was the reply. "I never was for the agitation; I did not urge the strike; I set my face nearly dead against it. The worst is, we all have to suffer for it alike."

"Ay, that is the worst of things in this world," responded the doctor. "When people do wrong, the consequences are rarely confined to themselves, they extend to the innocent. Come, Florence. I will see you again later, Mary."

The doctor and his niece walked away. Mrs. Quale had already departed on her errand.

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“He was always a kind man,” observed John Baxendale, looking after Dr. Bevary. “I hope he will be able to cure you, Mary.”

“I don’t feel that he will, father,” was the low answer. But Baxendale did not hear it;

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he was going out at the gate to join a knot of neighbours, who were gathered together at a distance.

“Will Mary Baxendale soon get well, do you think, uncle?” demanded Florence, as they went along.

“No, my dear, I do not think she will.”

There was something in the doctor’s tone that startled Florence. “Uncle Bevary! you do not fear she will die?”

“I do fear it, Florence; and that she will not be long first.”

“Oh!” Then, after she had gone a few paces further, Florence withdrew her arm from his. “I must go back and stay with her a little while. I had no idea of this.”

“Mind you don’t repeat it to her in your chatter,” called out the doctor; and Florence shook her head by way of answer.

“I am in no hurry to go home, Mary; I thought I would return and stay a little longer with you,” was her greeting, when she reached the invalid. “You must feel it dull, sitting here alone.”

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“Dull! oh no, Miss Florence. I like sitting by myself and thinking.”

Florence smiled. “What do you think about?”

“Oh, miss, I quite lose myself in thinking. I think of my Saviour, of how kind he was to everybody; and I think of the beautiful life we are taught to expect after this life. I can hardly believe that I shall soon be there.”

Florence paused, feeling as if she did not know what to say. “You do riot seem to fear death, Mary. You speak rather as if you wished it.”

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"I do not fear it, Miss Florence, I have been learning not to fear it ever since my poor mother died. Ah, miss! it is a great thing to learn; a great boon when once it's learnt."

"But surely you do not want to die!" exclaimed Florence, in surprise.

"Miss Florence, as to that, I feel quite satisfied to let it be as God pleases. I know I am in His good hands. The world now seems to me to be full of care and trouble."

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"It is very strange," murmured Florence. "Mamma, too, believes she is near death, and she expresses no reluctance, no fear. I do not think she feels any."

"Miss Florence, it is only another proof of God's mercies," returned the sick girl. "My mother used to say that you could not be quite ripe for death until you felt it; that it came of God's goodness and Christ's love. To such, death seems a blessing instead of a terror, so that when their time is drawing near, they are glad to die. There's a gentleman waiting to speak to you, miss."

Florence lifted her head hastily, and encountered the smile and the outstretched hand of Austin Clay. But that Mary Baxendale was unsuspecting, she might have gathered something from the vivid blush that overspread her cheeks.

"I thought it was you, Florence," he said. "I caught sight of a young lady from my sitting-room window; but you kept your head down before Mary."

"I am sorry to see Mary looking so ill. My uncle was here just now, but he has

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Gone. I suppose you were deep in your books?" she said with a smile, her face regaining its less radiant hue. "This lock-out must be a fine time for you."

"So fine, that I wish it were over," he answered. "I am sick of it already, Florence. A fortnight's idleness will tire out a man worse than a month's work."

"Is there any more chance of its coming to an end, sir?" anxiously inquired Mary Baxendale.

"I do not see it," gravely replied Austin. "The men appear to be too blind to come to any reasonable terms."

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“Oh, sir, don't cast more blame on them than you can help!” she rejoined in a tone of intense pain. “They are all led away by the Trades' Unions; they are, indeed. If once they enrol under them, they must only obey.”

“Well, Mary, it comes to what I say—that they are blinded. They should have better sense than to be led away.”

“You speak as a master, sir.”

“Probably I do; hut I have brought my

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common sense to bear upon the question, both on the side of the masters and of the men; and I believe that this time the men are wrong. If they had laboured under any real grievance, it would have been different; but they did not labour under any. Their wages were good, work was plentiful.—”

“I say, Mary, I wish you'd just come in and sit by the little ones a bit, while I go down to the back kitchen and rinse out the clothes.”

The interruption came from Mrs. Baxendale, who had thrown up her window to speak. Mary rose at once, took her pillow from the chair, wished Florence good day, and went indoors.

Austin held the gate open for Florence to pass out: he was not intending to accompany her. She stood a moment, speaking to him, when some one, who had come up rapidly and stealthily, laid his great hand on Austin's arm. Absorbed in Florence, Austin had not observed him, and he looked up with a start. It was Lawyer Gwinn, of Ketterford:

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and he appeared to be in some anger or excitement.

“Young Clay, where is your master today?”

Neither the salutation nor the manner of the man pleased Austin; his appearance, there and then, especially displeased him. His answer was spoken in haughty defiance.

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Not in policy: and in a cooler moment he would have remembered the latter to have been the only safe diplomacy.

A strangely bitter smile of conscious power parted the man's lips. "So you take part with him, do you, sir? It may be better for both you and him, that you bring me face to face with him. They have denied me to him at his house; their master is out of town, they say; but I know it to be a lie: I know that the message was sent out to me by Hunter himself. I had a great mind to force—"

Florence, who was looking deadly white, interrupted, her voice haughty as Austin's had been.

"You labour under a mistake, sir. My

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father is out of town. He went this morning."

Mr. Gwinn wheeled round to her. Neither her tone nor Austin's was calculated to abate his anger.

"You are his daughter, then!" he uttered, with the same insolent stare, the same displayed irony he had once used to her mother. "The young lady whom people envy as that spoiled and only child, Miss Hunter! What if I tell you a secret?—that you—"

"Be still!" shouted Austin, in uncontrollable emotion. "Are you a man, or a demon? Miss Hunter, allow me," he cried, grasping the hand of Florence, and drawing her peremptorily towards Peter Quale's door, which he threw open. "Go upstairs, Florence, to my sitting-room: wait there until I come to you. I must be alone with this man."

Florence looked at him in amazement, as he pushed her into the passage. He was evidently in the deepest agitation: every vestige of colour had forsaken his face, and his manner was authoritative as any father's could have been. She bowed to its power

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unconsciously, not a thought of resistance crossing her mind, and went straight upstairs to his sitting-room—although it might not be precisely correct for a young lady so to do. Not a soul, save herself, appeared to be in the house.

A short colloquy and an angry one, and then Mr. Gwinn was seen returning the way he had come. Austin came springing up the stairs, three at a time.

“Will you forgive me, Florence? I could not do otherwise.”

What with the suddenness of the proceedings, their strangeness, and her own doubts and emotion, Florence burst into tears. Austin lost his head: at least, all of prudence that was in it. In the agitation of the moment he suffered his long-controlled feelings to get the better of him, and spoke words that he had hitherto successfully repressed.

“My darling!” he whispered, taking her hand, “I wish I could have shielded you from it! Florence, you know—you must long have known—that my dearest object in

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life is you—your happiness, your welfare. I had not intended to say this so soon; it has been forced from me: you must pardon me for saying it here and now.”

She gently disengaged the hand, and he did not attempt to retain it. Her wet eyelashes fell on her blushing cheeks; they were like a damask rose glistening in the morning dew. “But this mystery?—it certainly seems one,” she exclaimed, striving to speak with matter-of-fact calmness. “Is not that man Gwinn, of Ketterford?”

“Yes.”

“Brother to the lady who seemed to cause so much emotion to papa. Ah! I was but a child at the time, but I noticed it. Austin, I think there must be some dreadful secret. What is it? He comes to our house at periods and is closeted with papa, and papa is more miserable than ever after it.”

“Whether there is or not, it is not for us to inquire into it. Men engaged in business often have troublesome people to deal with. I hastened you in,” he quickly went on, not caring to be more explanatory, and compelled

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to speak with reserve. "I know the man of old, and his language is sometimes coarse, not fitted for a young lady's ears: so I sent you away. Florence," he whispered, his tone changing to one of deepest tenderness, "this is neither the time nor the place to speak, but I must say one word. I shall win you if I can."

Florence made no answer. She only ran down stairs as quickly as she could, she and her scarlet cheeks. Austin laughed at her haste, as he followed her. Mrs. Quale was coming in then, and met them at the door.

"See what it is to go gadding out!" cried Austin to her. "When young ladies pay you the honour of a morning visit, they might find an empty house, but for my stay-at-home propensities."

Mrs. Quale turned her eyes from one to the other of them in puzzled doubt.

"The truth is," said Austin, vouchsafing an explanation, "there was a rude man in the road, talking nonsense, so I sent Miss Bunter in doors, and stopped to deal with him."

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"I am sure I am sorry, Miss Florence," cried unsuspecting Mrs. Quale. "We often have rude men in this quarter: they get hold of a drop too much, the simpletons. And when the wine's in, the wit's out, you know, miss."

Austin piloted her through Daffodil's Delight, possibly lest any more "rude men" should molest her, leaving her at her own door.

But when he came to reflect on what he had done, he was full of contrition and self-blame. The time had *not* come for him to aspire to the hand of Florence Hunter, at least in the estimation of the world, and he ought not to have spoken to her. There was only one course open to him now in honour: and that was, to tell the whole truth to her mother.

That same evening at dusk he was sitting alone with Mrs. Hunter. Mr. Hunter had not returned: that he had gone out of town for the day was perfect truth: and Florence escaped from the room when she heard Austin's knock.

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After taking all the blame on himself for having been premature, he proceeded to urge his cause and his love, possibly emboldened to do so by the gentle kindness with which he was listened to.

"It has been my hope for years," he avowed, as he held Mrs. Hunter's hands in his, and spoke of the chance of Mr. Hunter's favour. "Dear Mrs. Hunter, do you think he will some time give her to me!"

"But, Austin—"

"Not yet; I do not ask for her yet; not until I have made a fitting home for her," he impulsively continued, anticipating what might have been the possible objection of Mrs. Hunter. "With the two thousand pounds left to me by Mrs. Thornimett, and a little more added to it, which I have myself saved, I believe I shall be able to make my way."

"Austin, you will make your way," she replied, in a tone of the utmost confidence and kindness. "I have heard Mr. Hunter himself anticipate a successful career for you. Even when you were, comparatively speaking, penniless, Mr. Hunter would say that

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talent and energy, such as yours, could not fail to find its proper outlet. Now that you have inherited the money, your success is certain. But—I fear you cannot win Florence."

The words fell on his heart like an icebolt. He had reckoned on Mrs. Hunter's countenance though he had not been sure of her husband's. "What do you object to in me?" he inquired, in a tone of pain. "I am of gentle birth."

"Austin, I do not object. I have long seen that your coming here so much—and it was Mr. Hunter's pleasure to have you—was likely to lead to an attachment between you and Florence. Had I objected to you, I should have pointed out to Mr. Hunter the impolicy of your coming. I like you: there is no one in the world to whom I would so readily intrust the happiness of Florence. Other mothers might look to a higher alliance

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for her: but, Austin, when we get near the grave, we judge with a judgment not of this world. Worldly distinctions lose their charm.”

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“Then where lies the doubt—the objection?” he asked.

“I once—it is not long ago—hinted at this to Mr. Hunter,” she replied. “He would not hear me out; he would not suffer me to conclude. It was an utter impossibility that you could ever marry Florence,” he said: “neither was it likely that either of you would wish it.”

“But we do wish it; the love has already arisen,” he exclaimed, in agitation. “Dear Mrs. Hunter—”

“Hush, Austin I calm yourself. Mr. Hunter must have some private objection. I am sure he has; I could see so far; and one that, as was evident, he did not choose to disclose to me. I never inquire into his reasons when I perceive this. You must try and forget her.”

A commotion was heard in the hall. Austin went out to ascertain its cause. There stood Gwinn of Ketterford, insisting upon an interview with Mr. Hunter.

Austin contrived to get rid of the man by convincing him Mr. Hunter was really not

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at home. Gwinn went out grumbling, promising to be there the first thing in the morning.

The interlude had broken up the confidence between Austin and Mrs. Hunter; and he went home in despondency: but vowing to win her, all the same, sooner or later.

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MR. COX.

TIME had gone on. It was a gloomy winter's evening. Not that, reckoning by the seasons, it could be called winter yet; but it was getting near it, and the night was dark and sloppy, and blowing and rainy. The wind went booming down Daffodil's Delight, sending the fierce rain before it in showers, and the pools gleamed in the reflected light of the gas-lamps, as wayfarers splashed through them and stirred up their muddy waters.

The luxurious and comfortable in position—those at ease in the world, who could issue their orders to attentive tradespeople at their morning's leisure—had no necessity to be abroad on that inclement Saturday night. Not so Daffodil's Delight; there was not

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much chance (taking it collectively) of a dinner for the morrow, at the best; but, unless they went abroad, there was none. The men had not gone to work yet, and times were bad.

Down the street, to one particular corner shop, which had three gilt-coloured balls hanging outside it, flocked the stream- chiefly females. Not together. They mostly walked in units, and, some of them at least, in a covert sort of manner, keeping in the shade of dead walls, and of dark houses, as if not caring to be seen. Amongst the latter, stole one who appeared more especially fearful of being recognised. She was a young woman, comely once, but pale and hollow-eyed now, her bones too sharp for her skin. Well wrapped up, was she, against the weather; her cloth cloak warm, a fur round her neck, and india-rubber shoes. Choosing her time to approach the shop when the coast should be tolerably clear, she glanced cautiously in at the window and door, and entered.

Laying upon the counter a small parcel, which she carried folded in a handkerchief,

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she displayed a cardboard box to the sight of the shop's master, who came forward to attend to her. It contained a really handsome set of corals, fashioned like those worn in the days when our mothers were young; a neck- lace of six rows of small beads, with a gold snap made to imitate a rose, a large coral bead set in it. A pair of gold earrings, with long pendant coral drops, lay beside it, and a large and handsome gold brooch, set likewise with corals.

“What, is it *you*, Miss Baxendale?” he exclaimed, his tone expressive of some surprise.

“It is, indeed, Mr. Cox,” replied Mary. “We all have to bend to these hard times. It's share and share alike in them. Will you please to look at these jewels?”

She tenderly drew aside the cotton which was over the trinkets—tenderly and reverently, almost as if a miniature live baby were lying there. Very precious were they to Mary. They were dear to her from association; and she also believed them to be of great value.

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The pawnbroker glanced at them slightly, carelessly lifting one of the earrings in his hand, to feel its weight. The brooch he honoured with a closer inspection.

“What do you want upon them?” he asked.

“Nay,” said Mary, “it is not for me to name a sum. What will you lend?”

“You are not accustomed to our business, or you would know that we like borrowers to mention their own ideas as to sum; and we give it if we can,” he rejoined with ready words. “What do you ask?”

“If you would let me have four pounds upon them,” began Mary, hesitatingly. But he snapped up the words.

“Four pounds! Why, Miss Baxendale, you can't know what you are saying. The fashion of these coral things is over and done with. They are worth next to nothing.”

Mary's heart beat quicker in its sickness of disappointment.

“They are genuine, sir, if you'll please to look The gold is real gold and the coral is the best coral; my poor mother has told me

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so many a time. Her godmother was a lady, well-to-do in the world, and the things were a present from her.”

“If they were not genuine, I’d not lend as many pence upon them,” said the man. “With a little alteration the brooch might be made tolerably modern; otherwise their value would be no more than old gold. In selling them, I—”

“It will not come to that, Mr. Cox,” interrupted Mary. “Please God spares me a little while—and, since the hot weather went out, I feel a bit stronger—I shall soon redeem them.”

Mr. Cox looked at her thin face; he listened to her short breath; and he drew his own conclusions. There was a line of pity in his hard face, for he had long respected Mary Baxendale.

“By the way the strike seems to be lasting on, there doesn’t seem much promise of a speedy end to it,” quoth he, in answer. “I never was so over-done with pledges.”

“My work does not depend upon that,” said Mary. “Let me get up a little strength,

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and I shall have as much work as I can do. And I am paid well, Mr. Cox; I have a private connection. I am not like the poor seamstresses who make shirts for fourpence a-piece.”

Mr. Cox made no immediate reply to this, and there was a pause. The open box lay before him. He took up the necklace and examined its clasp.

“I will lend you a sovereign upon them.”

She lifted her face pitiably, and the tears glistened in her eyes.

“It would be of no use to me,” she whispered. “I want the money for a particular purpose, otherwise I should never have brought here these gifts of my mother’s. She gave them to me the day I was eighteen, and I have tenderly kept them from desecration.”

Poor Mary! From desecration!

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“I have heard her say what they cost; but I forget now. I know it was over ten pounds.”

“But the day for this fashion has gone by. To ask four pounds upon them was

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preposterous; and you would know it to be so, were you acquainted with the trade.”

“Will you lend me two pound, then?”

The tone was tremblingly eager, the face beseeching—a wan face, telling of the coming grave. Possibly the thought struck the pawnbroker, and awoke some humanity within him.

“I shall lose by it, I know, if it comes to a sale. I’d not do it for anybody else, Miss Baxendale.”

He proceeded to write out the ticket, his thoughts running upon whether—if it did come to a sale—he could not make three pounds by the brooch alone. As he was handing her the money, somebody rushed in, close to the spot occupied by Mary, and dashed down a large-sized paper parcel on the counter. She wore a black lace bonnet, which had once been white, frayed, and altogether the worse for wear, independent of its dirt. It was tilted on the back of her head, displaying a mass of hair in front, half grey, half black, and exceedingly in disorder; together with a red face. It was Mrs. Dunn.

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“Well, to be sure! if it’s not Mary Baxendale! I thought you was too much of the lady to put your nose inside a pop-shop. Don’t it go again the grain?” she ironically added, for she did not appear to be in the sweetest of tempers.

“It does indeed, Mrs. Dunn,” was the girl’s meek answer, as she took her money and departed.

“Now then, old Cox, just attend to me,” began Mrs. Dunn. “I have brought something as you don’t get offered every day.”

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Mr. Cox, accustomed to the scant ceremony bestowed upon him by some of the ladies of Daffodil's Delight, took the speech with indifference, and gave his attention to the parcel, from which Mrs. Dunn was rapidly taking off the twine.

"What's this?—silk?" cried he, as a roll of dress-silk, brown, crossbarred with gold, came forth to view.

"Yes, it is silk; and there's fourteen yards of it; and I want thirty shillings upon it," volubly replied Mrs. Dunn.

He took the silk between his fingers, feeling

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its substance, in his professionally indifferent and disparaging manner.

"Where did you get it from?" he asked.

"Where did I get it from?" retorted Mrs. Dunn. "What's that to you! D'ye think I stole it?"

"How do I know" returned he.

"You insolent fellow! Is it only to-day as you have knowed me, Tom Cox? My name's Hannah Dunn; and I don't want you to testify to my honesty; I can hold up my head in Daffodil's Delight just as well as you can—perhaps a little better. Concern yourself with your own business. I want thirty shillings upon that."

"It isn't worth thirty shillings in the shop, new," was the rejoinder.

"What?" shrieked Mrs. Dunn. "It cost three-and-fourpence halfpenny a yard, every yard of it, and there's fourteen of 'em, tell you."

"I don't care if it cost six-and-fourpence halfpenny; it's not worth more than I say. I'll lend you ten shillings upon it, and I should lose then."

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"Where do you expect to go to when you die?" demanded Mrs. Dunn, in a tone that might be heard half over the length and breadth of Daffodil's Delight. "I wouldn't tell such lies for the paltry sake of grinding folks down; no, not if you made me a duchess to-morrow for it."

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“Here, take the silk off. I have not got time to bother: it’s Saturday night.”

He swept the parcel, silk, paper, and string, towards her, and was turning away. She leaned over the counter and seized upon him.

“You want a opposition in the place, that’s what you want, Master Cox! You have been cock o’ the walk over Daffodil’s Delight so long, that you think you can treat folks as if they was dirt. You be over-done with business, that’s what you be; you’re a making gold as fast as they makes it in Aurstraliar; we shall have you a setting up your tandem next. What’ll you give me upon that silk?”

“I’ll give you ten shillings; I have said so. You may take it or not; it’s at your own option.”

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More contending; but the pawnbroker was firm; and Mrs. Dunn was forced to accept the offer, or else take away her silk.

“How long is this strike going to last?” he asked, as he made out the duplicate.

The words excited the irascibility of Mrs. Dunn.

“Strike!” she uttered, in a flaming passion. “Who dares to call it a strike? It’s not a strike; it’s a lock-out.”

“Lock-out, then. The two things come to the same, don’t they? Is there a chance of it’s coming to an end?”

“No, they don’t come to the same,” shrieked Mrs. Dunn. “A strike’s what it is—a strike; a act of noble independence which the British workman may be proud on. A lock-out is a nasty, mean, overbearing tyranny on the part of the masters. Now, old Cox! call it a strike again.”

“But I hear the masters’ shops are open again—for anybody to go to work that likes,” replied Mr. Cox, quite imperturbable.

“They be open for slaves to go to work, not for free-born men,” retorted Mrs. Dunn,

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her shrieking voice at a still higher pitch. "I hope the men'll hold out for ever, I do! I hope the masters 'll be drove, every one of 'em, into the dust and dregs of the bankruptcy court! I hope their sticks and stones 'll be sold up, down to their children's cradles—"

"There, that's enough," interposed the pawnbroker, as he handed her what he had to give. "You'll be collecting a crowd round the door, if you go on like that. Here's somebody else waiting for your place." It was Mrs. Cheek, an especial friend of the lady's now being dismissed. Mrs. Cheek was carefully carrying a basket which contained various chimney ornaments—pretty enough in their places, but not of much value. The pawnbroker, after some haggling, not so intemperately carried on as the bargain just concluded, advanced six shillings on them.

"I had wanted twelve," she said; "and I can't do with less."

"I am willing to lend it," returned he, "if you bring goods accordingly."

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"I have stripped the place of a'most all the light things as can be spared," said Mrs. Cheek. "One doesn't care to begin upon the heavy furniture and the necessaries."

"Is there no chance of the present state of affairs coming to an end?" inquired Mr. Cox, putting the same question to which he had not got a direct answer from Mrs. Dunn. "The men can go back to work if they like; the masters' yards are open again."

"Open!" returned Mrs. Cheek, in a guttural tone, as she threw back her head in disdain; "they have been open some time, if you call *that* opening 'em. If a man likes to go as a sneaking coward, and work upon the terms offered now, knuckling down to the masters, and putting his hand to their mean old odious document, severing himself from the Union, he can do it. It ain't many of our men as you'll find do that dirty work. If my husband was to attempt it, I'd be ready to skin him alive."

"But the men have gone back in some parts of the metropolis."

"*Men*, do you call 'em? A few may;

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one black sheep out of a flock. They ain't men; they are half -castes. Let them look to theirselves," concluded Mrs. Cheek significantly, as she quitted the pawnbroker's shop with a fling.

At the butcher's stall, a few paces further, she came up to Mrs. Dunn, who was standing in the glare of the blazing gas-light, in the incessant noise of the "Buy, buy, buy! what'll you buy?" Not less than a dozen women were congregated there, elbowing each other, as they turned over the scraps of meat set out for sale in small heaps—sixpence the lot, a shilling the lot, according to quality and quantity. In the prosperous time when their husbands were in full work, these ladies had scornfully disdained such heaps on a Saturday night. They had been wont then to buy a good joint for the Sunday's dinner.

One of the women nudged another in her vicinity, directing her attention to the inside of the shop. "Just twig Mother Shuck; she's a being served, I hope!"

"Mother Shuck," Slippery Sam's better

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half, was making her purchases in the agreeable confidence of possessing money to pay for them—liver and bacon for the present evening's supper, and a breast of veal, to be served with savoury herbs, for the morrow's dinner. In the old times, while the throng of women now outside had been able to make the same or similar purchases, *she* had hovered without like a hungry hyena, hanging over the cheap portions with covetous eyes and fingers, as many another poor wife had done, whose husband could not or would not work. Times were changed.

"I can't afford nothing, hardly, I can't," grumbled Mrs. Cheek. "What's the good of six shillings for a Saturday night, when everything's wanted, from the rent down to a potater? The young 'uns have got their bare feet upon the boards, as may be said, for their shoes be without toes and heels; and who is to get 'em others? I wish that Cox was a bit juster. He's a getting rich upon our spoils. Six shillings for that lot as I took him in!"

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“I wish he was smothered!” struck in Mrs. Dunn. “He took and asked me if I’d stole the silk. It was that lovely silk, you know, as I was fool enough to go and choose the week of the strike, on the strength of the good times a coming. We have had something else to do since, instead of making up silk gownds.”

“The good times ain’t come yet,” said Mrs. Cheek, shortly. “I wish the old ‘uns was back again, if we could get ‘em without stooping to the masters.”

“It was at the shop where Mary Ann and Jemimar deals, when they has to get in things for their customers’ work,” resumed Mrs. Dunn, continuing the subject of the silk. “I shouldn’t have had credit at any other place. Fourteen yards I bought of it, and three-and-fourpence halfpenny I gave for every yard of it; I did, I protest to you, Elizar Cheek: and that swindling old screw had the conscience to offer me ten shillings for the whole!”

“Is the silk paid for?”

“Paid for!” wrathfully repeated Mrs.

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Dunn; “has it been a time to pay for silk gownds when our husbands be under a lock-out? Of course it’s not paid for, and the shop’s a beginning to bother for it; but they’ll be none the nearer getting it. I say, master, what’ll you weigh in these fag ends of mutton and beef at—the two together?”

It will be readily understood, from the above conversation and signs, that in the several weeks that had elapsed since the commencement of the lock-out, things, socially speaking, had been going backwards. The roast goose and other expected luxuries had not come yet. The masters’ works were open—open to any who would go to work in them, provided they renounced all connection with the Trades’ Unions. Daffodil’s Delight, taking it collectively, would not have this at any price, and held out. The worst aspect in the affair—I mean for the interests of the men—was, that strange workmen were assembling from different parts of the country, accepting the work which they refused. Of course this

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feature in the dispute was most bitter to the men; they lavished their abuse upon the masters for employing strange hands; and they would have been glad to lavish something worse than abuse upon the hands themselves. One of the masters compared them to the fable of the dog in the manger: they would not take the work, and they would not let (by their good will) anybody else take it. Incessant agitation was maintained. The workmen were in a sufficiently excited state, as it was; and, to help on that which need not have been helped, the agents of the Trades' Union kept the ball rolling— an incendiary ball, urging obstinacy and spreading discontent. But this little history has. not so much to do with the political phases of the unhappy dispute, as with its social effects.

As Mary Baxendale was returning home from the pawnbroker's, she passed Mrs. Darby, who was standing at her own door looking at the weather. "Mary, girl," was the salutation, "this is not a night for you to be abroad."

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"I was obliged to go," was the reply. "How are the children?"

"Come in and see them," said Mrs. Darby.

She led the way into a back room, which, at the first glance, seemed to be covered with mattresses and children. A large family had Robert Darby—indeed, it was a complaint prevalent in Daffodil's Delight. They were of various ages; these, lying on the mattresses, six of them, were from four to twelve years. The elder ones were not at home. The room had a close, unhealthy smell, which struck especially on the senses of Mary, rendered sensitive from illness.

"What have you got them all in this room for?" she exclaimed, in the impulse of the moment.

"I have given up the rooms above," was Mrs. Darby's reply.

"But—when the children were ill—was it a time to give up rooms?" debated Mary.

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“No,” replied Mrs. Darby, who spoke as if she were heart-broken, in a sad, subdued tone, the very reverse of Mesdames Dunn and Cheek. “But how could we keep on

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the top rooms when we were unable to get together the rent, to pay for them? I spoke to the landlord, and he is letting the back rent stand a bit, not to sell us up; and I gave up to him the two top rooms; and we all sleep in here together.”

“I wish the men would go back to work!” said Mary, with a sigh.

“Mary, my heart’s just failing within me,” said Mrs. Darby, her tone a sort of wail. “Here’s winter coming on, and all of them out of work. If it were not for my daughter, who is in service, and brings us her wages as she gets them, I believe we should just have starved. I *must* get medicine for the children, though we go without bread.”

“It is not medicine they want: it is nourishment,” said Mary.

“It is both. Nourishment would have done when they were first ailing, but now that it has turned to low fever, they must have medicine, or it will grow into typhus. It’s bark they have to take, and it costs—”

“Mother! mother!” struck up a plaintive

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voice, that of the eldest of the children lying there, “I want more of that nice drink!”

“I have not got it, Willy. You know that you had it all. Mrs. Quale brought me round a pot of black currant jelly,” she explained to Mary, “and I poured boiling water on it to make drink. Their little parched throats did so relish it, poor things.”

Mary knelt on the floor and put her hand on the child’s moist brow. He was a pretty boy; fair and delicate, with light curls falling round his face. A gentle, thoughtful, intelligent hoy he had ever been, hut less healthy than some.

“You are thirsty, Willy?”

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He opened his heavy eyelids, and the large round blue eyes glistened with fever, as they were lifted to see who spoke.

“How do you do, Mary,” he meekly said. “Yes, I am so thirsty. Mother said perhaps she should have a sixpence to-night to buy a pot of jelly like Mrs. Quale’s.”

Mrs. Darby coloured slightly; she thought Mary must reflect on the extravagance

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implied. Sixpence for jelly, when they were wanting money for a loaf!

“I did say it to him,” she whispered, as she was quitting the room with Mary. “I thought I might spare a sixpence out of what Darby got from the society. But I can’t; I can’t. There’s so many things we cannot do without, unless we just give up, and lie down and don’t even try at keeping body and soul together. Rent, and coals, and candles, and soap; and we must eat something. Darby, too, of course he wants a trifle for beer and tobacco. Mary, I say I am just heart-faint. If the poor hoy should die, it’ll be upon my mind for ever, that the drink he craved for in his last illness couldn’t be got for him.”

“Does he crave for it?”

“Nothing was ever like it. All day long it has been his sad, pitiful cry. “Have you got the jelly yet, mother Oh, mother, if I could but have the drink!”

As Mary went through the front room, Robert Darby was in it then. His chin rested on his hands, his elbows were on the

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table; altogether, he looked very down hearted.

“I have been to see Willy,” she cried. “Ah, poor little chap!” It was all he said; but the tone implied more.

“Things seem to be getting pretty low with us all. I wish there could be a change,” continued Mary.

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“How can there be, while the masters and the Unions are at loggerheads?” he asked. “Us men be between the two; and between the two we come to the ground. It’s like sitting on two stools at once.”

Mary proceeded to the shop where jelly was sold, an oilman’s, bought a sixpenny pot, and took it back to Mrs. Darby’s, handing it in at the door.

“Why did you do it, Mary? You cannot afford it.”

“Yes, I can. Give it to Willy, with my love.”

“He will only be out of a world of care, if God does take him,” sighed Mary to herself, as she bent her steps homeward. Oh, father!” she continued aloud, encountering

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John Baxendale at their own gate, “I wish this sad state of things could be ended. There’s the poor little Darbys worse instead of better. They are all lying in one room, down with fever.”

“God help us if fever should come!” was the reply of John Baxendale.

“It is not catching fever yet. They have given up their top chambers, and are all sleeping in that back room. Poor Willy craved for a bit of jelly, and Mrs. Darby could not get it him.”

“Better crave for that than for worse things,” roughly returned John Baxendale. “I am just a walking about here, because I can’t bear to stop in doors. I *can’t* pay the rent, and the things must go.”

“No, father, they need not. He said if you would get up two pounds towards it, he would give time for the rest. If—”

“Two pounds!” ejaculated John Baxendale, “where am I to get two pounds from? Borrow of them that have been provident, and so are better off, in this distress, than me? No, that I never will.”

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Mary opened her hand, and displayed two sovereigns held in its palm. They sparkled in the gas-light. “The money is my own, father. Take it.”

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A sudden revulsion of feeling came over Baxendale—he seemed to have passed from despair to hope. “Child,” he gently said, “did an angel send it?” And Mary, worn with weakness, with long-continued insufficient food, sad with the distress around her, burst into tears, and, bending her head upon his arm, sobbed aloud.

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CHAPTER III.

“I THINK I HAVE BEEN A FOOL.”

THE Shucks had got a supper party. On this same Saturday night, when the wind was blowing outside, and the rain was making the streets into pools, two or three friends had dropped into Sam Shuck's—idlers like Sam himself—and were hospitably invited to remain. Mrs. Shuck was beginning to fry the liver and bacon she had just brought in—you saw her purchasing it—with the accompaniment of a good peck of onions, and Sam and his friends were staying their appetites with pipes and porter.

When Mary Baxendale and her father entered—Mary having lingered a minute outside, until her emotion had passed, and her eyes were dry—they could scarcely find their way across the kitchen, what with the

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clouds from the pipes, and the smoke from the frying-pan. There was a great deal of laughter going on. Prosperity had not yet caused the Shucks to change their residence for a better one. Perhaps that was to come: but Sam's natural improvidence stood in the way of much change.

“You are merry to-night,” observed Mary, by way of being sociable.

“It's merrier inside nor out, a-wading through the puddles and the sharp rain,” replied Mrs. Shuck, without turning round from her employment. “It's some'at new to see you out such a night as this, Mary Baxendale! Don't you talk about folks wanting sense again.”

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"I don't know that I ever do talk of it," was the inoffensive reply of Mary, as she followed her father up the stairs.

Mrs. Baxendale was hushing a baby when they entered their room. She looked very cross. The best-tempered will do so, under the long-continued embarrassment of empty purses and empty stomachs.

"Who has been spreading it up and down

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the place that *we* are in trouble about the rent?" she abruptly demanded, in no pleasant voice. "That girl of Ryan's was here just now—Judy. She knew it, it seems, and she didn't forget to speak of it. Mary, what a simpleton you are, to be out in this rain!"

"Never mind who speaks of the rent, Mrs. Baxendale, so long as it can be paid," said Mary, sitting down in the first chair to get her breath up, after mounting the stairs. "Father is going to manage it, so that we shan't have any trouble at present. It's all right."

"However have you contrived it?" demanded Mrs. Baxendale of her husband, in a changed tone.

"Mary has contrived it—not I. She has just put two pounds into my hand. Where did you get it, child?"

"It does not signify your knowing that, father."

"If I don't know it, I shan't use the money," he answered, shortly.

"Why, surely, father, you can trust me!" she rejoined.

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"That is not it, Mary," said John Baxendale. "I don't like to use borrowed money, unless I know who it has been borrowed from."

"It was not borrowed, in your sense of the word, father. I have only done what you and Mrs. Baxendale have been doing lately. I pledged that set of coral ornaments of my mother's. Had you forgotten them?"

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“Why, yes, I had forgot ‘em,” cried he. “Coral ornaments! I declare they had as much slipped my memory, as if she had never possessed them.”

“Cox would only lend me two pounds upon them. Father, I hope I shall sometime get them redeemed.”

John Baxendale made no reply. He turned to pace the small room, evidently in deep thought. Mary, her poor short breath gathered again, took off her wet cloak and bonnet. Presently, Mrs. Baxendale put the loaf upon the table, and some cold potatos. “Couldn’t you have brought in a sausage or two for yourself, Mary, or a red herring?”

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she said. “You had got a shilling in your pocket.”

“I can eat a potato,” said Mary; “it don’t much matter about me.”

“It matters about us all, I think,” cried Mrs. Baxendale. “What a delicious smell of onions!” she added, in a parenthesis. “Them Shucks have got the luck of it just now. Us, and the children, and you, are three parts starved—I know that, Mary. *We* may weather it—it’s to be hoped we shall; but it will just kill you.”

“No, it shan’t,” said John Baxendale, stopping short in his promenade, and turning to them with a strangely stern decision marked upon his countenance. “This night has decided me, and I’ll go and do it.”

“Go and do what?” exclaimed his wife, a sort of fear in her tone.

“I’ll go to WORK, please God, Monday morning comes,” he said, with emphasis. “The thought has been hovering in my mind this week past.”

“It’s just the thing you ought to have done weeks ago,” observed Mrs. Baxendale.

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“You never said it.”

“Not I. It’s best to let men come to their senses of their own accord. You mostly act by the rules of contrary, you men; if I had advised your going to work next Monday morning, you’d just have stopped away.”

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Passing over this conjugal compliment in silence, John Baxendale descended the stairs. He possessed a large share of the open honesty of the genuine English workman. He disdained to do things in a corner. It would not suit him to return to work the coming Monday morning on what might be called "the sly;" he preferred to act openly, and to declare it to the Trades' Union previously, in the person of their paid agent, Sam Shuck. This he would do at once, and for that purpose entered the kitchen.

The first instalment of the supper was just served: which was accomplished by means of a tin dish placed on the table, and the contents of the frying-pan being turned unceremoniously into it. Sam and the company deemed that liver and bacon were best

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served hot and hot, so they set themselves to eat, while Mrs. Shuck continued to fry.

"I have got just a word to say, Shuck: I shan't disturb you," began John Baxendale. But Shuck interrupted him.

"It's of no use, Baxendale, your remonstrating about the short allowance. Think of the many mouths there is to feed. It's hard times, we all know, thanks to the masters; but our duty, ay, and our pride too, must lie in putting up with them, like men."

"It's not very hard times with you, at any rate," said John Baxendale, sniffing involuntarily the savoury odour, and watching the tempting morsels consumed. "My business here is not to remonstrate at anything, but to inform you that I shall resume work on Monday."

The announcement took Sam by surprise. He dropped the knife with which he was cutting the liver, held upon his bread—for the repast was not served fashionably, with a full complement of plates and dishes—and stared at Baxendale.

"What!" he uttered.

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"I have had enough of it. I shall go back on Monday morning"

"Are you a fool, Baxendale Or a knave?"

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"Sometimes I think I must be a fool," was the reply, given without irritation. "Leastways, I have wondered lately whether I am or not: when there has been full work and full wages to be had for the asking, and I have not asked, but have let my wife and children and Mary go down to starvation point."

"You have been holding out for principle," remonstrated Sam.

"I know; and principle is a very good thing, when you are sure it's the right principle. But flesh and blood can't stand out for ever."

"After standing out as long as this, I'd try and stand out a bit longer," ironically cried Sam. "You *must*, Baxendale; you can't turn traitor now."

"You say a 'bit' longer, Sam Shuck. It has been e a bit longer,' and 'a bit longer,' for some time past; but the bit doesn't

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come to any ending. There's no more chance of the masters' coming-to, than there was at first, but a great deal less. The getting of these men from the country will render them independent of us. What is to become of us then?"

"Rubbish!" said Sam Shuck "The masters must come-to: they can't stand against the Unions. Because a sprinkling of poor country workmen have thrust in their noses, and the masters are keeping open their works on the show of it, is that a reason why we should knuckle down? They are doing it to frighten us."

"Look here," said Baxendale. "I have two women and two children on my hands, and one of the women is next door to the grave; I am threatened—*you* know it, Sam Shuck—with a lodging for them in the street next week, because I have not been able to pay the rent; I have parted, by selling and pledging, with nearly all there is to part with, of my household goods. There was what they call a Bible reader round last week, and he says, pleasantly,

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'Why don't you kneel down and ask God to consider your condition, Mr. Baxendale?' Very good. But how can I do that? Isn't it just a mockery for me to pray for help to

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provide for me and mine? If God was pleased to answer us in words, would not the answer be ‘ There is work, and to spare; you have only got to do it?’“

“Well! that’s grand,” put in one of Sam’s guests, most of whom had been staring with open mouths. “As if folks asked God about such things as this!”

“Since my late wife died, I have thought about it more than I used to,” said Baxendale, simply, “and I have got to see that there’s no good to be done in anything without it. But how can I in reason ask for help now, when I don’t help myself? The work is ready to my hand, and I don’t take it. So, Sam, my mind’s made up at last. You’ll tell the Union.”

“No, I shan’t. You won’t go to work.”

“You’ll see. I shall be glad to go. I haven’t had a proper meal this—”

“You’ll think better of it between now

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and Monday morning,” interrupted Sam, drowning the words. “I’ll have a talk with you to-morrow. Have a bit of supper, Baxendale?”

“No, thank ye. I didn’t come in to eat your victuals,” he added, moving to the door. “We have got plenty,” said Mrs. Shuck, turning round from the frying-pan. “Here, eat it up-stairs, if you won’t stop, Baxendale.”

She took out a slice of liver and of bacon, and handed them to him on a saucer. What a temptation it was to the man, sick with hunger! However, he was about to refuse, when he thought of Mary.

“Thank ye, Mrs. Shuck. I’ll take it, then, if you can spare it. It will be a treat to Mary.”

Like unto the appearance of water in the arid desert to the parched and exhausted traveller, was the sight of that saucer of meat to Mary. Terribly did she often crave for it. John Baxendale positively refused to touch any; so Mary divided it into two portions, giving one to Mrs.

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Baxendale. The woman's good-nature—her sense of Mary's condition—would have led her to refuse it; but she was not quite made up of self-denial, and she felt faint and sinking. John Baxendale cut a thick slice of bread, rubbed it over the remains of gravy in the saucer, and ate that. "Please God, this shall have an end," he mentally repeated. "I think I *have* been a fool!"

Mr. Hunter's yard—as it was familiarly called in the trade—was open just as were other yards, though as yet he had but few men at work in it; in fact, so little was doing that it was almost equivalent to a stand-still. Mr. Henry Hunter was better off. A man of energy, determined to stand no nonsense, as he himself expressed it, he had gone down to country places, and engaged many hands.

On the Monday following the above Saturday night, John Baxendale presented himself to Austin Clay and requested to be taken on again. Austin complied at once, glad to do so, and told the man he was wise to come to his senses.

Mr. Hunter was not at business that day;

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"too unwell to leave home" was the message carried to Austin Clay. In the evening Austin went to the house: as was usual when Mr. Hunter did not make his appearance at the works in the day.

Florence was alone when he entered. Evidently in distress; though she strove to hide it from him, to turn it off with gay looks and light words. But he noted the signs.

"What is your grief, Florence?" he asked, speaking in an earnest tone of sympathy.

It caused the tears to come forth again. Austin took her hands and drew her to him, as either a lover or a brother might have done, leaving her to take it as she pleased. "Let me share it, Florence, whatever it may be."

"It is nothing more than usual," she answered; "but somehow my spirits are low this evening. I try to bear up bravely; and. I do bear up: but, indeed, this is an unhappy home. Mamma is sinking fast; I see it daily. While papa—"

But for making the abrupt pause, she

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would have broken down. Austin turned away he did not choose that she should enter upon any subject connected with Mr. Hunter. This time Florence would not be checked: as she had been hitherto.

“Austin, I cannot bear it any longer. What is it that is overshadowing papa?” she continued, her voice, her whole manner full of dread. “I am sure that some misfortune hangs over the house.”

“I wish I could take you out of it,” was the impulsive and not very relevant answer. “I can tell you nothing, Florence,” he concluded more soberly. “Mr. Hunter has many cares in business; but the cares are his own.”

“Austin, is it kind of you to try to put me off so? I can bear reality, whatever it may be, better than suspense. It is for papa I grieve. See how ill he is! And yet he has no ailment of body, only of mind. Night after night he paces his room, never sleeping.”

“How do you know that?” Austin gravely inquired.

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“Because I listen to it.”

“You should not do so.”

“I cannot *help* listening to him. How is it possible? His room is near mine, and when his footsteps are sounding in it, in the midnight silence, hour after hour, my ears grow sensitively quick. I say that, loving him, I cannot help it. Sometimes I think that if I only knew the cause, the nature of his sorrow, I might soothe it—perhaps help to remove it.”

“As if young ladies could ever help or remove the cares of business!” he cried, speaking lightly.

“I am not a child, Austin,” she resumed: “it is not kind of you to make pretence that I am, and try to put me off as one. Papa’s trouble is *not* connected with business, and I am sure you know that as well as I do. Will you not tell me what it is?”

“Florence, you can have no grounds for assuming that I am cognisant of it.”

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"I feel very sure that you are. Can you suppose that I should otherwise speak of it to you?"

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"I say that you can have no grounds for the supposition. By what do you so judge?"

"By signs," she answered. "I can read it in your countenance, your actions. I was pretty sure of it before that day when you sent me hastily into your rooms, lest I should hear what the man Gwinn was about to say; but I have been fully sure since. What he would have said related to it; and, in some way, the man is connected with the ill. Besides you have been on confidential terms with papa for years."

"On business matters only: not on private ones. My dear Florence, I must request you to let this subject cease, now and always. I know nothing of its nature from your father; and if my own thoughts have in any way strayed towards it, it is not fitting that I should give utterance to them."

"Tell me one thing: could I be of any service, in any way?"

"Hush Florence," he uttered, as if the words had struck upon some painful cord. The only service you can render is, by taking no notice of it. Do not think of it

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if you can help; do not allude to it to your mother."

"I never do," she interrupted.

"That is well."

"You have sometimes said you cared for me."

"Well?" he rejoined, determined to be as contrary as he could.

"If you did, you would not leave me in this suspense. Only tell me the nature of papa's trouble. I will not ask further."

Austin gathered his wits together, thinking what plea he should invent.

"It is a debt, Florence. Your papa contracted a debt many years ago; he thought it was paid; but by some devilry—pardon the word; I forgot I was talking to you—a

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lawyer, Gwinn of Ketterford, has proved that it was not paid, and he comes to press for instalments of it. That is all I know. And now you must give me your promise not to speak of this. I'll never tell you anything more if you do."

Florence had listened attentively, and was satisfied.

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"I will never speak of it," she said. "I think I understand it now. Papa fears he shall have no fortune left for me. Oh, if he only knew—"

"Hush, Florence!" came the warning whisper, for Mrs Hunter was standing at the door.

"Is it you, Austin? I heard voices here, and wondered who had come in."

"How are you, dear Mrs. Hunter?" he said, advancing to her as she entered. "

"Better this evening?"

"Not better," was Mrs. Hunter's answer, as she retained Austin's hand, and drew him on the sofa beside her. "There will be no 'better' for me in this world. Austin, I wish I could have gone from it under happier circumstances. Florence, I hear your papa calling."

"If *you* are not happy in the prospect of the future, who can be?" murmured Austin as Florence left the room.

"I spoke not of myself. My concern is for Mr. Hunter. Austin, I would give every minute of my remaining days to know what

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terrible grief it is that has been so long upon him."

Austin was silent. Had Mrs. Hunter and Florence entered into a compact to annoy him?

"It has been like a dark shade upon our house for years. Florence and I have kept silence upon it, to him and to each other; to him we dared not speak, to each other we would not. Latterly it has seemed so much worse, that I was forced to whisper of it to

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her; I could not keep it in; the silence was: killing me. We both agree that you are in his confidence; if so, perhaps you will satisfy me?"

Austin Clay felt himself in a dilemma. He could not speak of it in the light manner he had to Florence, or put off so carelessly Mrs. Hunter.

"I am not in his confidence indeed, Hunter," he broke forth, glad to be able to say so much. "That I have observed the signs you speak of in Mr. Hunter, his embarrassment, his grief—"

"Say his fear, Austin."

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"His fear. That I have noticed this it would be vain to deny. But, Mrs. Hunter, I assure you he has never given me his confidence upon the subject. Quite the contrary; he has particularly shunned it with me. Of course I can give a very shrewd guess at the cause—he is pressed for money. Times are bad; and when a man of Mr. Hunter's thoughtful temperament begins to be really anxious on the score of money matters, it shows itself in various ways."

Mrs. Hunter quitted the subject, perhaps partially reassured; at any rate convinced that no end would be answered by continuing it.

"I was mistaken, I suppose," she said, with a sigh. "At least you can tell me, Austin, how business is going on. How will it go on?"

Very grave turned Austin's face now. This was an open evil—one to be openly met and grappled with; and what his countenance gained in seriousness it lost in annoyance.

"I really do not see how it will go on,"

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was his reply, "unless we can get to work soon. I want to speak to Mr. Hunter. Can I see him?"

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“He will be in directly. He has not been down to-day yet. But I suppose you will wish to see him in private; I know he and you like to be alone when you talk upon business matters.”

At present it was expedient that Mrs. Hunter, at any rate, should not be present, if she was to be spared annoyance; for Mr. Hunter's affairs were growing ominous. This was chiefly owing to the stoppage of works in process, and partly to the effect of a diminished capital Austin as yet did not know all the apprehension, for Mr. Hunter contrived to keep some of it from him. That the diminishing of the capital was owing to Gwinn of Ketterford, Austin did know; at least, his surmises amounted to certainty. When a hundred pounds, or perhaps two hundred pounds, mysteriously went out, and Austin was not made acquainted with the money's destination, he drew his own conclusions.

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“Are the men not learning the error of their course yet?” Mrs. Hunter resumed.

“They seem further off learning it than ever. One of them, indeed, came back to-day: Baxendale.”

“I felt sure he would be amongst the first to do so. He is a sensible man, a reflecting man: how he came to hold out at all, is to me a matter of surprise.”

“He told me this morning, when he came and asked to be taken on again, that he wished he never had held out,” said Austin. “Mary is none the better for it.”

“Mary was here to-day,” remarked Mrs. Hunter. “She came to say that she was better, and could do some work if I had any. I fear it is a deceitful improvement. She is terribly thin and wan. No: this state of things must have been bad for her. She looks as if she were half famished.”

“She only looks what she is,” said Austin.

“Oh, Austin! I should have been so thankful to help her to strengthening food during this scarcity,” Mrs. Hunter exclaimed, the tears rising in her eyes. “But I have

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not dared. You know what Mr. Hunter's opinion is—that the men have brought it upon themselves, and that, to help their families; only in the least degree, would be encouraging them to hold out, and would tend to prolong the contest. He positively forbade me helping any of them: and I could only obey. I have kept indoors as much as possible, that I might avoid the sight of the distress which I must not relieve. But I ordered Mary a good meal here this morning: Mr. Hunter did not object to that. Here he is.”

Mr. Hunter entered, leaning upon Florence. He looked like an old man, rather than one of middle age.

“Baxendale is back, sir,” Austin observed, after a few words on business matters had passed in an under tone.

“Come to his senses at last, has he?” cried Mr. Hunter.

“That is just what I told him he had done, sir.”

“Has he signed the declaration?”

“Of course he has. The men have to do

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that, you know, sir, before they get any work. He says he wishes he had come back at first.”

“So do a good many others, in their hearts,” answered Mr. Hunter, significantly. “But they can't pluck up the courage to acknowledge it.”

“The men are most bitter against him—urged on, no doubt, by the Union. They—”

“Against Baxendale?”

“Against Baxendale. He came to speak to me before breakfast. I gave him the declaration to read and sign, and sent him to work at once. In the course of the morning it had got wind; though Baxendale told me he had given Sam Shuck notice of his intention on Saturday night. At dinner time, when Baxendale was quitting the yard, there were, I should say, a couple of hundred men assembled there—”

“The Daffodil Delight people?” interrupted Mr. Hunter.

“Yes. Our late men chiefly, and a sprinkling of Mr. Henry's. They were waiting

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there for Baxendale, and the moment he appeared, the yells, the hisses, the groans were dreadful. I suspected what it was, and ran out. But for my doing so, I believe they would have set upon him."

"Mark you, Clay! I will protect my workmen to the very limit of the law. Let the malcontents lay but a finger upon any one of them, and they shall assuredly be punished to the uttermost," reiterated Mr. Hunter, bringing down his hand forcibly. "What did you do?"

"I spoke to them just as you have now spoken," said Austin. "Their threatenings to the mail were terrible. I dared them to lay a finger upon him; I assured them that the language they were using was punishable. Had the police been in the way—but the more you want them, the less they are to be seen—I should have handed a few into custody."

"Who were the ringleaders?"

"I can scarcely tell. Ryan, the Irishman, was busy, and so was Jim Dunn; Cheek, also, backed by his wife."

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"Oh, you had women also!"

"In plenty," said Austin. "One of them—I think it was Cooper's wife—roared out a challenge to fight *Mrs.* Baxendale, if her man, Cooper, as she expressed it, was too much of a woman to fight *him*. There will be bloodshed, I fear, sir, before the thing is over."

"If there is, let they who cause it look to themselves," said Mr. Hunter, speaking as sternly as he felt. "How did it end?"

"I cleared a passage for Baxendale, and they yelled and hooted him home," replied Austin. 'I suppose they'd like to take my life, sir, 'he said to me; 'but I think I am only doing right in returning to work. I could not let my family and Mary quite starve.' This afternoon all was quiet; Quale told me the men were holding a meeting."

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Florence was sitting with her hands clasped, her colour gradually rising. "If they should—set upon Baxendale, and—and injure him!" she breathed.

"Then the law would see what it could

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do towards getting some of them punished," sternly spoke Mr. Hunter.

"Oh, James!" interposed his wife, her pale cheeks flushing, as the words grated on her ears. "Can nothing be done to prevent it? Prevention is better than cure. Austin, will you not give notice to the police, and tell them to be on the alert?"

"I have done it," answered Austin.

"Papa," said Florence, "have you heard that Robert Darby's children are ill?—likely to die? They are suffering dreadfully from want. Mary Baxendale said so when she was here this morning."

"I know nothing about Robert Darby or his children," was the uncompromising reply of Mr. Hunter. "If a man sees his children starving before him, and will not work to feed them, he deserves to find them ill. Florence, I see what you mean—you would like to ask me to permit you to send them relief. *I will not.*"

Do not judge of Mr. Hunter's humanity by the words, or deem him an unfeeling man. He was far from that. Had the men

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been out of work through misfortune, he would have been the first to forward them succour; many and many a time had he done it in cases of sickness. He considered, as did most of the other London masters, that to help the men or their families in any way, would but tend to prolong the dispute. And there was certainly reason in their argument—if the men wished to feed their children, why did they not work for them?

"Sir," whispered Austin, when he was going, and Mr. Hunter went with him into the hall, "that bill of Lamb's came back to us to-day, noted."

"No!"

"It did, indeed. I had to take it up."

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Mr, Hunter lifted his hands.

“This wretched state of things! It will bring on ruin, it will bring on ruin. I heard one of the masters curse the men the other day in his perplexity and anger: there are times when I am tempted to follow his example. Ruin! for my wife and for Florence!”

“Mr. Hunter,” exclaimed Austin, greatly

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agitated, and speaking in the moment's impulse; “ why will you not give me the hope of winning her? I will make her a happy home——”

“Be silent!” sternly interrupted Mr. Hunter. “I have told you that Florence can never be yours. If you cannot put away this unthankful subject, at once and for ever, I must forbid you the house.”

“Good night, sir,” returned Austin. And he went away, sighing heavily.

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CHAPTER IV.

SOMEBODY “PITCHED INTO.”

How do the poor manage to pull through illness? Through distress, through hunger, through cold, through nakedness; above all, through the close, unwholesome atmosphere in which too many of them are obliged to live, they struggle on from sickness back to health.

Look at the children of Robert Darby. The low fever which attacked them had in some inexplicable way been subdued, without its going on to the dreaded typhus. If typhus had appeared at that untoward time in Daffodil's Delight, why, then, no earthly power could have kept many from the grave.

Little pale, pinched forms, but with the disease gone, there sat Darby's children. Colder weather had come, and they had

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gathered round the bit of fire in their close room: fire it could scarcely be called, for it was only a few decaying embers. All sat on the floor, save Willy; he was in a chair, leaning his head back on a pillow. The hoy had probably never been fitted by constitution for a prolonged life, though he might have lasted some years more under favourable surroundings; as it was, fever and privation had done their work with him, and the little spirit was nearly worn out Mrs. Darby had taken him round to Mr. Rice. "He does not want me, he wants good nourishment, and plenty of it," was the apothecary's announcement! And Mrs. Darby took him home again.

"Mother, the fire's nearly out."

"I can't help it, Willy. There's no more coal, and nothing to buy it with."

"Take something, mother."

You may or may not, as you are acquainted or not with the habits of the poor, be aware that this sentence referred to the pawnbroker: spoken out fully it would have been, "Take something and pledge it,

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mother." In cases of long-continued general distress, the children of a family know just as much about its ways and means as the heads do.

Mrs. Darby cast her eyes round the kitchen. There was nothing to take, nothing that would raise them help, to speak of. As she stood over Willy, parting the hair with her gentle finger upon his little pale brow, her tears dropped upon his face. The pillow on which his head leaned? Ay! she had thought of that with longing; but how would his poor aching head do without it? The last things put in pledge had been Darby's tools.

The latch of the door opened, and Grace entered. She appeared to be in some deep distress. Flinging herself on a chair, she clasped hold of her mother, sobbing wildly, clinging to her as if for protection. "Oh, mother, they have accused me of theft; the police have been had to me!" were the confused words that broke from her lips.

Grace had taken a service in a baker's family, where there was an excessively cross

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mistress. She was a well-conducted, honest girl, and, since the distress had commenced at home, had brought her wages straight to her mother, whenever they were paid her. For the last week or two, the girl had brought something more. On the days when she believed she could get a minute to run home in the evening, she had put by her allowance of meat at dinner—they lived well at the baker's—and made it upon bread and potatoes. Had Grace for a moment suspected there was anything wrong or dishonest in this, she would not have done it: she deemed the meat was hers, and she 'took it to Willy. On this day, two good slices of mutton were cut for her; she put them by, ate her potatoes and bread, and after dinner, upon being sent on an errand past Daffodil's Delight, was taking them out with her.

The mistress pounced upon her. She abused her, she reproached her with theft, she called her husband to join in the accusation; and finally, a policeman was brought in from the street, probably more to frighten

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the girl than to give her in charge. It did frighten her in no measured degree. She protested, as well as she could do it for her sobs, that she had no dishonest thought; that she had believed the meat to be hers to eat it or not as she pleased, and that she was going to take it to her little brother, who was dying. The policeman decided that it was not a case for charge at the police-court, and the baker's wife ended the matter by turning her out. All this, with sobs and moans, she by degrees explained now.

Robert Darby, who had entered during the scene, placed his hand, more in sorrow than in anger, upon Grace's shoulder, in his stern honesty.

"Daughter, I'd far rather we all dropped down here upon the floor and died out with starvation, than that you should have brought home what was not yours to bring."

"There's no need for *you* to scold her, Robert," spoke Mrs. Darby, with more temper than she, meek woman that she was, often betrayed: and her conscience told her that she had purposely kept these little episodes

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from her husband. "It is the bits of meat she has fed him with twice or thrice a week that has just kept life in him; that's my firm belief."

"She shouldn't have done it; it was not hers to bring," returned Robert Darby.

"What else ha he had to feed him?" proceeded the wife, determined to defend the girl "What do any of us have? *You* are getting nothing."

The tone was a reproachful one. With her starving children before her, and one of them dying, the poor mother's wrung heart could but speak out.

"I know I am getting nothing," was his answer. "Is it my fault? I wish I could get something. I'd work my fingers to the bone to keep my children."

"Robert, let me speak to you," she said in an imploring tone, the tears gushing from her eyes. "I have sat here this week and asked myself, every hour of it, what we shall do. All our things, that money can be made on, are gone; the pittance we get allowed by the society does not keep body and soul

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together; and this state of affairs gets worse, and will get worse. What is to become of us? What are we to do?"

Robert Darby leaned in his old jacket—one considerably the worse for wear—against the kitchen wall, his countenance gloomy, his attitude bespeaking misery. He knew not what they were to do, therefore he did not attempt to say. Grace had laid down her inflamed face upon the edge of Willy's pillow and was sobbing silently. The others sat on the floor: very quiet; as semi-starved little ones are apt to be.

"You have just said you would work your fingers to the bone to keep your children," resumed Mrs. Darby to her husband.

"I'd work for them till the flesh dropped off me. I'd ask no better than to do it," he vehemently said. "But where am I to get work to do now?"

"Baxendale has got it," she rejoined in a low tone.

Grace started from her leaning posture.

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“Oh, father, do as Baxendale has done! don't let the children quite starve. If you

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had been in work, this dreadful thing would not have happened. It will be a slur upon me for life.”

“So I would work, girl, but for the Trades' Unions.”

“Father, the Trades' Unions seem to bring you no good; nothing but harm. Don't trust them any longer; trust the masters now.”

Never was there a better meaning man than Robert Darby; but he was too easily swayed by others. Latterly it had appeared to him that the Trades' Unions did bring him harm, and his trust in them was shaken. He stood for a few moments, revolving the question in his own mind.

“They'd cast me off, you see, the Trades' Unions would,” he observed to his wife, in an irresolute tone.

“What if they did? The masters would take you on. Stand right with the masters——”

Mrs. Darby was interrupted by a shriek from Grace. Little Willy, whom nobody had been giving attention to, was lying back with a white face, senseless. Whether from

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the weakness of his condition, or from the unusual excitement of the scene going on around him, certain it was that the child had fainted.

There was some little bustle in bringing him to, and Mrs. Darby sat down, the boy upon her lap.

“What ailed you, deary?” said Robert Darby, bending down to him.

“I don't know, father,” returned the child. And his voice was fainter than ever.

Mrs. Darby pulled her husband's ear close to her lips.

“When the hoy's dead, you'll wish you had cared for him more than for the Trades' Unions; and worked for him.”

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The words told upon the man. Perhaps for the first time he had fully realized to his imagination the moment when he should see his hoy lying dead before him.

"I will work," he exclaimed. "Willy, boy, father will go and get work; and he'll soon bring you home something good to eat, as he used to."

Willy's hot lips parted with a pleasant

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smile of response; his blue eyes glistened brightly. Robert Darby bent his rough, unshaven face, and took a kiss from the child's smooth one.

"Yes, my hoy; father *will* work."

He went out, bending; his steps towards Slippery Sam's—who, by the way, had latterly tried to exact the title of "Mr. Shuck." There was a code of honour—as they regarded it—amidst these operatives of the Hunters, to do nothing underhanded. That is, not to resume work without first speaking to the Unions' man, Sam Shuck—as was mentioned in the case of Baxendale.

It happened that Mr. Shuck was standing in the strip of garden before his house, carrying on a wordy war over the palings with Mrs. Quale, when Darby came up. Peter Quale had of course been locked out with the rest, but with the first hour that Mr. Hunter's yard was open, Peter returned to his work. He did not belong to the Trades' Unions—he never had belonged to them and never would; therefore, he was a free man. Strange to say, he was left to do as he

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liked in peace; somehow, the Union did not care to interfere with Peter Quale—for one thing, he occupied a better position in the yard than most of the men. Peter pursued his own course quietly—going to his work and returning from it, saying little to the malcontents of Daffodil's Delight. Not so Mrs. Quale; she exercised her tongue upon them whenever she got the chance. Her motive was a good one: she was at heart sorry for the privation at present existing in Daffodil's Delight, and would have liked to shame the men into going to work again.

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"Now, Robert Darby! how are them children of your'n?" began she. "Starved out yet?"

"Next door to it," was Darby's answer.

"And whose is the fault?" she went on. "If I had children, and my husband wouldn't work to keep 'em out of their graves, through getting some nasty mistaken crotchet in his head and holding out when the work was going a-begging, I'd go before a magistrate and see if I couldn't have the law of him."

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"You'd do a good many things if you wore the breeches," interposed Sam Shuck, with a sneer; "but you don't, you know."

"You be wearing whole breeches now, which you get out of the blood and marrow of the poor misguided men," retorted Mrs. Quale. "They won't last out whole for ever, Slippery Sam."

"They'll last out as long as I want 'em to, I dare say," said Sam. "Have you come up for anything particular, Darby?"

"I have come to talk a bit, Shuck," answered Darby, inwardly shrinking from his task, and so deferring for a minute the announcement. "There seems no chance of this state of things coming to an end."

"No, that there doesn't. You men are preventing that."

"Us men!" exclaimed Robert Darby in surprise. "What do you mean?"

"I don't mean you; I don't mean the sturdy, honest fellows who hold out for their rights like men—I mean the other lot. If every operative in the kingdom had held out, to a man, the masters would have given

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in long ago—they must have done it; and you would all be back, working in triumph the nine hours per day. I spoke of those rats who sneak in, and take the work, to the detriment of the honest man."

"At any rate, the rats are getting the best of it just now," said Robert Darby.

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“That they are,” said Mrs. Quale, exultingly, who would not lose an opportunity of putting in her word. She stood facing the men, her arms resting on the palings that divided the gardens. “It isn’t *their* children that are dropping into their winding-sheets through want of food.”

“If I had my way, I’d hang every man who in this crisis is putting his hand to a stroke of work,” exclaimed Sam Shuck. “Traitors! to turn and work for the masters after they had resorted to a lock-out! It was that lock-out floored us.”

“Of course it was,” assented Mrs. Quale, with marked complaisance. “If the Union only had money coming in from the men, they’d hold out for ever. But the general lock-out stopped that.”

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“Ugh!” growled Sam, with the addition of an ugly word.

“Well, Shuck, as things seem to be getting worse instead of better, and prospects look altogether so gloomy, I shall go back to work myself,” resumed Darby, plucking up courage to say it.

“Chut,” said Shuck.

“Will you tell me what I *am* to do? I’d rather tum a thousand miles the other way than I’d put my foot indoors at home, and see things as they are there. If a man can clam himself, he can’t watch those belonging to him clam. Every farthing of allowance I had from the society last week was—”

“You had your share,” interrupted Sam, who never cared to contend about the amount received. “Think of the thousands there is to divide it among. The subscriptions have come in very well as yet, but they be falling off now.”

“And think of the society’s expenses,” interposed Mrs. Quale, with suavity. “The scores of gentlemen, like Mr. Shuck, there

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is to pay, and keep on the fat of the land. He’ll be going into Parliament next!”

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“You shut up, will you?” roared Sam. “Ryan,” called out he to the Irishman, who was lounging up, “here’s Darby saying he thinks he shall go to work.”

“Oh, but that would be rich,” said Ryan, with a laugh, as he entered the garden, and took his standing beside Sam Shuck. “Darby, man, you’d never desert the society! It couldn’t spare you.”

“I want to do for the best,” said Darby; “and it seems to me that to hold out is for the worst. Shuck, just answer me a question or two, as from man to man. If the masters fill their yards with other operatives, what is to become of us?”

“They can’t fill their yards with other operatives,” returned Shuck. “Where’s the use of talking nonsense?”

“But they can. They are doing it.”

“They are not. They have just got a sprinkling of men for show—not many. Where are they to get them from?”

“Do you know what I heard? That

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Mr. Henry Hunter has been over to Belgium, and one or two of the other masters have also been, and—”

“There’s no fear of the Beljim workmen,” interrupted Ryan. “What English master ‘ud employ them half-starved frogs?”

“I heard that Mr. Henry Hunter was quite thunderstruck at their skill,” continued Darby, paying no attention to the interruption. “Their tools are bad: they are not to be called tools, compared to ours; but they turn out finished work. Their decorative work is beautiful. Mr. Henry Hunter put the question to them, whether they would like to come to England and earn: five-and-sixpence per day, instead of three shillings as they do there, and they jumped at it. He told them that perhaps he might be sending for them.”

“Where did you hear that fine tale?” asked Slippery Sam.

“It’s going about among us. I daresay you have heard it also, Shuck. Mr. Henry was away somewhere for nine or ten days.”

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“Let ‘em come, them Beljicks,” sneered Ryan. “Maybe they’d go back with their heads off. It couldn’t take much to split the skull of them French beggars.”

“Not when an Irishman holds the stick,” cried Mrs. Quale, looking the man steadily in the face, as she left the palings.

Ryan watched her away, and resumed. “How dare the masters think of taking on forringers? Leaving us to starve!”

“The preventing of it lies with us,” said Darby. “If we go back to work, there’ll be no room for them.”

“Listen, Darby,” rejoined Shuck, in a persuasive tone of confidence, the latter in full force now that his enemy, Mrs. Quale, had gone. “The bone of contention is the letting us work nine hours a day instead of ten: well, why should they not accord it? Isn’t there every reason why they should? Isn’t there men, outsiders, willing to work a full day’s work, but can’t get it? This extra hour, thrown up by us, would give employment to them. Would the masters be any the worse off?”

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“They say they’d be the hour’s wages out of pocket.”

“Flam!” ejaculated Sam. “It would come out of the public’s pocket, not out of the masters’. They would add so much the more on to their contracts, and nobody would be the worse. It’s just a dogged feeling of obstinacy that’s upon ‘em; it’s nothing else. They’ll come-to in the end, if you men will only Jet them: they can’t help doing it. Hold out, hold out, Darby! If we are to give in to them now, where has been the use of this struggle? Haven’t you waited for it, and starved for it, and hoped for it?”

“Very true,” replied Darby, feeling in a perplexing maze of indecision.

“Don’t give in; man, at the eleventh hour,” urged Shuck, with affectionate eloquence: and to hear him you would have thought he had nothing in the world at heart so much as the interest of Robert Darby. “A little longer, and the victory will be ours. You see, it is not the bare fact of your going back that does the mischief:

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it's the example it sets. But for that scoundrel Baxendale's turning tail, you would not have thought about it."

"I don't know that," said Darby.

"One bad sheep will spoil a flock," continued Sam, puffing away at a cigar which he was smoking. He would have enjoyed a pipe a great deal more; but gentleman smoked cigars, and Sam wanted to look as much like a gentleman as he could: it had been suggested to him that it would add to his power over the operatives. "Why, Darby, we have got it all in our own hands—if you men could but be brought to see it. It's as plain as the nose before you. Us builders, taking us in all our branches, might be the most united and prosperous body of men in the world. Only let us pull together, and have consideration for our fellows, and put away selfishness. Binding ourselves to work on an equality, nine hours a day being the limit: eight, perhaps, after awhile—"

"It is a good thing you have not got much of an audience here, Sam Shuck!

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That doctrine of yours is false and pernicious; it's in opposition to the laws of God and man."

The interruption proceeded from Dr. Bevary. He had come into the garden unperceived by Sam, who was lounging on the side palings, his back to the gate. The Doctor was on his way to pay a visit to Mary Baxendale.

Sam started up.

"What did you say, sir?"

"What did I say!" repeated Dr. Bevary. "I think it should be, what did you say? You would dare to circumscribe the means of usefulness God has given to man—to set a limit to his talents and his labour! You would say, 'So far shall you work, and no farther!' Who are you, and all such as you, that you should assume such power, and set yourselves up between your fellowmen and their responsibilities?"

"Hear, hear!" interrupted Mrs. Quale, putting her head out at her window—for she had gone indoors. "Give him a bit of truth, sir."

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“I have been a hard worker for years,” continued Dr. Bevary, paying no attention, it must be confessed, to Mrs. Quale. “Mentally and practically I have toiled—toiled, Sam Shuck—to improve and make use of the talents entrusted to me. My days are spent in alleviating, so far as may be, the sufferings of my fellow-creatures; when I go to rest, I often lie awake half the night, pondering difficult questions of medical science. What man living has God endowed with power to come and say to me, ‘You shall not do this; you shall only work half your hours; you shall only earn a limited amount of fees?’ Answer me.”

“It’s not a parallel case, sir, with ours,” returned Sam.

“It is a parallel case,” said Dr. Bevary. “There’s your friend next door, Peter Quale; take him. By diligence he has made himself into a finished artizan; by dint of industry, in working over hours, he is amassing a competence that will keep him out of the workhouse in his old age. What reason or principle of justice can there be

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in your saying, ‘He shall not do this; he shall receive no more than I do, or than Ryan, there, does? Because Ryan is an inferior workman, and I love idleness and drink and agitation better than work, Quale and others shall not work to have an advantage over us; we will share and fare alike.’ Out upon you, Slippery Sam, for promulgating doctrines so false! You must be the incarnation of selfishness, or you could not do it. If ever they obtain sway in free and enlightened England, the independence of the workman will be at an end.”

The Doctor stepped into Shuck’s house, on his way to Mary Baxendale, leaving Sam on the gravel. Sam put his arm within Darby’s, and led him down the street, out of the Doctor’s way, who would be coming forth again presently. There he set himself to undo what the Doctor’s words had done, and to breathe persuasive arguments into Darby’s ear.

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Later, Darby went home. It had grown: dusk then, for Sam had treated him to a glass at the Bricklayers' Arms, where sundry

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other friends were taking their glasses. There appeared to be a commotion in his house as he entered; his wife, Grace, and the young ones were standing round Willy.

"He has had another fainting fit," said Mrs. Darby to her husband, in explanation. "And now—I declare illness is the strangest thing!—he says he is hungry."

The child put out his hot hand.

"Father!"

Robert Darby advanced and took it.

"Be you better, dear? What ails you this evening?"

"Father," whispered the child, hopefully, "have you got the work?"

"When do you begin, Robert?" asked the wife. "To-morrow?"

Darby's eyes fell, and his face clouded.

"I can't ask for it; I can't go back to work," he answered. "The society won't let me."

A great cry. A cry from the mother, from Grace, from the poor little child. Hope, sprung up once more within them, had been illumining the past few hours. "You

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shall soon have food; father's going to work again, darlings," the mother had said to the hungry little ones. And now the hopes were dashed! The disappointment was hard to bear.

"Is he to *die* of hunger?" exclaimed Mrs. Darby, in bitterness, pointing to Willy. "You said you would work for him."

"So I would, if they'd let me. I'd work the life out of me, but what I'd get a crust for ye all; but the Trades' Union won't have it," panted Darby, his breath short with excitement. "What am I to do?"

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“Work without the Trades’ Union, father,” interposed Grace, taking courage to speak. She had always been a favourite with her father. “Baxendale has done it.”

“They are threatening Baxendale awfully,” he answered. “ But it is not that I’d care for: it’s this. The society would put a mark upon me: I should be a banned man: and when this struggle’s over, they say I should be let get work by neither masters nor men. My tools are in pledge, too,” he added, as if that climax must end the contest.

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Mrs. Darby threw her apron over her eyes and burst into tears; Grace was already crying silently, and the boy had his imploring little hands held up.

“Robert, they are your own children I” said the wife meekly. “I never thought you’d see them starve.”

Another minute and the man would have cried with them. He went out of doors, perhaps to sob his emotion away. Two or three steps down the street he encountered John Baxendale. The latter slipped five shillings into his hand. Darby would have put it back again.

“Tut, man; don’t be squeamish. Take it for the children. You’d do as much for mine, if you had got it and I hadn’t. Mary and I have been talking about you. She heard you having an argument with that snake, Shuck.”

“They be starving, Baxendale, or I would’nt take it,” returned the man, the tears running down his pinched face. “I’ll pay you back with the first work I get. You call Shuck a snake: do you think he is one?”

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“I’m sure of it,” said Baxendale. “I don’t know that he means ill, but can’t you see the temptation it is?—all this distress and agitation that’s ruining us, is making a gentleman of him. He and the other agents are living on the fat of the land, as Quale’s wife calls it, and doing nothing for their pay, except keeping up the agitation. If we all went to work again quietly, where would they be? Why, they’d have to go to work also;

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for their pay must, cease. Darby, I think the eyes of you union men must be blinded not to see this.”

“It seems plain enough to me at times,” assented Darby. “I say, Baxendale,” he added, in a low voice, wishing to speak a word of warning to his friend ere he turned away, “have a care of yourself; they are going on again you at a fine rate.”

Come what would, Darby determined to furnish a home meal with this relief, which seemed like a very help from heaven. He bought two pounds of beef, a pound of cheese, some tea, some sugar, two loaves of

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bread, and a lemon to make drink for Willy. Turning home with these various treasures, he became aware that a bustle had arisen in the street. Men and women were pressing down towards one particular spot. Tongues were busy; but he could not at first obtain an insight into the cause of the commotion.

“An obnoxious man had been set upon in a lonely corner, under cover of the night’s darkness, and pitched into,” was at length explained. “Beaten to death.”

Away flew Darby, a horrible suspicion at his heart. Pushing his way amidst the crowd collected round the spot, as only a resolute man can do, he stood face to face with the sight. One, trampled on and beaten, lay in the dust, his face covered with blood.

“Is it Baxendale?” shouted Darby, for he was unable to recognise him.

“It’s Baxendale, as sure as a trivet. Who else should it be? He have caught it at last.”

But there were pitying faces around. Humanity revolted at the sight; and quiet,

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inoffensive John Baxendale had ever been liked in Daffodil’s Delight. Robert Darby, his voice rising to a shriek with emotion, held out his armful of provisions.

“Look here! I wanted to work, but the Union won’t let me. My wife and children be a starving at home, one of them dying: I came out, for I couldn’t bear to stop indoors in the misery. There I met a friend—it seemed to me more like an angel—and he gave

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me money to feed my children; made me take it; he said if I had money and he had not, I'd do as much for him. See what I bought with it: I was carrying it home for my poor children when this cry arose. Friends, the one to give it me was Baxendale. And you have murdered him!"

Another great cry, even as Darby concluded, arose to break the deep stillness. No stillness is so deep as that caused by emotion.

"He is not dead!" shouted the crowd.

"See! he is stirring. Who could have done this?"

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CHAPTER V.

A GLOOMY CHAPTER.

THE winter had come in, intensely hard. Frost and snow lay early upon the ground. Was that infliction in store—a bitter winter—to be added to the already fearful distress existing in this dense metropolis? The men held out from work, and the condition of their families was something sad to look upon.

Distress of a different nature existed in the house of Mr. Hunter. It was a house of sorrow; for its mistress lay dying. The spark of life had long been flickering, and now its time to depart had come.

Haggard, worn, pale, stood Mr. Hunter in his drawing-room. He was conversing with his brother Henry. Their topic was business. In spite of existing domestic woes,

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men of business cannot long forget their daily occupation. Mr. Henry Hunter had come into inquire news of his sister-in-law, and the conversation insensibly turned on other matters.

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"Of course I shall weather it," Mr. Henry was saying, in answer to a question. "It will be a fearful loss, with so much money out, and buildings in process standing still. Did it last very much longer, I hardly know that I could. And you, James?"

Mr. Hunter evaded the question. Since the time, years back, when they had dissolved partnership, he had shunned all allusion to his own prosperity, or non-prosperity, with his brother; Possibly he feared that it might lead to that other subject—the mysterious paying away of the five thousand pounds.

"For my part, I do not feel so sure of the strike's being near its end," he remarked.

"I have positive information that the eligibility of withdrawing the strike at the Messrs. Pollocks' has been mooted by the central committee of the Union," said Mr.

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Henry. "If nothing else has brought the men to their senses, this weather must do it. It will end as nearly all strikes have ended—in their resuming work upon our terms." "But what an incalculable amount of suffering they have brought upon themselves!" exclaimed Mr. Hunter. "I do not see what is to become of them, either, in future. How are they all to find work again? We shall not turn off the stranger men who have worked for us in this emergency, to make room for them."

"No, indeed," replied Mr. Henry. "And those strangers amount to nearly half my complement of hands. Do you recollect a fellow of the name of Moody?"

"Of course I do. I met him the other day, looking like a walking skeleton. I asked him whether he was not tired of the strike. He said *he* had been tired of it long ago; but the Union would not let him be."

"He hung himself yesterday."

Mr. Hunter replied only by a gesture.

"And left a written paper behind him, cursing the strike and the Trades' Unions,

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which had brought ruin upon him and his family.' I saw the paper," continued Mr. Henry. "A decent, quiet man he was; but timorous, and easily led away."

"Is he dead?"

"He had been dead two hours when he was found. He hung himself in that shed at the back of Dunn's house, where the men held some meetings in the commencement of the strike. I wonder how many more souls this wretched state of affairs will send, or has sent, out of the world!"

"Hundreds, directly or indirectly. The children are dying off quickly, as the Registrar-General's returns show. A period of prolonged distress always tells upon the children. And upon us also, I think," Mr. Hunter added, with a sigh.

"Upon us in a degree," Mr. Henry assented, somewhat carelessly. He was a man of substance: and, upon such, the ill effects fall lightly. "When the masters act in combination, as we have done, it is not the men who can do us permanent injury. They must give in, before great harm has

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had time to come. James, I saw that man this morning: your *bête noire*, as I call him."

Mr. Hunter changed countenance. He could not be ignorant that his brother alluded to Gwinn of Ketterford. It happened that Mr. Henry Hunter had been cognisant of one or two of the unpleasant visits forced by the man upon his brother during the last few years. But Mr. Henry had avoided questions: he had the tact to perceive that they would only go unanswered, and be deemed unpleasant into the bargain.

"I met him near your yard. Perhaps he was going in there."

The sound of the muffled knocker, announcing a visitor, was heard the moment after Mr. Henry spoke, and Mr. Hunter started as though struck by a pistol-shot. At a calmer time he might have had more command over himself; but the sudden announcement of the presence of the man in town—which fact he had not been cognisant of—had startled him to tremor.

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That Gwinn, and nobody else, was knocking for admittance, seemed a certainty to his shattered nerves.

“I cannot see him! I cannot see him!” he exclaimed, in agitation; and he backed away from the room door, unconscious what he did in his confused fear, his lips blanching to a deadly whiteness.

Mr. Henry moved up and took his hand. “James, there has been estrangement between us on this point for years. As I asked you once before, I now ask you again: confide in me and let me help you. Whatever the dreadful secret may be, you shall find me your true brother.”

“Hush!” breathed Mr. Hunter, moving from his brother in his scared alarm. “Dreadful secret! who says it? There is no dreadful secret. Oh Henry! Hush! Hush! The man is coming in! You must leave us.”

Not the dreaded Gwinn, but Austin Clay. He was the one who entered. Mr. Hunter sat down, breathing heavily, the blood coming back to his face; he nearly fainted in the

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revulsion of feeling brought by the relief. Broken in spirit, health and nerves alike shattered, the slightest thing was now sufficient to agitate him.

“You are ill, sir!” exclaimed Austin, advancing with concern.

“No—no—I am not ill. A momentary spasm; that’s all I am subject to it.”

Mr. Henry moved to the door in vexation. There was to be no more brotherly confidence between them now than there had formerly been. He spoke as he went, without turning round.

“I will come in again by-and-by, James, and see how Louisa is.”

The departure seemed a positive relief to Mr. Hunter. He spoke quietly enough to Austin Clay.

“Who has been at the office to-day?”

“Let me see,” returned Austin, with a purposed carelessness. “Lyll came, and Thompson—”

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“Not men on business, not men on business,” Mr. Hunter interrupted with feverish eagerness. “Strangers.”

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“Gwinn of Ketterford,” answered Austin with the same assumption of carelessness. “He came twice. No other strangers have called, I think.”

Whether his brother's request, that he should be enlightened as to the “dreadful secret,” had rendered Mr. Hunter suspicious that others might surmise there was a secret, certain it is that he looked up sharply as Austin spoke, keenly regarding his countenance, noting the sound of his voice.

“What did he want?”

“He wanted you, sir. I said you were not to be seen. I let him suppose that you were too ill to be seen. Bailey, who was in the counting-house at the time, gave him the gratuitous information that Mrs. Hunter was very ill—in danger.”

Why this answer should have increased Mr. Hunter's suspicions, he best knew. He rose from his seat, grasped Austin's arm, and spoke with menace.

“You have been prying into my affairs! You sought out those Gwinn's when you last went to Ketterford! You—”

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Austin withdrew from the grasp and stood before his master, calm and upright. “Mr. Hunter!”

“Was it not so?”

“No, sir. I thought you had known me better. I should be the last to ‘pry’ into anything that you might wish to keep secret.”

“Austin, I am not myself to-day, I am not myself,” cried the poor gentleman, feeling how unjustifiable had been his suspicious. “This grief, induced by the state of Mrs. Hunter, unmans me.”

“How is she, sir, by this time?”

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“Calm and collected, but sinking fast. You must go up and see her. She said she should like to bid you farewell.”

Through the warm corridors, so well protected from the bitter cold reigning without, Austin was conducted to the room of Mrs. Hunter. Florence, her eyes swollen with weeping, quitted it as he entered. She lay in bed, her pale face raised upon pillows: save for that pale face and the laboured breathing, you would not have suspected the

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closing scene to be so near. She lifted her feeble hand and made prisoner of Austin's. The tears gathered in his eyes as he looked down upon her.

“Not for me, dear Austin,” she whispered, as she noted the signs of sorrow. “Weep rather for those who are left to battle yet with this sad world.”

The words caused Austin to wonder whether she could have become cognisant of the nature of Mr. Hunter's long-continued trouble. He swallowed down the emotion that was rising in his throat.

“Do you feel no better?” he gently inquired.

“I feel well, save for the weakness. All pain has left me. Austin, I shall be glad to go. I have only one regret, the • leaving Florence. My husband will not be long after me; I read it in his face.”

“Dear Mrs. Hunter, will you allow me to say a word to you on the subject of Florence?” he breathed, seizing on the swiftly passing opportunity. “I have wished to do it before we finally part.”

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“Say what you will.”

“Should time and perseverance on my part be crowned with success, so that the prejudices of Mr. Hunter become subdued, and I succeed in winning Florence, will you not say that you bless our union?”

Mrs. Hunter paused. “Are we quite alone?” she asked.

Austin glanced round to the closed door.

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“Quite,” he answered.

“Then, Austin, I will say more. My hearty consent and blessing be upon you both, if you can, indeed, subdue the objection of Mr. Hunter. Not otherwise: you understand that.”

“Without her father’s consent, I am sure that Florence would not give me hers. Have you any idea in what that objection lies?”

“I have not. Mr. Hunter is not a man who will submit to be questioned, even by me. But, Austin, I cannot help thinking that this objection to you may fade away—for, that he likes and esteems you greatly, I know. Should that time come, then tell

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him that I loved you—that I wished Florence to become your wife—that I prayed God to bless the union. And then tell Florence.”

“Will you not tell her yourself?”

Mrs. Hunter made a feeble gesture of denial. “It would seem like an encouragement to dispute the decision of her father. Austin, will you say farewell, and send my husband to me? I am growing faint.”

He clasped her attenuated hands in both his; he bent down, and kissed her forehead. Mrs. Hunter held him to her. “Cherish and love her always, should she become yours,” was the feeble whisper. “And come to me, come to me, both of you, in eternity.”

A moment or two in the corridor to compose himself, and Austin met Mr. Hunter on the stairs, and gave him the message. “How is Baxendale?” Mr. Hunter stayed to ask.

“A trifle better. Not yet out of danger.”

“You take care to give him the allowance weekly?”

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“Of course I do, sir. It is due to-night and I am going to take it to him.”

“Will he ever be fit for work again?”

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“I hope so.”

Another word or two on the subject of Baxendale, the attack on whom Mr. Hunter most bitterly resented, and Austin departed. Mr. Hunter entered his wife's chamber. Florence, who was also entering, Mrs. Hunter feebly waved away.

“I would be a moment alone with your father, my child. James,” Mrs. Hunter said to her husband, as Florence retired—but her voice was now so reduced that he had to bend his ear to catch the sounds—” there has been estrangement between us on one point for many years: and it seems—I know not why—to be haunting my death-bed. Will you not, in this my last hour, tell me its cause?”

“It would not give you peace, Louisa. It concerns myself alone.”

“Whatever the secret may be, it has been wearing your life out. I ought to know it.”

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Mr. Hunter bent lower. “My dear wife, it would not bring you peace, I say. I contracted an obligation in my youth,” he whispered, in answer to the yearning glance thrown up to him, “and I have had to pay it off—one sum after another, one after another, until it has nearly drained me. It will soon be at an end now.”

“Is it nearly paid?”

“Ay. All but.”

“But why not have told me this? It would have saved me many a troubled hour. Suspense, when fancy is at work, is hard to bear. And you, James: why should simple debt, if it is that, have worked so terrible a fear upon you.”

“I did not know that I could stave it off: looking back, I wonder t at I did do it. I could have borne ruin for myself: I could not, for you.”

“Oh, James!” she fondly said, “should I have been leas brave? While you and Florence were spared to me, ruin might have done its worst.”

Mr. Hunter turned his face away:

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strangely wrung and haggard it looked just then.

“What a mercy that it is over!”

“All but, I said,” he interrupted. And the words seemed to burst from him in an uncontrollable impulse, in spite of himself.

“It is the only thing that has marred our life’s peace, James. I shall soon be at rest. Perfect peace! perfect happiness! May all we have loved be there! I can see—”

The words had been spoken disjointedly, in the faintest whisper, and, with the last one died away. She laid her head upon her husband’s arm, and seemed as if she would sleep. He did not disturb her: he remained buried in his own thoughts.

A short while, and Florence was heard at the door. Dr. Bevary was there.

“You can come in,” called out Mr. Hunter.

They approached the bed. Florence saw a change in her mother’s face, and uttered an exclamation of alarm. The physician’s practised eye detected what had happened: he made a sign to the nurse who had followed

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him in, and the woman went forth to carry the news to the household. Mr. Hunter alone was calm.

“Thank God!” was his strange ejaculation.

“Oh, papa! papa! it is death!” sobbed Florence, in her distress. “Do you not see that it is death?”

“Thank God also, Florence,” solemnly said Dr. Bevary. “She is better off.”

Florence sobbed wildly. The words sounded to her ears needlessly cruel—out of place. Mr. Hunter bent his face on that of the dead, with a long, fervent kiss. “My wronged wife!” he mentally uttered. Dr. Bevary followed him as he left the room.

“James Hunter, it had been a mercy for you had she been taken years ago.” Mr. Hunter lifted his hands as if beating off the words, and his face turned white. “Be still! be still! what can *you* know?”

“I know as much as you,” said Dr. Bevary, in a tone which, low though it was, seemed to penetrate to the very marrow of the unhappy man. “The knowledge has

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disturbed my peace by day, and my rest by night. What, then, must it have done by yours?"

James Hunter, his hands held up still to shade his face, and his head down, turned away. "It was the fault of another," he wailed, "and I have borne the punishment."

"Ay," said Dr. Bevary, "or you would have had my reproaches long ago. Hark! whose voice is that?"

It was one known only too well to Mr. Hunter. He cowered for a moment, as he had hitherto had terrible cause to do: the next, he raised his head, and shook off the fear.

"I can dare him now," he bravely said, turning to the stairs with a cleared countenance, to meet Gwinn of Ketterford.

He had obtained entrance in this way. The servants were closing up the windows of the house, and one of them had gone outside to ten the gossiping servant of a neighbour that their good lady and ever kind mistress was dead, when the lawyer arrived. He saw what was being done, and drew his

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own conclusions. Nevertheless, he desisted not from the visit he had come to pay.

"I wish to see Mr. Hunter," he said, while the door stood open.

"I do not think you can see him now, sir," was the reply of the servant, "My master is in great affliction,"

"Your mistress is dead, I suppose,"

"Just dead"

"Well, I shall not detain Mr. Hunter many minutes," rejoined Gwinn, pushing his way into the hall, " I must see him."

The servant hesitated. But his master's voice was heard. "You can admit that person, Richard."

The man opened the door of the front room, It was in darkness; the shutters were closed; so he turned to the door of the other, and showed the guest in. The soft perfume

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from the odoriferous plants in the conservatory was wafted to the senses of Gwinn of Ketterford as he entered.

“Why do you seek me here?” demanded Mr. Hunter when he appeared. “Is it a fitting time and place?”

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“A court of law might perhaps be more fit,” insolently returned the lawyer. “Why did not you remit the money, according to promise, and so obviate the necessity of my coming?”

“Because I shall remit no more money. Not another farthing, or the value of one; shall you ever obtain of me. If I have submitted to your ruinous and swindling demands, you know why I have done it—”

“Stop!” interrupted Mr. Gwinn. “You have had your money’s worth—silence.”

Mr. Hunter was deeply agitated. “As the breath went out of my wife’s body, I thanked God that He had taken her—that she was removed from the wicked machinations of you and yours. But for the bitter wrong dealt out to me by your wicked sister Agatha, I should have mourned for her with regrets and tears. You have made my life into a curse: I purchased your silence that you should not render hers one. The fear and the thralldom are alike over.”

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Mr. Gwinn laughed significantly. “Your daughter lives.”

“She does. In saying that I will make her cognisant of this, rather than supply you with another sixpence, you may judge how firm is my determination.”

“It will be startling news for her.”

“It will: should it come to the telling. Better that she hear it, and make the best and the worst of it, than that I should reduce her to utter poverty—and your demands supplied, would do that. The news will not kill her—as it might have killed her mother.”

Did Lawyer Gwinn feel baffled? For a minute or two he seemed to be at a loss for words.

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"I will have money," he exclaimed at length. "You have tried to stand out against it before now."

"Man! do you know that I am on the brink of ruin?" uttered Mr. Hunter, in deep excitement, "and that it is you who have brought me to it? But for the money supplied to you, I could have weathered

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successfully this contest with my workmen, as my brother and others are weathering it. If you have any further claim against me," he added, in a spirit of mocking bitterness, "bring it against my bankruptcy, for that is looming near."

"I will not stir from your house without a cheque for the money."

"This house is sanctified by the presence of the dead," reverently spoke Mr. Hunter. To have any disturbance in it would be most unseemly. Do not force me to call in a policeman."

"As a policeman was once called in to you, in the years gone by," Lawyer Gwinn was beginning with a sneer: but Mr. Hunter raised his voice and his hand.

"Be still! Coward as I have been, in one sense, in yielding to your terms, I have never been coward enough to permit *you* to allude, in my presence, to the past. I never will. Go from my house quietly, sir: and do not attempt to re-enter it."

Mr. Hunter broke from the man—for Gwinn made an effort to detain him—opened

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the door, and called to the servant, who came forward.

"Show this person to the door, Richard."

An instant's hesitation with himself, whether it should be compliance or resistance, and Gwinn of Ketterford went forth. "Richard," said Mr. Hunter, as the servant closed the hall door.

"Sir?"

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“Should that man ever come here again, do not admit him. And if he shows himself troublesome, call a policeman to your aid.”

And then Mr. Hunter shut himself; in the room, and burst into heavy tears, such as are rarely shed by man.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE LITTLE BOY AT REST.

No clue whatever had been obtained to the assailants of John Baxendale. The chief injury lay in the ribs. Two or three of them were broken: the head also was much bruised and cut. He had been taken into his own home and there attended to: it was nearer than the hospital: though the latter would have been the better place. Time had gone on since, and he was now out of danger.

Never would John Baxendale talk of the harshness of masters again—though, indeed, he never had much talked of it. The moment Mr. Hunter heard of the assault, he sent round his own surgeon, directed Austin to give Baxendale a sovereign weekly, and caused strengthening delicacies to be served

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from his own house. And that was the same man whom you heard forbidding his wife and daughter to forward aid to Darby's starving children. Yes; but Mr. Hunter denied the aid upon principle: Darby would not work. It pleased him far more to accord it to Baxendale than to deny it to Darby: the one course gladdened his heart, the other pained it. The surgeon who attended was a particular friend of Dr. Bevary's, and the Doctor, in his quaint, easy manner, contrived to let Baxendale know that there would be no bill for him to pay.

It was late when Austin reached Baxendale's room the evening of Mrs. Hunter's death. Tidings of which had already gone abroad. “Oh, sir,” uttered the invalid,

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straining his eyes on him from the sick-bed, before Austin had well entered, "is the news true?"

"It is," sadly replied Austin. "She died this afternoon."

"It's a good lady gone from among us. Does the master take on much?"

"I have not seen him since. Death

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came on, I believe, rather suddenly at the last."

"Poor Mrs. Hunter!" wailed Baxendale. "Hers is not the only spirit that is this evening on the wing," he added, after a pause. "That boy of Darby's is going Mary"—looking on the bright sovereign put into his hands by Austin—"suppose you get this changed, and go down there and take 'em a couple of shillings? It's hard to have a cupboard quite empty when death's a visitor."

Mary came up from the far end of the room, and put on her shawl with alacrity. She looked but a shadow herself. Austin wondered how Mr. Hunter would approve of any of his shillings finding their way to Darby's; but he said nothing against it. But for the strongly expressed sentiments of Mr. Hunter, Austin would have given away right and left, to relieve the distress around him: although, put him upon principle, and he agreed fully with Mr. Hunter.

Mary got change for the sovereign, and took possession of a couple of shillings. It

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was a bitterly cold evening; but she was well wrapped up. Though not permanently better, Mary was feeling stronger of late: in her simple faith, she believed God had mercifully spared her for a short while, that she might nurse her father. She knew, just as well as did Dr. Bevary, that it would not be for long. As she went along she met Mrs. Quale.

"The child is gone," said the latter, hearing where Mary was going.

"Poor child! Is he really dead?"

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Mrs. Quale nodded. Few things upset her equanimity. "And I am keeping my eyes open to look out for Darby," she added. "His wife asked me if I would. She is afraid"—dropping her voice—"that he may do something rash."

"Why!" breathed Mary, in a tone of horror, understanding the allusion.

"Why!" vehemently repeated Mrs. Quale; "why, because he reflects upon himself—that's why. When he saw that the breath was really gone out of the poor little body—and that's not five minutes ago—he

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broke out like one mad. Them quiet natures in ordinary be always the worst if they get upset; though it takes a good deal to do it. He blamed himself, saying that if he had been in work, and able to get proper food for the boy, it would not have happened; and he cursed the Trades' Unions for misleading him, and bringing him to what he is. There's many another cursing the Unions on this inclement night, or my name's not Nancy Quale."

She turned back with Mary, and they entered the home of the Darbys. Grace, unable to get another situation, partly through the baker's wife refusing her a character, partly because her clothes were in pledge, looked worn and thin, as she stood trying to hush the youngest child, then crying fretfully. "Mrs. Darby sat in front of the small bit of fire, the dead boy on her knees, pressed to her still, just as Mrs. Quale had left her.

"He won't hunger any more," she said, lifting her face to Mary, the hot tears running from it.

Mary stooped and kissed the little cold

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face. "Don't grieve," she murmured. "It would be well for us all if we were as happy as he."

"Go and speak to him," whispered the mother to Mrs. Quale, pointing to a back door, which led to a sort of open scullery. "He has come in, and is gone out there."

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Leaning against the wall, in the cold moonlight, stood Robert Darby. Mrs. Quale was not very good at consolation: finding fault was more in her line. "Come, Darby, don't take on so: it won't do no good," was the best she could say. "Be a man."

He seized hold of her, his shaking hands trembling, while he spoke bitter words against the Trades' Unions.

"Don't speak so, Robert Darby," was the rejoinder of Mrs. Quale. "You are not obliged to join the Trades' Unions; therefore there's no need to curse 'em. If you and others kept aloof from them, they'd soon die away."

"They have proved a curse to me and mine"—and the man's voice rose to a shriek, in his violent emotion. "But for

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them, I should have been at work long ago."

"Then I'd go to work at once, if it was me, and put the curse from me that way," concluded Mrs. Quale.

With the death of the child, things had come to so low an ebb in the Darby household, as to cause sundry kind gossipers to suggest, and to spread the suggestion as a fact, that the parish would have the honour of conducting the interment. Darby would have sold himself first.

He was at Mr. Hunter's yard on the following morning before daylight, and the instant the gates were opened presented himself to the foreman as a candidate for work. That functionary would not treat with him.

"We have had so many of you old hands just coming on for a day or two, and then withdrawing again, through orders of the society, or through getting frightened at being threatened, that Mr. Clay said I was to take back no more shilly-shallyers."

"Try me!" feverishly cried Darby. "I will not go from it again."

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"No," said the foreman. "You can speak to Mr. Clay."

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“Darby,” said Austin, when the man appeared before him, “will you pass your word to me to remain? Here men come; they sign the document, they have work assigned them; and in a day or so, I hear that they have left again. It causes no end of confusion to us, for work to be taken up and laid down in that way.”

“Take me on, and try me, sir. I’ll stick to it as long as there’s a stroke of work to do—unless they tread me to pieces as they did Baxendale. I never was cordial for the society, sir. I obeyed it, and yet a doubt was always upon me whether I might not be doing wrong. I am sure of it now. The society has worked harm to me and mine, and I will never belong to it again.”

“Others have said as much of the society, and have returned to it the next day,” remarked Mr. Clay.

“Perhaps so, sir. They hadn’t seen one of their children die, that they’d have laid down their own lives to save—but that they

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had not *worked* to save. I have. Take me on, sir! He can’t be buried till I have earned the wherewithal to pay for it. I’ll stand to my work from henceforth—over hours, if I can get it.”

Austin wrote a word on a card, and desired Darby to carry it to the foreman. “You can go to work at once,” he said.

“I’ll take work too, sir, if I can get it,” exclaimed another man, who had come up in time to hear Austin’s last words.

“What! is it you, Abel White?” exclaimed Austin, with a half laugh. “I thought you made a boast that if the whole lot of hands came back to work, you never would, except upon your own terms.”

“So I did, sir. But when I find I have been in the wrong, I am not above owning it,” was the man’s reply, who looked in a far better physical condition than the pinched, half-starved Darby. “I could hold out longer, sir, without much inconvenience; leastways, with a deal less inconvenience than some of them could, for I and father long to one or two provident clubs, and

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they have helped us weekly, and my wife and daughters don't do amiss at their umbrella work. But I have come over to my old father's views at last; and I have made my mind up, as he did long ago, never to be a Union man again—unless the masters should turn round and make themselves into a body of tyrants; I don't know what I might do then. But there's not much danger of that—as father says—in these go-a-head days. You'll give me work, sir?"

“Upon certain conditions,” replied Austin. And he sat down and proceeded to talk to the man.

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CHAPTER VII.

MR. DUNN'S PIGS BROUGHT TO MARKET.

DAFFODIL'S DELIGHT and its environs were in a state of bustle—of public excitement, as may be said. Daffodil's Delight, however low its condition might be, never failed to seize hold upon any possible event, whether of a general public nature, or of a private local nature, as an excuse for getting up a little steam. On that cold winter's day, two funerals were appointed to take place: the one, that of Mrs. Hunter; the other, of little William Darby: and Daffodil's Delight, in spite of the black frost, turned out in crowds to see.

You could not have passed into the square when the large funeral came forth, so many had collected there. It was a funeral of mutes and plumes and horses and trappings

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and carriages and show. The nearer Mr. Hunter had grown to pecuniary embarrassment, the more jealous was he to guard all suspicion of it from the world. Hence the display:

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which the poor unconscious lady they were attending would have been the first to shrink from. Mr. Hunter, his brother, and Dr. Bevary were in the first mourning-coach: in the second, with two of the sons of Henry Hunter, and another relative, sat Austin Clay. And more followed.

That took place in the morning. In the afternoon, the coffin of the hoy, covered by something black—but it looked like old cloth instead of velvet—was brought out of Darby's house upon men's shoulders. Part of the family followed, and pretty nearly the whole of Daffodil's Delight brought up the rear.

There it is, moving slowly down the street. Not over slowly either; for there had been a delay in some of the arrangements, and the clergyman must have been waiting for half an hour. It was a week since Darby resumed work; a long while to keep the child,

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but the season was winter. Darby had paid part of the expense, and had been trusted for the rest.

It arrived at the burial place; and the little body was buried, there to remain until the resurrection at the last day. As Darby stood over the grave, the regret for his child was nearly lost sight of in that other and far more bitter regret, the remorse of which was telling upon him. He had kept the dead starving for months, when work was to be had for the asking!

"Don't take on so," whispered a neighbour, who knew his thoughts. "If you had gone back to work as soon as the yards were open, you'd only have been set upon and half-killed, as Baxendale was."

"Then it would not, in that case, have been my fault if he had starved," returned Darby, with compressed lips. "His poor hungry face 'll be upon my mind for ever."

The shades of evening were on Daffodil's Delight when the attendants of the funeral returned, and Mr. Cox, the pawnbroker, was busily transacting the business that the

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dusk hour always brought him. Even the ladies and gentlemen of Daffodil's Delight, though they were common sufferers, and all, or nearly all, required to pay visits to Mr. Cox, imitated their betters in observing that peculiar reticence of manner which custom has thrown around these delicate negotiations.

The character of their offerings had changed. In the first instance they had chiefly consisted of ornaments, whether of the house or person, or of superfluous articles of attire and of furniture. Then had come necessaries: bedding, and heavier things; and then trifles—irons, saucepans, frying pans, gowns, coats, tools—anything; anything by which a shilling could be obtained. And now had arrived the climax when there' was nothing more to take—nothing, at least; that Mr. Cox would speculate upon.

A woman went banging into the shop, and Mr. Cox recognised her for the most trouble some of his customers—Mrs. Dunn. Of all the miserable households in Daffodil's Delight, that of the Dunns' was about the

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worst: but Mrs. Dunn's manners and temper were fiercer than ever. The non-realization of her fond hope of good cheer and silk dresses was looked upon as a private injury, and resented as such. See her as she tums into the shop: her head, a mass of torn black cap and entangled hair; her gown, a black stuff once, dirty now, hanging in jags, and clinging round her with that peculiar cling which indicate that few, if any, petticoats are underneath; her feet scuffling along in shoes tied round the instep with white rag, to keep them on! As she was entering, she encountered a poor woman named Jones, the wife of a carpenter, as badly reduced as she was. Mrs. Jones held out a small blanket for her inspection, and spoke with the tears running down her cheeks. Apparently, her errand to Mr. Cox had been unsuccessful.

“We have kept it till the last. We said we could not lie on the sack of straw this awful weather, without the blanket to cover us. But to-day we haven't got a crumb in the house, or a ember in the grate; and

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Jones said, says he, 'There ain't no help for it, you must pledge it.'

'And Cox won't take it in?' shrilly responded Mrs. Dunn.

The woman shook her head, and the tears fell fast on her thin cotton shawl, as she walked away. 'He says the moths has got into it.'

'A pity but the moths had got to her! his eyes is sharper than they need to be,' shrieked Mrs. Dunn. 'Here, Cox,? dashing up to the counter, and flinging an it a pair of boots, 'I want three shillings on them.'

Mr. Cox took up the offered pledge—a thin pair of woman's boots, black cloth with leather tips; new, they had probably cost five shillings, but they were now considerably the worse for wear.

'What is the use of bringing these old things?' remonstrated Mrs. Cox. 'They are worth nothing.'

'Everything's worth nothing, according to you,' retorted Mrs. Dunn 'Come! I want three shillings on them.'

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'I wouldn't lend you eighteen-pence. They'd not fetch it at an auction.'

Mrs. Dunn would have very much liked to fling the boots in his face. After some dispute she condescended to ask what he would give.

'I'll lend a shilling, as you are a costumer, just oblige you. But I don't care to take them in at all.'

More dispute; and she brought her demand down to eighteen-pence.

'Not a penny more than a shilling,' was the decisive reply. 'I tell you they are not worth that, to me.'

The boots were at length left, and the shilling taken. Mrs. Dunn solaced herself with a pint of half-and-half in a beer shop, and went home with the change.

Upon no home had the strike acted with worse effects than upon that of the Dunns: and we are not speaking now as to pecuniary matters. *They* were just as bad as they could be. Irregularity had prevailed in it at the best of times; quarrelling and contention often; embarrassment, the result of

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bad management, frequently; upon such a home, distress, long continued bitter distress, was not likely to work for good. The father and a grown-up son were out of work; and the Misses Dunn were also without employment. Their patronesses, almost without exception, consisted of the ladies of Daffodil's Delight, and, as may be readily conjectured, they had no funds just now to expend upon gowns and their making. Not only this: there was from one party or another, a good bit of money owing to the sisters for past work, and this they could not get. As a set-off to this—on the wrong side—*they* were owing bills in various directions for materials that had been long ago made up for their customers, some of whom had paid them and some not. Any that had not been paid before the strike came, remained unpaid still. The Miss Duns might just as well have asked for the moon, as for money, owing or not owing, from the distressed wives of Daffodil's Delight. So, there they were: father, mother, son, daughters, all debarred from earning

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money; while all, with the younger children in addition, had to be kept. It was wearying work, that forced idleness and that forced famine; and it worked badly, especially on the girls. Quarrelling they were accustomed to; embarrassment they did not mind; irregularity in domestic affairs they had lived in all their lives; but they could not bear the distress that had now come upon them. Added to this, the girls were unpleasantly pressed for the settlement of the bills above alluded to Mrs. Quale had from the first recommended the two sisters to try for situations: but when was advice well taken? They tossed their heads at the idea of going out to service, thereby giving up their liberty and their idleness. They said that it might prevent them getting together again their business, when things should look up; they urged that they were not fitted for service, knowing little of any sort of housework; and, finally, they asked—and there was a great deal in the plea—how they were to go out while the chief portion of their clothes was in pledge.

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For the past few days certain mysterious movements on the part of Mary Ann Dunn had given rise to some talk (the usual expression for gossiping and scandal) in Daffodil's Delight. She had been almost continually out from home, and when asked where, had evaded an answer. Ever ready, as some people are, to put a bad construction upon things, it was not wanting in this case. Tales were carried home to the father and mother, and there had been a scene of attack and abuse, on Mary Ann's presenting herself at home at mid-day. The girl had a fierce temper, inherited probably from her mother; she returned abuse for abuse, and finally rushed off in a passion, without having given any satisfactory defence of herself. Dunn cared for his children after a fashion; and the fear that the reports must be true completely beat him down; cowed his spirit, as he might have put it. Mrs. Dunn, on the contrary, ranted and raved till she was hoarse; and then, being excessively thirsty, stole off surreptitiously with the boots to Mr. Cox's; and so obtained a pint of half-and-half.

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She returned home again, the delightful taste of it still in her mouth. The room was stripped of all, save a few things, too old or too useless for Mr. Cox to take; and, except for a little fire, it presented a complete picture of poverty. The children lay on the boards crying; not a loud cry, but a distressed moan. Very little indeed, even of bread, got those children; for James Dunn and his wife were too fond of beer, to expend in much else the trifle allowed them by the Trades' Union. James Dunn had just come in. After the scene with his daughter, when he had a little recovered himself, he went out to keep an appointment. Some of the work- men, in a similarly distressed condition to himself, had been that day to one of the police courts, hoping to obtain pecuniary help from the magistrates. The result had been a complete failure, and Dunn sat, moody and cross upon a bench, his depression of spirit having given place to a sort of savage anger; chiefly at his daughter Mary Ann, partly at things altogether. The pint of half-and-half upon an empty stomach had not tended to render

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Mrs. Dunn of a calmer temper. She addressed him snappishly.

“What, you have come in! Have you got any money?”

Mr. Dunn made no reply; unless a growl that sounded rather defiant constituted one. She returned to the charge.

“Have you got any money, I ask? Or be you come home again with a empty pocket?”

“No; father hasn't got none: they didn't get any good by going there,” interposed Jemima Dunn, as though it were a satisfaction to tell out the bad news, and who appeared to be looking in all sorts of corners and places, as if in search of something. “Ted Cheek told me, and he was one of 'em that went. The magistrate said to the men that there was plenty of work open for them if they liked to do it; and his opinion was, that if they did not like to do it, they wanted punishment instead of assistance.”

“That's just my opinion,” returned Mrs. Dunn, with intense aggravation. “There!”

James Dunn broke out intemperately, with

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violent words.' And then he relapsed into his gloomy mood again.

“I can't think what's gone with my boots,” exclaimed Jemima.

“Mother took 'em out,” cried a little voice from the floor.

“What's that, Jacky?” asked Jemima. “Mother took 'em out,” responded Jacky.

The girl turned round; and stood still for a moment as if taking in the sense of the words. Then she attacked her mother, anger flashing from her eyes.

“If you have been and took 'em to the pawnshop, you shall fetch 'em back. How dare you interfere with my things? Aren't they my boots? Didn't I buy 'em with my own money?”

“If you don't hold your tongue, I'll box your ears:’ shrieked Mrs. Dunn, with a look and gesture as menacing as her tone. “Hold your tongue! hold your tongue I say,

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miss!" "I shan't hold my tongue," responded Jemima, struggling between anger and tears. "I will have my boots! I want to go out, I do! and how can I go barefoot?"

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"Want to go out, do you!" raved Mrs. Dunn. "Perhaps you want to go and follow your sister! The boots be at Cox's, and you may go there and get 'em. Now then!"

The words altogether were calculated to increase the ire of Jemima; they did so in no measured degree. She and her mother commenced a mutual contest of ranting abuse. It might have come to blows but for the father's breaking into a storm of rage, so violent as to calm them, and frighten the children. It almost seemed as if trouble had upset his brain.

Long-continued hunger—the hunger that for weeks and months never gets satisfied—will on occasion transform men and women into demons. In the house of the Dunns, not only hunger but misery of all sorts reigned, and this day seemed to have brought things to a climax. Added to the trouble and doubt regarding Mary Ann, was the fear of a prison, Dunn having just heard that he had been convicted in the Small Debts Court. Summonses had been out against him, hopeless though it seemed to sue anybody so

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helplessly poor. In truth the man was overwhelmed with misery—as was many another man in Daffodil's Delight—and did not know where to turn.

After his outburst, he sat down on the bench again, administering a final threat to his wife for silence. Mrs. Dunn stood against the bare wooden shelves of the dresser, her hair on end, her face scarlet, her voice loud enough, in its shrieking sobs, to alarm all the neighbours; altogether in a state of fury.

Disregarding her husband's injunction for silence, she broke out into reproaches. "Was he a man, that he should bring 'em to this state of starvation, and then turn round upon 'em with threats? Wasn't she his wife 1 wasn't they his children? If she was a husband and father, she'd rather break stones till her arms rotted off, but what she'd find

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'em food! A lazy, idle, drunken object! There was the masters' yards open, and why didn't he go to work? If a man cared for his own family, he'd look to his interests, and set the Trades' Union at defiance. Was

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he a going to see 'em took off to the workhouse? When his young ones lay dead, and she was in the poor-house, then he'd fold his hands and be content with his work. If the strike was to bring 'em all this misery, what the plague business had he to join it? Couldn't he have seen better? Let him go to work if he was a man; and bring home a few coals, and a bit of bread, and get out a blanket or two from Cox's, and her gownds and things, and Jemimar's boots—"

Dunn, really a peacefully inclined man by nature, and whose own anger had spent itself, let it go on to this point. He then stood up before her, and with a clenched fist, but calm voice of suppressed meaning, asked her what she meant.

What, indeed! In the midst of Mrs. Dunn's reproaches, how was it she did not cast a recollection to the past? To her own eagerness, public and private, for the strike?—how she had urged her husband on to join it, boasting of the good times it was to bring them? She could ignore all that now: perhaps really had almost forgotten it. Anyway,

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her opinions had changed. Misery and disappointment will subdue the fiercest obstinacy; and Mrs. Dunn, casting all the blame upon her husband, would very much have liked to chastise him with hands as well as tongue.

Reader! If you think this is an over-drawn picture, go and lay it before the wives of the workmen who suffered the miseries induced by the strike, and ask them whether or not it is true. Ay, and it is only part of the truth.

"I wish the strike had been buried five fathom deep, I do!" uttered. Dunn, with a catching up of the breath that told of the emotion he strove to hide; "It have been nothing but a curse to us, all along. And where's to be the ending?"

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“Who brought home all this misery, but you?” recommenced Mrs. Dunn. “Have you done a day’s work for weeks and months? No, you havn’t; you know you havn’t! You have just rowed in the same boat with them nasty lazy. Unionists, and let the work go a begging.”

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“Who edged me on to join the Unionists who reproached me with being no man, but a sneak, if I went to work and knuckled down to the masters?” demanded Dunn in his sore vexation. “It was you! You know it was you! You was fire-hot for the strike: worse than ever the men was.”

“Can we starve?” said Mrs. Dunn, choking with passion. “Can we drop into our coffins with famine? Be our children to be drove, like Mary Ann,—”

An interruption—fortunately. Mrs. Cheek came into the room with a burst. She had a tongue also, on occasions.

“Whatever has been going on here this last half hour?” she inquired in a high voice. “One would think murder was being committed. There’s a dozen listeners collected outside your shutters.”

“She’s a casting it in my teeth now, for having joined the strike,” exclaimed Dunn, indicating his wife. “She! And she was the foremost to edge us all on.”

“Can one clam?” fiercely returned Mrs.

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Dunn, speaking at her husband, not to him. “Let him go to work.”

“Don’t be a fool, Hannah Dunn,” said Mrs. Cheek. “I’d stand up for my rights till I dropped: and so must the men. It’ll never do to bend to the will of the masters at last. There’s enough men turning tail and going back, without the rest doing of it. I should like to see Cheek attempting it: I’d be on to him.”

“Cheek don’t wan’t to; he have got no cause to,” said Mrs. Dunn. “You get the living now, and find him in beer and bacca.”

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"I do; and I am proud on it," was Mrs. Cheek's answer. "I goes washing, I goes charing, I goes ironing; nothing comes amiss to me, and I manages to keep the wolf from the door. It isn't my husband that shall bend to the masters. He shall stand up with the Unionists for his rights, or he shall stand up against me."

Having satisfied her curiosity as to the cause of the disturbance, Mrs. Cheek went out as she came, with a burst and a bang, for she had been bent on some hasty errand

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when arrested by the noise behind the Dunns' closed shutters. What the next proceedings would have been, it is difficult to say, had not another interruption occurred. Mrs. Dunn was putting her entangled hair behind her ears, most probably preparatory to the resuming of the attack on her husband, when the offending Mary Ann entered, attended by Mrs. Quale.

At it she went, the mother, hammer and tongs, turning her resentment on the girl, her language by no means choice, though the younger children were present. Dunn was quieter: but he turned his back upon his daughter and would not look at her. And then Mrs. Quale took a turn, and exercised *her* tongue on both the parents: not with quite as much noise, but with better effect

It appeared that the whispered suspicions against Mary Ann Dunn had been mistaken ones. The girl had been doing right, instead of wrong. Mrs. Quale had recommended her to a place at a small dressmaker's, partly of service, chiefly of needle-work. Before

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engaging her, the dressmaker had insisted on a few days of trial, wishing to see what her skill at work was; and Mary Ann had kept it secret, intending a pleasant surprise to her father when the engagement shall be finally made. The suspicions cast on her were but a poor return for this; and the girl, in her temper, had carried the grievance to Mrs. Quale, when the day's work was over. A few words of strong good sense from that talkative

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friend subdued Mary Ann, and she had now come back in peace. Mrs. Quale gave the explanation, interlarding it with a sharp reprimand at their proneness to think ill of “their own flesh and blood,” and James Dunn sat down meekly in glad repentance. Even Mrs. Dunn lowered her tone for once.

Mary Ann held out some money to her father after a quick glance at Mrs. Quale for approval.

“Take it, father. It’ll stop your going to prison, perhaps. Mrs. Quale has lent it me to get my clothes out, for I am to enter for

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good on my p]ace to-morrow. I can manage without my clothes for a bit.”

James Dunn put the money back, speaking softly, very much as if he had tears in his voice.

“No, girl: it’ll do you more good than it will me. Mrs. Quale has been a good friend to you. Enter on your place, and stay in it. It is the best news I’ve heard this many a-day.”

“But if the money will keep you out of jail, father!” sobbed Mary Ann, quite subdued.

“It wouldn’t do that; nor half do it; nor a quarter. Get your clothes home, child, and go into your place of service. As for me—better I was in jail than out of it,” he added with a sigh. “In there, one does get food.”

“Are you sure it wouldn’t do you good, Jim Dunn?” asked Mrs. Quale, speaking in the emergency he seemed to be driven to. Not that she would have helped him, so improvident in conduct and mistaken in opinions, with a good heart.

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“Sure and certain. If I paid this debt, others that I owe would be put on to me.”

“Come along, Mary Ann,” said Mrs. Quale. “I told you I’d give you a bed at my house to-night, and I will: so you’ll know where she is, Hannah Dunn. You go on down

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to Cox's, girl; get out as much as you can for the money, and come straight back to me: I'm going home now, and we'll set to work and see the best we can do with the things."

They went out together. But Mrs. Quale opened the door again and put in her head for a parting word: remembering perhaps her want of civility in not having given it.

"Good night to you all. And pleasant dreams—if you can get 'em. You Unionists have brought your pigs to a pretty market."

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CHAPTER VIII.

A DESCENT FOR MR. SHUCK.

THINGS were coming to a crisis. The Unionists had done their best to hold out against the masters; but they found the effort was untenable—that they must give in at last. The prospect of returning to work was eagerly welcomed by the greater portion of the men. Rather than continue longer in the wretched condition to which they were reduced, they would have gone back almost on any terms. Why, then, not have gone back before? as many asked. Because they preferred to resume work with the consent of the Union, rather than without it: and besides, the privations got worse and worse.

A few of the men were bitterly enraged at the turn affairs seemed to be taking—of

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whom Sam Shuck was chief. With the return of the hands to work, Sam foresaw no field for the exercise of his own peculiar talents, unless it was in stirring up fresh discontent for the future. However, it was not yet finally arranged that work should be resumed: a little more agitation might be pleasant first, and possibly prevent it.

"It's a few white-livered hounds among yourselves that have spoilt it," growled Sam to a knot of hitherto staunch friends, a day or two subsequent to that conjugal

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dispute between Mr. and Mrs. Dunn, which we had the gratification of assisting at in the last chapter. "When such men as White, and Baxendale, and Darby, who have held some sway among you, turn sneaks and go over to the nobs, it's only to be expected that you'll turn sneaks and follow. One fool makes many. Did you hear how Darby got out his tools?"

"No."

"The men opposed to the Union, opposed to us, heard of his wanting them, and they clubbed together and made up the tin, and

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Darby is to pay 'em back so much a-week—two shillings I think it is. Before I'd lie under obligation to the non-Unionist men, I'd shoot myself. What good has the struggle done you?"

"None," said a voice. "It have done a good deal of harm."

"Ay, it has—if it is to die out in this ignoble way," said Sam. "Better have been slaving like dray-horses all along than break down in the effort to escape the slavery, and hug it to your arms again. If you had only half the spirit of men, you'd stop White's work for a while; and Darby's too, as you did Baxendale's. Have you been thinking over what was said last night?" he continued, in a lower tone.

The men nodded. One of them ventured to express an opinion that it was "dangerous game."

"That depends upon how it's done," said Shuck. "Who has been the worse, pray, for the pitching into Baxendale? Can he, or anybody else, point a finger and say, 'It

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was you did it?' or 'It was you?' Why of course he can't."

"One might not come off again with the like luck."

"Psha!" returned Sam, evincing a great amount of ridicule.

"But one mightn't, Shuck," persisted his adversary.

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“Oh, let the traitors alone, to go their own way in triumph if you like; get up a piece of plate for them, with their names wrote on it in gold,” satirically answered Sam.

“Yah! It sickens one to see you true fellows going over to the oppressionists.”

“How do you make out that White, and them, be oppressionists?”

“White, and them? they are worse than oppressionists a thousand times over,” fiercely cried Sam. “I can’t find words bad enough for *them*. It isn’t of them I spoke: I spoke of the masters.”

“Well, Shuck, there’s oppression on all sides, I think,” rejoined one of the men. “I’d be glad to rise in the world if I could, and I’d work over hours to help me on to it

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and to educate my children a bit better than common; but if you come down upon me and say, ‘You shall not do it, you shall only work the stated hours laid down, and nobody shall work more,’ I call that oppression.”

“So it is,” assented another voice. “The masters never oppressed us like that.”

“What’s fair for one, is fair for all,” said Sam. “We must work and share alike.”

“That would be right enough if we all had talents and industry equal,” was the reply. “But as we haven’t, and never shall have, it can’t be fair to put a limit on us.”

“There’s one question I’d like to have answered, Shuck,” interposed a former speaker: “but I’m afeared it never will be answered, with satisfaction to us. What is to become of those men that the masters can’t find employment for? If every one of us was free to go back to work to-morrow, and sought to do so, where would we get it? Our old shops be half filled with strangers, and there’d be thousands of us

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rejected—no room for us. Would the Society keep us?”

A somewhat difficult question to answer, even for Slippery Sam. Perhaps for that reason he suddenly called out “Hush!” and bent his head and put up his finger in the attitude of listening.

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“There’s something unusual going on in the street,” cried he. “Let’s see what it is.” They hurried out to the street, Sam leading the way. Not a genial street to gaze upon, that wintry day, taking it with all its accessories. Half-clothed, half-starved emaciated men stood about in groups, their pale features and gloomy expression of despair telling a piteous tale. A different set of men entirely, to look at, from those of the well-to-do cheerful old days of work, contentment, and freedom from care.

Being marshalled down the street in as polite a manner as was consistent with the occasion, was Mr. James Dunn. He was on his road to prison; and certain choice spirits of Daffodil’s Delight, headed by Mrs. Dunn, were in attendance, some bewailing and

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lamenting aloud, others hooting and yelling at the capturers. As if this was not enough cause of disturbance, news arose that the Dunns’ landlord, finding the house temporarily abandoned by every soul—a chance he had been looking for—improved the opportunity to lock the street-door and keep them out. Nothing was before Mrs. Dunn and her children now, but the parish Union.

“I don’t care whether it is the masters that have been in fault or whether it’s us; I know which side gets the suffering,” exclaimed a mechanic, as Mr. Dunn was conveyed beyond view. “Old Abe] White told us true; strikes never brought nothing but misery yet, and they never will.”

Sam Shuck seized upon the circumstance to draw around him a select audience, and to hold forth to them. Treason, false and pernicious though it was, that he spoke, his oratory fell persuasively on the public ear. He excited the men against the masters; he excited them to his utmost power against the men who had gone back to work; he inflamed their passions, he perverted their

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reason. Altogether, ill-feeling and excitement was smouldering in an unusual degree in Daffodil’s Delight, and it was kept up through the live-long day.

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Evening came. The bell rang for the cessation of work at Mr. Hunter's, and the men came pouring forth, a great many of whom were strangers. The gas lamp at the gate shed a brilliant light, as the hands dispersed—some one way, some another. Those bearing towards Daffodil's Delight became aware, as they approached an obscure portion of the road which lay past a dead wall, that it bore an unusual appearance, as if dark forms were hovering there. What could it be?

Not for long were they kept in ignorance. There arose a terrific din, enough to startle the unwary. Yells, groans, hootings, hisses, threats were poured forth upon the workmen; and they knew that they had fallen into an ambush of the Society's men.

Of women also, as it appeared. For shrill notes and delicate words of abuse, certainly only peculiar to ladies' throats, were pretty

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freely mingled with the gruff tones of the men.

"You be nice nine-hour chaps! Come on, if you're not cowards, and have it out in a fair fight—"

"A fair fight!" shrieked a female voice in interruption, "who'd fight with them? Traitors! cowards! Knock 'em down and trample upon 'em!"

"Harness 'em together with cords, and drag 'em along like beasts o' burden in the face and eyes o' London!" "Stick 'em up on spikes!" "Hoist 'em on to the lampposts!" "Hold 'em head down'ards in a horse-trough!" "Pitch into 'em with quick lime and rotten eggs!" "Strip 'em and give 'em a coat o' tar!" "Wring their necks, and have done with 'em!"

While these several complimentary suggestions were thrown from as many different quarters of the assailants, one of them had quietly laid hold of Abel White. There was little doubt—according to what came out afterwards—that he and Robert Darby were the two men chiefly aimed at in this night

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assault. Darby, however, was not there. As it happened, he had turned the contrary way on leaving the yard, having joined one of the men who had lent him some of the money to get his tools out of pledge, and gone towards his home with him.

“If thee carest for thy life, thee’ll stop in-doors, and not go a-nigh Hunter’s yard again to work!”

Such were the words hissed forth in a hoarse whisper into the ear of Abel White, by the man who had seized upon him. Abel peered at him as keenly as the darkness would permit. White was no coward, and although aware that this attack most probably had him for its chief butt, he retained his composure. He could not recognise the man—a tall man, in a large loose blue frock, such as is sometimes worn by butchers, with a red woollen cravat wound roughly round his throat, hiding his chin and mouth, and a seal-skin cap, its dark “ears” brought down on the sides of the face, and tied under the chin. The man may have been so wrapped

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up for protection against the weather, or for the purpose of disguise.

“Let me go,” said White.

“When thee hast sworn not to go on working till the Union gives leave.”

“I never will swear it. Or say it.”

“Then thee shall get every bone in th’ body smashed. Thee’st been reported to Mr. Shuck, and to the Union.”

“I’d like to know your name and who you are,” exclaimed White. “If you are not disguising your voice, it’s odd to me.”

“D’ye remember Baxendale? *He* wouldn’t take the oath, and he’s lying with his ribs stove in.”

“More shame for you! Look you, man, you can’t intimidate me sterner stuff than that.”

“Swear!” was the menacing retort; “swear that thee won’t touch another stroke o’ work.”

“I tell you that I never will swear it,” angrily and firmly returned White. “The Union has hoodwinked me long enough; I’ll have nothing to do with it.”

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“There be desperate men ye—them as won’t leave ye with whole bones. You shall swear.”

“I’ll have nothing more to with the Union; I’ll never in obey it,” answered White, speaking earnestly. “There! make your most of it. If I had but a friendly gleam of light here, I’d know who you are, and let others know.”

The confusion around had increased. Hot words were passing everywhere between the assailants and the assailed—no positive sault as yet, save that a woman had shaken her fist in a man’s face and spit at him. Abel White strove to get away with the last words, but the man who had been threatening him struck him a sharp blow between the eyes, and another blow from the same hand caught him behind.

The next instant he was down. If one blow was dealt him, ten were from as many different hands. The tall man with the cap was busy with his feet; and it really seemed by the manner he carried on the pastime

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that his whole heart went with it, and that it was a heart of revenge.

But who is this, pushing his way through the crowd with stern authority. A policeman? The men shrank back, in their fear, to give him place. No; it is only their master, Mr. Clay.

“What is this?” exclaimed Austin, when he reached the point of battery. “Is it you, White?” he added, stooping; down. “I suspected as much. Now, my men,” he continued in a stern tone, as he faced the excited throng, “who are you? which of you has done this? “

“The ringleader. was him in the cap, sir—the tall one with the red cloth round his neck and the fur about his ears, “spoke up White, who, though much maltreated, retained the use of his brains and his tongue. “It was him that threatened me; he was the first to set upon me.”

“Who are you?” demanded Austin of the tall man.

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The tall man responded by a quiet laugh of decision. "He felt himself perfectly

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secure from recognition in the dark obscurity; and though Mr. Clay was of powerful frame, more than a match for him in agility and strength, let him only dare to lay a finger upon him, and there were plenty around to come to the rescue.

Austin Clay heard the derisive laugh, subdued though it was, and thought he recognised it. He took his hand from within the breast of his coat, and raised it with a hasty motion—not to deal a blow, not with a pistol to startle or menace, but to turn on a dark lantern!

No pistol could have startled them as did that sudden flash of bright light, thrown full upon the tall man's face. Off flew the fellow with a yell, and Austin coolly turned the lantern upon others.

"Bennet—and Strood—and Ryan—and Cassidy!" he exclaimed, recognising and telling off the men. "And *you*, Cheek! I never should have suspected you of sufficient courage to join in a thing of this nature."

Cheek, midway between shaking and tears, sobbed out that it was "the wife made him;"

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and Mrs. Cheek roared out from the rear, "Yes, it was, and she'd have shook the bones out of him if he hadn't come."

But that light, turning upon them every- where, was more than they had bargained for, and the whole lot moved away in the best manner that they could, putting the stealthiest and the quickest foot foremost; each one devoutly hoping, save the few whose names had been mentioned, that his own face had not been recognised.

Austin, with some of his workmen who had remained—the greater portion of them were pursuing the vanquished—raised Abel White. His head was cut, his body bruised, but no serious damage appeared to have been done. "Can you walk with assistance as far as Mr. Rice's shop?" asked Austin.

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"I dare say I can, sir, in a minute; I'm a bit giddy now," was White's reply, as he leaned his back against the wall, being supported on either side. "Sir, what a mercy that you had that light with you!"

"Ay," shortly replied Austin. "Quale,

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there's the blood dripping upon your sleeve. I will bind my handkerchief round your head, White. Meanwhile, one of you go and call a cab; it may be better that we get him at once to the surgeon's."

A cab was brought, and White assisted into it. Austin accompanied him. Mr. Rice was at home, and proceeded to examine into the damage. A few days' rest from work and a liberal application of sticking-plaster, would prove efficacious in effecting a cure; he believed. "What a pity but the ruffians could be stopped at this game!" the doctor examined to Austin. "It will come to attacks more serious, if they are not."

"I think this will do something towards stopping it," replied Austin.

"Why? do you know any of them?"

Austin nodded "A few. It is not a second case of impossible identity, as was Baxendale's."

"I'm sure I don't know how I am to go in home in this plight," exclaimed White, catching sight of his strapped-up face and head, in a small looking-glass hanging in

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Mr. Rice's surgery. "I shall frighten poor old father into a fit, and the wife too."

"I will go on first and prepare them," said Austin, good-naturedly.

Turning out of the shop on this errand; he found the door blocked up. The door! nay, the pavement—the street; for it seemed as if an Daffodil's Delight had collected there. He elbowed his way; through them; and reached White's home. There the news had preceded him, and he found the deepest distress and excitement reigning, the family having been informed that Abel was killed. Austin reassured them; made light of the matter, and departed.

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Outside their close-up home, squatting on the narrow strip of pavement; their backs against the dirty wall, were Mrs. Dunn and her children, howling pitiably. They were surrounded with warm partisans, who spent their breath sympathising with them, and abusing the landlord.

“How much better that they should go into the workhouse,” exclaimed Austin

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“They will perish with cold if they remain there.”

“And much you masters ‘ud care,” cried a woman, who overheard the remark. “I hope you are satisfied now with the effects of your fine lock-out! Look at the poor creatur, a sitting there with her helpless children.”

“A sad sight,” observed Austin, “but *not* the effects of the lock-out. You must look nearer home.”

The day dawned. Abel White was progressing very satisfactorily. So much so that Mr. Rice did not keep him in bed. It was by no means so grave a case as Baxendale’s. To the intense edification of Daffodil’s Delight, which had woke up in an unusually low and subdued state, there arrived, about mid-day, certain officers within its precincts, holding warrants for the apprehension of some of the previous night’s rioters. Bennet, Strood, Ryan, and Cheek were taken; Cassidy had disappeared.

“It’s a shame to grab us!” exclaimed timid Cheek, shaking from head to foot.

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“White himself said as we was not the ringleaders.”

While these were secured, a policeman entered the home of Mr. Shuck, without so much as saying, “With your leave,” or “By your leave.” That gentleman, who had remained in-doors all the morning, in a restless, humble sort of mood, which imparted much surprise to Mrs. Shuck, was just sitting down to dinner in the bosom of his family: a savoury dinner, to judge by the smell, consisting of rabbit and onions.

“Now, Sam Shuck, I want you,” was the startling interruption.

Sam turned as white as a sheet. Mrs. Shuck stared, and the children stared.

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“Want me, do you?” cried Sam, putting as easy a face as he could upon the matter. “What do you want me for? To give evidence?”

“*You* know. It’s about that row last night. I wonder you hadn’t better regard for your liberty than to get into it.”

“Why, you never was such a fool as to put yourself into that!” exclaimed Mrs.

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Shuck, in her surprise. “What could have possessed you?”

“I!” retorted Sam; “I don’t know anything about the row, except what I’ve heard. I was a ‘good mile off from the spot when’ it took place.”

“All very well if you can convince the magistrates of that,” said the officer. “Here’s the warrant against you, and I must take you upon it.”

“I won’t go,” said Sam, showing fight. “I wasn’t nigh the place, I say.”

The officer was peremptory—officers generally are so in these cases—and Sam was very foolish to resist. But that he was scared out of his senses; he would probably not have resisted. It only made matters worse; and the result was, that he had the handcuffs clapped on. Fancy Samuel Shuck, Esquire, in his crimson necktie with the lace ends; and the peg-tops, being thus escorted through Daffodil’s Delight, himself and his hands prisoners; and a tail the length of the street streaming after him!

You could not have got into the police

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court. Every avenue, every inch of ground was occupied; for the men, both Unionists and non-Unionists, were greatly excited, and came flocking in crowds to hear the proceedings.

The five men were placed at the bar—Shuck, Bennet, Cheek, Ryan, and Strood: and Abel White and his bandaged head appeared against them.

The man gave evidence. How he and others—but himself, he thought, more particularly—had been met by a mob the previous night, upon leaving work, a knot of the Society’s men, who had first threatened and then beaten him.

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“Can you tell what their motive was for doing this?” asked the magistrate.

“Yes, sir,” was the answer of White. “It was because I went back to work. I held out as long as I could, in obedience to the Trades’ Union; but I began to think I was in error, and that I ought to return to work; which I did, a week or two ago. Since then, they have never let me alone. They have talked to me, and threatened me,

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and persuaded me; but I would not listen: and last night they attacked me.”

“What were the threats they used last night?”

“It was one man did most of the talking: a tall man in a cap and comforter, sir. The rest of the crowd abused me and called me names, but they did not utter any particular threat. This man said, Would I promise and swear not to do any more work, in defiance of the Union; or else I should get every bone in my body smashed. He told me to remember how Baxendale had been served, and was lying with his ribs stove in. I refused; I would not swear; I said I would never belong to the Union again. And then he struck me.”

“Where did he strike you?”

“Here,” putting his hand up to his forehead. “The first blow staggered me, and took away my sight, and the second blow knocked me down. Half a dozen set upon me then, hitting and kicking me: the first man kicked me also.”

“Can you swear to that first man?”

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“No, I can’t, sir. I think he was disguised.”

“Was it the prisoner, Shuck?”

White shook his head. “It was just his height and figure, sir, but I can’t be sure that it was him. His face was partially covered, and it was nearly dark, besides; there are no lights about, just there. The voice, too, seemed disguised: I said so at the time.”

“Can you swear to the others?”

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“Yes, to all four of them,” said White, stoutly. “They were not disguised at all, and I saw them after the light came, and knew their voices. They helped to beat me after I was on the ground.”

“Did they threaten you?”

“No, sir. Only the first one did that.” “And him you cannot swear to? Is there any other witness who can swear to him?”

It did not appear that there was. Shuck addressed the magistrate, his tone one of injured innocence.

“It is not to be borne that I should be dragged up here like a felon, your worship.

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I was not near the place at the time; I am as innocent as your worship is. Is it likely *I* should lend myself to such a thing? My mission among the men is of a higher nature than that.”

“Whether you are innocent or not, I do not “know,” said his worship; “but I do know that this is a state of things which cannot be tolerated. I will give my utmost protection to these workmen; and those who dare to interfere with them, shall be punished to the extent of the law: the ringleaders especially. A person has just as much right to come to me and say, ‘You shall not sit on that bench; you shall not transact the business of a magistrate,’ as you have to prevent these industrious men working to earn a living. It is monstrous.”

“Here’s the witness we have waited for, please your worship,” spoke one of the policemen.

It was Austin Clay who came forward. He bowed to the magistrate, who bowed to him: they occasionally met at the house of Mr. Hunter. Austin was sworn, and gave

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his evidence up to the point when he turned the light of the lantern upon the tall assailant of White.

“Did you recognise the man?” asked the Bench.

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“I did, sir. It was Samuel Shuck.”

Sam gave a howl; protesting that it was *not*—that he was a mile away from the spot.

“I recognised him as distinctly as I recognise him at this moment,” said Austin. “He had a woollen scarf on his chin, and a cap covering his ears, no doubt assumed for disguise, but knew him instantly. What is more, he saw that I knew him; I am sure he did, by the way he slunk off, I also recognised his laugh.”

“Did you take the lantern with you purposely?” asked the clerk of the court. “I did,” replied Austin. “A hint was given me in the course of yesterday afternoon, that an attack upon our men was in agitation. I determined to discover the ringleaders, if possible, should it take place, and not to let the darkness baffle justice, as

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was the case in the attack upon Baxendale. For this purpose I put the lantern in readiness, and had the men watched when they left the yard. As soon as the assault began, my messenger returned to tell me.”

“You hit upon a good plan, Mr. Clay.” Austin smiled. “I think I did,” he answered.

Unfortunately for Mr. Samuel Shuck, another witness had seen his face distinctly when the light was turned on; and his identity with the “tall man disguised” was established beyond dispute. In an evil hour, Sam had originated this attack on White; but, not feeling altogether sure of the courage of his men, he had determined to disguise himself and take part in the business, saying not a word to anybody. He had not bargained for the revelation that might be brought by means of a dark lantern.

The proceedings in court were prolonged, but they terminated at length. Bennet, Strood, and Ryan were condemned to pay a fine of £5 each, or be imprisoned for two months. Cheek managed to get off Mr.

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Sam Shuck, to whom the magistrate was bitterly severe in his remarks—for he knew perfectly well the part enacted by the man from the first—was sentenced to six months at the treadmill, without the option of a fine.

What a descent for Slippery Sam!

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CHAPTER IX.

ON THE EVE OF BANKRUPTCY.

THESE violent interruptions to the social routine, to the organised relations between masters and men, cannot take place without leaving their effects behind them: not only in the bare cupboards, the confusion, the bitter feelings while the contest is in actual progress, but in the results when the dispute is brought to an end and things have resumed their natural order. You have seen some of its disastrous working upon the men: you cannot see it all, for it would take a whole volume to depicture it. But there was another upon whom it was promising to work badly; and that was Mr. Hunter. At this, the eleventh hour, when the dispute was dying out, Mr. Hunter knew

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that he would be unable to weather the short remains of the storm.

Drained, as he had been at various periods, of sums paid to Gwinn of Ketterford, he had not the means necessary to support the long-continued struggle. Capital he possessed still; and, had there been no disturbance, no strike, no lock-out—had things, in short, gone on upon their usual course uninterruptedly, his capital would have been sufficient to carry him on: not as it was. His money was locked up in arrested works, in buildings brought to a standstill. He could not fulfil his contracts or meet his debts; materials were lying idle; and the crisis, so long expected by him, had come.

It had not been expected by Austin Clay. Though aware of the shortness of capital, he believed that with care difficulties would be surmounted. The fact was, Mr.

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Hunter had succeeded in keeping the worst from him. It fell upon Austin one morning like a thunderbolt.

Mr. Hunter had come early to the works. In this hour of embarrassment—ill as he

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might be, as he *was*—he could not be absent from his place of business. When Austin went into his master's private room he found him alone, poring over books and accounts, his head leaning on his hand. One glance at Austin's face told Mr. Hunter that the whispers as to the state of affairs, which were now becoming public scandal, had reached his ears.

"Yes, it is quite true," said Mr. Hunter, before a word had been spoken by Austin." I cannot stave it off."

"But it will be ruin, sir!" exclaimed Austin.

"Of course it will be ruin. I know that, better than you can tell me."

"Oh, sir," continued Austin, with earnest decision, "it must not be allowed to come. Your credit must be kept up at any sacrifice."

"Can you tell me of any sacrifice that will keep it up?" returned Mr. Hunter.

Austin paused in embarrassment. "If the present difficulty can be got over, the future will soon redeem itself," he observed.

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"You have sufficient capital in the aggregate, though it is at present locked up."

"There it is," said Mr. Hunter. "Were the capital not locked up, but in my hands, I should be a free man. Who is to unlock it?"

"The men are returning to their shops," urged Austin. "In a few days, at the most, all will have resumed work. We shall get our contracts completed, and things will work round. It would be *needless* ruin, sir, to stop now."

"Am I stopping of my own accord? Shall I put myself into the gazette, do you suppose? You talk like a child, Clay."

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“Not altogether, sir: What I say is, that you are worth more than sufficient to meet your debts; that, if the momentary pressure can be lifted, you will surmount embarrassment and regain ease.”

“Half the bankruptcies we hear of are caused by locked-up capital—not by positive non-possession of it,” observed Mr. Hunter. “Were my funds available, there would be

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reason in what you say, and I should probably go on again to ease. Indeed, I know I should; for a certain heavy—heavy—” Mr. Hunter spoke with perplexed hesitation—” A heavy private obligation, which I have been paying off at periods, is at an end now.”

Austin made no reply. He knew that Mr. Hunter alluded to Gwinn of Ketterford: and perhaps Mr. Hunter suspected that he knew it.

“Yes, sir; you would go on to ease—to fortune again; there is no doubt of it. Mr. Hunter,” he continued with some emotion, “it *must* be accomplished somehow. To let things come to an end for the sake of a thousand or two, is—is—”

“Stop!” said Mr. Hunter. “I see what you are driving at. You think that I might borrow this ‘thousand or two’ from my brother, or from Dr. Bevary.”

“No,” fearlessly replied Austin, “I was not thinking of either one or the other. Mr. Henry Hunter has enough to do for himself just now—his contracts for the season were

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more extensive than ours: and Dr. Bevary is not a business man.”

“Henry *has* enough to do,” said Mr. Hunter. “And if a hundred-pound note would save me, I should not ask Dr. Bevary for its loan. I tell you, Clay, there is no help for it: ruin must come. I have thought it over and over, and can see no loophole of escape. It does not much matter: I can hide my head in obscurity for the short time I shall probably live. Mine has been an untoward fate.”

“It matters for your daughter, sir,” rejoined Austin, his face flushing.

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"I cannot help myself, even for her sake," was the answer, and it was spoken in a tone that, to a fanciful listener, might have told of a breaking heart.

"If you would allow me to suggest a plan, sir—"

"No, I will not allow any further discussion upon the topic," peremptorily interrupted Mr. Hunter. "The blow must come; and, to talk of it will neither soothe nor avert it. Now to business. Not another

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word, I say.—Is it to-day or to-morrow that Grafton's bill falls due?"

"To-day," replied Austin.

"And its precise amount?—I forget it." "Five hundred and twenty pounds."

"Five hundred and twenty! I knew it was somewhere about that. It is that bill that will floor us—at least, be the first step to it. How closely has the account been drawn at the bank?"

"You have the book by you, sir. I think there is little more than thirty pounds lying in it."

"Just so. Thirty pounds to meet a bill of five hundred and twenty. No other available funds to pay in. And you would talk of staving off the difficulty?"

"I think the bank would pay it, were all circumstances laid before them. They have accommodated us before."

"The bank will *not*, Austin. I have had a private note from them this morning. These flying rumours have reached their ears, and they will not let me overdraw even by a pound. It had struck me once or

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twice lately that they were becoming cautious."

There was a commotion, as of sudden talking, outside at that moment, and Mr. Hunter turned pale. He supposed it might be a creditor: and his nerves were so shattered, as was before remarked, that the slightest thing shook him like a woman.

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"I would pay them all, if I could," he said, his tone almost a wail. "I wish to pay every one."

"Sir," said Austin, "leave me here to-day to meet these matters. You are too ill to stay."

"If I do not meet them to-day, I must to-morrow. Sooner or later, it is I who must answer."

"But indeed you are ill, sir. 'You look worse than you have looked at all.'"

"Can you wonder that I look worse? The striking of the docket against me is no pleasant matter to anticipate."

The talking outside now subsided into laughter, in which the tones of a female were distinguishable. Mr. Hunter thought

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he recognised them, and his fear of a creditor subsided. They came from one of his women servants, who, unconscious of the proximity of her master, had been laughing and joking with some of the men, whom she had encountered upon entering the yard.

"What can Susan want?" exclaimed Mr. Hunter, signing to Austin to open the door.

"Is that you, Susan?" asked Austin, as he obeyed.

"Oh, if you please, sir, can I speak a word to my master?"

"Come in," called out Mr. Hunter.

"What do you want?"

"Miss Florence has sent me, sir, to give you this, and to ask you if you'd please to come round."

She handed in a note. Mr. Hunter broke the seal, and ran his eyes over it. It was from Florence, and contained but a line or two. She informed her father that the lady who had been so troublesome at the house once before, in years back, had come again, had taken a seat in the dining-room, removed her bonnet, and expressed her intention of

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there remaining until she should see Mr. Hunter.

“As if I had not enough upon me without this!” muttered Mr. Hunter. “Go back,” he said aloud to the servant, “and tell Miss Florence that I am coming.”

A few minutes given to the papers before him, a few hasty directions to Austin, touching the business of the hour, and Mr. Hunter rose to depart.

“Do not come back, sir,” Austin repeated to him. “I can manage all.”

When Mr. Hunter entered his own house, letting himself in with a latch key, Florence, who had been watching for him, glided forward.

“She is in there, papa,” pointing to the closed door of the dining-room, and speaking in a whisper. “What is her business here what does she want? She told me she had as much right in the house as I.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Mr. Hunter. “Insolent, has she been?”

“Not exactly insolent. She spoke civilly. I fancied you would not care to see her, so I

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said she could not wait. She replied that she should wait, and I must not attempt to prevent her. Is she in her senses, papa?”

“Go up stairs and put your bonnet and cloak on, Florence,” was the rejoinder of Mr. Hunter. “Be quick.”

She obeyed, and was down again almost immediately, in her deep mourning.

“Now, my dear, go round to Dr. Bevary, and tell him you have come to spend the day with him.”

“But, papa—”

“Florence, go! I will either come for you this evening, or send. Do not return until I do.”

The tone, though full of kindness, was one that might not be disobeyed, and Florence, feeling sick with some uncertain, shadowed-forth trouble, passed out of the hall door. Mr. Hunter entered the dining- room.

Tall, gaunt, powerful of frame as ever, rose up Miss Gwinn, turning upon him her white, corpse-like looking face. Without the ceremony of greeting, she spoke in her

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usual abrupt fashion, dashing at once to her subject.

“Now will you render justice, Lewis Hunter?”

“I have the greater right to ask that justice shall be rendered to me,” replied Mr. Hunter, speaking sternly, in spite of his agitation. “Who has most cause to demand it, you or I?”

“She who reigned mistress in this house is dead,” cried Miss Gwinn. “You must now acknowledge *her*.”

“I never will. You may do your best and worst. The worst that can come is, that it must reach the knowledge of my daughter.”

“Ay, there it is! The knowledge of the wrong must not even reach her; but the wrong itself has not been too bad for that other one to bear.”

“Woman!” continued Mr. Hunter, growing excited almost beyond control, “who inflicted that wrong? Myself, or you?”

The reproach told home, if the change to sad humility, passing over Miss Gwinn’s countenance, might be taken as an indication.

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“What I said, I said in self-defence; after you, in your deceit, had brought wrong upon me and my family,” she answered in a subdued voice.

“That was no wrong,” retorted Mr. Hunter. “It was you who wrought all the wrong afterwards, by uttering the terrible falsehood, that she was dead.”

“Well, well, it is of no use going back to that,” she impatiently said. “I am come here to ask that justice shall be rendered, now that it is in your power.”

“You have had more than justice—you have had revenge. Not content with rendering my days a life’s misery, you must also drain me of the money I had worked hard to save. Do you know how much?”

“It was not I,” she passionately uttered, in a tone as if she would deprecate his anger. “*He* did that.”

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"It comes to the same. I had to find the money. So long as my dear wife lived, I was forced to temporize: neither he nor you can so force me again. Go home, go home, Miss Gwinn, and pray for forgiveness for

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the injury you have done both her and me. The time for coming to my house with your intimidations is past."

"What did you say?" cried Miss Gwinn.

"Injury upon *you*?"

"Injury, ay! such as rarely has been inflicted upon mortal man. Not content with that great injury, you must also deprive me of my substance. This week the name of James Lewis Hunter will be in the Gazette, on the list of bankrupts. It is you who have brought me to it."

"You know that I have had no hand in that: that it was he; my brother—and *hers*," she said. "He never should have done it had I been able to prevent him. In an unguarded moment I told him I had discovered you, and who you were, and—and he came up to you here and sold his silence. It is that which has kept me quiet."

"This interview had better end," said Mr. Hunter. "It excites me, and my health is scarcely in a state to bear it. Your work has told upon me, Miss Gwinn, as you cannot help seeing, when you look at me. Am I

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like the hearty, open man whom you came up to town and discovered a few years ago?"

"Am I like the healthy unsuspecting woman whom you saw some years before that" she retorted. "My days have been rendered more bitter than yours."

"It is your own evil passions which have rendered them so. But I say this interview must end. You—"

"It shall end when you undertake to render justice. I only ask the you should acknowledge her in words; I ask no more."

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“When your brother was here last—it was on the day of my wife’s death—I was forced to warn him of the consequences of remaining in my house against my will I must now warn you.”

“Lewis Hunter;” she passionately resumed, “for years I have been told that she—who was here—was fading; and I was content to wait until she should be gone. Besides, was not he drawing money from you to keep silence? But it is, all over, and my time is come.”

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The door of the room opened and some one entered. Mr. Hunter turned with marked displeasure, wondering who was daring to intrude upon him. He saw—not any servant, as he expected, but his brother-in-law, Dr. Bevary. And the doctor walked into the room and closed the door, just as if he had as much right there as its master.

When Florence Hunter reached her uncle’s house, she found him absent: the servants said he had gone out early in the morning. Scarcely had she entered the drawing-room when his carriage drove up: he saw Florence at the window and hastened in.

“Uncle Bevary, I have come to stay the day with you,” was her greeting. “Will you have me?”

“I don’t know that I will,” returned the doctor, who, loved Florence above every earthly thing. “How comes it about?”

In the explanation, as she gave it, the doctor detected some embarrassment, quite different from her usual open manner. He questioned closely, and drew from her what had occurred.

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“Miss Gwinn of Ketterford, in town!” he exclaimed, staring at Florence as if he could not believe her. “Are you joking?”

“She is at our house with papa, as I tell you, uncle.”

“What an extraordinary chance!” muttered the doctor.

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Leaving Florence, he ran out of the house and down the street, calling after his coachman, who was driving to the stables. Had it been anybody but Dr. Bevary, the passers-by might have deemed the caller mad. The coachman heard, and turned his horses again. Dr. Bevary spoke a word in haste to Florence. "Miss Gwinn is the very person I was wanting to see: wishing some marvellous telegraph wires could convey her to London at a moment's notice. Make yourself at home, my dear; don't wait dinner for me, I cannot tell when I shall be back."

He stepped into the carriage and was driven away very quickly, leaving Florence in some doubt as to whether he had not gone to Ketterford—for she had but imperfectly understood him.

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Not so. The carriage set him down at Mr. Hunter's. Where he broke in upon the interview, as has been described.

"I was about to telegraph to Ketterford for you," he began to Miss Gwinn, without any other sort of greeting. And the words, coupled with his abrupt manner, sent her at once into an agitation. Rising, she put her hand upon the doctor's arm.

"What has happened? Any ill "

"You must come with me now and see her," was the brie answer.

Shaking from head to foot, gaunt, strong woman though she was, she turned docilely to follow the doctor from the room. But suddenly an idea seemed to strike her, and she stood still.

"It is a *ruse* to get me out of the house. Dr. Bevary, I will not quit it until justice shall be rendered to Emma. I will have her acknowledged by him."

"Your going with me now will make no difference to that, one way or the other," drily observed Dr. Bevary.

Mr. Hunter stepped forward in agitation.

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“Are you out of your mind, Bevary? You could not have caught her words correctly.”

“Psha!” responded the doctor, in a careless tone. “What I said was, that Miss Gwinn’s going out with me could make no difference to any acknowledgment.”

“Only in words,” she stayed to say.

“Just let him say it in words.” But nobody took any notice of the suggestion.

His bearing calm and self-possessed, his manner authoritative, Dr. Bevary passed out to his carriage, motioning the lady before him. Self-willed as she was by nature and by habit, she appeared to have no thought of resistance now. “Step in,” said Dr. Bevary.

She obeyed, and he seated himself by her, after giving an order to the coachman. The carriage turned towards the west for a short distance, and then branched off to the north. In a comparatively short time they were clear of the bustle of London.

Miss Gwinn sat in silence; the doctor sat in silence. It seemed that the former wished, yet dreaded to ask the purport of

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their present journey, for her white face was working with emotion, and she glanced repeatedly at the doctor, with a sharp yearning look. When they were clear of the bustle of the streets; and the hedges, bleak and bare, bounded the road on either side, broken by a house here and there, then she could bear the silence and suspense no longer.

“Why do you not speak?” broke from her in a tone of pain.

“First of all, tell me what brought you to town now,” was his reply. “It is not your time for being here.”

“The recent death of your sister. I came up by the early train this morning. Dr. Bevary, you are the only living being to whom I lie under an obligation, or from whom I have experienced kindness. People may think me ungrateful; some think me man; but I am grateful to you. But for the fact of that lady’s being your sister, I should have insisted upon another’s rights being acknowledged long ago.”

“You told me you waived them in consequence of your brother’s conduct.”

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“Partially so. But that did not weigh with me in comparison with my feeling of gratitude to you. How impotent we are!” she exclaimed, throwing up her hands. “My efforts by day, my dreams by night, were directed to one single point through long, long years—the finding James Lewis. I had cherished the thought of revenge until it became part and parcel of my very existence; I was hoping to expose him to the world. But when the time came, and I did find him, I found that he had married your sister, and that I could not touch him without giving pain to you. I hesitated what to do. I went home to Ketterford, deliberating—”

“Well?” said the doctor. For she had stopped abruptly.

“Some spirit of evil prompted me to disclose to my good-for-nothing brother that the man, Lewis, was found. I told him more than that, unhappily.”

“What else did you tell him?”

“Never mind. I was a fool: and I have had my reward. My brother came up to

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town and drew large sums of money out of Mr. Hunter. I could have stopped it—but I did not.”

“If I understand you aright, you have come to town now to insist upon what you call your rights?” remarked the doctor.

“Upon what *I* call!” returned Miss Gwinn, and then she paused in marked hesitation. “But you must have news to tell me, Dr. Bevary. What is it?”

“I received a message early this morning from Dr. Kerr, stating that something was amiss. I lost no time in going over.”

“And what was amiss?” she hastily cried.

“Surely there was no repetition of the violence? Did you see her?”

“Yes, I saw her.”

“But of course you would see her,” resumed Miss Gwinn, speaking rather to herself. “And what do you think? Is there danger?”

“The danger is past,” replied Dr. Bevary. “But here we are.”

The carriage had driven in through an inclosed

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avenue, and was stopping before a large mansion: not a cheerful mansion, for its grounds were surrounded by dark trees, and some of its windows were barred. It was a lunatic asylum. It is necessary, even in these modern days of gentle treatment, to take some precaution of bars and bolts; but the inmates of this one were thoroughly well cared for, in the best sense of the term. Dr. Bevary was one of its visiting inspectors.

Dr. Kerr, the resident manager, came forward, and Dr. Bevary turned to Miss Gwinn. "Will you see her, or not?" he asked.

Strange, fears were working within her, Dr. Bevary's manner was so different from ordinary. "I think I see it all," she gasped. "The worst has happened."

"The best has happened," responded Dr. Bevary. "Miss Gwinn, you have requested me more than once to bring you here without preparation, should the time arrive—for that you could bear certainty, but not suspense. Will you see her?"

Her face had grown white and rigid as

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marble. Unable to speak, she pointed forward with her hand. Dr. Bevary drew it within his own to support her.

In a clean, cool chamber, on a pallet bed, lay a dead woman. Dr. Kerr gently drew back the snow-white sheet, with which the face was covered. A pale, placid face, with little band of light hair folded underneath the cap.

She—Miss Gwinn—did not stir: she gave way to neither emotion nor violence; but her bloodless lips were strained back from her teeth, and her face was as white as that of the dead.

"God's ways are not as our ways," whispered Dr. Bevary. "You have been acting for revenge: He has sent peace. Whatsoever He does is for the best."

She made no reply: she remained still and rigid. Dr. Bevary stroked the left hand of the dead, lying in its utter stillness—stroked, as if unconsciously, the wedding-ring on

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the third finger. He had been led to believe that it was placed on that finger, years and years ago, by his brother-in-law,

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James Lewis Hunter. And had been led to believe a lie!

And she who had invented the lie, who had wrought the delusion, who had embittered Mr. Hunter's life with the same dread belief, stood there at the doctor's side, looking at the dead.

It is a solemn thing to persist though but tacitly in the acting of a vile falsehood, in the mysterious presence of death. Even Miss Gwinn was not strong-minded enough for that.

As, Dr. Bevary turned to her with a remark upon the past, she burst forth into a cry, and gave utterance to words that fell upon the physician's ear like a healing balm, soothing and binding up a long-open wound.

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CHAPTER X.

THE YEARS GONE BY.

THOSE readers will be disappointed who look for any very romantic *dénoûment* of "A Life's Secret." The story is a short and sad one. Suggesting the wretchedness and evil that may result when truth is deviated from; the lengths to which a blind, unholy desire for revenge will carry an ill-regulated spirit; and showing how, in the moral government of the world, sin casts its baleful consequences upon the innocent as well as the guilty.

When the carriage of Dr. Bevary, containing himself and Miss Gwinn, drove from Mr. Hunter's door on the unknown errand, he—Mr. Hunter—staggered to a seat, rather than walked to it. That he was very ill that day, both mentally and bodily, he

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was only too conscious of. Austin Clay had said to him, "Do not return: I will manage," or words to that effect. At present Mr. Hunter felt himself incapable of returning.

He sank down in the easy chair, and closed his eyes, his thoughts thrown back to the past. An ill-starred past: one that had left its bane on his after life, and whose consequences had clung to him. It is impossible but that ill-doing must leave its results behind: the laws of God and man alike demand it. Mr. Hunter, in early life, had been betrayed into committing a wrong act; and Miss Gwinn, in the 'gratification of her passionate revenge, had visited it upon him all too heavily.

Heavily, most heavily was it pressing upon him now. That unhappy visit to Wales, which had led to all the evil, was especially present to his mind this day. A handsome young man, in the first dawn of manhood, he had gone to the fashionable Welsh watering-place—partly to renew a waste of strength more imaginary than real; partly in the love of roving natural to

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youth; partly to enjoy a few weeks' relaxation. "If you want good and comfortable lodgings, go to Miss Gwinn's house on the South Parade," some friend, whom he encountered at his journey's end, had said to him. And to Miss Gwinn's he went. He found Miss Gwinn a cold, proud woman—it was she whom you have seen—bearing the manners of a lady. The servant who waited upon him was garrulous, and proclaimed, at the first interview, amidst other gossip, that her mistress had but a limited income—a hundred, or a hundred and fifty pounds a year, she believed; that she preferred to eke it out by letting her drawing-room and adjoining bed-room, and to live well; rather than to rusticate and pinch. Miss Gwinn and her motives were nothing to the young sojourner, and he turned a careless, if not a deaf ear, to the gossip. "She does it chiefly for the sake of Miss Emma," added the girl: and the listener so far roused himself as to ask apathetically who "Miss Emma." was. It was her mistress's young sister, the girl replied:

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there must be twenty good years between them. Miss Emma was but nineteen, and had just come home from boarding-school: her mistress had brought her up ever since her mother died. Miss Emma was not at borne now, but was expected on the morrow, she went on. Miss Emma was not without her good looks, but her mistress took care they should not be seen by everybody. She'd hardly let her go about the house when strangers were in it, lest she should be met in the passages. Mr. Hunter laughed. Good looks had attractions for him in those days, and he determined to see for himself, in spite of Miss Gwinn, whether Miss Emma's looks were so good that they might not be looked at.

Now, by the merest accident—at least, it happened by accident in the first instance, and not by intention—one chief point of complication in the future ill was unwittingly led to. In this early stage of the affair, while the servant maid was exercising her tongue in these items of domestic news, the friend who had recommended Mr.

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Hunter to the apartments, arrived at the house, and called out to him from the foot of the stairs, his high clear voice echoing through the house.

“Lewis! Will you come out and take a stroll?”

Lewis Hunter hastened down, proclaiming his acquiescence, and the maid proceeded to the parlour of her mistress.

“The gentleman's name 'is Lewis, ma'am. You said you forgot to ask it of him.”

Miss Gwinn, methodical in all she did, took a sheet of note-paper and inscribed the name upon it, “Mr. Lewis,” as a reminder for the time when she should require to make out his bill. When Mr. Hunter found out their error—for the maid henceforth addressed him as “Mr. Lewis,” or “Mr. Lewis, sir”—it rather amused him, and he did not correct the mistake. He had no motive whatever for concealing his name: he did not wish it concealed. On the other hand, he deemed it of no importance to set them right; it signified not a jot to him whether they called him “Mr.

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Lewis” or “Mr. Hunter.” Thus they knew him as, and believed him to be, Mr. Lewis only. He never took the trouble to undeceive them, and nothing occurred to require the mistake to be corrected. The one or two letters only which arrived for him—for he had gone there for idleness, not to correspond with his friends—were addressed to the post-office, in accordance with his primary directions, not having known where he should lodge.

“Miss Emma” came home: a very pretty and agreeable girl. In the narrow passage of the house—one of those shallow residences built for letting apartments at the sea-side—she encountered the stranger, who happened to be going out as she entered. He lifted his hat to her.

“Who is that, Nancy?” she asked of the chattering maid.

“It’s the new lodger, Miss Emma: Lewis his name is. Did you ever see such good looks? And he has asked a thousand questions about you.”

Now, the fact was, Mr. Hunter—stay, we

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will also call him Mr. Lewis for the time being, as they had fallen into the error, and it may be convenient to us—had not asked a single question about the young lady, save the one when her name was first spoken of, “Who is Miss Emma?” Nancy had supplied information enough for a “thousand” questions, unasked; and perhaps she saw no difference.

“Have you made any acquaintance with Mr. Lewis, Agatha?” Emma inquired of her sister.

“When do I make acquaintance with the people who take my apartments?” replied Miss Gwinn, in a tone of reproof. “They naturally look down upon me as a letter of lodgings—and I am not one to bear that.”

Now comes the unhappy tale. It shall be glanced at as briefly as possible in detail; but it is necessary that parts of it should be explained.

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Acquaintanceship sprang up between Mr. Lewis and Emma Gwinn. At first they met in the town, or on the beach, accidentally; later, I very much fear that the meetings

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were tacitly, if not openly, more intentional. Both were agreeable, both were young; and a liking for each other's society arose in each of them. Mr. Lewis found his time hang somewhat heavily on his hands, for his friend had left; and Emma Gwinn was not prevented from walking out as she pleased. Only one restriction was laid upon her by her sister: "Emma, take care that you make no acquaintance with strangers, or suffer it to be made with you. Speak to none."

An injunction which Miss Emma disobeyed. She disobeyed it in a particularly marked manner. It was not only that she did permit Mr. Lewis to make acquaintance with her, but she allowed it to ripen into intimacy. Worse still, the meetings, I say, from having been at first really accidental, grew to be sought. Sought on the one side as much as on the other.

Ah! young ladies, I wish this little history could be a warning to you, never to deviate from the strict line of right—never to stray, by so much as a thoughtless

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step, from the straight path of duty. Once allow yourselves to do so, and you know not where it may end. Slight acts of disobedience, that appear in themselves as the merest trifles, may yet be fraught with incalculable mischief. The falling into the habit of passing a pleasant hour of intercourse with Mr. Lewis, sauntering on the beach in social and intellectual converse—and it was no worse—appeared a very venial offence to Emma Gwinn. But she did it in direct disobedience to the command and wish of her sister; and she knew that she so did it. She knew also that she owed to that sister, who had brought her up and cared for her from infancy, the allegiance that a child gives to a mother. In this stage of the affair, she was chiefly to blame. Mr. Lewis did not suppose that blame attached to him. There was no reason why he should not while away an

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occasional hour in pleasant chat with a young lady; there was no harm in the meetings, taking them in the abstract. The blame lay with her. It is no excuse to urge that Miss

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Gwinn exercised over her a too strict authority, that she kept her secluded from society with an unusually tight hand. Miss Gwinn had a motive in this: her sister knew nothing of it, and resented the restriction as a personal wrong. To elude her vigilance and walk about with a handsome young man, seemed a return justifiable, and poor Emma Gwinn never dreamt of any ill result. At length it was found out by Miss Gwinn.

She did not find out much. Indeed, there was not much to find: except that there was more friendship between Mr. Lewis and Emma than there was between Mr. Lewis and herself, and that they often met to stroll on the beach, and enjoy the agreeable benefit of the sea-breezes. But that was quite enough for Miss Gwinn. An uncontrollable storm of passionate anger ensued, which was vented upon Emma. She stood over her, and forced her to attire herself for travelling, protesting that not another hour should she pass in the house while Mr. Lewis remained. Then she started with Emma, to

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place her under the care of an aunt, who lived so far off as to be a day's journey.

"It's a shame!" was the comment of sympathetic Nancy, who deemed Miss Gwinn the most unreasonable woman under the sun. Nancy was herself engaged to an enterprising porter, to whom she intended to be married some fine Easter, when they had saved up sufficient to lay in a stock of goods and chattels. And she forthwith went straight to Mr. Lewis, and communicated to him what had occurred, giving him Miss Emma's new address.

"He'll follow her if he have got any spirit," was her inward thought. "It's what my Joe would do by me, if I was forced off to desert places by a old dragon."

It was precisely what Mr. Lewis did. Upon the return of Miss Gwinn, he gave notice to quit her house, where he had already staid longer than he intended to do

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originally. Miss Gwinn had no suspicion but that he returned to his home—wherever that might be.

You may be inclined to ask why Miss

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Gwinn had fallen into anger so great. That she loved her young sister with an intense and jealous love was certain. Miss Gwinn was of a peculiar temperament, and she could not bear that one spark of Emma's affection should stray from her. Emma, on the contrary, scarcely cared for her eldest sister: entertaining for her a very cool regard indeed, not to be called a sisterly one: and the cause may have lain in the stem manners of Miss Gwinn. Deeply, ardently as she loved Emma, her manners were to her invariably cold and stern: and this does not beget love from the young. Emma also resented the jealous restrictions imposed on her, lest she should make any acquaintance that might lead to marriage. It had been better possibly that Miss Gwinn had disclosed to her the reasons that existed against it.

There was madness in the Gwinn family. One of the parents had died in an asylum, and the medical men suspected (as Miss Gwinn knew) that the children might be subject to it. She did not fear it for herself,

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but she did fear it for Emma: in point of fact, the young girl had already, some years back, given indications of it. It was therefore Miss Gwinn's intention and earnest wish—a very right and proper wish—that Emma should never marry. There was one other sister, Elizabeth, a year older than Emma. She had gone on a visit to Jersey some little time before; and, to Miss Gwinn's dismay and consternation, had married a farmer there, without asking leave. There was nothing for Miss Gwinn but to bury the dismay within her, and to resolve that Emma should be guarded more closely than before. But Emma Gwinn, knowing nothing of the prompting motives, naturally resented the surveillance.

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Mr. Lewis followed Emma to her place of retirement. He had really grown to like her: but the pursuit may have had its rise as much in the boyish desire to thwart Miss Gwinn—or, as he expressed it, “to pay her off—” as in love. However that might have been, Emma Gwinn welcomed him all too gladly, and the walks were renewed.

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It was an old tale, that, which ensued. Thanks to improved manners and morals, we can say an “old” tale, in contradistinction to a modern one. A secret marriage in these days would be looked upon askance by most people. Under the purest, the most domestic, the wisest court in the world, manners and customs have taken a turn with us, and society calls underhand doings by their right name, and turns its back upon them. Nevertheless, private marriages and run-a-way marriages were not done away with in the days when James Lewis Hunter contracted his.

I wonder whether one ever took place—where it was contracted in disobedience and defiance—that did not bring, in some way or other, its own punishment? To few, perhaps, was it brought home as it was to Mr. Hunter. No apology can be offered for the step he took: not even his youth, or his want of experience, or the attachment which had grown up in his heart for Emma. He knew that his family would have objected to the marriage. In fact, he dared not tell

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his purpose. Her position was not equal to his—at least old Mr. Hunter, a proud man, would not have deemed it to be so—and he would have objected on the score of his son's youth. The worst bar of all would have been the tendency to insanity of the Gwinns—but of this James Hunter knew nothing. So he took that one false, blind, irrevocable step of contracting a private marriage; and the consequences came bitterly home to him.

The marriage was a strictly legal one James Hunter was honourable enough to take care of that: and both of them guarded the secret jealously. Emma remained at her

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aunt's and wore her ring inside her dress, attached to a neck ribbon. Her husband only saw her sometimes; to avoid suspicion he lived chiefly at his father's home in London.

Six months afterwards, Emma Gwinn—nay, Emma Hunter—lay upon her deathbed. A fever broke out in the neighbourhood, which she caught; and a different illness also supervened. Miss Gwinn, apprised of her danger, hastened to her. She stood

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over her in a shock of horror—whence had those symptoms arisen, and what meant that circle of gold that Emma in her delirium kept hold of on her neck. Medical skill could not save her, and just before her death, in a lucid interval, she confessed her marriage—the bare fact only—none of its details; she loved her husband too truly to expose him to the dire wrath of her sister. And she died without giving the slightest clue to his real name—Hunter. It was the fever that killed her.

Dire wrath, indeed! That was scarcely the word for it. Insane wrath would be better. In Miss Gwinn's injustice, (violent people always are unjust,) she persisted in attributing Emma's death to Mr. Lewis. In her bitter grief, she jumped to the belief that the secret must have preyed upon Emma's brain in the delirium of fever, and that that prevented her recovery. It is very probable that the secret did prey upon it, though, it is to be hoped, not to the extent assumed by Miss Gwinn.

Mr. Lewis knew nothing of the illness.

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He was in France with his father at the time it happened, and had not seen his wife for three weeks. Perhaps the knowledge of his absence abroad, caused Emma not to attempt to apprise him when first seized; afterwards she was too ill to do so. But by a strange coincidence he arrived from London the day after the funeral.

Nobody need envy him the interview with Miss Gwinn. On her part it was not a seemly one. Glad to get out of the house and be away from her reproaches, the stormy interview was concluded almost as soon as it had begun. He returned straight to London, her last words ringing their refrain on his ears—that his wife was dead and he

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had killed her: Miss Gwinn being still in ignorance that his proper name was anything but Lewis.

Following immediately upon this—it was curious that it should be so—Miss Gwinn received news that her sister Elizabeth, Mrs. Gardener, was ill in Jersey. She hastened to her: for Elizabeth was nearly, if not quite, as dear to her as Emma had been.

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Mrs. Gardener's was a peculiar and unusual illness, and it ended in a confirmed and hopeless affection of the brain.

Once more Miss Gwinn's injustice came into play. Just as she had persisted in attributing Emma's death to Mr. Lewis, so did she now attribute to him Elizabeth's insanity: that is, she regarded him as its remote cause. That the two young sisters had been much attached to each other was undoubted: but to think that Elizabeth's madness came on through sorrow for Emma's death, or at the tidings of what had preceded it, was absurdly foolish. The poor young lady was placed in an asylum in London, of which Dr. Bevary was one of the visiting physicians; he was led to take an unusual interest in the case, and this brought him acquainted with Miss Gwinn. Within a year of her being placed there, the husband, Mr. Gardener, died in Jersey. His affairs turned out to be involved, and from that time the cost of keeping her there devolved on Miss Gwinn.

Private asylums are expensive, and Miss

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Gwinn could only maintain her sister in one at the cost of giving up her own home. I'll—conditioned though she was, we must confess she had her troubles. She gave it up without a murmur: she would have given up her life to benefit either of those, her young sisters. Retaining but a mere pittance, she devoted all her means to the comfort of Elizabeth, and found a home with her brother, in Ketterford. Where she spent her days bemoaning the lost, and cherishing a really insane hatred against Mr. Lewis—a desire for revenge.

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She had never come across him, until that Easter Monday, at Ketterford. And that, you will say, is scarcely correct, since it was not himself she met then, but his brother. Deceived by the resemblance, she attacked Mr. Henry Hunter in the manner you remember; and Austin Clay saved him from the gravel-pit. But the time soon came when she stood face to face with *him*. It was the hour she had so longed for: the hour of revenge.

What revenge? But for the wicked lie

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she subsequently forged, there could have been no revenge. The worst she could have proclaimed was, that James Lewis Hunter, when he was a young man, had so far forgotten his duty to himself, and to the world's decencies, as to contract a secret marriage. He might have got over that. He had mourned his young wife sincerely at the time, but later grew to think that all things were for the best—that it was a serious source of embarrassment removed from his path. Nothing more or less had he to acknowledge.

What revenge would Miss Gwinn have reaped from this? None. Certainly none to satisfy one so vindictive as she. It never was clear to herself what revenge she had desired: all her efforts had been directed to the discovering of him.

She found him a man of social ties. He had married Louisa Bevary; he had a fair daughter; he was respected by the world: all of which excited the anger of Miss Gwinn.

Remembering her violent nature, it was

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only to be expected that Mr. Hunter should shrink from meeting Miss Gwinn when he first knew she had tracked him and was in London. He had never told his wife the episode in his early life, and would very much have disliked its tardy disclosure to her through the agency of Miss Gwinn. Fifty pounds would he have willingly given to avoid a meeting with her. But she came to his very home; so to stay, into the presence of his wife and child; and he had to see her, and make the best of it.

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You must remember the interview. Mr. Hunter's agitation *previous* to it, was caused by the dread of the woman's near presence, of the disturbance she might make in his household, of the discovery his wife was in close danger of making—that he was a widower when she married him, and not a bachelor. Any husband of the present day might show the same agitation I think under similar circumstances. But Mr. Hunter did not allow this agitation to sway him when before Miss Gwinn; once shut up with her, he was cool and calm as a

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cucumber; rather defied her than not, civilly; and asked what she meant by intruding upon him, and what she had to complain of: which of course was but adding fuel to the woman's flame. It was quite true, all he said, and there was nothing left to hang a peg of revenge upon.

And so she invented one. The demon of mischief put it into her mind to impose upon him with the lie that his first wife, Emma, was not dead, but living. She told him that she (she, herself) had imposed upon him with a false story in that long-past day, in saying that Emma was dead and buried. It was another sister who had died, she added—not Emma: Emma had been ill with the fever, but was recovering; and she had said this to separate her from him. Emma, she continued, was alive still, a patient in the lunatic asylum.

It never occurred to Mr. Hunter to doubt the tale. Her passionate manner, her impressive words, but added to her earnestness, and he came out from the interview believing that his first wife had not died. His state

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of mind cannot be forgotten. Austin Clay saw him pacing the waste ground in the dark night. His agony and remorse were fearful; the sun of his life's peace had set: and there could be no retaliation upon her who had caused it all—Miss Gwinn.

Miss Gwinn, however, did not follow up her revenge. Not because further steps might have brought the truth to light, but because after a night's rest she rather repented

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of it. Her real nature was honourable, and she despised herself for what she had done. Once it crossed her to undo it; but she hated Mr. Hunter with an undying hatred, and so let it alone and went down to Ketterford. One evening, when she had been at home some days, a spirit of confidence came over her, which was very unusual, and she told her brother of the revenge she had taken. That was quite enough for Lawyer Gwinn: a glorious opportunity of enriching himself, not to be missed. He went up to London, and terrified Mr. Hunter out of five thousand pounds. "Or I go and tell your wife, Miss Bevary, that she is not your wife,"

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he threatened, in his coarse way. Miss Gwinn suspected that the worthy lawyer had gone to make the most of the opportunity, and she wrote him a sharp letter, telling him that if he did so—if he interfered at all—she would at once confess to Lewis Hunter that Emma was really dead. Not knowing where he would put up in London, she enclosed this note to Austin Clay, asking him to give it to Lawyer Gwinn. She took the opportunity, at the same time, of writing a reproachful letter to Mr. Hunter, in which his past ill-doings and Emma's present existence were fully enlarged upon. As the reader may remember, she misdirected the letters: Austin became acquainted with the (as he could but suppose) dangerous secret; and the note to Lawyer Gwinn was set alight, sealed. If Austin or his master had but borrowed a momentary portion of the principles of Gwinn of Ketterford, and peeped into the letter! What years of misery it would have saved Mr. Hunter!

But when Miss Gwinn discovered that her brother had used the lie to obtain money,

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she did not declare the truth. The sense of justice within her yielded to revenge. She hated Mr. Hunter as she had ever done, and would not relieve him. A fine life, between them, did they lead Mr. Hunter. Miss Gwinn protested against every fresh aggression made by the lawyer; but protested only. In Mr. Hunter's anguish of mind at the disgrace

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cast on his wife and child; in his terror lest the truth (as he assumed it to be) should reach them—and it seemed to be ever looming—he had lived, as may be said, a perpetual death. And the disgrace was of a nature that never could be removed; and the terror had never left him through all these long years.

Dr. Bevary had believed the worst. When he first became acquainted with Miss Gwinn, she (never a communicative woman) had not disclosed the previous history of the patient in the asylum. She had given hints of a sad tale, she even said she was living in hope of being revenged on one who had done herself and family an injury, but she said no more. Later circumstances connected with

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Mr. Hunter and his brother, dating from the account he heard of Miss Gwinn's attack upon Mr. Henry, had impressed Dr. Bevary with the belief that James Hunter had really married the poor woman in the asylum. When he questioned Miss Gwinn, that estimable woman had replied in obscure hints: and they had so frightened Dr. Bevary that he dared ask no further. For his sister's sake he tacitly ignored the subject in future, living in daily thankfulness that Mrs. Hunter was without suspicion.

But with the dead body of Elizabeth Gardener lying before her, the enacted lie came to an end. Miss Gwinn freely acknowledged what she had done, and took little, if any, blame to herself. "Lewis Hunter spoilt the happiness of my life," she said; "in return I have spoilt his."

"And suppose my sister, his lawful wife, had been led to believe this fine tale?" questioned Dr. Bevary, looking keenly at her.

"In that case I should have declared the truth," said Miss Gwinn. "I had no animosity

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to her. She was innocent, she was also your sister, and she should never have suffered."

"How could you know that she remained ignorant?"

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“By my brother being able, whenever he would, to frighten Mr. Hunter,” was the laconic answer.

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CHAPTER XI.

RELIEF.

WE left Mr. Hunter in the easy chair of his dining-room, buried in these reminiscences of the unhappy past, and quite unconscious that relief of any sort could be in store for him. And yet it was very near: relief from two evils, quite opposite in their source.

How long he sat there he scarcely knew; it seemed for hours. In the afternoon he aroused himself to his financial difficulties, and went out. He remembered that he had purposed calling that day upon his bankers, though he had no hope—but rather the certainty of the contrary—that they would help him out of his financial embarrassments. There was just time to get there before the bank closed, and Mr. Hunter had a cab

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called and went down to Lombard Street. He was shown into the room of the principal partner. The banker thought how ill he looked. Mr. Hunter's first question was about the heavy bill that was due that day. He supposed it had been presented and dis-honoured.

“No,” said the banker. “It was presented and paid.”

A ray of hope lighted up the sadness of Mr. Hunter's face. “Did you indeed pay it? It was very kind. You shall be no eventual losers?”

“We did not pay it from our own funds, Mr. Hunter. It was paid from yours.”

Mr. Hunter did not understand. “I thought my account had been nearly drawn out,” he said; “and by the note I received this morning from you, I understood you would decline to help me.”

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“Your account was drawn very close indeed; but this afternoon, in time to meet the bill upon its second presentation, there was a large sum paid in to your credit—two thousand, six hundred pounds.”

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A pause of blank astonishment on the part of Mr. Hunter. “Who paid it in?” he presently asked.

“Mr. Clay. He came himself. You will weather the storm now, Mr. Hunter.”

There was no answering reply. The banker bent forward in the dusk of the growing evening, and saw that Mr. Hunter was incapable of making one. He was sinking back in his chair in a fainting fit. Whether it was the revulsion of feeling caused by the conviction that he *should* now weather the storm, or simply the effect of his physical state, Mr. Hunter had fainted, as quietly as any girl might do. One of the partners lived at the bank, and Mr. Hunter was conveyed into the dwelling-house. It was quite evening before he was well enough to leave it.

He drove to the yard. It was just closed for the night, and Mr. Clay was gone. Mr. Hunter ordered the cab home. He found Austin waiting for him, and he also found Dr. Bevary. Seeing the latter, he expected next to see Miss Gwinn, and glanced nervously round.

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“She is gone back to Ketterford,” spoke out Dr. Bevary, divining the fear. “The woman will never trouble you again. I thought you must be lost, Hunter. I have been here twice; been home to dinner with Florence; been round at the yard, worrying Clay; and could not come upon you anywhere.”

“I went to the bank, and was taken ill there,” said Mr. Hunter, who still seemed anything but himself, and looked round in a bewildered manner. “The woman, Bevary—are you sure she’s gone quite away? She—she wanted to beg, I think,” he added, as if in apology for pressing the question.

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“She is *gone*: gone never to return; and you may be at rest,” repeated the doctor, impressively. “And so you have been ill at the bankers’, James! Things are going wrong, I suppose.”

“No, they are going right. Austin “—laying his hand upon the young man’s shoulder—”what am I to say? This money can only have come from you.”

“Sir!” said Austin, half laughing.

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Mr. Hunter drew Dr. Bevary’s attention, pointing to Austin. “Look at him, Bevary. He has saved me. But for him, I should have borne a dishonoured name this day. I went down to Lombard Street, a man without hope, believing that the blow had been already struck in bills dishonoured—that my name was on it way to the *Gazette*. I found that he, Austin Clay, had paid in between two and three thousand pounds to my credit.”

“I could not put my money to a better use, sir. The two thousand pounds were left to me, you know: the rest I saved. I was wishing for something to turn up that I could invest it in.”

“Invest!” exclaimed Mr. Hunter, deep feeling in his tone. “How do you know you will not lose it?”

“I have no fear, sir. The strike is at an end, and business will go on well now.”

“If I did not believe that it would, I would never consent to use it,” said Mr. Hunter.

It was true. Austin Clay, a provident man, had been advancing his money to save

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the credit of his master. Suspecting some such a crisis as this was looming, he had contrived to hold his funds in available readiness. It had come, though, sooner than he anticipated.

“How am I to repay you?” asked Mr. Hunter. “I don’t mean the money: but the obligation.”

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A red flush mounted to Austin's brow. He answered hastily, as if to cover it.

"I do not require payment, sir. I do not look for any."

Mr. Hunter stood in deep thought, looking at him, but vacantly. Dr. Bevary was near the mantelpiece, apparently paying no attention to either of them.

"Will you link your name to mine?" said Mr. Hunter, moving towards Austin.

"In what manner, sir?"

"By letting the firm be from henceforth Hunter and Clay. I have long wished this; you are of too great use to me to remain anything less than a partner, and by this last act of yours, you have earned the right to be so. Will you object to join your name

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to one which was so near being dishonoured?"

He held out his hand as he spoke, and Austin clasped it. "Oh, Mr. Hunter!" he exclaimed, in the strong impulse of the moment, "I wish you would give me hopes of a dearer reward."

"You mean Florence," said Mr. Hunter.

"Yes," returned Austin, in agitation. "I care not how long I wait; or what price you may call upon me to pay for her. As Jacob served Laban seven years for Rachel, so would I serve for Florence, and think it but a day, for the love I bear her. Sir, Mrs. Hunter would have given her to me."

"My objection is not to you, Austin. Were I to disclose to you certain particulars connected with Florence—as I should be obliged to do before she married—you might yourself decline her."

"Try me, sir," said Austin, a bright smile parting his lips.

"Ay, try him," said Dr. Bevary, in his quaint manner. "I have an idea that he may know as much of the matter as you do,

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Hunter. You neither of you know too much," he significantly added.

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Austin's cheek turned red; and there was that in his tone, his look, which told Mr. Hunter that he had known the fact, known it for years. "Oh, sir," he pleaded, "give me Florence."

"I tell you that you neither of you know too much," said Dr. Bevary. "But, look here, Austin. The best thing you can do is, to go to my house and ask Florence whether she will have you. Then—if you don't find it too much trouble—escort her home."

Austin laughed as he caught up his hat. A certain prevision, that he should win Florence, had ever been within him.

Dr. Bevary watched the room door close, and then drew a chair in front of his brother-in-law.

"Did it ever strike you that Austin Olay knew your secret, James?" he began.

"How should it?" returned Mr. Hunter, feeling himself compelled to answer.

"I do not know how," said the doctor, "any more than I know how the impression,

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that he did, fixed itself upon me. I have felt sure, this many a year past, that he was no stranger to the fact, though he probably knew nothing of the details."

To the fact! Dr. Bevary spoke with strange coolness.

"When did *you* become acquainted with it " asked Mr. Hunter, in a tone of sharp pain.

"I became acquainted with your share in it at the time Miss Gwinn discovered that Mr. Lewis was Mr. Hunter. At least, with as much of the share as I ever was acquainted with until to-day."

Mr. Hunter compressed his lips. It was no use beating about the bush any longer. "James," resumed the doctor, "why did you not confide the secret to me? It would have been much better."

"To you! Louisa's brother!"

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“It would have been better, I say. It might not have lifted the sword that was always hanging over Louisa’s head, or have eased it by one jot; but it might have eased *you*. A sorrow kept within a man’s own

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bosom, doing its work in silence, will hum his life away: get him to talk of it, and half the pain is removed It is also possible that I might have made better terms, than you, with the rapacity of Gwinn.”

“If you knew it, why did you not speak openly to me?”

Dr. Bevary suppressed a shudder. “It was one of those terrible secrets that a third party cannot interfere in uninvited No: silence was my only course, so long as you observed silence to me. Had I interfered, I might have said ‘Louisa shall leave you!’”

“It is over, so far as she is concerned,” said Mr. Hunter, wiping his damp brow. “Let her name rest. It is the thought of her that has well nigh killed me.”

“Ay, it’s over,” responded Dr. Bevary; “over, in more senses than one. Do you not wonder that Miss Gwinn should have gone back to Ketterford without molesting you again?”

“How can I wonder at anything she does? She comes and she goes, with as little reason as warning.”

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Dr. Bevary lowered his voice. “Have you ever been to see that poor patient Kerr’s asylum?”

The question excited the anger of Mr. Hunter. “What do you mean by asking it?” he cried. “When I was led to believe her dead, I shaped my future course according to that belief. I have never acted, nor would I act, upon any other—save in the giving money to Gwinn, for my wife’s sake. If Louisa was not my wife legally, she was nothing less in the sight of God.”

“Louisa was your wife,” said Dr. Bevary, quietly. And Mr. Hunter responded by a sharp gesture of pain. He wished the subject at an end The doctor continued

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“James, had you gone, though it had been but for an instant, to see that unhappy patient of Kerr’s, your trammels would have been broken. It was not Emma, your young wife of years ago.”

“It was not!—What do you say?” gasped Mr. Hunter.

“When Agatha Gwinn found you out, here, in this house, she startled you nearly

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to death by telling you that Emma was alive—was a patient in Kerr’s asylum. She told you that, when you had been informed in those past days of Emma’s death, you were imposed upon by a lie—a lie invented by herself. James, the lie was uttered *then*, when she spoke to you here. Emma, your wife, did die; and the young woman in the asylum was her sister.”

Mr. Hunter rose. His hands were raised imploringly, his face was stretched forward in its sad yearning. What!—which was true? which was he to believe?

“In the gratification of her revenge, Miss Gwinn concocted the tale that Emma was alive,” resumed Dr. Bevary; “knowing, as she spoke it, that Emma had been dead years and years. She contrived to foster the same impression upon me; and the same impression, I cannot tell how, has, I am sure, clung to Austin Clay. Louisa was your lawful wife, James.”

Mr. Hunter, in the plenitude of his thankfulness, sank upon his chair, a sobbing burst of emotion breaking from him, and the drops

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of perspiration gathering again on his brow.

“That other one, the sister, the poor patient, is dead,” pursued the doctor. “As we stood together over her, an hour ago, Miss Gwinn confessed the imposition. It appeared to slip from her involuntarily, in spite of herself, inquired her motive, and she answered, ‘To be revenged on you, Lewis Hunter, for the wrong you had done.’ As you had marred the comfort of her life, so she in return had marred that of yours. As she

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stood in her impotence, looking on the dead, I asked her which, in her opinion, had inflicted the most wrong, she or you?"

Mr. Hunter lifted his eager face. "It was a foolish deceit. What did she hope to gain by it? A word at any time might have exposed it."

"It seems she did gain pretty well by it," significantly replied Dr. Bevary. "There's little doubt that it was first spoken in the angry rage of the moment, as being the most effectual mode of tormenting you: and the terrible dread with which you received it—

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as I conclude you so did receive it—must have encouraged her to persist in the lie. James, you should have confided in me; I might have brought light to bear on it in some way or other. Your timorous silence has kept me quiet."

"God be thanked that it is over!" fervently ejaculated Mr. Hunter. "The loss of my money, the loss of my peace, they seem to be little in comparison with the joy of this welcome revelation."

He sat down as he spoke and bent his head upon his hand. Presently he looked at his brother-in-law.

"And you think that Clay has suspected this? And that—suspecting it—he has wished for Florence?"

"I am sure of one thing—that Florence has been his object, his dearest hope. What he says has no exaggeration in it—that he would serve for her seven years, and seven to that, for the love he bears her."

"I have been afraid to glance at such a thing as marriage for Florence, and that is

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the reason I would not listen to Austin Clay. With this slur hanging over her—"

"There is no slur—as it turns out," interrupted Dr. Bevary. "Florence loves him, James; and your wife knew it."

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“What a relief is all this!” murmured Mr. Hunter. The woman gone back to Ketterford! I think I shall sleep to-night.”

“She is gone back, never more to trouble you. We must see how her worthy brother can be brought to account for obtaining money under false pretences.”

“I’ll make him render back every shilling he has defrauded me of: I’ll bring him to answer for it before the laws of his country,” was the wronged man’s passionate and somewhat confused answer.

But that is more easy to say than to do, Mr. Hunter!

For, a few days subsequent to this, Lawyer Gwinn, possibly scenting that unpleasant consequences might be in store for him, was quietly steaming to America in a fine ship; taking all his available substance with him and leaving Ketterford and his sister behind.

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CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION.

WITH outward patience and inward wonder, Florence Hunter was remaining at Dr. Bevary’s. That something must be wrong at home, she felt sure; else why was she kept away from it so long And where was her uncle? Invalids were shut up in the waiting-room, like Patience on a monument, hoping minute by minute to see him appear. And now here was another, she supposed!

No. He had passed the patients’ room and was opening the door of this. Austin Clay! “What have you come for?” she exclaimed, in the glad confusion of the moment.

“To take you home, for one thing,” he answered, as he approached her. “Do you dislike the escort, Florence?”

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He bent forward as he asked the question. A strange light of happiness shone in his eyes; a sweet smile parted his lips. Florence Hunter's heart stood still, and then began to beat as if it would have burst its bounds.

"What has happened?" she faltered.

"This," he said, taking both her hands and drawing her gently before him. "The right to hold your hands in mine; the right—soon—to take you to my heart and keep you there for ever. Your father and uncle have sent me to tell you this."

The words, in their fervent earnestness, carried instant truth to her heart, lighting it as with the brightness of sunshine. "Oh what a recompense!" she impulsively murmured from the depths of her great love. "And everything lately has seemed so dark with doubt, so full of trouble!"

"No more doubt, no more trouble," he fondly whispered. "It shall be my life's care to guard my wife from all such, Florence—heaven permitting me."

Anything more that was said may as well

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be left to the reader's lively imagination, aided no doubt by his own experience. They arrived at home after awhile; and found Dr. Bevary there, talking still.

"How you must have hurried yourselves!" quoth he, turning to them. "Clay, you ought to be ill from walking fast. What has kept him, Florence?"

"Not your patients, Doctor," retorted Austin laughing; "though you are keeping them. One of them says you made an appointment with him. By the way he spoke, I think he was inwardly vowing vengeance against you for not keeping it."

"Ah," said the Doctor, "we medical men do get detained sometimes. One patient has had the most of my time this day, poor lady!"

"Is she better?" quickly asked Florence, who always had ready sympathy for sickness and suffering: perhaps from having seen so much of it in her mother.

"No, my dear, she is dead," was the answer, gravely spoken. "And, therefore,"

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added the doctor in a different tone, "I have no further excuse for absenting myself from those other patients who are alive and grumbling at me. Will you walk a few steps with me, Mr. Clay?"

Dr. Bevary linked his arm within Austin's as they crossed the hall, and they went out together. "How did you become acquainted with that dark secret?" he breathed.

"Through a misdirected letter of Miss Gwinn's," replied Austin. "After I had read it, I discovered that it must have been meant for Mr. Hunter, though addressed to me. It told me all Dr. Bevary, I have had to carry the secret all these years, bearing myself as one innocent of the knowledge; before Mrs. Hunter, before Florence, before him. I would have given half my savings not to have known it."

"You believed that—that—one was living who might have replaced Mrs. Hunter?"

"Yes; and that she was in confinement. The letter, a reproachful one, was too explanatory."

"She died this morning. It is with her

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—at least with her and her affairs—that my day has been taken up."

"What a mercy!" ejaculated Austin.

"Ay; mercies are showered down every day: a vast many more than we, self-complaisant mortals, acknowledge or return thanks for," responded Dr. Bevary, in the quaint tone he was fond of using. And then, in a few brief words, he enlightened Austin as to the actual truth.

"What a fiend she must be!" cried Austin, alluding to Miss Gwinn of Ketterford. "Oh, but this is a mercy indeed! And I have been planning how to guard the secret always from Florence."

Dr. Bevary made no reply. Austin turned to him, the ingenuous look upon his face that it often wore.

"You approve of me for Florence? Do you not, sir?"

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“Be you very sure, young gentleman, that you should never have got her, had I not approved,” oracularly nodded Dr. Bevary. “I look upon Florence as part of my belongings; and, if you mind what.

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you are about, and don't offend me, perhaps I may look upon you as the same.”

Austin laughed. “How am I to avoid offence?” he asked.

“By loving your wife with an earnest, lasting love; by making her a better husband than James Hunter has been enabled to make her poor mother.”

The tears rose to Austin's eyes with the intensity of his emotion. “Do you think there is cause to *ask* me to do this, Dr. Bevary?”

“No, my boy, I do not. God bless you both! There! leave me to get home to those patients of mine. You can be off back to her.”

But Austin Clay had work on his hands, as well as pleasure, and he turned towards Daffodil's Delight. It was the evening for taking Baxendale his week's money, and Austin was not one to neglect it. He picked his way down amidst the poor people, standing about hungry and half-naked. All the works were open again, but numbers and numbers of men could not

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obtain employment, however good their will was: the masters had taken on strangers, and there was no room for the old workmen.

John Baxendale was sitting by his bedside, dressed. His injuries were yielding to skill and time: and in a short while he looked to be at work again.

“Well, Baxendale?” cried Austin in his cheery voice. “Still getting better?”

“Oh yes, sir, I'm thankful to say it. The surgeon was here to-day, and told me there would be no further relapse. I am a bit tired this evening; I stood a good while at the window, watching the row opposite. She was giving him such a basting.”

“What! do you mean the Cheeks? I thought the street seemed in a commotion.”

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Baxendale laughed. "It is but just over, sir. She set on and shook him soundly, and then she scratched him, and then she cuffed him—all outside the door. I do wonder that Cheek took it from her; but he's just like a puppy in her hands, and

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nothing better. Two good hours they were disputing there."

"What was the warfare about!" inquired Austin.

"About his not getting work, sir. Cheek's just like many of the other wives in Daffodil's Delight—urging their husbands not to go to work, and vowing *they'd* strike if they didn't stand out. I don't know but Mother Cheek was about the most obstinate of all—making a merit of keeping him herself and finding him in beer and tobacco. The very day that I was struck down, I heard her blowing him up for not 'standing firm upon his rights;' and telling him she'd rather go to his hanging than see him go back to work. And now she beats him because he can't get any to do."

"Is Cheek one that cannot get any?"

"Cheek's one, sir. Mr. Henry took on more strangers than did you and Mr. Hunter; so, of course, there's less room for his old men. Cheek has walked about London these two days, till he's foot-sore, trying different shops, but he can't get taken on:

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there are too many men out, for him to have a chance And she turns round and visits it upon him!"

"I think some of the wives in Daffodil's Delight are the most unreasonable women that ever were created," ejaculated Austin.

"*She* is—that wife of Cheek's," rejoined Baxendale. "I don't know how they'll end it. She has shut the door in his face, vowing he shall not put a foot inside it until he can bring some wages with him. Forbidding him to take work when it was to be had, and now, that it can't be had, turning upon him for not getting it! If Cheek wasn't a

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donkey, he'd turn upon her again. There's other women just as contradictory. I think the bad living has soured their tempers."

"Where's Mary this evening?" inquired Austin, quitting the unsatisfactory topic. Since her father's illness, Mary's place had been by his side: it was something unusual to find her absent. Baxendale lowered his voice to reply.

"She is getting ill again, sir. All her old

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symptoms have come back, and I am sure now that she is going fast. She is on her bed, lying down."

As he spoke the last word, he stopped, for Mary entered. She seemed scarcely able to walk; a hectic flush shone on her cheeks, and her breath was painfully short.

"Mary," Austin said, with much concern, "I am sorry to see you thus."

"It is only the old illness come back again, sir," she answered, as she sunk back in the pillowed chair. "I knew it had not gone for good—that the improvement was but temporary. But now, sir, look how good and merciful is the hand that guides us—and yet we sometimes doubt it! What should I have been spared for, and had this return glimpse of strength, but that I might nurse my father in his illness, and be a comfort to him? He is nearly well—will soon be at work again, and wants me no more. Thanks ever be to God!"

Austin went out, marvelling at the girl's simple and beautiful trust. It appeared that she would be happy in her removal whenever

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it should come. As he was passing up the street he met Dr. Bevary. Austin wondered what had become of his patients.

"All had gone away but two; tired of waiting," said the Doctor, divining his thoughts. "I am going to take a look at Mary Baxendale. I hear she is worse."

"Very much worse," replied Austin. "I have just left her father."

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At that moment there was a sound of contention and scolding, a woman's sharp tongue being uppermost. It proceeded from Mrs. Cheek, who was renewing the contest with her husband. Austin gave Dr. Bevary an outline of what Baxendale had said.

"And if after a short season of prosperity, another strike should come, these women would be the first again to urge the men on to it—to 'stand up for their rights!'" exclaimed the Doctor.

"Not all of them."

"They have not all done it now. Mark you, Austin! I shall settle a certain sum upon Florence when she marries, just to

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keep you in bread and cheese, should these strikes become the order of the day, and you get engulfed in them."

Austin smiled. "I think I can take better care than that, Doctor."

"Take all the care you please. But you are talking self-sufficient nonsense, my young friend. I shall put Florence on the safe side, in spite of your care. I have no fancy to see her reduced to one maid and a cotton gown. You can tell her so," added the Doctor as he continued on his way.

Austin turned on his, when a man stole up to him from some side entry—a cadaverous-looking man, pinched and careworn. It was James Dunn; he had been discharged out of prison by the charity of some fund at the disposal of the governor. He humbly begged for work—"just to keep him from starving."

"You ask what I have not to give, Dunn," was the reply of Austin. "Our yard is full; and, consider the season! Perhaps when spring comes on—

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"How am I to exist till spring, sir?" he burst forth in a voice that was but just kept from tears. "And the wife and the children?"

"I wish I could help you, Dunn. Your case is but that of many others."

"There have been so many strangers took on, sir!"

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“Of course there have been. To do the work that you and others refused.”

“I have not a place to lay my head in this night, sir. I have not so much as a slice of bread. I'd do the meanest work that could be offered to me.”

Austin felt in his pocket for a piece of money, and gave it him. “What misery they have brought upon themselves!” he thought. And it was a positive relief to get out of Daffodil's Delight.

When the announcement reached Mrs. Henry Hunter of Florence's engagement, she did not approve of it. Not that she had any objection to Austin Clay; he had from the first been a favourite with her, though

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she had sometimes marked her preference by a somewhat patronizing manner; but for Florence to marry her father's clerk, though that clerk had now become partner, was more than she could at the first moment quietly yield to.

“It is quite a descent for her,” she said to her husband privately. “What can James be thinking of? The very idea of her marrying Austin Clay!”

“But if she likes him?”

“That ought not to go for anything. Suppose it had been Mary? I would not have let her have him.”

“I would,” decisively returned Mr. Henry Hunter. “Clay's worth his weight in gold.”

Some short while given to preliminaries, and to the re-establishment (in a degree) of Mr. Hunter's shattered health, and the new firm “Hunter and Clay” was duly announced to the business world. Upon an appointed day, Mr. Hunter stood before his workmen, his arm within Austin's. He was introducing him to them in his new capacity of

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partner. The strike was quite at an end, and the men—so many as could be made room for—had returned; but Mr. Hunter would not consent to discharge the hands that had come forward to take work during the emergency.

“What has the strike brought you?” inquired Mr. Hunter, seizing upon the occasion to offer a word of advice. “Any good?”

Strictly speaking, the men could not reply that it had. In the silence that ensued after the question, one man’s voice was at length raised. “We look back upon it as a subject of congratulation, sir.”

“Congratulation!” exclaimed Mr. Hunter. “Upon what point?”

“That we have had the pluck to hold out so long in the teeth of difficulties,” replied the voice.

“Pluck is a good quality when rightly applied,” observed Mr. Hunter. “But what good has the ‘pluck,’ or the strike, brought to you in this case?—for that was the question we were upon.”

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“It was a lock-out, sir; not a strike.”

“In the first instance it was a strike,” said Mr. Hunter. “Pollocks’ men struck and you had it in contemplation to follow their example. Oh, yes! you had, my men; you know as well as I do, that the measure was under discussion. Upon that state of affairs becoming known, the masters determined upon a general lock-out. They did it in self-defence; and if you will put yourselves in thought into their places, judging fairly, you will not wonder that it was considered the only course open to them. The lock-out lasted but a short period, and then the yards were again opened—open to all who would resume work upon the old terms, and sign a declaration not to be under the dominion of the Trades’ Unions. How very few availed themselves of this, you do not need to be reminded.”

“We acted for what we thought the best, sir,” said another.

“I know you did,” replied Mr. Hunter.

“You are—speaking of you collectively—steady, hard-working, well-meaning men,

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who wish to do the best for yourselves, your wives, and families. But, looking back now; do you consider that it was for the best? You have returned to work upon precisely the same terms that you were offered then, having held out to the very verge of starvation. Here we are, in the depth of winter, and what sort of homes do you possess to fortify yourselves against its severities?"

What sort indeed! Mr. Hunter's delicacy shrank from depicting them.

"I am not speaking to you now as your master," he continued, conscious that men do not like, and in some cases will not brook, this style of converse from their employers. "Consider me for the moment as your friend only; let us talk together as man and man—as equals on the great stage of life. I wish I could bring you to see the evil of these convulsions; I do not wish it from motives of self-interest, but for your sole good. You may be thinking, ' Ah, the master is afraid of another contest; this one has done him so much damage, and that's why he is going on at us against them.' You are mistaken;

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that is not why I speak. My men, were any further contests to take place between us, in which you held yourselves aloof from work, as you have done in this, we should at once place ourselves beyond dependence upon you, by bringing over foreign workmen. In the consultations which have been held between myself and Mr. Clay, relative to the terms of our partnership, this point has been fully discussed, and our determination taken. Should we have a repetition of the past—and some think that it is not unlikely—Hunter and Clay would then import their own workmen."

"And other firms as well?" interrupted a voice.

"We know nothing of what other firms might do: to attend to our own interests is enough for us. I hope we shall never have to do this; but it is only fair to inform you that such would be our course of action. If you, our native workmen, brothers of the soil, abandon your work from any crotchets—"

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“Crotchets, sir!”

“Ay, crotchets—according to my opinion,”

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repeated Mr. Hunter. “Could you show me a real grievance, it might be a different matter. But let us leave motives alone, and go to effects. When I say that I wish you could see the evil of these convulsions, I speak solely with reference to your good, to the well-being of your families. It cannot have escaped your notice that my health has become greatly shattered—that, in all probability, my life will not be much prolonged. My friends” —his voice sunk to a deep, solemn tone— “believing, as I do, that I shall soon stand before my Maker, to give an account of my doings here, could I, from any paltry motive of self-interest, deceive you? Could I say one thing and mean another? No; when I seek to warn you against future troubles, I do it for your own sakes. If you can keep clear of them, do so. Whatever may be the urging motive of a strike, whether good or bad, fancied or real, it can only bring ill in the working. I would say, were I not a master, ‘Put up with a grievance, rather than enter upon a strike;’ but, being a master, you might

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misconstrue the advice. My attention has been very much drawn of late to past strikes, and I cannot read of one that was not productive of evil. I am not going into the merits of the measures—to say this past strike was right, or that was wrong; I speak only of the terrible amount of suffering they wrought. A man said to me the other day—he was from the factory districts—’ I have a horror of strikes, they have worked so much evil in our trade.’ You can get books which tell of them, and read for yourselves. How many orphans, and widows, and men in prisons are there, who have cause to rue this strike that has only now just passed? You know of a few; you do not know of all. It has broken up homes that, before it came, were homes of plenty and content, leaving in them despair and death. Let us try to go on better for the future. I, for my part, will always be ready to receive and consider any reasonable proposal from my men; my

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partner will do the same. If there is no attempt at intimidation, and no interference on the part of others, there ought to

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be little difficulty in discussing and settling matters, with the help of 'the golden rule.' Only—it is my last and earnest word of caution to you—Abide by your own good sense, and do not yield it to those agitators who would lead you away.”

Every syllable spoken by Mr. Hunter, as to the social state of the people, Daffodil's Delight, and all other parts of London where the strike had prevailed, could echo. Whether the men had invoked the contest needlessly, or whether they were justified, according to the laws of right and reason, it matters not here to discuss; the effects were the same, and they stood out broad, and bare, and hideous. Men had died of want; had been cast into prison, where they still lay; had committed social crimes, in their great need, against their fellow-men. Women had been reduced to the lowest extremes of misery and suffering, had been transformed into viragos, where they once had been pleasant and peaceful; children had died off by scores. Homes were dismantled; Mr. Cox had cart-loads of things that stood no chance

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of being recalled, and that could not be re- placed in a dozen years. Families, united before, were scattered now; young men were driven upon idleness and evil courses; young women upon worse, for they were irredeemable. Would wisdom for the future be learnt by all this? It was uncertain.

When Austin Clay returned home that evening, he gave Mrs. Quale notice to quit. She received it in a spirit of resignation, intimating that she had been expecting it—that lodgings, such as hers, were not fit for Mr. Clay, now that he was Mr. Hunter's partner.

Austin laughed. “I suppose you think I ought to set up a house of my own.”

“I dare say you'll be doing that one of these days, sir,” she responded.

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"I dare say I shall," said Austin. "I wonder whether what Mr. Hunter said to-day will do any of 'em any service?" interposed Peter Quale. "What do you think, sir?"

"I think it ought," replied Austin. "Whether it will, is another question."

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"It mostly lies in this—in the men's being let alone," nodded Peter. "Leave 'em to theirselves, and they'll go on steady enough; but if them Trade Union folks, Sam Shuck and his lot, get over them again, there'll be more outbreaks."

"Sam Shuck is safe for some months to come."

"But there's others of his persuasion that are not, sir. And Sam, he'll be out some time."

"Quale, I give the hands credit for better sense than to suffer themselves to fall under his yoke again, now that he has shown himself in his true colours."

"I don't give 'em credit for any sense at all, when they get unsettled notions into their heads," phlegmatically returned Peter Quale. "I'd like to know if it's the Union that's helping Shuck's wife and children."

"Do they help her?"

"There must be some that help her, sir. The woman lives and feeds her family. But there was a Trades' Union secretary here this morning, inquiring about all this disturbance there has been, and saying that the

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men were wrong to be led to violence by such a fellow as Sam Shuck: over eager to say it, he seemed to me. I gave him my opinion back again," concluded Peter, pushing the pipe, which he had laid aside at his young master's entrance, further under the grate. "That Sam. Shuck, and such as he, that live by agitation, were uncommon 'cute for their own interests, and those that listen to them were fools. That took him off, sir."

"To think of the fools this Daffodil's Delight has turned out this last six months!" Mrs. Quale emphatically added. "To have lived upon their clothes and furniture, their saucepans and kettles, their bedding and their children's shoes; when

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they might, most of 'em, have earned thirty-three shillings a week at their ordinary work! When folks can be so blind as that, it is of no use talking to them black looks white, and white black."

Mr. Clay smiled at the remark, though it had some rough reason in it, and went out. Taking his way to Mr. Hunter's.

"Austin! You must live with me."

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The words came from Mr. Hunter. Seated in his easy chair, apparently asleep, he had overheard what Austin was saying in an undertone to Florence—that he had just been giving Mrs. Quale notice, and should begin house-hunting on the morrow.

They turned to him at the remark. He had half risen from his chair in his eager earnestness.

"Do you think I could spare Florence? Where my home is, yours and hers must be. Is not this house large enough for us? Why should you seek another?"

"Quite large enough, sir. But—but I had not thought of it. It shall be as you and Florence wish."

They both looked at her; she was standing underneath the light of the chandelier, the rich damask colour mantling in her cheeks.

"I could not give you to him, Florence, if it involved your leaving me."

The tears glistened on her eyelashes. In the impulse of the moment she stretched out a hand to each. "There is room here for us all, papa," she softly whispered.

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Mr. Hunter took both their hands in one of his; he raised the other in the act of benediction; the tears, which only glistened in the eyes of Florence, were falling fast from his own.

"Yes, it shall be the home of all; and—Florence!—the sooner he comes to it, the better. Bless, oh, bless my children!" he murmured. "And grant that this may prove a happier, a more peaceful home for them, than it has for me."



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“Amen!” answered Austin, in his inmost heart.

THE END.

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