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STVDII  
SALAMANTINI

RALPH NORBRECK'S  
TRUST.

BY  
WILLIAM WESTALL.

AUTHOR OF "RED RYVINGTON," "THE OLD FACTORY," "LARRY LOHENGRIN,"

ETC. ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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[NP]

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,  
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

[NP]

TO

MY BROTHERS.

[NP]

VNiVERSITAS  
STVDII

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## RALPH NORBRECK'S TRUST

### Prologue

### CHAPTER I

#### THE SQUIRE AND HIS SON.

On a summer afternoon, some forty or fifty years ago, Simon Nutter, manufacturer, landowner and farmer—generally called by his tenants and workpeople "The Squire"—was sitting in his counting-house at Wellsprings, engaged in the interesting occupation of turning old envelopes inside out. His bent shoulders, white hair, furrowed cheeks, and skinny fingers, showed that he had reached, if he had not passed, the limit assigned by the Psalmist to the age of man; but his eyes were still bright, his cheeks ruddy, and

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his hale appearance warranted his frequent boast that he was good for ten years' more work.

In the way of furniture the counting-house contained only a sloping desk, a table, on which stood a wrap reel, three or four cane-bottomed chairs, an old iron safe, and a wooden cupboard. The Squire was dressed in a shabby suit of gray tweed, flecked with cotton fluff, and his hobnailed shoes showed that he had lately made a visit to his stables and shippens.

"There," he muttered, as he dropped the transformed envelopes into a drawer, "that's twopence-halfpenny saved; it'll be summat toward what that lad has wasted."

Then Mr. Nutter looked at his watch.

"Half-past six," he continued; "he'll be here soon. I'll make ready for him."

Whereupon he took from the safe a banker's passbook, the cashbook and some loose papers, and laid them on the desk. A few minutes afterwards a brisk step was heard in the passage outside, the door opened, and a smart-looking young fellow

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stepped briskly into the counting-house. He might be four or five-and-twenty years old; was fashionably, almost loudly, dressed; and wore his hat slightly on one side. For the rest, he had rather large features, a long face, square jaws, and dark eyes, and he was both tall and broad-shouldered.

"So you have got back?" said the old man without looking round.

"Yes, father. I only left Manchester at four o'clock, and I've driven from Carrington under the half-hour. Not bad that."

"I call it very bad. To drive at that speed is a waste both of hoss-flesh and wheels. But you never think of that. Owt fresh?"

"Nothing particular — dull market—nothing sold."

"Have you drawn any brass?"

Yes. Jorrockses gave me three hundred and fifty: Here it is."

"No more?" asked the old man, as he carefully counted the notes.

"No. What makes you ask such a question?"

"Because I thought you might happen ha' been

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pocketing some, as you have done before," exclaimed the old man, turning suddenly round and looking straight in his son's eyes.

The eyes fell, and Rupert Nutter reddened to the very roots of his hair.

"It's not true, father," he stammered. "I have not—"

"Stop. It is no use lying when you can make nowt by it. You have been robbing me, Rupert, and I can prove it. I've thought for some time back as you were spending too much—more than you come by honestly—and a twothry week sin' I happened to be looking over Jorrockses' account—it is not often as I do, my eyes are not as good as they used to be—and I see a ten pound debited on th' 13th o' June as looked as if it had been altered, and—what is more—it did not add up right with ten, but it did with a hundred. So th' last time I went to Manchester I just asked Jorrocks' cashier—as if nowt wor—to tell me what cash we had drawn in June. He showed me his ledger, and there, sure enough, on the 13th o' June we were debited with a hundred pounds. Then I felt

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cocksure as there would be summat else; and yesterday, when I went to Carrington, I called at the bank and got a new passbook by saying we had lost the owd 'un. It's just as I feared. You have been paying in less brass than you've put down in the cashbook, pocketing the difference, and tampering with the passbook to blind your old father. I fun' out a thousand pounds, and ten to one there's more. I thought once of getting an accountant from Manchester to look through the books and go into it. But they're expensive chaps, them accountants, and there's not much chance of getting owt back, I'm thinking. It would only be throwing good brass after bad," said the old man bitterly. "But you can tell me if you will. How much have you robbed me on altogether, Rupert?"

"I don't know exactly how much I've had," answered the young man, whose manner, now that he had recovered from his confusion, was sulky rather than penitent.

"But I never meant to rob you, father. I will pay it all back, if you'll only give me time."

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"Pay it back!" said the Squire, with a mocking laugh; "why, you'll never make a thousand pounds yourself as long as you live—you haven't it in you. It's hard work, making brass is, and you don't like hard work. It's a sight o' money, a thousand pounds is—fifty pounds a year for ever at five per cent. Where has it gone? What have you done with it all? —But what is the use of asking?" continued Mr. Nutter, after a short pause. "You would not tell the truth if you were to speak; and I know it's gone i' betting, billiards, and bad companions. But you've got to the far end now, my lad. We must part. Rob somebody else next time; you shall rob me no more."

"Don't be hard, father," pleaded Rupert, whom the prospect of parting with his father, or possibly, of being no longer able to continue his depredations, seemed greatly to alarm. "Don't be hard with me now, and I'll try to do better—indeed I will. If you only knew how much I've been tempted. Give me one more chance, if only for my mother's sake. You'll never regret it. I—"

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"I've given you chances enough already," interrupted the old man angrily. "Didn't I pay that tailor's bill as you run up at Carrington— £69. 18s. 9d., the odd coppers and all, as that thief he's now else—refused to take off? And £50 to get you out of that scraps at Lytham, and nearly £100 to pay them bets as you lost at Heaton Park races? And didn't you talk me over every time, and promise how good you'd be if I'd give you one more chance? No, no, I've put my foot down this time, Rupert. Go your ways, and be thankful I don't prosecute you —many a one would ha' done."

"Do you really mean it, father?" asked the young man, defiantly.

"I mean that I'll have nowt more to do with you, and the sooner you get you gone the better I shall be pleased."

"All right, I'll go now," said Rupert, and, suiting the action to the word, he rose from his chair and strode towards the door.

"Stop a minute," cried the Squire.

Rupert stopped and turned round.

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"Have you any brass?"

Rupert put his hand in his pocket and produced three or four sovereigns and a few shillings.

"I thought so," said the father; "a fool and his money are soon parted. Here, take this," and he handed his son a bank-note which Rupert put unopened into his purse.

"Good-bye, father," said the young fellow.

"Good-bye, Rupert," returned the old man.

And so Simon Nutter and his son parted, never, as it turned out, to meet again.

As the latter was walking up Wellsprings Clough he took out his purse and looked at the bank-note his father had just given him.

"A hundred pounds," he muttered; "that is not enough to go to America with. I must have more than this from somewhere."

Meanwhile Mr. Nutter was poring over his cash-book and ledger, an occupation from which he did not seem to derive much satisfaction, for after spending nearly a hour at it he closed the books with a bang and an imprecation, and putting on



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his hat and taking his stick, left the office and made in a direction opposite to that followed by his son. After walking about half-a-mile he came to an old-fashioned roadside inn, known as the "Old Mother Redcap," which he entered. A little black-browed, round-faced woman was standing in the doorway.

"I'm very glad to see you, Squire," she said, dropping a curtsy. "Won't you step in and take a glass of something? I hope as the young missesis and Mr. Rupert is well in 'ealth. No use asking how you are; you look younger and heartier than iver." Mrs. Jessop, the landlady of "Old Mother Redcap," had been a domestic servant in a southern county, and flattered herself that in language and manners she was vastly superior to the rustics of the neighbourhood.

"The lasses is well enough, and Rupert is better than he deserves to be," answered Mr. Nutter curtly. "I want a bit of supper, Mrs. Jessop. Is Jessop in?"

"Certainly, Mr. Nutter," said the landlady, abating nothing of her affability, though inwardly

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anathematising the Squire's gruffness. "Will 'am an' eggs do?"

"Ay."

"I'll go and get 'em ready and call Jessop. He is in the stable rubbing a norse down. Step into the parlour, willn't you?"

Mr. Nutter stepped into the parlour accordingly, and was joined there in a few minutes by Jessop, who came in almost at the same time as the ham and eggs. Jessop

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was tall and saturnine, lean and lantern-jawed, almost as old as the Squire himself, and his only confidant. He had been Mr. Nutter's farm bailiff and general factotum more than forty years, and had only retired from that position to the dignified ease of "Old Mother Redcap" a few months previously.

"I'm getting my supper here," observed the Squire, as he cut himself a piece of ham, "because I don't want to get home before th' lasses has gone to bed. They'll be a bit upset about our Rupert, I daresay. I expect he's told 'em, and women make so much bother about owt o' th' sort. They'll have quietened down a bit by morning, ten to one;

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but whether they like it or not they'll have to bide it."

"What's to do about Rupert?"

"I've sent him away."

"For good?"

"Ay, for good. He's robbed me of more than a thousand pounds, Jessop. I gave him a hundred pounds, and tow'd him to shift for hissel—as I'd ha' nowt more to do wi' him."

"But you'll not stand to that, Squire. You'll let him come back?"

"Some time, happen; but he'll have to shapp different first."

"But you'll want somebody to help you. You cannot keep them books and manage both factory and land all by yourself."

"Not very well, I think. I'm good for ten years yet, but I'm getting too owd to root among books. Ay, I mun have somebody to help me, Jessop—and soon."

"Who will you get, thinkin' you?"

"Well, I mean to get Ralph Norbreck, if he does not ax too much. He is in Gate's office

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at Liverpool, a right active young fellow, and honest, they tell me."

"Ay, I've yerd on him. His father had a bit o' land, and started a coalpit wide of Leeburn, and broke twothry years sin'."

"Ay, I think I've heard summat o' th' sort. I'll write him a letter to-morrow, and see him next week, when I go to Liverpool."

After Mr. Nutter had smoked three or four pipes, and drunk two or three glasses of rum, he signified his intention of going home.

"There is just one thing I'd like to mention to you afore you set off, Squire," said Jessop, slowly and deliberately. "Yore Rupert owes me a bit o' brass—a trifle o' five pounds, as I lent him about a month sin'—you'll see me paid willn't you?"

"I'll see you paid wi' pleasure," replied the old man grimly, "if you can get anybody to pay you—but if you mean me I'se pay nowt, not a farthing."

"That's hard law, Squire, and him your own son."

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"Son or no son, he has behaved better to you than he has to me. You shouldn't ha' let him have it. He never gave me th' chance. He took my brass without so much as axing. Not a penny, Jessop. Put five per cent, more watter in your rum and make up your loss that way."

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"The Squire is aging, I think," observed Mrs. Jessop, when her husband returned from seeing their guest to the door. "He does not look as canty as he did by a good deal, and leans heavier on his stick as if he felt hisself getting older."

"Ay, owder and waur," growled the landlord; "he's keener than ever he wor, I do believe, d—n him. I wish Mr. Rupert had taken ten thousand 'stead o' one, I do that."

Mr. Nutter was not given to making superfluous journeys—they took time and cost money—but having grave doubts as to the accuracy of his son's statement, that he had drawn from Jorrocks no more than three hundred and fifty pounds, he went specially to Manchester, two days after

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his son's departure, to ascertain the truth by personal inquiry.

It was quite true. Rupert had received the sum in question and no more; but he had gone a second time on the day following, and, on some plausible pretext or other, obtained a further amount of a thousand pounds, for Jorrocks was the Manchester agent, and had always a considerable balance to Mr. Nutter's credit.

On the day after he received from his son a letter, dated Liverpool, which ran thus:—

"DEAR FATHER,

"A hundred pounds is very little to face the world and go abroad with, so I went round by Manchester and got a thousand pounds from Jorrocks. Added to what I borrowed from you before this will make, as nearly as I can tell, two thousand five hundred pounds, which you can put to my debit in the books, and deduct with interest at five per cent, from the amount I shall come into when you die.

"Your dutiful son,

"RUPERT."

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When Mr. Nutter had read this letter he tore it into a hundred pieces, and then tore about the counting-house in a tempest of rage, to the great alarm of a small factory girl who had come for a new hand-brush—the giving out of brushes being a thing which (in order to check waste) he reserved to himself. He made it a rule never to give out a brush save on the production of an old one, worn to the wood.

Later in the day he drove over to Carrington and had an interview with Mr. Sheepskin (firm of Sheepskin and Sutton). A week thereafter the Squire executed a will whereby the whole of his property was bequeathed in equal proportions to his four daughters, Rupert being cut off without even the traditional shilling.

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## CHAPTER II.


### A PRIMITIVE FOLK.

Old Jessop's information about the Norbrecks was strictly accurate. Ralph's father, who held a large farm at a peppercorn rent and might have held it as long as he lived, was so well-to-do that he wanted to do better, to which end he joined a neighbour at sinking for coals. He lost all he had without finding what he sought, was made bankrupt and sold up—dish and spoon—and died of anxiety, worry, and shame.

His two sons, left penniless and almost friendless, had to go into the world and earn their living as they best could. They had fortunately received a fair education at a neighbouring grammar school; and Roger, the elder by two or three years, obtained

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a bookkeeper's situation in Manchester, while Ralph, in default of anything better, accepted a very humble post in the office of a Liverpool cotton broker. But he was determined to get on, and he possessed a keen sense of the value of money, acquired in the bitter school of adversity. Diligence brought him promotion and increased pay, and the smartness and energy which won him the favour of his employer attracted, as we know, the attention of Mr. Nutter, who was one of his employer's customers.

  
Ralph hesitated long before he accepted the Squire's invitation to go to Wellsprings and become the manager of his business, and the steward of his property. He felt that he had his foot on the first rung of the ladder where he was, and that success was within his grasp. Moreover, the salary offered by Mr. Nutter was far from magnificent, while his promises about advancement were provokingly vague. But Ralph had been bred to husbandry, he hated the life of towns, his love of the country prevailed over his doubts as to the expediency of leaving Liverpool,

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and he ended by closing with the old landlord- manufacturer's proposals.

One of the conditions of his engagement was that he should live at Crow Nest, in order, as Mr. Nutter said, that he might be as well placed as possible for looking after both farm and factory.

An incidental advantage of this arrangement— in the opinion of its author—was that it cheapened Ralph's services. His keep, as Mr. Nutter said to himself, though taken into consideration in fixing his salary, would never be felt—to say nothing of having somebody in the house to talk to, "besides th' lasses."

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Crow Nest was the home of the Nutters. It stood on a hill overlooking a deep dell, known in the neighbourhood as Wellsprings Clough. Its style of architecture was a queer combination of the ancient and the modern. Crow Nest had served at one time as a manor house, at another as a farmhouse. It had an old end and a new end. The old end was all that remained of the manor house. Its walls were ivy-mantled and timbered, its roof of gray slate was moss-grown. The new end, built

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by Simon Nutter, was a villa-like edifice with a pretentious portico; but being partly overgrown with ivy the general effect was less incongruous than might be supposed, while its elevated position and its avenue of old lime-trees, peopled by a numerous colony of rooks, imparted to the place the quaint and picturesque aspect that had doubtless suggested the name which it bore. Hidden from sight in the clough, but not far off, were the factory and the factory cottages.

Wellsprings was neither a modern mill nor a big concern. Mr. Nutter had made his money rather by dint of small economies than large gains. He could never shake off the feeling that broad acres were a safer investment than looms and spindles, a belief on which he acted by putting all his spare money into land and live stock.

But he knew how to make farm and factory work together for good. Whenever a man was "shopped" he received a key and became the tenant of a cottage. Whether he lived in it or not was his own affair—so long as he paid his rent. The hands were expected to buy their milk

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and butter at Crow Nest, their flour and groceries at the factory "badge;" a cow or a calf

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was killed every week to provide them with butcher meat, and those who drank—and there were very few who did not drink—gave great offence if they took their liquor elsewhere than at "Old Mother Redcap," which well-accustomed public-house was the property of Mr. Nutter.

In these circumstances, as may be supposed, the workpeople saw very little hard cash. It was a standing joke in the neighbourhood that they were always paid with the same money. When they received their wages they were expected, "before leaving the ground," to settle their scores with the "badge" and the butcher's shop (representatives of which departments were always in attendance on these occasions). As fast as the hands paid in the money it was taken back to the counting-house, and utilised for the payment of those that came after. In this way Mr. Nutter had rarely to provide more than £40 or £50 for a fortnight's pay, thereby greatly economising his own capital and the current coin of the realm.

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It was a system which conduced more to the profit of the employer than the benefit of the employed—a system, moreover, of doubtful legality. But as the Wellsprings folk had never known any other, and it did not occur to any of them to set the law in motion, the practice was persisted in as long as Mr. Nutter lived and for many years after his death.

To tell the truth, the people of Wellsprings were hardly abreast of the age in which they lived. They were lamentably ignorant of their rights and knew nothing of their wrongs. The nearest mill and the nearest station were three or four miles away, the nearest market town, six; and as the men spent most of their spare time at "Old Mother Redcap," and the women most of theirs in "siding up," their opportunities of intercourse with the outer world were few and far between. Their ignorance made the hair of the head factory inspector from London (a famous philanthropist and zealous promoter of popular education) positively stand on end. When he asked Bill o' Fat Bob's who was



the Prime Minister, Bill said "he

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did not reytly know, but th' primest as he'd ever yerd wer Winking Jacob, th' Methody parson, fro th' top o' Enfield."

Another youth was ignorant of the blessed fact that he lived under a constitutional government, did not know Britain was an island, and thought that Europe was "somewheer toord Lunnon."

But the worst case of all was that of Jenny o' Jeff's Mary Ann (aged thirteen). When the inspector asked her who Queen Victoria was, adding affably (for the poor child seemed terribly scared) "the gracious lady, you know, whom we are all bound to love, honour, and obey," the answer he got was "Th' Owd Missis."

This horrified the great man exceedingly. Until it was explained to him that the girl meant Mrs. Nutter (a lady of strong will and high temper), he thought she had intended to make game of him and insult Her Gracious Majesty at the same time.

On his return to London the inspector made Bill o' Fat's Bob and Jenny o' Jeff's Mary Ann

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the subject of a special report to the Home Secretary. The report found its way into a Blue Book, and being mentioned in Parliament, and quoted in several speeches and leading articles, Wellsprings became celebrated for a whole week—a fact, however, of which, as of many other facts, it remains profoundly ignorant.

Many old usages and superstitions survived at Wellsprings long after they had

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been banished from other places in the neighbourhood. If a man's wife left him for a few days, somebody was sure to put a besom in the chimney. If a married couple led a quarrelsome life a wisp of straw would be laid across the doorstep—either as a charm to conjure away their evil tempers or as a hint that their neighbours' eyes were upon them. When a lad and a lass were so lost to all sense of decency as to let themselves be caught courting on a Friday night, they were treated to a serenade of clanging frying-pans, tin kettles, and hideous howlings. There was a fause (cunning) woman at Further Fold, who could cure warts by simply looking at them, and was supposed to have close

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relation with the nether world. The outer doors of most of the houses were adorned with old horseshoes, which were supposed to protect the inmates of the dwelling from the wiles of evil-disposed witches. It was an article of faith that disembodied spirits "revisited the glimpses of the moon," and firmly believed that our ghostly foe prowled about in human shape, seeking to entrap unwary mortals. He was generally called "Th' Owd Lad," and said to be recognisable by his game leg and the careful way in which he concealed his long tail under the flaps of his coat. For this reason clergymen, and all who wore voluminous black garments, were looked upon with a good deal of suspicion, and their movements closely scrutinised. There were at least a score of persons ready to be "book sworn " that they had repeatedly seen "Th' Owd Lad" sitting on a rail at the top end of the clough, blowing a cloud from an iron pipe, and occasionally scratching his head with claw-like fingers. But swearing was unnecessary. They were believed on their bare word. In Squire Nutter's time the age of doubt had not yet dawned at Wellsprings.

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**CHAPTER III**  
**THE SQUIRE'S LASSES**

Ralph Norbreck was well received at Crow Nest, for the Nutters, though rich and proud of their wealth, were too thrifty to be ostentatious, and Norbreck belonged to the same class as themselves. He had seen more of the world, too, was pleasant mannered, and his presence in the house helped to fill up the void caused by the absence of the disinherited son.

The Squire (though he would rather have perished than confess it) was a good deal shaken by Rupert's treachery. Ralph's help soon became indispensable to him, and before the new manager had been at Crow Nest six months he was the director, with plenary powers, of farm, factory, and estate.

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The lasses, whose society—as Mr. Nutter hinted to Ralph—he found somewhat monotonous, were his three daughters, Martha, Mary, and Sarah. None of them had enjoyed any great advantages in the way of education, the Squire being of opinion that for the female sex any acquisitions beyond reading, writing, and a bit of ciphering were expensive superfluities, if not decided evils, as making them worse to manage.

Nevertheless Mr. Nutter was persuaded—partly by her own entreaty, partly by the influence of Rupert—to make an exception in favour of his youngest and favourite daughter, Alice. She was sent to a boarding-school at Chester—as it happened, a tolerably good school. Her father, however, stipulated, with a view to economy in travelling expenses, that she should remain there three years without coming home, and when Ralph took up his abode at Crow Nest Alice had not returned from Chester.

But with good looks and great expectations Martha, Mary, and Sarah were not likely to remain long without suitors, and in the second year of

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Ralph's management Martha was married to a calico printer of the name of Stripes, and Mary became the wife of Mr. Carboy, a manufacturing chemist. Both were considered to be good matches. Stripes kept a carriage, and went a hunting, and Carboy had lately brought out a new tin-salt said to be worth a fortune in itself.

About this time Alice came home from school, and, as was almost a matter of course, Ralph fell in love with her. She was eighteen, and as different from her sisters, people said, as if she was not the least bit akin to them.

It was a moot point in the neighbourhood whom she "favoured." Her sisters were tall, big-boned beauties, with rich complexions and a wealth of black hair. Alice was little and plump, her hair of a tint approaching red (nowadays it would be called golden), and her face brown and freckled. But it was exquisitely shaped; her head and neck were perfection, and she had a smile both winsome and merry. Her sisters, on the other hand, although they could laugh loudly enough, smiled without grace—their idea of smiling

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being to grin and show their white, strong teeth. The palm of beauty was generally awarded to Sarah, and as touching bodily presence and brilliancy of complexion, she was certainly a very fine woman. In spite of her superior education, Alice was looked upon by her elder sisters rather as the Cinderella of the family; as likely to go off the last, if not to remain an old maid. But the Squire thought more of her than all his other daughters put together. He one day confidentially informed his manager that she was the best of the bunch; an opinion in which the manager doubtless fully concurred.

The hands and tenants, who were much given to discussing the family at Crow Nest, thought that Norbreck would end by marrying Sarah; and Ralph would have been more than blind if he had not seen that Sarah was, to say the least, partial to him. Over-

modesty was not one of her foibles, and she did everything short of making him a formal tender of her hand and heart. He feared that, sometime or other, she might do even that. But she possessed a terribly imperious temper; he

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suspected that she had contracted a habit of secret drinking, and, greatly as he desired to get on, not for all her father's fortune would he have ventured to make Sarah Nutter his wife.

Although Ralph's position was an awkward one, and he foresaw that his love for Alice might involve him in serious difficulties, Mr. Nutter, he knew, was well disposed towards him, and he had no reason to suppose that the old man would withhold his consent to their marriage. But Ralph might count with absolute certainty on the bitter opposition of Sarah and the hostility of Carboy and Stripes, and he greatly feared that the Squire, who had grown visibly feebler during the last twelvemonth, would not have the spirit to withstand so powerful a combination of unfriendly interests. Moreover his employer had hinted an intention to give him, at no distant date, an interest in the business, probably in the shape of a percentage on the profits; and, eager as Ralph was to win Alice, he did not want, in winning her, to lose his place and ruin his prospects.

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It was a contest between prudence and love, and ended, as such contests are wont to do, in the triumph of the tender passion. If he had seen Alice only occasionally it might have been otherwise; but he was exposed every day to the fascination of her presence, and he succumbed. Yet though they saw each other so often, they were never left alone together, and months elapsed before Ralph had a chance of declaring his love. But the passion that laughs at locksmiths is too crafty to be hindered by lack of

opportunity, and long before they had exchanged a word of love Ralph and Alice knew by a hundred subtle signs, which only they could interpret, that they were not indifferent to each other.

At length the opportunity came.

Sarah, who was the great stumbling-block—never being out of the way when Ralph was in the house—went very reluctantly, and on the strong insistance of her father, on a visit to her sister Mary, who had just presented her husband with a young Carboy.

The habits of the Nutter family were of

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primitive simplicity, and as regular as clockwork. Breakfast at seven, dinner at noon, tea at four, supper at eight, and to bed at ten. After supper and his second glass of rum, the Squire often fell fast asleep, when he was of no more account than if he had been upstairs in bed.

It was thus on the first evening after Sarah's departure, and for the first time in their lives, Ralph and Alice were left to themselves.

"At last," said Ralph, stealing behind her and taking her hand, the moment the crash of her father's pipe on the hearth showed that his snooze had begun. "At last I may speak my mind. My darling, you have seen—you know—"

"Yes, Ralph, I have seen, I know," she murmured, raising her soft brown eyes to his, and smiling her sweetest smile.

That was enough. Ralph drew his chair nearer, and holding her hand in his put his disengaged arm round her waist and gave her a loving kiss.

"Oh, Ralph," she exclaimed, making a futile attempt to free herself from his

embrace. "I am so glad; but if one of the maids should come in!"

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The possibility was undeniable; and the Crow Nest servants, not being accustomed to knock before entering, one that, in view of the proximity of the chairs, might lead to inferences which it was desirable to avoid.

"Let us get into the garden, then," said Ralph; "nobody can surprise us there."

"But if my father should waken?" "He will think we are gone to bed, and go himself." So into the garden they went and paced a long time to and fro in the Yew Tree Walk, where they felt themselves as free from observation as if they had been in the depth of some vast wilderness. It was a delicious time—a summer night lit up with millions of stars—a sweet tranquillity, unmarred by a single discordant sound—a gentle breeze that came to them laden with the perfume of mignonette and roses, rustling among the branches.

Like all sweet girls, Alice was sentimental and susceptible; and being keenly alive to the witchery of the hour and the occasion, she felt supremely happy, while Ralph was lifted into the region

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of romance, and for once in his life forgot there was such a thing as time. Although there was no fear of eavesdroppers they conversed in whispers. Once, when Ralph inadvertently raised his voice, it jarred on Alice's ear like a discord.

"Shall we tell your father now, or wait a while?" asked Ralph, descending at length to the practical. "That is the question. If he should take it amiss he might give me

the sack, and, if we married in spite of him, cut you off with a shilling."

"You are worth more to me than all the fortunes in the world, Ralph," returned the girl gently. "Still I don't think my father would ever do that. But Sarah would move heaven and earth to prevent our coming together; and the others would be all against us. Stripes and Carboy are very proud; and of course my sisters will think as they think. And they would say that I might—" Here she hesitated.

"Do much better than marry your father's manager," said Ralph, completing the sentence. "I have thought of all that. But shall we gain

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anything by waiting—will they be less proud, or Sarah less angry, six months hence?"

"I don't think they will; and my father thinks very highly of you—and he is not proud a bit, you know. Besides, he means to take you into partnership."

"Yes. He has hinted as much; but when?"

"Next stocktaking."

"Are you sure?"

"He said so only last week. He finds you so useful that he wants to fasten you. I do not think he means to offer you a very big share, though. He is very keen, you know—too keen. That is his fault, I think."

"The amount of the share is quite a secondary consideration, for a share, however small, will make me a partner, and involve an agreement for a term. I should be fixed then, and the brothers-in-law might do their worst. Next stocktaking? That will be in January. We will wait, Alice, and keep our own counsel till after Christmas. But we must be very circumspect, and be content with a stolen interview now and then."



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"Yes, Ralph," said Alice meekly, yet with a shade of disappointment in her voice. "But it will be very seldom indeed that we shall be able to see each other. When Sarah is here she hardly ever loses sight of you. I sometimes think she suspects already."

"Impossible! What ground has she? This is the first time we have been alone together."

"I cannot tell. She is jealous by nature, and suspects without cause sometimes."

"When she gets to know?" suggested Ralph.

"Oh! It will be terrible," said Alice with a shudder. "She will go mad. I'm afraid of her, Ralph."

"You need not be. She may make a big noise, but she will not hurt you; I shall see to that," said Ralph, drawing her more closely to him. "The only thing I fear is that she and others will set your father against us, and bully him into forbidding our marriage."

"Well, we must wait, as you say. We can easily do that. You are not old, and I am very young. But, Ralph dear, we can write to each other, cannot we?"

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"I should be very glad, I am sure; but how? Letters coming to you in my handwriting, or to me in yours, would rouse suspicion at once."

"I have a plan, Ralph. Look here. When I have anything to tell you I will write it on a little piece of paper and slip it into the lining of your hat, which you always hang on the hatstand, you know, and you can put your letters in the same place. I can easily

get them without being seen. It will only be an affair of half a minute."

"Capital!" exclaimed Ralph admiringly. "See what it is to have a clever sweetheart! I shall look in my hat lining every day now. Mind that."

"So shall I," said Alice gaily, "and if I don't find something there every day I shall be disappointed. Mind that."

"And whenever there's a chance, and Sarah is out of the way, we will meet here in the Yew Tree Walk."

"And if we hear anybody coming we will hide in the summer house. Won't that be fun?" said Alice jocularly.

"Particularly if this somebody happens to be

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Sarah, and she discovers our hiding place," answered Ralph, who never lost sight of the practical for long together.

"Don't suggest such a horror, Ralph dear. Sarah must not catch us, whoever else does. But never mind her now. I want to talk to you about my brother."

"What about him, Alice?"

"Well, he has been a naughty boy, I know, and behaved very badly to father; but he was always good to me. Many a half-sovereign has he sent me in the seal of a letter when he could ill afford it. And there are excuses for him. My father was so strict with him when he was younger, and kept him so short of money, that he was almost forced to be dishonest and deceitful. He had a character that required careful training, and he was hardly trained at all. While my poor mother lived she contrived to keep him straight, but since her death he has gone all wrong. We don't know where he is, and my father says he will not leave him a penny. What will become of him Heaven only knows. If ever

you have a chance

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you will befriend him, won't you, Ralph, for my sake? We shall all gain by his loss, you know. My father meant to leave him all the land, but now he is going to leave it all to us."

"I will, Alice," said Ralph, earnestly, "I don't know your brother, and from the hints your father has occasionally dropped I had come to the conclusion that he was an unredeemed villain. But I see now that he is not so bad as he has been painted, and for your sake I will do all I can for him, if ever I have a chance. I promise you that with all my heart, dearest."

"Thank you, Ralph, I knew you would," said Alice, putting her arms round his neck and giving him a kiss. "But don't you think we had better go in? I am sure we have been out a long time."

"Perhaps we had," answered Ralph, "it would never do for us to meet your father just as he was toddling off to bed. I will open the door quietly, and let you in first and follow in a few minutes afterwards."

With that they strolled leisurely towards the house, and Ralph, advancing on tiptoe to the

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door, raised the latch slowly and softly. But the door, old-fashioned and nail-studded, did not yield. He tried a second time and a third, but always with the same result.

"It is locked inside," said Ralph, in a tremulous whisper, turning to Alice.

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"Oh, Ralph, this is dreadful—what *shall* we do?" she returned in an agitated voice, clinging to him for support. "If we knock, the maids will be frightened to death—and what would they think? And my father and Sarah will get to know, and—and—oh, Ralph—" and a half sob drowned her voice.

"I know how it is," observed Ralph, recovering his coolness. "When your father wakened up he thought, as I expected he would, that we were gone to bed, but—what I certainly did not expect—he turned the key before going upstairs; thought he would save Betty the trouble, I suppose. I'll creep round to the back door, and, if it is open, slip in, and open this. Wait there until I come back."

No sooner said than done. But Ralph, as he

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feared, found the back door also locked. It was now quite clear that they had stayed out longer than they were aware, and that all the household had retired to rest.

When Alice knew that they were locked out on both sides of the house her agitation increased, and she could not refrain from shedding a few tears. Ralph, too, was a good deal put out, and cursed his stupidity for not having exercised more foresight.

"There is only one thing for it," he said, after a few minutes' thought; "I will throw a pebble at Betty's window (Betty was the housemaid) and ask her to let us in. She is a good-natured lass and will happen keep our secret."

"Do as you think best, Ralph, dear," said Alice, who was becoming a little more resigned. "As you say, Betty is very good-natured. But I don't think she could keep a secret more than a day to save her life."

"It is a choice of evils. We must get inside the house somehow."

On reconnoitring Betty's window Ralph perceived

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at once that his idea was hardly practicable. Her room was in the old end, and the third storey, and the window so small and high up that it would not have been easy to hit it, even by daylight. How could he tell, moreover, that if he were to hit the window Betty would not be half frightened out of her senses and alarm the house?

As Ralph came reluctantly to this conclusion, the moon, which was late that night, rounded the corner of a cloud and beamed through the branches of an old walnut-tree on the window of his own room.

How Ralph blessed the moon and the walnut- tree, for he saw that it would be quite possible to reach the window-sill from one of the branches.

He ran back to Alice, whom he found in the porch gazing with tearful eyes at the newly-risen moon, and explained his plan.

"But if you fall down and get hurt or killed! Oh, Ralph, it is too dangerous. Rather let us knock boldly at the door. What if they do know? It is not a hanging matter."

"No, Alice, we must not do that if we can possibly help it," answered her lover quietly. He

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foresaw the evil use to which Sarah and others might put the incident, were it to come to their ears. "I can get into my room easily enough. Remain here. In five minutes I will have that door open."

With that Ralph slipped off his shoes and ran to the walnut-tree. He had not

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climbed a tree since he was a lad and went bird-nesting, and he found the job he had undertaken a good deal tougher than he expected. It was fully fifteen minutes before he reached the branch nearest to his bedroom window. The drop to the window-sill was very touch and go, and if the ivy to which he clung on landing had not held firm Alice's worst anticipations might have been realised. But even when his feet were solidly placed on the stone sill of the window his troubles were not over. Ralph lived in an age which looked upon the night air as an enemy, and Betty had carefully fastened the window inside. But he had not gone so far to be stopped by a trifle. Retreat moreover was impossible. He must either stay where he was or go on to the end. So he pushed his elbow quietly

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against one of the panes, and as luck would have it, the broken glass fell on the floor without much noise. After that the sash was easily raised, and Ralph stole stealthily downstairs to put his sweetheart out of her misery.

Horrors! When he opened the door no Alice was there. The bird had flown.

For a moment Ralph was quite staggered. Then he bethought him that the five minutes in which he had promised to be back had run into thirty, and without stopping to put on his shoes he ran a second time to the walnut-tree. Alice, who was looking for her lover's dead or maimed body, as well as blinding tears would let her, when she saw him coming towards her, uttered a suppressed scream and, throwing her arms round his neck, gave him a *feu de joie* of kisses.

"Thank God, Ralph," she exclaimed, "I thought you were killed."

Then they returned to the door, and after carefully closing and locking it, went upstairs with many precautions, and gained their bedrooms without anybody being the wiser.

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CHAPTER IV  
AN EXPLOSION

The next morning Alice, for the first time in her life, had a bad headache and did not appear until dinner time. Her languid looks drew the attention of her father, who remarked that it would never do for her "to doe badly" (have bad health), and said that if she "began to lie i' bed of a morning he would have to send her to th' sawt watter."

After his supper the old man fell asleep a second time, and the lovers had another stolen interview in the Yew Tree Walk; but Alice was so nervous that Ralph could not persuade her to stay out more than a few minutes. This was the last tryst they were able to have for some time. The following night Mr. Nutter remained awake and

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kept his manager in talk about business until a late hour, and the next day Miss Nutter came back.

The lovers had now to be trebly on their guard, and the better to hoodwink Sarah they showed her more than usual civility. They were perhaps too civil, and if she had been less vain her suspicions might have been roused by the very means taken to allay them. As it was, she quite thought that Ralph was "coming round," and that shyness and too keen a sense of the difference in their positions alone stood in the way of a declaration. She did her best to smooth the way for him. But the fates were not propitious; she never found herself alone with the object of her passion. If the Squire did not make a third Alice did, and whenever they chanced to be out of the way Ralph was sure to be down at the factory, busy about the farm, or absent on a business journey.

In the meantime Ralph and Alice were carrying on a brisk correspondence through the medium of the hat. Rarely a day passed that the lining did not contain at least one clandestine missive. Alice wrote the most and the oftenest; which, seeing

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that she had the most time and always something to say, was perhaps natural. An occasional meeting in the Yew Tree Walk would have been more to the purpose. Yet, thanks to the hat, they could talk to each other every day; and in four months would come the stocktaking—the time fixed by Mr. Nutter for taking Ralph into partnership—when necessity for concealment would be at an end. It was not long to wait, as Alice often said to herself and wrote to her sweetheart.

All the same, the lovers—particularly Alice, who was not altogether satisfied with the brevity of Ralph's communications—were anxious for another interview, and had agreed to meet in the old trysting place on the first opportunity.

One night after supper, and just as Mr. Nutter was disposing himself for his customary snooze, Sarah, pleading a headache, declared her intention of going forthwith to bed. But this was only an excuse. She had made up her mind to write Ralph a letter, offering him her hand and heart, and she naturally thought the privacy of her chamber the most suitable for her purpose.

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As she spoke, the lovers exchanged a look of intelligence. It said, as plainly as words could have said, "The Yew Tree Walk." Though only a flash, Sarah detected it, and, albeit she could not guess its purport, her jealousy was thoroughly awakened. Nevertheless she kept her countenance and retired to her bedroom. But she found it impossible to stay there. What could that look mean? Was it possible, she asked herself, that there could be some secret understanding between Ralph and her sister—that the "little chit," as she often called Alice, whom she almost hated for the partiality shown her by their father, was her successful rival?



The mere thought made her gnash her teeth.

"Anyhow I'll not leave them together," she said to herself. "I'll go down again and say my head is better, or that I have changed my mind— either will do."

Meanwhile Ralph and Alice had slipped quietly out at the front door and were pacing to and fro in the Yew Tree Walk, he with an arm round her waist, she with one of hers over his shoulder. It was a

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still night, and, though far from dark, the lovers, hidden between the yews that bordered the path, felt themselves in perfect security. Now and then Alice, who seemed to be in a merry humour, indulged in a laugh, for which the more prudent Ralph thought it his duty to take her to task.

"Softly, Alice," he said; "a laugh can be heard a long way on a still night like this."

"Who is there to hear, you foolish Ralph? There is nobody in the garden but our two selves."

"I hope not; but you can never be certain about anything in this world. It is best to be on the safe side. My old master in Liverpool used to impress on me two things— one can never lose anything by being cautious and courteous. And it behoves us to be very cautious if we would not be found out."

"How very wise you are, Ralph! Well, I won't laugh any more. But really, when I think of Sarah, who has been making love to you with her eyes all the week, so kindly leaving us alone, it is hard not to laugh, and my heart is light to-night."

"It will not be light long; I'll take care of that, you false, bad, wicked girl!" said a hoarse

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and almost inarticulate voice behind her. "You are a hussy and Ralph is a villain."

Alice uttered a loud scream, Ralph an imprecation, and both, turning round, found themselves face to face with Sarah, who had evidently been watching them from the corner of a path that intersected the Yew Tree Walk.

"So you have been playing the spy," exclaimed Ralph indignantly.

"Spying, do you call it? I call it looking after my sister, whom you are trying to wrong, you false, bad man. My father shall know of this, and he will send you packing, and that right sharply, my fine gentleman."

"Your father shall know, Sarah. I will tell him myself."

Alice, whom her sister's appearance seemed to have struck dumb, took her lover's arm, and they went towards the house—Sarah, with clenched hands and flaming face, striding on before them.

"Father!" she exclaimed, as the three entered the parlour, in a voice that awakened the old man as effectually as a pistol-shot could have done.

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"What's up?" he asked, staring at the group in utter surprise.

"Up!" shouted Sarah. "Why, I have just caught these two courting in the Yew Tree Walk. He had his arm round her waist, and I saw him kiss her — kiss her — and I want to know — I want—"

"It's quite true," interposed Ralph respectfully. "Alice and I have a liking for

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each other, and we are come to ask for your consent to our marriage. It is true I am not rich; but, as you know, I am a worker, and I am determined to get on. As for our walking in the garden, we have never been alone together but once before, and I could not well ask your consent, you know, without speaking to Alice first."

"It is a lie. You have been there many a time; I am sure you have," exclaimed Sarah passionately; "and if I had not found you out to-night there is no telling what would have come of your philanderings."

"It is as Ralph says," answered Alice warmly. "We have walked in the garden but once before;

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and it is not more than a month since—since—I knew he had a respect for me."

"Well, well," said the Squire, not unkindly. "I don't see much harm in a lass walking out with her sweetheart a bit. Not as I don't think you mightn't ha' done better than take up wi' Norbreck, though he is a steady lad; I will say that for him. But we'll see about it; we'll talk it over to-morrow. It'll keep till then, willn't it?"

"What, father!" screamed Sarah. "Do you want to disgrace us all? What is Ralph Norbreck but the son of a bankrupt farmer? He wants nothing with Alice but her money, and to step into your shoes when you are gone."

"You are in a passion, I think, Sarah. Or maybe you want him yourself," said the old man, with a shrewd smile.

"I want Ralph Norbreck!" answered Sarah, in a voice of sublimest scorn. "I would not wipe my feet on him, not if he asked me on his bended knees."

And with that she flung out of the room in a towering rage.

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"You must not mind what our Sarah says. I have heard folk like her talk before," said Mr. Nutter, as he patted Alice on the cheek. "We'll make it all right, you'll see. Father's your friend."

Alice and Ralph knew that this was a virtual sanction of their engagement, and they looked forward to the morrow without misgiving. In truth, the old man was far from being displeased with the turn things were taking. He wanted to have Alice near him. If Sarah would only marry too they might all live together at Crow Nest. And he might possibly, in this way, secure Ralph's services without taking him into partnership/or by giving him a smaller share than he had, contemplated. Nothing liked the old fellow better than to kill two birds with one stone, especially if he could save his pocket or turn an honest penny at the same time.

But Sarah went off early the next morning in the phaeton, and in the afternoon returned with her sisters Carboy and Stripes and their husbands, all fully determined to prevent, by hook or by crook, Alice from "making a fool of herself."

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Stripes, who was a very big man in his own estimation, expressed great indignation at the idea of his sister-in-law marrying her father's manager; and as Carboy had a younger brother whom, in his mind, he had long destined for Alice, he also was very wroth. Their wives, who as in duty bound shared their husband's views, did all in their power to persuade the old man to dismiss Ralph and forbid the marriage.

"It's all nonsense to talk about sending Norbreck away," he said. "I cannot do without him. And as to not letting 'em get wed—why cannot they please themselves? I let you please yourselves."

"But, father, you surely do not compare Norbreck with my Carboy! Norbreck is a poor nobody. Henry is a gentleman of means and position."

"A gentleman of means and position!" said Nutter a little scornfully. "Why, his father used to go about swopping salt and sand for rags and bones and owd iron. Your mother has had mony a deal wi' him; and his uncle Sam is banksman at

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Litherland pit this minute. As for Ralph's father, he was a decent farmer, just like my father; and he wasn't badly off either afore he broke. And if Ralph is not rich, what's that to me? He wouldn't give me any of his brass if he wor rich. Th' carboys is making ten thousand a year, they tell me; but I'm no better for it. Norbreck has enough to furnish a house and keep Alice in comfort, and that is all as I care about. I shall leave you all alike, you know. Ii always would."

But the sisters were far from being content with this answer, and they worried their father until, wearied with their importunity, he promised to give the matter his further consideration, and not to do anything hasty. This, though something, was not enough; and in a council of war, at which Sarah was the principal spokeswoman, it was resolved that Mr. Stripes and Mr. Carboy should go home and leave their wives to continue the contest; for, as Mrs. Carboy observed, it was a poor look-out if the three of them could not prevent Alice from making a fool of herself. One,

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and perhaps the most powerful, reason for their persistence was that they feared, notwithstanding their father's promise to divide his property equally among them, that if Ralph and Alice were allowed to marry—the former being always with him, and the

latter his favourite—they might persuade him to alter his will and leave his youngest daughter better off than the others.

Stripes, before he left, went down to the counting-house and relieved his feelings by calling Ralph "a penniless adventurer" and the son of a bankrupt farmer, whereupon Ralph relieved his by kicking the calico printer downstairs.

It was not a pleasant evening at Crow Nest. Ralph kept out of the way and Alice kept her bedroom, so that Mr. Nutter was left to bear the brunt of the attack alone. Altogether the Squire had rather a hard time of it; and, being old and desirous of a quiet life, he was perhaps constrained to promise more than he meant to perform.

"I'll tell you what," he said to Ralph next morning, when they met at the counting-house,

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"I don't like all this bother. I want an end putting to it somehow. I wish you and Alice had gotten wed and said nowt."

On this hint Ralph acted. After breakfast, at which the sisters, though they talked at him, never once spoke to him, Ralph, observing that he was going to the farm, asked Alice to walk down the avenue with him.

He felt that the hour had come for him to take the bull by the horns.

"Well, I never," exclaimed Martha, Mary, and Sarah in chorus, and their looks were more expressive than their words. Alice, who was very pale and seemed much distressed, promptly acquiesced in the proposal, whereupon they looked more horrified still.

Ralph did not detain her long. In ten minutes she was in the house again, looking as bright and lively as she had before looked dull and depressed. When her sisters asked her what had passed she laughed softly in a way that enraged them as much as it piqued

their curiosity. They had never seen

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her in such spirits before, and could not for the lives of them tell what had come over the girl.

An hour later Ralph was on his way to Carrington market. While there he had an interview with a surrogate, the keeper of a livery stable, and the clerk of the parish church.

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## CHAPTER V.

### AN ELOPEMENT.

There was great excitement the next morning at Crow Nest.

Alice did not appear at breakfast and could nowhere be found. Betty, the housemaid, was also missing, and a credible witness affirmed that, shortly after six o'clock a.m., mistress and maid, Ralph Norbreck and Kester Knocker (a youth who wrote a good hand and helped Ralph in the counting-house) had been seen on the Carrington road.

This both deepened the mystery and fed the fire. The sisters were frantic with curiosity and apprehension. Further inquiry was made, and towards ten o'clock a carter, who had just come

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in from a journey, testified that he had seen a lady and gentleman, "as he thowtwor th' manager and Miss Alice, in a coach with two osses, driving like mad tord th' sawt watter."

Mr. Nutter heard this and chuckled. He guessed what had come to pass, and albeit not a little surprised by the promptness with which his hint had been acted upon, it pleased him to think how his lasses had been taken in.

About eleven o'clock the truant Betty turnedup and was forthwith summoned into the parlour, and, as she subsequently observed, "put through her facings."

"Where have you been?" asked Mrs. Carboy excitedly.

"Where's Miss Alice?" demanded Mrs. Stripes sharply.

"Where's Norbreck?" inquired Miss Sarah furiously.

"I expect they're together," answered Betty quietly.

"Where?"

"In a carriage, driving tord th' sawt watter."

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"Are they married?"

"Ay, are they."

"How do you know?"

"I seed 'em."

"Where?"

"At Carrington Owd Church."

This being evidence there was no gainsaying, Mesdames Stripes and Carboy



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thought it their duty to burst into tears. As for Miss Sarah, after laughing loudly, as if it were all a capital joke, she went off into a tremendous fit of hysterics which, being real, greatly alarmed her sisters, and, drying their tears, they called for brandy and smelling salts. It was the first case of hysterics ever known at Crow Nest, or in the Nutter family. In the kitchen they had no other name for it than "Miss Sarah's queer do."

Later in the day Martha and Mary, feeling they had been thoroughly vanquished, went home, Sarah accompanying her sister Stripes, on that lady's pressing invitation, "for a few days' quiet and rest."

Two days later Mr. Nutter received a letter

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from Alice and her husband announcing their marriage, and asking his forgiveness for taking so important a step without his sanction, and excusing themselves for acting as they had done. For the rest, the tone of the letter was rather formal and decidedly independent. It contained no mention whatever of coming back. So far from that, Alice asked for certain clothes of hers to be sent to her at Blackpool, and Ralph Requested that his letters might be forwarded to the same address.

This was far from satisfactory to Mr. Nutter. He had expected Ralph to come back, as a matter of course, on the old terms, or to ask humbly to be taken on again on whatever conditions the old gentleman might choose to impose.

"I see how it is," he muttered, "they want begging on to come back. But they will have to wait a long time before I ask 'em to come back—they will that."

Mr. Nutter was quite right. Ralph did want asking to come back, and he had made up his mind not to return until he was asked. For this

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he had several reasons. He must either ask or be asked. If he adopted the former alternative he would place himself under an obligation to his father-in-law, and have to resume his situation on the former's own terms, exposing himself thereby to the taunts of Stripes and the sneers of Carboy, who would be sure to say that he had begged to be taken on again. Whereas by staying away until he should be asked to return he would be in a position to dictate his own terms, and set his brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law at defiance.

He did not lose sight of the possibility that the second alternative might not be offered to him; yet he had a well-grounded confidence that Mr. Natter would very soon want him back, and that a pressing invitation was only a question of a few weeks. So he quietly bided his time at the seaside.

The event justified his hope. Even before his son left him Mr. Nutter had slackened in his attention to business, and for the last two or three years he had been little more than a looker-on.

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To use his own expression, he merely "odded about." Ralph had become everything—manager, steward, farm bailiff, all rolled into one—and a few days after his departure the Squire found himself encompassed by difficulties on every side. The farm alone he might have coped with, but factory and farm together were quite beyond him. During his tenure of office Ralph had introduced quite a new system of bookkeeping, and made changes in the internal economy of the concern with which Mr. Nutter was little familiar. He had only little Kester Knocker, Ralph's man Friday, as aide. The making up of the wage book nearly drove him wild, and when the pay day came the confusion was something frightful.

As a rule the hands were all paid and "off the ground" by two o'clock on the

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Saturday afternoon. On the first Saturday after Ralph's departure the pay lasted until seven o'clock. It was Knocker's duty to collect the "badge and milk brass," but it is given to no man to be in two places at one time. He could not both help the "Owd Master" in the counting-house and look after defaulting

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debtors at the factory gates. The consequence was that most of them slipped off without settling their scores, the change did not come round in due course, and before the pay was half over a dearth of silver and copper set in. After borrowing all that could be borrowed both at "Mother Redcap's" and elsewhere, even to the extent of making the servants at Crow Nest empty their pockets of all the small coin they contained, it was found necessary to despatch Fiery Bill (so-called from the intense redness of his hair and the extreme mildness of his temper) in the gig to Carrington for an additional supply of change.

This was bad enough, but the hardly concealed amusement of the workpeople with their master's difficulties was even worse. Some of the older hands, with whom Mr. Nutter was always on terms of easy familiarity, went so far as to trot (chaff) him.

"This is a bonny do, Squire," observed Molly O'Kits, an ancient weaver. "I never seed owt like it sin' I've been on th' ground; and lass and woman I've wrought for you moor'n thirty

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year. I've had my bit o' wage reckoned up forty times and wrong every time, and it's five o'clock and I've not gotten my brass yet. Yo're getting too owd for this sort o' wark, mayster. Yo' mun (must) get Norbreck back. What if he has wed yo're Alice? Hoo's no

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waur for it, I'll be bun, and I durned wonder at her takin' a liking to him, wi' his blue een and black whiskers. If I'd ha' bin twenty year younger I could ha' fawn i' love wi' him mysel. Yo' send for him back, Squire, and let us weet th' wedding wi' some o' that owd ale you have up at Crow Nest. There'll be no good done till you do."

"Let 'em ax then, I don't like begging folks to do me a favour. But get you gone, woman, do; theer's your brass, reyt at last. I'm that moidered I hardly know what I'm doing."

The next day came the sons-in-law and their wives, intent on confirming the old man in his resolution (which they highly commended) of not asking the runaways to return.

"That's all very fine," said the Squire in answer to a remark of Carboy's, "but how mun

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I do without Norbreck? Just tell me that! I never was so moidered in all my life as I was yesterday, and I'm feared next pay 'll be no better. And there's cotton to buy and pieces to sell, and it's th' rent day on th' twenty-fourth. I cannot find th' calf book, and one way and another I'm welly at th' far end."

"It's a pity you left so much to him, father," observed Martha compassionately; "I always thought it would come to this, but I did not like to say so. You seemed so much set up in him. Couldn't you find somebody to help my father, Richard?" turning to her husband.

"It was just what I was going to propose," said Mr. Stripes, a tall man, with a red face, a loud voice, and carrotty whiskers. "I know of a fellow that would just suit you, a man of age and experience, good bookkeeper and that, not a conceited jackanapes like Norbreck."

"You think he'll do then?"

"I'm sure."

"Send him, then, and the sooner the better. It'll be th' last shift when I ask Ralph to come

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back, if it is only because of his being so independent. But it is gradely awkerd about that calf book, isn't it now?"

All agreed as to the awkwardness of the dilemma; but the only comfort they could offer him was a suggestion that the missing book might possibly turn up, "if Norbreck has not hidden it away out of pure malice," added Stripes, who was Ralph's greatest enemy.

The bookkeeper recommended by Mr. Stripes came accordingly—name Jeremiah Cocker, a pudgy old fellow, with a big paunch, a bald head, and an enormous nose. He may have been experienced, but he was far from sharp. The hands made great fun of him, called him Skenning (squinting) Jerry, because of a slight cast in his left eye; and, being new to everything, he made terrible mistakes; consigned a load of pieces to the wrong house in Manchester, addressed a letter containing money to London instead of to Liverpool, and caused endless confusion by ordering eighty-one bales of a certain sort of cotton when he should have ordered only eighteen. But the worst thing he did was

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going off one night (he lived at Carrington) with Mr. Nutter's spectacles, and leaving

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Mr. Nutter his own. The Squire put them on, but they made him "that goamless," he said, that he could not tell whether he stood on his head or his heels, and on his way home he walked into Wellsprings brook instead of over the footbridge.

This was the feather that broke the camel's back. The next day but one Ralph (who was enjoying at Blackpool the longest holiday he had ever had in his life) received a letter thus conceived:

"Dear Son,

"For God's sake come back. There's too many spectacles i' th' hoyle.

"Your affectionate father,

"SIMON NUTTER.

"N.B.—Sarah's off."

The day following the receipt of the letter, Mr. and Mrs. Norbreck arrived at Crow Nest, and were received by the Squire as if nothing had happened.

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"Sarah's off," meant, as they surmised, that Miss Nutter was away from home. "At Carboy's," Mr. Nutter explained, adding, "you don't need to fear no bother, she will be in no hurry to come back as long as you're here."

Terms were discussed and settled.

"I've a wife now, you know," said Ralph; "I shall want something to keep her on."

"You'll have enough and to spare when I'm gone."

"But you're not gone. You've twenty years of life in you yet, father."

"And you may have the house full by that time," laughed Mr. Nutter, not ill

pleased by the compliment. "Well, I'll treat you liberal, you shall have two hundred and fifty pounds a year and a tenth."

"Nay, father, you'll have to make it three hundred pounds and a third. I deserve that, I think."

"Three hundred pounds and a third! Why, you want to ruin me. Will nowt less than that content you?"

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"Nowt," answered Ralph resolutely.

"Why, it will make you a matter of a thousand pounds a year, that will, and only Alice and you to keep?"

"And leave you three thousand pounds and all your rents and dividends, and only Sarah and yourself to keep? "

"Well, well, have your own way; but it is ruination, complete ruination," said the old man angrily. "And if it was not as I am saving Alice's keep—and she goes through a sight of clothes—I couldn't afford it, I really couldn't afford it, Ralph."

At this sally Ralph, who knew better than Mr. Nutter himself how much the latter was worth, laughed outright, and the old fellow, not being without a sense of humour, and guessing what was passing in his son-in-law's mind, laughed too.

"It's all very fine laughing," he said, "but it'll make th' sum tottle to divide among you when I'm gone so much less."

"All right, father. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, you know. Besides you are a long way from being gone yet."

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Ralph having secured his bird, it was necessary to provide her with a cage. Living at Crow Nest, in the same house with Miss Nutter, was out of the question; and, as the speediest solution of the difficulty, two of the best cottages at Wellsprings were converted into one, and there Ralph and Alice passed the first and happiest years of their wedded life.

When the Stripeses and Carboys heard what had come to pass they were more angry than ever. The same idea as that expressed by Mr. Nutter in his conversation with Ralph occurred to both; they thought that the value of the estate would be diminished by the amount of his salary and his share in the profits. In this, however, they were mistaken, for Ralph's diligence and shrewdness benefited the property far beyond the consideration he received for his services.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE SQUIRE AND THE PARSONS

Miss Nutter took her revenge in a peculiar fashion. A few months after her sister's marriage she accepted an offer from Mr. Diamond, a large colliery proprietor, whom she had already refused more than once, but who, being as persistent in love as he was persevering in business, was not easily discouraged. In some respects the match did not seem a very desirable one, for he was hard-featured, coarse-mannered, and more than middle-aged. On the other hand he was rich and ostentatious, and Sarah liked to spend money and make a big show. She lived in a grand house, and had a very fine carriage, in which she delighted to drive through Wellsprings, casting, as she

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passed, a glance of disdain at her sister's cottage, and bestowing on Ralph Norbreck,



whenever she met him, a haughty stare and a scornful smile.

This display of impotent spite rather amused Ralph than otherwise; nevertheless he felt keenly indignant at the treatment Alice received from her sisters and their husbands. If they had all been lords and ladies, and she had married a beggar or a thief, they could not have been more high and mighty, or manifested more marked disapproval of her choice.

In this they somewhat overshot the mark; for they angered Mr. Nutter even more than they annoyed Alice and her husband.

"Has Martha and Mary been to see you yet?" he asked of his youngest daughter one evening at Crow Nest.

"Oh no, father!" said Alice in a rather pained voice, "We are not grand enough for them. They live in fine houses and drive about in carriages, and we live in a cottage."

"It's not so much that," answered the old man. "I expect it's more spite than pride, and Carboy

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and Stripes are more to blame than th' lasses. I think they'd come and see you if it were not for their husbands. And Sarah drove past again this afternoon, they tell me. That's both pride and spite; but she little knows what a fool she is making of herself, and how folks laughs at her. And what a fearfu' waste o' money! Two horses, worth a hundred apiece, I'll be bound, a coachman and a footman as fat as pigs, and a carriage lined wi' silk—all for th' use of a single woman! It's a crying shame, I call it. Such like extravagance should be put down by law."

"Sarah likes that sort of thing," said Alice, with a smile.

"Ay, she was always fond of pomp and pride. But I'll tell you what it is, Ralph

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(turning to his son-in-law), you may be even wi' 'em yet, if you'll mind. I said I'd leave th' lasses all alike, and so I will; but I mean to put things in such a shape that you may .keep all th' freehold, and have plenty of time to pay for it. Make money, Ralph, that is the way to vex 'em, and if you'll mind and be

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careful you may be a rich man before you're an old 'un—richer than either Stripes or Carboy; for I don't think Stripes is doing much good with his calico printing, and everybody is making them tin salts now—there is not half the profit in 'em now as there used to be, they tell me. And Carboy is terrible extravagant. He spends as much i' cigars as would keep a poor man's family. I am content with a bit o' bird's-eye and a clay pipe, and I dare say (smiling) I am "welly (nearly) as well off as he is. Ay, make money, Ralph, lad. It's not spending as gets you weel thowt on—it's having it. When I bought Crow Nest they laughed and called me 'Squire.' They said as I was stretching my arm further than th' coat-sleeve would reach. But they know different now, and they call me Squire i' earnest. Do you think they'd made me a magistrate, or as Sir Timothy Clinker would ha' stopped his carriage t'other day to ask my opinion o' th' crops and state o' trade, if I had not been middling weel off? Ay, Ralph, make money. They say knowledge is power; but, as far as I can see,

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money is a deal powerfuller. Why, there is not a fool anywhere but what, if he has brass, folks will take their hats off to him and respect him."

"A poor sort of respect though, father," put in Alice. "I would rather be respected for something else than the mere possession of wealth."

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"And then there is the pleasure of making it —of seeing it rowl up, stocktaking after stocktaking, rent day after rent day, and knowing as you are getting a bit richer nearly every minute," went on the Squire, too much in earnest to heed his daughter's interruption. "And you've th' satisfaction of thinking as when you're dead and gone it'll do some good to them as comes after you. You cannot say as much o' knowledge or wisdom or owt o' that sort. Ay, ay, make money, Ralph, and when you've made it stick to it. You have a fine chance. If you mind what I say and take th' freehold and th' factory on the conditions as is set forth in my will, you'll be worth a hundred thousand pounds — happen more—before you're fifty, and after that you've nowt to do but watch

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it, it'll make itself then—rowl together just like a snowball."

"But, father, said Alice, timidly, "won't you do something for Rupert before—before?"

"Before I die you mean. No, Alice, I don't mean to do owt for Rupert. Didn't he rob me o' two thousand five hundred pounds—and more too, if the truth was known—and hasn't he gone away, nobody knows where, and never a word to show us as he was sorry?"

"It's no use, Alice," continued the old man, peremptorily, seeing she was about to renew her appeal. "I shall not hear another word, and I'll not leave Rupert a penny. As he has made his bed let him lie on it."

A few weeks after this conversation the Squire fell ill and took to his bed, from which he never rose again; but though the doctor looked grave, and had evidently a poor opinion of his patient's chances of recovery, Mr. Nutter refused to believe that he should never get better, and bitterly resented the attempt of the two clergymen of the neighbourhood to offer him ghostly comfort, as implying

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that he was like to die. His resentment was all the greater as, though nominally a Churchman, he was on "bad terms with the vicar and his curate.

Crow Nest possessed two pews at the parish church. One had always been let. After his wife's death the Squire let the other, and on the rare occasions when he was a worshipper sat with one of his tenants. When the new vicar disputed his right to draw rent for the Crow Nest pews Mr. Nutter was as wroth as if somebody had disputed his right to receive rent for his farms, and he showed his displeasure by cutting the church altogether and going occasionally to the Baptist chapel, not because he liked the Baptist chapel, but because there was a bitter feud between the vicar and the Baptist parson.

Nevertheless, the vicar called at Crow Nest and sent up his card to the sick man. The curate had called the day before, without success.

"I say, Ralph," said the old fellow, viciously, to his son-in-law, as the card was given to him, "these chaps are like slink butchers after a stricken cow, aren't they?"

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This was in allusion to low, or "slink," butchers, who, in the days before the contagious cattle diseases law, used to hang vulture-like about farms where cattle were ailing, on the look-out for a bargain.

"But I am not dead yet," continued the Squire, after a pause, "nor going to be. And if I was I would not be talked to by a fellow as wants to do me out o' my pew rents. Tell him, Ralph, tell him as I'll have nowt to do neither with Sounding Brass nor Tinkling Cymbal."

This message, rendered into polite language, was conveyed to the vicar, who thereupon took his departure, and made no further attempt to interview his eccentric

parishioner.

Alice was greatly distressed by her father's obduracy.

"You won't see Mr. Clare," she said, "and you won't see Mr. Blowwell. Will you let me send for Mr. Overhead? Do, please! I believe he is a very worthy good man."

Mr. Overhead was the Baptist minister.

"What, Alice," exclaimed the old man, in a

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grieved voice, you too! I thowt you had more respect for your owd father than that. I'm worth a good lot of dead men yet, my lass."

"Oh, father, do be reasonable," pleaded Alice. "I hope and believe you will be with us many a year yet. Who knows? You may live longer than either Ralph or me. But you have not been to chapel or church, or talked to a clergyman for months—I might almost say for years. And it is our duty, you know; and life is uncertain for the youngest of us. Do, please, let me send for Mr. Overhead—for my sake, father. He can do you no harm; he cannot make your life a minute shorter, and he may do you good."

"Well, if you put it i' that way, Alice, send for th' Dipper," growled the Squire, "but I don't like parsons of any sort. They're always trying to get subscriptions out of you, or summat."

So Mr. Overhead was sent for; a short, somewhat heavy man, both in figure and face, more successful as a preacher than as a comforter of the afflicted, a vocation for which his shortness of temper and want of tact ill fitted him. Though

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not possessed of a ready wit, he could say a sharp thing on occasion, when time was allowed him for reflection. Mr. Clare, the vicar, once stigmatised him at a church tea-meeting as an "ignorant schismatic," a remark which the curate followed up by observing that he looked on the Baptists as being a degree worse than heathens, for while the latter erred in ignorance the former sinned with their eyes open.

Ten days afterwards, Overhead retaliated by saying, equally in public, that he heeded the censures of certain so-called ministers of the Gospel no more than if they were sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.

The epithets fitted, for the vicar was loud-voiced and pompous, and the curate, a clerical dandy who wore rings on his lily-white hands, and played the flute. Nobody about Wellsprings could go long without a nickname, and Mr. Clare was forthwith dubbed "Sounding Brass," and Mr. Blowwell "Tinkling Cymbal," much, it need hardly be added, to their disgust.

When Mr. Overhead was sent for—after the

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repulse of the two "Church parsons"—to administer spiritual consolation to the Squire, the fact was regarded as a great Dissenting triumph. Crow nest had always been counted Church, and Simon Nutter was the richest man in the country side. Some very sanguine Baptists even indulged in hopes that he might remember the chapel, or its minister, in his will. An annuity of twenty or thirty pounds a year to Mr. Overhead would be a great saving for a congregation that was neither large nor wealthy; seeing that in his people's estimation he had enough already, they could reduce his stipend by whatever amount it might please Mr. Nutter to leave him.

As the minister, who lost no time in answering to Mr. Norbreck's call, entered the sick chamber, the Squire wakened up from a nap.

"Hallo!" he said peevishly, forgetting for the moment that he had consented to

see the "Dipper." "Who's that? You've come to th' wrong shop, Mr. Overhead. I cannot afford to give you owt this time. What with th' high price o' cotton

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and coals, and cows dying, and crops failing, and tenants being behindhand wi' their rents, I'm that poor, I hardly know which way to turn. If th' times would only mend a bit I might happen to spare you a trifle—"

"You forget, father," interposed Alice gently, "you said you would like to see Mr. Overhead, and I asked him to come."

And then, with a glance at the minister, as much as to say, "I'll leave you alone with him," she left the room.

"Oh, ay," said Mr. Nutter, "I believe I did say summat o' th' sort. Take a cheer, Mr. Overhead; take a cheer."

The minister took a chair accordingly, and seated himself with great deliberation, thinking meanwhile how he should open the campaign.

"Well?" asked Mr. Nutter sharply, seeing that his guest seemed in no hurry to begin.

"I'm sorry to find you so poorly, Mr. Nutter," observed the minister, somewhat disconcerted by the abruptness of the question.

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"That's nonsense. I'm not poorly—not I— only a bit out o' sorts. You don't mean to say as I'm looking ill, do you?"

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"Well, perhaps it's being in bed that makes you look changed," answered Mr. Overhead, who was too truthful to tell a lie, and too polite to tell the truth.

"Yes, that's it. And then I have not been shaved this morning; and a chap never does look quite hisel with a nightcap on his head, and his head on a pillow."

"Looks are a very secondary consideration for people who are on the brink of eternity," returned the minister solemnly. "We shall all look alike when we are laid in the tomb. You asked me just now what I had got to say. Well, I have come to talk to you about your soul—to talk to you as dying man to dying man—to—"

"Speak for yourself, Mr. Overhead," put in the Squire angrily. "I'm not a dying man, if you are. I could get up this minute—I do believe I could, if they'd let me—and I've ten years of life and work in me yet—whatever you may think."

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"At any rate, you cannot deny you are mortal, and a lost sinner," said the minister, nettled even more by the rudeness of his host's manner than by the interruption. "Nothing is so certain as death. Your life may be required of you—as mine may be of me—this very night. Remember the parable of the rich man, and you are a rich man. And there is an appointed time for all, a time fixed before the foundation of the world, and it is my duty, my solemn duty, to tell you, Mr. Nutter, that unless—"

"Come, come," interposed the Squire, still more testily than before, "there's nowt i' that; I've heard it all afore. Tell us summat new man."

"Unless," continued the minister, in a voice now trembling with indignation, "you turn your thoughts from things of time to things of eternity, cast aside all consideration of self, and money, and business, and repent, you will be lost, and your portion will be in the lake of brimstone, where the worm—"

"Drat the fellow," exclaimed Mr. Nutter, in a rage, rising in bed and shaking his



skinny fist at the minister. "I can bide there if anybody else

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can. Besides, if everything's fixed aforehand, what matters it whether I repent or not?"

This was more than Mr. Overhead could stand. He rose from his chair, and left the room without another word.

At the foot of the stairs he met Alice.

"I can do no good with your father, Mrs. Norbreck," he said sternly. "He has eyes, but he sees not; ears, but he hears not. As God in the days of old hardened the heart of Pharaoh, so has he hardened the heart of Simon Nutter. As far as I can see, he will die as he has lived, an impenitent sinner."

Alice went hurriedly, and in tears, to her father's room.

"Oh, father!" she said, with a half sob.

"Sit down and read me summat," said the Squire.

"Let me read you a chapter in the Bible," asked Alice eagerly.

"Ay, if you will."

She read him the "Sermon on the Mount,"

"That's better than parson's talk," said Mr. Nutter, who had listened attentively.

"I was

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happen a bit too hard on that Dipper, but he provoked me to it. What business is it of his

to tell me I am a dying man and a lost sinner? You can read me a bit more, if you like, Alice."

After another chapter, Alice, who was fond of poetry, read from Keble's "Christian Year" the beautiful lines beginning:

Red o'er the forest peers the setting sun,  
The line of yellow light dies fast away,  
That crown'd the eastern copse; and, chill and dun,  
Falls on the moor the brief November day.

"You're a good wench, Alice," said the old man, taking her hand affectionately in his. "There is none of t' others as has been as good to me as you have. And if so be as—if I don't get better o' this illness, though I am sure as I shall—you'll find as your old father did not forget you. It'll be a matter of forty or fifty thousand pounds as you and Ralph will have; and it's a nice little nest egg, that is."

"Don't talk of it now, father. I hope it will bring with it a blessing. But poor Rupert! Won't you do anything for Rupert?"

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"Curse—"

"Stop, father," exclaimed Mrs. Norbreck, almost sternly, as she placed her hand on the old man's lips. "Remember, he is your son—your own flesh and blood."

"I know it to my sorrow, lass. Well, I will not say owt agen him. But he is a wastrel, for all that. Not a line or a word since he went away. He deserves neither your love nor my money; and if you, or anybody belonging to you, ever come across Rupert, have nowt to do with him. You'll rue it if you do."

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE RULING PASSION

The Squire rallied wonderfully on the day after Mr. Overhead's visit, and the doctor told Mrs. Norbreck that, if the weather remained mild, her father might not improbably recover for a while, though at his age it was not to be expected that he could live very much longer.

But the weather did not remain mild. After a few days' sunshine the temperature fell to freezing point, a keen north-east wind set in that killed old people off like flies, and it soon became evident that Mr. Nutter's case was hopeless.

Alice was with him to the last. She read to him often from the Bible, and as he seemed to listen attentively she hoped that the readings, and

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a word in season, which she occasionally ventured to let drop, were doing the old man good and bringing him into a better frame of mind.

A short time before the end, and when he was almost speechless, her father beckoned to her. Alice smoothed his brow with her hand, and bent her ear to his lips.

"Currant loaf will do," he whispered; and these were Simon Nutter's last words.

"Currant loaf will do!" replied Alice to herself. "What can my father mean?"

She consulted her husband and her sisters, but none of them were able to suggest any explanation of the enigma; and it was not until she took into council Mrs. Jessop, of "Old Mother Redcap," who came up to Crow Nest to offer her help, and had a great reputation for being "sharp at seeing owt," that the mystery was cleared up.

"No currant loaf, mem," said the landlady in her mincing way. "It is just like

your father, Mrs. Norbreck. He knew how to take care, he did, though he was so well off."

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"But what could my poor father mean, Mrs. Jessop? That is what I am at a loss to understand—for he was not rambling."

"Oh, no, mem, Mr. Nutter was not rambling. Men like him don't ramble—they are too sensible for that. Don't you really know what he meant?"

"I am sure I don't. If I did I should not have asked you."

"Deary me, mem, you don't say so. Why, I knew it from the first. Your father meant that currant bread would do for his funeral—that he did not want you to go to the expense of biscuits."

Mrs. Jessop's interpretation was strictly correct. The guests at poor folks' buryings were served with bun, loaf, and beer, at rich folks' funerals with biscuits and wine, and the Squire's intimation that "currant loaf would do" meant that he desired to be buried like a poor man.

But to this the Diamonds, the Stripeses, and the Carboys would in no wise consent, and being in the majority they had their own way. The largest undertaker in Carrington was sent for

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and ordered to arrange a funeral becoming the position and means of the deceased—regardless of expense. This order was promptly and, in the matter of expense, lavishly obeyed. Simon Nutter, who had never ridden to church in his life, was

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carried thither in a hearse drawn by four horses; many carriages and a long procession of workpeople followed his remains to the grave, and it cost more money to lay his body in the ground than he had bestowed in charity in all his threescore years and fifteen. The guests were regaled with a sumptuous luncheon at Crow Nest, while tenants and workpeople were treated to burying bread and beer at Wellsprings. The beer was supplied from the "Old Mother Redcap," a fact which led Mr. Jessop to remark that he had made more money out of the Squire dead than he had ever made out of him living.

The will was read in the hall, the most spacious room in the house. Though modernised and called parlour it bore many traces of its former destiny. The oaken floor was carpeted, but beams, black as ebony, showed through the white painted ceiling;

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the grate, albeit a register, was of a size altogether abnormal, and surrounded by a framework of carved freestone, whose appearance bespoke a respectable antiquity. The plate-glass windows that replaced the diamond-shaped panes of former days were set in heavy mullioned frames, and the furniture was of dark oak, massive enough to last for generations. It had belonged to the previous occupiers of Crow Nest, and the Squire valued it all the more as, having got it "thrown in" when he bought the estate, he considered that it "stood him in next to nowt."

It was generally understood that the deceased gentleman had left his property equally among his daughters to the exclusion of his son; but it is always open to a man to change his mind, and when Mr. Sheepskin, an old gentleman with a rosy face, a white necktie, and almost whiter hair, rose to read the will there was quite a flutter of excitement among the daughters and their husbands. Nobody else was much concerned, for nobody else expected anything. In the body of the will, as Mr. Sheepskin

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explained, Mr. Nutter had bequeathed his estate in equal portions to his four daughters, without reservations; but in a codicil, added shortly before his death, he had introduced one or two slight modifications. In the first place, he bequeathed all the furniture and other contents of the mansion house at Crow Nest to his daughter Alice, in token of her constant kindness and attention to the testator both before and during his illness. In the second place, the option was given to Ralph Norbreck of buying all the real estate, together with the machinery and plant at Wellsprings, farm and factory, stock, and outstanding debts at a price named by the testator, payable in instalments extending over sixteen years — if Norbreck so desired. Mrs. Norbreck's share might be taken in part payment, the balance to bear interest at four per cent., and be secured by a mortgage on the freehold until completely liquidated.

"Trifling modifications do you call 'em!" exclaimed Mr. Diamond, angrily. "I call it a regular do. Why, it is as good as making Norbreck here a present of ten or fifteen thousand

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pounds—to say nowt of letting the greater part of th' purchase-money lie at four per cent., instead of five. Mr. Nutter always told me as he'd leave his lasses all alike. I declare if I had known I would—"

"Never have married Sarah," he was going to say, but Sarah's eye was on him, and he quailed.

"I quite agree with Mr. Diamond," observed Mr. Carboy. "It's a regular piece of deception. I wish I could get the property for ten thousand pounds more. But perhaps Norbreck does not mean to accept the offer. Do you, Norbreck?"

"If your opinion is worth anything I ought to do," answered Ralph, quietly. "I'll consider about it."

*The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. Vol. 1 (1883)*

"Allow me to remind you, gentlemen," observed the lawyer, with some asperity, "that a man has a right to do what he likes with his own, and that none of you is very much hurt. If Rupert had stayed at home and behaved himself you would have got very much less. The estate is, moreover, much larger than you are probably

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aware. Mr. Natter died worth nearly, if not quite, two hundred thousand pounds."

This announcement caused evident surprise, for the most sanguine estimates had not made the late Squire worth more than a hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

"I'm glad to hear it. Yet that is no reason why Alice and her husband should be left better off than the others," observed Mr. Diamond, who, being already rich beyond the dreams of avarice, naturally wanted to be richer still.

Alice did not want her husband to purchase the estate.

"Why should you," she said, when they were alone together, "undertake such a responsibility? With my fortune and your earnings we shall be very well off. Buy Crow Nest and the home farm—the factory too, if you like—and let us live here quietly and bring up the children. If you take all the estate and engage to pay a hundred thousand pounds it will be a burden on your shoulders for years."

"But it is such a chance," pleaded Ralph.

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"Diamond is quite right. At that price it is a tremendous bargain. There is twenty thousand pounds in it; I am sure there is. None of them know the value of the estate as well as I do."

"But consider how you will have to work and strive. A hundred thousand pounds is an immense sum to pay."

"It is, but then I have sixteen years to pay it in."

"And we are so well off as it is," continued Alice. "It is a good thing to let well alone. And if you should fail?"

"I shall not fail. If the worst comes to the worst I could sell the estate, or raise money by way of second mortgage. There will be lots of margin."

"Would not that be failing, Ralph? At any rate, the brothers-in-law would say so."

"Well, we'll think about it," answered Ralph, whom his wife's last argument seemed rather to stagger. "There's plenty of time. I have not to give my answer till a fortnight after the will is proved, and I'll consult old Billy Crookes. He's the wisest man I know."

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The gentleman irreverently denominated "Billy Crookes" was Mr. William Crookes, the late Mr. Nutter's banker, and in anything touching money or business one of the shrewdest men in the county. His answer to Ralph's request for advice was characteristically prompt and unequivocal.

"Accept the offer with both hands," he said. "Never refuse money. Giving you this option is as good as giving you twenty thousand pounds, and your credit is good for twenty thousand more."

Ralph knew what this meant. It meant that the old banker would let him have, if he should ever need it, an overdraft of twenty thousand pounds.

When he went home and told Alice what Mr. Crookes said, and that he felt



**The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust*. Vol. 1 (1883)**

disposed to follow his advice, she offered no further remonstrance, for she perceived that her husband had made up his mind, and that opposition would irritate without convincing him. In a matter of business and money it was impossible to set her opinion against that of Mr. Crookes and other wise men. All the same, Alice greatly regretted her husband's decision; for,

[99]with her woman's loving solicitude, she felt more keenly than Ralph himself the responsibilities he was incurring, and she foresaw more clearly than he did the difficulties of the struggle to which he was about to commit himself.

HERE ENDS THE PROLOGUE

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**CHAPTER VIII**

**VAIN REGRETS**

A great many things may happen in sixteen years; and during the sixteen years that elapsed between Simon Nutter's death and the liquidation of his estate events befell which deeply affected the fortunes of the Norbreck family.

Ralph succeeded, if not to the full measure of his hopes, much better than many people expected. He is now much better off than the brothers-in-law who once scorned his poverty and tried to prevent his marriage. Stripes is dead, and he left his family so ill-provided for that Ralph had to help them. The Carboys are almost as poor. Diamond, though richer than ever, is a confirmed invalid with a frightful temper. It is no secret that Sarah drinks more than is good for her; and, with all

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their wealth, they are probably the most wretched couple in the county.

Nevertheless, as Ralph sits all alone in the old parlour at Crow Nest, his mind is ill at ease and his musings are dark. Though little given to introspection, he is taking stock of his life; and, as the smoke of his pipe curls fantastically upward, the past is rolled out before him like a panorama, from the time when he left his father's house to seek his fortune, to the time when, a few hours ago, he received the greatest shock that ever befell him. It was a greater shock than even poor Alice's death, for that event was not unlooked for, and—perhaps because his hands were so full at the time—he had felt the blow less than at one time seemed possible. He was surprised how soon he got over the acuteness of his grief. But now, in this supreme crisis of his life, his eyes were opened and his heart was full of sadness. He had loved his wife dearly—as much, probably, as a man who is bent above all things on getting on can love—and he saw now, when it was too late, that he had not treated her too kindly.

He did not know it at the time; but when he

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elected to purchase the factory and estate, and resolved to become rich, he made Alice's happiness—her own life and health even—subordinate to his success. For a while after Mr. Nutter's death everything went well with Ralph, and he counted confidently on completing the purchase of the estate by the time appointed. But the fat years were followed by lean years. A time came when the factory, instead of being a source of profit, made heavy losses, when bankrupt tenants, ruined by the rinderpest, left their farms without paying their rents, and when he had the utmost difficulty to meet his engagements with his late father-in-law's executors. During this trying time he worked night and day and practised an almost ferocious economy. As he slaved in his business Alice slaved in the house. Not by compulsion, for, being a faithful wife, she conformed willingly, if not gladly, to his wish. But she was of a fragile constitution—toil, confinement and anxiety told upon her, and before Ralph noticed any change—so

absorbed was he in his occupations—she was sick, past hope of recovery.

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And, after all, he had fallen short of full success. In order to pay the final instalment due on the estate, he had been compelled to raise thirty thousand pounds by way of mortgage, and this comparative failure fretted him hardly less than complete failure would have done.

To the pain of disappointment, moreover, was added the bitterness of self-reproach. For he saw now that if he had stinted Alice less of money—as he easily could have done, for at the worst they were well off—let her have more help in the house, given her more of his company, made life easier for her, he might, in his extremity, when he was himself so sorely stricken, have had the consolation of her presence and the solace of her love. With what keen regret and intense longing did he look back to the time before he had fettered himself with the undertaking to pay Simon Nutter's executors a hundred thousand pounds—to the time when his anxieties ended with his day's work, and his greatest pleasure was to walk with Alice of an evening round the reservoirs and through Wellsprings Wood, or stroll up to Crow Nest to

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take tea and have a camp (talk) with the old man.

Though Ralph could not call the estate entirely his own, he had passed the point at which his father-in-law said that money makes itself, and he had a deep sense of its value; yet for one hour of the time when he was full of hope and inspired by love he would willingly have sacrificed every penny he possessed. Money and its power, the world and its triumphs, were very little to Ralph Norbreck just then.

**The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. Vol. 1 (1883)**

As he sat there all alone there surged into his mind, like the memory of a long-forgotten dream, the words of "Break, break, break," read to him once by Alice in days gone by, but which at the time he had taken hardly any notice:

"And the stately ships go on to their haven under the hill,

To their haven under the hill;

But, oh! For the touch of a vanished hand,

And the sound of the voice that is still."

"Break, break, break,

W

At the foot of the crags, oh sea!

But the tender grace of a day that is dead

Will never come back to me."

SALAMANCA

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"Will never come back to me," he repeated, in an intense whisper. "God help me! Alice, Alice!"

"Dear father, I am here," answered a low, sweet voice, and two soft round arms stole around his neck, and two loving lips were pressed to his. "Were you calling me?"

"Yes," said Ralph, when he had recovered from his surprise, which was, however, but momentary. "I was calling for Alice, and I have no Alice save you. Come on my knee, child."

"You seem sad, father. What makes you sad?" asked the girl as she nestled close to him.

"Is it not enough to make me sad when I think of my two motherless children?"

*The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. Vol. 1 (1883)*

"Poor mother! I wish I remembered her better. But I have you, dear father. And then there is uncle Roger and Dorothy; and Bertie is almost a man now, and can help you to take care of me, you know."

"Not all of us are equal to one mother, my poor lass. Yes, Bertram is coming on fast. If he is only a good lad he will be a great comfort to

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us. But what have you been learning this afternoon, Alice, and where is Mrs. Whalley?"

"Mrs. Whalley has gone to Carrington. She will not be back until after I have gone to bed. I have been doing sums and writing, and Mrs. Whalley read about the princes in the Tower. Won't you tell me a story, too, father? You have not told me one for ever so long."

"I know so few, and not a single new one. You have heard my stock over and over again."

"I think I like old stories best, father," returned Alice, in a caressing voice. "Tell me an old one, please, one that you told me when I was quite a little girl."

"What shall it be, then"

"Tell me, tell me, yes, tell me the ' Babes in the Wood.'"

Ralph was not a gifted story-teller; but it did not require much effort, in his present mood, to imagine the deserted children his own; and he told the oft-repeated tale with a simple pathos that made the child weep, and brought the tears to his own eyes.

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"What is it, my pet?" he asked tenderly.

"Those wicked men, father. Are there any men as wicked nowadays, father?"

"I am afraid there are, Alice. But they can never harm you, darling."

"How can they? Are you not here to take care of me?"

To this Ralph answered only by pressing the child more closely to him; and, before the silence was broken, the parlour-door opened and a middle-aged woman, whose appearance was that of a superior servant, entered the room with a lamp.

"Will you have anything to your tea, master?" she asked, as she placed the lamp on the table.

"I could like, Dorothy," answered Ralph, doing his best to look cheerful.

The joke was a very old one, but Dorothy laughed at it as pleasantly as she had laughed a score of times before.

"You know what I mean. Would you like some meat, or an egg or two—or anything else?"

"What shall we have, Alice?" asked her father.

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"May I order?" exclaimed the child, springing briskly up.

"Yes, order."

"Well, then, Dorothy, please tell cook to do some buttered eggs, and I daresay father would like a kidney—would not you, father? Yes, a kidney for father—well done, you know—and let her be sure the plates are hot, and do not forget the dry toast and the marmalade, please," said the little maid, speaking rapidly, and with an air of great authority.

**The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust*. Vol. 1 (1883)**

"Dear me, Miss Alice, what a missus you will make some day," said Dorothy admiringly. "But bless me, you have been crying! What is the matter? Is not she well?"

"Oh, yes; but father has been telling me about the 'Babes in the Wood' and it's so sad, you know."

"But you've no call to cry, my sweet; you'll never be a babe in the wood."

"Of course I shall not," answered Alice, with great dignity, "neither in the wood nor anywhere else. You are forgetting that I shall be thirteen

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years old next birthday. But that is no reason why I should not feel sorry for the 'Babes in the Wood,' Dorothy."

"Dear me, how sensible the child is, to be sure," muttered Dorothy on her way to the kitchen (where she did not fail to relate this further instance of Alice's sharpness) to order the buttered eggs and kidneys.

Alice presided at her father's table, and poured out his tea in a fashion which showed that the duty was far from being an unwonted one; and to his great relief she chatted so briskly that he was rarely called upon for an observation.

Tea over, Ralph smoked another pipe and read, or tried to read, a newspaper, while Alice, sitting on a stool beside him, pored over an illustrated story book.

When she was tired of this occupation she touched her father's knee.

"Will you have a game at draughts with me?" she asked.

"Of course I will," he said tenderly, taking her hand in his. "Fetch the board."

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The board was fetched, and they were soon absorbed in the game; but Ralph was so absent- minded that Alice, to her great surprise, beat him with ease.

As they were thus engaged a stamping of feet was heard in the passage leading from the kitchen, the door opened, and a man, muffled up in a greatcoat and rubbing his hands together as if he were cold, entered the room.

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## CHAPTER IX THE BROTHERS

The man in the great-coat was Roger Norbreck. He had left his situation in Manchester some years previously, and was now his brother's right-hand man and principal assistant. In outward appearance the two, though decidedly different, were yet very much alike. Ralph had a full, resolute face with plenty of colour, and keen, dark blue eyes. Though his hair was streaked with gray, he had plenty of it, and his bushy black whiskers met under his chin and nearly covered his cheeks. Roger's features, albeit cast in a similar mould, were on a smaller scale. He had little hair on his face and less on his head, his cheeks were smaller and paler, his eyes duller and more deeply set than those of his brother, while his thinner

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lips and narrower jaws denoted at once a more irritable temper and a weaker will.

"Draw up to the fire," said the younger brother, pointing to a chair at the opposite corner of the fireplace.

Roger, after taking off his great-coat, drew up to the fire accordingly, and



seemed grateful for its warmth.

"You seem cold," observed Ralph. "Will you have a drop of something warm?"

"With all my heart," was the answer. Whereupon Ralph rang the bell, and ordered whisky and hot water.

"Did you catch Cracker?"

"I did that," replied Roger, "but I had to go a thundering long way—nearly as far as Cock Bridge."

Cracker, it should be observed, was one of the Crow Nest carters. His correct appellation was Grubshaw, the nickname of "Cracker" having been conferred upon him because of his skill in whip cracking. But Cracker was sadly given to loiter on the way. Instead of being back in reasonable

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time, and having his horses fed and "bedded up" by six or seven o'clock, he would often not return until ten or eleven, and not bed them up at all. In order to put a stop to this vicious practice, Roger, who had a vigilant eye for his brother's interests, had been on the road to watch Cracker and ascertain how he disposed of his time.

"So you found him on the bridge," inquired Ralph; "what was he doing?"

"Nay, I didn't. I found th' cart and horses at 'The Cock' door, and Cracker was inside, beering up."

"What then?"

"I waited till he came out, and rare and cold it was, I can tell you. When he set off, I walked behind th' cart, taking care he did not see me. At Raefield he stopped again and had another pint. At 'The Lord Nelson' he made another long stop; the same at 'Hark to Bellman;' and then I got so tired of waiting, and th' horses was that cold and starved,

as I took pity on 'em and brought 'em home, and left Cracker to do as he liked."

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"And where is he now?"

"In the stable bedding 'em up."

"He overtook you then?" said Ralph, assuming an interest he did not feel.

"Just as I reached th' farmyard."

"What said you to him?"

"I gave him a bit of my mind, and he was saucy, and I—"

"Got in a passion, and gave him a bit more of your mind, I suppose?" put in Ralph.

"I did more, I just licked him," said the other, with a twisting of his lips and a contraction of his eyebrows that made him look almost vicious.

"You have a good pluck. I should think twice before I tackled Cracker. Why, he is one of the strongest fellows about the place."

"I know that; but when a chap is full of drink and blown with running, he is not much good."

"Yes," repeated Roger, as if he liked to dwell on the idea, "I knocked him down twice. Serve him right, too, if for nowt but his cruelty to th' horses; letting 'em stand for half-an-hour together at jerry-shop doors on a neet like this."

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*The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. Vol. 1 (1883)*

And, as if to emphasise the sentiment, he took up the poker and dealt a lusty blow at a big coal which crowned the spacious fire. The coal blazing up threw its red light on Ralph's face, and brought every line and feature of it into full relief.

"God bless me, Ralph!" exclaimed his brother in a startled voice. "What's to do? What is there wrong? Why, you look like a man as has just got his death-warrant."

"You never spoke a truer word in your life, Roger. I have got my death-warrant."

Roger looked at his brother in silent astonishment. Could he be joking? No; the deep trouble of his eyes, the almost convulsive contraction of his lips, the intense anxiousness of his expression, were only too real. And then Roger remembered that Ralph had complained lately of not feeling well; of heart palpitations, and of a lack of his usual energy, symptoms to which neither of them had, however, attached much importance.

"You are ill," gasped Roger after a short silence. "You have been to see Gort?"

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Ralph nodded.

"And—"

"He stethoscoped me; and, guessing from his manner that he had detected something not very satisfactory, I wanted to know what was the matter. He was not for saying at first, but I made him. It is aneurism of the aorta."

"Is that something very bad?"

"I'm going to tell you. Gort made the best of it; while admitting it was a serious complaint, he said there was no cause for anxiety, and that, with care, I might live to be threescore and ten. But I was not satisfied. I had heard that in cases of heart-disease doctors don't like to tell a patient the worst, and I felt that he was keeping something

back. Well, as I went down the street, I chanced to meet Dr. Squibs. He always likes a chat, and I asked him, just as if nothing was, 'What sort of a complaint aneurism of the aorta is.'"

"Do you know anybody as has got it?" he said.

"'Yes', I said; 'a friend of mine has got it.'

"Well, then, he has got his death-warrant,' he

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said. 'Not all the medical faculty can save him. But don't let him know. Truth is an excellent thing; but there are cases in which it is not always expedient to reveal it to the person most concerned, and this is one of them.'"

"But Gort may be mistaken," exclaimed Roger eagerly. "You'll see somebody else, won't you?"

"If it will give you any satisfaction, I will. But he is not mistaken. There is something here (laying his hand on the region of his heart) that tells me he is right. I'm done, Roger, lad."

Roger was too agitated to speak; his lips twitched tremulously, and, in spite of his efforts to keep them back, tears welled from his eyes. Ralph, too, was much affected.

"Thou'll be good to th' childer," he said, in a broken voice, relapsing unwittingly into the language of their boyhood; "and—and keep the property together till they're owd enough to tak' care of it for themselves."

"I will, I will, so help me God, I will!" exclaimed Roger, rising and taking both his brother's hands in his. "But I cannot believe it is

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as bad as you think, Ralph. We shall have you with ns many a year yet."

"If it might please God to let me bide only two or three years longer wi' th' childer and thee, just till they are a bit older, I would ask for nowt more," returned Ralph, in a voice almost inarticulate with emotion.

Then after a short pause he continued more calmly, "I ordered a will to be drawn up when Alice died, but it has never been signed. I must see Skinner to-morrow and give him fresh instructions. I have thought what to do. I mean to put the property into trust, and make thee the acting trustee. And now, had not you better be going? Th' wife will wonder what has become of you, and I feel as if I'd like to lie down myself. This has been a trying day."

And then Ralph kissed his brother, the first time for thirty years, and they separated for the night.

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## CHAPTER X

### BERTRAM ARRIVES

When Ralph Norbreck had made his will, every line and word of which was carefully weighed, he yielded to his brother's pressing solicitation and went to London to consult a physician famous for his knowledge of affections of the heart. Albeit the great man's diagnosis confirmed that of Dr. Gort, and he could hold out no hope of cure, he strongly advised his patient not to despair. The aneurism, though it undoubtedly existed, was not increasing, and if Mr. Norbreck would live quietly, adopt a strict regimen, and avoid excitement, he might live many years, and see his children grow up to maturity. And he spoke so cheerfully—for this physician made it a rule never to discourage

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a patient—that Ralph's despondency was perceptibly diminished, and he went back to Crow Nest comforted. He felt himself no less doomed than before, but he had received a reprieve.

While Ralph was in London, Roger had an interview with Dr. Gort, who took a far less hopeful view of Mr. Norbreck's case than his London colleague. In his opinion, he said, it was a rather bad case of aneurism of the thoracic aorta. It was beyond doubt a fatal malady, and though a patient suffering from it might, perchance, live many years, he might, on the other hand, die at any moment by the bursting of the aneurism into the trachea and aesophagus: or, more gradually, of suffocation, arising from the tumour pressing on the nerves, or the trachea; or, by starvation, from its pressure on the aesophagus. But he strongly charged Roger not to communicate these facts and fears to his brother. The doing so, while it would serve no useful purpose, could not fail seriously to disturb his mind, and it was essential above all things to keep his mind undisturbed. In cases of heart- disease it was a safe rule not to tell a patient the

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worst, and Dr. Gort greatly regretted that Mr. Norbreck had discovered from what a terrible malady he was suffering.

Roger thus learnt that his brother's worst fears were only too well founded, and he went home with his heart full of sorrow; for Ralph had been to him both an affectionate brother and a faithful friend. Within a few years after Mr. Nutter's death he had taken him from his hard and ill-paid situation in Manchester and given him congenial and well-remunerated employment at Wellsprings. And they had always pulled so well together. Roger, though the elder, frankly recognised his brother's superior energy and capacity, and submitted gladly to his guidance; while Ralph, albeit he did not always share his brother's views, and often rejected his advice, appreciated at their true value Roger's many excellent qualities and zealous devotion to his service,

and he had more than once expressed an intention—when the estate should be free from encumbrance—of "doing something for him;" in other words, of taking him into partnership.

"Do you think of sending for Bertram?" asked

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Roger of Ralph a few days after the tatter's return from London.

"Nay, I don't think as I will," answered the other; " it is arranged for him to be back in three months; and, according to what Sir William Joynson says, I am likely to live that long, anyhow."

"Have you told him you are ailing?"

"Yes; I said in the letter I sent him yesterday that I was far from well, and that when he came back he would have to buckle down to business. I hope he'll turn out well, Roger, and I think he will—he's sharp."

"Ay, sharp enough. I'm only afraid he'll be too much of a gentleman. When a lad is meant for work or business, he should be put to it before he gets nineteen or twenty."

"I don't quite see that. Schooling is work if it is rightly followed up, and hard work too. Bertram did very well at Yarrow, and there is not a better grammar school in the county; and Rothenberg writes me from Dresden that, though he is a bit wild at times, he is both intelligent and diligent."

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"I have no doubt of that. At the same time, I never knew of anybody as was kept a long time at school or college turning out a good business man."

*The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. Vol. 1 (1883)*

"I have known several, and but for this—if my life were not so precarious—I think I should let Bertram graduate at some university. He will be independent of business, and might find some occupation to suit him better. But as things are it is best for him to come here and set to work. He may be a great help to me now, and to you after I am gone."

"Don't say that, Ralph; don't think about it," said Roger deprecatingly; "that is the best— don't let your mind dwell on the dark side."

"Easily said," replied Ralph rather bitterly. "You don't know what it is to feel that you must die soon, and may die any minute. I think about little else. Not but what I am getting more reconciled than I was at first. What cannot be cured must be endured, I suppose. Still it is hard to bear—but I won't repine. If the children were a little older, poor things! And the

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estate were clear, I should feel easier. That mortgage weighs on my mind, Roger. If it might please the Lord to spare me only two years! Bertram would be of age then, and Alice—"

"Don't talk in that way, I pray you," said Roger, striving in vain to keep back his tears, "or I shall not be able to keep up. You will live many a year yet, and if so be—as you should be taken away—I will not rest till I have paid the mortgage off; and as for the children, make your mind easy—I will look after them just as if they were my own."

Three months after this conversation Bertram Norbreck came home. Roger met him at the station, for among other changes that had come to pass since the Squire's death was the making of a railway through the clough, and the building of a station close to Wellsprings, and within a mile and a half of Crow Nest.

Bertram, though slightly built, was broad-shouldered, long-limbed, and a full head taller than his uncle. He had dark hair, which he wore long



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brown eyes, with long lashes, well-cut features, and cheeks of a healthful red. Contrary to the fashion of the time, his neck was confined neither by stock nor cravat, and his turned-down collar displayed a shapely white throat and a broad sunburnt neck. His clothes, of foreign cut, and the braided student cap perched on one side of his head, gave him a somewhat dandified air, which Roger was not slow to observe.

"It is just as I said," he muttered; "he is too much of a gentleman a good deal I shall have to keep a tight hand on him."

The uncle and nephew exchanged greetings.

"Let us walk through the clough," said the former. "I want to talk to you. Tim will go by the road with your things."

"How is my father?" asked Bertram, when they were outside the station.

Roger gave two or three loud sniffs—he was rather given to sniffing—and then putting his hand in his coat pocket, he drew forth a big key, with which he deliberately rubbed his nose. The elder Norbreck was absent-minded sometimes, and in a

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moment of abstraction had mistaken his key for his pocket-handkerchief.

"It's nowt to laugh about," said Roger, who perceived in the same instant his mistake and his nephew's amused smile. "Your father is very ill, and like to die."

"Surely not so bad as that much!" exclaimed Bertram, turning pale, and stopping abruptly in his walk.

Then his' uncle explained, to him the nature of his father's illness.

"He has been rather worse the last few days," he added; "and hardly ever stirs from Crow Nest now. He has wanted you back badly."

"My poor father!" exclaimed Bertram, after a long pause. "Why was I not told of this sooner, uncle? I would have come home at once."

"I wanted him to tell you, but he would not. That London doctor gave him good hopes of living ever so many years, and your father did not think it necessary to send for you. He did not want you to break off your studies before the end of the term. He always thinks of himself last. I was

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with him only yesterday, but he would not let me stop. He drove me down to th' factory."

"Drove you down to the factory!" said Bertram in surprise. "He cannot be so very ill, then. I thought you said he never stirred from Crow Nest?"

"You seem purposely to misunderstand me, Bertram," returned the uncle with some asperity. "I did not mean that he drove me down in a conveyance; I meant that he insisted on my leaving him and going to the factory."

"I beg your pardon, uncle," said the nephew rather stiffly; "purposely misunderstood you I did not. I only thought you meant what you said."

Roger gave his nephew an angry glance, but made no reply, and nothing further passed until they reached Crow Nest.

They found Ralph sitting in the old parlour. As Bertram entered he rose from his chair.

"Thank God you are come," he exclaimed fervently, as he put his arms round his

son's neck and returned his embrace.

Bertram was so shocked at the change in his

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father's appearance that he could hardly answer his greeting. He had left him straight, strong, and hale. He found him bent, haggard, and hollow-eyed. The stamp of death was on Ralph Norbreck's face.

Then came Alice, who threw herself silently into her brother's arms, and Bertram could see that on her spirits, too, was weighing the sense of impending calamity. It was a sorrowful homecoming for the lad.

They all sat down to tea together, Mrs. Whalley with grave face presiding, and by a great effort Bertram contrived to start a conversation about Germany and entertain them with an account of his journey.

Shortly after tea Roger took his leave, and Mrs. Whalley, knowing how much Mr. Norbreck desired to have a long talk with his son, went with Alice to their own room.

"How did Bertram seem to take it?" asked Mrs. Roger of her husband, when the latter got home.

"Very lightly, it seemed to me. He took

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me off as we walked up th' dough, and did nowt but laugh and talk all th' time."

"I dare say," answered the wife grimly. "He's ten to one thinking how soon he'll

be th' mayster."

"Not as soon as he thinks, happen. It's me as will be th' mayster—for five or six year to come, anyhow."

"You'll have trouble wi' that lad, Roger."

"I'm feared so; he has a terrible conceit of himself. But there is one thing as he'll soon find out. I'll not stand being laughed at. I'll give him a clout at th' side of th' head, one of these days, if he doesn't mind what he is doing."

And Roger, settling in his chair, subsided into a brown study.

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## CHAPTER XI

### RALPH DEPARTS

"Bring your chair near to mine, Bertram," said Ralph to his son. "How you are grown, my dear lad, and how well you look!" (placing his arm lovingly on Bertram's). "You will find me looking worse, I daresay. Your uncle has told you?"

Bertram drew a deep breath, and pressed his father's hand. Speak he could not.

"Don't fret more than you can help, Bertram. It is hard, I know—harder for you and Alice than it is for me. But it is God's will, and we must submit. I've had some comforting talks lately with Mr. Aidin—the new clergyman, you know—and I'm almost reconciled. If I could feel sure that all would go well with you and Alice, I think

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I could depart in peace. But I want to tell you what I have arranged; for the disease has developed itself fast the last week or two. Gort cannot deny it, and if he did I should know better. I may go any minute, and' it is well you should know from me what I have

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done. My will puts my property into trust for six years after my death, or until your sister reaches twenty—which means that it will be benefit and Alice's. I have made this arrangement for several reasons. You will be all the better for a few years' experience before having full control of your fortune, and there should be more to divide when you are twenty-five or so, than when you are twenty-one. Then it will give ample time to pay off the mortgage, and enable me to do something for your uncle without making your and Alice's fortunes any less. I reckon the estate to be worth now about £125,000. It should not take more than two years to clear it of liabilities. It will then be worth £150,000, and I have directed that half of whatever it is valued at above that, when the property comes to be divided, shall go to

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your uncle. If the total is £200,000, as I daresay it will be, your share and your sister's will be £175,000, his £25,000. Do you understand?

"Perfectly."

"I think that will be fair. Your uncle has served me long and faithfully, and he is my only brother, you know."

"Whatever you think right, dear father, will be right for me, as I am sure it will be for Alice. But I hope"

"Don't let us flatter ourselves with false hopes, Bertram," said Ralph kindly, yet firmly. "For the present, remember, we are discussing business and future arrangements. If we let our thoughts wander we shall forget something."

"I have not divided the property equally. You are both equally my children, and if Alice were grown up and married I think I should leave you both alike. But a fatherless and motherless girl, with a large fortune, is exposed to great dangers, and I have thought it best to limit her share to fifty thousand pounds. Perhaps in the circumstances even that is too much; but I have a feeling

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that it would not be right to make the difference between you greater. Your share should be a hundred thousand, or not far off."

"That is a great deal of money, father," said Bertram, who now learned for the first time the extent of his father's possessions.

"It is, and it has been hardly earned," said Ralph gloomily. "The making of it has killed me, Bertram, and I fear it shortened your mother's life. Ah, if I had only taken her advice! Yes, a hundred thousand pounds is a deal of money. I hope, as your mother said to your grandfather, when he told her what he was going to leave her, that it will bring you a blessing, Bertram. Try to make a good use of it. You will see how you like business the next few years. If you don't you can try something else. But, whatever you do, have an occupation. Idleness is the mother of mischief. See how often one generation wastes what another has made. The Carboys are well-nigh ruined, the Stripeses are poor, and from the way your cousin Percy is shaping, Diamond's property is likely enough to go to the dogs, too, one of these days.

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The fathers save, and the sons waste—that's it. Don't let it be so with us. You may sell the factory if you like; but I should like you to keep the land together; unless I am mistaken it will increase in value, and there should be coal under Flounder's farm. I don't think there's any danger of money becoming a part of your soul. The danger is more likely to be the other way, and I want you to promise me one thing—not to run into debt. You'll have no need; the trustees will make you a sufficient allowance."

"Look well to your sister, Bertram," continued Mr. Norbreck, after his son had

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made the required promise. "She is very young to be left without father or mother, poor little lass! Be both a father and a mother to her, Bertram. Mrs. Whalley will stop here as housekeeper, and take charge of her education, and Dorothy will have a home at Crow Nest as long as the trust lasts, and, I hope, a long time after. She was a great favourite with your mother."

"She shall have a home at Crow Nest as long as she lives, father," said Bertram warmly. "But you have not told me who the trustees are?"

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"Skinner, the lawyer, James Digit, and your Uncle Roger. He will be the managing trustee, with a salary of five hundred pounds a year and a house. I hope you and he will pull well together."

"I will do my best, father, but—Here

Bertram hesitated.

"Speak your mind, lad; there should be no reserves between you and me."

"I suppose, then, my uncle will be the master, both at Crow Nest and Wellsprings, just as you are—that is, when" (here the boy's voice was broken by a sob) "he steps into your shoes?"

"Yes," said Ralph, as a tear rolled slowly down his cheek, "he will step into my shoes—when the time comes. Don't you think the arrangement a good one?" he asked, after a short pause.

"I was only thinking that people don't like him as well as they like you, dear father; and it will be so different."

"Well, I don't think he is very popular. He has his faults like the rest of us. But he means well, and knows more of the ins and outs of the business and the property than

anybody else.

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Then he will not be able to take any step of importance without the consent of his co-trustees, and Skinner and Digit are good men; and he will have you to help him. The worst thing about Roger is his wife. I don't much like her."

"Neither do I—not a bit."

"However, I have not made her a trustee. Yes," resumed Ralph pensively, "I think Roger will do right for my sake and yours; and his interests are identified with the estate. Unless he makes it worth more than a hundred and fifty thousand pounds he will get nothing but his salary; and if anything were to happen to you children it would all go to him and his children. No; I don't think I could have arranged better. What think you, Bertram?"

"I think you have arranged everything for the best, father," returned Bertram sadly, "and you are so much older and wiser than I am that if I did not think so I should be sure I was wrong."

"Happen not, my lad. I have noticed that much thinking does not always conduce to clearness of judgment, and that an opinion formed on

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the spur of the moment is often the best. But we have done with business now; you know as much as I can tell you, and whether I have been well or ill advised, what I have done must stand. It is too late now to make different arrangements. You know the story of your Uncle Rupert, of course?"



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"Yes, he ran away a long time ago, and has not been heard of since," returned Bertram, in some surprise, for the question seemed *à propos* to nothing in particular.

"Not exactly; he has not been heard from, but he has been heard of. Not long after he left home, a Carrington man, who had emigrated to the United States, sent word that he had seen Rupert Nutter in New Orleans. Since then we have not heard a word, and nobody knows whether he is alive or dead. But your mother had always an idea that he would come back, or that we should have news of him; and she made me promise—both before we were married and after—as if it ever lay in my power, and he needed it, I would give her brother a helping hand. I once thought of leaving him something in my will; but, seeing as I don't know

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whether he is alive or dead, I concluded it would be better to pass the engagement on to you. If ever you come across your Uncle Rupert, or anybody belonging to him, and they are in need, you must deal with them generously for your mother's sake."

"I will, father, and right gladly."

"I'm afraid your uncle is not a good man, wherever he is, although your mother always thought he received hard measure from his father. Anyhow, there is no doubt he has a claim on us. If he had not gone away I should not have come to Crow Nest and married your mother, and you would never have been. If he had come back, or shown some sign of penitence, it is not likely that your grandfather would have cut him off with nothing and left your mother fifty thousand pounds; and we certainly should not have got Crow Nest. Yes, very nearly everything as has befallen me, for good or for evil, since I left home a poor lad to seek my fortune, has come of Rupert Nutter robbing his father and running away. As that has influenced my life, something in appearance

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equally trifling may influence yours and Alice's, who knows?"

And Ralph, sighing deeply, leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

Bertram, seeing how much the conversation, and the excitement it involved, had exhausted his father, suggested that he should go to bed.

"In a minute, lad, in a minute. I don't feel well to-night, and I would like to say all as I have to say before I am worse. One thing more, and I have done. You see this?" (pointing to a gold locket fastened to his watch-chain).

"It contains my mother's miniature, doesn't it?"

"Yes. She gave it me before your sister was born. She was afraid she might not get over her trouble, and I have kept it ever since. It is yours now, Bertram; take it and keep it; it is the picture of a good woman, whose last thoughts were of you, and who was wiser than your father. Keep it in remembrance of her."

"As long as I live," said Bertram, deeply moved. "I wish I could have your portrait, too, father."

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"I was just going to show you. Here" (touching a spring at the back of the locket) "is my likeness, not as I am now, but as I was a few years since. I have had the marrow (fellow) to it made for Alice. Mrs. Whalley will give it to her when the child is a little older. May God bless you both! And now, if you will give me a lift, I will get me to bed. It has come to something—hasn't it?— as I should want helping upstairs, and me not fifty, and many a man is hale at eighty."

Bertram helped his father to undress, and he was so alarmed by his appearance that he insisted on remaining with him, and lay down on a sofa close to his bedside. At

sunrise, he was roused by what sounded like an exclamation, and when the lad looked at him, although he had never before seen death, he knew that his father was dying.

It seemed to Bertram that his father wanted to say something, and, bending his head low, he listened intently. All that he could distinguish were the words " Alice—Rupert Nutter— mind!"

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In a few minutes all was over, and when Mrs. Whalley and the servants, summoned by the frantic ringing of the bell, entered the room, they found Bertram kneeling by the bedside, clasping in both his the hand of his dead father.

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## CHAPTER XII

### ROGER IN POWER

Ralph Norbreck had been highly respected by friends and neighbours as a man of probity and means, and for a few weeks after his demise he was much talked about and sincerely regretted. None mourned for him more effusively than his brother. Whenever Ralph's name was mentioned Roger burst into tears. Bertram, on the other hand, nursed his sorrow in secret; and, though he looked pale and spiritless, was rarely seen to weep, from which it was generally inferred that— probably on account of his youth—he did not feel their common loss as much as his uncle felt it.

But everything has an end, and there came a time when Roger ceased to cry and Bertram to

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mope, and each began to settle down to his new position. For a while the former seemed to feel the weight of his increased responsibilities almost as much as he had felt the death of his brother. He was so timid that he would hardly venture on any step of the slightest importance without taking advice. Advice is so comforting to the self-distrustful, and Roger wrapped himself in it as in a garment. Mr. Digit lived at a distance, and came only occasionally to look at the books and see how things were going on, but Mr. Skinner was easily accessible, and scarcely a day passed that Roger did not run over to Carrington to consult him about something or other. He even consulted his nephew, especially on matters of detail; and the young fellow having, what the old one did not possess, a good head for figures, he often found his advice useful. Bertram, too, was frequently sent on business-journeys; and nothing for a year or two could be more satisfactory than their relations—they pulled together as well as Ralph himself could have desired.

The first check on Roger's habit of consulting

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his professional co-trustee was the receipt of Skinner and Flint's bill of costs. It was as long as a tale in one volume, and the amount of it—two hundred pounds—mostly for consultations, made all the hair Roger had left positively stand on end, and the last item—"receiving instructions to make out this bill, six and eightpence"—excited his unbounded indignation.

"Just look here," he exclaimed to his nephew, as he turned over the pages of the portentous document. "I'll be hanged if he has not charged for every question as I have asked him since your father died. What do you think of this now? 'Advising with Mr. Roger Norbreck as to whether the funeral of his late brother should take place on Wednesday or Thursday, when it was decided to inter him on Thursday, six and eightpence.' Why, I only just said, 'I think Thursday would be best, Mr. Skinner, what do you think?' And he said: 'Just as the family prefers, Mr. Roger.' And I said: 'We'll

have it on Thursday, then.' That was all; not a word more. I never knew such a thing in all my life. Two hundred pounds! God bless me!

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Why, that's the interest of four thousand pounds at five per cent. It would keep me a twelvemonth, two hundred pounds would—and well, too. It's downright robbery; it's nowt else. Do you think as Mr. Skinner can stand to it, Bertram? I thought a trustee could not charge owt except for money out o' pocket."

"Yes, but there are exceptions. You are a trustee, and you have a salary, you know."

"Ay, but that's in the will."

"Are you sure there's nothing in the will about Mr. Skinner's charges?"

Bertram knew quite well there was, but he did not like to suggest that his uncle had not read the will with understanding, or that he had forgotten the existence of the clause in question.

"There happen is—let's see, replied Roger, as he took a copy of the will from his drawer. "You're right, Bertram. It says here as the acceptance by the said George Skinner of the office of trustee shall not debar him from receiving payment for such professional services as he may render to the estate. But isn't there such a thing

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as taxing a lawyer's bill? By gum, I'll have it taxed."

"Well, I don't think Mr. Skinner would like to have his bill taxed, and he is a trustee, you know," returned Bertram drily. "Perhaps you had better speak to Mr. Digit

about it."

Roger did speak to Mr. Digit about it.

"Well, it is rather a stiff bill," observed the latter, as he cast his eye over the formidable array of six and eightpences—"there is no denying that; but I don't think I should say anything to Skinner, if I were you. You would only give offence, and I am sure you would get nothing knocked off. But there's one thing you can do—mind better in future. Don't go asking for advice unless there is real need."

"I will not that. If I had thought we should have to pay for it to this tune, it's precious little I should have troubled Mr. Skinner, I can tell you."

Mr. Digit, a retired land surveyor, with a red face, a short neck, and a round paunch, laughed softly to himself when Roger turned his back. He

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knew that Skinner—who, besides being a busy man, was rich and an invalid—had been terribly bored by his co-trustee's ceaseless visits, and that the big bill was an expedient for stopping, or, at any rate, curtailing them. Skinner and Flint were delighted to do the legal business of the trust; but the senior partner had a decided objection to being pestered with Roger's often puerile questions at the rate of six and eightpence an hour.

So Roger had to pocket the [affront and vent his indignation in the bosom of his family. His wife, the daughter of a country innkeeper and farmer, fully sympathised with him. He had married her against his brother's advice; but so far as managing his house and looking after his interests went, she made him an excellent wife.

Mrs. Roger thought two hundred pounds an enormous sum.

"It's that much out of our pockets," she said.

"Out of the Trust's pocket, you mean. I shall pay none of it."

"You will pay it all."

"Nonsense."

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"You will, I tell you. You get whatever there is above a hundred and fifty thousand, don't you?"

"Ay, but it hasn't reached that yet."

"That's just it. The sooner it does the sooner there'll be something for us, and the less there is spent the more we shall get. That stands to reason, doesn't it?"

"Ay, looking at it in that way. It comes to what I have always said. I must keep expenses down in every possible way."

"That is just it. Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves. A groat a day makes six pounds a year. I suppose Crow Nest is costing as much as ever?"

"More. Bertram wanted ten pounds last week, and I daresay he's running bills as well."

"Stop it, Roger."

"How can I stop it? Doesn't the will say as the house has to be kept up and the testator's children brought up?"

"But it doesn't say as Bertram and Mrs. Whalley may take off at th' side i' that way. It's your duty to see as they are not extravagant."

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"What would you do, then?"

"Next time as Bertram asks for money tell him he is taking too much—as they must be more careful at Crow Nest—and give him less than he wants."

"I will," replied Roger. "I have thought for a long time as they were spending a good deal too freely, but I did not like to speak."

"Mrs. Whalley is not as careful as she ought to be, either. To tell th' truth, I don't much like Mrs. Whalley."

"Nor I. She is too much of a fine lady for my liking. But what can you do? It's in the will as she must be kept on."

"I know that. Besides, I don't want to fall out with th' woman. One has to hold a candle to th' devil sometimes. Have you ever thought owt about our Jacob and Alice?"

Roger stared. Jacob was his eldest son, whom, in order to prevent being spoiled by over-education, he had put to business when the lad was barely fourteen.

"What *are* you driving at, Nancy? What has our Jacob to do with Alice?"

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"Nowt yet; but I could like him to have some time. Would not it be nice, thinken you, to bring 'em together? Fifty thousand pounds is a very nice fortune for a young fellow to marry."

"That's all very fine. But where is your common sense? Jacob is not seventeen yet, and Alice not much above fifteen."

"They'll cure o' that. And my common sense tells me that in three or four years Alice will be old enough to be engaged, if not wed. It is often too late to look forrud, but never too soon. That's why I want us to keep thick (friends) with Mrs. Whalley, though we don't like her, and I don't think she much likes us."



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"But I'm not sure," said Roger, slowly and hesitatingly, "that it would meet my brother's approval if he were alive. And it is my duty to be guided by his wishes, you know, or, what I have reason to think, would have been his wishes."

"Did he ever say so?"

"No, how could he?"

"Well then, you have full liberty. And are not we quite as good as them at Crow Nest? You are

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Alice's own uncle, Jacob is her cousin, and I'm as good as any of Simon Nutter's daughters any day. We are not as rich, I know, but what does that matter?"

"And then there's Bertram," said Roger, rather following up his own thoughts than responding to his wife's question. "It's a very pretty scheme, Nancy, and would be a nice thing for our Jacob, I will say that. But you cannot manage it. Bertram will put a stopper on it if nobody else does."

"Ay, Bertram Norbreck is no friend of mine, I know that. But you surely don't think as he'll stop here till Alice is of age, do you?"

"Why shouldn't he? He's been very steady so far."

"So far. But it will not last, you'll see that. He'll not be content to stop at Crow Nest and go regular to the factory when he finds out what it is to be heir to a hundred thousand pounds. They say, too, as Bertram's most uncommon like his Uncle Rupert, and you know how he turned out."

"All the more reason why I should keep a

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tight hand on him. I promised my brother as I'd treat him like one of my own. And I will If he tries any tricks with me he'll find as he has got th' wrong sow by th' ear. I'm master now at any rate, and I'll take care as he wastes neither his time nor my money—for that's what it comes to."

"Very brave words," was his wife's sarcastic comment. "It's to be hoped as you'll make 'em good."

All the same, Mrs. Norbreck was well satisfied with the way things were shaping. She had secured her husband's assent to her match-making schemes and sown the seed of dissension between him and his nephew. This was killing two birds with one stone—feeding the grudge which, ever since Ralph had told his brother he might do a great deal better than marry her, she had borne the Crow Nest Norbrecks—and prepared the way for the advancement of her son. It was a good evening's work. She retired to rest with an approving conscience and slept the sleep of the just.

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### CHAPTER XIII

#### UNCLE AND NEPHEW

"Will you be wanting any money to-day?" asked Roger of his nephew, on the Saturday following the conversation recorded in the foregoing chapter. The last day of the week, being pay day, was a convenient time for Bertram to take what money he required for himself and the household expenses at Crow Nest.

"Yes, ten pounds."

"What, again! Why, you had ten pounds only last week."

"I know. Mrs. Whalley wanted eight, and I took two for myself."

"Why, bless me, what did you want two pounds for?"

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"Several things—gloves, a new hat, and a pair of spurs."

"Your old hat would have done a bit longer, and I am sure I don't know what you want with spurs. You must be careful, or else we shall never get that mortgage paid off. Here, take eight pounds, I cannot spare anymore."

Bertram, though evidently annoyed, took the money without a word.

"I'm sorry for that," said Mrs. Whalley, when he told her that his uncle could only spare her eight pounds. "I shall not be able to pay everything, and I am like your father, I hate to run up bills."

The same thing happened the Saturday following. Bertram asked for twelve pounds. His uncle gave him ten.

"What is the use being so screwing, uncle?" he asked. "We have plenty of money coming round; there is a good balance at the bank; and I'm sure, for our position, we do not spend much."

"I am the best judge of that. I am determined

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to keep expenses down. Let us get this mortgage paid off and then I'll not be so tight."

Bertram was about to make an angry reply; but, remembering that Roger was his father's brother, he pocketed the money, turned on his heel, and left the office without a word. This vexed his uncle more than a sharp answer would have done.

"Confound him," he muttered. "I shall have to give him a good clout on the head, one of these days."

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A few days afterwards Bertram had a visit from his cousin, Percy Diamond. Percy was an Oxford undergraduate, who had been first ploughed and then rusticated, and was now enjoying a spell of idleness at home. His talk was chiefly about dogs and horses. He kept a betting-book, and was never so happy as when chatting with a groom or flirting with a barmaid. He came to tell Bertram that they were going to try some young hounds the next day.

"It's not a regular 'fix,' you know—too soon for that yet. Tom Little wants to train his young

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hounds a bit—that is all. I don't expect much sport; but it will be good fun for all that. Will you come?"

"Yes, I'll come," said Bertram eagerly. "I was trying that Sangrado colt only yesterday. He offers to jump very well, and has a good turn of speed too. When are you going?"

"Tom will be passing the Layrock on Brockholes Moor about eight. Will that suit you?"

"Of course it will. I'll meet you there." There were always a brood mare or two and a few well-bred horses at Crow Nest; yet, although before Bertram went to Germany he had sometimes ridden with the Carrington Harriers—when they were in the neighbourhood—this was the first time since his father's death that he had gone off for a whole day and without telling his uncle. But he was in a reckless mood, and a condition of simmering revolt against the yoke Roger was trying to impose upon him.

As Percy Diamond anticipated, they had good fun if little sport. Brockholes Moor was a wild stone-wall country of deep sandy lanes and rushy

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pastures. Only one hare was found, and that the hounds "chopped" before she had gone three fields. They also "chopped" a wretched cat, which was prowling about after field mice; and several of the young hounds chased a sheep, an offence for which they received such exemplary punishment that the cry of "ware sheep" could hardly fail to be a terror to them as long as they lived. But the great event of the day was an exhilarating burst of fifteen minutes after a cur dog, and if the poor little brute had not, in his agony, taken refuge in a drain, he would of a certainty have been "chopped" too. Then there were young horses and young riders in the field, as well as young hounds, and some of the former gave their riders considerable trouble and onlookers much amusement.

As for the Sangrado colt, though he rushed his fences too much, and, like all young hunters, jumped a good deal higher than he need have done, he proved himself an excellent performer across country, and Bertram was well satisfied with his mount.

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"He shapes uncommonly well," said Percy, as they rode homeward together, "I never saw anything better jumped in my life than that last cop- he did it as cleverly, on and off, as Tom Little's mare, and she is as nimble as a cat. You'll come out often this season, Bertram?"

"I don't know. I am not sure that my uncle will let me."

Percy smiled scornfully.

"Why, what has he to do with it?"

"He is the acting trustee, you know, and very tight about money. And then he is always wanting me to help him with his calculations, and cash keeping, and that."

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"I understand. He lives like a common workman and toils like a galley slave, and wants you to do the same. But I'd see him hanged first, if I were you."

"But what would you do?"

"Why, to begin with, I'd only go to the counting-house when it suited me. Let him do his confounded calculations for himself. He's paid for

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it, I suppose. And as for money, you can get money fast enough."

"How would you get it?" asked Bertram in some surprise. Owing probably to the defects of his German training, he was not as familiar with methods of wind raising as the Oxford undergraduate.

"How would I get it? Why, Bertram, what a simpleton you are! The estate is yours, is it not? There's more than a hundred thousand coming to you, my governor says. You are nearly twenty-one, and then you'll be able to raise as much as you like on your expectations. I'll find you a fellow who'll lend you anything you like in reason, and all in coin too, no sherry or jewellery or that sort of nonsense."

"No, Percy. I promised my father the day before he died that I would never run into debt, and I mean to keep my word."

"Oh!" returned the other with an amused smile, "if that is the line you mean to take I don't think I can give you a lead. You won't

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hold to that resolution long, I'm thinking. I wonder how often I have promised my father not to run into debt."

"And have you done?"

"Bather. To a tune that would make the governor's hair stand on end if he only knew. That's between ourselves, you know. Well, if you change your mind you have only to speak and I'll introduce you to Lucas. He'll let you have a few hundred any time, and glad to do it."

When Bertram rode into the stableyard at Crow Nest, he was met by Tim Bolland, the carter- groom, a brown-faced, black-whiskered, honest- looking fellow, who was as great a favourite with him as he had been with his father.

"Your uncle wor up this morning," he said, "in a mad hig (towering passion), wanting to know wheer you wor; and when I towd him as you had gone a hunting, he went on hoeful, and welly swore hissel black i' th' face. And he said as if I ever leet you tak' a hoss out o' th' stable ageean, bout his leeve, he'd bag (discharge) me theer and then."

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"And what did you say, Tim? " asked Bertram quietly, though with heightened colour.

"What could I say? It's a case o' porridge. I've a wife and five childer, you know, and three on 'em works at Wellsprings. I said as I'd do as he towd me."

"You did quite right, Tim. It won't do for you to suffer on my account. My uncle is in power, you know."

"We all know that, to our sorrow, d—n him.

By gum, if it warn't for th' wife and childer—," said Tim, with a significant shake of his brawny fist. "But I'll tell you what, Mr. Bertram, whenever you want th' cowl just tip me a wink, and I'll get out o' th' road, and you can tak' him but my knowing, you know. Your uncle does not expect me to stand at th' stable-door day and

neet, I reckon?"

"Nay, Tim; I don't think I should like to do that. I'm not going to act as if I were afraid of my uncle. Never mind, we shall see."

When Bertram had changed his breeches and boots for more suitable attire, he joined his sister

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and Mrs. Whalley at tea; but he was silent and distraught, and it was plain to see that he had something on his mind.

"What is the matter, you dear old Bertie?" said Alice sidling up to him and putting her hand in his. "You look as if something dreadful had happened. Have you seen a ghost out hunting?"

"Nothing; at any rate nothing worth mentioning," returned Bertram, with assumed indifference. "As soon as I can find a pony to suit you, we will go out hunting together."

"Oh, how nice that would be!" exclaimed the girl, clapping her hands gleefully. "When will you buy it? I asked uncle one day and he said he could not afford it, though poor papa used to say I should have one when I was old enough to ride; and I am sure I am old enough now. Don't you think so, Mrs. Whalley?"

"The pony is only a diversion, I think, Alice," returned Mrs. Whalley, with a curious, yet kindly glance at Bertram. "I fear something has occurred to annoy your brother, and he does not like to tell us what it is. I don't want to intrude on your

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confidence, my dear Bertie, but when we are in trouble it is often a great relief to talk to a friend; and you need no assurance, I think, that I am your friend."

Bertram, who liked Mrs. Whalley, and had confidence in her judgment, required no further soliciting. He told her what had happened and how his uncle was treating him.

"I am very sorry to hear this," said Mrs. Whalley when he had finished. "If you two cannot agree, it will be bad. Your uncle means well, I think, he slaves at the business as if his life depended on it; but he is greatly lacking, both in temper and discretion; still, Bertie, he is your uncle—put in the position he occupies by your father—and I think it is your duty to be as patient as possible, and bear with him as long as you can."

"I think so too, Mrs. Whalley; at any rate, I have thought so; but you don't know how provoking he can be. The property is mine and Alice's, not his; yet he acts as if it belonged altogether to him, and treats me worse than a hired servant. Just fancy his telling Tim not to let me take a horse

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out of the stable without his leave; it's a downright insult. Besides, that Sangrado colt is doubly mine. My father always said that if he turned out well he should be for my riding. If it were only for a few months longer, for a year even, I might put up with it. But to go on in this way for years! No, I don't think I could stand that, Mrs. Whalley, and I don't think it is my duty to stand it. I would rather leave Crow Nest altogether and seek my fortune in Australia or somewhere."

"Oh, you must not do that, Bertie, and I don't think you will need. There is a better way. Your uncle is not the only trustee. Why not appeal from him to Mr. Skinner and Mr. Digit?"

Bertram shook his head.

"I don't like telling tales," he said. "It looks soft."

"Not at all. You don't tell tales. Your uncle treats you in a way you do not think fair. You ask his co-trustees if it is within his right to do so, that is all. Take my advice, now, and see Mr. Skinner to-morrow."

"I don't know, Mrs. Whalley, I am not sure

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that it would be quite jannock—together the thing, you know. I'll try to bear it a bit longer. My uncle will, perhaps, be in a better humour tomorrow."

"I hope so, for your sake, my dear Bertie; but if he is not, take my advice and speak to Mr. Skinner at once. It will be better than quarrelling.'

Mrs. Whalley, who had been greatly befriended by Ralph Norbreck, took a motherly interest in his son and cherished Alice as the apple of her eye. It had been her ill-fortune, though she could never be brought to regard it in that light, to make a love marriage with a consumptive curate. He had a stipend of a hundred and fifty pounds a year, she a fortune which brought in fifty more, and they thought, poor souls, that with care, they could live on their united incomes, if not luxuriantly at any rate comfortably. And for a year or two they did. But when three or four children were born to them in rapid succession, all bearing in their frail bodies the seeds of consumption, it became hard work to make both ends meet. When her husband fell ill and lost his curacy, Mrs.

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Whalley could not make them meet at all. Friends helped her a little, and after her husband's death she started a boarding-school at Carrington. Then all her children died,

and Ralph Norbreck, who wanted somebody to take care of his house, and could not bear the idea of Alice going to school, invited Mrs. Whalley to come to Crow Nest and be his housekeeper, and the governess of the child whose guardian she had now virtually become.

Although Mrs. Whalley had reached middle age, and her hair was streaked with gray, and her sweet grave face bore traces of sorrow and suffering, she was still a good-looking woman; and there were those who said that, if Ralph had lived, she might have become the second Mrs. Norbreck.

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#### CHAPTER XIV CHANGES

Bertram's hope was disappointed. He did not find his uncle in a better humour.

"You went a hunting yesterday?" said Roger with a snarl, when they met next morning at Wellsprings.

"You can hardly call it hunting. However it comes almost to the same thing. I went out with the young hounds."

"I care not whether they are old or young. You went off without saying owt, and I wanted you here—that's enough for me. And that cowt—I'll have no skylarking with that cowt. He's worth eighty guineas, they tell me, and if you lame him he'll be ruined. I told Tim as you was

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not to take him out again without my leave, as maybe you have heard."

"I have, and I don't think it was very nice of you, uncle."

"That's very likely; but I mean to do my duty, whatever you think."

"You talk as if everything belonged to you," returned Bertram quietly, a quietness, however, which it cost him a great effort to maintain.

"So it does till your sister gets twenty; and until then I mean to be the master on this ground; and the sooner you make up your mind to it the better."

"Besides," went on the nephew, gulping down his anger, "that colt is mine. My father gave it me."

"Did he?" sneered Roger.

"You surely don't doubt my word, uncle?"

"Well, he never said owt o' th' sort to me."

Bertram, feeling that if the conversation continued there would be a scene, put on his hat and left the office.

"D—n him!" exclaimed Roger, thumping his

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fist on the table before which he sat. "I'll put a stop to this nonsense—and soon, too. He thinks the cowt is his, does he? We'll soon see."

As Bertram went up to his dinner he met Tim Bolland.

"Han yo' yerd?" asked the groom in a whisper.

"Heard what, Tim?"

"As yer uncle is going to sell th' Sangrado cowt. He sent little Billy o'er to Carrington this morning to tell Snaffle to look in th' fost time he passes this way; and, as it is Horncastle fair next week, that'll ten to one be to-morrow."

Snaffle was a horse dealer.

This decided Bertram. At dinner he told Mrs. Whalley that he meant to see Mr. Skinner that afternoon.

"It's the best thing you can do," she said. "I really cannot understand why your uncle should act in such a way. He used to seem so quiet, and was always so submissive to your father. It must be that power is spoiling him. The best of servants sometimes make the worst of masters."

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Bertram found Mr. Skinner—a pale, delicate-looking man, with a high forehead and an intellectual face—in his office, and told his tale.

"Your uncle is too zealous," said the lawyer, "and over zeal is apt to impair the judgment. How much money, about, do you take for the house and yourself?"

Bertram told him.

"Dear me, that is not much. I wish I could keep house on as little, and you are better off than I am. It is very well to be careful; but you are the heir to a considerable estate, and have a right to a handsome allowance. Your uncle has to be here to-morrow to sign some leases; I will speak to him."

"And will you speak to him at the same time about the Sangrado colt?"

"You want to keep the horse, I suppose?"

"Very much."

"All right. I think you may make your mind easy on that score."

"And the pony for Alice?"

"Well, I think the Trust may afford a pony for

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Miss Norbreck," said the lawyer with a smile. "But don't pay too much, or we shall have your uncle finding fault."

Bertram was going away.

"One minute," said Mr. Skinner. "I have put all the legal business of the Trust into the hands of our chief clerk, John Rooke. He is quite competent, and I have the utmost confidence in him. My health is so precarious that I must lighten my work in every possible way. I shall of course always be happy to see you on any personal matter as usual. Ah, here comes the man himself," and as he spoke the door opened, and Mr. Rooke entered the room.

"I was telling Mr. Bertram, John, of the arrangement we had made; that I have given over to you the management of the Norbreck Trust."

Though they had seen each other before, both regarded this as a formal introduction, and Rooke bowed to Bertram, and as Bertram bowed to Rooke, he looked at the chief clerk as he had never looked at him before.

John Rooke was young—perhaps seven-and- twenty—and by no means ill-looking. If his very

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aquiline nose gave him too much the air of a bird of prey, and his lips were too thin, and his jaws too square, these drawbacks were more than redeemed by the rustic freshness of his complexion, a handsome black moustache, a pleasant smile, and great suavity of manner.

*The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. Vol. 1 (1883)*

He said the affairs of the Trust should always have his best attention, and he hoped that his management of the legal business would give satisfaction to Mr. Norbreck and Mr. Bertram.

Bertram said that so far as he was concerned, he had not a doubt of it, shook hands with master and man, and returned to Crow Nest with a mind more at ease.

Roger went to Carrington to sign the leases, and when he returned it was plain to see that he had passed a bad quarter of an hour with his co-trustee. He did not say much, and what he did say was of the curtest j but if angry looks were lightning Bertram would have been annihilated.

When Saturday came, and the pay was over, Roger, instead of asking his nephew, as usual, how much money he wanted, threw a bag of gold on the

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table before him with the words, "There, d—n you! Help yourself."

This was rather startling; and Bertram's first impulse was to pay his uncle back in his own coin, and throw the bag at his head; but by a great effort of will he restrained himself, counted out the money he wanted, wrote a receipt on a slip of paper, and left the office without answering a word. An hour later he was "schooling" the Sangrado colt in the Crow Nest pastures—Alice and Miss Whalley looking on admiringly. The Monday following he went out with the Carrington Harriers—one of the effects of his uncle's interview with Mr. Skinner being the withdrawal of the order against Bertram riding to hounds.

Roger was, in truth, very sore about his nephew complaining to Mr. Skinner, and the check was all the more felt as he was just beginning to gain confidence in himself and enjoy the sweets of office. He did not dislike his nephew, but he really thought the lad required a tight hand, and he looked upon the appeal to his co-trustee as an act of flat rebellion; his theory being that, as he had

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undertaken to be a father to Bertram, the latter owed him the obedience of a son.

He propounded this theory to his wife when he told her what had passed between his colleague and himself. She quite agreed with him.

"It's a right-down shame' she exclaimed. "I never thought Bertram would have gone complaining and telling tales like a babby."

"And me as wants nothing but his good; for the more expense is kept down the better it'll be for him."

"Of course, anybody can see that. And what's the use of being a hacting trustee, I should like to know, if you cannot aot as you lide."

"That's just what I said to Mr. Skinner, or what amounts to the same thing, if not in them very words. But he said as all had equal power, and all must work together, and that I am only the agent for carrying out our joint decisions. And as Digit will be sure to say as he says, I was like to give in. But I mean to let Bertram see what I think of his conduct all the same. They cannot stop my doing that, anyhow. Skinner looks most terrible ill; if he lives long he will cheat me."

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Roger was not cheated. Little more than a year after his interview with Bertram the lawyer had a severe epileptic fit; which in the course of a few months was followed by a second and a third, and the third, as it nearly always does, proved fatal.

His death made no difference in the relations of Bertram with his uncle. The latter continued to "let him see" in various ways how much he disapproved of his



conduct, manifestations of which the young fellow grew so impatient that it required all Mrs. Whalley's influence to prevent an open rupture.

This was the condition of things when there came news one day that Mr. Digit had gone over to the majority. A man of full habit and a free liver, he had died suddenly of apoplexy.

Robert Norbreck thus became the sole trustee of the Norbreck property.

This was a contingency that Ralph, with all his care and forethought, had not foreseen. Although he had not sounded all the depths of his brother's character he gauged too well the measure of his capacity to entrust him with the exclusive management

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of his affairs, or confide to him the choice of his co-trustees. He knew Roger's proneness to seek advice, and felt assured that, in all important matters, he would be guided by Skinner and Digit; and, if they had lived, probably all would have been well.

The mistake Ralph made was in selecting as his executors two men whose tenure of life was palpably precarious, and in not giving to his son a voice in the choice of their successors. It was one of those blunders which are worse than a crime, in the sense that they may lead to more trouble and confusion than actual wrong-doing.

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## CHAPTER XV

### THE NEW TRUSTEE

"Well, you'll be th' master now, I reckon," observed Mrs. Roger to her husband, when she heard of Digit's death.

**The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust*. Vol. 1 (1883)**

"I think so," returned Roger complacently, as he sat before the fire, working his hands industriously to and fro on his thighs, a way he had when well pleased. "I certainly think so, and unless I'm mistaken Bertram thinks so too. Skinner's death made him down, and now he's downer than ever."

"He's feared as a stop will be put to his goings on, that's it. As for Mr. Digit I wish him no ill, and I 'ope he's 'appy. But I cannot say as I had much respect for him. I don't think,

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you know, as he always treated you as he should ha' done, and he always sided with Skinner. But I doubt it was to his hurt, poor man. For if you'll take notice, Roger, them as goes against us doesn't prosper much. Skinner and Digit went against us, and they're both gone dead. And there's that spinner—what's his name—Codger, as came here one night after his wage, and as you turned, out of th' house—him as summoned you for bagging him without notice, and got a month's wage. Well, Betty o' Jeff's told me only this morning—she called to ask if I thought you could find a job for her little Ted—she told me as Codger is out o' work yet, and as none o' th' childer is owd enough to go to th' factory, and th' wife is near her downlying; they're fair clemming."

Mrs. Norbreck made no pretences to piety. She did not attend a place of worship once in a twelvemonth; but in her young days she had been a chapel goer, and picked up a few notions of theology, and it gave her a pleasing sense of superiority to her neighbours to think that Providence

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kept a special watch over her and her family and confounded their enemies.

**The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust*. Vol. 1 (1883)**

"Serve Codger right," said her husband spitefully. "He behaved right badly, and what made it worse Bertram sided with him—actually wanted me to take him on again. I'd see Codger blazing first."

"But you'll put Bertram in his proper place now, I hope."

"I mean to try."

"Try! You must do it. There's nobody to say you nay now, is there?"

"Not as I know of," returned Roger, whose confidence the recollection of previous rebuffs was beginning somewhat to impair. "But there is so many quips and cranks in wills, as one can never be cocksure about owt. Just reach it here off my desk, and I'll see what it says."

The "it" meant his brother's will.

"It says here," he continued, after he had found the clause which was occupying his thoughts, "that, in the event of two of the trustees dying, the surviving trustee may appoint one or two fit

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and proper persons, in the place of one or both of the aforesaid trustees deceased."

"'May' not 'must;' then you can please yourself."

"Ay, it's 'may' plain enough; *m, a, y*, may. But (dubiously) this is only a copy, you know; it's happen 'must' in the original."

"Not it," responded Mrs. Norbreck impetuously; "lawyers does not make mistakes in copying them things. I do hope, Roger, as you're not going to be chicken-hearted. If you don't stand on your rights and put a stop to Bertram's extravagance there'll never be nowt for none of us, except the trifle as you can save out of your salary."

**The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust*. Vol. 1 (1883)**

"Oh, I'll stand on my rights, Nancy, you may be sure of that," returned Roger sharply, for the reproach implied in his wife's remark rather nettled him; "only I don't want another rap on the knuckles. I think I had better not speak to Rooke before I say owt to Bertram."

"Just as you like. For my part I don't much believe in your Mr. Rooke. I wouldn't give a pin to choose between him and Flint, and you know what

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a character he bears. Lawyers is all alike, in my opinion. They think of nowt but setting folks by th' ears and feathering their own nests."

"Well, you are wrong about Rooke, anyhow. He's a right decent chap, lawyer or no lawyer. I like him a vast sight better than Skinner. He's civiler by hoaf, and I can ask him th' time of day without fearing as he'll charge six and eightpence for his answer."

"I see what it is," said the lady scornfully; "he's got under your buttons, Roger; and when anybody has got under your buttons all as they say or they do it's law."

"And what's more," resumed Roger, without heeding his wife's interruption, "Rooke is getting on; he'll be one of th' first men in Carrington before long—mark me if he is not."

Roger was right as to Rooke's present prosperity, whatever he may have been as touching his future greatness. On Mr. Skinner's death Mr. Flint had taken the managing clerk into partnership, and the firm was now Skinner, Flint, and Rooke, the name of Skinner still figuring in the

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firm because the senior partner's widow retained an interest in the business.

This was a great rise for John Rooke, and an equally great, if not a greater rise, was his marriage with a lady who, in addition to other property, owned a whole square in the town of Carrington. Her father had been a furniture broker and valuer, and being both prudent and persevering he accumulated a fair fortune, part whereof he devoted to the building of a square of shops and houses, on which he conferred his own somewhat singular name of Mouse. Not a name to be very proud of perhaps, but Dicky Maas, as his humbler neighbours called him, saw so little reason to be ashamed of his patronymic that he left it as a legacy to his native town. But he left his native town nothing else, all his estate being bequeathed to his daughter Mary. She deserved it, for she had been his principal assistant, and spent her youth in an atmosphere of dust, varnish, feathers, flocks, and frippery, helping to make the fortune which she was destined to inherit.

Skinner and Flint were Mr. Mouse's legal

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advisers, and when he died they proved his will, wound up his affairs, and disposed of his business; for Miss Mary, being heartily sick of old furniture and secondhand bedding, had resolved to sell the shop and retire into private life. All this led to frequent interviews with Mr. Booke, both in his own office and at her house, and as he was affable by instinct, good-looking, and naturally paid more than usual attention to a lady client who had just come into a fortune, it is perhaps not very surprising that he won Mary Mouse's heart. Though almost, if not quite thirty years old, she had never loved before; but her love, when it did come, was as ardent as that of a Juliet of seventeen, and not having been brought up with much respect for the proprieties she made no attempt to hide her feelings from the object of her passion.

It is not in the nature of things that law should be very responsive to love, and there is reason to suppose that the managing clerk was neither much smitten with poor Mary's charms, nor deeply affected by her evident preference for his. She had, in truth,

few charms to boast of. Her features

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though honest and good-natured, were neither beautiful nor striking. Her accomplishments were limited to an acquaintance with the three r's, and though she had a shrewd knowledge of arithmetic and the value of secondhand furniture, her orthography left something to be desired. But she had an abundance of common sense and a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, and John Rooke (who rarely did things by impulse), after weighing the matter well over in his mind, made her an offer of his hand and heart.

Mary accepted the offer with effusion, and six months after Dicky Maas's death, Mr. Rooke became the owner of Mouse Square, and richer by twenty thousand pounds, for Mary's confidence in her future husband was so implicit that she would not hear of a settlement. If she could trust herself to him, she said, she could trust her fortune, and would do so, even if it were ten times as much.

Their marriage was the occasion of many jokes and a multitude of bad puns. It was said that Mary had been rooked out of her fortune—that rooks were beginning to catch mice—that John

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Rooke had made as much money in one day as old Dicky Maas had made in all his life—that a lawyer had married Mouse Square—and more of the same sort.

But the object of these sarcasms recked little of the pleasantries of their neighbours. Mary had got a husband on whom she doted, John an accession of fortune which he found extremely useful; and both, for the time at least, were well satisfied with

the world and themselves.

A day or two after Roger Norbreck's conversation with his wife he took occasion to inquire of Rooke, if he was under any obligation to appoint successors to his deceased colleagues.

"No, I don't think you are exactly under an obligation to appoint other trustees," said the lawyer, after carefully reading the clause in Ralph Norbreck's will bearing on the point. "At the same time, I am strongly of opinion that you should appoint at least one friend to act with you."

"Why?" said Roger, with a disappointed look. He had expected a different answer.

"Because it would diminish your responsibility.

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You would have somebody to advise with, and if anything should go wrong your position would be so much stronger."

"That's true; it is a great responsibility."

"A very great one. Not only so; but if anything were to happen to you the estate would have to be administered by the Court of Chancery, and that would be both expensive and unpleasant. And there is another consideration; your nephew might not like to have the trust in the hands of a single trustee."

"My nephew! Why, what has he to do with it? It's me as has the appointment of one or more trustees to succeed them as is dead."

"Of course it is; but Mr. Bertram Norbreck is the principal beneficiary, and if he were dissatisfied he might petition the Chancellor of the Palatinate Court to appoint additional trustees, or even to administer the trust through the officials of the court."

"Why, that would be putting it into Chancery," observed Roger, greatly dismayed. In his idea, putting a property into Chancery was like putting it

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into a bottomless pit; the mere suggestion of such a calamity made him break into a cold sweat.

"Of course it would," returned the lawyer, with a smile; "but it is only a supposition—your nephew would never do anything so foolish."

"I am not so sure of that. There is no telling how foolish young fellows can be when they try, and Bertram is most terribly headstrong. I must appoint somebody—that is quite clear—and soon. Who would you advise me to appoint, Mr. Rooke?"

"Now you are going beyond me," replied the other pleasantly. "I can advise you on the legal bearings of the case; but the selection of a co-trustee is a matter personal to yourself. You should have a man of position—the Norbreck trust is an important one—if possible a business man, with whom you think you can cordially act, and who is willing to act. There, I fear, you will find some difficulty, for no office is more thankless than a trusteeship, and the responsibility is one which few men are willing to assume."

"That is quite true; and, to tell the honest truth, I really don't know who to ask," said Roger,

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who was now as wishful to have a colleague as he had previously been not to have one, "unless you— Would you let me appoint you, Mr. Rooke? You'd do me a great kindness if you would."



**The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust*. Vol. 1 (1883)**

"I really! I don't think I could, Mr. Norbreck I really never thought," exclaimed the lawyer seemingly quite taken back by the suddenness of the proposal. "I never thought you would think of me. It's a very serious matter, you know, being a trustee; and I was saying only the other day that I would never accept a trusteeship again—you have no idea how many troublesome matters I have in hand."

"But to oblige me," implored Roger.

"Well, if you put it in that way, you know."

"I do put it in that way. For the sake of the Trust, then, I should like you to act with me. There is nobody I could like better, or as would do better; and we are your clients, you know, and my brother was a good client of yours many a year."

"There's a good deal in what you say, Mr. Norbreck, a good deal," said the lawyer thoughtfully.

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"I confess there is. You have been faithful clients of the office a long time, and it would be ungrateful to refuse your request. I agree."

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Rooke," exclaimed Roger, rising from his chair and warmly shaking John's hand. "You have relieved my mind of a great load. When shall I sign the appointment?"

"Whenever you like."

"The sooner the better, so far as I am concerned."

"Very well. How long are you staying in town—a couple of hours?"

"Quite. I have a good lot of errands to do."

"Call the last thing before you go home then, and the document shall be ready for your signature."

**The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust*. Vol. 1 (1883)**

As the door closed behind Roger Norbreck, John Rooke leaned back in his chair, a smile broke over his rosy face, and his strong white teeth gleamed through his black moustache.

"That is a good stroke," he murmured. "It will keep the Norbreck Trust in the office, and a Trust like that, with an idiot like my friend

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Roger at the head of it, may develop all sorts of possibilities"

And then, after calling a clerk and giving directions for drawing the deed of appointment, he refreshed his memory by a careful reperusal of Ralph Norbreck's will.

Three hours later Roger returned to the office and executed the deed.

"There's one thing I wanted to mention," he observed to his co-trustee after the document had been duly signed and attested. "It's about my nephew."

"What about him, pray?" asked Rooke. "Nothing wrong, I hope. I always thought him a very fine young fellow."

"A good deal too fine, for my liking. He spends too much money; goes a hunting a good deal too often, and does not stick to business as he should do, and as his father would have liked him to do."

"Indeed, I am very sorry to hear that," said Rooke, sympathetically. "What do you think is best to be done?"

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"Reduce his allowance, or stop it altogether; then he could not go off hunting

and that."

"That would be rather a strong measure, don't you think? We must mind what we are doing, you know. If I remember rightly, Mr. Skinner and Mr. Digit fixed the amount of Mr. Bertram's allowance, and if we were to get across with him he might throw the Trust into Chancery."

Roger paled and his lips twitched convulsively.

"Chancery again," he exclaimed. "Why, I thought making you a trustee would stop any nonsense of that sort—that is what I did it for."

"My being trustee renders such a contingency less probable, of course," returned Rooke, with dignity, "but no conceivable precaution can render it impossible. But leave it to me, my dear sir, leave it to me. I'll talk to your nephew. I'll manage him."

"I wish you would," said Roger, somewhat reassured. "The Trust is well off, I know; but it is our duty to be careful all the same, and Bertram cares no more about money than if it came down the chimney."

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"I am afraid it is only too true, Mr. Norbreck. Well, if we cannot put old heads on young shoulders we may perhaps succeed in convincing Mr. Bertram that money does not come down chimneys. I must have a serious talk with the young gentleman. By- the-bye, I have just been looking over your brother's will, and I perceive—what I had not previously noticed—that you have a contingent interest in the estate. I congratulate you, my dear sir. I hope it will make you something handsome."

"Not much, I am afraid," replied Roger, with a gloomy shake of the head. "Trade is bad and expense is most terrible heavy."

"Oh, we have plenty of time before us; trade will mend, and you will make twenty thousand pounds out of the Norbreck Trust, take my word for it."

**The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust*. Vol. 1 (1883)**

The compliment pleased Roger, and he walked home (it was a fine night, and he thought he might as well save the railway fare) well satisfied with what he had done. He did not see how he could have done better—he had secured a clever and complaisant colleague, and avoided the pitfall of

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Chancery. There was only one alloy to his satisfaction—he feared that his wife might not view the matter in exactly the same light; still Nancy was a woman of sense, and he hoped that, when he explained all to her, she would be of opinion that he had acted for the best.

But, as so often happens in this world, the fear was realised, the hope disappointed.

When he told her, as they sat at tea, what he had done, she looked at him aghast; and then, with a thump on the table that overturned the teapot, and made the cups and saucers dance as if they were possessed, she shouted: "Well, I never! " and went on repeating "Well, I never," until Roger asked her sharply "What the dickens she meant?"

"Well, to tell the plain truth, Roger, I never thought you were such a goose. Why, you said you meant to be t' master, and instead of that you have gone and taken a partner as will tend to one be your master. Mr. Skinner and Mr. Digit might as well never have died. It's a fair flying in the face of Providence, I call it."

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"Nonsense, Nancy, it will not make a bit of difference, I tell you. My responsibility will be less, and I shall be master all the same. Rooke will do whatever I want him."

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"Not he, Roger. It is you as will have to do what he likes. You've only to look at his face to see that. Why, he has a high like a hoke, and a nose like a howl."

Scarcely were the words uttered when a howl was heard upstairs. Mrs. Norbreck's thump on the table had wakened her baby. She hurried from the room, and the angry reply that rose to her husband's lips remained unspoken.

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**CHAPTER XVI**

ALAN CUERDALE

On the same evening Bertram sat alone in the little breakfast room at Crow Nest, puffing at a cigar and poring over a book. The book was "Humboldt's Travels in South America," in French, and on the table near him lay another book—an ancient history of "Columbus's Discovery of Salvador," illustrated with some amazing woodcuts, which he had fished up from the depths of his father's library.

He was deep in the description of the famous Guachero Cave of Caripe when he was disturbed by the creaking of the door, followed by the appearance of a bright face—surrounded by a dark mass of wavy hair—a face, as yet, the dearest to him in all the world.

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"Here's Alan Cuerdale, Bertie," announced the fair intruder.

"Let him come in," was the reply.

"You can come in, Alan," said Alice in a slightly patronising voice to somebody outside, whereupon there entered, rather slowly and diffidently, a young man with some books under his arm.

The new-comer appeared to be a year or two older than Bertram, and was nearly

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as tall. He wore a velveteen coat, corduroy trousers, a check shirt and rather clumsy shoes, and his hands, albeit quite clean, were large, brown and rough. Exposure to sun and air had dyed his face a healthy red, and though his features were too irregular to be handsome, his broad white forehead, over which clustered a mass of auburn curls, and his large deep blue eyes, were more than sufficient to redeem them from plainness, and give him a look at once attractive and striking.

"Glad to see you, Alan," said Bertram, as he shook the lad warmly by the hand and offered him a chair. "How's the German going on, eh?"

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"Middling weel, I think. I'm beginning to get more into th' heart of it. See here—this is what I have written," opening an exercise book.

"I suppose I am *de trop*," interrupted Alice saucily; "that means one too many, Alan, and you would like me to go."

"I am sure I don't want you to go, Miss Alice. I would liefer you stayed a good deal," returned Alan, with an admiring glance at the young girl.

"Thank you very much," said Alice laughing, "but I was asking my brother—not you."

Alan's countenance fell, and he bent thoughtfully over one of his books.

"Yes, I think you had better go to Mrs. Whalley. I'm afraid if you were to stay here we should get precious little work done. And look here, you may tell Dorothy that we will have a bit of supper; let me see, yes, at nine o'clock. Now, Alan."

A silence of several minutes followed.

"You are getting on, my boy. This exercise is really very well done. It is one thing to translate from German into English; it is something quite

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different to do the other thing. See, I have marked the mistakes. I should advise you to write the exercises out fair, with the mistakes corrected. Have you learnt anything by heart this time?"

"Ay, have I; nearly all the third act of 'Nathan der Weise.'"

"Why, what a fellow you are, Alan; and you are learning Greek and Latin, and I don't know what besides. I met Mr. Horbury the other day, and he says your knowledge of Greek is really wonderful, considering your opportunities. I don't know how you manage it?"

"Well, I think cart-driving is favourable to learning, Mr. Bertram. I have always a book or two i' my cart-box, and as I go along th' road, and there is nowt particular stirring, I do my tasks— th' open air is my study. When I cannot be looking at a book I am nearly always thinking of what I have read, and saying it o'er in my head. I got Nathan der Weise' off in that way as I went yesterday to Clitheroe for lime; and after milking

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time, and when the beasts have got their licking, especially in winter time, I can often do an hour or two's writing before I go to bed."

"And what do you think of the 'Parable of the Ring?'"

"Oh, isn't it fine?" exclaimed Alan enthusiastically. "It was like a new light to me. And it's true. All as are upright in heart, and strive to act honestly, has got the true ring, whatever may be their creed, and will find favour in the sight of God—that's what

it means. Isn't that so, Mr. Bertram?"

"Yes, I think that's about it, Alan; but Mr. Horwell wouldn't say so."

"No, he wouldn't that. He did not seem much to like it when I told him you were learning me German; he said German writers were a pestilent set; and if I said owt o' th' sort to my mother, I almost think she'd turn me out o' th' house. Why, she cried one day because I sided with th' open communionists—they as would admit other Christians to the Lord's Supper, you know,

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whether they had been baptized or not. Did I tell you what she did with that Shakspeare as you lent me?"

"No; what did she do?"

"Well, there's rather queer things here and there in Shakspeare, you know, and one day, when I chanced to leave it on th' kitchen table, she looked at it, and lighting on something as did not quite please her, she threw th' book out o' th' window, and said as if she ever caught me with Shakspeare again she'd shake me. But it was no worse. I found it i' th' field, and now I keep it in my cart-box."

"That cart-box is a regular circulating library for you," said Bertram, laughing at his friend's anecdote. "By the way, are there any other books you would like to have, Alan? You are quite welcome, you know."

Alan rose from his chair and went to the bookcase.

"I think I should like to read this," he said, taking from one of the shelves a copy of "Don Quixote;" "it is a book I have often heard about."

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"You will like it. It is amusing, and something more. I think Cervantes must have been almost as wise a man as Lessing. Take 'Gil Blas' too, if you like; it is in the same shelf. But I like the old Don best. He was a real gentleman, in spite of his craze; and Gil Blas of Santillane was a particularly unscrupulous, if very amusing, vagabond."

"Thank you, Mr. Bertram. I'll take 'Gil Blas' another time. My cart-box will be about full now, and as 'Gil Blas' is such a rogue, my mother might object to give him house-room. I should think now" (turning over the pages of "Don Quixote") "as a book like this would read a good deal better in the original?"

"Of course it would; but you require to know Spanish well to appreciate 'Don Quixote.'"

"But you do know Spanish?"

"A little. I learnt it from a fellow at Rothenberg's. He came from Santa Fe de Bogota—born of German parents, though—and was very anxious to learn English, so I taught it him, and he taught me Spanish—at any rate

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enough to read a bit and get on with in Spanish speaking countries. You should have heard the stories Kellermann—that was his name—used to tell about Central and South America. I'd give—I don't know what I would not give—to go there, Alan."

"I wish you would go and take me with you," said the other, earnestly. "I've never been further than Manchester, and th' salt water, all my life."

"No chance of that just now, Alan, my lad," laughed Bertram. "Fancy how my uncle would look, and, above all what would he say, if I were to propose such a thing and ask him for money for the journey. I'll tell you what I would do, though, if I had come into my property—I would send you to college, Alan. But I say, (looking at his

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watch), it's nearly nine o'clock. Let us read Nathan's speech to Saladin once again; nothing like reading aloud for improving the pronunciation, and yours is still susceptible of improvement."

By the time the parable of the "Lost Ring" had been read a second time supper was announced,

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whereupon Bertram and his rustic and linguistic friend put down their books and went into the dining-room. As they passed through the hall Alan took a brown-paper parcel from an oaken settle, and on entering the dining-room he laid it on a chair.

Mrs. Whalley received the youth with great cordiality. She looked upon him as a prodigy, and prodigies were rare at Crow Nest; and Alice, who was growing fast, and had assumed the long frocks of young ladyhood, greeted him with a nod more condescending than gracious. "Alan Cuerdale is all very well," it seemed to say, "and very clever and that; but he drives a cart and milks cows, his brother is a blacksmith, his sisters go to the factory, and I am Miss Norbreck, of Crow Nest. I must let him see that he comes here by favour. Bertie is really getting too familiar with the young man."

Alan, guessing her thoughts, felt uneasy and abashed; but as the supper went on, and conversation was joined, he became more lively and she less reserved. Mrs. Whalley asked him several

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questions about his studies, but the talk ran mostly on local topics, lapsing at times into gossip.

"Miss Earnsdale has come home, I hear?" observed Mrs. Whalley.

"Has she?" returned Bertram carelessly. "Do you mean Mr. Hugh Earnsdale's daughter?"

"Of course. His eldest daughter is the only one who has the right to be called Miss Earnsdale. He is the head of the family, you know."

"Yes, I know that. I suppose everybody does hereabouts. But I do not know Miss Earnsdale, even by sight. Where has she been?"

"Travelling on the Continent with her father and her cousin, Miss Gladys Earnsdale. She also spent some time, I believe, at a superior school in Paris."

"Miss Earnsdale ought to be *très instruite* (very accomplished) with such an education as she has had," put in Alice. She liked, when Alan was present, to interlard her conversation with scraps of French. He had not yet learnt that language, and it pleased her to show off the one scholarly acquirement which she possessed and he did not.

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"Considering all the pains and expense that have been lavished on her education, it would be I very discreditable to Miss Earnsdale if she were not, as you say, *très instruite*" said Mrs. Whalley, who perceived the drift of her pupil's thoughts. "Yet I doubt whether, with all her advantages, she knows a hundredth part as much as our friend Alan here, whose education has cost his parents next to nothing."

Alice felt the implied rebuke.

"Oh, Alan!" she exclaimed, as if struck by a sudden thought, "my album. You promised to write something in it, you know."

"And so I have done, Miss Norbreck," said Alan, who had been waiting for this

question all the evening. He was too diffident to mention the circumstance unsolicited.

Fetching the parcel from the chair on which he had laid it, he took therefrom a handsome album, a present from Bertram to his sister, and handed it to Miss Norbreck.

Alice opened the book eagerly; she was curious to know what the learned farmer's boy had written.

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"Well, I never!" she exclaimed, as a page of seemingly cabalistic signs, divided into two parts, met her eye. "But it really looks very nice, Alan, and I am sure it is very clever."

One of the parts was headed "The Apostles' Creed in Hebrew;" the other "The Same in Syriac." The penmanship appeared perfect.

"You are honoured, Alice," said Mrs. Whalley, staring at the strange characters, as if by much looking she could make something of them. "It is not every young lady who has Hebrew and Syriac in her album. I had no idea you could write so beautifully, Alan."

"They are well written, are they not?" put in Alice warmly. "Thank you very much, Alan."

Alan seemed greatly gratified.

"I tried to write some verses," said the lad diffidently; "but they did not please me, so I wrote that instead. It is not as difficult as you might think. The Apostles' Creed is not an original composition, you know."

"But fancy having all those queer letters to form," said Alice. "I am sure I cannot tell one

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from the other. And the verses, Alan, I am sure they were very good though you are too modest to say so. When will you write me some poetry?"

"When I can write something worthy of you, Miss Norbreck," replied the lad gravely, and blushing deeply.

"Why, Alan, you are growing quite courtly," said Mrs. Whalley, eyeing him keenly. "We shall have to make you an ambassador, or something of that sort. But are you two not going to have your game of chess?"

"By all means," replied Bertram, "if it is not too late for Alan."

"Not at all," said the latter; "my mother is never uneasy when I am at Crow Nest."

A few minutes afterwards the two youths were bending intently over the chess-board, Alice meanwhile betaking herself to a book, and Mrs. Whalley to her work.

Alan Cuerdale was the son of a small farmer with a large family, a tenant of the Norbreck Trust. Caleb Cuerdale's holding was only about thirty

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acres, for which he paid quite as much as it was worth; and he was in the habit of saying, with perfect truth, that if it were not for a bit of carting and the earnings of his daughters, who wrought as winders at Wellsprings, " he would be hard set to find th' childer i' porridge." His eldest son was learning to be a blacksmith, and Alan, when he was not going about with the cart, helped him on the farm.

The Cuerdales were of the Baptist persuasion and their minister, Mr. Horwell, a man of great erudition, was one day so struck with Alan's quickness in the Sunday

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school that he offered to teach him Greek, in order that he might the better understand the New Testament. The offer was eagerly accepted, and the lad showed so much intelligence and capacity that the minister subsequently taught him Latin, Hebrew, and Syriac. Mr. Horbury wanted him to enter the ministry, but to this Alan did not see his way. He had no vocation for the sacred calling, or, as he himself put it, he did not feel that he was qualified for the pulpit. An indirect offer from a neighbouring

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rector to help him to enter the Church met with a similar response.

Bertram and Alan had long been friends, and when the former returned from Germany he offered to teach him German, an offer of which Alan gladly availed himself. Bertram, moreover, enjoyed his company much more than that of Percy Diamond and his hunting friends, and he always looked forward to his visits with pleasure. As for Alan, the two evenings a week he spent at Crow Nest were little less than foretastes of heaven. He thought Bertram the finest fellow in the world, Mrs. Whalley the kindest lady, and Alice—it was not in the power of words to express his feelings about Alice.

Since Alan had declined to become either a Dissenting minister or a Church parson nobody knew exactly what was to become of him. So far, he had learnt for the pleasure of learning, and rarely gave a thought to his future. He got little encouragement from his family. His mother, who was a very Particular Baptist indeed, distrusted

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all learning that had not a direct relation with Holy Writ; and his father, a careless, easygoing man, thought that in buying Alan a book now and then he did all for him that

duty required.

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## CHAPTER XVII BOOKS AT HOME

"I shall not be back again this afternoon," said Bertram to his uncle, a few days after the latter's visit to Carrington. "Rooke has asked me to dine with him this evening."

"Has he? I thowt he would. He'll ten to one have a bit of news for you. I could tell you what it is if I liked; but it's happen just as weel as he should tell you himself."

The truth was—though he would not for the world have confessed it—that Roger felt that he had not acted quite rightly in appointing another trustee without consulting his nephew, and he was only too glad to let Rooke be the first to inform him of the fact.

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The note containing the invitation to dinner was dated from Murton Hall, and bore a crest—a rook flapping his wings and flying upwards—and a device, *En Avant*.

The lawyer's house lay about a mile on the other side of Carrington, and Bertram drove thither in his new dogcart, the purchase of which, though he had got it a great bargain, had been the occasion of more than one unpleasant passage of words with his uncle.

Carrington nestles at the foot of an almost precipitous wood-crowned height, knows as Keering Hillock, an appellation doubtless derived from the old English viking, Keering, who established his "ton" in the valley, and gave his name to the town. The ground on which it stands is so undulating that you cannot get in or out of it without

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going either up hill or down, and in one part the houses, which are all stone-built, rise above each other in terraces. There is a quaint old square-towered church in a hollow, a new gothic one on a green knoll; and in Ralph Norbreck's time there was an ancient manor house, which, according

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to tradition, stood on the site of a still more ancient abbey, with a park and a rookery, close to the main thoroughfare.

As the factories and the two or three printworks lie mostly in the outskirts, and their chimneys are lofty, the air is comparatively free from smoke. Being, moreover, like the houses, of stone, they do not, even by day, look absolutely hideous, and when lighted up on a winter's night, rising as they do one above another with a shadowy background of hill and moorland, their aspect is cheerful and not unpicturesque.

After passing through the town Bertram had a steep brow to rise, and Smiler, a rare old roadster, which had served the family faithfully for more than half a generation, took the liberty of changing his trot to a walk.

On the right, the road was bordered by a thick belt of woodland that served to hide from the vulgar gaze the park and mansion of Mr. Hugh Earnsdale, and from the valley below rose the smoke of the extensive printworks and factories of Earnsdale Brothers. The brothers were all

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rich and kept up large establishments, but Hugh was by far the richest and lived in the biggest house and the most lordly style. The foundation of their fortunes was laid in a past generation, when every stroke of an engine "spoke gold," and the profit on calico



printing averaged a sovereign a piece. Half the ground on which Carrington stood, and many of its buildings, belonged to the Earnsdales, and they possessed great estates in other parts of the country. Their printworks and factories—conducted on very old-fashioned principles by well-salaried managers and junior partners—had long ceased to yield a profit, and were now kept going solely for the good of the town. It was sometimes said, indeed, that half Carrington lived on the Earnsdales, to which it was retorted that even if it were so, the Earnsdales were only giving back a small portion of that which they had received; for all they possessed was made out of Carrington, and the growth of the town added continually to the value of their property. The Earnsdales figured among the landed gentry, and were on visiting terms with all the squires of the

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county, and Hugh had married a baronet's daughter of ancient family. Except Oliver, the youngest brother, who was suspected of entertaining revolutionary sentiments because he had once given a lecture at the Mechanics' Institution and presided at a meeting of the Bible Society, the Earnsdales kept themselves very much aloof from the townsfolk, and were Tory to the bone.

Mr. Hugh was once asked if there were any Radicals at Yale Printworks.

"I hope not," was his answer, given with much feeling. "I do hope not, and I think not. That would indeed be a sorry return for our carrying on the concern so long at such a heavy loss."

But the Earnsdales acted invariably on the principle of *noblesse oblige*. They were always courteous, their benefactions were numerous and liberal; and, in spite of their pride, the people of Carrington held them in high esteem.

Shortly after passing Earnsdale Park gates, and when he was almost within sight of Murton Hall, Bertram perceived, coming towards him down the hill, a couple of horsewomen, followed at some

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distance by a groom. Both ladies had good looks, and their horses were real beauties. One, a bright little bay with black legs, seemed to be thoroughbred, and was so full of life that he danced, rather than walked, down the road, thereabouts very steep. Bertram admired the steeds even more than the riders.

Just as he reached them a donkey, laden with a pair of empty milk tins, came jingling by, whereupon the little bay capered more than ever, and ended by rearing so high as to be in imminent danger of falling over on his back. Both the girls screamed; and Bertram, without waiting to stop old Smiler, jumped from the drag, ran to the pony, seized the abandoned bridle, and with a single pull brought him down on all fours. The shock unseated the fair rider; but Bertram, who was on the alert, threw his right arm round her waist, and just as the groom came up landed her safely on *terra firma*.

The girl was younger than Bertram had at first supposed, and seemed very grateful for the service he had rendered her. Though pale and evidently rather agitated, she did not lose her self-possession.

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"Thank you very much," she said, "for your timely help. It was a very narrow escape."

"It was indeed," said the other; "and we are very much indebted to this gentleman. Will you kindly tell us, sir, whom we have to thank—I was going to say for saving this young lady's life—at any rate, for saving her from a very serious accident."

"Really," replied Bertram, "thanks are not necessary. I could hardly have done less."

"Still, I should like to know who—"

"My name is Bertram Norbreck."

"Of Crow Nest?"

"Of Crow Nest."

"Thank you. I think I have heard the name before. My father must thank you for this."

Bertram bowed. It seemed to him that this young lady's manner was marked by a certain condescension, and that she was more haughty than beautiful. He did not like her so well as her companion.

"Dare you mount again?" he asked, turning to the latter. "If not, I shall be delighted—"

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"Of course, I dare," she replied, with a proud flash of her large black eyes; "and if you will kindly—"

Bertram offered his hand, and the next moment she was again in the saddle.

"You had better keep close," he said to the groom; "the pony is skittish, and donkeys are not scarce about Carrington."

Then after doffing his hat and receiving a most gracious parting salute from the *équestriennes*, he climbed into his dogcart, and a few minutes later reached the gates of Murton Hall.

It was not much of a Hall, despite Rooke's efforts and expenditure to make it worthy of its rather pretentious designation. People said he had bought the place solely for its name, and he seemed so proud of it—never by any chance dating his private letters from anywhere else, even when they were written at his office—that he was

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dubbed by general consent "Baron of Murton." This rather pleased Rooke. He liked to be called "Baron" even in jest; but when the factory folks (who are as destitute of reverence as the traditional French

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sapper) began to style his residence (as he was wont to call it) "Rooke's Mouse Trap," it was gall and wormwood to him, and caused his excellent wife many a pang.

The lawyer received the young fellow very kindly, and showed him over the place which, though not very extensive, was very complete—avenue, grassplots, conservatory, stables, miniature fish pond—nothing was lacking. The house itself, an old-fashioned timbered structure, stood in a grassy mound, and Rooke had been at great pains to fill it with appropriate knickknacks and furniture, which latter was mostly of old oak, and he had oak-panelled several of the rooms.

Bertram could conscientiously congratulate his host on the possession of so nice a place, and compliment him on the good taste displayed in the decoration and improvements, whereat Rooke seemed greatly pleased. The dinner was good and well served, from which, as also from some other circumstances, he rightly inferred that Mrs. Rooke was a notable woman. Her devotion to her husband was palpable and almost pathetic.

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She hardly ever took her eyes off him, did nothing without appealing to him, and was always on the watch to anticipate his wishes. Rooke, as his guest thought, found his wife's attentions rather a bore, and he once or twice showed his impatience of them in a way that could hardly have failed to hurt her feelings.

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As they sat at dinner Bertram related his adventure with the two horsewomen, and asked Rooke if he knew who they were.

"Of course, I do," said the lawyer. "Miss Earnsdale, and her cousin, Miss Gladys Earnsdale."

"I thought as much from what Mrs. Whalley was saying the other day," returned Bertram; "but, as I do not remember seeing them before, I could not be sure."

"By Jove," said Rooke emphatically, "I would give a hundred pounds to have rescued that girl instead of you."

"Give me half the money," laughed Bertram, "and you shall have all the credit."

"I am afraid it is not transferable. We are not in the least like, and they know me. But,

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seriously, it would have been a good thing for me if I had been in your place."

"How?"

"Don't you see? I should have had Hugh Earnsdale under an obligation. He could hardly have avoided giving our office a share of his business, it is worth I don't know how much a year."

Rooke did not say, although he thought, that he might-also have received—what he would have valued quite as much as an accession of business— an occasional invitation to Earnsdale Park.

"An immensely fine girl, Miss Earnsdale, don't you think?" he observed: "and she will be awfully rich one of these days. There is only her and a younger sister, and she's her father's favourite. The son is as good as dead, you know, a confirmed lunatic, and the property is not entailed."

"Well, I thought the other—Miss Gladys, don't you call her?—the better looking of the two," said Bertram, carelessly, "but to tell the truth, I did not examine either of them very critically."

"Gladys is too pale for my fancy. I like

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a good healthy colour. She is a Creole, you know."

"A Creole?"

"I suppose so. Anyhow, she was born in the West Indies—Jamaica, Barbadoes, or one of those places—and since Mr. Tom died, her mother has spent a good deal of her time there. But the daughter has been brought up altogether in England. She will have money too, though I have no idea how much. Some of those West Indian estates are really worth next to nothing. They give a man position, though, and that is as good as money sometimes. Won't you take another glass of this claret? It should be good, cost me a matter of five pounds a dozen. But wine is like anything else, if you want it good, you must pay for it. I should like you to try this hock. A glass of hock for Mr. Norbreck, Thomas. You have not told me how you left your uncle and your sister. I hope they are quite well."

Bertram said he had left his uncle and his sister in perfect health.

"Your uncle has told you, I suppose?"

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"He told me you would tell me something."

"Ah, he has left it to me, has he? Well, it is soon told. He has persuaded me to

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take Mr. Skinner's place as trustee. It is a very responsible position, and I have a great many irons in the fire; but you are old clients, and I could not refuse. I hope we shall get on well together; indeed I am sure we shall."

"Well," said Bertram, after a short pause, "I am surprised; I cannot deny that. And I think my uncle might have told me what he was about. At the same time, I am glad that he has appointed another trustee, and still more so that his choice should have fallen on you. It shall not be my fault if we don't get on well together, Mr. Rooke."

"I am glad to hear you say that. And I shall do my best to make your uncle and you pull better together than you have hitherto done. He asked me to speak to you about your expenditure—he thinks you spend too much—and I promised to do so. But I did not say in what sense. Of course, I don't think you do spend too much. On the contrary, I think, for your position, you spend

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very little; and, as I always said to poor Skinner, you are one of the steadiest young fellows I know. But your uncle has old-fashioned ideas, and a personal interest in keeping down expenses, which, I daresay, counts for something. But he only requires managing. I think I know how to stroke him the right way. Just go on as usual and leave him to me. I will make it all right. Of course, this is entirely between ourselves."

"Of course," said Bertram, with a smile. He was not much given to exchanging confidences with his Uncle Roger, and this Rooke doubtless knew.

Bertram was quite sincere in his expression of satisfaction with Rooke's appointment. The possible consequences, both to the Trust and himself, of his uncle's uncontrolled management had caused him considerable misgiving; and though there was something about Rooke which he did not altogether like, he knew no reason why he should make a less efficient trustee than Mr. Skinner.

When they met on the following morning, his

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uncle asked him if Rooke had told him the news?

"Yes," said Bertram, "he told me."

"Well?"

"I think you have done quite right, uncle."

"I am fain to hear you say so. Did he say owt in particular; owt about keeping expenses down?"

"He did."

"That's right. I thowt he would. Well, if you don't heed what I say, you'll happen heed what he says."

Bertram's only answer was a smile; but he little thought that this was the last time his uncle would ever speak to him on the vexed subject of economy in expenditure.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### "OLD MOTHER REDCAP"

A few days afterwards took place the rent audit dinner, which, ever since Simon Nutter's time, had been held at "Old Mother Redcap's." At a period still more remote it was wont to be held at Crow Nest; but the Squire had not been long in possession of the estate when he found it would be more profitable to regale his tenants at the public-house than his own. True, he had to pay for the dinner —eighteenpence a head—and for the beer actually consumed, but the diners did a good deal of promiscuous drinking on their own account, to the great advantage of "Old Mother Redcap." Wherefore Mr.



Nutter demanded—and got—a far higher rent than he would otherwise have been able to obtain.

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"Fifty pounds is aw nonsense," he would say to an intending tenant. "Why, th' two rent dinners will be as good as twenty pounds in your pocket, let alone owt else. I man (must) ha' seventy pounds a year for 'Th' Redcap,' my lad."

He reckoned that, by this device, he had added at least three hundred pounds to the net value of the estate. It led necessarily to heavy drinking— sometimes to worse, the rent day being occasionally rounded off with a free fight—and shortly before his death Ralph Norbreck had resolved to revert to the primitive custom and feast his farmers at Crow Nest; but Roger, though a Radical, was not the man to favour reforms that cost money; and, with a view to future increases of rent, he did all that in him lay to promote the prosperity of " Old Mother Redcap."

As being the first audit since Rooke's accession to the trusteeship, he was invited by his co-trustee to the dinner, and though his engagements prevented him, "to his great regret," from accepting the invitation, he promised "to look in" for half- an-hour or so if he could possibly find time. The

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truth was, as the lawyer confided to his wife, that he had a decided objection to dining at a country tavern, and spending a whole evening in the company of Roger Norbreck and a lot of half- drunken farmers and factory folks.

In order that the tenants might be taken from their work as little as possible, the dinner—a supper, as they called it—did not take place until after milking time, and

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towards six o'clock on the eventful evening Roger and his nephew wended their way towards " Old Mother Redcap." The former carried under his arm the rent-book and in his hand a strong black bag, the destined repository of the farmers' payments. The prospect of receiving a considerable sum of money and the incense of a little flattery, which the tenants never failed to offer him on these occasions, had put the acting trustee into excellent spirits, and he was so pleasant and genial withal that Bertram almost forgot that his uncle had been, or could be, either mean or ill-tempered.

The dinner was given in the club-room of the inn, and the diners numbered nearly forty; for,

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though the Crow Nest estate was not a large one, the holdings were small and the tenants relatively numerous. There were also several guests who were not tenants—half-a-dozen of the Wellsprings overlookers—Mr. Benjamin Yates (*alias* Little Fat Ben), the overseer and rate collector, Mr. Plumber, the local gauger, and one or two others. The dinner was simple but substantial—roast and boiled beef, half-a-dozen geese, and about a wheelbarrow load of " rotten" (plum) pudding, the whole washed down with copious draughts of a rather thin (and very cheap) beer, called "Daniel," after the brewer of it.

The repast over, Roger and Bertram adjourned to a large room downstairs, and there received the tenants and their rents. Two or three women, whose husbands were not able to put in an appearance, brought with them bottles for the reception of the gills of rum to which, by old custom, those who could not come to the dinner were entitled.

After business came pleasure. Roger put his money-bag, with several smaller bags, into a cupboard near the fireplace, carefully locked the door,

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placed his chair against it, and put on his most important look. These preparations completed, the tenants and guests, who had been loitering in the lobby and before the house, were asked "to step in."

Among them was Caleb Cuerdale, tall and stalwart, strong-limbed, rosy-cheeked, and bright-eyed. Being fond of his joke and able to sing a good song or two, Caleb was always in great request at social gatherings; but he stood too much in awe of his strong-minded wife to take more drink on board than he could carry comfortably home, even on a rent night. The place of honour among the farmers, an easy-chair by the fireside, was given by general consent to John Brindle, generally known as "Owd Neverdee." John was ninety-five years old, and did not look seventy. He had never in his long life slept a night out of the house in which he was born, never travelled by rail, never seen "th' sawt watter," and never been behind with his rent.

"Now, chaps," said Roger, when they were all seated, "will you order?"

Whereupon the "chaps" gave their orders to

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Joe Jessup, who had succeeded the old gentleman of the same name as landlord of the "Redcap Inn."

Brindle ordered a "sooup o' whisky."

"Why, John, yo're as wakken as ever yo wor, I do declare," exclaimed Cuerdale, giving Neverdee a hearty slap in the back. "There is life i' th' owd dog yet."

"Ay, and teeth too," returned John, nettled at being likened to an old dog. "How much has th' wife gan thee for spending brass to-neet, Caleb?"

This hit was received with a roar of laughter—the despotic sway with which the excellent Mrs. Cuerdale ruled her household and her husband being a matter of common knowledge—and Cuerdale looked rather foolish. By way of changing the subject, he

asked John how many landlords he had lived under.

"Nobbut six," answered the old fellow with a sarcastic smile, "and the Norbreck Trust, if yo' reckon 'em as one, maks seven. One broke, and run away wi' a lot of other folks' brass; one—he wor the parson, he wor—run away wi' another chap's wife and never coom back; one bruok his neck wi'

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hunting, an' th' others deed i' their beds like Christians."

"Well done yo'. Why (with a wink at the company) yo'll very like see another or two put under the sod afore yo're put there yoresel, John."

"I couldn't like to do, Caleb, particular when they're sich like as Mr. Norbreck and Mr. Bertram. I know when I've gotten a good landlord if yo' don't, Caleb. Here's to yo're health, gentlemen."

"Of coorse, of coorse, John, them's my sentiments also; yo' knowen that weel enough. I wur nobbut trotting a bit," said Cuerdale, who perceived that his joke was not much to Roger's liking. "Here's to yo' aw, gentlemen and chaps."

Before the "gentlemen and chaps" could reply to this comprehensive toast, a sound of wheels was heard on the road, and after rattling over the pavement in front of the house they suddenly stopped.

"It's ten to one a carriage o' some soort," said a fat-cheeked, dull-looking farmer, who had been dubbed Moonface by reason of the vastness of

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his chaps, yet capable, as the event proved, of making a correct inference.

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"It will be Mr. Rooke," exclaimed Roger, with an air of importance. "He said he would come. I'll go and see. Won't you come with me, Bertram?"

"Mr. Rooke? That is the new trustee. He'll ten to one be stanning glasses round, chaps," observed the dull fat man, his voice thickening into a chuckle and a smile rippling over his great face.

"It's to be hoped so," put in another; "if he's a gradely gentleman he will."

"Yo've lived under aw these landlords, John," said Cuerdale, turning to Owd Neverdee; "just tell us, now, which wor th' cobdest on 'em."

"Weel, I used to think as Squire Nutter wor; he raised my rent five pound a year, and th' land that poor as it would hardly keep a tewit (pewit), and he wor that fond of his brass as he could hardly find of his heart to dee. A hard un, sure-ly, owd Squire Nutter wor; but (with sudden energy) I do believe as Roger Norbreck licks him. Why, what do you think, chaps?"

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Here Neverdee paused, but observing that his audience was listening to him, he continued:

"Yo' knowen my barn doors, they're rotten to that end as they're fair tumbling i' taa (falling in pieces). Well, I want new 'uns, that stands to reason; and now Roger—drat him—says as I mun (must) pay for 'em myseL He's a devil upset; he'd ride a louse to London for the sake of its hide and taller, Roger Norbreck would. But durnt (don't) say nowt, chaps. It's best to speak him fair'. Never fa' out wi' your landlords is my motty. They can be most terrible okerd if they liken, and I want to dee under th' owd roof tree wheer my fayther deed and I wor born and"

At this point Neverdee's speech was cut short by the entrance of the two trustees.

"This is Mr. Rooke, chaps—gentlemen," said Roger, indicating the lawyer with

a backward movement of his thumb, "my new co-trustee."

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Rooke with his pleasantest smile and a comprehensive sweep of his gloved hand. "Glad to make your acquaintance.

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I trust we shall always be good friends. Very sorry I am so late and compelled to make my stay so short. Perhaps you will allow me to contribute to the harmony of the evening by paying for a bowl of punch."

An appreciative murmur ran round the room, the fat-faced farmer chuckled until he nearly choked, and Owd Neverdee looked more alive than ever.

"And while the punch is being prepared we will have glasses round. Drink up, please, and give your orders—whatever you like."

The murmur this time became almost a cheer, and though Rooke did not stay more than an hour he made himself as popular among the Crow Nest tenants as his co-trustee was the reverse, and established a reputation as a fine, free-handed gentleman.

As Bertram turned into the house, after seeing the lawyer drive away, he heard music upstairs and a stamping of feet.

"Hullo! What's that?" he asked of Joe Jessup.

"Don't you know? It's Pee o' Dick's and

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Mally fro' th' Nook as has been getting wed, and they're having a bit o' a dance i' th' club-room. To' can go up if yo' like."

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Bertram did like. He thought the company upstairs would be a pleasant change from that in the farmers' room. The people in the club-room, who were mostly Wellsprings hands and tenants' sons and daughters, gave him a hearty welcome, and as some of the lasses were comely in look and fair dancers he stepped several measures with them, as much to their satisfaction as his own, for it was somewhat of a distinction to dance with th' " young mayster," and Bertram had no share in his uncle's unpopularity.

As he was walking round the room with his partner he perceived, sitting all by himself in a remote corner, his cousin Jacob.

"What are you doing here, Jacob?" he asked. "Why are you not dancing?"

The lad, looking unutterable things, pointed to his shoes, which were clouted and heavy, and his clothes, roughly made and a world too little for him. Between his foot gear and trousers showed his

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worsted stockings, and between trousers and waistcoat an inch, of shirt was visible. Roger allowed his son and heir only one suit a year (of " invisible green "), and the youth was growing fast.

"How can a chap dance in things like these?" he whispered fiercely in Bertram's ear. "And as my father wouldn't give me a penny I could not stand a glass of beer for my partner."

"Don't let that trouble you, Jacob," said Bertram, slipping half-a-crown into his cousin's hand. The lad was his uncle's son, and he felt sorry for him.

Half-an-hour afterwards Caleb Cuerdale, with a face as red as the rising sun, appeared at the club-room door. He motioned to Bertram.

"Your uncle wants you," he said.

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Bertram went downstairs. As he entered the farmers' room Roger, whose stock was awry and waistcoat half unbuttoned, rose from his chair.

"Thatsh right, dear boy," he hiccuped, holding out his hand, which Bertram rather reluctantly took. "Hope you've had a nish dance with a nish lass. Nothing like lasses, is there, Bertram?"

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Wine and women—eh, you rogue! You'll like rum and water better though, when you get my age. I wantsh to drink your health and be friends. If I'm arsh sometimes itsh all for your good and because I love you like a father. I treatsh you —I mean I would treatsh you if you'd let me—like my own son, and nobody can say fairer than that— can they, chaps? I respect you, Bertram—everybody respects you. Here's to your health. Mr. Bertram's health, chaps."

As many of the "chaps" as could stand rose from their chairs, joined vociferously in the toast, and, led by Caleb Cuerdale, sang " For he's a jolly good fellow," and went on repeating it as if they never meant to stop, until Roger dropped suddenly into his seat and burst into tears.

"That will do, chaps," he sobbed; "that will do. It makes me think of my brother."

This brought Bertram's disgust to a climax, and he was turning to leave the room when Cuerdale suggested that his uncle had better "be gotten home."

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"It was time. Roger had laid his head on the table and was fast sinking into



unconsciousness.

"Tell Jacob to come here," said Bertram.

"If you like, Jacob and me will take him between us," suggested Caleb, "and you can follow wi' th' brass. We mustn't forget that."

This suggestion was at once acted upon, and they all left "Old Mother Redcap" together, Cuerdale and Jacob leading, or rather carrying, Roger—for he was utterly helpless—while Bertram, mortified beyond measure at the exhibition his uncle was making of himself, walked behind with the moneybag.

When they knocked at Roger's door the summons was answered by Mrs. Norbreck in person.

"Oh, he's drunk, is he?" she said coolly. "Well, it isn't often as he's o'ertaken in that way. Bring him in, and Jacob and me will get him to bed."

"Here's the money-bag; you had better lock it up somewhere," said Bertram to his aunt, when

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Roger was safely inside; and, after bidding her good-night, a salutation to which Mrs. Norbreck did not think it her duty to respond, he and Caleb Cuerdale turned their faces towards Crow Nest.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### BERTRAM STRIKES

Bertram did not go down to Wellsprings on the following morning quite so early as he generally did. He rose rather later than usual, looked in at the stable, had a talk with Tim about the horses and with the farm-bailiff about the cattle and the crops. The

scene of the night before had so much annoyed him that he shrank from meeting his uncle, who he feared might be headachy and cross-grained, and as Bertram himself was not in the best of humours, they were as likely as not to have words. It was quite true, as his aunt had said, that Roger was not often "overtaken in that way." With rare exceptions he was sober to abstemiousness. But this fact rendered his conduct

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at "Old Mother Redcap's" none the less disgraceful. There was not a labourer about Crow Nest nor a hand at Wellsprings who did not know that Roger had got so drunk the night before as to be past walking home, and as Bertram recalled his uncle's speech to him and the reference to his father he grew hot with shame and vexation. But quarrelling would not undo what had happened, and it was possible that the inevitable headache (for even a slight excess always made Roger terribly "unfine") might soften more than it irritated him. "At any rate," resolved Bertram, "I will not lose my temper. I will keep cool, whatever happens."

When he reached the counting-house he found his uncle, who looked frightfully cross, seated before a large writing-table, on which were arrayed several heaps of gold and silver and a small pile of bank notes.

"I have wanted you a long while," snarled Roger viciously, the moment he set eyes on his nephew, and without returning his greeting. "Just count this brass, will you?"

Bertram counted it.

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"Now add this list of rents received up."

Bertram added it up. '

"Well?" exclaimed Roger fiercely.

"There appears to be a difference of a hundred and twenty pounds."

"Short?"

"Yes, there is that much short."

"Ay, is there. I have counted it over and over again. Where is it?"

"Where is it?" repeated Bertram indignantly "How should I know?"

"How should you know? Nobody better. I put them hundred and twenty sovereigns into th' bag, I'll swear I did. You carried th' bag home, and now th' sovereigns is gone."

"And do you really mean to say—to think even—that I took them?" said Bertram with forced calmness.

"I do think so. Who else could have taken 'em?"

"Oh, this is too bad!" exclaimed the young fellow passionately. "You do me a foul wrong, uncle. You do not—you cannot think so."

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Roger rose from his chair.

"What! You would make me a liar, would you? Take that for your impudence."

"That" was a stinging "clout" on the side of the head, which made Bertram reel; but hardly was it given when Roger, hurled thither by a blow from his nephew's fist, fell back into his chair with a crash—fortunately more frightened than hurt, for the two were so close together that Bertram's stroke had not taken full effect.

"I am sorry I hit you, uncle," said Bertram, who was the first to recover his presence of mind, "but—"

"Ay, you are a nice 'un, arn't you, to go and hit your uncle in th' face in that way," interrupted Roger, feeling tenderly about his nose for damages.

"I regard that as nothing. You have forfeited all claim to my respect by charging me with theft; but one should not strike a man so much older than oneself. But I could not help it. When I felt that blow on my ear my arm struck out of itself. I am afraid I should do the same again under similar provocation."

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Roger made no reply; he was too much occupied with his nose.

"But we must have no more of this," resumed Bertram, after a moment's thought. "My mind is made up. I am going; and, until the Norbreck Trust comes to an end, I shall not enter this counting-house or Wellsprings Mill again."

Then he went to his drawer, took therefrom his private papers, and without another word, or a second glance at his uncle—who seemed too much dumbfounded to speak—he turned on his heel and left the office.

"If anybody wants me I shall be at home," said Bertram to the lodgekeeper, as he passed through the "watch-house," and then, absorbed in thought, he bent his steps towards Crow Nest by the familiar path through Wellsprings Clough. The charge of theft brought against him by his uncle troubled him hardly at all. It was too absurd to call for serious attention; and, remembering Roger's condition the previous night, he thought it more than likely that the latter had himself inadvertently taken the missing money from the bag,

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and would find it before the day was out. But in no case would he resume his position at Wellsprings as his uncle's subordinate—on that he was resolved. Even if his uncle should apologize to him and ask his pardon on his knees, he would not. Nothing should induce him to risk the recurrence of another incident like that which had just come to pass. And there were other reasons why he felt that it was his duty to persist in this determination. His uncle was not conducting the business to his satisfaction. For a while after his brother's death Roger tried to follow in Ralph's footsteps, and manage the factory and the estate on the lines he had laid down. But he lacked the capacity—perhaps he had not really the will—to succeed in this endeavour. He changed his ideal; and, little by little, fell back on the bad practices of Simon Nutter's time—reintroduced the truck system, cut down wages, raised rents, and drove cruelly hard bargains. This led to the loss of many good hands and some good tenants, for the railway had brought both enlightenment and competition into the valley, and the Wellsprings folks were neither so ignorant

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nor submissive as they had been when the old Squire ruled the roast. The same spirit characterised all Roger's proceedings. He meant well, perhaps, and was faithful to the trust; but he was mean to the verge of dishonesty, and though he listened to some people only too readily, a mild remonstrance from his nephew was sufficient to put him into a towering passion.

"Yes, we are too antipathetic to get on together; and, quite apart from the blows we have just exchanged, it is better we should part," was the conclusion Bertram came to as he reached Crow Nest.

He went into the farmyard and ordered Tim to saddle Cartouche—now no longer the Sangrado colt, but a fleet and powerful hunter. A long ride, he thought, might help him to compose his mind and see his way.

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He turned his horse's head towards Brockholes, a wild stonewall country, with yellow, sandstone roads, turf mosses, rushy pastures, and hungry- looking farmhouses, yet interspersed here and there with deep, romantic glens, and commanding wide views of moorland and vale.

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"What should he do?" was the question that now busied Bertram's thoughts. It was not in him to loaf about the country and lead the idle, purposeless life his cousin Percy led, even if he could forget his promises to his dead father and mother, and those promises he held as sacred as on the day they were given. He could still see his mother as, a few days before she was taken upstairs to die, she lay on the sofa—pale and with hollow cheeks and large, sad eyes—and talked to him for the last time.

"My dear little boy will soon be without a mother," she said; "but, if God permit, she will always be with him in spirit, and she wants him to promise that he will try in the years to come— even when he is a grown man—never to do anything that would make her unhappy; that he will try, with God's help, to be upright in heart, truthful and honourable in all his dealings, obedient to his father, loving to his sister—and not in too great haste to be rich."

The lad threw his arms round his mother's neck, and, weeping bitterly, promised to do his utmost to be all she wished.

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And then there were his promises to his father. Though dead, both parents yet spoke to him; neither, he felt sure, would desire him to stay any longer with his uncle, the more especially as the mortgage, which had lain so heavy on his father's mind,

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would shortly be paid off—and neither would like him to be idle. Occupation he must have—so much was clear; but what sort of occupation? He had no passion for letters and learning, like Alan Cuerdale; he was too old, or thought he was, to learn law or medicine; for business one required capital, and as he could do nothing in particular he did not think it would be very easy to get a situation. What he should most like would be to travel a year or two; but, after what had just come to pass, his uncle would hardly be persuaded to provide him with funds for such a purpose. Perhaps, after all, the best thing he could do would be to seek his fortune in America or Australia.

Bertram was still pondering over this seemingly insuperable difficulty, when the appearance of the "Moorcock Inn" reminded him that he was hungry, and that Cartouche also stood in need of refreshment.

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So he rode up to the door, put his horse into the stall, and, after seeing him drink half a bucket of meal and water and set briskly to work on a measure of corn, he went into the house and ordered something for himself.

While he was discussing the rasher of bacon, oat-cake, and pint of home-brewed, which were all the landlady could offer him, there entered the little parlour a man with a pack on his back.

"Fine day, sir," said the new-comer, as he threw his pack on a settle and himself into an. arm-chair. He was middle-aged, well-dressed, and had a good-humoured, prepossessing countenance.

"Very; but I am afraid it won't last. The clouds are gathering to the south, and the glass was falling this morning."

"Oh, I never trouble myself about the future; that would mar my enjoyment of the present. You see, sir, I am what they call in these parts a travelling Scotchman; though, as it happens, I never was in the 'Land o' Cakes' in all my life; and as I spend

most of my days out of doors, and sunshine is more grateful to me than most folks, I

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decline to dilute my enjoyment of it by worriting about clouds and weather glasses. Don't worrit, that is the secret of a contented life, and the philosophy on which I endeavour to shape mine."

"And not a bad philosophy either. The difficulty lies in its practical application," said Bertram with a smile.

"Well, nothing worth having is acquired without difficulty. But persistent effort, you know, produces habit, and habit is second nature. I was once as fidgety, and as eager to climb to the topmost rung of the ladder, as anybody. But a few tumbles taught me the unwisdom of over-eagerness. I noticed, too, that easy-going people often succeed better than the pushing, besides getting more enjoyment out of their lives. I don't mean idle folks—I could not be idle, even if idleness led to greatness—but folks who wait for opportunities instead of compassing heaven and earth to find them. And so, gradually, and, I must admit, with some strenuous effort, I schooled myself in the philosophy of content, which consists in taking things as they come; neither weeping over the

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past nor worriting about the future. Perhaps you will say, seeing I am only a travelling Scotchman, my philosophy is not justified by its fruits. But if you knew to what desperate straits I was reduced by the system of push before I took up my present calling, you would think differently. For an admirer of nature, and an observer of human nature moreover, the calling has its attractions. And I shall perhaps not always be a



travelling Scotchman."

"I thought you were content."

"So I am, content and watchful. If a chance of advancement comes in my way—and it will come—I shall not refuse it, and be all the better able to profit by the opportunity that I have not wasted my energies in its pursuit. You are younger than I am; and, as I judge by your countenance, both ingenuous and high-spirited. Let me advise you not to be in too great a hurry to get on. You may often gain more by watching than working, and if you should happen to fall into perplexity, and not see your way straight before you, wait for light rather than risk blundering in the dark."

"Very good advice," observed Bertram; "and,

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what is better, opportune. I am rather in perplexity at present."

"Capital," exclaimed the packman gleefully, as if he was delighted to hear it. "What better proof could there be of the value and truth of my philosophy? You drop casually into 'The Moorcock,' I drop casually into 'The Moorcock,' we exchange views, and you receive a few hints from the stores of my experience that may prove highly useful to you. But I see you want to go, your horse is at the door. I will not try to keep you longer, but we may meet again; the world is small, though there are so many of us in it; and, as I said, I do not expect to be always a travelling Scotchman."

"Say, rather, a peripatetic philosopher."

"No; I may cease to be a peripatetic; but if we should meet in after years, you will, I hope, find me as much a philosopher as ever. But, pardon me, I was about to observe that my name is Barraclough Cragg."

Bertram was amused at the packman's dodge to find out who he was; but seeing no harm in gratifying his curiosity, he answered:

"And mine is Norbreck, of Crow Nest."

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"Norbreck; thank you," returned the philosopher, "the name is recorded in the tablets of my memory. I know Crow Nest, though it is not in my beat. Perhaps you will kindly (taking a card from his pocketbook) give this to Mrs. Norbreck—yet. Well, then, to the lady who presides over your household, and ask her, when she is next in the market for tea, to address herself to Barraclough Cragg. She will find it to her advantage. Having no large establishment to keep up, I can undersell the shops by twenty per cent. And as for quality, I shall leave that to speak for itself. You smile again; you perhaps think it is *infra dig* for a philosopher to push business. But even a philosopher wants bread-and-cheese, you know, and it is part of my system to profit by every opportunity that fortune throws in my way."

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## CHAPTER XX

### VISITORS

Bertram laughed and took the card; and whether from the effects of "The Moorcock's" home-brewed, or of Mr. Cragg's homilies, or the two united, he left the inn with spirits so raised that, when he came within a mile of Crow Nest he turned into the fields for a short spin across country. He made in the first instance towards the farmyard, but as he went on it occurred to him that it would be just as near to enter the grounds by a wooden gate that opened into the Bent meadow, and on nearing the gate it occurred to him further that it would be just as easy to jump over as to open it. No sooner thought than done. Giving Cartouche a kick with his heel to rouse the hunter's attention, and pulling him into a canter, he let him go.

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The horse cleared the top bar by a foot, and alighted safely on the gravel walk.

"Do you always come home in that way, Mr. Norbreck?" said a laughing, silvery voice, almost, as it seemed, at his elbow.

Turning round in surprise he saw before him Miss Earnsdale and her cousin, another lady whom he did not know, Mr. Hugh Earnsdale, whom he knew by sight, Alice, and Mrs. Whalley, all of whom had evidently been watching his performance.

"A very sportsmanlike jump," exclaimed Mr. Earnsdale. "I never saw anything better done, even in my hunting days. I do not think we require any formal introduction, Mr. Norbreck, we have seen each other before; but allow me to introduce you to my sister-in-law, Mrs. Thomas Earnsdale, who desires to thank you, as I do, for the timely service you rendered the other day to her daughter and my niece."

Bertram bowed, blushed, said a few words in reply to Mr. Earnsdale's rather pompous little speech, then slid from his horse and shook hands with his guests.

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Mr. Earnsdale was a tall, spare man, with white whiskers, a long red face and a bearing which betrayed a deep consciousness of his local importance. His sister was a little, rotund, bright-eyed woman of middle age, whose frank engaging smile and matronly manner at once won Bertram's liking.

The two girls, divested of the hideous headgear which they wore when he first met them, appeared, Bertram thought, too much greater advantage than on that occasion. Lucy Earnsdale was tall, and she had a rich complexion, regular features, brilliant teeth, beautiful blue eyes and magnificent auburn hair. She was, in truth, as Rooke had said, a very fine woman.

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Gladys, though almost as tall, was in most other respects her cousin's opposite. Her eyes were dark, with long lashes, and somewhat deeply set. Her almost raven hair clustered in short crisp natural curls about a shapely head. Her face was oval and of a slightly olive tint, but always when she spoke her cheeks flushed a delicate pink. Her lips were perhaps a little too full, yet daintily

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formed; and her teeth, if possible, whiter than her cousin's.

Mrs. Thomas, or Mrs. Tom, as she was generally- called, often said that her daughter bore a striking resemblance to her grandmother, a Creole of Spanish descent.

"You have come only just in time, Bertie," said Alice. "Mr. Earnsdale was just going away. Where have you been all the morning?"

"I have been to the ' Moorcock Inn,' on Brock- holes Moor, hearing a lecture on the philosophy of content."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Mr. Earnsdale, "a lecture at 'The Moorcock' of all places in the world. I never heard of such a thing. And who was the lecturer, pray? Were there many people there?"

"The lecture was extempore, and the audience small. Seeing that it consisted of myself only, it could not well have been much smaller," returned Bertram with a smile. "The name of the lecturer is Barraclough Cragg. He retails philosophy and deals in tea. Here is his card; he will be glad if you will send him an order, Mrs. Whalley."

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"I understand now," observed Mr. Earnsdale, gravely. "He is a travelling

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Scotchman. Very conceited chaps, some of those Scotchmen. They go about the country filling people's heads with all sorts of Radical rubbish. I could never understand why Scotchmen are nearly always Radicals; they are shrewd sensible fellows, most of them, with good coats on their backs."

"Please, papa, don't talk politics," put in Miss Earnsdale rather peremptorily. "When gentlemen once begin talking politics they have never done; and I dare say Mr. Norbreck's Scotchman was not a Radical at all—was he, Mr. Norbreck?"

"He was not even a Scotchman," laughed Bertram, "and it did not occur to me to question him concerning his political opinions."

"That alters the case," said Mr. Earnsdale, reflectively; "still I could never understand—"

"I like this house so much, Lucy," interrupted Gladys, without, however, intending to be rude, for her uncle paused as if he had nothing more to say, "don't you? The timbered walls and high gables are so quaint and picturesque, and that

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avenue of elms is splendid. You have nothing finer at Earnsdale Park, uncle."

"Yes, they are rare old trees," said Bertram, gratified with the girl's praise, "and I value them all the more that they remind me of my dear mother. My grandfather, shortly before his death, wanted to cut them down, and my mother, with great difficulty, persuaded him not to do so."

"Cut them down!" exclaimed Gladys, aghast. "What"

"What barbarity!" she was going to say, but remembering that the barbarian was her host's grandfather, she stopped short.

"I knew your grandfather," remarked Mr. Earnsdale, with an air of grave

condescension, as if he thought that acquaintance with him should be esteemed a mark of distinction. "We met occasionally on the bench. I also once or twice met your uncle."

"My Uncle Rupert?"

"Yes, your Uncle Rupert."

Nobody seeming much interested in this topic, the two older ladies paired off, and the three young

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ones strolled down the avenue, while Mr. Earnsdale and Bertram held a discussion on the respective merits of deep and shallow draining.

Before going away Mr. Earnsdale invited the Norbrecks and Mrs. Whalley to visit« them at Earnsdale Park.

"I am sorry I cannot invite you to my house, Mr. Norbreck," said Mrs. Earnsdale; "but Lime- field has been shut up ever since my husband's death. When we are in Lancashire we always stay with my brother. But (smiling) if you should ever find yourself in Trinidad, and we should happen to be at home, we shall be delighted to see you at Prospect—shall we not, Gladys?"

"Particularly if he brings his sister with him," answered the young lady, with a demure smile and her usual blush.

"Trinidad—Prospect?" said Bertram, with a puzzled look. "There are several Trinidads in the world—where?"

"Trinidad, in the West Indies. We have a house and an estate there called Prospect. We are thinking of going out, Gladys and I—to look after

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things, you know—and I dare say we shall remain two or three years."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Earnsdale. If I should ever find myself in Trinidad—or within a thousand miles of it—though it is about the most unlikely thing in the world—I shall certainly do myself the pleasure of accepting your invitation."

"And you will be made very welcome. Do not forget the name—Prospect."

"Mrs. Earnsdale, I could not possibly forget so pleasant a prospect," returned the youth gallantly, with a glance at Gladys, as he handed the ladies into their carriage.

As the carriage disappeared from view Bertram put his arm around his sister's waist and led her into the house.

"I have something to tell you—you and Mrs. Whalley," he said. "This morning when I went—"

He was here interrupted by a maidservant, who told him that Mrs. Norbreck had come a few minutes previously, and wanted to see him "very anxious."

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"Aunt! Mrs. Norbreck!" exclaimed Alice and Mrs. Whalley simultaneously. "Why, she has not been here for years. What can it be, Bertie?"

"I will go and see," answered Bertram. "If it is a message from my uncle, and he wants me to go back, he will find himself very much mistaken," he muttered between his set teeth as he opened the drawing-room door.

Mrs. Norbreck's eyes were red, as if with weeping; her face flushed and paled alternately, and when she spoke her voice was broken by sobs.

Bertram was greatly surprised to see this woman, usually so hard and hectoring, so completely overcome. He thought that his uncle was dead, or that some terrible

accident had befallen him, and he too turned pale.

"What is it, aunt?" he asked. It generally cost him an effort to call her aunt, but pity this time was stronger than dislike.

"Jacob!" she gasped.

It was Jacob then.

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"Is he—?"

"He's gone."

"Yon surely don't mean that he is dead?" "No, he has run away, and oh, Bertram, I shall, maybe, never see my lad again. But I thought you might happen know—that he might happen have said something to you last night."

"He did not say anything about going away. Have you no idea where he is gone?"

"We think he has gone to Liverpool. But that is not the worst. He had no money of his own, and we are feared as it's him as has taken that hundred pounds as your uncle fell out with you about this morning. How we shall ever get over the disgrace the Lord only knows—it will be in everybody's mouth before the day's over. And your uncle is quite undone—I never saw a man in such a state in my life. He wanted me to tell you how sorry he is for what happened this morning, and ask you to look over it. You will, won't you, Bertram? You know how hasty he is, but he means no ill—he doesn't—he doesn't."

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"I shall certainly never go near Wellsprings again while he is there, if that is what you mean," answered Bertram firmly.

"Well, I don't wonder, but I am sorry to hear you say so, and I hope you'll never rue it. But what about Jacob—what must I do about Jacob? If you would help us to find him, Bertram, I should never forget it as long as I live, nor your uncle nayther. He's too much put out o' th' way to set off himself, or I wouldn't ask you."

"If I may speak frankly, I am not surprised that Jacob has run away," answered Bertram evasively. He did not feel much disposed to go on a wild-goose chase after his cousin.

"I know what you mean," said Mrs. Norbreck, bursting into tears. "You think we have been too hard on th' lad. It's true; we have. I can see it now. We thought it was best to bring him up strict and careful, in th' old-fashioned way as we were brought up ourselves. But, as I told your uncle this morning, things are different now, and young folks has different ideas from what we had

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when we were young. I can see it now, and I'll never treat another the same, so what comes. And you'll help us, willn't you, Bertram, for th' sake of your own mother? She would have had pity on me, I am sure she would."

This was an appeal Bertram could not resist.

"I will do my best," he said; "and if I succeed in finding him you must let him have a little more liberty than he has had, and more pocket- money."

"I will, I will; don't be feared of that."

"Another thing, you must not reproach him."

"Reproach him! Is that all you know of a mother's feelings, Bertram? And as for

that money, why I'd give every shilling we have to get my lad back."

Bertram made no further objection. It was arranged that he should drive forthwith to Carrington and start by the first available train for Liverpool. While he made his preparations his

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aunt would see his uncle, procure a supply of money, and fetch a photograph of Jacob, which might, she suggested, help him with his quest.

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## CHAPTER XXI

### RUN TO EARTH

An hour later, Bertram, accompanied by his trusty servitor, was on his way to Carrington.

Tim liked to tell that it was he who fetched the doctor when " th' young mayster wor born," and he had several times informed his wife that "he felt for th' lad just as if he wor his own son." At any rate, he often talked to him like a father, and Bertram liked the rough, kind-hearted fellow too well to resent familiarity in which there was never anything offensive.

"You're going to fetch Jacob, I reckon?" he asked as they dropped Crow Nest Brow.

"If I can find him."

"Well, it'll be a job, I dassay—summut like

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looking for a hayseed in a muck-midden. There is a good two-thry folk i' Liverpool, and he'd very like tak to th' sawt watter as soon as he geet theer. I'm gradely chet (deceived) wi' Jacob—I am that." "Why?"

"Why! I never thowt as he'd pluck up corridge enough to make a bowt on it. Bithmon, I'd ha' bowted too, if I'd ha' been in his place. But it chet's me wheer he's getten th' brass to pay his way. His father would not give him a farthing to save his sowl. Wheer did he get it, thinken yo'?"

"That's more than I can tell you," said Bertram, truthfully enough, for suspicion is not certainty.

"Nor me nayther," returned Tim with a wink and a knowing look. "But a chap can guess, cornt he? It wor th' rent day yesterday, and Mr. Roger alius takes th' rent brass home wi' him."

To this remark Bertram did not deem it expedient to reply, and Tim "reckoned" to himself that he had better let the subject drop.

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"Which on 'em do yo' think as yo'll have, Mr. Bertram?" asked Tim suddenly, after a few minutes' silence.

"Which of what?" asked Bertram, with a puzzled look.

"Which o' them two lasses as has just bin to see yo'?"

"They did not come to see me, you foolish fellow," laughed Bertram.

"Didn't they just! I knows better than that—they coom for nowt else. Lasses doesn't go to see lasses when there is a good-looking young chap onywhere about. I like th' chestnut best, but th' dark un isn't a bad soort."

"But how if neither of them would have me?" said Bertram gravely.

"Not have yo'!" exclaimed the ostler scornfully. "Just yo' try. Write a letter and let me tak it o'er to Earnsdale Park, and yo'll see."

"What! To either of them?"

"Ay, ayther on 'em. Not as I don't think but what th' dark unfav vers yo' moor than t'other. I watched her ee yo' wi' them great black een

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o' hers as hoo geet into th' carriage. Bat ayther 'll do. They're both prize cattle."

"Come, I cannot stand that, Tim. Comparing young ladies with prize cattle is really too bad, you know, and one of them the greatest heiress in the county."

"Is hoo? It's her as yo' mun (must) have then, Mr. Bertram."

"Nay, I don't mean to marry just yet, Tim. I must see a bit more of the world before I settle down and become an old fogy."

"Well, you're happen reyt. A chap fastens hissels when he gets wed, he does that. And to tell th' real honest truth, there is a vast sight moor gam (fun) i' coorting than there is i' wedding. When I wor a young fellow I used to have two or three lasses on th' stick at th' same time; and now, Bithmon, if I nobbut look at another woman th' wife is fit to knock my heyd off. And then, when childer gets agate o' coming, it maks a sight o' difference in a chap's pocket. Not as childer is not reyt enough when they don't drop in too fast. But that's the deuce on

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it—they oft do drop in too fast. I know they do at our house. Ay, yo're happen reyt i' not being in a horry and haying yo're fling. All th' same, a nice lass wi' a lot o' brass is

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gradely tempting. Such like as Miss Earnsdale is not to be pyked up every day. To' had happen better let me tak her a bit o' a letter after aw, Mr. Bertram."

The idea of Miss Earsndale, and the half million or so which she would one day inherit, being "pyked up" with the help of "a bit of a letter" conveyed by Tim Bolland amused Bertram much, and he "laughed consumedly," somewhat to the ostler's discomfiture, who had made the suggestion in all seriousness.

At Carrington, Bertram ascertained that Jacob had gone by an early train to Liverpool, and his first proceeding on arriving thither was to call at the police-office and obtain the help of a detective. As there was reason to believe that the fugitive would try to leave for some foreign country with the least possible delay, the detective proposed that, in addition to boarding all vessels that were on the

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point of departure, they should visit the principal shipping offices and inspect their list of passengers. It was not very pleasant work, for the shipping office employés rather objected to showing their lists, and were not always as civil as they might have been. Boarding vessels was unpleasanter still. It rained—the docks and the river are not attractive in wet weather—and after haunting them three or four days and meeting with sundry adventures—the people on the ships they visited being even less civil than the clerks in the shipping offices—without finding the slightest clue, Bertram told the detective that, in his opinion, it was useless to continue the quest, and that he had decided to give it up and return home.

The detective admitted that they had little to hope from boarding any more vessels, but proposed as a last chance, that they should take to visiting theatres, public-houses, and singing rooms. Rustic runaways with money, he said, are generally loath to leave Liverpool without seeing a "bit of life," and, as likely as not, the young fellow might be amusing himself ashore while they were hunting for him on the water.

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"Why did not you suggest that before?" Bertram asked rather indignantly, and reflecting that, as the man knew not Jacob, and could be of little further use to him, he dismissed him on the spot, and telegraphed for Tim Bolland.

"Now, Tim," he said, when the ostler put in an appearance, "you must walk about Liverpool streets from morning to night looking for Jacob. At night, you must pop into singing rooms, and such-like places, and when you find him come and tell me."

"Vary weel. I'll do my best; but it'll be very like looking for a hayseed—"

"Never mind that. You look, and I shall look too. But there is one thing I must insist on, Tim—you must on no account take any drink."

"Not tak ony drink! How is a chap to pop into singing places and sich like, and sup nowt— will yo' just tell me that, Mr. Bertram?"

"You cannot help ordering something occasionally, I admit; but you need not drink it, you know."

"And pay for it?"

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"Of course."

"Pay for good stuff and not sup it?" exclaimed Tim, with a look of horror. "The Lord forbid as I should be guilty of sich like wilful waste. Wheer do yo' expect me to go to, Mr. Bertram?"

"Well, keep sober, and I don't care. But you must promise me that."

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"It's hard law, Mr. Bertram, to come to Liverpool and not get drunk; but I promise yo', and nobody can say as ever I broke my word. Mon I (must I) set off fust thing?"

"We must disguise you a bit first. Jacob might recognise that livery before you recognised him, and make himself scarce. Here, get this coat and hat on—I bought them on purpose at an old clothes shop."

"By gum!" exclaimed Tim, as he put himself inside the coat—a long, much worn, rough-looking garment that reached almost to his heels. "I never see owt like this i' aw my life. I'm just like a crow boggart (scarecrow). Bithmon, I'm waur (donning the hat, a broad-brimmed, battered affair); I've nobbut to put a pipe i' my mouth to

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look like a Quaker wi' th' blue devils or Sir Robbut Peel, when they bornt his giffy" (burnt him in effigy).

"Never mind how you look," said Bertram, trying hard to keep his countenance. "Nobody here knows you."

"Aw reyt, Mr. Bertram; I'll do owt to please yo. But, for goodness sake, say nowt about it at Crow Nest; they'd caw me 'crow boggart,' or 'Giffy,' or 'Sir Robbut Peel,' or summat o' that soort, as long as I live. And now, if yo'll gie me a trifle o' brass, I'll set off."

On the third day after Tim's arrival, Bertram, who by this time had given up all hope of finding his cousin, called on the Trust's broker, Mr. Lowe Middling, and was by him invited to dinner, an invitation which the young fellow, weary of looking for a needle in a haystack, gladly accepted.

Lowe Middling was only a few years older than Bertram himself. He had an excellent business, made by his father, who had died a short time previously, and was

considered to have inherited with his fortune a good deal of the old gentleman's shrewdness.

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Lowe Middling's hobby was investments.

"Anybody can make money/" he observed to Bertram as the two sat over their wine in the broker's luxuriously-furnished dining room in Edge Lane; " the difficulty is to invest it. People talk about five per cent. I despise five per cent. I had a good deal to invest when my father died—something like thirty thousand pounds—and it is making me one way or another at least ten per cent., some of it even more. Do you know how I manage it?"

Bertram answered in the negative. He took the least possible interest in Mr. Lowe Middling's investments.

"I take a line of my own, and give the lawyers a wide berth. That is how I do it. There are always good things knocking about, if you only know where to look for them. All that you have to do is not to put too many eggs in one basket, and divide your risks. If I put a thousand pounds or two into an affair that's a bit risky, I put as much at the same time in something that's cocksure. That is how I do. There is a thing I heard

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of the other day that I have engaged, under certain conditions, to put a couple of thousand pounds into, and I should not a bit wonder if it gave fifty per cent. It's a silver mine in South America."

Bertram pricked up his ears; a silver mine in South America sounded romantic.



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"In what part of South America?" "Chili or Peru, or one of those places, I suppose. But that is only a detail. I'll get to know all about it if you are disposed to take a share; and I really believe it's a devilish good thing, Bertram. I heard of it from Dunbar—he's ship's husband to a China clipper in which I have a sixteenth interest — one of the cleverest fellows I know. He has put me in for several uncommonly good things before. He met the fellow that owns the mine—Rivaz, I think his name is—a few years ago in the United States. How he got hold of this mine I cannot tell you; but he has sent Dunbar several cargoes of silver ore which have turned out very well, and he says there is any quantity where it comes from, only he is short of capital and cannot work the thing effectively. So Dunbar has proposed to form a

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syndicate and buy the whole concern, and Rivaz is willing to take twenty thousand pounds, reserving a fourth interest for himself. Dunbar thinks there's a fortune in it, and from what he says I am disposed to think the same. But, all the same, we are going cautiously to work. We mean to have a thorough investigation. We shall not send out a mining engineer—they are so awfully expensive— but a mining captain from Cornwall or one of those places—a fellow that will go out for fifty pounds and his expenses, you know—and a business man— somebody with a head on his shoulders; and if they report favourably we will find the money and either work the affair ourselves, or, if we can make good terms, sell it to a company, or form one. We limit the stakes to two thousand pounds apiece, and have eighteen thousand pounds promised. What do you say—will you be one of us? We only want another. By Jove, why shouldn't you, and go out with the mining captain? It would be a fine trip for you—all your expenses paid; and I don't suppose the trustees will make much difficulty about granting you leave of absence."

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Why not, indeed? Bertram would only he too glad; he wanted above all things to see foreign lands. But how was he to find the money? And supposing that difficulty to be overcome, did Lowe Middling think he would be able to do what was required in the matter?

"The trustees will advance you the money," answered the cotton broker; "why should not they? They have plenty of it, and good security; and if they don't, there are others that will. And as for being able, why you are just the man. You are sharp and know something about business. The mining captain will undertake the technical part, and all that you have to do is to tell us what he says and what Rivaz says and what you think, after getting all the information you can. The thing is in a nutshell. If the affair turns up trumps you stand to win a pile. If you report unfavourably we shall go no further. You have it practically in your own hands, and in any case you will get a very pleasant trip at very little cost. About money, what we propose is this : We each pay two thousand pounds into a bank,

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and out of the common fund pay your—I say 'your' because I am sure you will go—and the mining captain's expenses, say five hundred pounds in all. So if nothing comes of it we shall lose only about fifty pounds apiece. Should the enterprise, on the other hand, prove a success, and we require more than the twenty thousand pounds first subscribed, we shall have no difficulty in finding it, or forming a company. I will answer for that."

The scheme was perhaps open to criticism; but Bertram was not in a critical mood, nor had he yet learnt distrust in the bitter school of experience. The chance seemed to him almost providential and he told the cotton broker that he would see the trustees and give him an answer in a few days.

"I'll keep it open for you as long as I can; but I am not the only one you know, and I don't think I can give you more than a week," said the cotton broker as he accompanied his guest to the garden gate.

"You shall know at once," was the reply. "I mean to return to-morrow, whether I find this

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cousin of mine or not, and I'll speak to Rooke as I pass through Carrington."

When Bertram came in sight of his hotel he perceived the remarkable figure of Tim Bolland pacing to and fro before it.

"Yo're just th' mon I want," exclaimed the ostler excitedly. "I've hoyled (run him to earth) at last."

"Where?"

"In th' Prince's Theayter. I seed him go in wi' another lad as does not look ony better than he should be. They're in th' pit. I yerd 'em ax for tickets."

Bertram and his man went forthwith to the theatre, stationed themselves at the door, and pounced upon Jacob as he came out, much to that youth's surprise. His not very reputable-looking companion took them for a couple of detectives, and bolted ignominiously.

Jacob at first was rather rough and sulky, but on Bertram's assurance that he would receive immunity for the past and better treatment for the future he consented to go home. He admitted having

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taken the hundred pounds, but he had spent only twenty pounds and handed eighty pounds intact to his cousin.

In order to make sure of the lad Bertram took him to his hotel, and informed his mother by telegraph at what time they should arrive the next day at Carrington.

END OF VOL. I.

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