

Author: William Bury Westall (1834-1903)

Text type: Prose

Date of composition: 1883

Editions: 1883, 1885, 2011, 2018.

Source text:

Westall, William. 1885. *Ralph Norbreck's Trust*. London: Cassell & Cy.

e-text

Access and transcription: April 2021

Number of words: 144,410

Dialect represented: Lancashire

Produced by Lidia Abad-Sancho and María de Gracia Acedo-Codosero

Revised by María F. García-Bermejo Giner

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**RALPH NORBRECK'S
TRUST.**

By
WILLIAM WESTALL.

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

ETC. ETC.

CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED

LONDON, PARIS, NEW YORK & MELBOURNE

1885

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[NP]

TO
MY BROTHERS.

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RALPH NORBRECK'S TRUST

Prologue.

The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)*
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 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 grey 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

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desk. A few minutes afterwards a brisk step was heard in the passage outside, the door opened, and a smart-looking young fellow 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.”

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"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 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 Ruppert 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, Ruppert, 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 th' 13th o' June we were debited with a hundred pounds. Then I felt cocksure as there would be summat else; and yesterday,

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when I went to Carrington, I called at th' bank and got a new passbook by saying we had lost th' owd 'un. It's just as I feared. You have been paying in less brass than you've put down in th' cashbook, pocketing th' difference, and tampering wi' th' 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 fro' Manchester to look through th' 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

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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."

"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 th' truth if you were to speak; and I know it's gone i' betting, billiards, and bad companions. But you've got to th' 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——"

"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., th' odd coppers and all, as that thief—he's nowt else—refused to take off? And £50 to get you out of that scrape 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

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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."

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“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.

“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 an hour at it he closed the books with a band and an imprecation, and putting on 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. “Willn’t you step in and take a glass of somethink? I hope as th’ 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

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county, and flattered herself that in language and manners she was vastly superior to the rustics of the neighbourhood.

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"Th' 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 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 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 Rupert, I daresay. I expect he's told 'em, and women make so much bother about owt o' th' sort. They'll have quieted down a bit by morning, ten to one; 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 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 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’ll se pay nowt, not a farthing.”

“That’s hard law, Squire, and him your own son.”

“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.”

“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 hisselt 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 his son’s departure, to ascertain the truth by personal inquiry.

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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

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was the Manchester agent, and had always a considerable balance to Mr. Nutter's a 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.”

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 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.

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

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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 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 expediency of leaving Liverpool, 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 his 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.”

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

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queer combination of the ancient and modern. Crow Nest had served at one time as a manor house, at another as a farmhouse. It had an old and a new end. The old end was

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all that remained of the manor house. Its walls were ivy-mantled and timbered, its roof of grey slate was moss-grown. The new end, built 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 sight in the clough, but not far off 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 economics 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 livestock.

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 and butter at Crow Nest, their flour and groceries at the factory "badge;" a cow or a calf 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 work-people 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 ground," to settle their scores with the "badge" and the butcher's shop (representative of which departments were always in attendance in 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

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£50 for a fortnight's pay, thereby greatly economising his own capital and the current coin of the realm.

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

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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 was 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 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 "somewheere 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 the subject of a special report to the Home Secretary. The report found its

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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 been banished from other places in the

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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—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 simply looking at them, and was supposed to have close relation with the nether world. The outer doors of most of the houses were adorned with old horse-shoes, 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. 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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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.

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 his 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 Ralph's management Martha was married to a calico printer of the name of Stripes, and Mary became wife of Mr. Carboy, a manufacturing chemist. Both were considered to be good matches. Stripes kept carriage,

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and went a hunting, and Carboy had lately brought out a new tin-salt said to be worth a fortune in itself.

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

About a 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 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 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 of 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; and opinion in which the manager doubtless fully concurred.

The hands and tenants, who were much given to discussion 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. Overmodesty was not one of her foibles, and she did everything short of making him 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 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, 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

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

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.

It was a contest between prudence and love, and ended, as such contest are wont to do, in the triumph of the tender passion. If he had seen Alice 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 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 time in their lives, Ralph and Alice were eft to themselves.

“At last,” said Ralph, stealing behind her and taking her hand, the moment the crash of her father’s pipe on the heart 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

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holding her hand in his, put his disengaged arm around 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! “

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 a sweet girl, 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 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 we should take 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.

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But shall we gain 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 to 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.”

“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.”

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“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?”

“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

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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 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 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

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he will not leave him any penny. What will become of him, Heaven only knows. If ever you have a chance you will befriend him, won't you, Ralph for my sake? We shall all gain by his loos, 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."

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"Thank you, Ralph; I knew you would," said Alice, putting her arms around 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 the 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 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.

"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 up-stairs; though 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."

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No sooner said than done. But Ralph, as he 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; “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

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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 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 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 her 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.”

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

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he was or go on to the end. So he pushed his elbow quietly 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 has flown.

For a moment Ralph was quite staggered. Then he bethought him that five minutes 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 over'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 up-stairs with many precautions, and gained their bedrooms without anybody being wiser.

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 kept his

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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 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 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 of 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 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 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

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necessity for concealment would be 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.

As she spoke, the lovers exchanged a look of intelligence. It said as plainly as words could have said, "The Yew Tree Walk." Thought only a flash, Sarah detected it, and albeit she could not guess its purport, her jealousy was thoroughly

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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 still night, and, though far from dark 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."

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“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 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.

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“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 himself.”

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.

“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——”

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"It's quite true," interposed Ralph respectfully. "Alice and I have a liking for 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; and it is not more than a month since—since—I knew he had a respect for me."

"Well, well," said 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 hat 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

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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 shrew 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.

"You must not mind what 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

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

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."

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."

"Bur, 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 o means and position!" said Nutter a

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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 bonksman at 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. I always said I would."

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But 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, 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 down-stairs.

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, "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 int Ralph acted. After breakfast, at which the

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sisters, though they talked at him, never once spoken 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.

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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 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.

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 in from a journey, testified that he had seen a lady and gentleman, "as he thowt wor th' manager and Miss

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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 taken upon, it pleased him to think how his lasses had been taken in.

About eleven o'clock the truant Betty turned up 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.

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

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

"Where?"

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

"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 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 of 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 day' quiet and rest."

Two days later Mr. Nutter received a letter 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 certain clothes of hers to be sent to her at Blackpool, and Ralph requested that his letters might be forwarded to the same address.

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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.

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"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 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. Nutter 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 his attention to business, and for the last two or three years he had been little more than a looker-on. 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 book-keeping, and made changes in the internal economy of the concern with which Mr. Nutter was a 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 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

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milk brass," but it is given to be in two places at one time. He could not both help the "Owd Master" in the counting-house and look after defaulting 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 fro 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'Kitts, 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 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 of wark, mayster. Yo' mun (must) get Norbreck back. What if he has wed yo're Alice? Hoo's no 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 myself. Yo' send for him back, Squire, and let us weet th' weeding 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; there'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 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.

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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 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 Skening (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 going off one night (he lived at Carrington) with Mr. Nutter's spectacles, and leaving Mr. Nutter his own. The Squire put them on, but they made him "that

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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

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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.

"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?"

"Nowt," answered Ralph resolutely.

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“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

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guessing what was passing in his son-in-law 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.”

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.

CHAPTER VI

THE SQUIRE AND THE PARSONS

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MISS NUTTER took her revenge in a peculiar fashion. A few months after his 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

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show. She lived in a grand house, and had a very fine carriage, in which she delighted to drive through Wellsprings, casting, as she 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 than pride, and Carboy 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 fearful' 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

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lined wi' silk—all for the 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 found of pomp and pride, but I'll tell you what it is, Ralph" (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 mind and be careful you may be a rich man before you're and old 'un—richer than either Stripes and Carboy; for I don't think Stripes is doing much

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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—its 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 ha' 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, 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."

"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

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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 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 robe 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?”

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“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 his ghostly comfort, as implying 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 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.

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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?"

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.

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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 miniser.

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

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“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 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.

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Blowwell “Tinkling Cymbal,” much, it need hardly be added, to their disgust.

When Mr. Overhead was sent for—after the 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 accounted Church, and Simon Nutter was the richest man in the country side. Some very sanguine Baptist 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; and 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.

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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 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.

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

"Well, perhaps it's being in bed that makes you look

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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 hissel 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

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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.”

“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 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

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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.

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"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 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 limes 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?"

"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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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 northeast 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 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."

"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?"

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

The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust.* (1885)

“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 folk’s burials were served with bun, loaf, and beer, at rich folks’ funeral 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 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 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; 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 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 at 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

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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, and 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 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 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," 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 ought to do," answered Ralph, quietly. "I'll consider about it."

"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

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himself you would have got very much less. The estate is, moreover; much larger than you are probably aware. Mr. Nutter 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. "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 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."

The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust.* (1885)

The gentlemen 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

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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 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 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.

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,

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though richer than ever, is a confirmed invalid with a frightful temper. It is no secret that Sarah drinks more than is

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good for her; and, with all their wealth, they are probably the most wretched couple in the country.

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 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

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her, and before Ralph noticed any change—so absorbed was he in occupations—she was sick, past hope of recovery.

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.

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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 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.

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 of 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,
At the foot of the crags, oh sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.”

“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 round 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

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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?”

“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 great comfort to us. But what have you been learning his 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.”

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

"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.

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

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

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

"How can they? Are you 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.

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"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 and egg or two—or anything else?"

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

"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.

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“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 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 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.

“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 great coat, and rubbing his hands together as if he were cold, entered the room.

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 mand and principal assistant. In outward appearance the two, though decidedly different, were yet

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very much alike. Ralph had a full, resolute face, with plenty of colour, and keen, dark blue eyes. Though his hair was streaked with grey, 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 lips and narrowed jaws denoted at once a more irritable temper and a weaker will.

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

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."

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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 time and having his horse 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?"

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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."

"And where he is 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

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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"

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 us got his death-warrant."

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

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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?”

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 diseases 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 said. ‘Not all the medical faculty can save him. But don’t let

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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?”

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

"If it might please God to let me bide only two or three years longer wi' the 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 was never 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

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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 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 œsophagus; or, more gradually, of suffocation, arising from the tumour pressing on the nerves or the trachea; or by starvation, from its pressure on the œsophagus. 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 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

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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

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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 Roger of Ralph a few days after the latter’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 Willian Johnson 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 Rothenburg writes me from Dresden that, though he is a bit wild at times, he is both intelligent and diligent.”

“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.”

“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.

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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,” replies 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

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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 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—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, 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.”

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“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

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

rubbed his nose. The elder Norbreck was absent-minded sometimes, and in a 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 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 misunderstand 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

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he put his arms round his son's neck and returned his embrace.

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Bertram was so shocked at the change in his 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 home-coming 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 me off as we walked up th' clough, 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?"

The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust.* (1885)

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

"Don't fret me 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 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 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 administered for that time by trustees for your 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 fortune 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 your uncle. If the total is £200, 000, as I daresay it will be, you share and your sister's will be £175, 000, his £25, 000. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

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"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

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

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 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 wasted 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. 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.

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Norbreck, after his son had made the required promise. “She is very young to be left without father or mother, poor little lass! Be both a father and a brother 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.”

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

“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?”

“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 reserve 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. 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?”

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"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 the spur of the moment is often the best. But we have done with the 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?"

"Yes, he ran away a long time ago, and has not been heard 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 Ruppert 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 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.

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As that has influenced my life, something in appearance 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."

"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 up-stairs, 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, 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 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 matter 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 relation—they pulled together as well as Ralph himself could have desired.

The first check on Roger's habit of consulting his professional co-trustee was the receipt of Skinner and Flint's bill of cost. 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

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

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

“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 eyes over the formidable array of six and eightpences.

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—“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 a 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 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 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 interest 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.”

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

"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' 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?"

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"More. Bertram wanted ten pounds last week, and I dare say 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."

"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 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?"

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

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?”

“Nowt yet; but I could like him to have sometime. 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.”

“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,

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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 fully liberty. And are not we quite as good as them at Crow Nest? You are 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 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 off age, do you?”

“Why shouldn’t he? He’s been very steady so far.”

The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust.* (1885)

“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 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’s 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?”

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

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

"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 any more."

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 of 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 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.

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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. "

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

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

“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 Harries—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 Dimond anticipated, they had good fun if little sport. Brockholes Moor was a wild stone-wall country of deep sandy lanes and rushy 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.

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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 as excellent performer across country, and Bertram was well satisfied with his mount.

“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

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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 the calculations, and cash keeping, and that."

"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 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 hold to that resolution long, I'm thinking."

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I wonder how often I have promised my father not to run into debt."

"And have you done?"

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“Rather. 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 hundreds 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 where you wor; and when I towd him as you had gone hunting, he went on hoeful, and welly swore hissels 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.”

“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 children, 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 bout 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 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,”

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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 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 judgement, 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 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."

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“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

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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-trustee 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 that it would be quite jannock—altogether the thing, you know. I'll try to bear it a bit longer. My uncle will, perhaps, be in a better humour to-morrow.”

“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 luxuriously 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 seed of consumption, it became hard work to make both ends meet. When her husband fell ill and lost his curacy, Mrs. 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 grey, 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 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.

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

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"Han yo' yerd?" asked the from, 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 submissive to your father. It must be that power is spoiling him. The best of servants sometimes make the worst of masters."

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 judgement. 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 a 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."

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“And the pony for Alice?”

“Well, I think the Trust may afford a pony for 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.

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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; and that I had 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 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.

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,

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and what he did say was of the curtest; 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 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. And hour later he was "schooling" the Sangrado colt in the Crow Nest pastures—Alice and Mrs. Whalley looking admiringly. The Monday following he went out with the Carrington Harries—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

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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 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 act as you like."

"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

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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.”

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 t 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 way 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.

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

"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 think 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, 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

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—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' the 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 kept a special watch over her and her family, and confounded their enemies.

"Serve Codger right," said her husband, spitefully. "He behaved right badly; and, what made it worse, Bertram sided with him—actually wanted 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?"

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“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 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 and proper in the place of one or both of the aforesaid trustee 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; its 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.”

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“Oh. I’ll stand on my rights, Nancy, you may be sure of that,” returned, 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 a character he bears. Lawyers is all alike, in my opinion. They think of nowt but setting folks by the 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.”

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"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 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 preserving, 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

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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 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. Rooke, 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

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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. Her features, though honest and good-natured, were limited to an acquaintance with the three r's, and though she had 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 Mass'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 Rooke had made as much money in one day as old Dicky Maas had made in all his life—that a

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lawyer had married Mouse Square, and more of the same sort.

But the objects of these sarcasm reeked little of the pleasantries of their neighbours. Mary had got a husband on whom she doted, John and accession of fortune which he found extremely useful; and both, for the time at least, were well satisfied with the world and themselves.

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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. 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 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."

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"I am not so sure of that. There is no telling how foolish young fellows can be when they try, and Bertram is most terrible headstrong. I must appoint somebody—that is quite clear—and soon. Who would you advise me to appoint, Mr. Rooke?"

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“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, 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.”

“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 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. “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.”

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“Very well. How long are you staying in town—a couple of hours?”

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“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.”

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 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 re-perusal 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?”

“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

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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 your duty to be careful all the same, and Bertram cares no more about money than if it came down the chimney."

"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-by, 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 expenses 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 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 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?"

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“Well, to tell the plain truth, Roger, I never thought you were such a goose. Why, you said you meant to be th’ master, and i’ stead of that you have gone and taken a partner as will ten to one be your master. Mr. Skinner and

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Mr. Digit might as well never have died. It’s fair flying in the face of Providence, I call it.”

“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.”

“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 up-stairs. 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.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALAN CUERDALE.

DON 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 a table near him lay another book—an ancient history of “Columbus’s Discovery of Salvador,” illustrated with some amazing wood cuts, 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.

“Here’s Alan Cuerdale, Bertie,” announced the fair intruder.

“Let him come in,” was the reply.

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"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

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Bertram, and was nearly 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?"

"Middling weel, I think—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 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?"

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“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. Horwell the other day, and he says your knowledge of Greek is really wonderful, considering your opportunities. I don’t know how you manage it?”

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“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 de Weise’ off in that way as I went yesterday to Clitheroe for lime; and after milking 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 the open communionists—they as would admit other Christians to the Lord’s Supper, you know, whether they had been baptised or not. Did I tell you what she did with that Shakespeare as you lent me?”

“No; what did she do?”

“Well there’s rather queer things here and there in Shakespeare, 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 of th’ window, and said as

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if she ever caught me with Shakespeare 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 to 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 do you know Spanish?"

"A little. I learnt it from a fellow at Rothenberg's. He came from Santa Fé 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 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

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and ask him for money for the journey? I'll tell you what I would do, though, f I had come into the property—I would send you to college, Alan. But I say (looking at his 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, 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.

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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 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?"

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“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.

“Considering all the pains and expense that have been lavished on her education, it would be 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.”

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Alice felt the implied rebuke.

“Oh, Alan!” she exclaimed, as if struck by 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.

“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

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has Hebrew and Syriac in her album. I had no idea you could write so beautifully, 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 they were very good, though you are too modest to say so. When will you write me some poetry?”

“When I can write some 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.”

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“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 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 acres, for which he paid quite as much as it was worth; and he was in the habit of saying, with the 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 the 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-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

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intelligence and capacity that the minister subsequently taught him Latin, Hebrew, and Syriac. Mr. Horwell 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. And indirect offer from a neighbouring 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

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a very Particular indeed, distrusted all learning that had not a direct relation with Holy Writ; and his father, a careless, easy-going man, thought that in buying Alan a book now and then he did all for him that duty required.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ROOKE 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. “

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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.

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, known 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 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

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green knoll; and in Ralph Norbreck's time there was an ancient manor-house, which, according 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 print-works 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 un-picturesque.

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 the mansion of Mr. Hugh Earnsdale, and from the

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valley below rose the smoke of the extensive printworks and factories of Earnsdale Brothers. The brothers were all rich, and kept up large establishments, but Hugh was by far the richest, and lived in the biggest house and the mostly 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 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 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 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 Mechanic's Institution, and presided at a meeting

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of the Bible Society, the Earnsdales kept themselves very much aloof from the townfolk, and were Tory to the bone.

Mr. Hugh was once asked if there were any Radicals at Vale 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

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horsewomen, followed at some 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 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.

“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.”

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“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.”

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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——"

"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 *equestriennes*, he climbed into his dog-cart, 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 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 destitute of reverence as the traditional French 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, grassplats, 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

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knicknacks and furniture, which latter was mostly of old oak, and he had oak-panelled several of the rooms.

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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. 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.

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, 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."

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“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 vey critically.”

“Gladys is too pale for my fancy. I like 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 a 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?”

“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 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

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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 very little; and,

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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 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—eighteen-pence a head—and for the beer actually consumed, but the dinners 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.

“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 mun (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 truth was, as the lawyer confided to his wife, that he had a decided objection to dinning 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

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as little as possible, the dinner—a supper, as they called it— did not take place until after milking time, and 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 farmer's 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, 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 rather thin (and very cheap) beer, called “Daniel,” after the brewer of it.

The repast over, Roger and Bertram adjourned to a large room down-stairs, 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, 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

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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,

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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 Joe Jessop, who had succeeded the old gentleman of the same name as landlord of the "Redcap Inn."

Brindle ordered a "soup o' whisky."

"Why, john, yo're as waken 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 house-hold 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' hunting, an' th' tothers 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 th' 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 getten a good landlord if yo' don't, Caleb. Here's to yo're health, gentlemen."

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"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,

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and after rattling over the pavement in front of the house they suddenly stopped.

"It's ten to one a carriage o' some sort," said a fat-cheeked, dull-looking farmer, who had been dubbed Moonface by reason of the vastness of his chaps, yet capable, as the event proved, of making a correct interference.

"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 huoped 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."

"Well, 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?"

Here Neverdee paused, but observing that his audience was listening to him, he continued:—

"Yo' knowen my barn doors, they've 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 myself. 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

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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

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hand. “Glad to make your acquaintance. I trust we shall always be good friends. Very sorry I am so late and compelled to make my stay 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 up-stairs, and a stamping of feet.”

“Hullo! What's that?” he asked Joe Jessop.

“Don't you know? It's Pee o' Dick's and Mally fro' th' Nook as has been getting wed, and they're having a bit of a dance i' th' club-room. Yo' can go up if yo' like.”

Bertram did like. He thought the company up-stairs 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.

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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, 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 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.

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“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.

“You uncle wants you,” he said.

Bertram went down-stairs. As he entered the farmers’ room, Roger, whose stock was awry and waistcoat half unbuttoned, rose from his chair.

“That’sh right, dear boy,” he hiccupped holding out his hand which Bertram rather reluctantly took. “Hope you’ve had nish dance with a nish lass. Nothing like lasses, is there, Bertram? 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 it’s 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

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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.”

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 we 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,

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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 money-bag.

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 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 somewhere,” said Bertram to his aunt, when 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.

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 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

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uncle, who he feared might be headachy and cross-gained, 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 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

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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.

"Now add this list of rents received up."

Bertram added it up.

"Well?" exclaimed Roger fiercely.

"There appears to be a difference of 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?"

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“How should you know? Nobody better. I put them hundred and twenty sovereigns into th’ bad, 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.”

Roger rose from his chair.

“What! You would make me a liar, would you? Take that for your imprudence.”

“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——”

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“Ay, you are a nice ‘un, aren’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 is 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.”

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 come 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.

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“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, and would find it before the day was out. But in no case would he resume his position at Wellsprings as his uncle subordinate—on that he was resolved. Even if his uncle should apologise 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

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system, cut down wages, raised rents, and drove cruelly hard bargains. This led to the loss of many good tenants, for the railway had brought both enlightenment and competition into the valley, and the Wellsprings folks were neither so ignorant 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 thought 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.

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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.

He turned his horse's head towards Brockholes, a wild stonewall country, with yellow sandstones 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.

“What should he do?” was the question that now busied Bertram's thoughts. It was not in him to loaf about the county 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 up-stairs 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, 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

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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. So he rode up to the door, put his horse into the stable, 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 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."

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"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

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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 past nor worrying about the future. Perhaps you will say that, 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 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 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

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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 s 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.”

“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. Ah, you smile; there is no Mrs. Norbreck—yet. Well, then, to the lady who resides over your household, and asked 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.”

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

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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.

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 Mrs. Earnsdale's rather pompous little speech, then slid from his horse and shook hand with his guests.

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 head-gear which they wore when he first met them, appeared, Bertram thought, to 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.

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 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 Brockholes 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."

"I understand now," observed Mr. Earnsdale, gravely. "He is a travelling 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 daresay 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——"

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"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 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 Limefield 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.

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"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 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—

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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."

"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.

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"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.

"Is he——?"

"He's gone."

"You 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 now—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

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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 asked 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."

"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 so 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 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.

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"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 is different now, and young folks has different ideas from what we had 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, fro 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

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the first available train to Liverpool. While he made his preparations his 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.

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

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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—summat like 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 chets me wheer he’s gotten 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 gues, corn’t he? It wor th’

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rent day yesterday, and Mr. Roger allus 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.

“Which on ‘em do yo’ think as you’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 onywheer about. I like th’ chestnut best, but the dark un isn’t a bad sort.”

“But how if neither of them would have me?” said Bertram gravely.

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“Not have yo’!” exclaimed the ostler scornfully. “Just yo’ try. Write a letter and let me tak it o’er to Earnsdale Park, and you’ll see.”

“What! To either of them?”

“Ay, ayther on ‘em. Not as I don’t think but what th’ dark un favvers yo’ moor than t’other. I watched her ee yo’ wi’ them great black een o’ hers as hoo geet into th’ carriage. But 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’ mum (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 fogey.”

“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 makes 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 it—they oft do drop in too fast.”

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I know they do at our house. Ay, yo’re happen reyt i’ not being in a horry and having yo’re fling. All the same, a nice lass wi’ a lot o’ brass is gradely tempting. Such like as Miss Earnsdale is not to be pyked up every day. Yo’ had happen better let me tak’ her a bit o’ a letter, after aw, Mr. Bertram.”

The idea of Miss Earnsdale, and the half a 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

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that, in addition to boarding all vessels that were on the 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 unpleasant 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.

“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.

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“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’ one 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.”

“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 word. Mon I (must I) set off fost 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 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

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summat o’ that sort, as long as I live. And now, if you’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

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considered to have inherited with his fortune a good deal of the old gentleman's shrewdness.

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 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 picked up his ears; a silver mine in South America sounded romantic.

"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

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me in for several uncommonly good things before. He met the fellow that owns that 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

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which have turned our 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 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.”

Why not indeed? Bertram would only be 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 Rivas 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

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cost. About money, what we propose is this: we each pay two thousand pounds into a bank, 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 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 cousin of mine or not, and I’ll speak to Rooke as I pass through Carrington.”

When Bertram came insight 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 Jacob (run him to earth) at last.”

“Where?”

“In the 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 taken the hundred pounds, but he had spent only twenty pounds, and handed eighty pounds intact to his cousin.

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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.

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CHAPTER XXII.

PROS AND CONS.

WHEN Bertram, Bolland, and the prodigal son arrived at Carrington station, they found Mrs. Norbreck awaiting them on the platform.

“Oh, my lad,” she exclaimed in an agitated voice, as she laid her hand on Jacob’s arm, “you have nearly broken my heart; but I’m right fain to see you back. Come here into th’ waiting-room; I can hardly keep up.”

In the waiting-room she threw her arms around her son’s neck and wept; Jacob, to whom all this maternal tenderness came as a revelation, being silent with astonishment and confusion.

“Hoo’s bin a hard un,” said Tim in an undertone to his master. “I shouldn’t ha’ thowt it on her. But mothers is aw alike at th’ bottom—they care about nowt but their childer. I’ll be bun (bound) now, as your aunt wouldn’t tak it hoaf as ill if yo’re uncle wor to dee as hoo has done that lad running away. Ay, Mr. Bertram, women’s a queer lot, and that yo’ll find out if ever yo’ gotten wed.”

Bertram was prevented from replying to this profound observation by the approach of his aunt.

“I want to thank you for what you have done for us, Bertram,” she said, drying her eyes; “if it had not been for you I don’t think as ever I should have seen my lad again. I know we haven’t always been th’ best o’ friends, and your father wasn’t very kind to me. But, after this I shall allus look on you as my friend, whether you think th’ same of me or not, and Tim there too, as you say has helped you so much. And your uncle, Bertram, is just of my mind, and he’d be very fain if you’d look o’er what’s happened; let bygones be bygones, and be to one another as you used to be.”

“That is impossible,” returned Bertram decidedly. “Let bygones be bygones by all means, but I shall have nothing more to do with the business, if that is what you mean. I have other views.

"I am very sorry to hear you say so, but I don't know as

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I can blame you," was Mrs. Norbreck answer; and after some further conversation on indifferent topics, she, Bertram and Tim left for Wellsprings by train.

Bertram said he had business in Carrington, and told his man to be at "The Earnsdale Arms" two hours later with the drag. He preferred driving home to going thither by rail.

From the station Bertram went straight to Rooke's office. The lawyer knew of his journey to Liverpool, and congratulated him on its successful result.

"Your uncle will be very glad," he said.

"He ought to be, I suppose. You know we have quarrelled?"

"Not seriously, I hope. He told me he had been a little hasty and you a little warm, and that you had left the office saying you should never return. But he does not believe you mean it, and I am sure he will very glad to see you when you go back."

Roger had not told the worst, then. Rooke did not know how desperate the quarrel had been—of the blows given and received. Bertram was both pleased and surprised; he had not expected that his uncle would show so much discretion, nor did it occur to him that the lawyer might know all, yet not deem it expedient to divulge the fact.

"I don't know about his being glad," answered Bertram after a moment's silence, "but I shall certainly not resume any position in the business."

"I am very sorry to hear you say so, Mr. Bertram. I trust you will think better of it."

"That is not possible. I have been thinking about it for a week, and the more I think the more resolved I become. My uncle and I have not pulled together for a long time, and we never shall pull together. If we were to piece up now we should fall out again before the year was over.

"If that is the view you take of it there is nothing more to be said. You cannot be forced to go to the factory, and you have always your allowance, you know, and the use of Crow Nest. At the same time, your interests in the property are so great that I should think it would be worth your while to look after it a little."

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"My uncle is quite able to look after the property without my help. At any rate, he gives so little heed to any suggestion of mine that the little good I might do

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by staying on is not worth a thought. You spoke of my allowance just now, Mr. Rooke. Is it in the power of the trustees to make an advance of money—not much—a couple of thousand pounds or so for a special purpose?"

"Money!" exclaimed Rooke, eyeing the young fellow keenly. "I hope you are not in debt, Mr. Bertram. I did not suppose——"

"No, indeed," answered Bertram, proudly. "I should scorn to be in debt. I want the money for a business purpose, which I will explain when you have told me whether the trustees can advance me this sum or not."

The lawyer took from one of his drawers a copy of Ralph Norbreck's will and turned over a few pages of it.

"Yes," he said, "I believe we have the power; but, mind, I do not commit myself to a positive opinion until I have had time to consider the point. I find no expressed power, in so many words, to lend you money; but as the trustees are authorised to deduct from the amount eventually to be paid to you any sum or sums they may have advanced out of the Trust funds, it almost seems as if the power were implied."

"Of course it is," said Bertram rather scornfully. "Anybody can see that."

"Excuse me," returned Rooke, rather nettled; "anybody cannot see that. There are terms of art which a layman may easily misunderstand. I must, as I said, consider the point more fully before I can give a decisive opinion. I may even find it necessary to take counsel's opinion."

"Oh, bother counsel's opinion! I must know in a few days, or it will be too late," and then Bertram described Lowe Middling's scheme and the part he desired to take therein.

"A silver mine in South America! I may be mistaken, you know, but it certainly strikes me as being rather a wild scheme," observed Rooke.

"I strongly advise you to have nothing to do with it," he was going to add, but refrained, for he reflected that he had nothing to gain by thwarting the young fellow. If

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Bertram went away to South America Roger would be altogether in his power, he could do with him what he liked; and although he had no distinct idea at the moment how he should turn the circumstance to account, he felt that it would be to his advantage "to let the young fool go."

"A wild scheme! Not at all," answered Bertram eagerly

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"Don't you see that I shall have the chance of seeing for myself before deciding? I am not a mining man, it is true, but I take a mining man with me, and by his opinion I shall, of course, be a good deal led. If I don't like the thing, I will have nothing more to do with it, and, in that case, all I can lose is fifty pounds."

"Ah, I see; that throws and entirely new light upon it. There may be something in the affair, after all. How long do you suppose you would be away?"

"That depends. If I don't like the thing, I shall come back pretty soon, though when I am there I mean to see as much of the country as I can. But if I find it all right I shall probably stay a long time. Lowe Middling hinted that I might, if I liked, stay at the mines as the company's representative."

"Then you might stay out there until the end of the Trust?"

"That is very likely, I think."

"Well, I will think the matter over and talk to your uncle. It depends more on him than on me, remember; for though we may have the power to make you an advance, we are certainly under no obligation to do so; and as he is the senior trustee I am naturally bound to defer a great deal to his opinion."

"He defers a great deal to your opinion, Mr. Rooke, and I am sure he will do whatever you advise," answered Bertram with a smile.

Rooke smiled too, and said he should write to Mr. Norbreck at once, asking him to call the next day, and Bertram went away very much pleased with the lawyer, and fully confident that his request would be granted.

Now came the painful part of his task. As yet Alice and Mrs. Whalley were unaware of the breach with his uncle, much less of his intention to leave the country; he knew, much less of his intention to leave the country; he knew they would try to turn

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him from his purpose, and as the difficulty of carrying it out diminished, objections which he had hitherto overlooked began to obtrude themselves, doubts hitherto dormant cooled his courage. Never before had Crow Nest and its associations seemed so dear to him. How pleasant it was to drive with honest Tim up the old avenue, listen to the familiar cawing of the rooks among the elms, the friendly barking of the dogs in the farmyard, the lowing of the kine in the Bent pasture, and watch the blue smoke as it rose lazily from the quaint chimney-stacks

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and floated over the tree tops towards the brown moorlands he knew and loved so well.

And when he went into the old parlour, hallowed to him by the memories of his father and mother, and seeming more comfortable and homelike than it had ever seemed before, Alice met him at the threshold, threw her arms round his neck, and raising her sweet, bonny face to his, almost smothered him with kisses. It was well; for just then Bertram could not have spoken a word to save his life.

“What an age you have been away! We were beginning to think we had lost you—were we not, Mrs. Whalley?”

“Not quite so bad as that,” said the governess, as Bertram touched her cheek with his lips; “a week is not an age. Still you were very much missed, and the subject of— But there I must not make you vain. You are very very welcome, dear Bertie.”

“All the more so as you have news for us,” put in Alice. “You found that poor little Jacob, so you must have had adventures. Tell us all about them, please, first thing. I delight in adventures.”

“Are you going to Wellsprings to-night?” asked Mrs. Whalley when Bertram had finished his story. “You must have much to tell your uncle.”

“No,” said Bertram drily. “I shall go down to Wellsprings neither to-night, nor to-morrow, nor the day after to-morrow,” and then he told her all that had passed between his uncle and himself on the memorable day of the Earnsdales call and his departure for Liverpool.

Mrs. Whalley was deeply pained, Alice hotly indignant.

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"I cannot blame you," said the former. "You know how I have always counselled moderation and submission; but there is a limit to everything, and no gentleman—no youth of spirit can submit to such treatment as you have received from your uncle. You did right in resenting it, and I applaud your resolution not to return to Wellsprings, grave as it is. But what will you do, Bertie? You do not come into the property for two or three years. if your poor father could only have foreseen!"

"I am going to South America," said Bertram slowly and gravely.

"To South America!" exclaimed Mrs. Whalley, falling back in her chair as if somebody had struck her.

"Yes, South America. A voyage to South America is

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nothing nowadays—at any rate nothing to be alarmed about, it is not like going to Australia or New Zealand, you know."

"It is not the voyage that I fear, Bertie," exclaimed Alice, throwing her arms round his neck a second time; "it is your going away and the long, long separation. Don't go! Oh, Bertie, please don't go!"

"Don't be foolish, you little woman," said Bertram returning her caress. "I am not sure that it will be a long separation. I may be back in three or four months, and it is not certain yet that I shall go. Let me tell you all about it."

"Then your going depends on uncle letting you have two thousand pounds" said Alice, when he had told them all about it. "I hope he will not let you have it. I have a great mind to go to Wellsprings this moment and ask him not to; and I hate that Mr. Lowe Middling who has put it into your head."

"Have you thought it well over, Bertie? Do you think it right?" asked Mrs. Whalley, and she glanced significantly at Alice.

"I know what you mean, Mrs. Whalley. Yes, it will be hard to leave my sister, and you think, perhaps, I should not leave her. But she is in good hands; she has the trustees and she has you, and you can take care of her without me just as well as you can take care of her with me. And then, how could I remain here more than two years, having no

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position in the business, no authority on the estate, and on unfriendly terms with my uncle?"

"That is quite true," replied Mrs. Whalley sympathetically; "but South America is a long way off, and three years a long time to look forward to. Who can tell what may happen before you come back?"

Just then Bertram was called out to see a man from Wellsprings, who wanted to speak to him at the door.

"It is no use trying to dissuade him, Alice," said Mrs. Whalley, with a sorrowful shake of the head. "He is quite set on, as they say here, and nothing we can say will keep him at home. I am not surprised, and I do not blame him. I daresay if I were a young man I should do the same. But there is one thing, Alice—if he does go we will not stay here."

"Not stay here! What shall we do, then?"

"Travel. You require now better masters than we can

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get at Carrington. We will stay for a while in London, and then go somewhere on the Continent. I shall propose to the trustees to shut up Crow Nest, and as our travelling expenses need not exceed the cost of housekeeping, they are sure to consent, I think."

"Yes, that would be very nice. I want to go on the Continent almost as much as Bertie wants to go to South America," said Alice; "and life here without him would be intolerable."

Two days afterwards Bertram received a letter from Rooke, asking him to call at the office on the following afternoon. He called accordingly, and rather to his surprise found his uncle, whom he had not seen since their quarrel, in the lawyer's room. Roger seemed unusually quiet and subdued, and his greeting was shy and embarrassed, as if, Bertram thought, he felt a little ashamed of himself.

"Your uncle and I have given your application for an advance of two thousand pounds from the trust funds our serious consideration," said Rooke, slowly and with an air of importance, "and I have asked you to meet us here in order that you may learn our decision. We have decided, on conditions which I shall presently set forth, and without

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offering any opinion on the use you propose to make of the money, or accepting the slightest responsibility in connection therewith, to accede to your request. The conditions are these: The loan must be secured by being made a first charge on your revision under your father's will; it must bear interest, payable half-yearly, at the rate of five per cent per annum—the amount thereof to be deducted from your allowance, which will thereby be reduced to four hundred pounds a year—and, finally, you will be required to defray all the legal and other expenses arising out of the matter. Do you accept the conditions?"

"Certainly," replied Bertram. The conditions were better than he had dared to expect; he had feared they might propose to abolish his allowance altogether.

"Good. The papers will be ready for your signature, and the money at your disposal, this day week, and I trust the venture in which you are about to engage will turn out to your satisfaction."

"I trust so, too," said Roger, rising from his chair. "Two thousand pounds is a good deal of money, and South America is a long way off. I am loath for you to go, but I don't suppose anything I could say would turn you from your

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purpose. You were very good about Jacob. I hope you will think kindly of us when you are gone. I loved you father, Bertram, I did, and——"

The old man's voice trembled, and his eyes filled with tears. Bertram was touched; he took Roger's hand and pressed it warmly.

"Yes, uncle, we will always think kindly of each other—why shouldn't we? Let everything unpleasant be forgotten, if only for my father's sake. I will see you again before I go."

As Bertram walked from Rooke's office towards "The Earnsdale Arms," where he had left faithful Tim and old Smiler, misgivings as to the expediency of the course he was pursuing again crossed his mind. Was he acting rightly, he asked himself, in going away without making yet another effort to work with his uncle? and although he pondered the question long and deeply he did not succeed in finding an answer which fully satisfied both judgment and conscience. But he had gone too far to retreat—or

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thought he had—and he wrote by the following post to Lowe Middling, accepting his offer and agreeing to go out to South America on condition that, in the event of a company being definitely constituted he should have the option of becoming resident agent at the mines.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALAN'S HOPE.

THE rather large kitchen of a small farmhouse; a sanded stone floor, in the middle of which stands a round deal table. In the middle of this, again, stands a big brown mug, surrounded, at a respectable distance, by a number of white basins, each containing an iron spoon. Overhead hangs a big bread cratch, filled with oar caked and flanked by a side of bacon, two or three hams and a round of "hung" beef. A collection of pewter plates and brass candlesticks adorns the mantelpiece; the long dresser is topped by a tall pot-rail. A

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few straw-bottomed chairs and two or three settles are ranged round the room, one corner of which is filled up by an oaken cupboard, another by an ancient clock in an oaken case.

In an arm-chair near the hearth reposes our friend Caleb Cuerdale, smoking a long pipe and thoughtfully watching his wife as she stirs, with a thible like a miniature oar, an immense pan of porridge; and on a settle near the lozenge-paned window, their son, Alan, is poring over a volume of Goethe.

"That's them," exclaimed Mrs. Cuerdale, as a sound of approaching clogs was heard faintly in the distance; whereupon Caleb clapped down his pipe, rose from his chair, and, lifting off the fire the big pan, poured the contents of it into the big brown mug, his wife meanwhile filling each of the white basins with milk.

Hardly was this done when the door opened with a bang, and half-a-dozen lads and lasses clattered into the kitchen.

"Come on, Alan," cried one of the lads, as they drew up to the table.

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Alan laid down his Goethe with a sigh, and took his place with the others. There was not much ceremony. The spoons were first dipped into the porridge pot, then into the milk basins, and the contents conveyed to their destination with marvellous rapidity. The mug was emptied almost as fast as it had been filled. Then Mrs. Cuerdale, who had meanwhile been busy at the dresser, served each of her children with an enormous slice of bread-and-butter. Alan, who had not made very vigorous play with his spoon, pushed his portion aside, rose from his chair, and, making a muttered excuse about having something to do in the stable, went out of the house.

“What’s to do wi’ Alan to-neet?” asked Mary Cuerdale. “He seems put out o’ th’ way.”

“He is that,” said the farmer, “and so am I. “It’s about th’ young mayster going away.”

“Yo’ve yerd, then—it’s true!”

“Ay, is it. Alan met him this afternoon when he was out wi’ th’ cart. He’s to go up to Crow Nest o’ Saturday neet. Alan thinks a deal o’ th’ young mayster, he does that.”

“He’s weel thowt on by everybody. It’s a gradely bad job, his going away.”

“Thou art reyt, lass, it is,” returned the farmer with great energy of manner, “a gradely bad job, both for th’

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tenants and th’ factory folks. It’s aw along o’ that Roger, as is too near to let onybody live but hiss—d——n him.”

“Hush, Caleb, don’t swear,” said Mrs. Cuerdale severely, “it isn’t recht, and if Mr. Norbreck heard as you used sic like language about him it might be bad for us. Yes, I am very sorry; but it’s waur for Alan than any other body—he’ll lose the best fren’ as he has, and it’s sometimes been borne on my mind as th’ young mayster might happen do summat for th’ lad, he seems to set so much store on him.”

“I don’t think as Alan has ever had such a thought, mother,” said Mary warmly; “it’s Mr. Bertram’s going away as is fretting him, and nowt at all else.”

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"I did no say no different, bairn. But we may have wer thowts and wer hopes, maan't us?" observed Mrs. Cuerdale, who, as her twang denoted, came from the neighbourhood of Morecambe Bay.

"Well, to tell th' truth," said Caleb, "I've thowt th' same myself at times. But never mind; th' lad's doing vary weel as he is. Book larning is a very fine thing, I darsay; but it is not o' much use to a poor mon, as far as I can see. A bit o' coal-rake sense (a capacity for making money) 'ud tell a different tale, and our Alan has gotten a bit."

The object of these remarks was meanwhile seated on an up-ended bucket in the stable. For a wonder, he was without a book. He could not read, he could hardly think, or, rather, he could hardly think of anything save Bertram Norbreck—and somebody else. His dearest, his best friend, whom he loved as Jonathan loved David, was going away to a foreign land. No more peeps into Elysium, no more evenings at Crow Nest, no more seeing Alice, no more touches of her soft hand—gone for him her pleasant railleries, her pretty coquetries, the music of her silvery voice—all gone. But who was he that he should think thus of one so much above him—a young lady of fortune who lived in a grand house, and was beautiful and rich enough to marry a lord? And she scorned him and laughed at his rough ways, his coarse clothing, and his big hands—he knew she did. How could it be otherwise? And when Bertram was gone she would never think of him or look at him again. He wondered if she would be at home on Saturday night. Bertram had asked him up to supper, the last time, it might be, for years—perhaps for ever. Yes, just one more peep into Elysium, and then—darkness.

When Saturday night came, poor Alan donned himself

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with unusual care, put on his best holiday shirt, and almost washed the skin off his hands in the effort to free them from the stains of work.

The servant who opened the door showed him into the morning room, and he sat down alone, and looked at every object in it as if he might never see them more. He took up a book and turned over an age or two; it was no use, he could not read a word,

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and he put it down again with a sigh. As he sighed the door opened softly, and in stepped—not Bertram, but Alice.

“My brother will be with you presently, Alan,” she said, offering him her hand; “you have come a little sooner than he expected, and he is just finishing a letter. You look very sorry. I knew you would be when you heard.”

She had never spoken in this way to him before, and he could see that she was little less down-spirited than himself.

“Your brother is my best friend, Miss Norbreck; he has been more to me than a brother, and when a man is going to lose his best friend, how can he help showing his sorrow? Everything seems dark to me. I feel as if life were not worth living.”

“Poor Alan! Not so bad as that, I hope. Bertie will not be away always, you know; and he told me a little secret today that, when you know it, will, I am sure, give you pleasure and perhaps—but no, I am saying too much. He must tell you himself.”

Alan shook his head and smiled sadly, as if he were doomed never to know pleasure more; yet he felt as if he would willingly be torn in pieces by wild horses to hear her say “Poor Alan” in that pitying sympathetic voice again.

“Oh, you must keep up your courage. Who knows? You will perhaps be a great man one of these days, and then we shall all be proud of you—shall we not Bertie?”

“Proud of whom?” asked her brother, who had entered the room as she spoke.

“Of Alan here, when he is a great man. I was trying to cheer him a little. He seems so low about your going away.”

“Low-spirited! Come, that will never do, Alan. You will make me low-spirited too if you go on in that way. Why I shall be back almost before you know I am gone. Meanwhile——But I will tell you all about that afterwards. I

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must first tell you about this South American business. Draw up to the fire, Alan. Will you stay, Alice, or go to Mrs. Whalley?”

“I’ll stay if you will let me. We shall not be together many times more, you know.”

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"We three," laughed Bertram, as he lighted a cigar; "not this year, perhaps, but often, I hope, in the years to come, when Alan here realises your anticipation, and becomes a great man, and I return from the Spanish Main with a shipload of silver."

And then he went on to tell his friend of all that had come to pass since he last saw him. The day before he had been Liverpool a second time, and ascertained from Lowe Middling that he and his associates willingly accepted Bertram's condition as to appointing him resident agent. The mining captain was already engaged, and Mr. Dunbar wanted them to sail as soon as possible. On his way to Southampton Bertram was to spend a day or two with that gentleman, read through his correspondence with Rivaz, and otherwise inform himself touching the matters which it concerned him to know. Bertram had further ascertained that the mines were neither in Chili nor Peru, "nor any of those places," as Lowe Middling had vaguely put it, but near a place called El Dorado, in Venezuela—whereabouts in that country he had not the most remote idea—it was not marked in any atlas he possessed.

"Let me look," said Alice, whereupon an atlas was produced, and, the map of Venezuela being turned up, all put their heads together and looked hard at it for a long time, but without finding any El Dorado.

"Well, never mind," said Bertram, "this Mr. Dunbar will tell me all about it when I go to London. And now for the secret. My going is to help you, Alan."

"Help me! Break my heart, rather."

"Nonsense. I have had the idea from the first; but until an hour or two ago, when I told Alice and Mrs. Whalley, I did not mention it to a soul. Look here. Besides this two thousand pounds the trustees are lending me, I shall have an allowance of four hundred pounds a year; and in any case—whether this company is organised and I stay at El Dorado or not—I can well spare half of it. That half is for you, Alan."

"For me?"

"Yes, for you. To support you at one of the universities,

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where you must go and take a degree and make a man of yourself."

Alan bowed his head. When he looked up his eyes were filled with tears.

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“Bertram, Bertram, what can I say?” he cried, taking both his friend’s hands in his. “It is too much; you are too good. How can I repay you?”

“By accepting my offer without any more words, old fellow, and making yourself a distinguished man; as I am sure you will. Alice is right. We shall all be proud of you one of these days. Two hundred pounds a year is not very much, I know; but I think you will be able to make it do; and you are so far advanced already that you are sure to win prizes, and fellowships, and that; and if you should ever be short of a ten-pound note, you have only to let me know, for I mean to make these fellows stand me a good screw.”

“Oh, but I am sure two hundred pounds will be more than enough. Why, it’s four pounds a week, more than we addle (earn) all put together at our house. Three pounds will be quite enough.”

“No it won’t Alan. I have inquired. You will have an outfit to provide books to buy, and fees to pay, remember. Two hundred pounds will be quite little enough. I shall arrange with Rooke to pay you the money regularly every quarter. And look here, you must write to me often, and I shall write to you. But as I may not be able to write to everybody by every mail, you may send mu letters sometimes to Alice; she will send you her address when they are settled in London.”

Alan had come to Crow Nest with bowed head and bent shoulders. He walked home erect, with elastic step, gazing skyward, feeling like a new man and full of courage. True, Bertram and Alice were going away, but the bitterness of regret had been conjured by the magic of new-born hope. She had pitied him and bade him be of good cheer. Oh, how he would strive to make himself worthy of her good opinion and Bertram’s kindness! And if he succeeded who could tell what might happen? Still stranger things had come to pass. And then Alan looked at the stars again, and bethought him of the many who, even less befriended by fortune than he, had yet become good and great men.

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HALF Wellsprings was at the station to see Bertram off; his uncle and aunt, Caleb Cuedale and his son, and many of the old hands and tenants were there. Caleb was very grateful for Bertram's kindness to his son; nevertheless his gratitude was not incompatible with a sense of regret that "the young master had not chosen to set the lad up in a nice little farm, rather than to send him to th' varsity."

Roger, who seemed much affected, asked Bertram if he could do anything for him while he was away.

"If you would keep Tim Bolland on and not part with Cartouche, I should be very glad," said Bertram.

"I will that," said Roger. "I owe Tim a good turn for what he has done for me."

Poor Tim wept aloud, and felt the departure of his master so keenly that he spent the remainder of the day at "Old Mother Redcap," and went home late at night in a condition of happy oblivion.

At Carrington, rather to his surprise, Bertram met Rooke. The lawyer thought he would like to shake hands with him for the last time, he said, and wish him a safe journey, then, as carelessly as if the idea had only just occurred to him, he asked a question about Dunbar. "And tell him please," he observed, "that when he has anything in the shape of a spec—I mean an investment—that he can really recommend, I shall be glad to hear from him; and if you should think well of this silver mine, and a company is formed, I would not mind putting a thousand or two in myself."

The truth was, albeit nobody yet knew it but his broker, that Rooke was a very keen speculator, and had begun to "dabble" rather largely on the Stock Exchange.

The events of the last few weeks had left Bertram little time to think of the Earnsdales, yet he greatly regretted not being able to bid them good-bye. He and Alice had called at the Park a few days previously only to learn that they had left for the south of England, and nobody had any idea when they would be back.

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Bertram's first proceeding on the day after his arrival in London was to call upon Mr. Dunbar at his office in Nicholas Lane. The ship's husband and finder of good things was a little fat foreign-looking man with closely-cropped black hair, a heavy drooping

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moustache, shaven cheeks, and a quick, vivacious manner, which at times became almost abrupt. He liked to call himself an Englishman; but, as Bertram learned afterwards, his only claim to the title was the fact of his having been born in Ireland to German parents, whose name of Baer pleased him so little that he had converted it into "Dunbar."

He received Bertram very graciously, and they had long talk about El Dorado and his future duties. Dunbar gave him very minute instructions as to how he was to deal with Rivaz in the event of the mining captain, Treffry, being of opinion that the mines were worth working.

"Does Rivaz speak English?" asked Bertram.

"He is English—though you would not think it from his name—and he has a very American look. At any rate, he says so, and I don't know why he should tell a lie about it. I made his acquaintance at New York a few years ago, when he was Minister for Ecuador, or one of those Central American States, and helped him to place some of its bonds—one of the few mistakes I ever made, that. I thought I was on the right side in getting them at a very low price, but what is the use of that when you get neither principal nor interest? However, it was not Rivaz's fault. There was a revolution, and he had to run for his life. An extraordinary man, Rivaz. He has been nearly everywhere in North, South, and Central American, and is very clever at geology and mining, and that. He is one of those men, I fancy, who can make money a great deal easier than they can keep it. All the same he is very sharp about business, and awfully keen at making a bargain. You will have to keep your weather eye open, or he will get the better of you. How he got hold of those mines is a mystery—he had to leave pretty nearly everything behind him when he bolted from Ecuador—or was it Salvador?—and cheap as property is in Venezuela you cannot quite get it for nothing. However, that is not our affair; only if you think it well to go further, you must be sure to see that the title is all in order. He may have spouted the estate for anything we know."

"Don't you think he is honest, then?"

"Well, if you put it in that way, I should say honestish."

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At the same time it is quite within his right to mortgage his property, and equally within ours to make sure that he is the legal owner and competent to convey what he proposes to sell. For if we go into this matter we must acquire the mines of El Dorado absolutely. Don't misunderstand me. I have nothing against Rivaz; only when I deal with people of whom I know little, I always go on the principle of treating their honesty as doubtful until I have had proofs of their good faith. My transactions with Rivaz have been so few that I do not feel quite sure about him yet. You think I am too distrustful. Well, you are young, and have not been deceived, perhaps. Wait a few years and you will see. But theory is one thing, practice is quite another; and none of us, I suppose, always act up to our principles. I know I do not. For instance, when Rivaz began to work these mines, he shipped me a cargo of ore, and drew on me for a couple of thousand pounds—with bills of lading of course. I knew nothing about the stuff; for anything I could tell, it might have been a cargo of paving stones or sea sand, not worth a red cent; and yet I accepted the draft and paid the money. Very foolish of me, you will say; and so it was in one sense. But a man who wants to make money must run risks sometimes, and as it happened the "Breeze" consignment came out and left a small balance to the good. I have had several more since—some better, some worse—and I am now quite convinced that if the ore be crushed and cleaned before shipment—and there is plenty of it, that is the main point—we shall all make our fortunes by the mines of El Dorado. At present Rivaz ships the stuff just as it comes out of the mine, so that in order to get one ounce of argentiferous galena we have to handle, and bring all the way to England, about ten ounces of dirt. Now, what we have to do is to get rid of the dirt on the spot and ship only the crude ore. Why, the saving in freight alone would make a splendid profit. I am glad you are willing to remain at El Dorado as resident agent, in the event of our floating a company. Rivaz will take the technical management, I suppose; but we must have a business man on the spot whom we can trust, and you may spend a few years there very pleasantly."

"But where is this El Dorado, and how shall I get there? It is not marked in my atlas, and I only know that I must go, in the first instance, to St. Thomas."

"Your atlas is not a good one. See here (opening a fine German atlas by Perthes). El Dorado is a very small port

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on the northern coast of Venezuela, and the mines are in the neighbourhood. As to getting there, you may go either by La Guayra or Trinidad. In point of time and expense both routes are pretty much the same."

"The island of Trinidad?"

"Exactly, and one of the most beautiful and flourishing of our possessions in the West Indies," answered Dunbar, laying great stress on the "our."

"I shall go by Trinidad," said Bertram, thinking of Mrs. Earnsdale and her invitation to Prospect, though he had no idea that he should find her there.

"You are right. Those islands are splendid, and it will gratify you to see everywhere signs of British influence and ascendancy. And the climate is superb. You may trot about with nothing on but a nightshirt."

Bertram laughed. He pictured to himself what a queer figure Mr. Dunbar would make trotting about in his nightshirt.

The next day Captain Treffry put in an appearance, and the three had a long conference in Mr. Dunbar's private room, and received their final instructions.

Before leaving Bertram delivered Rooke's message.

"Give me his address, and I'll see what I can do," Dunbar said. "He has money, I suppose?"

"Yes; Rooke is very well off."

"You see, Mr. Norbreck, as I am getting rather widely known as a discoverer of good things, I have many applications of this sort; but I enter into relations only with men of means and position. Hence my inquiry concerning your friend. I really think it would be worth my while to give up the mercantile part of my business and go in for company promoting altogether."

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BERTRAM had already secured berths for himself and Treffry on the screw steamer *Borysthenes*, bound from Southampton to St. Thomas, and on the following day, an hour before she left her moorings off Netley, they went on board. There were so many people on the quarter-deck—passengers, passengers' friends, and others—that Bertram, after seeing his luggage safely stowed in the hold, was glad to go “forrud” and get out of the press. Shortly after they had passed the Needles the dinner-gong sounded, and he went into the salon, which was very full, and with some difficulty found a place at the purser's table, between an extremely polite young fellow with a very red face, who informed him that he was going home—his home being Cuba—and a Mexican “Juarist” colonel, whose copper skin, high cheekbones, beardless face, and long, lank hair, showed that he was of the race of the Incas.

After dinner everybody went on deck.

It was a beautiful night, and our hero, who had never been on a big ship before, or made a voyage more important than that from Harwich to Antwerp, was delighted with the scene around him. The rapid motion of the brave *Borysthenes* through the water, the perfect order on her decks, the coming and going of sailors and officers, the star-studded sky, the white sails of passing merchantmen, the sense that he was fairly on the way for that, to him, mysterious new world of which he had read and hear so much, seemed more like a romantic dream than stern reality, and he did not go below until warned that the sergeant-at-arms was about to put out the lights.

He had not been asleep, as it seemed to him, more than three or four hours, when he awoke with a sudden start and a sensation as if he were being rolled in a tub down a steep hillside. He grasped the sides of his bunk in fear, and as he heard the howling of the wind above, and the fierce swish of the sea as it beat against the side of the ship, he shuddered in spite of himself; and the turmoil inside him was hardly

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less fierce than the turmoil outside the *Borysthenes*. He did not think that he was a “luxurious slave,” yet his soul, as Byron says, “sickened o'er the heaving weave.” He had herd that lying perfectly still is the best remedy for sea-sickness, but how can anybody be still when a ship is oscillating like a pendulum? And all that poor Bertram, could do was to lie crosswise, wedge himself with pillows, and wait for daylight.

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Daylight came at last, but, the ports being closed, it was some time before he became aware of the fact. When he perceived that it would be no lighter, he slipped from his bunk, and, after pitching headforemost, he sat down on the floor, and contrived, with infinite pains and many bumps, to dress himself. Opening the door rather incautiously, he collided against a steward who happened to be passing, and both rolled under the fore-saloon table, in the neighbourhood of which Bertram's cabin was situated.

"Frightfully rough, isn't it?" he asked, as he picked himself up.

"Not very, sir," said the steward, rubbing one of his shins, which had been rather badly barked in the encounter; "only blowing half a gale of wind; but this 'ere ship, sir, she do roll most uncommon."

"Half a gale of wind!" muttered Bertram, walking, or rather lurching, towards the hatchway. "What would a whole gale be like, I wonder?"

When he gained the deck, which was wet from recent rain, he saw around him what was truly "a wild waste of waters." The sky was leaden, the wind almost dead ahead, and the foam-flecked sea looked dark and angry.

"Isn't it terrible, sir—terrible, terrible, terrible?" said a shaky voice behind him, for, finding it impossible to walk, Bertram was clinging to one of the mizzen shrouds.

Looking round, Bertram perceived that he had a companion—besides himself the only passenger visible—a short, dumpy old gentleman, with grey dishevelled hair, whose round fat face was white with sea-sickness and terror. He wore an immense great-coat, the collar turned up to his ears, but, as was evident when the wind blew it aside, no trousers. On one foot he had a slipper, on the other a boot, and on his head and old-fashioned poke nightcap, adorned with a long tassel.

"Terrible, terrible," he repeated, in a husky whisper. "How long do you think it will last?"

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"The gale? I am sure I cannot tell you," said Bertram, rather curtly, for he felt that, just then, speaking was not unattended with danger.

"No, the ship. How long will it be before she goes to the bottom?"

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“A very long time, I hope. Better ask this officer,” beckoning to the second mate, whose watch it was.

“This gentleman thinks we are in danger,” said Bertram to the officer.

“Not a bit. Half a gale of wind, that is all.”

“It is very kind of you to say so,” moaned the old gentleman; “but I can bear the truth—indeed I can. Do you think there is any chance of any of us being saved in the boats, or shall we all go down bodily?”

“You were never at sea before, I think?” said the officer, smiling.

“No, I never was, and please God I never will be again, if I once get safely back to Stalybridge. Heaven help us! Did you see that?”

“Don’t be alarmed; she only shipped a green sea. But the wind is rising, there’s no doubt about that; we shall have it worse before long, I fear.

“Worse than this!” exclaimed the little man,” and yet you say there is nothing to fear! I knew it! I felt it from the first. We shall all be drowned. I do not think anything can save us. Oh, what a fool I am to come all this way to be drowned! If either of you gentlemen should survive the catastrophe, will you please remember that my name is Wobberly, from Stalybridge; my card-case is in my trousers pocket, but I could not get them on—firm of Wobberly and Waterhouse, in the machine trade—everybody knows me at Stalybridge—and kindly inform my unfortunate family of my untimely end. Oh, my——”

Here Mr. Wobberly, who had slightly relaxed his grip of the shroud to which he had been holding on, involuntarily sat down, and before he could recover himself, was rolled right across the deck into the lee scuppers, as the second officer observed,” like a bundle of old clothes.”

Sick and sorry as Bertram was, he could not help laughing. Mr. Wobberly was speedily avenged. The laugh seemed to touch a hidden spring, and—— But there are horrors that defy description—sea-sickness is one of them, and I forbear.

The officer and one of the seamen helped Mr. Wobberly to his feet.

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“Are you any worse?” asked the former.

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"No," groaned the gentleman from Stalybridge; "but I'm no better. Please help me down-stairs, and don't disturb me, please. I may as well die there as anywhere else; for, whatever becomes of the ship, it will very soon be all up with me. Oh, I'm dreadfully ill, gentlemen."

Bertram went down to breakfast, or rather to look at it, for he could eat nothing, although, at the earnest recommendation of the purser, he made a desperate effort to swallow a bit of captain's biscuit and a cup of tea. Not more than a dozen passengers—all men—showed up. All the rest were writhing in the agonies of sea-sickness in their cabins.

The second officer's forecast was verified by the event. The wind did freshen, and before sunset it was blowing a stiff gale from the north-east. For two days Bertram observed an involuntary fast; but, finding it impossible to remain in his dark and stuffy cabin, he spent the most of his time on deck, watching the waves, wishing they were green fields, and thinking of Crow Nest. On the third day of the voyage, happening to be in the saloon at luncheon time, he was constrained, by pressing advice of his friend the purser, to take a spoonful of pea-soup. To his surprise it went down without difficulty; after the second spoonful he began to feel positively hungry, asked for another plate, followed it up with a beefsteak, and rose from the table another man.

"Did not I tell you so?" said the purser. "You are all right now."

In the night the wind went down; the morrow broke brightly, and, as the day advanced, limp-looking passengers, who had been invisible since the *Borysthenes* left port, began to gather on the quarter-deck and walk feebly about in the sun.

Bertram, now fully recovered, was pacing to and fro with a young fellow who was going out to Lima. At sea everybody asks everybody else whither he is bound.

"I had no idea we had so many ladies on board," the former was saying. "There are seven or eight on deck already, and probably a lot more below."

"Yes; that gale coming on soon after we left port was too much for them, poor things!"

"See, there are two more just coming up the hatchway. Seem to be mother and daughter; and deuced good-looking girl the daughter is. A Creole, I expect."

“By Jove!” exclaimed Bertram. I do believe—I do believe——”

He went nearer, he looked again, and he looked hard. Yes, there was no mistake about it. Running towards the companion in some excitement, he doffed his hat, made a low bow, and Gladys Earnsdale and her mother were received on the quarter-deck of the *Borysthenes* by Bertram Norbreck.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHINING HOURS.

“YOU here, Mr. Norbreck!” chorused the two ladies, the elder one in her surprise almost falling backward down the companion.

“You were good enough to invite me to Prospect, and I believe this is the way to Trinidad,” said Bertram, gravely, as he unfolded Mrs. Earnsdale’s Southampton chair.

“Certainly I did, and we shall be delighted to see you at Prospect. But how did you know we were going? It was all so sudden; we did not write to anybody. I cannot conceive——”

“Mr. Norbreck is only teasing, mother,” put in Gladys, with a humorous glance at Bertram. “I do not think he had any more idea of meeting us here than we had of meeting him.”

“Is that so, Mr. Norbreck? Yes, it must be so. But how then? I really cannot understand——”

“What on earth are you going to Trinidad for,” she meant, which Bertram discerning, and having nothing to conceal, he placed three Southampton chairs in a row, sat down on the middle one, and told the ladies so much of his story as was sufficient to account for his appearance on the *Borysthenes*.

“Well, that is strange,” was Mrs. Earnsdale’s comment; “and to think we should meet here on our way to Trinidad is almost stranger still. We heard by the last

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mail, while we were staying at my brother's place in Berkshire, that our attorney had died very suddenly, and my brother thought I had better go out by the next packet to look after things, you know; and so we had to pack up and get away at once."

Bertram looked puzzled.

"Are lawyers, then, so scarce at Trinidad," he asked, "that the death of one of them is regarded as a calamity?"

"I did not say a lawyer; I said out attorney—the man who looked after the estate, and had my power of attorney, you know."

"I understand now. Your steward, in fact."

"We call them attorneys in the West Indies; and very important men they are, too, I assure you. It depends entirely on your attorney whether you make a handsome income or heavy loss. And very high and mighty gentlemen some of them are. I know I was always terribly afraid of Crystal; he wrote such letters. But my agents, the people through whom the sugar and that is shipped, say they know a very good man who will be glad to take his place. All the same, I should like to see him before he is engaged; for, though I don't profess to know much about business, I am a pretty good judge of character. And now about yourself, Mr. Norbreck. How long can you give us at Prospect? A good long time, I hope."

"I am afraid not, Mrs. Earnsdale. I must start by the first steamer that leaves Port of Spain for El Dorado."

"That is very unfortunate. I fear Prospect will not be ready for the reception of visitors or even of ourselves for some time. Uninhabited houses in the tropics go fast to ruin."

"Never mind that, Mrs. Earnsdale—I mean not being able to invite me to Prospect. I do not think I shall be so busy at El Dorado that I cannot find time to make an occasional visit to Trinidad."

"Of course you must; and we shall expect you always to come to Prospect, and take it very unkindly if you do not. It will be so pleasant to see somebody who knows Carrington; and as we may stay in Trinidad two or three years, we shall have ample opportunity of making each other's better acquaintance; and, do you know, I have a feeling that we shall become quite fast friends."

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"You express my own sentiments exactly. It is what I should have said myself if I had dared," said Bertram with

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a gallant bow to the mother, and a quick glance at the daughter. They were now walking about on the deck.

"Then we are fast friends, already," returned Mrs. Earnsdale, with a laugh. "What say you, Gladys?"

"Mr. Norbreck has already earned my gratitude," answered the girl, slightly blushing; "and I shall be delighted to possess his friendship."

"Very good indeed; you could not have put it better, Gladys," said her mother. "That is settled then; we are sworn friends. If I can forward your views in any way at Port of Spain I shall be only too glad. I know nearly everybody in the place—at any rate everybody worth knowing."

"Thank you very much, Mrs Earnsdale; if I should find it necessary I will not fail to profit by your kindness. Do you know El Dorado at all?"

"I simply know that such a place exists. I had certainly no idea there was a silver mine there. How strange and romantic it all seems!"

"Yes," says Gladys, "a silver mine in South America suggests memories of Chili and Peru, Cortez and Pizarro, terrible dangers, wild adventures, and dazzling wealth. I hope you will survive the dangers, acquire the wealth, and write an account of your adventures, Mr. Norbreck."

"Thank you. But let me first see if I meet with any adventures worth relating. As for your other wish, I am not sure that it is conducive to happiness either to desire great wealth or possess it. My object in going to Venezuela is to find occupation for a year or two, and to see something of a part of the world which has long possessed a singular attraction for me."

"And so it has for me," returned Gladys, "which, seeing that I am a Creole, is perhaps not very strange."

"A Creole?" repeated Bertram.

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“Yes; I was born in the West Indies, and all who are born in the West Indies are Creoles. But I remember hardly anything of my birthplace. A dream of being led about by a black woman, of being taken in a carriage to a shining sea, and sailing for many days in a big ship—that is all.”

“Yes, you were very young then,” signed Mrs. Earnsdale, “little more than a baby; and your poor father—ah, me! How thickly sad memories cluster round our lives as we get older! But you are too young to have any sad memories, Mr. Norbreck.”

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“You forget, mother, that he has lost both his father and mother, and is now separated from his sister,” said Gladys, with a somewhat reproachful glance at Mrs. Earnsdale: and Bertram acknowledged her sympathy with a look eloquent of gratitude.

From this time Bertram became the Earnsdale ladies' cavalier; and after the *Borysthenes* had passed the Azores and got into the south-east trades, and the air became so balmy that if Mr. Dunbar had been there he might, so far as climate was concerned, have trotted about in his nightshirt all day, our hero passed many delicious hours reading to his friends as they sat on either side of him in their Southampton chairs. And sometimes after sunset, when a great golden moon, set in a purple aureole, shone on the mysterious ocean with a brilliancy northern latitudes never know, the deck would be cleared for a waltz; and while the moonbeams danced on the sea Bertram, yielding to the witchery of the hour and the scene, and feeling as if he were in fairyland, would glide round with Gladys in his arms. He did not care to dance with anybody else, and when he had to surrender her to another partner he would hang over the taffrail, his spirits raised and soothed in turn by the lively music of the orchestra and the soft lapping of the waves.

It was like a fairy tale; time sped with dreamlike swiftness, and before the voyage seemed to have well begun, Sombrero, most easterly of the islands, was seen and passed. A few hours later the “painted rocks” and picturesque harbour of St. Thomas were in view, and the *Borysthenes* “let go” among the crowd of black-funnelled steamers and tall-masted merchantmen. The mail boats for the Leeward and Windward Islands, for Vera Cruz, Colon, Cuba and La Guayra were awaiting the arrival of the

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liner, and the friends of a fortnight were about to separate for a lifetime. The passengers of the *Borysthenes* were gathered on her quarter-deck, talking in groups and bidding each other farewell, hoping, some of them, though little expecting, that they might meet again. Among those from whom Bertram parted with regret was Mr. Wobberly, who had long since got over his fright, about which nobody laughed more heartily than himself, for he proved to be a pleasant and companionable old gentleman, and made himself a general favourite.

The *Arno*, a small though fast and shapely steamer,

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known as "the island boat," was now alongside, and Bertram had quite enough to do in looking after the luggage, taking care of the two ladies, and keeping an eye on Captain Treffry, who had drunk so many parting cocktails with sundry of his fellow-passengers that he was quite capable of going off by the wrong vessel. At last all was in readiness, the *Arno* cast loose from her consort, and amid cheers and shouts of farewell and other good wishes, which they as cheerily returned, our travellers started on the second stage of their journey.

CHAPTER XXVII.
SUNNY LANDS.

IT is the third day of the second voyage. Bertram and the ladies are, as usual, on deck. Except to eat and sleep, they never leave it—some of the male passengers even sleep on deck—for below are stuffiness and gloom, above beauty and light. Ample awnings intercept the rays of the burning sun, and the rapid motion of the ship produces a perpetual breeze which tempers the heat to a genial warmth. The sea, of a deep translucent blue, is calm as an Alpine lakelet on a summer morn, and the sky, undimmed by a single cloud, of a loftiness never matched in northern climes. One island succeeds another, each, if possible, lovelier than its fellow; and Bertram felt, as few who sail for the first time over the enchanted waters of the Caribbean Archipelago can fail to feel—how utterly powerless is pen to describe or brush to depict the fairness, the grandeur and the glory of those emerald mountains and that azure main.

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"It is almost too beautiful to be real," said Bertram, as they passed the lordly Guadalupe and sighted the solitary headlands of Marie Galanté. "Do you know, Miss Earnsdale, I have sometimes the absurd idea that it is all an illusion, and that I shall wake up some fine morning and find I have been dreaming."

"And everything is so picturesque," said Gladys, "even

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the people. Observe the man at the wheel there; a white sailor would not fit in with the scene nearly so well."

The man at the wheel was in truth worth looking at Dark as Erebus, more than six-feet high, bare-footed and long-limbed, dressed in white ducks and blue shirt, a red handkerchief twisted turban wise round his head, swaying his lithe form to and fro as he worked the wheel, he seemed the very beau-ideal of a black Hercules, or the corsair pilot of a West Indian cruiser.

"One can hardly imagine a man like that not being a pirate," laughed Gladys; "yet I daresay he is a very good-natured, quiet fellow, after all."

"You are quite right, Miss Earnsdale," put in the first officer, who had overheard her remark. "Long Tom Venus is one of our best quartermasters, and terribly afraid of his wife, a little woman hardly higher than his waistband."

"Tom Venus! What a name! how did he come by it, Mr. Bruce?"

"I suppose because he id such a handsome nigger."

"But why Venus? Venus was a woman, you know. They should call him Adonis."

"Well, I don't suppose sailors are very learned in heathen mythology, and you must admit that Tom Adonis does not sound half as well as Tom Venus—and there is a good deal in sound when you are giving a fellow a nickname. You want something that trips lightly on the tongue."

"I like these black people so much," said Gladys, turning to he mother; "they seem so faithful and kind-hearted."

"Wait until you have seen more of them, and then perhaps you will alter your opinion. You were saying a little while since that you would like to live to altogether in the West Indies, and never go back to England."

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“Only occasionally, and always in summer—just to see our friends, you know. I feel that here is my home; and what has England to offer in comparison with this delicious climate and glorious scenery?”

“Again, I say, wait. It is one thing to glide past these islands, which, I admit, are as beautiful as a dream; it is quite another to live in one of them, and I venture to say that, before you have been three years in Trinidad, you will tire of its monotony and long to return home.”

“Trinidad is my home, mother. I am a Creole, remember.”

“That is nothing. You will find any number of Creoles

[168] in Trinidad who would give just anything to leave it. But I am tired, and shall sit down here with my novel while you continue your promenade.”

“My mother is too matter-of-fact,” resumed Gladys. “How is it possible to tire of scenes like these? Do you think you shall ever tire of them, Mr. Norbreck?”

“Well, it does seem as if I could feast my eyes on them for ever, especially——” Here he paused as if at a loss for a word, and Gladys, catching his eye, blushed as if she fathomed the thought which he hesitated to express. “For my part, I never enjoyed anything so much in my life as this voyage. I was never so happy, in such high spirits, so full of hope. I suppose it is all the effect of the scenery, the climate, and this life in the open air—and, perhaps, something else—don’t you think it is, miss Earnsdale?”

“I think the scenery and the splendid weather are quite sufficient to account for high spirits without anything else. What can there be else, Mr. Norbreck?”

“I don’t know,” said Bertram, rather confusedly; “but it seems to me that the ship has some sort of influence on my feelings; or if not the ship, those who are on board of her. I am quite sure that if I had gone with that poor Mr. Garcia to Cuba, or with Mr. Wobberly to Colon, I should not have been nearly so happy. It is possible, indeed, I might have been miserable.”

“Unhappy with Mr. Wobberly!” returned Gladys, with a merry, though somewhat nervous, laugh. “How can you say so? I will tell Mr. Bruce what you say about the

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Arno; he will be delighted. See, there are some dolphins trying to catch the ship! Let us go to the taffrail and watch them.”

And to the taffrail they went; and, leaning over it with their heads rather closer together than was absolutely necessary, remained there long after the dolphins had given up the attempt to race the *Arno* as a bad job. It was, perhaps, not very much prudent of Mrs. Earnsdale to leave the two young people so much to themselves; but as they were rarely out of her sight, her easy-going Creole nature did not readily take alarm, and she may conceivably have thought that young Norbreck would not make an altogether undesirable *parti* for her daughter.

Meanwhile Bertram, as he had told Gladys, was very happy; and his manner, and even his words, did not leave much room for doubt that he attributed his present happiness

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even more for her society than to the magnificent scenery in which they both so much delighted. But he hesitated to probe his feelings to the bottom, and albeit a declaration of love more than once trembled on his lips, it still remained unspoken. If his knowledge of the world was slight, he possessed considerable self-restraint, and it was hardly possible for his father's son, and old Simon Nutter's grand-son, not to have a practical side to his character. Though of an adventurous disposition, he was too prudent to take such a leap in the dark as asking Gladys to be his wife before he was in a position to marry, and too proud to risk the imputation of desiring to marry her for the fortune which, no doubt, being an Earnsdale, she possessed or would inherit. He wanted to travel, too, to see something of South America and he had an idea that if he became engaged his betrothal might interfere with his plans. And then they were both very young; it would be time for them to think of marrying two or three years hence. And perhaps, after all, Gladys did not care for him. But this was rather a weak excuse, and as often as the suggestion occurred to him his heart gave it the lie; perhaps if he had been less certain he might have been more eager. He knew, or thought he knew, that he was not indifferent to her; he could read it in her eyes, perceive it in her manner, detect it in her voice. He did not doubt that she, as well as he, felt they were lovers in everything

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but in name; and, in spite of his prudent resolves, it was all he could do to refrain from confessing his passion, asking her to be his, and throwing his mission, Mr. Rivaz, and the mines of El Dorado to the winds.

But the voyage, which left golden memories in the mind of each never to be effaced, is rapidly approaching its end. Dominica, Martinique, Santa Lucia, and Grenada have been passed; the wooded peaks of Tobago are in view, and the *Arno* is making straight for the wondrous Bocas de Dragos—the Dragon's Mouth—and Port of Spain. All that the travellers had yet beheld was surpassed by the wild beauty of the islets that stud the portal of the Gulf of Sadness, as the Spaniards call the great sheet of water formed by the outflow of the Orinoco. Rocky holms, rising sheer from the sea, which dashes wildly against their sides, are covered with all the marvellous luxuriance of tropical vegetation—nodding palms, graceful tree ferns, plants whose roots float in mid-air—and flowers of gorgeous hue crown the tops of dizzy cliffs and clothe their rugged flanks with perennial verdure. East-

[170] ward gleam the green hills of Trinidad—the trees that deck them so joined together and compacted as to resemble, in the distance, the turf of a well-kept lawn—and far away to the west loom the blue mountains of the Spanish Main.

“Imagine the feelings of Columbus and his mariners when they first sighted the Antilles,” said Bertram. “No wonder they called them the Islands of the Blest.”

“They must have felt as the Israelites felt when they first saw the Promised Land,” returned Gladys, “that they enjoyed the special protection of the Almighty; and Columbus, you know, testified his gratitude by conferring on most of the islands he discovered the name of a saint.”

“Yes; Columbus was a grand mand, and he had a very proper respect for religion, according to his lights; yet he brought anything but blessing to the poor devils who lived there. The Spaniards killed every man Jack of them. They are the cruellest and most bloodthirsty people on the face of the earth.”

The speaker was a Scotch doctor with whom Bertram and the Earnsdales had struck up a friendship. He had been to Scotland “for some cold,” and having got what he

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wanted was now returning to Port of Spain, where he had been long settled and had a large practice.

“I’m afraid you are right, Dr. Mungo,” said Mrs. Earnsdale; “but you must not forget that I have Spanish blood in my veins, though, I hope, no Spanish cruelty in my nature.”

“Heaven forbid, Mrs. Earnsdale, that I should think any such thing. The Spaniards have many high and noble qualities; and you have them all, and all our best British qualities to boot.”

“A thousand thanks, doctor; if it were not so very warm I would get up and make you a curtsy. But I am thinking less about Columbus and the Spaniards than our arrangements. See, the men are getting up the luggage, we shall soon be in. I suppose we can easily get a boat?”

“Rather too easily, if anything. A dozen boats will be at your disposal the moment we let go; and seeing there are so few passengers, the boatmen, as likely as not, will decide by wager of battle which of them shall have the honour of carrying us off. They fight over a passenger like a lot of hungry dogs over a bone.”

“Well, shall we all go ashore in the same boat, then? You can manage these people better than we can.”

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The doctor and Bertram cordially concurring in this proposal, it was resolved accordingly.

“As I told you,” said Mrs. Earnsdale to Bertram, “we shall stay with my agent, Mr. Canton. He does not know we are coming, but I daresay he more than half expects us.”

“Why not go to the Countess Alvini’s, mother?” put in Gladys. “She is a much older friend, and you know her much better than the Cantons.”

“That is quite true, and she would be delighted to see us, you especially. But she is very old; and so sudden a visit might inconvenience her. Of course we shall call; and if it will take long to make Prospect habitable we must stay with her a short time. Where shall you go, Mr Norbreck? I am so sorry we cannot offer you quarters.”

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“Don’t mention it, Mrs. Earnsdale. I suppose I shall find some place. Is there a decent hotel in Port of Spain, Dr. Mungo?”

“Not exactly an hotel, in the European sense; but there are two or three respectable boarding-houses. If you like, I like take you to the one I stay at; I am a bachelor, you know. It is the best in town, and I daresay Miss Georgiana MacRitchie—Miss Georgy, as we call her—will be glad to put you and Mr. Treffry up.”

“MacRitchie! She is Scotch, then?”

“Not exactly. We don’t breed Mulattoes in Scotland. But these coloured folks are very fond of Scotch names. Or else (aside to Bertram) some disreputable countrymen of mine, who formerly lived in the island, were very fond of them.”

“How long do you suppose you shall stay in Port of Spain, Mr. Norbreck?” asked Mrs. Earnsdale as the *Arno* came to anchor, a mile or more from the shore, the Bay of Paria being thereabouts extremely shallow.

“Until I know when the steamer starts for El Dorado I really cannot say. Her comings and goings are very uncertain, the doctor tells me.”

“In any case we shall see you before you leave.”

“In any case,” said Bertram earnestly, stealing a glance at Gladys. “I could not possibly go away without making my adieux.”

“And you will write occasionally, and let us know how you get on with your silver mine.”

“Certainly, Mrs. Earnsdale, if you wish it. And if it is

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not asking too much, I shall be glad to have news of you and Miss Earnsdale sometimes.”

“Of course, we must reciprocate. You write to us, and we will write to you.”

“Is the *Spanish Main* steamer in?” asked Dr. Mungo of the black boatmen who rowed them ashore.

“Yes, she came in from Ciudad Bolivar last night, and should start for El Dorado the day after to-morrow. But there is no telling; Captain Hooker is never particular to a day or two.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MISS MACRITCHIE'S.

MISS GEORGIANA MACRITCHIE'S establishment was both more extensive and better mounted than Bertram expected, and she found him and Treffry large and airy bedrooms. The beds, rather to their surprise, were old-fashioned fourposters, and Sarah, the black chambermaid, was at much pains to explain to them the right way of arranging the mosquito curtains, which were folded round the posts.

"Miss Jargy," as Sarah called her, was a stout, dark-complexioned lady of forty; with a remarkable good-natured face and a very voluble tongue. There was also a younger and much fairer lady who addressed her as "mother," and of whom the servants spoke as Miss Corney, which Bertram afterwards ascertained to be short for Cornelia.

The company which sat down to the six o'clock dinner included Dr. Mungo, a newly-arrived judge, a Government officer, a clergyman from the United States, a newspaper editor, and two or three casual guests. The meal was eaten in semi-darkness—lights attracted mosquitoes—and the shaded lamps were placed on a sideboard at the end of the room. It was very close, and Treffry, who did not stand heat well, declared that never, even at the bottom of the deepest mines he had ever been in, had he perspired so much as he did over his first meal in Trinidad.

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After dinner Dr. Mungo invited Bertram to join him and several other of the diners, on the balcony in front of the house, where, sitting in American rocking-chairs, they sipped their coffee, smoked, talked, and watched the gleaming of the fireflies on the bushes in the garden.

The talk ran on the manners and customs of the Trinidadians.

"Miss Georgy is rather cool about that daughter of hers, isn't she?" observed the judge.

"Does not seem the least bit ashamed," said the parson.

"Ashamed! What on earth has she to be shamed about?" asked Mungo snappishly.

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"I suppose you mean she is married, or has been. Why does she allow herself to be called Miss Georgy, then?"

"Married! Not she; Georgy is not such a fool."

"Dr. Mungo, what do you mean?" exclaimed the parson, with a look of horror. "How can you defend such flagrant immorality?"

"Flagrant immorality, nonsense! Georgy is a highly moral woman, and a good mother, I tell you. I can see you don't know people. In Europe women want to marry, here they do not. Marriage among black and coloured folks—and they form the great bulk of our population—is the exception, rare exception I should say. The woman say they want husbands, not masters; and as the law places them virtually in subjection to the men whom they marry, and negroes do not make particularly kind masters, they prefer not to marry—that is all."

"All? Good Heavens, what an all!" groaned the parson.

"A very curious thing happened a few years ago," the doctor went on, heedless of the interruption. "Much as a black or coloured woman objects to matrimony, there is one occasion on which she waives her objection. When the father of her children is so sick that he cannot possibly get better, she will, in order that he may have priestly absolution, consent to become his wife; for these are people nearly all Roman Catholics, and, as you know, the Catholic Church does not grant clean bills of health for the next world to couples whose union she has not blessed. Well, there was once a stupid fool of a Colonial Minister who, thinking that what was good for England could not be bad for Trinidad, issued an edict that nobody should thenceforth be allowed to marry without banns, licenses, and all that sort of nonsense.

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Now it stands to reason that a moribund cannot wait three weeks for a license to get himself married in a church. So the new law, which virtually condemned one half of the population to die unshriven, created a terrible uproar. All the Catholics were up in arms; there was talk of secession, of an independent republic of Trinidad, and I don't know what besides. In the end, the Minister consented to a modification of the enactment, in the sense that when a doctor certifies a man to be *in articulo mortis*, or nearly so, the

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certificate answers as a license, and the priest may tie the knot there and then. I have given many such certificates, and the curious point is that, as often as not, the woman refuses to take my word for it, and will only consent to become a bride when she is convinced by her own observations that there is an absolute certainty of her becoming a widow.”

“And are you even required to perform the same office for the women?” asked the judge.

“Oh, dear no; the men are only too glad to marry without any sort of compulsion. You see it is a good deal a matter of climate. Women in this country are quite independent of the lords of creation. Here in town they can always have plenty of work at good wages; in the country they can live for next nothing. A few palm leaves protect them from sun and rain—cold there is none—and the children, until they are old enough to earn them, require no clothes to speak of. The men, on the other hand, are often lazy beggars, who like nothing so much as to make their women work while they smoke and drink and bask in the sun.”

“I daresay you are right,” observed the judge; “and I cannot honestly say that I think the women are very much to blame. Nevertheless, such laxity of morals is very much to be deprecated, and I should like to try the effect of a liberal law of divorce, making cruelty and idleness on the part of a husband a sufficient ground for dissolution of marriage.”

“I am afraid that would not do much good,” answered Dr. Mungo. “It would be difficult to persuade the women that, if they were once tied, they could ever get loose. Then you would have the priests to count with. The Catholic Church, you know, does not recognise divorce, and would certainly refuse extreme unction to divorced people who re-married, so you would just have the old difficulty in another shape. No, I think things will have to remain as they are until the men are more enlightened and the women more

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virtuous, or until the climate of the West Indies becomes either temperate or cold, and, as far as I can see, the one eventuality is no more likely to come to pass than the other.”

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The next day Bertram called on the firm of Meyer and Macall, who were to act as agents for the mines, and made certain arrangements with them concerning future shipments of ore, *viâ* Trinidad, and other matters. He also saw Captain Hooker, a little, broad-shouldered man with a mahogany face, and long, tawny hair and beard, and ascertained from him that the *Virtuous Maiden* would sail on the following evening at six o'clock.

"But that is rather an awkward hour, isn't it?" added the skipper after a moment's reflection. "I dine at six, and I daresay you do. Make it eight, then, if you are aboard at eight you will be all right."

So Bertram took two first-class tickets for El Dorado, and after a conversation about that place and Rivaz, whom Hooker knew well, he returned to Miss Georgy's to write his letters.

He had hardly settled down to his work when he was informed that a gentleman, whose name he did not catch, desired to see him. Descending to the drawing-room, he found there a short young man in white garments, with dark beady eyes, which, as he frequently winked them, had a rather peculiar effect. With many apologies for intruding upon him, the new-comer produced his card, from which Bertram perceived he had to do with Mr. Max Wunderstern, of the house of Wunderstern and Son.

"He is the little Wunder, I suppose," thought Bertram, and looking at his visitor's blinking eyes, he was involuntarily reminded of the lines he had learnt in the nursery, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are!"

Mr. Max Wunderstern's business was to ask if Mr. Norbreck would be good enough to favour his father, the head of the firm, with a visit, he was exceedingly sorry to trouble Mr. Norbreck, but Mr. Wunderstern, senior, having had the misfortune to sprain his ankle, could not possibly call on Mr. Norbreck, and Mr. Wunderstern had something to say to him about the mines of El Dorado, perhaps Mr. Norbreck would kindly call at the store before the departure of the steamer.

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"Nothing like time present," said Bertram. "I will go with you now."

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The store was on the quay, and very near Meyer and Macall's which it greatly resembled—a long, low, white-washed building, with two wide entrances, one leading into the sugar warehouse, the other into the general store. The latter was a lofty, barn-like place, hung round with agricultural implements, saws, boat tackle, saddles, and bridles; and the middle of the room was taken up by a long, broad semi-circular counter, whereon stood cases containing nails, screws, gimlets, and other hardware in great variety, for colonial merchants deal in pretty nearly everything, and are as open to sell a pennyworth of tacks as a cargo of sugar.

Bertram was led by young Wunderstern to a spacious court at the rear of the store, where, sitting in an arm-chair and nursing his game leg, they found the head of the firm, a tall, middle-aged German gentleman, with a bald head and a very smiling countenance, his manner was deferential to excess, and he thanked Bertram with much effusion for his visit.

"I heard you were likely to be connected with the mines of El Dorado," he said; "and I thought we might be useful to each other in various ways. That is why I took the liberty of sending for you. I hope you will decide to buy the mines. I know if I had the money to spare I should try to buy them."

And then he paused as if he expected Bertram to make some observation; but Bertram, though young, was not quite so green as Mr. Wunderstern thought him. Moreover, Dunbar had warned him to be in his guard. "Those Trinidad people will try to pump you," he said; "but don't you let them." So instead of replying, he quietly lit a cigar.

"But, as I was going to observe, we are not great capitalists like you," went on the merchant, "and require all our money in our business. Ach, here you are at last (to a servant who just appeared with bottles and glasses). What a long time you have been! Here, Mr. Norbreck, let me offer you a glass of dry champagne; you will find it excellent. If you will permit me, I shall be happy to put up a few bottles to take with you to El Dorado. To your health and a good journey (drinking). Of course, you cannot disclose your plans until you have surveyed the ground; that goes without saying. I suppose, however, if you find everything

satisfactory, and your engineer thinks well of the mines, you will try to come to terms with Rivaz?"

"I thought you wanted to tell me something. Mr. Wunderstern?" said Bertram, with a marked emphasis on the "me".

"You won't tell me anything, at any rate," answered the merchant with a good-humoured smile. "Well, I suppose I may as well come to the point at once. Rivaz owes me a lot of money, and if you will help me to recover it I will make it worth your while. I would even accept payment in shares if you should form a company."

"Owes you a lot of money—how?" asked Bertram, who felt that he was on the trace of something which it behoved him to know.

"For stores, tools, and sundries—including wine, provisions, and clothing—which I have sent to El Dorado at various times for account of Mr. Rivas. And then I advanced on some consignments of ore which left a heavy loss; but as they were transhipped here and sent to England by steamer, that is perhaps, not very surprising. One way and another Rivaz owes me at least two thousand pounds."

"A heavy sum."

"A very heavy sum, and more than I can afford to lose. Now, if you will help me to recover it, I will make it worth your while. If you purchase the mines, money must of course pass, and you could make the settlement of my claim a condition, you know. I would, in that case, allow you a commission of five per cent—and a hundred pounds is not to be picked up every day."

"Thank you, Mr Wunderstern," said Bertram coldly, "I don't do that sort of thing. I am not a debt collector."

"Don't misunderstand me," returned the merchant earnestly. "I am not asking you to wrong anybody or do anything underhand. It is simply a matter of business. You recover a debt for me and I give you a hundred pounds for your trouble."

"I don't want a hundred pounds, Mr. Wunderstern, and I must tell you frankly that this is a business with which I have no wish to meddle."

"Don't want a hundred pounds! Well, you are the first man I ever met that did not. But there is another way. Will you buy my claim at a discount? It will be as good as cash when you come to settle with Rivaz."

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“I have no power to do anything of the sort. But I will mention your proposal to Mr. Dunbar, the manager of the syndicate, and he may perhaps be disposed to treat with you. But why are you so anxious—don’t you think Mr. Rivaz is an honourable man?”

“He may be—only I know I would much rather have bank-notes than his promise to pay. All the same, I think very well of El Dorado—I have been there, and unless I am very much mistaken there is a fortune in those mines—with capital, and that is just what Rivaz has not got.”

This conversation did not impress Bertram very favourably, and he began to fear that his mission might be much more difficult than he had expected. It was clear that Wunderstern distrusted Rivaz, nor did Bertram feel at all sure that the opinion which the former had expressed about the mines was sincere. It was his interest that they should be sold—if they were not he would stand very little chance of being paid—and the interest of his house were evidently the merchant’s first consideration.

Before Bertram left the store he was introduced to one of the Mr. Wundersterns’s young men—by name Liebert—who was also going to El Dorado, and whose knowledge of the place—for he had been there previously—might be useful for him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALTA VISTA.

THE situation of Port of Spain, with its outlook over the tranquil waters of the Bay of Paria and its background of verdured mountains, is highly picturesque. The town, one of the most considerable in the West Indies, is orderly and well built, and looks both prosperous and respectable. But the people he met in the streets interested Bertram more than either the place or its surroundings—smart-looking European traders all in white; pretty Creole girls attired in not the very

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oldest fashions of London and Paris; coloured folks of every shade and hue, from nearly black to almost white; great barefooted negresses flaunting in gorgeous print dresses and yellow turbans; slightly-built, and highly-bronzed East Indian coolies and their women, the latter often with refined features and dark expressive eyes—arms and ankles covered with bangles—and disposing their scanty drapery with instinctive grace; and stalwart Chinese coolies, with hardly any clothing at all.

When Bertram went down to dinner, after finishing his interrupted correspondence, he was introduced by Dr. Mungo to two new-comers, Mr. Bludger, an attorney—*i. e.*, manager of a sugar plantation—from Naparima, and Dr. Flare, who had just arrived in charge of a cargo of coolies from Calcutta. The first was a man of many inches and proportionate girth, with a voice like distant thunder and the manners of a slave driver. No wonder, thought Bertram, Mrs. Earnsdale is afraid of attorneys, if this be a fair specimen of them. Dr. Flare had a very red beard and an almost redder face, large blue eyes, a bald head, and manners as gentle as Bludger's were the reverse. Like the Wandering Jew he was never at rest. From Trinidad he was going by the first packet to London, whence he meant to proceed, in medical charge of an emigrant ship to Melbourne; then back again to Calcutta or Madras, as the case might be, to return to the west Indies with more coolies, then back again to Australia with more emigrants. As he took great care of his people and always landed them in good condition, Dr. Flare never lacked employment, and made a handsome income.

"I hope the coolies you have brought are a good lot, doctor," said Bludger, "not a set of lazy devils like the last."

"Our coolies are not lazy devils, allow me to observe," returned Flare rather warmly; "they are only too good for the work you are going to put them to. Some of those who have come by the *Ganges*, especially women, are as gentle and refined as the finest ladies of the land."

"What did they come for, then?"

"For various reasons. Most, perhaps, in the hope of earning a little money, which they find it hard to do at home; some because they have lost caste, and find life among their own people intolerable."

"Yes, and they will save, and save, and in a few years go back to Calcutta with a pile of our money."

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“Not your money, Mr. Bludger, but their own, which they have wrought hard for and richly deserve. But if you object so much coolies, why do you send for them?”

“Because our Trinidad negroes are too lazy to work. You see them by scores—the great hulking scoundrels—idling about the street or sleeping in the sun; and if you speak to them they abuse you like pickpockets. Do you know, sir, that there are eight thousand of them in this town without visible means of subsistence, and as fat as pigs. I never see a black fellow at large that I don’t long to lay a whip about his shoulders and set him to some honest work.”

“You would like to restore slavery, I suppose?”

“Of course I would, and so would any man of sense who understands the subject and knows the West Indies. Emancipation has ruined these islands—completely ruined them, by gad. And as for slavery, I have seen it here and I have seen it in the Southern States, and by gad, sir, I believe it is one of the most beneficent institutions on the face of this earth.”

“Come, come, Bludger, that is more than I can stand. Emancipation was a mistake, I quite admit; but, hand it, you know, you cannot call slavery a beneficent institution. And where is the ruin you talk so much about? I see no signs of it,” said Mr. Mungo,

“Nor I,” observed Bertram; “the place strikes me as being remarkably prosperous.”

“That shows how little you know about it,” returned the attorney. “Why, plantations are going out of cultivation everywhere, and those that are not are mortgaged up to the hilt, and planters are over head and ears in debt to the merchants and the banks.”

“Not quite so bad as that, I hope,” remarked Dr. Mungo; “imports and exports would not increase as they do if the islands were not thriving. And it is, you know it is, Bludger. Even your plantation cannot be doing badly.”

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“Doing badly! Who the blazes said it was? Why there is not a plantation in the island that is doing half so well, and if you only saw the balance-sheet I sent home last mail you would say——”

“That you are as far from ruin as you look,” put in Mungo with a laugh, in which the others, including Bludger himself, heartily joined.

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Shortly after dinner the attorney announced his intention to retire for the night.

“Rather soon to go to bed, isn’t it, Bludger?” observed Mundo. “Don’t you feel well?”

“Well! Of course I am. Who the devil said I was not? But the packet sails tomorrow, and I have a lot of letters to write. And warm work it is. I never could write with my clothes on, so I make as if I had gone to bed, bar my door, and blaze away.”

“Naked?”

“As a black baby. It is nor the mere writing that fevers me—it is the cursed composition. How the devil those newspaper fellows do that have to write so much every day passes my comprehension. By gad, I think I would almost rather turn doctor and be at everybody’s beck and call, than have to sling ink for my living.”

And having discharged this parting shot, Bludger went to his room, took off his clothes, and betook himself to his correspondence.

On the following afternoon Bertram, having completed his business arrangements, despatched his letters, and sent his and Treffry’s belongings on board the *Virtuous Maiden*, hired a carriage, and went to take leave of the Earnsdales—Alta Vista, where they were staying, being at some distance from the town. The way thither lay through the pretty Marine Square, with its crystal fountain and flowering trees, up a narrow well-paved street swarming with dogs, chickens, goats, black babies and blacker vultures (highly appreciated for their scavenging qualities, and strictly preserved), and lined with little wooden shanties, the abodes of numerous negroes; then by a broader road between high walls and gaily-painted houses, embowered in trees and set in gardens, all ablaze with brilliantly-coloured flowers. At the end of this road opens out

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the Savanna, a broad green park, fringed with noble trees and bounded by lofty and verdured mountains.

But on this particular afternoon Bertram was thinking more of a fair lady than of fair landscapes. His mind was full of Gladys and their approaching interview. He recalled every incident of the voyage, from meeting on the deck of the *Borysthenes* to the landing at Trinidad; and now, when he should not see her again for weeks, perhaps months, it seemed to him that his love for her was greater than ever. His spirits sank as the hour of separation approached, and he

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asked himself if he was right assuming that his love was returned. He believed so, still he might be mistaken; it would certainly be more satisfactory to have the assurance from her own lips. Why did he not ask her when he had the chance—ask her in one of those delicious moments when they leaned together over the taffrail of the *Arno*, gazing into the blue depths of the sea, or listening to the sighing of the night wind under the glorious star-lit sky? True, he and Gladys were young, but what of that? Many younger than they had been married; while as for the mines, he could go to El Dorado, arrange with Rivaz, then resign his post, and be back in Trinidad in two or three months, at the most. Yes he had tortured himself to no purpose. He should do so no longer. That very day he would speak to Gladys, settle his doubts, and learn his fate. But he did not doubt very much, and he fell into a bewitching reverie and dreamt of a golden future, peopled with all the sweet creations of a passionate lover's fancy, until the sudden stoppage of the carriage, and the guttural "Here we are, massa," of his negro coachman, recalled him to the things of sense, and reminded him that he had reached his destination.

Alta Vista, the home of the Cantons, a low one-storeyed villa, begirt with a broad verandah and roofed with brown and white shingle, was approached by an avenue of gold-fruited orange trees and crimson-flowered hibiscus bushes. The garden was separated from the road by a fence of impenetrable cactus; stately *palmists* stood round the houses like giant soldiers on guard, and the silver-sanded walks were shaded by the scarlet-leaved *bois immortelles* and the mimosa-like foliage of the saman.

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On the shady side of the verandah Bertram found Mrs. Earnsdale deep in converse with Mrs. Canton on "old Creoles days."

"You will find Gladys and the other young people in the grove there," said Mrs. Earnsdale, after they had exchanged greetings, pointing to a clump of trees in the middle of the garden.

"The other young people! I shall not find her alone then," thought Bertram in dismay, and he wished more than ever that he had spoken betimes.

The grove was charming sylvan retreat formed of a belt of trees, the pillar-like trunks of them bedecked with flowering creepers, their tops meeting overhead and forming a roof

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of fretted foliage, which intercepted the blazing sun rays without excluding the light. The air was further cooled by a crystal fountain, and a stream of clear water, overhung with ferns, ran through the grove.

Three or four young ladies were reclining on rustic seats round the fountain, but the first upon whom his eyes fell was naturally Gladys. He thought he had never seen her looking so well. The gauze silk dress, with its Indian-like stripes, the thick golden chain which hung round her neck, the jewelled bracelets that ornamented her arms, and the daintily white and delicately fragrant clavija flowers which shone in her dark hair, matched her face and figure to perfection, and were in subtle harmony with the place and the scene. She greeted him graciously, and introduced him to her friends, and then Bertram discovered—his eyes having become accustomed to the dimmer light of the grove—that a gentleman was present, Mr. Victor Canton. The ladies were his sisters, all more or less good-looking.

Victor was a pleasant, chirrupy, cocksparrow sort of young fellow, by no means ill-favoured, and, like most Trinidadian youths, rather a dandy. Bertram observed, with a thrill of jealousy, that he sat very near Gladys, and seemed very fond of her company. On the other hand, Miss Marie Canton, an extremely curious and talkative young lady, monopolised Bertram, and plied him with so many questions that it was only ever and

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anon that he could exchange a word with Gladys. But they all got on very well together; he hoped for the best, and with her so near it was impossible for him to be unhappy.

Mr. Victor, it seemed, was a musician, and at the request of one of his sisters, sang a lively French *chanson* to the accompaniment of a guitar, which he played very deftly. Then Miss Marie asked Bertram to give them a song. Bertram protested that he did not sing—he had never sung but one song in his life, he said, and that was such a hackneyed trifle that he really must decline to inflict it upon them.

“Never mind that,” said Miss Marie, “we shall be glad to hear it as if it were an Italian cantata, shall we not, girls? We are anything but critical.”

Bertram still declined.

“Will you asked him, Miss Earnsdale?” said irrepressible Marie, pouting her rosebud of a mouth. “Perhaps he will sing for you, if it not for us.”

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“Do, please, Mr. Norbreck,” murmured Gladys, with a blush. “We are all dying to hear you.”

So entreated, Bertram would have tried to sing a Scotch psalm to the accompaniment of Highland bagpipes, and he announced, with becoming diffidence, that his unique song was “Gaily the Troubadour.”

“Oh, how nice!” cried Marie. “Do you know it, Victor?”

“I should rather think I do,” answered Victor, striking the air on his guitar, and Bertram braced himself to the task. He got through it much better than he had expected, and was warmly applauded. When he repeated, for the last time, the refrain, “Lad love, lady love, welcome home,” he threw into the words an immensity of meaning, and tried to catch his lady-love’s eye; but at that critical moment Marie moved before Gladys, received the burning glance point-black, and, to Bertram’s unspeakable astonishment, responded in kind.

In this sort of trifling all that remained of the afternoon passed rapidly away, and the young people manifested great surprise when the old people entered the grove and informed them that it was drawing near the dinner-hour.

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“Let us walk round the garden,” said Marie. “The sun is going down, and it is almost cool, and Mr. Norbreck says he admired our tropical vegetation so much.”

This proposal was accepted with acclamation, and Bertram was rushing forward to take possession of Gladys when Marie, *à propos* to nothing at all, asked him a question. Before he had done answering it, Victor was by Miss Earnsdale's side, and Bertram had to pair off with Miss Canton; and she was pleasant a companion, and so pretty and graceful withal, that if he had not been quite so deeply in love he would probably have been more than half consoled for his disappointment. And either to hide his disappointment, or perhaps out of pique—for he was so unreasonable as to think that Gladys should have waited for him—he paid Marie a good deal more attention than he had need have done.

When they reached the house, Mrs. Canton asked him to stay to dinner and invitation which was warmly supported by the young people.

Bertram said he had to be on board the *Virtuous Maiden* by eight o'clock.

“That is nothing,” observed Victor. “Hooker is unpunctual

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on principle. He will not weigh anchor a minute before midnight.

Nothing would have pleased Bertram better than to stay. He had not exchanged six words with Gladys all the afternoon, and he feared she might misconstrue his involuntary attentions to Marie—she certainly seemed dissatisfied about something—and if he sat next to her at dinner, or got near to her in the drawing-room, he could easily put himself right and give her a hint of his hopes. It was certainly a strong temptation. On the other hand, his luggage was on board the steamer, he was pledged to go to El Dorado, and if he missed the present chance he would not be able to go for two or three weeks. This consideration decided him and he informed his hostess, with many expressions of sincere regret, that he should not be able to accept her invitation.

“When may we hope to see you at Prospect?” asked Mrs. Earnsdale, as he bade her good-bye.

“Very soon, I hope, Mrs. Earnsdale. I do not think I shall need to stay very long at El Dorado.”

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Gladys said only a word or two; she did not return the pressure of his hand, and he went away in a very dejected state of mind, feeling horribly jealous of Victor Canton.

As he drove homeward across the Savanna the weather seemed to take the hue of his thoughts. Lightning flashed about the mountain tops, thunder reverberated in their hollows, and when Bertram reached his lodgings, the rain was coming down the torrents.

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CHAPTER XXX.

THE "VIRTUOUS MAIDEN."

IT was no joke reaching the *Virtuous Maiden* that night. She lay more than a mile away in the offing, and so thick was the darkness, so blinding the rain, that the boatmen could not distinguish her lights. At length, after a long row, fouling against two merchant vessels that lay at anchor, and a narrow escape of being run down by a fishing smack, they came alongside the steamer, and Bertram and Treffry, drenched to the skin, clambered on deck.

A black sailor with a lantern showed them to what he called the saloon—a long, narrow, cockpit-looking place, a dirty table in the middle, two tiers of bunks round the sides, and dimly lighted by a single flickering lamp.

"But where are we to sleep?" asked Bertram in dismay, thinking sadly of the noble saloon of the *Borysthenes*, and the trim neatness of the Arno, and the memories they suggested.

"Here," said the black man.

"And eat?"

"Here. You sleeps, eats, and does everything here, massa. Dis de saloon of de *Vartuous Maiden*."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Treffry, "If this is a virtuous maiden, give me a maiden as isn't virtuous. Why, it is worse than the cabin of a Newcastle collier."

"How soon shall we start?" asked Bertram.

"Sorry I cannot tell you, massa. Mebbe at ten o'clock, mebbe at eleven, mebbe at twelve. Cap'n ain't aboard yet, and you are the first passengers."

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“Confound the fellow! Why, he told me to be on board at eight at latest.”

“Did he? Den mebbe we shall weigh at ten. De *Maiden* is neber sure of starting till she weighs, and not allus then. Last time we busted a boiler plate, and it took two days to splice it: time afore the screw dropped into the water, and the engineer he told me this morning as he was not quite sure about the shaft, and one of de cylinders is very shaky.”

“Did you ever hear the like of that, now?” exclaimed

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Treffry. “I don’t know what you think about it, Mr. Norbreck; but I have a wife and family, and I decidedly object to trusting my carcass in a wretched old tub like this. I vote we go ashore; we may have to wait a week.”

“You cannot, mass; leastways not till morning. Your boat cast off ten minutes since. But there’s no call to fear, mass. Vartuous Maiden is all right—the only thing agen her is as her boiler busses up, and her engines breaks down now and again,” said the black quartermaster with a grin.

“The only thing!” returned the mining captain in extreme disgust. “By gad, you might almost as well say that the only thing against her is that she has a few holes in her hull. There is one thing I know. I am going ashore the first chance I get. My life is dear to me, Mr. Norbreck.”

“Nonsense, Treffry,” said Bertram. “The man exaggerates. Besides, there is no other way of getting to El Dorado except by an open boat—fancy an open boat on a night like this! And it is not like an ocean voyage; we shall never be out of sight of land. Let us make the best of it. I am going to take off my wet clothes and turn in. If the captain does not come aboard and weigh before morning we will see about going ashore then.”

To this proposal Treffry grumblingly assented, and each crept into a cot—one in the upper, the other on the lower tier. The pillows and mattresses were anything but clean, and the reverse of sweet; and Bertram had not lain long before his flesh began to creep; he felt that fiends in insect shape were crawling all over him—and Treffry, between his snorings, was audibly cursing and scratching in the bunk below. It was not very pleasant; but Bertram was too much absorbed in his own thoughts to care a great

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deal what happened to him; and, after rolling feverishly about for awhile; he fell into a doze, from which he was roused by a cry of "Boat ahoy!" Then came a trampling of many footsteps overhead, and a score or more of dripping passengers rushed, pell-mell, into the little cabin, and engaged in a frantic struggle for berths.

But the demand exceeded the supply, and Salvador, the Catalonian steward—a fine-looking fellow, built like a Spanish bullfighter and nosed like an ancient Roman—had to make up beds both on the table and floor. The air of the place, which had been close and oppressive from the first, now became foul almost past bearing. Everybody smoked, all smelt of garlic, and but for the rain Bertram

[188] would have spent the night on deck. When the anchor was weighed and the steamer began to move though the water, the atmosphere became a little less pestiferous, and the process of purification was assisted by several of the smoking passengers throwing away their cigarettes and addressing themselves to sleep.

Bertram, now wide awake and likely to remain so, amused himself by watching the ways of his fellow passengers, especially of a little fat Frenchman with a bald head, who occupied an upper bunk opposite to his. The moment he got in, and almost before the boat started, he has asked Salvador for a basin; and there he lay grasping it tightly in his arms and ready for the emergency, which was not long in coming to pass—for there was some sea on, and the *Virtuous Maiden* rolled like a log. Then, as it seemed, the Frenchman fell asleep, and Bertram, closing his eyes, tried to do the same. But the creeping demons bit hard, the slumbering passengers snored, the rain fell on the deck like volleys of musketry, the *Virtuous Maiden* made such a noise over her work as if she had been a disreputable hag, and he courted oblivion in vain. Not being able to sleep, he mused, thought about Alice, home, Alan Cuerdale, Gladys Earnsdale, and his visit to Alta Vista. And had just succeeded in forgetting the present when he was startled by a great crash. Looking round, he saw the little Frenchman bound from his bunk, and, with a howl as if he had been bitten by a rattlesnake, fall head foremost among the sleepers below.

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"Stew-art, stew-art," he exclaimed in piteous accents, "I have broken ze pot; oh *mon Dieu*, I have broken ze pot," which surely enough he had, to the dire consternation of some o the folks on the floor, who fired off a volley of fierce "carambas," while the cause of the disaster offered profuse apologies in voluble French and broken English. Salvador, wakened by the uproar, came in and made peace and put matters to right as well as he could, and in a few minutes all was quiet again.

But not for long.

An hour or two after midnight, as it seemed to Bertram—who, though not asleep, was half dreaming—a stentorian cry of "Stop her" was heard, and the next moment the *Virtuous Maiden* brought to with a shock that shook her from stern to stern, threw nearly every man out of his bunk, and sent the sleepers table sprawling on the floor.

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"By G—— she's struck," shouted Treffry; "we are done for this time, Mr. Norbreck."

Bertram sprang to his feet, as did everybody else, and amid a scene of confusion that baffles description there was a general skedaddle up the hatchway.

Captain Hooker stood, cool as an Indian, near the binnacle.

"What's the matter?" "Has she struck?" "Is she going down?" "Won't you get out the boats?" were the questions simultaneously put in as many languages by the excited passengers.

"There is nothing to be alarmed about," said Hooker quietly. "I thought we were getting too near one of the Bocas, so I just gave the order to 'Let go' first and 'Stop her' afterwards. That is all; we shall ride here till morning."

"All, is it?" muttered Treffry. "This is the rummest craft I was ever aboard in my life. I would almost as soon be at the bottom of a fiery coal-pit with a naked light, by gum!"

And then they hurried below, for it was raining as hard as ever, and as dark as pitch.

This incident naturally gave rise to a great deal of conversation, and it was some time before the talkers settled down to sleep. But Bertram, who had taken little part in

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the talk, slept no more, and after ascertaining, by putting his hand out of a port, that the rain had ceased, he slipped on his coat and went on deck. All was quiet; no watch had been set, and the look-out man slumbered at his post. The *Virtuous Maiden* was, indeed, as Treffry had said, a very rum ship.

Bertram went to the bows and looked eastward, where above the mountain range that bounds the north coast of Trinidad a grey streak was visible in the sombre sky. Then the upper part of a crimson disc appeared, the forests glowed as if they were on fire, the cloud wreaths on the lofty Cabo de Paria—the furthest point of the Venezuelan Cordillera—grew blood-red and the sky purple. Rapidly the great orb mounted high above the hills, and sea, islands, and shore, were bathed in the glorious light of a tropic sun.

When Bertram turned from the east and looked to the north he was both delighted and dismayed. Not a cable's length from the bows a rocky island rose sheer out of the water to the height of a thousand feet. All about hung the air-roots of millions of matapolos, blossoming with great

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white magnolia-like flowers. Above the matapolos grew tree after tree, liane after liane, each, if possible, more graceful than the others; the cliffs to which they clung were richer in floral beauty than the most brilliant of English conservatories, and through a rift in the rock could be seen the blue waters of the Caribbean Sea, as calm as the heavens, and unflecked by a single sail. But all round this lovely island raged a wild waste of breakers, hammering, crashing, and tearing away at its base, leaping and spouting up at its sides as if bent on its instant destruction.

“Yes,” said a voice at his elbow, as if the speaker had guessed his thoughts. “It was a very near go. If I had given the order to stop her first and let go afterwards, we should—well, we should not have been here.”

“No, and if he ship had struck on those rocks I don't suppose any of us would have got ashore.”

“Not exactly. Why those breakers would smash every bone in a man's body. And as for swimming to one of those caves yonder—look there,” said Captain Hooker,

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pointing to the water, above which appeared the black fins of a couple of sharks. "There's generally a shoal of 'em hereabouts. I don't think you had ever a narrower escape of being eaten in your life, Mr. Norbreck; I am sure I never had."

By this time all the passengers were on deck, and among them Bertram was glad to see the honest German face of Mr. Liebert, Wunderstern and Son's clerk. After exchanging greetings with him he went below and asked Salvador where he could have a wash.

"Here," said the steward, "there is nowhere else."

"Have the goodness to give me a basin then."

"Caramba!" exclaimed the steward, after peering into his pantry. "I had quite forgotten; the little French gentleman broke it last night."

"And you have no other?"

"No; but I will get you a soup plate, if you like."

"*Gracias*, Senor Salvador," laughed Bertram; "but I think I should like something rather bigger;" and taking from his portmanteau a towel and soap, he went on deck, and asked one of the sailors to give him a bucket of fresh water. Then, stripping to his waist, and kneeling down, he took a small header into the bucket, and felt greatly refreshed thereby. This proceeding seemed greatly to excite the curiosity of the Venezuelan passengers, who

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gathered round him in an admiring throng and talked vociferously.

"Gad!" exclaimed Captain Treffry, who stood by half naked, waiting his turn. "I don't think they have ever seen a man have a right good wash before. There are two or three down in the cabin washing their faces in coffee cups and drying 'em with the ship's towel. No wonder they look dirty.

No wonder indeed!

CHAPTER XXXI.

EL DORADO.

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ALL day long the *Virtuous Maiden*, favoured by a strong current and a fair wind, skirted the northern coast of Venezuela—a coast without a shore, for the verdured cliffs rose sheer from the water, and only in a few places, where the waves had effected a breach, or a stream descended into the sea, would it have been possible to land. And so closely serried was the immense phalanx of trees, so thick the undergrowth, that without hewing a path not a single step onward could have been taken. Although teeming with life, the forest to outward seeming was as silent as the grave; and only here and there, at long intervals, did a little cane patch or a solitary hut betoken human presence.

Late in the afternoon Hooker pointed out to Bertram and Liebert, who were talking and smoking on the quarterdeck, a dip in the line of a coast to westward, where there were some signs of a beach.

“There you are,” he said; “that is El Dorado, sir. In half an hour we shall be there.”

On this Bertram and Treffry went below to get their belongings together, and when they returned on deck the *Virtuous Maiden* was close in, and steaming at half speed.

Not unpicturesque was the aspect of El Dorado. Scattered groups of white houses with red roofs—a bay, deep, wide, and crescent-like, its two horns fantastically- shaped

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rocks, around which twine straggling, unkempt masses of gorgeously tinted vegetation—foam-crested waves rolling towards a palm-fringed shore—a rocky islet, peopled with pelicans, and a grand back-ground of verdant mountains.

The *Virtuous Maiden* let go a few hundred yards from a wooden jetty, on and about which all the folks in the place seemed to be gathered, for the arrival of the steamer was an event of no ordinary importance at El Dorado, and in a few minutes several boasts were alongside.

“We will go ashore in the same boat, if you like,” said Liebert; “and I think you had better let me arrange with the custom-house people for you. Better pay a dollar or so than have all your things upset and be kept waiting, *Gott in Himmel* knows how long.”

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This proposal, in which Bertram gladly acquiesced, was forthwith acted upon; and after a few minutes' conversation with the *duanero*, whom they found in a wooden shed, dignified by the name of El Aduana, and a very cursory examination of their luggage, they were courteously dismissed.

"Now we must get some peons to carry our things," said Liebert. "Ah, here is my friend Brockmann! He will find somebody for us. Ach, Brockmann, *wie gets?*"

"*Ganz gut,*" replied the new-comer, a fair middle-aged German, with lively blue eyes and a frank intelligent face. "You will stay with me—*natürlich.*"

"With all my heart, and see here (pointing to a barrel of bottles), I have brought a lot of beer; we will drink it together. Where are you going to stay, Mr. Norbreck?"

"I really don't know. I suppose there is some sort of an inn here?"

"Yes, there is a *posada,*" said Brockmann. "If you like I will go with you and introduce you to the *posadero.*"

"Thank you very much; and then I should like to see Mr. Rivaz."

"Nothing easier. There he is."

"Where?"

"The caballero on the black horse. The doctor is not often seen on foot in El Dorado."

Bertram took a few steps forward, and curiously scrutinised the man he had come so far to see. Tall, well-built and broad-chested, Rivaz, as he sat there in his powerful horse, made a striking figure. His face was large and very pale, his long hair and American beard were almost black, and but for the crow's feet under his dark eyes and the wrinkles

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on his cheeks, Rivaz might have passed for a man of forty. He was neatly dressed too, and as Bertram subsequently discovered, spared no pains to preserve the comparative youthfulness of his appearance. He wore a blue tunic, white cotton breeches, polished leather riding boots, adorned with silver spurs, and a broad-brimmed Panama hat. From his scarlet waistbelt hung a broad-bladed hunting knife, and each of his holsters

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contained a silver-mounted revolver. Whatever else he might be, Rivaz was evidently a good deal of a dandy.

“You are Mr. Norbreck, I fancy,” he said, riding to meet Bertram, as the latter walked forward to greet him. “I heard from Mr. Dunbar you were coming, and it is easy to see you are an Englishman, I hope you have had a pleasant voyage. And this is Captain Treffry, I suppose? Well, I hope you will both give a good account of the mines of El Dorado, and that we shall have ample opportunities of making each other's better acquaintance. I am sorry I cannot ask you up to the mines this evening. The fact is, we are not prepared; our accommodation is very limited, and we did not expect the steamer until to-morrow or the next day. But, by a miracle, she has kept her time.”

“The mines are not here then?”

“Oh, dear no. they are more than an hour's ride up there (pointing to the mountains) but you can ride down in much less than an hour. I will send horses for you to-morrow morning, and I think at the *posada*——”

Here Brockmann, who had been talking to Liebert, struck in.

“If Mr. Norbreck will accept my poor hospitality,” said the German in fluent English, “I shall be happy to give him quarters in my house. I cannot offer him very luxurious entertainment, but I daresay he will find himself more comfortable than at the *posada*. Liebert tells me, Mr. Norbreck, that you have lived in Dresden, and as Dresden is my *Vaterstadt*, I look up you almost as a countryman.”

“You are very good, Brockmann. What do you say, Mr. Norbreck?”

“I am extremely obliged to Mr. Brockmann, and would accept his invitation with pleasure; but Treffry knows no Spanish, and I fear it might be awkward for him at the *posada* all by himself.”

“I think I can arrange that,” said Rivaz, beckoning to a swarthy broad-set among the onlookers. “Senor

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Montey, can you find this gentleman, Captain Treffry, a bed at your lodgings, do you think?”

“Certainly, Dr. Rivaz. We have a spare room, and a bed is easily arranged.”

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“Good. You must look well after him, and get him something to eat. To-morrow morning early I shall send a peon down with two horses, and I want you to bring Mr. Norbreck and Captain Treffry up to the mines. And here, Montey—excuse me one moment, gentlemen.”

On this the two drew aside, and the doctor, as it seemed, gave Montey some particular instructions, to which the Creole listened with great attention, while Brockmann looked curiously on.

“Montey acts as my major-domo and a man of business,” observed Rivaz to Bertram when the confabulation was finished, “and very useful I find him. As you perceive, he speaks tolerable English, and I think Mr. Treffry and he will get on very well together. And now, I regret to say, I must leave you. In an hour it will be dark, and our mountain roads are none of the best. *Hasta mañana, señores,*” and amid a profusion of hat-raising Dr. Rivaz, putting spurs to his horse, rode off at a great pace.

After accompanying Treffry to his quarters, which were hard by, Bertram walked with Liebert and Brockmann to the latter's house. The way thither was by a long, unpaved street, the middle of which formed a deep, irregular gully, the abode of numerous masterless dogs that, as Bertram subsequently found to his sorrow, often made night hideous with their howlings. The street, which possessed one extremely dilapidated causeway, ran between two rows of houses; some little more than roofs on stilts, other build of sticks and clay, a few only substantial structures of stone.

All the population seemed to be out of doors—or at their doors—and the two strangers were evidently objects of general interest. The men, hardly any two of whom were alike in colour or complexion, were nearly all barefooted and wore their shirts outside their trousers. The costume of the women consisted of a single garment, generally a print dress.

“That is a cook,” observed Brockmann, as they passed a great strapping wench, as tall as a man and as stately as a queen.

“How do you know?” asked Bertram.

“By her dress. Did you not notice how greasy it is in

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front? That is because a Venezuelan cook always wipes her hands on her gown.”

In El Dorado, young people went about naked and were not ashamed. Bertram was both startled and amused to see a tall lad standing in a doorway, smoking an immense cigar, and with nothing in the world on but a straw hat.

“Do the children go about equally undressed in the rainy season?” he asked of his companion.

“Certainly,” laughed Brockmann; “that is the only time they are ever washed.”

Brockmann’s place was a corner building with two entrances, one leading into his store; the other, large enough to admit a man on horseback, gave access to the house and patio (court). But of house in the English sense of the word, as consisting of a collection of rooms, there was next to none. And open verandah ran along one side of the patio. In this verandah were a table, a secretaire, and a few chairs. A small place, just big enough to hold a single bed, was boxed off at one corner, and a little further down stood the kitchen, a stone bench, on which were a few bits of charcoal and a kettle, supported by three or four large pebbles.

Bertram wondered where they were all to sleep; for the establishment was somewhat largely populated. There were two young Germans, whom Brockmann introduced as his assistants, two big, unbreeched lads in little shirts, who were doing something with the cocoa, several small children without either shirts or anything else, and a tall, good-looking woman with dark gipsy eyes, whom Brockmann addresses as Antonia.

“Supper will be ready shortly,” said the man of the house to his guests. “Pray be seated, while I step into the store for a few minutes.”

“We have not seen Madame Brockmann yet,” said Bertram to Liebert when they were left alone. “I suppose she is out?”

“Madame Brockmann!” returned the German, growing rather red. “There is no Madame Brockmann; he is not married; that is the housekeeper.”

When Bertram had been a little longer in Venezuela he learnt that, while the woman deem it a disgrace to become hired servants they consider it an honour to act in a capacity which, in Europe, is looked upon as a degradation; and that it is hardly possible for a man to obtain a housekeeper save on the condition that she is that—and something more.

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After supper, which consisted of a sancoche, followed by a baked rice pudding and rum sauce washed down with a few bottles of Liebert's beer, cigars and coffee were produced, and they had a long talk, ranging over a great variety of subjects, from Dresden and London to Trinidad and Venezuela.

Bertram asked his host what he thought of the mines of El Dorado.

"I am not competent to give an opinion," was Brockmann's answer. "I know next to nothing about mines and mining; but Dr. Rivaz is very sanguine about them, and last shipments have turned out well, I believe."

Bertram would have liked to ask what his host knew and thought of Rivaz; but he felt that after so short an acquaintance, it would neither be expedient nor in good taste to put the question, so he contented himself with an inquiry touching the doctor's probable age.

"I don't know how old he is," said Brockmann, with an emphasis on the know; "older than he looks, I suspect at any rate on horseback. He must be fifty, and may be sixty. But he is very reserved about anything that concerns himself, as you will find if you have much to do with him."

More than this Brockmann did not or could not say, and towards ten o'clock Antonia and one of the lads appeared on the scene, carrying two X-shaped folding trestle beds and three hammocks. The former were destined for Bertram and Liebert; the latter for Brockmann and his assistants. Antonia then vanished into the corner, the boys and children lay down anywhere, and the men proceeded to undress. The last thing Bertram saw before he closed his eyes was the red top of Brockmann's cigar, as he lay in his hammock, and the first thing he saw next morning was the red top of another cigar in the same place; for, except when eating or sleeping, the Dresdener had never a cigar out of his mouth.

Although it was hardly dawn, breakfast was being prepared, and in a few minutes all were up and dressed, and the trestles and hammocks cleared away.

Half-an-hour later Montey and Treffry were at the door with a spare horse, and Bertram, after thanking Brockmann warmly for his hospitality, rode off to the mines.

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“What think you of the Englander?” asked Liebert of his friend, as the three horsemen disappeared from view.

“I like him much—a frank, pleasant-spoken young fellow, with a good face—but he has something to learnt yet. It will take an older head than his to cope with Rivaz. He

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should not have let Treffry go with Montey. Did you mark how the doctor took him aside?”

“Harm for Mr. Norbreck, I am afraid, if he does not take care. Depend upon it, Rivaz was giving his man instructions to square that mining captain, as they say in English.”

“Don’t you think the mines are good, then?”

“I cannot tell. They may be. But I think it is extremely probable that Mr. Treffry will say they are.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

PARADISE.

THOUGH still very early, it was already very warm, and the stretch of level country between El Dorado and the foot of the hills, whither the three horsemen were bound, being under cultivation, and the roads shadeless, the sun had them at his mercy, and let them feel the full extent of his power. Even Montey felt the heat, and, to the great discomfort of Treffry, rode at speed in order to reach the forest before it became still hotter. Unlike Bertram, the mining captain had not taken the precaution to bring a pair of high boots, and his trousers were so thin that, as for any protection they afforded him, he might almost as well have been without, a fact of which he soon became painfully conscious by a woeful loss of “leather.” Being, moreover, a poor rider, and a big man with very large feet, he found the small stirrups which are the mode in Venezuela extremely inconvenient. Fortunately, Venezuelan horses do not trot, they pace, otherwise Treffry, notwithstanding the energy with which he held on to the pommel of his saddle, would have come to frequent grief.

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"I don't know how you are, Mr. Norbreck," exclaimed the poor mining captain, as he wiped from his eyes the perspiration which almost blinded him, "but I'm nearly done

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for. The *Virtuous Maiden* was bad enough, yet I would rather be aboard of her than atop of this beast."

But this was far from being Bertram's opinion. For albeit the temperature was high, the morning was young; the cane pieces and maize fields through which they rode were still fresh with the night's dew; fragrant flowers perfumed the air, lustrous cloud banners hung from the wooded peaks of the *sierras*, the jewelled sea stretched vast and blue towards an horizon of silvery mist, and a soft, white surf boomed on the shore. What could be more glorious or exhilarating, although one did perspire more than was altogether pleasant? Bertram, moreover, enjoyed the "pacing" as much as Treffry detested it. He was well mounted; his horse ran with a swift, smooth motion, the like of which he had never seen before, and it was with a sense of disappointment he saw Montey turn from the main road into a by-path, so thickly strewn with stones as to compel slackening of speed.

"This is a queer sort of road, I think, Senor Montey," said Treffry, with a sigh of thankfulness for the shade afforded by the bushes that grew on either side of the track.

"It is not a road, it is a broke," returned Montey, a St. Thomas Creole, with a touch of the tar-brush in his complexion, who spoke three or four languages, each worse than the other.

"And a very pleasant break, too, I call it. I know I have not a dry thread on me, and both my calves are just skinned."

"I didn't mine that, Captain Treffry. I mined that it is a broke, a little *rio*, you know."

"Nonsense, where's the water?"

"If you are here in the *invierno*—the rainy season, you know—you will see. Last rainy season, when I came down from El Paraiso, I nearly drowned myself not far from here."

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"I can quite believe it, Treffry," observed Bertram; "this is the bed of a stream which they utilise as a road during the dry season. Where is this El Paraiso you mentioned, Senor Montey?"

"El Paraiso, that is the name of the doctor's place which we goes to."

"Paradise! The name promises well. Is it of the doctor's own choosing?"

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"No, it was the peoples wot first denounced the mines gave it that name."

"Ah, Senor Rivaz is not the first, then, who was tried his luck?"

"Oh, no; several peoples have made holes and looked for silver and gold; but they were only Venezuelans, and no good. Dr. Rivaz, he is the man to make fortune. You shall see the holes he has made, and the mineral he has ready."

By this time they had left the "little *rio*" and were mounting the face of a hill by a series of zigzags.

"This is all the doctor's doings; he engined this road quite himself," observed Montey, with pride.

"I wish he had not engined it so confoundedly steep, then," groaned Treffry, who, having lost his stirrups, was in mortal terror of slipping over his horse's tail.

"Oh, but you should see the old road; it goes straight, straight up, and there are woods across it like ladders for the horses to hold on by."

"Thank you; I don't want to see it. This is quite bad enough for me," growled the mining captain, and Montey, annoyed at what he considered his unreasonable fault-finding, relapsed into silence.

After half-an-hour's climbing they entered a wide glen between two mountain spurs, on the northern side of which ran the track, now no longer zigzagged, but always rising. Albeit the ground, both above and below them, was rocky and precipitous, every yard of it was thickly covered with bush and brake, and Bertram had an opportunity of observing, for the first time, those wonders of tropical flora, air orchids and trees with air roots. Owing to the nature of the ground, some of the latter trees, finding it impossible to draw sufficient nourishment from their proper roots, had let down from themselves, as it were, in the scanty soil, formed fresh sap conduits for the parent stem.

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These lines, of the thickness of two fingers, were often more than a hundred feet long, longer in some instances, because reaching lower, than the trees to which they belonged.

While Bertram was gazing curiously at these wonders of the vegetable world, and admiring the gorgeous hues of the flowers that twined themselves round the trunks of giant trees, and the wild beauty of the *quebrada*, he heard an exclamation from Montey:—

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“There is the mine of El Paraiso, and there is the house of Dr. Rivaz!”

On the opposite side of the glen, which had now become very narrow, could be seen a sort of cave and a heap of stones; this was the entrance of the mine, and a little further on a single-storeyed building of white-washed boards, roofed with palm leaves. Before the house was a garden, and the little clearing behind it had been converted into a maize field and a coffee plantation.

As Montey opened the little white gate that gave access to the garden, Rivaz advanced to meet his guests. His gait was slow and dignified—not to say stiff—and, as Brockmann had remarked, he looked decidedly older on foot than on horseback. “Welcome to Paradise,” he exclaimed, with a smile. “This is your first visit, and I hope it will by no means be your last.”

Then they dismounted, and the doctor led them to the house and introduced them to his wife. Madame Rivaz had a sweet face, yet worn and sad, and she looked, Bertram thought, as if her life had not been a happy one. Her hair was very grey, and she seemed much older than her husband; but in the tropics women age, as they ripen, earlier than men.

After Treffry and Montey had refreshed themselves with cocktails, compounded of rum and Angostura bitters, Rivaz proposed that they should utilise the time before luncheon by a visit to the nearest mine—that of El Paraiso. So they went to the hole before-mentioned, and each man, carrying a candle, marched some fifty or more yards into the heart of the mountain. The doctor, who headed the procession, ever and anon paused to answer some question of Treffry's, or point out a lump of gleaming ore embedded in the side of the cavern. He dwelt much on the dryness of the mine, and

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expressed a confident belief that the further they drove the heading the more mineral they should find. At the end of the gallery they found five or six naked men working in a temperature as high as that of the hot room of a Turkish bath. Treffry watched them for a while, asked a great many questions, and then, to Bertram's great relief—for he was nearly stifled—they returned to daylight.

"It is not bad mineral," observed Treffry, picking up a piece of ore that lay at the mouth of the gallery, "but you should find some way of getting rid of the gangue."

"That is exactly what I want to be at," said Rivaz. "If

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we had only the means of crushing and washing the stuff we should be able to ship pure mineral, and that would mean a princely income."

"Supposing there's plenty of the stuff," returned Treffry, drily.

"Plenty of stuff! Why, these mountains are full of mineral," answered the doctor warmly. "You have seen nothing yet. There are the Caballero, the Burro, the Estevan, the Esmeralda, and the Bolivar mines. I will show you a place, too, where I have found traces of gold. While as for quality, the last lot I shipped made forty ounces of silver to the ton—you know what that means, Captain Treffry—forty ounces of silver to the ton."

"Yes, that's very good, if you can only keep it up, Dr. Rivaz."

"Of course, I can keep it up, and improve on it. Yes, Mr. Norbreck, this is a veritable El Dorado. And the land! Why, the *pertenencia* of these mines amounts to ten thousand acres, and the timber alone, if we had easy access to the sea, would be worth a king's ransom."

By the time they got back to the house *almuerzo* was ready, and Treffry afterwards confided to Bertram that he had never made such a "second breakfast" in his life; and, certainly, a delicious soup, the like whereof neither of them had ever tasted before, turtle steaks, venison, a white meat (which Bertram rather thought was monkey), dried bananas, yams, cassava bread, followed by avocado pears, freshly-gathered oranges and pineapples, made a repast fit for the gods. To the surprise of his guests Rivaz produced some very fine champagne, which had been cooled by being enfolded

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in wet cloths, and at his request they drank success to the mines of El Dorado. Then they went out on the shady side of the house, and, sitting under the verandah, sipped milkless yet exquisitely-flavoured coffee, to the accompaniment of the finest Havana cigars Bertram had ever smoked. He had already remarked that, albeit his host lived in so remote a place and so rude a habitation, he had everything of the best; the emerald in his breastpin was a costly stone, his diamond ring and diamond shirt studs must have been worth, Bertram thought, more than a hundred pounds, and his talk was that of a man who had seen much of the world and undergone many vicissitudes and adventures.

“Yes, it is a very tolerable cigar,” he remarked in reply to a remark from Bertram. “I brought them from Havana

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myself. If you want good cigars you must fetch them. No use trusting to a merchant: Cubans don't sell their best cigars—they know better.”

“How did you get these then?”

“I got them from a Cuban planter to whom I had rendered a service. And you see this ring—it was given to me by the President of a Central American Republic for suppressing a rebellion.”

“You have been a soldier, then?”

“I have been a good many things, Mr. Norbreck. I have led an army, commanded a fleet, and fought an action. I am bound to say, however, that the fleet did not consist of very big boats, and that the action was fought on the Lake of Nicaragua. I have been a Minister Plenipotentiary, too, and if General Diego—the scoundrel—had not played me false, I should have been elected President of Ecuador.”

“But Mr. Dunbar said you were an Englishman?”

“Yes, I am a native of that country, I believe; but it is so long since I was there that my recollections of it are becoming very dim.”

“Have you no desire to see it again?”

“What for? Everybody I knew who is not dead must have forgotten me, and my memories of the old home are not particularly agreeable. Besides, what is the use of going to Europe unless you have plenty of money to spend? I have had plenty in my

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time, but it always seems to slip through my fingers somehow. Never mind, there is silver in these mines that will make us all millionaires in pounds sterling.”

At this point Treffry announced by a loud snore that the conversation did not interest him much.

“Did you see Wunderstern at Port of Spain?” asked the doctor abruptly, after a short pause.

“Yes; he sent for me.”

“To tell you, I suppose that I owe him two thousand pounds, and ask you to dun me for it?”

“Well, it did almost amount to that, I think” returned Bertram with a smile.

“The d— —d old German Jew. I know he claims two thousand pounds, and I do not expect to get off for much less; but he would be well paid at one thousand pounds, and have a handsome profit at that. I shall pay him of course, and everybody else, for Mr. Wunderstern is not the only man who takes an interest in my welfare. If you want to have a lot of people solicitous for your prosperity, Mr. Norbreck,

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incur liabilities. They say a planter never does really well until he gets deeply into his merchant's books. I am like a good many other people—have any quantity of property but not too much ready money—and the last revolution in Salvador quite knocked me out of time. I had been to New York about contracting a loan and purchasing arms and military stores, and had got as far as Cuba on my way back when I heard there had been a revolution, that my friend and patron, General Vivo, had been beheaded on the Plaza, and that if I went back I should probably be treated likewise. So I did not go.”

“You thought you would want your head another day.”

“Exactly. I went to Caracas instead, and then I heard of the mines at El Dorado—I have always had a passion for mining—indeed, I think I missed my vocation, I should have been a mining engineer—made an arrangement with the people who had the right of working them and came on here. Of course, I could not have done that if I had been absolutely destitute. Fortunately, I was not. I had a few diamonds and things, and a part of the proceeds of the loan, which I thought myself justified in keeping. My outlay here

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has been something frightful. That road is nothing much to look at, but it cost a lot of money to make, and to tell the truth I am getting hardish up. All the same I shall not sell any part of my interest in the mines for anything less than its full value. And if my son, who is now in Salvador, succeeds in realising my property there on anything like favourable terms, I shall be in a position to paddle my own canoe, Mr. Norbreck."

"Oh, you have a son, then?"

"Yes. Blas we call him. It is a Spanish name, but we have lived so much in Central and South America that we are more Spanish than English, I think. Blas is about your own age, I reckon; perhaps a little older. You will have an opportunity of making his acquaintance one of these days, I hope—when, it is hard to say. Collecting debts in Salvador is about as difficult an operation as extracting butter from a dog's throat is said to be."

When Treffry had finished his *siesta* they resumed their inspection of the mines, and the next day was similarly occupied. The sleeping accommodation at El Paraiso being somewhat limited, a hammock was slung in the verandah for the mining captain, and Bertram slept on a trestle in an out-house.

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"You will not be troubled with mosquitoes," observed the doctor; "we have none up here; and if you hear a squeak or two in the night you must not be alarmed. There are a few rats in the thatch, and they make a noise sometimes."

Bertram did, in effect, hear a great many squeaks, and was wakened early next morning by a big rat dropping plump on his nose. When he went out he found Rivaz and Treffry on the verandah deep in conversation about the mines.

CHAPTER XXXIII

RIVAZ CURIOUS.

"NOW you have seen the mines," observed the doctor, as he sat with his guests on the side of the house looking seaward, "you must survey the land a little. To-morrow, if you like, we will ride over a part of the estate. We can stay all night at a little place

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called Lobo. Then, on the following day, you may descend to El Dorado and decide what sort of an offer you are going to make me, and what like of a report you will send to Mr. Dunbar—favourable, I am sure?”

“That I cannot say until I have conferred with Captain Treffry,” answered Bertram. “But as for the ride, I accept your proposals with pleasure.”

“Good. To-morrow morning at five o’clock everything shall be ready for a start. We ride, of course, but two peons will accompany us on foot.”

“Is that necessary, doctor?”

“Very necessary, as you will see. Do you notice anything peculiar about this *quebrada*, Captain Treffry, or rather in the two hills by which it is enclosed?”

“They seem very much alike.”

“As two peas—same shape, same height, same sort of trees, same everything. Clap them together, and you would never know they have been parted.”

“You think they were once united, then?”

“I am sure; this gorge was made by an earthquake, and

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not very long ago either; and one of these days another earthquake may unmake it.”

“Not while we are here, I hope,” said the mining captain, with an incredulous laugh.”

“I also. But there is no telling. I have seen much more extraordinary things done by an earthquake than the closing of this *quebrada*.”

“Are shocks frequent here, doctor?”

“About one a month on an average, I think.”

“And does the ground really gape—open and shut?” asked Treffry in some alarm.

“I don’t think it is ever so bad as that here; you must go further west for that. But Salvador is the country for earth-quakes. I once lived in a place where there was an earth-quake every day for three months running, you talk about the ground gaping. I will tell you what befell Tadeo Roseta, a friend of mine in Salvador. He was riding along a road with his mother—he on a horse, she on a mule—when the ground opened under them and the mule incontinently disappeared—and the old lady would have gone

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too if Tadeo had not pulled her up by the hair of her head. The moment afterwards the rift closed.”

“And the mule?”

“Was buried alive”

“Do you believe it, doctor?” asked Bertram, dubiously.

“Why not? Tadeo is a truthful man; he had no interest in deceiving me, and the thing was quite possible. I have seen even stranger things. Once, at a place called Santa Maria—a village something like El Dorado—where I lived for a while, there was a very severe earthquake. When the first shock occurred, everybody ran out of their houses and made for the Plaza—squares being generally considered safer than streets—in Caracas people sometimes encamp in the squares for days together. As luck would have it, my house was half a mile from the Plaza, and I had not quite reached it when there came a second shock, more violent than the first. The church, which was on the Plaza, just collapsed—fell in like a house of cards—in one moment it became a heap of ruins; and then the Plaza itself was rent open, right in the middle, and every creature that had been standing on it disappeared. Such a wail there was. It rang in my ears for days afterwards. For five minutes or more I stood spellbound; I was like one in a dream. When I recovered my presence of mind my first impulse was to run away as fast as

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I could; but reflecting that one place was as little safe as another, I went on to the Plaza. And what do you think I found? A little baby on the ground unhurt. The mother must have thrown it there as she went down. The poor creature’s last thought was for her child.”

“And did all the others perish?”

“All”

“And what became of the baby?”

“A woman, all of whose children were killed, adopted it. More than half the population of Santa Maria perished that day.”

“I wonder at people living in such places,” said Treffry.

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“Well, it is rather surprising. It is sometimes said that people never get used to earthquakes. I think they do a little; though I never knew anybody that got to like them.

The sense of insecurity may become tolerable with habit; but an earthquake is a shock, come when it will, and most of all when it occurs at night. About the strangest earthquake experience I ever had was in Bolivia, not long after I was married. My wife and I were living in a country-house on the banks of a wide river, and one night we were awakened by a shock that nearly threw us out of our beds; the building swayed to and fro, like a tree in a storm. In an instant we were on our feet and at the door. But the door would not open. Then I looked round for the hatchet, which, together with a rope, I generally had by me, ready for such an emergency. The hatchet was not there, but the rope was; so the only way of escape was by the window, close under which swept the river, then high from recent rains. I had thus to choose between the risk of being killed by the earthquake or eaten by alligators. Concluding that it would be easier to dodge the alligators than the earthquake, I lowered my wife by the rope to the water's edge, fastened it to the window, then slipped down myself, and swam with her to the other side.”

“And did the house fall?”

“Like a pack of cards, a few minutes after we left it.”

“Well, you may say what you like about these tropical countries, and their scenery, and all the rest of it,” remarked Treffry, with much feeling, “but I say old England for me, with all thy faults, “I love thee still,” and no earthquakes or alligators.”

“Every man to his taste,” laughed Rivaz. “I prefer South America.”

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Before sunrise next morning they were all mounted, and riding in single file up a rut—road it was not—so steep that Treffry slipped over his beast's tail; and though he took no harm by his tumble, he refused to remount until they reached better ground, which they soon did.

“Now what do you think of that?” exclaimed Rivaz as they gained more even ground; “this is primeval forest.”

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They were in a natural avenue of palmist trees with smooth round stems, and topsso high that they looked like emerald clouds. And all round were other trees—mighty balatas, festooned with richly-flowered vines; giant liantasses; cocorite palms, with leaves nearly thirty feet long; parasites without end; and the air was thick with the pendent roots of wild pines, the ground resplendent with gorgeous flowers.

A sight so unspeakably beautiful would have made some men go on their knees and thank God they lived. A temple not built by hands—a glorious church of Nature's own making—and though windows richly dight there were none, an invisible canopy of green branches shed on the scene a dim, religious light, and at that hour the hush and stillness of the forest were more thrilling and solemnising than the organ peals of the greatest of Christian cathedrals.

“What trees!” exclaimed Bertram, after a long spell of astonished silence.

“Yes, they are pretty tall fellows,” said Rivaz; “but wait a bit, and I will show you something even bigger. There is every sort of timber here, I think. Rosewood, mahogany, green heart, purple heart, cedars, ceibas, lignum vitae, and sorts that botanists never heard of.”

Then they turned from the avenue, and, though the wood looked open enough, it was so full of creeping stems, and the under foliage was so intertwined with a hardly visible network of fine branches, that the two peons had to march constantly in front and make vigorous play with the *machetes* (a sort of cutlass) with which they were armed.

“Look out for nuts,” exclaimed the doctor, as they passed under the outspread branches of one giant of the forest, “or you will be having one of them on yours.”

Bertram, gazing, looked upwards, and perceived, high among the branches, a number of dark objects that looked like cannon balls.

“What are they?” he asked.

“That is a Brazil nut tree. You know what Brazil nuts are, of course?”

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“Why, Brazil nuts are little things,” remarked Treffry; “they cannot hurt anybody much”

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“But the little things are inside a very big thing. There is one on the ground. Be good enough to reach that nut, Jose (to one of the peons), and break it on the first stone we come to.”

After a good deal of hammering, the nut being large and hard, this was done. It contained quite a hatful of the three-cornered nuts dear to English schoolboys.

“The Capuchin monkeys are very fond of them,” said Rivaz. “People say they break them by rolling them against each other; but I rather think that is a cram.”

“Monkeys! Where are they? I don't see any,” said Bertram.

“In the tree tops, up there out of sight, they swarm, and parroquets, squirrels, and all sorts of creatures. Ah, there is the tree I wanted to show you; and under its branches we will, if you like, sit down and rest, and have something to eat. When I first saw that tree I thought I had run against a ship's side. See, how round and smooth it is! And the lowest branch, as near as I can guess, must be eighty feet from the ground; and the girth, for I measured it carefully, is full fifty feet, a yard from the ground.”

“And the height?”

“That is difficult to say. Perhaps two hundred and fifty feet—at any rate, two hundred.”

“Two hundred feet!” exclaimed Bertram, wonderingly, as he placed his face against the bole and looked upward at the wilderness of boughs and green cloud of leaves. “Why, that is fifty feet higher than our factory chimney, and it is not considered a little one.”

“Your factory chimney!” said Rivaz, who had also dismounted. “I did not know that Mr. Dunbar was a factory master.”

“I said our factory chimney,” returned Bertram. “I never saw Mr. Dunbar until I met him in London a month ago.”

“I beg your pardon. I thought you were one of his people. And where is this wonderful factory chimney of yours, may I ask?”

“Nothing very wonderful about it. The chimney is where the factory is—at, or rather near, a place I dare say you have never heard of, called Carrington.”

“Well, I must admit that the name does not seem quite

as familiar to me as London or Liverpool. What part of England is it in?"

"Lancashire. Do you know Lancashire at all?"

"Well, I have been there, but so long since that I have almost forgotten the circumstance. I suppose, when you speak of your factory, you mean that it belongs to your father?"

"My father is dead, Dr. Rivaz; my mother too, and Wellsprings—that is the name of it—belongs to my sister and myself, though we have not come into possession yet."

"Ah, I understand," said Rivaz, carelessly, as he unpacked his saddle-bags. "Wellsprings, Wellsprings—quite a poetic name. Is cotton manufacturing a thriving industry in Lancashire?"

"At any rate, it is an increasing industry. I have heard it said that in my grandfather's time you could not see more than three tall chimneys from Crow Nest, and now they are past counting—the valley is full of them."

"Crow Nest," said Rivaz, who was still busied with his saddle-bags; "that is another poetic name. It is where your grandfather lived, I suppose?"

"And where we live when we are at home."

"You are fortunate in having an ancestral home, Mr. Norbreck. I wish I had one. Has old Mr. Norbreck—your grandfather, I mean—been long dead?"

"I spoke of my maternal grandfather," returned Bertram, rather curtly, for he was growing somewhat impatient of the doctor's much questioning. "Yes, he has been long dead he died before I was born."

Rivaz made no reply, and during the *al fresco repast* which followed he was unusually silent and thoughtful. It was only after they were again in the saddle that he resumed his wonted liveliness of manner, and entertained them, as before, with anecdotes of his American adventures. The two peons—long, lithe, muscular fellows, whose shoeless feet must have been as hard as the iron of their machetes—went in front, and the horsemen had often to pause while they removed a fallen log or cut down the underwood with which the rarely-used path was in places overgrown.

"God bless us, what is that?" shouted Treffry, as a tremendous crash, followed by a noise like thunder, startled the echoes of the forest.

"An earthquake!" exclaimed Bertram.

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“Oh, dear, no; only a falling branch,” said the doctor, quietly.

“But how can a falling branch make a row like that?”

“Why, you see, a branch weighing, perhaps, three or four hundred pounds cannot well fall from a height of a hundred feet without making a noise.”

“Suppose,” said Treffry, with a shudder—for he was last, and the branch had come down close behind him—“suppose I had been under?”

“In that case, Mr. Treffry,” answered Rivaz, drily, “I fear we should have had to deplore the loss of a very excellent mining captain.”

“England, with all thy faults, I love thee still,” murmured Treffry, and thinking, probably, that tumbling branches might have more respect for numbers than for his single person, he drew as near to Bertram and the doctor as he could get.

“In a high wind,” observed Rivaz, “it is more dangerous to be in one of these forests than on the sea. A few months ago I went to visit a very curious lake, about a day’s journey in the interior. As I was coming back, and just as I was in the thickest part of a wood, a tremendous storm arose, and the branches snapped and fell like hail. Advance and retreat were equally dangerous, so I just let my horse go—and, *por dios*, he did go—galloping, scrambling, jumping, sliding like a mad thing, for the road, bad at the best, was encumbered with the limbs of trees. We were hit, both of us, over and over again. I could never understand how we missed being killed; and we should have been if we had not reached a *ranche* and there sheltered.”

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CHAPTER XXXIV

RIVAZ OBDRATE.

AFTER passing the night at Lobo, which consisted of three houses on stilts, and contained a population of six adults with a little clothing, thirty children without, twenty lean pigs and forty fat dogs, Bertram and Treffry parted from their host, and, accompanied by one of the peons, set their faces towards El Dorado.

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“Well, Treffry, what do you think of the mines?” asked Bertram, when they had reached a place where it was convenient to ride side by side.

“It is not easy to answer a question like that at a word, Mr. Norbreck; but, so far as I have been able to see, I think well of them.”

“Been able to see! Why, you have seen everything, haven't you?”

“And that is not very much, remember. There is only one considerable drift; the others are little more than holes. Still, there is a good show of mineral; one of those places is more like a quarry than a mine. The ore lies there in pots.”

“That is very good, isn't it?”

“If it will only last—very good. But, for my part, I would rather have a good vein that you can follow.”

“But they may last—these pots as you call them—may they not?”

“Of course, they may, and there are some very fair veins as well.”

“Then, taking it all together, your report will be favourable. I may act on that assumption in my dealings with Dr. Rivaz?”

“Certainly. At the same time, you must remember that I offer no opinion as to the quality of the mineral. You cannot tell—look at it as long as you like—whether a lump of galena, much less a ship-load, contains ten ounces of silver to the ton or a hundred.”

“That is not our affair. Dunbar must find that out for himself; it is only the quantity that concerns us.”

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“And about these blessed earthquakes, Mr. Norbreck. If those two hills should shut up, that would play the devil with everything, you know.”

“It is a very remote case, Treffry. Rivaz says the shocks, though frequent here, are never very severe. Besides, all those countries that are rich in the nobler metals—Peru, Chili, Mexico—are subject to earthquakes, and Dunbar and the others know that quite as well as we do.”

“That is quite true, Mr. Norbreck. All the same, you won't catch me putting money into a mine that is likely to be shut up by earthquakes; mining is risky enough without that.”

The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust.* (1885)

At El Dorado they separated—Bertram going to Brockmann's, while the mining captain, as before, became the guest of Montey. During the next few days both were fully occupied in writing out their reports in duplicate—one set for their own use, the other to be sent to England. That done, Bertram carefully re-read his instructions, and embodied in a letter the proposals he was authorised to make to Rivaz—and very stringent proposals they were. Until his title to the property had been carefully scrutinised and found unimpeachable, no money was to be advanced, except for the purpose of winning mineral, such mineral to be brought down to El Dorado for shipment as fast as it was got. When everything was in order, and the mines legally transferred to Bertram, as representative of the syndicate, he could pay to Rivaz, by drafts on London, a portion of the stipulated price, and the balance would be remitted from England.

The doctor's reply to these proposals was an angry, almost passionate letter, written in the third person, in which he expressed his great surprise that Mr. Norbreck should have stopped to make himself the medium of so insulting and humiliating an offer, an offer which he unhesitatingly and indignantly declined. The mines of El Dorado, he took leave to tell Mr. Norbreck, were not going a-begging yet. If he and his friends did not care to profit by so unequalled an opportunity, there were others who did; and he suggested that the best thing Bertram and Treffry could do would be to go home by the next steamer and inform those who sent them that Dr. Rivaz was neither a child nor a fool.

Bertram, furious, showed this astonishing epistle to Brockmann.

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“Rivaz might a least have written civilly. I shall certainly do as he says—return by the next mail.”

“I don't think you will,” returned to the German, quietly. “Take it coolly: wait a day or two and you will see. The doctor does not mean what he says. His idea is merely to frighten you into offering better terms. We are in South America, remember, and he is more South American than English. The peon who brought the letter is waiting for an

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

answer. Tell him there is no answer, and when Rivaz perceives that his letter has not alarmed you, he will make another move.”

On this advice Bertram acted, and the peon was sent packing.

“We are going to Naranza to-morrow, Liebert and I,” said Brockmann, shortly after the peon’s departure. “Will you go with us? We shall be very glad of your company, and I daresay it will be pleasanter for you than staying here by yourself.”

“I am very much obliged to you, I am sure; but suppose the doctor calls, or sends some message?”

“So much the better. He will look upon your going as a sign that you don’t care whether he accepts your offer or not, and very likely to be as much alarmed as he wants to alarm you. From that standpoint it is the best thing you can do.”

“Agreed; then I go.”

Later in the say Treffry called, and they had a long talk about mining in general, and the mines of El Dorado in particular. Brockmann asked him to make one of the party to Naranza. “Montey will lend you a horse,” he said, “or borrow one for you.”

“No, thank you,” answered Treffry grimly. “I have been horsed more than I like already. I am that stiff and sore I can hardly turn in bed.”

Naranza was an important village—important rather for its situation than its size—where Brockmann had a store and a cocoa plantation, some sixteen miles from El Dorado. The road thither was circuitous and horribly bad, even for Venezuela. In one narrow *quebrada* through which they passed the stones were so big, and lay so close together, that the horses had to jump them “in and out clever,” as English hunters jump banks and double rails. But Venezuelan horses can do anything. They will leap over tree trunks, “on and off,” like cats or monkeys; and when a hill is too steep and slippery to be walked down they put their fore legs

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well forward, tuck their hind legs under them, and shoot down. Most of them, too, are almost as much at home in water as on dry land.

Naranza stood on a steep hill with a flat top just big enough for the village as it was, but allowing no room for extension. It consisted of one street of single-storeyed

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

houses—some with walls and some without, and a wooden church of extremely ramshackle appearance. The inhabitants were, if possible, even more undressed than the people of El Dorado. As touching race, they were decidedly mixed, their faces presenting more varieties of colour than a rainbow; but the predominant type was Indian.

Brockmann's establishment, as touching its *personnel*, consisted of two young Germans and an ancient copper-coloured beldame, who cooked and washed up for them, and rejoiced in the name of Candelaria. Her sole garment was a not too ample print chemise, which, as Bertram noticed, served her also as a towel and duster. The furniture would not have made much of a show in an auctioneer's catalogue. It comprised a table, three chairs, two tubs, and half-a-dozen hammocks—there was not such a thing as a bed in all Naranza. The chairs were assigned to Brockmann and his guests; the two young men used the tubs—to sit upon, not to bathe in.

“Well, Mr. Norbreck, what do you think of Naranza?” asked his host as they sat outside the store, smoking indigenous cigars, and contemplating the scene around them.

“Rather amusing as a change; but it is not exactly a place one would like to spend a lifetime at.”

“I daresay not; but the people seem contented enough, and are, in fact, in very easy circumstances. I expect they get a great deal more enjoyment out of their lives than either our German *bauern* or your English rusties. By the way, we are to have gay doings to-night. A band of muleteers has come in from the *llanos*. Two of them are famous musicians, and they are to give a concert and a dance. Will you go?”

“With all my heart. But look here, you know, will they have anything on?”

“Who—the *arrieros*(muleteers)? Of course they will.”

“I am glad to hear ot. But my question applied rather to the guests—the young ladies, in fact.”

“They will be dressed quite *comme il faut*, we are not utterly uncivilised at Naranza, and you will meet some very pretty girls, I assure you.”

“And how are we expected to dress, Brockmann?”

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

Must I go barefooted and with my shirt outside my trousers?"

"As you like," laughed Brockmann. "This is a land of liberty; and if you were to do so, I don't think you would look a bit more absurd than rigged in a solemn black and long tailed coat."

The dance took place in a large room, round the mud walls of which were placed rough wooden seats for the accommodation of the guests. The musicians, enveloped in their *cobijas* (*ponchas*), which they wore the red side out (they had nothing else on), sat on a table. One, a *mestize* (half Indian, half white), played the *mandola*, the other, a black man, performed with a pair of *maracas*—a sort of castanets made from the hollowed fruit of the tortuma tree, inside of which some ears of Indian corn had been introduced. One is held in each hand, and when lightly clashed together to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument the effect is far from unpleasing. The proceedings opened with a wild *llanero* ditty, sung by the *mestize*, who accompanied himself on the *mandola*, which he played to perfection. Then the black man sang, and after some more singing, the two performers struck up a lively air, bearing a sufficient resemblance to a waltz to enable Bertram and the really pretty, if rather swarthy, daughter of one of Brockmann's neighbours to take part in it. Some of the men were great swells, sported patent leather boots, embroidered shirts, and trousers of spotless white; swallow-tailed coats, it is hardly necessary to say, there were none. The ladies were attired in the height of Naranza fashion, that is to say, they all wore gowns of some sort; albeit as they wore little of anything else, their toilettes would hardly have passed muster at an English evening party. The dancing, as may be supposed, was of a very energetic character, and kept up to so late an hour that Bertram and Brockmann did not consider it worthwhile to retire to their hammocks, and after breakfast and a bathe they saddled their horses and returned to El Dorado.

Rivaz had called here during their absence, and on the second occasion left a letter for Bertram. It began "My dear Mr. Norbreck," and was to the effect that the proposals, hard as they undoubtedly were, did not appear, after a second reading, quite to bear the construction he had in the first instance put upon them. He thought, at any rate, they were open to discussion, and might, with some modifications, be worth his consideration. He could not say more, but he

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would call on the following day and talk the matter over with him.

"I told you so," said Brockmann, to whom he showed the letter, and with whom he was becoming very intimate. "I think if you are firm you will get your own way in the end. Rivaz is deeply in debt, and if he refuses your offers I do not know how he can satisfy his creditors. But he will fight you inch by inch, and if you bring him to book before the steamer arrives you will be very fortunate."

"Have you more faith in the mines than you had, Brockmann?"

"I have. It is possible to be suspicious. Captain Treffry's opinion is favourable, and he strikes me as being an honest man. I don't think; however, they will ever realise the doctor's magnificent expectations. Still, there is no telling; mines make great surprises sometimes."

Rivaz called the next day, as he had said, and he and Bertram had a long talk. The doctor wanted a large lump sum paid down as earnest; he asked, too, a higher price for the property than Bertram had the right to offer; and he wanted advances on the mineral, as it was sent down for shipment, based on his own estimate of its value, and without regard to the cost of getting it out of the ground.

Bertram pleaded his instructions, and pointed out the unreasonableness of Rivaz wanting a sum as earnest before they were agreed about the price, and before his title to the property had been investigated. In the end, the doctor withdrew one of his counter-proposals and modified another; but, as he still insisted on a payment down, and would not agree to ship more against an advance of its bare cost, the interview terminated without result. The next day Rivaz wrote another letter; then he called again—called several times, but all to no purpose. He conceded a point one day only to withdraw it the next, and Bertram wrote to Dunbar that he feared he should not be able to arrive at any understanding with Rivaz. He would wait, he said, until the following mail, and if by that time he did not succeed in bringing the doctor terms, he should give the thing up as a bad job, return to Trinidad, and after staying there for a month or two, make an excursion right across the continent to the Pacific coast. When he should return home, he could not say—perhaps in two years. Then he wrote to Alice, to Alan Cuerdale, and

to Mrs. Earnsdale. The last letter being meant quite as much for Gladys as for her mother, was the

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longest. He thought of Gladys continually, and wanted above all things to keep himself in her mind. His jealous fears of Victor Canton had ceased to trouble him much. It was conceivable that Gladys might not love him, but he did not think it possible that she should ever give her heart to such frivolous creature (so she called him) as the chirping Creole.

CHAPTER XXXV
RIVAZ RELENTS.

"The steamer is coming, Mr. Norbreck; the steamer is coming; she has left Aluino; she will be here this afternoon. Are your letters ready?" exclaimed Brockmann, excitedly, as he ran into the *patio*, where Bertram sat, languidly reading in a cane-bottomed chair.

"Of course they are, and have been these two days. I thought she was never coming."

"Well, she is rather behind her time—or would be considered so in Europe. But the *Virtuous Maiden* is a peculiar vessel, and we are only too glad if she comes at all; sometimes she does not. Perhaps Hooker forgot his papers again, and that is the reason he is late."

"What papers?"

"His manifest, and clearance papers, and that. He once left them behind at La Guayra—did not discover his loss until he reached the next port—and had of course to go back for them, which added just a hundred miles to his trip—fifty there and fifty back."

"He could not have gone on without them, I suppose."

"Certainly not. A ship without papers is worse off than a woman without a character—she may be seized and her captain detained at the first port she puts into. But

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let us have *almuerzo* at once, and then we will walk down to the jetty with Liebert and see him off.”

The moment the *Virtuous Maiden* was signalled as having left Aluino, an island some sixty miles to the northward, yet,

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in that clear atmosphere, as easily seen by the naked eye as was the smoke of a steamer by the aid of a telescope, Montey had sent the news to El Paraiso by a mounted peon, and, as the ship came to anchor, Rivaz rode down among the crowd which beset the jetty. He saluted Bertram and Brockmann in a very *grand seigneur* fashion, and when Hooker came ashore entered into conversation with him, after which he told Montey, in a voice loud enough to be heard by all, that he should want twenty mules the following week to bring down mineral from the mines: then with a wave of his sombrero and an *adios señores* evidently meant to include everybody, he gave his black horse a touch of the spur, and went off at a great pace towards El Paraiso.

“I like that. What an actor the man is!” said Brockmann smiling, when the doctor had disappeared.”

“You think it is all done for effect, then?”

“Of course it is. He wants to make you believe he is independent of you, and rouse your jealousy by pretending he is going to ship a lot of mineral through some house at Port of Spain.”

“In that case he does not give me credit sincerity when I tell him that I cannot accede to his demands.”

“I do not suppose he gives anybody credit for sincerity. He is too much of a South American politician for that. The best way to meet men like Rivaz is to be honest and outspoken to a fault. Straightforwardness is so utterly strange to them that it puts them quite at a disadvantage; they will not understand it.”

“I think you are quite right Brockmann. I shall persevere in my policy of masterly inactivity.”

“And give out that you mean to leave by the next mail.”

“As I certainly do.”

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Nothing could be easier than a policy of masterly inactivity at El Dorado. Activity was quite foreign to the habits and ideas of the Doraderos, who were too wise in their generation to do anything to-day they could put off until to-morrow; and Bertram found no difficulty in conforming for a while to the ways of that sunny and sleepy place. After the early breakfast of black coffee and dry biscuits—taken always at dawn—he would mount Brockmann's horse and ride leisurely to a shady spot at the foot of the hills, where the little Dorado forms a deep pool wide enough for a swim, but not big enough to hold an alligator. His ablutions performed, he would make for the sea-shore and ride home,

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dreaming and musing to the music of the waves. Then came the *almuerzo*—the second breakfast—which Bertram, his appetite sharpened by the bathe and the ride, always enjoyed, though it must be admitted that the Señora Antonia's cookery left something to be desired in the way of variety. Even sancoche, excellent as it is, may become tiresome by frequent repetition; *carne frita*—meat fried to rags and tastelessness—appeared as regularly as the day, and a baked rice pudding, "sauced" with El Dorado rum, seemed to be the only sweet that Brockmann's kitchen was capable of producing. Then after a talk with his host and the two young men, Bertram generally spent the rest of the afternoon in reading and smoking—sometimes in writing—and when the *zancudos* (mosquitoes) did not bite too much he would indulge in the luxury of a *siesta*. Towards sunset Brockmann generally proposed a walk, and the two would stroll down to the jetty, or ascend one of the promontories which formed the horns of a crescent-shaped bay, and lie there, smoking and talking in the cool sea breeze, while the snowy surf, all aglow with phosphorescent light, beat at the foot of the cliffs.

"Do you like this life, Brockmann?" asked Bertram one evening of his companion, as they were taking their usual walk.

"So well that until I am compelled—that is to say, until I die—I do not mean to leave it."

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“It is pleasant, I admit, for a change and for a short time; but I certainly should not like to spend the rest of my days here. Life at El Dorado must get terribly monotonous after a time.”

“Where is life not monotonous, my friend, except for the rich? You will return to Europe, and as you have money you may be happy there; but for a poor dy-vil of a German merchant, who likes not royalties and nobilities, and all that nonsense, I do not think there could be a more congenial place than El Dorado.”

“Why, what ferocious Republican you are, Brockmann!” said Bertram with an amused smile.

“Ferocious, no; Republican, yes. I shed my blood, and nearly lost my life, in the effort to convert my own country into a republic. I fought in the Dresden revolution of 1849, and if I had not been secreted and smuggled out of the country by friends, I should very likely have lost my head. Then I became clerk to a London merchant, who afterwards

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gave me charge over his house at St. Thomas. But I do not like servitude; I had enough of that in Germany; and when I had saved a little money I set up here as a buyer and grower of cocoa, and seller of such European wares as a simple folk like the Doraderos stand in need of.”

“And you have met with a fair measure of success, I hope?”

“*Ja wohl*. I make a living. I shall never make a fortune. But what matters that? I want not to make a fortune. I have enough for my wants, which, as you have seen, are very modest. I live my own life; for here at El Dorado we have very little convention and next to no government.”

“Well, there does not seem to be much, especially of the latter; but do you think that is an advantage?”

“It is better than too much. You have been in Germany, yet you are not German born, and you do not know, as I do, what a pest and a curse Government can become. It may not be quite so bad now; but when I was a young man one could hardly call his soul his own. From the cradle to the grave the Government never let you alone for a

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single day. Without a concession from some functionary or other you might hardly breathe. And then I had to serve in the army, a thing I hated. The recollection of the two or three years I was a soldier is still hateful to me. You have no idea of the humiliations I endured. I was once publicly buffeted by a fool of a Serene Highness because I appeared on parade with my sword-belt a little awry. If there shall not soon be a revolution in that country, and all those princes and titled bloodsuckers sent to the devil, I shall be most infernally surprised.”

“Royalties and nobilities do not trouble me much,” said Bertram, rather amused at his friend’s tirade; “my acquaintance among them is of an extremely limited character. And what matters it what a man calls himself? A tittle makes him neither better nor worse, so far as I can see, than anybody else.”

“You are quite mistaken, Norbreck. Titles, particularly hereditary titles, are unjust because they confer on those who hold them distinctions which they have done nothing to merit; they encourage arrogance on the one hand and servility on the other. Fancy calling a man ‘Highness’ because he has taken the trouble to be born, and, above all, ‘Serene Highness!’ You might as well call him Pacific Altitude.

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I suppose people get used to that sort of thing; but I cannot help thinking that when a man hears himself addressed in such fulsome style he must feel like a fool—unless he is one already without knowing it.”

“I don’t think I can enter into the feelings of Pacific Altitudes, Brockmann,” laughed Bertram; “but as for servility, it strikes me that there is quite as much of it here as in Europe. I never saw more lickspittle in my life than in that Caracas paper you got the other day. Why, it is absolutely full of fulsome flattery of the President, calls him the ‘Illustrious American, Saviour of Society, ’ and I don’t know what besides, and announces that one of the States of Venezuela is to be renamed after him. I am sure it has never occurred to the most servile of German papers to suggest the idea of rechristening Pomerania ‘Bismarck, ’ or to call Brandenburg, ‘Moltke. ’ Depend upon it, people are just as eager to worship great folks here as anywhere else.”

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"In Caracas," said Brockmann reluctantly, "among the politicians—who I admit are a shocking bad lot—there is a good deal too much of that sort of thing. But I was thinking more of the country, of the peons, and of El Dorado, which is too far away from the capital to be affected by its revolutions or corrupted by its example."

"Yes, you are a peculiar people," returned Bertram.

"And so unsophisticated," observed the German gravely. "As you have seen, we have neither soldiers nor policemen. The *jefe politico* is my shoemaker, and the man who bakes our bread is also the president of our local tribunal. I am not quite sure, do you know, that the success of your enterprise, though it may enrich El Dorado, will make our people any happier. The incoming of a number of foreigners—above all, of foreign miners—would, I fear, do us more harm than good."

"At any rate, they could not worsen your ways" returned Bertram, as they scrambled over the gutter which in El Dorado serves the office of a street. "I admit the Arcadian simplicity of your morals, but your roads are—"

"The dy-vil" put in Brockmann; "yes, our roads are most infernal. But what matters it so long as the Doraderos are contented? Good roads would make life a burden to them; they would want keeping in order."

The next morning, as Bertram was smoking his first cigar, a peon rode into the *patio* with a missive from Rivaz. It was most graciously worded invitation to spend the following

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day at El Paraiso if he had nothing better to do. "If we cannot come to terms about business," wrote the doctor, "we may at least be good friends." Which, seeing that the doctor had all but cut him, struck Bertram as being just a little cool.

"Does this mean surrender?" he asked his host when he had read the note.

"That is more than I can say. Dr. Rivaz is not always an easy man to read. At any rate, it signifies a change of tactics, and you will have to be on your guard. Surrender in the end he must, or run away from El Dorado, and I do not believe he will do that."

"You think El Dorado is too charming a place for anybody to run away from, I suppose," returned Bertram, as he wrote his acceptance of the invitation.

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The doctor's reception of him fully justified the gracious terms of his missive. Bertram had never known Rivaz so pleasant and amusing; he told story after story of his adventures in North and South America, and it was not until after an excellent luncheon, and they sat smoking and sipping coffee in the verandah, that any mention was made of business.

"Have you really made up your mind to leave us, Mr. Norbreck?" asked the doctor, *à propos* to nothing in particular.

"Certainly. I shall leave Trinidad the first time the *Virtuous Maiden* affords me an opportunity, unless you accept my offer."

"That I cannot do, for several reasons. The price Mr. Dunbar wants to give me is too low—much too low. Not only so; it must in any case be a long time before the transaction can be concluded and I shall be able to touch the price. And money I want, and money I must have."

"In that case, doctor, the best thing you can do is to accept the proposals I am authorised to make you and begin shipping mineral as hard as you can; there will be no lack of money for that, and all the proceeds, after deduction of expenses, will be yours until the transfer is completed. I do not think you can do better with anybody else."

"There is something in that," replied Rivaz thoughtfully; "but the deuce of it is that I want money now, now, and these shipments you propose would not bring me any for months. Look here. Give me a thousand pounds on account, in a draft on Trinidad, or a draft that I can negotiate in Trinidad and I will do all you want."

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Bertram reflected a few minutes before giving his reply. Dunbar had left him a certain discretion. "If Rivaz accepts these proposals in substance," he had said, "you are at full liberty to use your own judgement about details." Still a thousand pounds seemed a large sum to advance without security, to an adventurer who admitted that he was overhead and ears in debt. He would draw the line half-way.

"No, Doctor Rivaz," he said, "I cannot do that, but I will give you five hundred pounds, if you like."

"Not enough; I must have a thousand pounds."

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"Five hundred pounds" returned Bertram, smiling.

"A thousand pounds," repeated the doctor, frowning.

"Five hundred pounds; I dare not go beyond five hundred pounds."

"Now, take another cigar, and let us talk about something else," said Rivaz abruptly. "I don't want to quarrel with you, and a thousand pounds I must have—or nothing."

They did talk about something else; but when Bertram mounted his horse to go away, the doctor, as he walked with him to the gate, returned to the subject.

"Will you do it?" he asked. "Give me a thousand pounds, and deduct the amount from the proceeds of the first cargo."

"It is no use, Dr. Rivaz," answered Bertram firmly. "I really cannot give you a pound more than five hundred pounds."

"Very well, make it five hundred pounds, then, and say 'done.' Do you know, Mr. Norbreck, that for a young man you are about the keenest hand at a bargain I had ever to do with? You must inherit the faculty from your grandfather, I think."

"My grandfather! What do you know about my grandfather?" exclaimed Bertram, in surprise.

"Nothing at all—how should I? but if not from him, you must inherit your business shrewdness from some other body. At your age it can hardly be an acquired quality. That is all I meant. You will want me to sign something—a sort of preliminary agreement, I suppose. Good; I shall be down the day after to-morrow, and altogether at your disposal. *Adios, señor, hasta Miercoles* (Adieu, sir, until Wednesday)."

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

DELAYS

"It is all arranged, Brockmann," exclaimed Bertram gaily, as he rode into the merchant's *patio*. Rivaz accepts my proposals, and we sign the preliminary agreement on Wednesday."

"Say rather beginning to be arranged. If you have everything finally arranged in twelve months you may esteem yourself a happy man."

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

"Twelve months? Nonsense!" returned Bertram in dismay, thinking of Gladys and Port of Spain. "Three or four months at the outside."

"You will see. Rivaz has only come to terms now because he is very hard up. Once he has money in his pocket you will not find him quite so easy to deal with."

"You forget, Brockmann I have not undertaken to give him a dollar until the agreement is signed."

"That is quite true, and I do not suppose that Rivaz will intentionally try to evade any conditions to which he may put his hand. But this agreement is only preliminary, bear in mind. You have to send it to England for the approval of your associates; then it will have to be put into legal shape and receive its final touches; legitimate differences of opinion may easily arise, and the negotiations drag on for months. I do not want to discourage, only to forewarn you. You are in a country, remember, whose most devoutly worshipped deity is *mañana por la mañana* (to-morrow morning). You will arrange everything satisfactorily in the end, I have no doubt; but the end is not yet."

The prediction, as Bertram found to his cost, proved only too true.

The prospect of remaining a whole year at El Dorado would hardly, in any circumstances have been agreeable to him; longing as he did to see Gladys Earnsdale, it was almost past enduring. He hoped that Brockmann exaggerated, and made up his mind that, come what might, he would make a visit to Trinidad—if only a flying one—

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in the course of three or four months. In this sense he wrote to Mrs. Earnsdale. He also wrote several other letters and completed all his arrangements for the mail—and none too soon—for the *Virtuous Maiden*, to the unspeakable surprise of everybody, appeared off the port one morning at daylight, when she was not expected, at the earliest, until evening. This phenomenon was due to the fact that Captain Hooker, having overshot Aluino in the dark, had resolved to call at El Dorado before calling at the island. With much difficulty he was prevailed upon to give intending passengers two hours to get ready—a respite by which others profited to finish their correspondence; but he kept them all in a quake by firing a gun every fifteen minutes, just to remind them as he said, that for once in his life he meant to keep his word. Rivaz, hearing these salutes at El

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Paraiso, and knowing quite well what they signified, rode down to El Dorado faster than he ever rode before, got his draft from Bertram, and packed Montey off to Trinidad to bring back the proceeds “in hard money,” and a quantity of supplies for the mines.

This done, the doctor, acting on the hint which Bertram had given him, set to work to win mineral. He engaged every peon in the region who was willing to work underground for fine words and high wages, hired a squadron of mules and donkeys, enlisted the services of Treffry—much to that gentleman’s satisfaction, for he was unutterably weary of doing nothing—and altogether, as Brockmann remarked, “unfolded a prodigious energy.” El Paraiso became a scene of unwonted activity. Every day, a long string of mules, laden with mineral, descended from the mountains; and as Bertram, according to the terms of his contact with Rivaz, had to pay the mule-drivers and the miners, and keep an account of everything, he had so much to do that he found it expedient to engage one of Brockmann’s young men as his assistant. He bought a horse too; for, although he made El Dorado his headquarters, he went often to the mines, in which, as well as in mining generally, he began to take a great interest and study theoretically. A few weeks later there came a brig, chartered at Port of Spain to take a cargo of ore from El Dorado to Swansea, and only a few boats were available, the operation of loading was slow and tedious. In another few weeks, and about three months after his arrival at El Dorado, Bertram

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received letters from home—from Alice, Alan Cuerdale and Dunbar.

But worth more than all these was a letter from Gladys Earnsdale. Her mother, being very busy about the estate and the house, had requested her to answer his letters, which they had read with the greatest interest—his descriptions were so spirited and graphic. They both hoped he would continue them, and that they should soon see him at Prospect, which she liked much and described at some length. She mentioned the Cantons, but in such a way as to convince Bertram that he had nothing to fear in that quarter, gave him the latest news from Carrington, and asked if he had heard from his sister. Altogether, a bright, pleasant letter. Bertram, it need hardly be said, addressed his reply to the writer—not to her mother—and Gladys, he hoped, could hardly fail to

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gather from it how much she occupied his thoughts, and how ardently he desired to see her again.

The letter from Dunbar was much less satisfactory. He besought Bertram (who had mentioned his intention of making a trip to Trinidad) on no account to leave El Dorado until the arrangement with Rivaz was quite completed. It would be a pity, he said, for a work so excellently begun to be left unfinished. In the present state of proceedings Bertram's services were too valuable to be dispensed with; even this temporary absence might spoil everything.

It was impossible to gainsay the cogency of Dunbar's reasoning. Bertram had undertaken the work; it would not be right for him to shrink from its performance, so, with a sigh, he added a postscript to his letter to Gladys informing her that it was quite impossible for him to fix a time for his trip to Trinidad. He could only hope it might be soon.

Alice was in the neighbourhood of London with Mrs. Whalley, studying with great assiduity, and, so far as appeared, very happy. They proposed to leave for the Continent towards the end of the year.

Alan wrote in great spirits. Oxford delighted him beyond measure. He was going in for honours, scholarships, and all sorts of things, and was already so advanced in several branches of study—notably in languages—that with steady work he could hardly fail, his tutors assured him, of success. They said "brilliant" success; but Alan was too modest to repeat the flattering epithet, even to his friend.

Another mail brought a second letter from Dunbar, together with a form of agreement intended to give legal effect to the preliminary contract which Rivaz had

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already signed, and whereby he had undertaken to do whatever else might be necessary to render the arrangement definitive and binding. The document, which was very voluminous—full of repetitions and abounding in tangled phraseology and sentences of portentous length—Bertram was requested to get turned into Spanish, and signed in duplicate by Rivaz. But Rivaz flatly refused to do anything of the sort. Aught in reason, he said, he would do, but put his hand to a paper that neither he nor anybody else could

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understand (that might mean anything or nothing) he should not. Translating such a deed into Spanish was simply out of question; the language possessed no equivalents for the barbarous terms of English conveyancers. All that was necessary could be expressed on a single sheet of foolscap; and, the property concerned being in Venezuela, it stood to reason that the contract should be drawn up according to the law of the land, not according to the law of England.

“I might promise to sign the thing only when you have got it translated into Spanish,” said Rivaz; “that would be never. But I prefer to say at once that I refuse to sign it either in Spanish or any other language.”

Bertram could only acknowledge that Rivaz was quite right, and return the document to Dunbar with an explanatory letter, in which he expressed his surprise that he should be asked to procure the doctor's signature to so absurd an instrument, and his regret at the delay in the completion of the arrangements that the instrument would interpose.

Four weary months went before Bertram got his answer. He could not well have had in less than three, and Dunbar, as the latter explained, missed a couple of mails owing to his absence on the Continent. He frankly admitted that the deed drawn up by the English lawyers was a mistake. It was not ready, he said, until the last moment before the departure of the mail and had been sent direct from the lawyer's office without being first submitted to him. Had he seen the document, it should never have gone—at any rate, not in that shape. He left Bertram to do in the matter whatever he thought expedient, but strongly recommended him to take the best legal advice, and to that end suggested that he should make a journey to Caracas, and get the deed drawn up there.

Bertram read this letter with a sense of disappointment bordering on despair. Destiny seemed to have decreed that he should never see Gladys

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and Trinidad again. Go to Caracas he must—that was quite clear—and the sooner the better; for among other blessings enjoyed by El Dorado was the negative one of being lawyerless, and in this opinion his counsellor, Brockmann, fully concurred. But

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opportunities of going to Caracas were few and far between. Before Bertram had finished reading his letters the *Virtuous Maiden* had weighed anchor, and was steaming towards La Guayra, whither she would not make another trip for a month—more or less.

“I will ride! ‘exclaimed Bertram desperately. “Why should not I?”

“What, and the rainy season just coming on!” said Brockmann.

“I am not sugar; I shall not melt.”

“I fear you would, though, or worse. In a few days the roads, such as they are, will be untravellable, the rivers swollen and unfordable. You might be weather-stayed for weeks at some wretched *pueblo or hacienda* and eaten up by *zancudos*; and if you escaped alligators, *caribes*, and *tembladores*, it would only be to perish of fever. If you start for Caracas on horseback I would not give that for your life, Mr. Norbreck,” and Brockmann threw on the floor the stump of his cigar.

“By Jove? What a country!”

“Well, it is not quite the paradise it sometimes looks” remarked Brockmann, lighting another cigar; “but you are not quite used to it yet, you know.”

“You think, then, there is nothing for it but to wait for the steamer.”

“There might possibly come a *faluca*; but it is not very nice, a voyage in a *faluca*.”

“It cannot be much worse than a voyage in the *Virtuous Maiden*.”

“Very well. I shall ask the *duanero* to let us know if a *faluca* comes; but I am afraid it is very unlikely at this time of the year.”

So unlikely that none did come, neither did the *Virtuous Maiden* until three weeks after her time. She had run into a sailing ship off Port of Spain, and been compelled to put back for repairs. Bertram sailed with her to La Guayra, whither, by a sort of miracle, she ultimately arrived, for her engines breaking down utterly soon after she left El Dorado, she had to crawl the greater part of the way under sail, and

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being terribly crank was more than once in imminent danger of turning turtle.

He found no difficulty in arranging his business at Caracas. The contract which had given so much trouble, was drawn up in an hour, and expressed, as Rivaz said it might be, on a single sheet of foolscap. All that he required to do in order to make the

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arrangement legal and blinding, the lawyer whom Bertram consulted told him, was to get the contract registered at El Dorado, and at the capital of the State, and the information he gave him touching the mining and land laws of the Republic showed that, in some respects at least, Venezuela was ahead of England.

Tedious as had been the journey from El Dorado, the return journey was more tedious still. There were no facilities at La Guayra for repairing the *Virtuous Maiden's* engines, and wind and current being dead against him, Hooker was compelled to hire a Venezuelan war steamer to tow his ship to Trinidad. The name of her was *El Toro*, she carried four guns, but no powder—the Government being desperately hard up at the time—and was commanded by a general. Only a little larger than the *Virtuous Maiden* herself, the *Toro* was almost as crank and a great deal dirtier; but her officers literally blazed with splendour; they seemed to have nothing on but gilt buttons and gold lace, and their hats were fearfully and wonderfully made.

When passengers and cargo were all on board and everything ready for a start, a serious difficulty arose. The general in command informed Hooker that he and his men had not touched a *peso* of pay for three months and that, without a settlement “in hard money” he did not mean to weigh the anchor. On this a wrangle ensued which lasted all day and a greater part of the night, but in the end Hooker yielded, and with a great many fierce oaths handed the general a considerable proportion of the sum he demanded.

“It’s awfully rough on me,” said the captain to Bertram, “but what could I do else? I have paid the Government for the use of the *Toro* and coaled her, and to lose that would be a greater loss than paying the general and the crew.”

“But cannot you make a claim on the government?”

“Nothing easier. There are five hundred people at Caracas just now making claims on the Government, and if they go on claiming till the crack of doom, they will get nothing. You have no idea what those fellows are, they would cheat a Jew out of his eye teeth. There was one poor

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devil who had been pestering the Government for years for a sum they owed him. At last they gave him an order on the Custom House at El Dorado for something on account—a few thousand *pesos*. He went with me on my last trip to get it cashed—and

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what do you think? The Minister sent a man by the same steamer with a letter to the *administrador*, telling him not to honour his own order. The man told me himself and showed me the letter.”

“That did not get rid of the claim, though.”

“But it got rid of the claimant—for a month, at any rate. Governments in Venezuela do not believe in paying: they prefer to receive. There is only one thing for which they give hard money.”

“And that is?”

“Powder; and they would not pay for that if they could get it in any other way.”

The conversation was interrupted by the breaking of the tow rope, and it went on breaking, as Bertram reckoned, at the rate of about once an hour, and the splicing being a tedious business—generally involving a lowering of boats and much shouting between Hooker and the general—the wind fresh and dead ahead, and the current contrary, the weary passengers began to fear that the voyage would last for ever, and Hooker had a very bad time on it indeed. But everything has an end—even in Venezuela. After tugging and straining as long as it would have taken an English liner to cross the Atlantic, Aluino was reached and El Dorado sighted, and Bertram laid the flattering unction to his soul that, in three or four weeks at the utmost, he would sight the Bocas del Drago, and see the girl he had left behind him. But not for the first time in his life—nor the last—he counted without his host.

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CHAPTER XXXVII

A REVELATION

THE jetty was beset with the usual crowd of scantily clad Doraderos, but more numerous than usual, for the rumour ran that some great misfortune had befallen the *Virtuous Maiden*, and everybody wanted to know why she had come so late. For though Venezuelans are never nice to a day or two, yet when a mail steamer is a fortnight behind her time they begin to feel a languid curiosity as to the cause.

As this boat touched the strand Bertram perceived that Rivaz was among the spectators. At his side rode another horseman—young, tall as the doctor himself, with a

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handsome red-brown face, dark gipsy-looking eyes, big black beard and mustachios, though which, when he smiled, gleamed a set of strong white teeth. He wore a red shirt with an embroidered front, and an enormous pair of silver spurs, and he sat his horse with the easy grace of a *llanero* of the Apure.

“That is Blas” said Bertram to himself, as he scrutinised the caballero with keen interest. “I wonder if I shall like him?”

It was Blas.

“My son—Mr. Norbreck,” said Rivaz, after they had exchanged greetings and shaken hands.

The two young fellows doffed their hats and looked hard at each other.

“When did you arrive?” asked Bertram.

“A fortnight ago. I came by a *faluca* from St. Thomas. El Dorado is not the easiest place in the world to get to.”

“Nor to get from,” said Bertram, with a smile: “at any rate, I found it so when I wanted to go to Caracas.”

Brockmann had brought Bertram’s horse, for the rains had converted the streets of El Dorado into rivulets of red mud, and they all rode together towards El Paraiso.

Bertram informed the doctor how he had fared at Caracas.

“You see it has turned out just as I told you it would,” said the latter. “I could have drawn that deed quite as well as the Caracas man, and it would have saved a great

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deal of money and no end of time; but you would not trust me.”

Bertram protested that he did not distrust the doctor in the least, but that he was obliged to follow his instructions.

“I don’t blame you. I only blame Mr. Dunbar. But never mind that; all’s well that ends well. I will take the deed to the mines with me. I should just like to glance over it, you know, and to-morrow I shall come down and have it executed and legalised. And we shall be glad if you will return and dine with us, and spend a few days at El Paraiso?”

“With pleasure,” said Bertram. “Have you had much rain, doctor?”

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“Rather! I think it must have rained the other night at the rate of an inch an hour. It is an unhealthy time, and I hear of several cases of *vomito negro*. So look out.”

Bertram, after accompanying the Rivazes as far as the first *quebrada*, returned to El Dorado and spent the remainder of the day in reading the letters which he found awaiting him—and thinking about them. One was from Gladys, written for her mother, and evidently at that lady’s dictation—pleasant, as far as it went, and very friendly—but Bertram found in the missive no food for his lover’s hopes, and he was laying it aside with a sigh of disappointment when his eye lighted on a tiny postscript at the very bottom of the page.

It consisted of only two words—“Very often.” But those two words made him happy. He had asked her if she ever thought of the time they had spent together on the *Borysthenes* and the *Arno*.

“Very often” —that was her answer—she thought of it, therefore she thought of him, very often.

It meant that he was as often in her thoughts as she was in his, and in blissful consciousness of the fact Bertram leaned back in his chair, built radiant castles in the air, and forgot, for a whole hour, that three or four other letters lay unopened on the table before him. One was from Alice. She and Mrs. Whalley were at Laussane, for the better prosecution of the former’s studies in French. After a sojourn there of a few months they meant to go to Germany. Another was from Alan, giving a very good account of himself. He had gained a college scholarship and a university prize, which would make him in a great measure independent of Bertram’s help. The next was from Rooke, enclosing a remittance and concluding with the usual stereotyped statement, “You will be glad to hear that your uncle and

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his family are quite well.” It contained also a second enclosure, a letter from Tim, which ran thus: —

“*dear Mestur bertrum. Holes well. Kartoosh is i’ rare fettle. Th’ wife sends respects; me th’same. Hoo’s gotten another—mek’s nine.*

“*Yore haffeckshunut servant,*

The two Rivazes appeared next morning in good time, and without any further difficulty the troublesome contract was duly executed and registered—whereupon Bertram announced his intention of going to Trinidad by the next steamer, and they all rode together to El Paraiso.

The doctor had money in his pocket—the last consignment of ore had made more than a hundred ounces of silver to the ton—and he was in high spirits. Madame Rivaz, rejoiced by the return of her son, looked almost happy, and Bertram was happier than he had been for along time.

In these circumstances it was only natural that the dinner party at El Paraiso should be a success, and the evening pass pleasantly. Blas had much to say about Salvador, and the difficulties he had experienced in realising his father's property, a task in which he had been only partially successful. He knew much about South America, but singularly little about Europe, and was evidently a bold rider and hunter, and well skilled in woodcraft. He made himself very agreeable to his father's guest as the representative of English capitalists, and one who came from that mysterious eastern world which every Creole longs behold; but when he related some adventure on the *llanos* or in the *sierras*, or spoke of his recent experiences in Salvador, there now and then flitted across his handsome face an expression which suggested to Bertram, that, pleasant as he seemed, it might possibly be better to have Blas Rivaz for a friend than an enemy.

It was arranged that, if the weather were favourable, of which there seemed every likelihood, they should visit a new mine called Encanto that had recently been opened, and had bade fair, the doctor said, to be a bout the best of the lot.

But the next morning Bertram was very unwell; he had passed a sleepless night, felt sick and headachy, and altogether out of sorts.

“You have a touch of fever,” said Rivaz. “Don't be alarmed; a touch of fever here is generally no more serious

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than a cold in England. All the same, you had better keep quiet. Remain here on the verandah, and if you are not better when we return from Encanto I will give you something. I must go and see what these fellows are doing for an hour or two.”

Instead of being better when Rivaz came back, Bertram was much worse. He had excruciating pains in his back, he was alternately hot and cold, and his head ached so much that he could hardly see.

“Stage number one,” said the doctor, the moment he set eyes on the sick man. “I did not think so this morning, but it is a true bill now, and no mistake.”

“What is the stage number one?” asked Bertram feebly.

“The first stage of yellow fever; you must have caught the infection yesterday at El Dorado, unless, as is quite possible, you brought it with you from Caracas. Well for you that you did not fall ill down yonder. Those Venezuelan Sangrados would have purged and emeticked you to death. Are you willing to put yourself in my hands?”

“Unreservedly,” groaned Bertram.

“I shall give you no physic,” resumed the doctor. “I have known people recover from yellow fever in spite of physic, but never because of it. I learnt all I know of the disease from an old Indian medicine man at San Fernando; but most doctors are too wedded to systems to try anything they have not learnt at college. And now we will set to work. We have fortunately plenty of cold water at El Paraiso.”

Then with the help of Blas and one of the peons, Rivaz rolled Bertram up in a wet sheet and a dry rug, put a mattress over him and enveloped his head in wet cloths. After he had steeped an hour, they unpacked him, put him in a tub of cold water, and kept him there until he was blue. This operation was repeated several times every day, until his pulse fell to its normal rate, and the first stage of the fever, which in this case proved to be the last, had run its course. All this time Bertram ate no solid food and drank only cold water, and milk which had previously been boiled. In three weeks Rivaz pronounced him out of danger, and allowed him to get up; yet he was still very weak, and going to Trinidad was quite out of question, so he had to content himself with writing a few lines to Gladys to inform her of his illness, and that he meant, if possible, to leave El Dorado by the steamer after the one which should bring her his letter.

When he began to eat he recovered strength rapidly, and was soon able to crawl about the shady side of the house supported on Blas's arm, or leaning on a stick.

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“How can I thank you all sufficiently?” he said one day to the doctor; “you, for treating me so skilfully, and Mrs. Rivaz and Blas for nursing me so devotedly? I shall never forget your kindness as long as I live.”

“Whom should we not be kind to, if not to our own kith and kin?”

“Kith and kin! Ah, I know what you mean. In one sense all the world is akin, but everybody is not kind, and you have really laid me under a great obligation, Dr. Rivaz”

“As for that, I hope we should have done as much for any guest. But you are more than an ordinary guest.”

“How?”

“Why, for one thing,” we are connected in business; if I had let you die I should not be able to pay my miners their next month’s wages; and without your signature the bank at Port of Spain would not cash my drafts on Mr. Dunbar,” said the doctor, with a half-cynical laugh. “Your life is of importance to me. But there is something else. You stand in a closer relation to me than you suspect.”

“You are joking, Dr. Rivaz.”

“I was never more serious in my life, Bertram Norbreck. I am—cannot you guess who I am?”

A light broke on Bertram’s mind. He remembered the curious allusion Rivaz had once made to his grandfather.

“You cannot—no, it is impossible—you cannot be——”

“Your Uncle Rupert. If you are Alice Nutter’s son, I am.”

“But—but—why—I do not understand,” gasped Bertram, who, still weak, was almost unmanned by the shock of this revelation.

“You do not understand why, being Rupert Nutter, I should call myself Roberto Rivaz. I will tell you presently. First of all, as I left England before you were born, and you cannot possibly recognise me, I must convince you that I really am what I represent myself to be—your mother’s brother.”

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“Your word is sufficient,” said Bertram, who just then felt too grateful to Rivaz to doubt anything he might say. “How, if you were not should you know my mother’s name, or that I ever had an Uncle Rupert?”

“Easily enough, I might have met him and heard his

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story from himself, or somebody else. But I can tell you of things which is hardly possible anyone but a member of the family should know.”

And then Rivaz went on to mention divers facts, such as the dates of his father’s, his own, and his sisters’ births; the number and situations of the rooms at Crow Nest, and many other things, which, in Bertram’s opinion, fully confirmed his claim to be Rupert Nutter.

“I do not think many of the old tenants are on the estate yet,” he continued, “but you have very likely heard of Owd Neverdee”

“He is still alive.”

“God bless me! Why, he must be nearly a hundred”

“So he is, and looks as little like dying as ever.”

“And Jessop, of ‘Old Mother Redcap?’ I owe him five pounds—if my father did not pay him—and I don’t suppose he did.”

“Jessop is dead; the house is carried on by his son.”

“And now tell me all about your mother and your aunts. I never knew your father.”

Bertram told him that all, save Sarah, Mrs. Diamond, were dead.

“All dead and gone, dead and gone,” said Rupert after a long silence. “I wonder when it will my turn! However, there is no use thinking of that. I had an inkling who you were, Bertram, almost the first time I set eyes on you, from your likeness to your mother. Poor Alice! She was always my favourite; and when you told me, up in the wood there, that you lived at Crow Nest, I felt certain. And now I must tell you why I call myself Rivaz, and a few other things.”

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CHAPTER XXXVIII

BERTRAM MAKE HIS WILL.

“But you are pale; I must prescribe for you. Maximiliano (to a peon who was working in the garden), *hagame Usted el favor de traer una botella de vino de champãño.*”

Bertram smiled. The doctor liked the excuse for ordering a bottle of champagne.

“How polite you are!” he said. “It is always ‘do me the favour.’”

“Unless I were I should get nobody to serve me, and words cost nothing, you know. I suppose now an English servant would open his eyes rather wide if you said, ‘Will your worship do me the favour to fetch a bottle of champagne?’”

“Rather; he would think you wanted to insult him.”

“Here comes the bottle. *Gracias*, Maximiliano. Now drink this. I shall take a glass also. To your speedy recovery, Bertram.”

Rupert emptied his glass, drank another, lighted a big cigar, and smoked silently for five minutes.

“You have doubtless heard, from your mother or somebody else, how I came to leave my father,” he said at length. “We had a quarrel about money, and he gave me the sack.”

“Yes, I have heard something of that sort,” replied Bertram cautiously; for he did not want to hurt his uncle’s feelings by telling all he had heard.

“I suppose you have heard that I robbed my father, and then ran away with the money? However, that is neither here nor there; they may say what they like, nobody knows the facts but myself. I was badly brought up, Bertram. My father was one of the keenest and hardest men that ever lived, I think. Even after I had left school, and began to be useful to him, he would hardly give me a sixpence to bless myself with; and if it had not been for my mother, who used to help me secretly, and entreat me to have patience, I should have run away and ‘listed for a soldier. At last, when he could not help himself, he agreed to give me a salary; but what was the use of that? I could never get it. If I asked

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him for a pound when he owned me two, he would give me ten shillings. So I got into debt, for I was always free-handed with money, and then there would be a row, and he had to fork out; but never, I think, all he owed me, if a proper account had been taken. When I came of age, and my mother died, I threatened to leave him; he did not like that, and to pacify me, raised an allowance and promised me a partnership. But my father could not abide to part with money; and when it came to paying there was always a dispute. So I now and again helped myself without telling him. But he owed it me, Bertram, every shilling. When he found it out we had the biggest row of all; he told me to go, and I went. That is just the whole story, Bertram. I don't say my conduct was exactly irreproachable; but I do say that, given the circumstances, very few young fellows of spirit would have done any better; many would have done worse."

"But why did you not write or come back, or make some sign that you were alive?" asked Bertram; who remembering his own experience with his Uncle Roger, and thinking what it must have been to have the old Squire for a father, felt a good deal of sympathy for his Uncle Rupert, through he could not say he approved of all that he had done.

"Well, I should have written to Alice, I know—and I meant to do—but I put it off so long that I was ashamed to write, and ended by not writing at all. As for coming back, I might have done if my father had left me anything."

"And how do you know he did not?"

"I never expected he would; and if he had, I should have been advertised for—and I know I never was advertised for. I kept an eye on papers. My father cut me off, as he said he would. Yes, I suppose that last quarrel with him cost me a hundred thousand pounds, for I don't think he would have left the lasses more than five thousand a-piece! 'Be patient while I dee, ' he once said to me, 'and thou shalt have it nearly all. But while I live I shall stick. ' And he did stick. However, I don't regret it one bit, Bertram. Gad, the champagne is all done. *Maximiliano hacerme el favor de traer otra botella.*"

"If I had stayed at Crow Nest," continued Rupert, as he uncorked the second bottle, "rendered passive obedience to my father, and followed the example of that wretched prig, the industrious apprentice, I might have been a churchwarden

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—perhaps even a justice of the peace—and worth a quarter of million by this time, and when I die have my virtues commemorated on a marble tablet in the parish church. But they lead wretchedly dull lives, these cotton-spinning fellows—their interests are centred in the price of thirty-two's twist and 8¼ lb. shirtings, and their only amusements are getting drunk on market days and cheating their workpeople. I would not exchange places with the best of them.”

“I think you forget I am a cotton—spinner, uncle’ ‘said Bertram, who was more amused than indignant at this outburst. He could see that Rupert was trying—perhaps not with entire success—to persuade himself that his had been the better part.

“I am speaking of my time. It may be different now. Yes, Bertram, I have lived an exciting, eventful life. An account of my adventures would fill a book. You have heard some of them, but I don't think I have told you how I went to California. Soon after gold was discovered there I rode right across the Continent from Vera Cruz to San Francisco with a lot of fellows who made me their leader, because I knew the language and the country. There were thirty of us altogether, but only ten reached the far end.”

“What became of the others?”

“They were killed, every man Jack of them. I'll tell you how it was. It so fell out that we reached a place called Concepcion, on a day when the people were celebrating the *fiesta* of their patron saint. We put up at a *posada*, and while the horses ate their food most of the boys strolled about the town to see what was going on, and several of them, among whom were two or three reckless Kentuckians, who feared neither God nor devil, went into the church—though I warned them not, for I feared trouble. Well, one fool of a fellow—Bill Reeves was his name—wouldn't take his hat off, and when an indignant priest tried to take it off for him he knocked the priest down. You may fancy the row there was. Knives were drawn, and they had to fight their way out. I was in the plaza with some of the others; we joined our forces to theirs, and managed after a hard struggle to get back to the *posada*, where we had left our horses and riffles, shut the doors, and barricaded ourselves inside. Five minutes afterwards the house was beset by a raging crowd; then soldiers came, and we had to stand a regular siege. We could all

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shoot pretty straight, and we kept the beggars at bay until nightfall. But it was plain to see how the thing

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would end. There were twenty thousand people in the place, our ammunition was running short, we had eaten everything there was in the *posada*, so I just asked the boys whether we should make a rush for it or stay where we were, to be killed like rats in a trap. 'Damn being killed in cold blood,' said Bill Reeves; 'let us make a rush for it and die fighting before we are weak with fasting.' So we waited until there was a lull, quietly saddled the horses, and then, slinging our rifles over our shoulders and drawing our revolvers, rode into the street. At first the Greasers gave way they did not expect to see us at that time of sight—but they soon rallied, and bullets just rained on us. Before we got across the plaza half the boys were down; when we reached the open we were only ten—all more or less hurt —. I owed my escape entirely to my doubloon doublet."

"What is a doubloon doublet?"

"Before I left Mexico I had all my money sewn into a washleather doublet, each piece separate, so that I could cut them out as they were required. It was quite strong enough to turn a knife-thrust or a bullet—unless fired very close—and it did turn more than that night."

"Did you get to California?"

"Yes, and made a big pile too. I have made many a big pile in my time; but somehow or another I could never manage to keep it."

"How did you become a doctor?"

"Well, I ran a hydropathic establishment at one time, and somebody suggested that it would be an attraction if I could write M. D. to my name. So I attended a few lectures at a college in Pennsylvania, paid an extra fee in consideration of being dispensed from attending any more, and got my diploma 'slick.' "

"And that is all the medical education you had?"

"All. But, as I told you, I learnt a good deal from an old Indian medicine-man at San Fernando, perhaps quite as much as I should have learnt at college," returned Rupert with a laugh," and as you know, I can cure yellow fever. As for changing my

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name, that is easily explained. My wife's name was Rivaz; she was an only daughter; when we married her father asked me to take her name instead of her taking mine, and as he was liberal in the matter of dowry, I thought it worth my while to do as he wanted. And it is my name still—one change of that sort in a life-time is quite enough. I shall never call myself Nutter again.”

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“I should have told you sooner who I was,” continued Rivaz, after a short pause; “only that I feared the information might turn you against me, and perhaps lead to a rupture of our friendship. But when you spoke so kindly just now I thought I might venture to reveal myself without suffering in your estimation.”

This was said in Rupert's wonted quiet manner, and probably without the cynicism, and almost bravado, which, probably owing to champagne and excitement, had characterised some of his previous remarks.

“You have not suffered in my estimation at all. On the contrary, I think better of my Uncle Rupert than ever I thought before, and I am glad you have told me, if only that I may keep the promise I made about you to my father” answered Bertram, who, though he did not suppose his uncle had told him everything, and suspected that there might be passages in his life which were better not told, knew nothing against him except taking the old Squire's money, and that, in the circumstances, he did not look upon as an unpardonable sin.

And then Bertram told his uncle of his last conversation with his father, and how both he and his mother had desired to repair the injustice of Simon Nutter's will.

“I cannot do anything now,” he said, “but when I come into my property I shall ask you to accept a portion of it; for though my father made by hard work the greater part of the fortune he left to my sister and myself, it would have been a great deal less if my grandfather had not disinherited you.”

“That makes the offer none the less handsome on your part, Bertram,” answered Rivaz, with much feeling; “for I have not a shadow of a claim on you, and if I were rich I would not hear of such a thing. But Blas has brought next to nothing from Salvador, and nearly all the money I have laid out here was borrowed, and though I believe the

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miners will turn out well, my interest in them now is very slight. Besides, there is nothing sure in this world. So long as I have my health I can make a living; but I am not as young as I look, and there may come a time when I shall not be able to work. My wife, moreover, is quite unprovided for—all her property is in the South, and it was utterly ruined by the war. She has had a rough time of it, poor soul! and longs for rest and a quiet life. I thank you, Bertram, with

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all my heart,” and Rupert rose from his chair and shook his nephew warmly by the hand.

“So far as it depends on me,” said Bertram, who began to understand why his aunt looked unhappy, “she shall have a quiet life. Do you know I have just have been thinking that, if I had died of the fever, you would have got nothing. My father used to say that everybody who had anything to leave should make a will. Life is uncertain, and I shall make mine.”

“Nonsense. A young man like you has no business to talk about dying.”

“Young men do die, though. At any rate, making my will won't make me die, and I shall make it. I consider it my duty.”

“As you like,” returned Rupert seriously. “But I would not if I were you. If I made a testament I should feel as if I had signed my death-warrant.”

“You are superstitious, uncle,” said Bertram, with an amused smile; “how can making a will by any possibility shorten anybody's life?”

“Well, perhaps I am. But my superstition, as you call it, need not affect you. Act as you think best, Bertram.”

About a fortnight after this conversation Bertram being strong enough to ride, went down to El Dorado and executed in duplicate a will which he had himself drawn. It was witnessed by Bertram and Brockmann, and their signatures were duly “legalised” by the Syndic and a foreign merchant, who acted as French Vice-Consul. One copy Bertram gave to his uncle, the other he retained. The will was very short and, signatures and attestations included, did not cover a sheet of foolscap. By it Bertram, on the assumption that a hundred thousand pounds was coming to him, bequeathed fifty

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thousand to his uncle, Rupert Nutter—otherwise Roberto Rivaz—failing him to his son Blas, and directed the residue, after payment of a few small legacies, to be equally divided between his sister and Alan Cuerdale. This he calculated would make Alice's fortune equal to about sixty or seventy thousand pounds.

Mrs. Rivaz—he called her aunt now—when she heard what he had done, and proposed to do, thanked him very sweetly and earnestly for what his loyalty and generosity.

“But I am sorry you have made a will,” she added. “It

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is only old men and fathers of families who should make wills.”

“You, too,” laughed Bertram. “This objection to will-making must be a family fad, I think.”

“It does not extend to me,” said Blas, who the moment before had lounged into the verandah, looking, with his picturesque dress, dark handsome face and black eyes, the beau ideal of a brigand chief or gipsy king. “I would make a will to-morrow—in your favour, Bertram, for you are the best fellow I know—if I had anything to leave.”

“If you had you would not keep it, Blas,” put in his father. “I never saw your equal for getting through money. For every dollar he has, Bertram, he spends two.”

“It is very few dollars I get to spend,” muttered the young fellow moodily. “I could do with a few more very well. But never mind that now. When you return from Trinidad, Bertram, we will make that excursion to the *llanos* we have so often talked about.”

“That is what I intend. I feel quite ashamed to think that I have been so long in the country and seen so little of it. Yes, we must go to the *llanos*, Blas.”

“*Bueno!* when you come back we will go”

CHAPTER XXXIX

AT LAST!

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Bertram felt quite satisfied with what he had done. By assuring a provision for his uncle he had performed an obvious duty and, in some measure, acquitted himself of the debt of gratitude which he owed Rupert and his family for the kindness they had bestowed upon him during his illness. He left El Dorado with a quiet conscience and, albeit still far from well, full of enthusiasm and hope, for at last he was going to see Gladys.

The *Virtuous Maiden* had no sooner let go her anchor, about a mile from Port of Spain, than she was surrounded

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by a swarm of boats—her appearance off the Bocas having been signalled several hours in advance of her arrival.

Bertram was standing on the quarter-dock surveying the scene, and hesitating whether he should put up for the day at Miss Georgy's or go straight to Prospect, when he was accosted by a black man in a white livery, who a few minutes before had come aboard from one of the boats alongside.

"Massa Norbreck?" said the man, touching his hat, and then he went on to say that he was Mrs. Earnsdale's coachman, that she had sent him to meet the packet and that if he found Massa Norbreck on board he was to drive him to Prospect.

This solved the difficulty. Bertram, after being rowed ashore, and calling at the agent's for his letters and papers, seated himself with a sigh of satisfaction in Mrs. Earnsdale's carriage, and after an hour's drive through a beautiful country reached her house. There was a shorter cut, the coachman told him, by the sea-shore, but that was practicable for horses only.

Prospect is a small, yet picturesque dwelling, somewhat in the style of a Swiss chalet, built on a mound at the foot of a hill which, a little further back, rises almost to the dimensions of a mountain, and seaward melts into a shore of silvery sand. Behind the house, and nearly overshadowing it, grows a grand and stately grove of Moriche palms. Every tree seems to be of the same height; none is less than a hundred feet. The great trunks, as straight, as smooth, and as parallel as the columns of a Greek temple,

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support a dome of fan-like leaves, which above reflect a pale yet lustrous light, and beneath make a serene and grateful shade.

Through the middle of this grove flows a broad brook, now forming deep pools, now tumbling in tiny cascades between the rocks, festooned with flowers. As it nears the mound the brook, not being able to surmount the obstacles, divides into two streams which flow on either side of the house, but only to reunite a little further on, and run swiftly and silently together until they are lost in the waveless waters of the Gulf of Sadness.

The two streams mark the limits of Mrs. Earnsdale's grounds.

The garden is gay with yellow croton, purple dracaena, and crimson poinsettia. There are bushes twenty feet high, crowned with giant roses, plantains with leaves six feet long,

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bananas laden with verdant fruit, golden orange-trees and yellow and green-fruited mangosteens. Between the densely wooded uplands and the shining sea is a wide stretch of ground covered with green cane fields, coolie gardens, and cocoa plantations, and dotted here and there with planters' houses, labourers' huts and sugar mills, from which blue wreaths of smoke rise lazily in the windless air.

"Very beautiful, but awfully hot," thought Bertram, as the carriage turned into the avenue. It was the warmest time of the day, and he felt grateful for the shade afforded by the trees and shrubs, whose leafy branches, meeting overhead, shut him in from the burning sun.

"Welcome to Prospect, Mr. Norbreck!" said Mrs. Earnsdale, as she met her guest in the darkened hall. "I hope you will make a long stay. How altered you are! I should hardly have known you. You seem quite exhausted. Your voyage in that dreadful Spanish Main steamer must have been too much for you after your illness."

It was quite true. Bertram had neither eaten nor slept on the *Virtuous Maiden*, and he was now so exhausted that he could scarcely keep his feet.

"Sit down here," she continued, showing him into a cool, cosy little room on the shady side of the house," and I will order you something, for I am sure you need it."

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Bertram accepted the invitation with thankfulness, sat down and had something—the said something consisting of deviled fowl, turtle steak, fried bananas, and a bottle of Bass's beer, and he felt thereafter physically a new man. But in spirit he was greatly perturbed, for he had neither seen nor heard anything of Gladys, and he conceived a dreadful suspicion that she was away from home—possibly in England. At length, after he had answered all Mrs. Earnsdale's questions about El Dorado and Caracas, he ventured to ask how Miss Earnsdale was.

“Quite well, I thank you. She is at the Countess Alvini's. The Countess is a very old lady and a very old friend, and as fond of Gladys as Gladys is of her. She often sends for Gladys to keep her company. When she goes I never know when I shall see her again. The Countess sent for her yesterday. She may be back to—morrow, or not for a week; there is no telling.”

She was only on a visit then, and not very far away. It might have been worse. At any rate, she had not gone to England. Yet to wait a whole week after so many months'

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waiting, and so much ardent anticipation, was bitterly disappointing, and he could not, in his weak state, prevent a shade of weariness from passing over his face.

Mrs. Earnsdale ascribed it to another cause.

“You are tired, I can see,” said she, “and no wonder. I will leave you to sleep awhile. Don't make any objection, please. I know what is good for you better than you know yourself, and I shall insist on being obeyed. Take the cushion. Now lean back in your chair and close your eyes.”

Bertram after a feeble remonstrance, did as he was told; and though the sense of disappointment kept him for some time awake, nature in the end conquered, and he sank into a deep and dreamless sleep—so deep and dreamless that, when he opened his eyes three or four hours later, he could not for a few seconds remember where he was, and looked around with wondering gaze.

The heat of the day was over, the jealousies had been thrown open, and a fresh sea-breeze, bearing with it the perfume of flowers, was wafting into the room. In a doorway,

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which led on to the balcony, stood the figure of a young girl so motionless and intent that it might almost have passed for a picture or statue.

“Gladys!” exclaimed, impetuously and involuntarily, so soon as he had convinced himself that he was wide awake.

“How do you do, Mr. Norbreck?” she said, moving from the doorway and holding out of her hand. “I saw you were asleep and feared to disturb you.”

“I beg your pardon, Miss Earnsdale,” returned Bertram, rather confusedly, taking and retaining the proffered hand. “But the fact is, I was so surprised that I have been guilty of an unintentional rudeness. I have no right to call you Gladys. But my thoughts——”

“Here is somebody you know, I think, Mr. Norbreck,” she interrupted hurriedly, at the same time withdrawing her hand and turning toward the balcony.

The somebody was Marie Canton, who had arrived while Bertram slept. She was as great a rattle as ever.

“Mr. Norbreck!” she exclaimed, “why, I never expected to see you again. We were all beginning to think you had made up your mind to stay in Venezuela all your life. I was saying to Victor only the other day that I believed you had married an Indian squaw and settled there for good. However, better late than never. But, whatever else it may be,

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Venezuela does not seem to possess a very salubrious climate. He cannot be congratulated on his appearance, can he, Gladys?”

“You would look ill, too, if you had had yellow fever,” said Gladys warmly. “And I don’t think he has quite recovered yet. My mother said he was far from well when he arrived. Do you feel better now, Mr. Norbreck?”

“Thank you very much, Miss Earnsdale, I feel quite well now. I have had an excellent luncheon, a refreshing sleep and——”

“Seen Gladys,” put in Miss Canton, with mischievous laugh.

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Bertram looked confused, Gladys blushed and led the way to the garden, where they were joined by Mrs. Earnsdale, and strolled about shady walks until the gong gave the signal for dinner.

Although Bertram had said he felt quite well, he was considerably worse on the following morning, and the ladies were so much alarmed by his looks that Mrs. Earnsdale insisted on calling in the doctor when he visited the plantation to make his official inspection of the coolies. He said that Bertram's indisposition was the consequence of undertaking a fatiguing voyage before he had fully recovered from the effects of the fever, prescribed a tonic, and enjoined rest and good living.

Mrs. Earnsdale undertook that this regimen should be strictly observed, and Bertram found it so much to his liking that he would not have objected if it had been indefinitely prolonged. Like all motherly women she delighted to have somebody to look after and order, was always fluttering about, getting him some new delicacy, and telling him to do this or not to do that. He was rarely left alone with Gladys, and never for more than a few minutes; but she was never long out of his sight, and his happiness, albeit of a quieter sort, was as great as it had been on the *Borysthenes* and the *Arno*. It lacked only one thing to make it complete.

"Mr. Norbreck wants to go up to the Moriche wood, mother," said Gladys, one day, to Mrs. Earnsdale; "do you think he may?"

"I don't know," answered the elder lady, with a dubious look; "Doctor Cookwell laid so much stress on the necessity of rest. How do you feel, Mr. Norbreck?"

"Almost as well as ever I did," returned Bertram, with a smile; "and I want to see inside that wood particularly."

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"Well, it is not very far, and you have perfect shade there. I think you may venture; but you must wait until the sun goes down a little more and the sea-breeze springs up."

Bertram bowed submissively, took up a book, went out on the verandah, lit a cigar, read a little, and thought a great deal. He found Mrs. Earnsdale's yoke very easy, and his life at Prospect very pleasant. he still lacked the assurance of Gladys' love, and

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before the sun went down and the sea-breeze sprang up he meant to know his fate. He had planned the excursion to the Moriche wood with that very object. Though he had little doubt as to the answer he should receive, the possibility that he might, after all, be mistaken, the sense that a great crisis in his life was approaching, made him restless and preoccupied: he looked at his watch every ten minutes, and only re-entered the house when the time had arrived for the proposed walk.

Gladys was painting.

“Are you going?” she asked.

“Yes; would you—would you kindly show me the way?” he asked, nervously.

“Certainly,” she replied, putting down her brush and her palette, and opening one of the jalousies; “you go down the footpath to the white gate at the bottom of the garden, then you cross the rustic bridge, and then——”

“Thank you very much, Miss Earnsdale, I can see the way very well. I meant, would you go with me?”

“Would you like me to go?”

“So much that, unless you will, I do not think I shall care to go at all.”

“Very well,” answered Gladys, quietly; “I cannot paint much longer. I will go with you.”

She left the room, and in a few minutes returned, wearing a broad-brimmed straw hat, and carrying a white parasol. Then they went down the shady walk between rows of orange plants and magnolias, and under the branches of crimson rose trees and scarlet *bois immortelles*, over the rustic bridge, and upwards towards the Moriche palms which rose before them like granite pillars supporting a dome of frosted silver.

Gladys was unusually silent, and Bertram talked rapidly and nervously about nothing in particular. At length they reached the “pillared shade” of the stately palm grove. Long smooth columns tower all around them; the great fan-like

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leaves of the Moriches form a groined roof more perfect and beautiful than was wrought by the hands of man. In one direction the eye is lost in the green recesses of the forest;

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in the other can be seen the gardens of Prospect, the gleaming sand, the surgeless sea, and the purple mountains of the Spanish Main. "where jaguars lie hid."

The only sound that can be heard is the bubbling music of the brook. The lovers are as much alone as if they were on some solitary alpine peak or in the depths of some vast wilderness.

"How glorious!" exclaimed Bertram. "I have seen bigger trees than these Moriches, but never anything so supremely beautiful as this wood."

"Nor anybody else, I think. And it grows on you Mr. Norbreck. Every time I come here it seems more marvellous. I could wander about it all day long, and find every moment something to admire."

"You come here often, then?"

"Not very. Mother does not like me to come alone, and the climbs is rather too much for her."

"Let me come with you, then. Give me the right, Gladys."

"I—I don't know what you mean, Mr. Norbreck" she answered, lowering her eyes, and a tell-tale blush reddened her cheeks.

"I mean, Gladys—what my manner must already have betrayed—that I love you—love you so much that without you I cannot live. And you love me—you must, you must;" and, as he spoke, he put his arms round her, and drew her towards him.

"Yes, Bertram, I do love you," she murmured, raising her bright eyes, brighter now than ever, to his.

"And we will love each other as long as we live," he said pressing his lips ardently to hers.

"As long as I live, I am yours," she answered; and the compact was sealed by another loving embrace.

Then followed a long delicious silence, and a still longer talk.

"What will your mother say?" asked Bertram.

"I do not think she will be very angry. She loves me and she likes you."

"I will tell her when we go back."

"We will tell her together"

"By all means, if you wish it, dearest. Your will is my law," answered Bertram passionately.

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"In everything and always?" she asked, archly.

"In everything and always," he answered, with a kiss.

"Let us go home, then. In a few minutes it will be pitch dark. Look there!"

Bertram looked towards the west. The headlands of Venezuela were hidden by a veil of rosy clouds, the sea was blood-red, and the great fiery sun so low in the horizon that it seemed to kiss the waves. The next moment, as if by the stroke of an enchanter's wand, it vanished utterly, the sea turned black, and the Moriche wood was plunged in Stygian darkness.

What a happy walk home it was! They groped hand in hand, among the palms, stumbled, laughing, over the roots, they gained the path which skirted its bank, Bertram found it necessary to put his arm round Gladys to keep her from falling into the water. The fire-flies and the stars, conspicuous among which was the Southern Cross, lighted the lovers home; but they lingered so long on the way that Mrs. Earnsdale had begun to fear they were lost.

"What a time you have been!" she said. "Dinner has been waiting nearly an hour. I can give you only ten minutes to dress."

CHAPTER XL.

MRS. EARSDALE CONSENTS.

"We have something to tell you, Mrs. Earnsdale," began Bertram, when dessert had been served, and Jupiter, the black butler, had withdrawn.

"We. Whom do you mean by we?" asked the lady gravely.

"Gladys and I. She wanted the telling to be done jointly, though that is not quite according to etiquette, I believe."

"Well, what is it?" said Mrs. Earnsdale, as gravely as before.

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Bertram felt rather bothered; he wanted Mrs. Earnsdale to give him a lead, and she refused to understand him.

“Why, the fact is—what I have to say is—I mean that Gladys and I love each other, and—and we want you to sanction our engagement, dear Mrs. Earnsdale.”

“I knew quite well what you meant,” replied the lady, with a rather mischievous smile, “only I wanted to tease you a little. I knew what had happened before you spoke.”

“But how could you know, mother?” said Gladys, putting an arm timidly round Mrs. Earnsdale’s neck, and looking rather alarmed. “It was up in the Moriche wood, and I do not think——”

“You foolish child,” interrupted Mrs. Earnsdale, fondly.

“Do you imagine I am blind? I could read it in your eyes and Bertram’s.”

“You are not angry, then, mother?”

“No, darling. I am not, nor surprised. I do not think you could have made a better choice, and I wish you every happiness.”

“Did I not tell you, Bertram?” exclaimed the happy girl, giving her hand to her lover, who pressed it to his lips.

“I knew we should have your blessing, mother, and I love Bertram so much.”

“Yes, that is the way,” said Mrs. Earnsdale, rather sadly. “You give your life to your children, lavish on them a world of love and care, and then they find somebody they like better, and leave you for ever.”

“Oh, mother!” answered Gladys, fondly. “I shall never leave you. In loving Bertram I have not ceased to love you.”

“You have a child the more, that is all, dear Mrs. Earnsdale,” put in Bertram. “If I did not love you for your own sake, I should love you for Gladys; and I love you for both.”

“You are very good, and you make me very happy. It is natural and right for young people to love and marry, and you have as fair prospect of happiness, I think, as anybody could desire. It is well too, that this has come about at Trinidad, and not at Carrington. I am not at all sure that your uncle Hugh will quite approve of your engagement.”

“But why——” what can he have against Bertram?”

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“Against he personally, nothing at all. But the Earsndales think themselves very great people, remember. Lucy expects to marry an earl’s son, at the least, and I fancy they

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will be disappointed when they know you are engaged to a manufacturer.”

“How absurd! Why, they are manufacturers themselves.”

“But they manufacture for glory, not for profit, and that makes a great difference, you know. And then the Earnsdales, though they did go into trade to recruit their fortunes are really an old county family, and that makes a still greater difference. However, I was not born at Earnsdale, and I do not think Bertram would be a bit better, or you a bit the happier, if he came of the oldest family in the county and none of her uncles has any control over Gladys. But there is one thing I must tell you, Bertram—she is not a great heiress.”

“You surely do not suppose, Mrs. Earnsdale,” broke in Bertram, impetuously, “that I had any such idea; that it ever occurred to me to think whether she was an heiress or not?”

“I am sure it never did, Bertram; but, all the same, it is only right you should know that, of all the Earnsdales, we are the least well off. The others are rich, we are not. My poor husband was an easy, good-natured man, who, after letting money slip through his fingers, tried to get it back by speculating, and lost more. For an Earnsdale, he died poor. Then for a long time, my Trinidad property did very badly. Still, we have something—quite enough for unambitious folks, and Gladys will not be dowerless, and the estate is beginning to do very well.”

“Never mind about money,” said Bertram, just a little emphatically, “I shall have enough for both. Only I fear we cannot marry until I come into my property, and it is such a frightfully long time to wait.”

“How long?”

“Nearly a year,” answered the youth, with something like a groan.

“Is that all?” laughed Mrs. Earnsdale; “why, you could not look more dismal if it were a whole decade.”

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“But you will stay here, Bertram?” said Gladys; “you will not go away? Remember what you said—that my will should be your law.”

“And so it shall,” said Bertram, pressing her hand; “only I am under an engagement to make one more visit to El Dorado.”

“In that case I must let you go,” she murmured, with

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a bewitching smile; “but I cannot spare you long, remember.”

“Only for a few weeks,” returned Bertram, gaily. It was so pleasant to know that he was necessary to her happiness. “When I have arranged one or two matters of business with my Cousin Blas, in connection with the mines, I shall ride across the *llanos* to the Orinoco, and return by way of Ciudad Bolivar. But there is no hurry. It will do if I start in a month or two.”

“What a remarkable history is that of your uncle,” observed Mrs. Earnsdale; “and what a strange life he must have led! I hope he and this Mr. Blas will prove worthy of your generosity.”

“I think he will, Mrs. Earnsdale. And then I am bound to do all I can for him—if only for my mother’s sake.”

“Of course. But don’t you think that will you made may lead him to expect too much? You could not now give him anything like fifty thousand pounds, you know.”

“I never meant to do. I made my will only to show him that I was in earnest, and to ensure a provision for him in any event.”

“And how much do you suppose you shall give him?”

“I was thinking about fifteen or twenty thousand pounds—or I might put it in the shape of a yearly allowance. Perhaps that would be better.”

“I am sure it would,” answered Mrs. Earnsdale, decidedly, “and I think I should cancel the will, if I were you. Not that I think it wrong to make a will, only your promise is quite sufficient.”

“It is not necessary, Mrs. Earnsdale. Marriage always cancels a will; and when I am married, I shall make another, and a very different one.”

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"Don't talk any more about wills, please," entreated Gladys; "it is almost as bad as talking about funerals."

"Well, it is not a very cheerful subject," replied Bertram.

"Let us talk about something else. Won't they be surprised at Carrington when they know my Uncle Rupert is alive?"

"Very, I should say," answered Mrs. Earnsdale, drily. She believed in her heart that Bertram was being victimised by an impostor. "Talking about Carrington, I suppose you have heard what a great man your friend Rooke is becoming."

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"Indeed. I have not. My only correspondent there is Rooke himself."

"Oh but he is, though. He has been appointed honorary colonel of the volunteers and a deputy-lieutenant. His name figures in every subscription list; he has given five hundred pounds to the new infirmary, and when the foundation-stone was laid he entertained the county members at dinner."

"Rooke is making money, then?"

"He ought to be. My brother Hugh thinks he intends to come out for the county, and he is very much surprised at what he calls the fellow's audacity. I am afraid Mr. Rooke is going just a little too fast. At any rate, that is what people seem to be saying. But his wife is very much liked, I hear. She gives herself no airs, and is so quiet and lady-like in manner that nobody cares to remember she is old Mouse's daughter, and once kept a second-hand furniture shop."

"I can quite believe it," said Bertram. "Mr. Rooke is a good woman; and though she had not much education, there was never anything vulgar about her."

"A great deal too good for him," returned Mrs. Earnsdale, emphatically. "I hope he treats her kindly. I never like lawyers at the best; but a lawyer with a hooked nose I simply detest." An expression of opinion which, couched as it was in an unintentional rhyme, made the lovers laugh heartily.

The next day the English mail came in, bringing several letters for Bertram, one of which considerably surprised him. It was from Dunbar, telling him that the Syndicate had sold the mines of El Dorado to a limited company promoted by himself, on

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extremely advantageous terms. A number of shares of large nominal value had been allotted to Bertram in consideration of his interest in the original concession. Dunbar took it for granted that Bertram would accept the allotment; but if not, he might have instead eight thousand pounds over and above the two thousand he had contributed to the Syndicate. A prospectus of the company was enclosed, and in the list of directors figured the names of Rooke and Lowe Middling.

Bertram showed the letter and the prospectus to Mrs. Earnsdale and Gladys.

"No need to wait now," he exclaimed, excitedly; "read that. We can be married at once; or any rate in a month or two."

"I am not so sure of that," returned Mrs. Earnsdale,

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smiling at his impetuosity. "Gladys is a ward in Chancery, and she cannot be married without the permission of the Lord Chancellor."

Bertram's countenance fell.

"Will that be difficult to obtain?" he asked.

"I don't think so. It will take a little time—three or four months, perhaps. But in any case I shall not let you be married sooner—possibly not even so soon. And are you quite sure about getting this money? It seems almost too good to be true."

"It does; still, I think Dunbar means what he says. He is a man of business. But the question now is, had I better take the money or the shares? If the mines of El Dorado succeed, the shares will be about the best investment I could have."

"That is true; though I think if I were in your place I should take the money. But I will tell you what; we are driving to-morrow to La Solitude to see the Countess Alvini, and inform her of your engagement—she must be the first to know—and we will ask her advice. Old as she is, she has full possession of her senses, and enjoys the reputation of being the best business woman in the island."

CHAPTER XLI.

A WARNING.

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

ON their way to La Solitude, Mrs. Earnsdale told Bertram something of the Countess Alvini's History. Her life had been a veritable romance. Born more than a hundred years before in Languedoc, she was married at sixteen to the Count Alvini, a gentleman of Provence, and presented at the court of Louis XV. the year in which that monarch died. Shortly after that event they sailed for St. Domingo, where her husband had an extensive sugar plantation, and there settled. In 1791, when the French National Assembly decreed the abolition of slavery, she had been a widow ten years, and sole

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proprietor of the estate, which she managed with remarkable energy and success. But, foreseeing that a rising of the negroes was inevitable, she proposed to those of her former slaves who were still faithful to her to accompany her to Trinidad, at that time a Spanish possession. Thirty of them, including several women with their children, accepted the offer, and a few days before the outbreak, in which nearly every white in St. Domingo perished, the Countess and her companions set sail in a small sloop, and arrived in due course at Port of Spain. The Spanish authorities, who gladly welcomed all immigrants that were at once French and Catholic, made her a grant of land in a district then so solitary and remote as to suggest the name is still bore—La Solitude. There she settled and superintended in person the clearing of the land. Her faithful negroes, working for love, built a wooden house for her, and cabins for themselves. Every year more land was cleared and planted; the negroes increased and multiplied; and thirty years after her arrival, almost penniless, at Port of Spain, Madame Alvini owned a thousand acres planted with sugar and cocoa, a beautiful house, two hundred negroes, and a fortune of a hundred thousand pounds. She had emancipated her slaves long before they were emancipated by law, given a great part of her savings to her kinsfolk on France—impoverished by successive revolutions—and her estate to her nephew, now an old man, who lived with her at La Solitude.

“Although Bertram and the ladies left Prospect shortly after daybreak and reached La Solitude in less than an hour, the Countess was already on the verandah, enjoying the freshness of the morning air. She sat, upright as a duchess, on her *tabouret*, her cheeks, though wrinkled, still rosy, her dark eyes still bright, and her abundant snow-white hair

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

her only *coiffure*. Two or three negresses stood respectfully at a distance awaiting her orders, and a couple of black babies were gambolling at her feet.

Mrs. Earnsdale and Gladys embraced the old lady in French fashion, by kissing her on each cheek, and, after a few whispered words had passed between them, Bertram came forward, and bending low, kissed her hand.

“Ah, you are the *fiancé*,” she said, adjusting her gold-mounted, double eye-glass, and scrutinising him long and keenly. “*Très bien* (to Gladys), I like him; he has a good face. I think you have done well, *ma fille chérie*. And you, Monsieur Norbreck, ought to esteem yourself very happy.

[257] God has given you the highest blessing a man can possess—the love of a sweet, good girl. See that you show yourself worthy of so great a benediction.”

“Please God, I will,” said Bertram, fervently.

“I like to hear you say that,” returned the Countess, with a gratified smile; “it is a sign of reverence and right feeling, and most young men of these days are as destitute of the one as the other. It is because they have ceased to believe in God.”

“I am so glad you like Bertie, Countess,” said Gladys, taking the venerable lady’s hand. “I esteem your approval of our *fiançailles* second only to that of my own mother, and you have really been a second mother to me.”

“Say rather a second grandmother, *ma petite*. I remembered thy great grandmother when she was a *fillette* like thee. But you have not told me when it shall take place—the marriage, I mean.”

“It is not settled yet. Perhaps in a year. But, now, Bertie wants to have it sooner.”

“And Bertie is quite right. A year is too long to be *fiancé*. Why would they wait a year?”

“*Nous verrons, chère Comtesse*” said Mrs. Earnsdale. “Bertie is a very ardent lover, and I don’t want to be cruel. But he has heard how wise you are, and we would like to have your advice on an important matter of business. After that we will talk about the marriage.”

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Whereupon Bertram told the Countess about the mines of El Dorado, and of the offer he had just received from Dunbar.

“You will accept the money,” she said. “*Cela va sans dire.*” I never had much faith in mines; they ruin more people than they enrich. And here you have a profit offered in advance—and, *ma foi*, what a profit! —three times cent per cent. If others can make more, let them. You, at any rate, will have reaped your harvest.”

“I am quite of your opinion, Countess, and I shall take your advice and Mr. Dunbar’s offer.”

“You will do well. And if you want a good investment, buy the Palmetto cocoa plantation. It is for sale, and can be bought for six or seven thousand pounds, I am sure. There is a house, and, if you like, you can live there. It will give you a very handsome interest.”

“Where is it?”

“Half way between La Solitude and Prospect.”

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“I will buy the Palmetto estate,” Bertram gaily, “if only for its situation.”

“You will pay for it, but you will not buy it. They would make you pay too much. Bludger shall buy it for you.”

“I have met him. He is rather an original, is he not?”

“Bludger is a diamond in the rough, but still a diamond. The best buyer and the best judge of the values of an estate in the island. I shall see him for you.”

“That being settled,” observed Mrs. Earnsdale, “I think the marriage may take place as soon as we can get the Lord Chancellor’s consent. The packet sails to-morrow, and if we write at once we may have an answer in six weeks or so. You do not want to go to El Dorado sooner than that, Bertie, do you?”

“Not at all. I have promised both my uncle and Dunbar to go there once again; but in no case (looking at Gladys) should I go for six weeks or more, and I shall wait now until Dunbar sends me the money.”

“Your uncle is called Rivaz, I think you said?” asked the Countess, who during the last few minutes had looked as if she were trying to remember something.

The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust.* (1885)

“Yes, Rupert Rivaz, generally called Roberto in Spanish-speaking countries.”

“It seems to me that I have heard that name before. How old is he?”

“Fifty-five, perhaps”

“And he has lived many years in South and Central America?”

“Yes.”

“Was he ever in Cuba?”

“No doubt. He has been everywhere in this part of the world.”

“Strange the name should intrigue me so,” said the old lady musingly. “But there are so many things that I forget now. What happened when I was young I remember perfectly; but the events of fifteen or twenty years back I find almost impossible to recall, unless I get a clue. But, never mind, it will perhaps come back to me one of these days. And he is your uncle, you say?”

“Yes, he is my uncle,” answered Bertram, who began to think the old lady was doting.

“Well, well, I may be mistaken. There is more than one Rivaz in the world, I suppose.”

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After some further conversation, Madame Alvini's guests took their leave and returned to Prospect. They had letters to write for the mail, and Mrs. Earnsdale wanted to see her lawyer concerning the application to the Lord Chancellor. Bertram wrote to Alice, Alan and Rooke, apprising them of his engagement, and to Dunbar, announcing his decision about the shares in the new company. He preferred to take the money, he said, on account of his approaching marriage, and he informed Mr. Dunbar further that he renounced the agency, that he should be able to make only one more visit to El Dorado, and advised him to send somebody out in his place to represent the new proprietors.

Mrs. Earnsdale and Gladys were writing letters up to the very last moment allowed for their dispatch; for they had many friends whom they deemed it their duty to inform of the betrothal.

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

Then care was thrown to the winds, and the lovers were as happy as the days were long. Many French customs still linger in Trinidad, and the French custom of making the interval between betrothal and marriage a time of enjoyment and gaiety is one of them. Mrs. Earnsdale gave dinner parties and dances; there were jaunts, picnics, and marine excursions, and often in the cool of the evening, the lovers would stroll in the shaded walks of the garden, or wander up to the Moriche wood to watch the sun sink into the waves—sometimes waiting until the glorious tropic moon rose majestically above the northern mountains and bathed sea and strand and forest in a mellower, if less brilliant light than that of day.

These were their happiest hours. Gladys told Bertram how she had loved him almost since the day of their first meeting on the Carrington Road, and both laughingly admitted that they had been just a little jealous—he of Victor, she of Marie Canton. Bertram talked about his father and mother, showed Gladys their miniatures, and wondered if they knew how fortunate he was in his prospects, how happy in his love. Then they recalled the incidents of their voyage in the *Borysthenes* and the *Arno*, and Bertram's eyes glowed and his voice trembled, and Gladys blushed and lowered her eyes, as he whispered that when they made their next voyage she would be his—his forever—his own peerless wife. Both agreed that Trinidad, with its genial climate and perfumed air, its gorgeous flowers and glorious trees was an earthly paradise, and though duty might sometimes call them to

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England, the tropics should be their home, They built enchanted castles in the air as high as the stars—castles of which he should be the prince and she the princess, and wherein was to be neither pain, nor evil, nor sorrow, but joy for evermore.

And so the days and weeks flew past on fleeting wings, and all went merry as a marriage bell, until the arrival of the mail—as it happened much behind time—with the answers to their letters, constrained Bertram and Gladys to exchange poetry for prose, and descend from the realms of love to the word of fact.

Gladys had quite a budget of congratulatory epistles. Her Uncle Hugh's letter, albeit quite courteous, expressed no very warm approval of her choice. Lucy felicitated

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

her cousin on having the courage to disregard mere rank and convention and bestow her hand where she had given her heart. Neither letter was altogether to Gladys' liking; but, of the two, her uncle's displeased her the least, for she warmly resented her cousin's insinuation that Bertram was not in every respect her equal, or that she had "condescended to a man of low estate."

"Lucy is so proud," she said to her mother. "She might be a duke's daughter, and her father is just as much a manufacturer as Bertie's father was. What difference is there between one manufacturer and another, I should like to know?"

"A great deal; at any rate many of them think so. There is quite as much of pride and exclusiveness among manufacturers as among county people, and much more vulgarity and snobbishness. And you really cannot compare the Earnsdales with ordinary manufacturers. I like Bertie so well, and have your happiness so much at heart, that I have not insisted on the difference of rank—but it exists, and if he had not a handsome fortune——"

"I don't care, mother," interposed Gladys warmly. "I should have loved him all the same if he had been as poor as his *protégé*, Alan Cuerdale, whom he was telling us about the other day."

"I doubt it, child," returned Mrs. Earnsdale with a smile.

"At any rate, you would not have been permitted to marry him. But you are not going to be put to the test; and it is well for you to think so now. A girl can never esteem too highly the man she is going to marry."

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Mrs. Earnsdale had also received letters on the all-absorbing subject. The one from her lawyers was somewhat of a disappointment—at any rate for Bertram. The Lord Chancellor's consent, they said, would doubtless be granted, as a matter of course; but the long vacation being on she must not expect the official authorisation for two or three months. In view of this fact it was evident that the marriage could not well take place under four months.

"That will give you ample time for your trip to the Spanish Main," observed Mrs. Earnsdale by way offering consolation.

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

"Too ample," answered the disappointed lover, rather gloomily. "I don't expect to be away more than six or eight weeks outside."

Among Bertram's letters was one from Dunbar, enclosing a draft for eight thousand pounds on the Colonial Bank. The promoter congratulated him on his approaching marriage, regretted the cessation of their business relations, and thanked him for his services to the Syndicate. His successor was appointed, and would arrive at Trinidad by the following mail, and Bertram was asked to accompany him to El Dorado and instruct him in his new duties.

He had also very pleasant letters from Alice, Mrs. Whalley, and Alan. Alice was delighted with his engagement. Although she had seen Gladys only once, she had conceived a warm affection for her, and felt sure she would make Bertram a most loving wife, and herself a very dear friend.

Another letter, which both surprised and puzzled him, was from his cousin Jacob—the first he had received from any member of his uncle's family since he left home. The engagement, it seemed, had got wind at Wellsprings and thereabouts, where, according to Jacob, it gave immense satisfaction. Hands and tenants were alike delighted, and there were confident hopes that, when he brought his bride to Crow Nest, the occasion would be celebrated by a great "stir." But the gist of the letter was in the postscript. "All is going on here as usual," wrote Jacob. "Last half year the factory made a fair profit, though not as much as father expected, and all the tenants are paying up well—all except Striver—but he is always behind, poor old chap! My mother sends her respects. She wants me to say as she has not forgotten your kindness, and she thinks it would be to your interest to come home *as soon as you conveniently can.*"

The concluding words were underscored, and it did not

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require much penetration to see that they constituted the motive of the letter. His uncle, Bertram felt sure, had not seen them. But what could they mean? That they meant more than met the eye, he felt sure. Mrs. Roger said in effect, "you once did me a good turn, and now I give you a friendly warning." A warning against what? In one sentence he was told that all was well; in the next, that the sooner he went home the better. She

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could not refer to Alice, for Alice was safe with Mrs. Whalley, and if all was right with his sister, and the factory and estate were prospering, what could be wrong, and what could be known to his aunt of which his uncle and Rooke were not equally cognizant? The more Bertram pondered over the riddle, the more puzzled he became. In the end he gave it up as insoluble; and though the incident caused him some misgiving, he consoled himself with the reflection that, whatever the warning might portend, he could not possibly return to England until after the marriage.

CHAPTER XLII.

MASSA BLAZES.

THE mail had been gone several days and Bertram, who had just completed the purchase of the Palmetto estate and paid the money, was solacing himself with a cigar on the verandah and talking to Mrs. Earnsdale, when Jupiter, the black butler, appeared on the scene and announced that “a gemman ob de name ob Blazes” wanted to see Massa Norbuck; he could not for the life of him say “Norbreck.”

“Who on earth is Massa Blazes?” exclaimed Bertram; “some friend of yours, Mrs. Earnsdale?”

“Certainly not. I know nobody with such a dreadful name. Bring him up, Jupiter, and if it be private business I will retire. Perhaps it is a friend of Mr. Bludger, he knows some very queer people.”

Jupiter vanished, and the next moment the tall figure

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and handsome face of Blas Rivaz was seen approaching the verandah.

“God bless me!” exclaimed Bertram, “Massa Blazes is my cousin Blas. This is an unexpected pleasure. When did you come? Allow me to introduce you to Mrs. Earnsdale. Sit down and let us have a talk. How did you leave the inhabitants of Paradise?”

Blas explained that, as he was growing weary of the monotony of El Dorado, El Padre (as he generally called his father) had suggested that he should make a trip to

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

Trinidad, that he had left three days previously in the *Virtuous Maiden*, and that, shortly after passing the Bocas, her engines broke down so utterly that the passengers were compelled to complete the voyage in the ship's boats. Hearing on his arrival that Bertram was staying at Prospect, and having no other acquaintance at Port of Spain, he had come on at once "to look him up."

"You did quite right. I should have been sorry if you had not come," said Bertram cordially, yet not without a feeling of annoyance; for he foresaw that he should be compelled to sacrifice in some measure the society of this betrothed to the duties of hospitality, and, though he did not dislike Blas, he was not particularly fond of him.

"We are having a few friends to dinner this evening," said Mrs. Earnsdale graciously, "and shall be glad if you will join us. We dine at seven."

"Thank you, madam," returned Rivaz rather shyly. "I shall be most happy, I am sure."

His news from El Dorado was of the slightest. All was going on as usual, and nothing of interest had occurred since Bertram's departure. After a short stay Blas returned to Port of Spain in the carriage which had brought him.

Some three hours later, Jupiter, with rolling eyes and a awe-struck face, announced "Massa Blazes" a second time, and Blas, to the surprise of all beholders, entered the drawing-room, clad in a brilliant uniform and covered with gold and silver lace. Bertram fancied that he seemed rather surprised at seeing nobody else similarly attired.

"What service is your cousin in, and why has he come dressed in that way?" whispered Gladys to Bertram, as he led her to the dining-room.

"I am not sure. I was not aware he held any military rank; but I suppose he must be something or another in the

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Salvadorian army, and he has probably come in his war paint because he thinks it the right thing to do. I do not think he has ever been in European society before."

Though, in the company of men Blas was extremely self-possessed—could even on occasion be insolent—he was very taciturn at dinner, and for some time afterwards.

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

Victor Canton, who talked enough for two, ascribed his shyness to stupidity, and in an unhappy moment conceived the idea of poking fun at him.

“That is a very handsome uniform, Mr. Rivaz,” he said; “and suits you admirably. Might I ask what uniform it is?”

“That of a colonel in the army of San Salvador,” answered Blas, gratified by the compliment, for he was as vain as he was good-looking.

“Ah, indeed. That of a colonel in the army of San Salvador. And those epaulettes, Señor Colonel—I suppose you won them on the field of battle?”

On this Blas, who was both sharp and short-tempered, perceived that he was being chaffed.

“I did win my epaulettes on the field of the battle, Mr. Canton,” he answered with a frown; “and I am ready at any moment to vindicate my claim to them on the field of honour. At the battle of Carico my squadron of *llaneros* rode down a whole regiment of Blues, and I lanced General Maturin with my own hand.”

“I hope you will not lance me,” said Victor with a nervous laugh.

“I could very easily,” answered Blas, with a disdainful glance at the little Creole, “and carry you on the point.”

“Thank you very much,” replied the other, turning pale; “but, everything considered, I think I would rather not. Riding on the point of a *llanero*'s lance would be awfully uncomfortable, I am sure, and make a fellow look so very ridiculous. But pray excuse me, Colonel Rivaz, I must speak a word to my sister. And, unless I am mistaken, Miss Earnsdale wants to speak to you. Yes, she does; you had better go to her.”

It was quite true. Gladys, having observed how little Blas was enjoying himself, that he never addressed a lady and seemed even to get on indifferently with Victor Canton, did want to speak at Blas and, if possible, make him feel more at ease. When in obedience to her command, he had taken a seat near her, she talked to him in her pleasantest

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manner about his father and mother, and El Dorado asked him questions about Salvador, Ecuador, and life on the *llanos*, drew him out on the subjects which he

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

understood, and exerted her powers of fascination so effectually that in a few minutes he was quite thawed. No young lady had ever talked to him so graciously before. He became as gay as he had previously been morose; and when, a little later in the evening, she asked him if he could sing, he answered in the affirmative, and offered, if a guitar could be found, to sing a song of the *llanos*. A guitar was found, and to a wild, yet pleasing air, that reminded Bertram of the concert he had heard at Naranja, Blas gave a song, one of the stanzas of which was somewhat as follows: —

“Mi cavallo y mi zamba,
Si mi murieron a un tiempo;
Al diablo la mujer,
Mi cavallo es lo que siento.”

(My steed and sweetheart died one day,
While love I did avow;
I only mourn my horse's neigh,
The deil may have her now.)

“It is very nice, I am sure,” said Gladys; “but I think I could appreciate it better if I knew what it meant.”

Bertram translated

“Oh, Mr. Blas, how shocking!” she exclaimed, in mock horror, “to prefer a horse to a sweetheart. I am really ashamed of you!”

“A *llanero* loves his horse above all else, but the poet who made that song had not seen you, Miss Earnsdale,” returned Blas, with heightened colour, and an admiring glance.

“Very well put, Blas,” said Bertram. “A little practice and you will become quiet a lady's man.”

When the time for leave-taking came, Bertram went with his cousin to the door.

“I never enjoyed an evening so much in all my life, Bertram,” said Blas warmly. “Caramba! I never had the chance. And what a fine girl is Miss Earnsdale; how superior

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

to an empty-headed Venezuelan *señorita*. *Por dios* I never saw her equal—and so kind and clever, too. She is just the girl——”

“I am glad you like her,” interrupted Bertram, drily; he

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did not altogether approve of the tone in which Blas expressed his admiration of Gladys.

“I am glad you like her, because she will one day be my wife, I hope.”

“You don’t mean that you are betrothed to her?”

“It is exactly what I do mean.”

Blas drew a deep breath.

“I congratulate you, cousin,” he said. “Caramba, what a lucky fellow you are! A fortune of half a million dollars and betrothed to a *señorita* like that. But I must go. *Hasta mañana*, Bertram.”

The next afternoon Blas called at Prospect to pay his respects to the ladies—somebody at Port of Spain had told him it was the right thing to do—when he received an invitation to accompany Gladys and Bertram, some of the Cantons, and several other friends, on an equestrian excursion to La Floresta, an estate about fifteen miles distant. The invitation was accepted with evident pleasure, and Blas undertook to be at the rendezvous at five o’clock on the following morning.

It was a beautiful ride by the sea-shore, and the cavalcade, which consisted of more than a dozen horsemen and horsewomen, reached their destination while the day was still young, and before the heat had grown oppressive. Floresta was an old sugar plantation, turned by its present owner into a cattle run, a purpose for which, by reason of its park-like character, its wide stretches of grass and abundance of water, it was admirably adapted.

When Blas saw the cattle he became quite excited. If there were not so many trees, he said, he could almost imagine himself on the *llanos*.

“Those are Venezuelan oxen, I’ll bet,” he remarked to Mr. Grant, the owner of the estate.

“You are quite right. They come from the *llanos* of Nueva Barcelona and are so wild that they will hardly let anybody come near them.”

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

"I think they will let me come near them, though," and, without another word, Blas dashed off at full speed after one of the biggest oxen of the herd. The next moment he was at the beast's quarters, and after galloping alongside him a few score yards, he bent low on his saddle, seized the tail in his right hand, and by a sudden jerk threw the creature over on his back. The shock was so severe that some time elapsed before the dazed ox could pick himself up. Blas galloped after another and served him like manner then rode back, smiling and triumphant.

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"Your cousin is a super horseman," said Gladys; "and I admire his courage and address. But I do not admire this sport—if he calls it sport. It must hurt the poor creatures dreadfully to be thrown down in that way."

"And have their tails half wrenched off. You are right, Gladys. It is a cruel sport. I saw it in Caracas. They call it 'bull-tailing.' The streets being barricaded, and two or three wrenched cows—not oxen, mind—whose horns had been sawn off, turned loose, a lot of young fellows galloped after them, and tailed them just as Blas tails those oxen; but over and over again—until the poor bruised brutes could hardly move, and stood stock-still with heaving flanks, bleeding limbs, and out-lolling tongues. And then came a crowd of men and boys who beat and goaded the poor tortured things into a final feeble gallop, only to be again thrown down on the hard pavement."

"And then?"

"They were dragged, or driven, away to the slaughter-house. I never wanted to see a fellow-creature killed before; but nothing would have pleased me more than to see one of these 'tailers' break his neck. Yes, men of Spanish race are cruel."

"But Blas is not of Spanish race."

"He is Spanish bred, and that us pretty much the same thing."

"I am sorry for that. I rather like Blas."

"And I am sure he admires you."

"Admires me?"

"I don't mean that he is spoons on you, nor should I like him to be. I am afraid he might be rather dangerous rival."

The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust*. (1885)

"Please, Bertie, dear don't talk nonsense."

"I was never more serious in my life, darling," laughed Bertram. "I should be vexed if Blas did not admire you. I should tremble if he loved you," and then he whispered something in her ear which caused her cheek to mantle with a blush of pleasure.

Ten days later Bertram and Blas, and Brush, the new agent, set sail for El Dorado.

"I do not like to let you go," said Gladys to her lover, as they sat in the purple twilight of the garden on the eve of his departure, "but I suppose you must?"

"And it is hard for me to go, darling," returned Bertram fondly, "and I shall count the minutes until I see you again.

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But I shall not be away long. Six weeks or seven will soon pass."

"Yes, six weeks. Your leave of absence is strictly limited to six weeks, remember. And are you quite sure now, Bertie, that you will be in no danger on the *llanos*?"

"None, whatever. There is no more danger in riding across the *llanos* than to the northern mountains of Trinidad. But if you like I will forego it, dearest."

"No, no, I must not be selfish, and I know how much you want to see the *llanos*. Come back safe and sound in six weeks—that is all I ask."

"If I live, Gladys, I shall be back at Prospect in six weeks—or seven—give me a week's law."

"Hush, you dear, foolish boy. If you suggest the possibility of your not living, I shall forbid you to go."

CHAPTER XLIII.

ANOTHER WARNING.

RUPERT RIVAZ and his son are sitting on the verandah of El Paraiso in the cool of the evening. The *quebrada* is in deep shade, for the sun is already hidden by the western *sierras*, and a few pale stars are shining in the darkening sky.

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

"So you have arranged to start on Friday," says the father. "I would not if I were you. Why not make it Saturday or Sunday?"

"I suppose you consider Friday unlucky?"

"And if I do, I am not alone in my opinion. At any rate, I always give myself the benefit of the doubt. I never begin a journey or anything else on a Friday if I can help it."

"That accounts for your undertakings having generally turned out so well, I suppose," said the son with a slight sneer. "If you had begun them all on a Friday you could not have done much worse."

"At any rate, it does not lie in your mouth to find fault with me," retorted Rupert angrily. "I have done my best

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for you, and all my undertakings have not turned out badly. These mines are doing first rate."

"How long will it last, *padre*? The veins in the Juan Burro are running out; in fact, there are no veins anywhere worth mentioning, and the 'pots' are getting scarcer and scarcer. I quite expect the whole thing will burst up one of these days."

"Don't talk nonsense, Blas! You know nothing about it."

"I know less about mining than you, I admit; but I am not so stupid that I cannot put two and two together. And it is plain to see that Treffry is getting into a mortal funk about the thing. He told me yesterday that it would be as much as he could do to fill the *Mary Marston* by the 15th."

"Treffry is a fool, and if he does not hold his tongue—I hope he has not said anything of the sort to Bertram or Brockmann."

"I don't think so. I thought you had squared him."

"So I did. I promised him a handsome premium if the thing went through."

"But has he got the money?"

"Of course he has. I paid him six months since."

"Then it is all right. Did you square Bertram, too?"

"I never tried. He is not the sort to be squared."

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"Yes, my cousin is really too good—at any rate for South America. By-the-way, *padre*, what would happen if he were to catch the yellow fever again?"

"*Quien sabe* (who knows)? Why do you ask?"

"I was only thinking that if he should have it a second time, and not—and not get better, you know—we should be the richer by fifty thousand pounds."

"I don't think he is at all likely to contract the fever a second time; he is getting acclimatised. But if he did it would probably finish him, and I should be devilish sorry."

"Of course. So should we all; and equally sorry if any accident were to befall him out on the *llanos* yonder."

Rupert threw away his cigar, rose abruptly from his chair, and walked several times hurriedly to and fro on the verandah. Then he stopped and put his hands on his son's shoulders.

"I know what you mean, Blas," he said in a low, intense voice. "But Bertram Norbreck is my sister Alice's son. I

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like the lad; he has behaved well, eaten salt with us, and, by G—I won't have him touched."

"You are making an old woman's induction, *padre mio*. I am not going to touch him," replied Blas carelessly, as he knocked the long ash from his cigar.

"Besides," went on the father, after a long pause apparently spent in deep thought, "it would be no use. He has promised to do something handsome for us when he comes into the estate, and Bertram is one of those fellows that keep their word."

"No doubt of it. But, simple as my cousin is in some things, he has a very shrewd idea of the value of money, and he has never said what he means by handsome. If you think he means to give you anything like fifty thousand pounds you are deucedly mistaken. I shall be very much surprised if he gives you as much as five."

"Five thousand pounds? Why, that would be nothing. Whatever put such a stupid idea as that into your head? Not Bertram, I am sure."

"Not directly. But he told Mrs. Earnsdale, and Mrs. Earnsdale told me. She was praising him one day when I was at Prospect—telling how generous he was, and all

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about the settlements he is going to make on Gladys. 'And you will not be forgotten,' she said. 'Bertie has confided to me that he intends to make your father a present of ten thousand pounds—very handsome, indeed, I call it.' And I am sure, from the way in which the old lady spoke, that it will be no fault of hers if you don't get a good deal less than ten thousand pounds. When she said 'handsome' she meant extravagant."

"Five thousand pounds!" repeated Rupert, with a ring of indignation in his voice, "and if right were done all the Crow Nest estate would be mine."

"Exactly," said the young man bitterly, "and I should be the heir. Bertram's father stepped into your shoes, and Bertram has stepped into mine. Just consider the difference between us. He, well educated, as good as worth a hundred thousand pounds, and betrothed to the most charming girl, *por dios*, you ever saw. I, a nobody, with next to no money, so imperfectly educated that I can hardly write an English letter, and so ignorant that those people at Trinidad looked upon me as only half civilised. My cousin should give us half his fortune at the very least."

"So he should. All the same, Blas, I would not have

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any harm befall him. He is Alice's child, and I like the lad."

"Five thousand pounds if he lives to marry Gladys Earnsdale—fifty thousand pounds if he don't; and I think the chances are fifty to one that he won't," muttered the son.

The father pretended not to hear.

"What are you saying, Blas!" he asked sharply.

"Only that no harm is likely to befall him—barring accidents—and accidents do sometimes happen on the *llanos*, you know."

"I hope none will," replied Rupert, though in a tone of irresolution which rather belied his words. "Don't you see that if he should come to any ill while with you or me, awkward questions might be raised?"

"If it were not for that consideration," said Blas savagely, "I would make Bertram fight me, and kill him."

"Good heavens, Blas! What for? What harm has he done you?"

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"I hate him, *padre*, and for more reasons than one," replied Blas, rising from his chair and throwing the burning stump of his cigar into the *quebrada*. "But never mind that; I shall take very good care to compromise neither you nor myself. Your son has not been brought up in South American republics for nothing. I thought you would see—Hallo! What's that?"

"What's what?"

"I fancied I heard a footstep down there," said the son peeping over the verandah.

"And if you did it amounts to nothing. Your mother is in her room; we have spoken very little Spanish, and there is nobody else here who understand English."

The next morning Bertram, who was staying with Brockmann, received two letters—brought by a peon—one from his uncle, on the business of the mines, the other from his aunt. The letter from his aunt was the following effect:—

"MY DEAR BERTRAM,

Something tells me that your excursion to the *llanos* will be attended with very great danger. For your own sake and the sake of others, I entreat you to abandon it. If you will not heed my warning, do, I beg of you, be always on your guard; perils may lurk where you least suspect their existence. I cannot say more, but I speak in all earnestness, for I love you so much that if any harm should befall on you it

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would break my heart. But not a word of this to anybody else, and I beseech you, when you have read this letter, to destroy it."

"Your affectionate aunt,

"CASANDRA RIVAZ."

"Well, this is droll," thought Bertram, after he had read and re-read his aunt's letter. "I have only two aunts, and here are both of them warning me against mysterious dangers! What is my aunt Casandra driving at, I wonder? Something tells her that my excursion to the *llanos* will be attended with very great danger. She did not say anything of that sort when I was talking to her the day before yesterday. What can have happened? I suppose she has had a dream. She rather believes in dreams, and she looked nervous and unhappy, as if she lived in constant apprehension of danger. The wandering

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life they have led—escaping from this place, running away from that, the revolution in Bolivia—when my uncle was taken and led out on the *plaza* to be shot—the fire at Santa Fé de Bogota, and a score of other perils, cannot fail to have told upon her. And I do not think my uncle and Blas are quite as considerate to her as they might be. Yes, that is it; she is nervous, and, naturally enough, conjures up imaginary dangers. and she appeals to me rather than to Blas, because she thinks that if I don't go neither will he. Yes, that must be it. Well, when I go to bid her good-bye I must try to laugh her out of her fears—if I have a chance—for she evidently does not want others to know that she has warned me. And I will take care they don't. Here goes the letter” (tearing it up).

If Bertram had been of a more suspicious turn of mind, or seen more of the seamy side of human nature, he might have been able to read between the lines of his aunt's letter and discern her meaning; but he was of a frank and open nature, and it had never happened to him to be betrayed by those whom he trusted. He had come to have the most implicit confidence in his uncle; he had no reason to distrust Blas, and probably nothing short of the evidence of his own ears or eyes would have convinced him that either of his kinsmen could in any conceivable circumstances play him false. Even if his aunt had told him all that had passed between her husband and her son on the terrace, he would rather have believed that she was mistaken than that they were untrue.

Still Bertram did not feel altogether at ease. If his aunt's

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warning had not kindled suspicion it had awakened doubt. There might, after all, be dangers on the *llanos* of which he knew nothing; and though no coward, he was a lover, had promised Gladys to be with her in two months—he was to be married in three—and not for all Venezuela would he fail to keep his tryst.

This feeling found expression in a question he put to Brockmann a few hours after he received the letter.

“Were you ever on the *llanos*, Brockmann?” he asked.

“Several times, but never for any long time.”

“What do you think of them—are they worth seeing?”

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“Decidedly. You must not leave Venezuela without a look at the *llanos*. They will interest you very much.”

“And this is a good time of the year to go, you think?”

“*Ja wohl!* The rains are not long over, and it will not be so very hot and dusty, nor the rivers so low, as later on.”

“I suppose the *llanos* are likely to be pretty safe just now?”

“I don't see why not. We have not had a revolution since six months, and there are no roving bands of Blues or Yellows about. And if there were they would not harm you. Venezuela is a wonderfully safe country to travel in; the people are very good. All the same, there are bad fellows everywhere, and if you were an unpopular politician or had enemies, means might be found of doing you an ill turn. But you, at any rate, can have no enemies in Venezuela”

“Nor anywhere else,” said Bertram.

“You can never tell,” returned Brockmann gravely; “false friends are worse than open enemies, and nobody can be sure he has not at least one false friend. However, we will hope that you have none, neither here nor anywhere else. As for the *llanos*, though I think there is nothing to fear, it is well to remember that you are in a country where there is no police system, or next to none, and you would do well to take a revolver with you and have it always at hand. If there should be any danger it will be at night. And Pedro Bolet goes with you, does he not?”

Pedro Bolet was one of the doctor's most trusty peons.

“Yes, and Blas and I take our riffles, of course. And how about the jaguars, alligators, and that?”

“Oh, jaguars will let you alone if you let them alone. As for alligators, you must take care to keep out of their reach, that is all. What with alligators, Caribe fish, and *tembladores*,

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some of the *llano* rivers are deadly enough, in all conscience; but the dangerous parts are well known, and you simply keep clear of them. I really don't think, Norbreck, there is any more danger in a journey to the Orinoco than to Trinidad. *Donnerwetter*, I believe

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there is less; the blessed *Virtuous Maiden* will either blow up or go down one of these days.”

There was nothing new in all this. Nevertheless Bertram felt more content. There was no danger on the *llanos*—at any rate none of which he had not previously been aware. His aunt’s fears were either altogether imaginary or grossly exaggerated, and he might set out on his journey with a quiet conscience, and in full assurance that he should meet his lady love at the appointed time.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE LLANOS.

“MIRA!” shouted Pedro.

“The *llanos*,” exclaimed Blas.

“The sea-shore!” said Bertram.

Then all three drew rein and looked on the scene before them. Bertram’s comparison was apt. Viewed from a distance, and in certain conditions of the atmosphere, the *llanos* bear a striking resemblance to the ocean. It was early morning. The horsemen were at the crest of a wooded hill, from the foot of which stretched, in appearance as far as the eye could reach, a vast and shining, yet waveless sea. The horizon was dotted with little islands, tall masts rose here and there from the silent water; but the masts, as motionless as the glassy sea, were declared by Blas to be stems of the Copernicia palm, and he further shattered the illusion by explaining that the islands were clumps of trees.

The travellers had been three days riding through forests and over *sierras*, and were now descending towards the first of the vast series of plains which extend from the Venezuelan *llanos* to the Straits of Magellan.

As they leave the hills behind them, and the day advances,

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the character of the scenery changes. The further they go the browner and yellower becomes the grass; a few hours ride brings them to a part where the calcined herbage

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lies thick on the ground in layers of yellow dust, which the trampling of their horses and a light wind raises in clouds, the sunbeams are yellow, the cattle are yellow, even the Copernicia palms are yellow. Save the seeming islands—veritable oases in a gamboge desert—everything is of the same sulphurous hue. Amid the prevailing gloom the trees of which they are composed, watered by hidden springs, preserve their verdure, and under their grateful shade the travellers rest during the mid-day heat.

Bertram, who had studied his Humbolt, was surprised to find so many trees where he had expected to find only grass and burnt earth. He learnt later that since the time of the great explorer the growth of trees on the *llanos* of Venezuela has perceptibly increased and is still increasing. The cause is curious, and affords a striking illustration of the interdependence of man and nature, and how even civil broils may modify the features of a landscape and affect the flora of a country. The revolutions which, since Venezuela freed herself from the Spanish yoke, have followed each other in rapid succession, have wrought terrible havoc among the herds of half-wild cattle that haunt the *llanos*. They are killed and jerked as provisions for troops, and slaughtered in thousands, often out of mere wantonness, by roving bands of Federalistas and Oligaschistas, Blues and Yellows. This led some time ago to a great rise in the price of hides, an important article of Venezuelan trade, and, consequently, in the value of cattle, so that an ox, which in Humboldt's time was worth no more than ten shillings, is worth now from three to five pounds sterling. Owners found it worth while to kill their cattle for the sake of the hides alone. Moreover, by turning them into money betimes they avoided the losses that every revolution brings in its train, for neither rulers nor rebels ever think of paying for the fat stock which they appropriate and consume. Cattle being fewer, the tender shoots of self-sown trees and shrubs are neither eaten nor trampled under foot to the extent they once were and attain their full growth in ever-increasing numbers. If the process goes on (which, however, is perhaps not very likely) the steppes at Venezuela may, at some future time, become either park-like prairies or impenetrable forests.

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But the *llanos* are still depastured by numerous herds, and Bertram and his companions encountered many of them on their way south in search of fresh pastures. The country nearest the *sierras* is the first to lose its grass, and as the summer advances the cattle draw nearer to the so-called *esteros*, in the neighbourhood of the great rivers, where there is herbage in abundance all the year round. The drovers are mounted *llaneros*, armed with long lances, used to keep in order the fierce bulls of their herds, whose formidable horns are brought to a bayonet-like keenness by frequent whetting on the adamantine stems of the *palma de cobija*.

The men are little less rude than the creatures they tend. Of mixed Spanish, Indian, and African blood, they possess a wonderful variety of complexion, from almost white to altogether black, but they are alike in their splendid *physique*, their recklessness, and the wild freedom of their lives. The *llanero* troubles himself neither with school nor church. From his earliest youth he is trained to ride, to handle the spear and throw the lasso. His religion consists in knowing the name of some saint by whom he often swears, and whose help, in moments of danger, he may occasionally beseech. The greater part of his life is spent in the saddle; he will, cross, without hesitation, rivers swarming with alligators and alive with *caribes colorados*, and enjoys nothing so much as a single-handed fight with a jaguar or a panther. If the *llaneros* were more amenable to discipline they would make the best irregular cavalry in the world. At the crowning victory of Caribobo their valour decided the fate of Spanish America, and their restlessness, their passion for fighting, and the ease with which unscrupulous politicians can persuade them to take the field are chief among the causes of the frequent revolutions that stain the annals and retard the progress of the United States of Venezuela.

The homes of the herdsmen of the *llanos* are called *hattos*; they consist of a few huts of the rudest description, built of the stems and roofed with the fronds of the *palma de sombrero*. The only occupation of the women, besides lolling in their hammocks, is cultivating little garden patches, on which are grown a few bananas and yuca plants for the use of their families. The loves of these people are as free as their lives. Sometimes a wandering priest, before baptising the children, will marry the parents—when they can be identified and do not object—but the latter never allow the benediction of the church to stand in the way of subsequent rearrangements.

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The travellers spent their first night on the plains in a *hatto*, whose half-naked inmates received them with that gracious hospitality and high-bred courtesy, the fashion of which is the best legacy left by the Spaniards to their ancient colonies. While the *llanero* owner led their horses to water, the women cooked their guests a savoury *sancoche de gallina* (fowl broth) which, with fried banana and cassava bread, made a most excellent supper. Then, in the same pan in which the fowl had been boiled, a brew of coffee was made, and served in the hollowed fruit of the tortuma tree, and so well made that Bertram found the flavour more exquisite than that of any he had ever drunk from the finest china.

They set out the next morning (as every morning) in the *madraguda* (the time between four o'clock and sunrise), and guided by the Pole-star and the Southern Cross, they had no difficulty in finding their way over the often trackless steppe. When daylight came they were guided by the compass and by the directions of casual herdsmen and occasional wayfarers. As they went the ground grew less parched, the herbage fresher, the air stiller and less dust-laden. Overhead was a cloudless sky; a boundless plain, vast as the ocean, encompassed them on every hand, always dotted with the same island-like groves, always the same view, yet grand and imposing in its very vastness and uniformity.

Here and there, at wide intervals, were pasturing herds of cattle and troops of horses, watched by mounted *llaneros*. Once, when Bertram was riding ahead of his companion, a truculent-looking bull began to pay him unwelcome attentions. The creature shook his shaggy head, whisked his long tail, stamped, bellowed, and finally "went for him" viciously. There was nothing for it but to run, so Bertram let his horse go, and he did go, as fast as he could lay his legs down—bull following closely after. The chase had lasted only a few minutes when the fugitive heard a shout. Looking around he saw Blas racing after the bull. The next moment his cousin had hold of its tail, and before the beast could either stop or turn it was thrown completely over on his back with its heels in the air.

"Thank you very much, Blas," said Bertram warmly, "you came just in time."

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"You were in no danger," returned the other, carelessly. "The brute could not have caught you; still if your horse had stumbled, the consequences might have been awkward.

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You should have got behind the beggar; it is always bad to be in front of a vicious beast like that."

"I quite agree with you, and in future I will try to follow your advice, at any rate until I have acquired some proficiency in the arts of tailing and lasso-throwing."

As he spoke, a *llanero* came up, and the bull being now on his feet, the herdsman gave him a prod with his long lance and drove the steer back to his feeding ground. Bertram owed more to this man than he knew, for if he had not been there Blas might possibly have ridden less promptly to the rescue. All the same, Blas was well satisfied. The fact, to which Pedro could testify, that he had saved his kinsman from a serious danger, would disarm suspicion in the event of any harm befalling Bertram while in his company, and the latter's confidence in him would now be greater than ever.

A week's ride brought the travellers to a small town called El Rastro, the centre of a brisk trade in hides and cattle, near the river of that name, an affluent of the Portuguesa; and, as Blas had a letter of introduction to one of the chief men of the place, a certain Señor Don Guanacho, and they had plenty of time before them, it was decided to give their horses a few days' rest, of which they stood much in need.

Señor Guanacho, like everybody else in Venezuela who wears his shirt inside his trousers, was a general. He gave them a warm welcome, and, there being no *posada* in the place, found Bertram and Blas rooms in an empty house near his own. Pedro slept in the stable with the horses.

El Rastro was well supplied with water, which bubbled up from springs formed by earthquake rifts, and the land round about was rich and fertile, and grass plentiful. The day after their arrival, Bertram and Blas, accompanied by their host, rode down to the river, and for some distance along its banks. El Rastro, General Guanacho told them, was one of the most dangerous streams in the country, remarkable for the ferocity of its crocodiles and the vast numbers of its Caribe fish and *tembladores*. There were only one

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or two places where it was safe to cross, and even there much caution had to be exercised. Girls who went for water often fell victims to the crocodiles, and whenever one of the great lizards had tasted human flesh it was always on the look-out for more. They had also a weakness for dog-flesh, a fact of which the dogs of the country were so well aware that, when

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they wanted to drink, they would bark loudly in one place, and then run to slake their thirst at another. Scores of these tyrants of the stream were sunning themselves on the opposite side of the river, and under the steep bank below great dirty yellow creatures, some of them twenty feet long, for the *caymanes* of the Portuguesa, the Apure, and the Orinoco, are true crocodiles (*crocodilas acutus*), and, if possible, more ferocious than the alligator kinsfolk. If you happen to be seized by a *cayman*, Señor Guanacho was good enough to inform Bertram, it is a good dodge to thrust your thumbs into the wretch's eyes—the pain may perchance make him let you go. Several people he knew had saved themselves in that way after being terribly mauled. But the *caribes colorados* are even more dangerous and dreaded than the fierce *caymanes cebados* (man-eating alligators). *Caribes* are hideous little fish, not more than seven or eight inches long, but furnished with jaws so powerful and teeth so strong that they can nip off a finger at a snap and cut through a piece of iron wire at a bite. It is hardly possible for a man or beast, attacked by them while crossing a stream, to escape. Once blood is drawn, they come on in shoals, and hold on like bulldogs, and, even if the victim succeeds in reaching land, he generally dies from loss of blood.

“Are there any *tembladores* hereabouts?” asked Bertram.

“I will show you,” answered Señor Guanacho, and he led them to a quiet reach of the stream overhung by bushes, where the water was clear and not very deep. “Look!” he said, throwing in two or three stones in rapid succession.

The next moment Bertram saw four great eel-like fish each of them from five to six feet in length, with long wedge-like noses and small eyes, swimming leisurely towards the spot, to see what it all meant; for *tembladores* are curious creatures in more senses than one.

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“They do not look as formidable as the *caymanes*,” said General Guanacho, “but, for all that, I am afraid, if you were to fall in, you would never come out. One blow about the chest or belly would drop the strongest man like a shot, and the merest touch in any part of the body will make you howl and dance, and you feel it for hours after. A German naturalist was here a while ago, and we caught a lot for him; it was rare fun, I can tell you.”

“How do you catch them—by driving horses into the water?”

“You mean in the way described by Humboldt. That is

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a fable, I think. At any rate, The learned Doctor Wacker said so, and I am sure that electric eels were never caught in that way, either before or since. In fact, we don't want to catch them; we are only too glad to let them alone. But as the doctor was a very nice man, and anxious to have some specimens, and paid the peons well, we organised a fishing party, drew the stream when the water was very low, and caught the *tembladores* in nets. A knowing man the Señor Doctor—he put on indiarubber gloves so that he might handle them without being electrified. But he let one touch his legs out of water—they always strike hardest out of the water. Caramba! how he did scream and caper! And then he put them into a tub, fastened wires to them, made us join hands, and electrified a dozen of us at a time. *Maria Purissima*, a wonderful man was Doctor Wacker—he played the piano, dissected bugs, knew everything, and was a close friend of the illustrious Bismarck.”

“Did he say so?” asked Bertram.

“Oh, no; he even pretended not. But it was no use trying to deceive us. A clever German like the Señor Doctor must be a friend of the illustrious Bismarck.”

As they rode towards El Rastro the talk fell on horses, and the difference between English and Venezuelan saddles and styles of riding. Bertram was for the English, Blas for the Venezuelan style, and the discussion waxed warm.

“They have very good horses in England,” observed Guanacho, sententiously, “and Señor Norbreck rides well, though I am not sure that I should feel comfortable in a saddle like that (Bertram had brought an English saddle with him from Trinidad). I

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think he could ride my colt Castaña, and there are not many who can ride Castaña. What say you, Señor Norbreck—will you mount him one day?”

“What does he do?” asked Bertram; “he is awfully vicious, I suppose?”

“No, I should not say that; wicked, perhaps, but not vicious. But he is very full of spirit, and wants a master on his back and well riding. An English *caballero* like you could make him do anything. And if he wants to go, let him go—we have plenty of room on the *llanos*. Caramba! I have a splendid idea. Ramon Aguirre pretends that his mare Estrella is faster than my colt. We will have a race; you, with your English saddle, shall ride Castaña. He will run away from the mare like lighting. What say you, Señor?”

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Bertram hesitated.

“You are surely not going to refuse, Bertram?” whispered Blas.

“It is rather cool of him to ask me to act as jockey for him, isn't it? And from what he says, I fancy that the horse is a regular devil.”

“Not a bit of it. He only wants riding, and you can ride, Bertram you know you can. And Guanacho, so far from meaning any disrespect, is paying you the highest compliment in his power. It would be ungracious to refuse, and he is a very good fellow, and has been very kind. I fear, too, he might put your refusal—if you do refuse—down to fear. Besides, it won't be a public race—only a trial of speed between two young horses.”

“Very well, General,” said Bertram, turning to his host: “if it is any pleasure to you, I will ride Castaña, though I must tell you that I never rode in a race before.”

“A thousand thanks, Señor Norbreck. It will be a very great pleasure to me, and an honour of which I shall be proud. And you will win the race, though it is your first. I shall see Ramon Aguirre at once, and arrange, if possible, to have it to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XLV.

THE RACE

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SEÑOR DON GUANACHO, a white-haired yet robust gentleman of almost pure Spanish blood, was as good as his word. An hour after their return to El Rastro he entered the *patio* where Bertram and Blas were swinging in grass hammocks, lazily smoking cigarillos, and informed them that everything was arranged. The race was to come off the next morning at the General's *hacienda* (estate), midway between the town and the river. Estrella would be ridden by Aguirre's son, Roderigo, who was, perhaps, a little lighter than Bertram; but the heavier Venezuelan saddle would about make up the difference. "And if it does not," said Guanacho "we can

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afford to give them a few pounds, although Estrella is a year older than my colt." There were to be no money stakes, but the losing horse was to be the prize of the victor.

"I do not like that," said Bertram. "I would rather it should be a race for love. Castaña is a very valuable horse, you say. Suppose I lose him for you, how will you like that?"

"Do not be afraid," returned Guanacho, with a knowing smile: "you are sure to win. Castaña could run away from that mare with both you and me on his back. Still, accidents are always possible; and if, by a miracle, you should not succeed you must not let yourself be troubled. The honour you do me in riding my horse will far more than compensate me for his loss."

After so gracious a speech, Bertram could not possibly suggest any further doubts, and it was agreed that they should ride to the *hacienda* next morning at daybreak, in order to go over the course and have a look at Castaña.

Bertram had brought with him only a very scanty wardrobe; but with his butcher boots well-polished, his white duck breeches, striped silk shirt, and broad-brimmed sombrero, he did not cut at all a bad figure, and Guanacho complimented him on his appearance.

"Caramba!" he said, "it is well you two señores are not staying long at El Rastro; you would play the *tembladores* with our señoritas, I fear. You have only to win the race, Señor Norbreck, and you may have your choice. And you will win. I went last night to the *hacienda*, and I never saw Castaña more fit to go since he was foaled."

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Half-an-hour's ride brought them to the *hacienda*, General Guanacho's farm, where he kept such of his horses and horned cattle as were not running loose on the *llanos*. The ground selected for the race lay between the *hacienda* and the river. The length of the course was about three miles in a straight line, beginning at the *hacienda*, the winning post being a solitary *palma de cobija*, from which waved, or rather drooped, the flag of the public.

"Who has to be umpire?" asked Bertram.

Guanacho did not understand the question, and it had to be explained to him that at European races a judge is always appointed, whose duty it is to say which horse has won.

"What do we want with a judge?" said the General, with a laugh. "Sure everybody can see which horse first

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passes the *palma de cobija*. I suppose, now, you would like to see Castaña?"

"By all means. I am most anxious to make his acquaintance."

So the horse was brought out, and very well he looked. A dark bay, with black points, fully fifteen hands two, clean-limbed, with long springy fetlocks, a little intelligent head well set on, beautifully arched neck, long sloping shoulders, a tremendous barrel closely ribbed up, and quarters and hocks that bespoke a great turn of speed. Castaña's nostrils were wide and crimson, his eyes full on fire, and when Bertram laid his hand on the animal's neck, and ran it down the forearm, he felt muscles and sinews as hard and elastic as steel.

"You are right, General Guanacho. Castaña is a splendid horse," exclaimed Bertram. "May I throw my leg over him for five minutes?"

"Of course you may. I knew you would like my colt. Do you think you will win now?"

"I do think so. Anyhow, win or not, I am sure it will be a pleasure to ride him."

The English saddle was put on, and Bertram mounted. The horse was very lively, and danced about a good deal; but Bertram found no difficulty in riding him, and after

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letting him have his fling for a few minutes, he gave him a short spin towards the *cobija* palm, and came back well pleased with his mount.

“Castaña will win! Castaña will win!” shouted Guanacho excitedly. “I had only one fear, that he would be restive; but he’s as gentle with you as a *señorita*; you can do with him what you like. That is because you are gentle with him. Our *llaneros* are fine horsemen, but they are often brutal; when a horse has a temper they make him stupid; and Castaña has a temper. If it is roused, and he should take it into his head to run away, neither fire nor water would stop him.”

Bertram dismounted, Castaña was taken into the stable, and the three men went into the house of Guanacho’s *majordomo* to breakfast. When they came out it wanted a quarter of an hour to the time fixed for the race. Estrella had arrived, and two or three score horsemen, and about the half of the inhabitants of El Rastro, were gathered round the *hacienda*.

Bertram was surprised, and rather annoyed.

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“I thought it was not going to be a public race,” said to Blas, “and here is all the country side.”

“You cannot prevent an affair of this sort getting wind, you know,” answered his cousin, “and the Rastreros, like all these people, are very curious. But never mind, there will be so many more to witness your victory. What think you of Estrella?”

“She is a beauty, and looks as throughbred as Eclipse. It will be all we can do to beat her, that’s my opinion. She is good-tempered, too. See how quietly she stands there, I spite of all this noise and hubbub!”

“I think you may as well mount,” said Guanacho, who was becoming apprehensive of the effect of the noise and hubbub on Castaña’s temper. “Señor Roderigo is quite ready. The signal is the firing of my revolver; and get off at once; for there is to be no second start.”

“But won’t that frighten the horses?” objected Bertram.

“Not at all; they are used to it.”

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As Bertram mounted, several men came up to admire and criticise the horse, some stroking his back and others patting his neck. Blas was the last to leave his cousin.

“Do not let him go too fast at first,” he said; “reserve something for the finish. You are quite right in thinking that Estrella is a formidable opponent. Most of the fellows here believe she will win.”

This was not very encouraging; but Bertram hardly noticed, and certainly did not heed, the remark, for almost at the same moment was heard the crack of Guanacho's pistol, and Castaña, instead of starting, began to kick, caper about, and wheel round as if he were possessed by a devil.

“*Maria purissima!*” exclaimed Guanacho, “all is lost; he is in one of his evil tempers. Give him the spur, Señor Norbreck, give him the spur; there is no time for gentle measures.”

This was quite true, for Castaña was standing up on his hind legs, as if he meant to fall over on his back, and Bertram not only gave him the spur, but fetched him a cut with his whip between the ears. Down came the horse on all fours, and then, with a cry of rage, went off like an arrow from a bow, fortunately in the direction taken by Estrella, for it would have been impossible to turn him.

The mare was well ahead, but in two minutes he had overtaken her. Then Bertram tried to pull his horse into a

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more moderate pace—he was afraid of his being pumped—but, either excited by the clatter of hoofs behind him (for all the mounted spectators were following at full gallop), or something else, Castaña was now utterly beyond control. His rider could only let him go straight and hope for the best. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that Roderigo was full fifty yards behind him, riding with a slack rein and using his spurs.

Then he looked no more, but kept his eyes fixed on the *cobija palm* and steadied Castaña as well as he could.

The goal is reached and passed, the race won; but still Castaña goes on as if he never meant to stop, no more heeding his rider's efforts to pull him up than if he had been a horse of steam.

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"Never mind," mutters Bertram "he cannot go on like this long. I'll let him tire himself out."

But, good God! there is the river gleaming in the sun hardly a mile before him. What if—The thought is madness; and Bertram, leaning back in his saddle and thrusting his feet forward, pulls at the bridle with all his strength. In vain; Castaña rushes on as madly as before. Bertram thinks of the demon horrors of the river—the crocodiles, the caribe fish, and the *tembladores*—and conceives the idea of throwing himself from the saddle. No; the ground is hard, and at that speed a fall would break every bone in his body. Better the river with all its perils; it is deep, and the plunge over they may perhaps get across.

Bertram ceases pulling, dashes the perspiration from his eyes, and draws a long breath. They are close to the brink, the drop down into the water is at least fifteen feet, and on the opposite side he can see three or four huge crocodiles basking in the sun. Castaña slightly moderates his pace, makes as if he would jump the stream, and the next moment they are flying though the air. Then down they go, down to the very bottom of the river; but before Bertram can decide whether to remain in the saddle, or throw himself off and swim for it, they are up again, and Castaña is bravely breasting the flood. The crocodiles are gone; they hate a noise, and the splash has frightened them away. Perhaps, after all, horse and rider may reach the opposite bank unharmed, and as it is low and shelving they can easily land. Castaña is still swimming strongly, and they are not more than fifty yards from the shore, when he gives a violent snort

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and throws his head back. A *caribe colorado* is hanging from his nostril. Then another comes, and another, and two or three fasten on his neck. Bertram, to give Castaña every chance he can, slips from his back and swims by the horse's side, holding with one hand to the mane, for his boots are heavy and full of water. "Courage, brave Castaña; two minutes more and we shall be in safety."

As he speaks Bertram feels a sharp pain in his thigh, as if a knife had been run into it. The fiends are at him now, the water all round is becoming stained with blood, poor Castaña sobs, and, though he struggles hard, is evidently swimming with great

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difficulty. Bertram prays, thinks of Gladys, and gives himself up for lost. Castaña stops swimming. He is going to die, poor brute! No, he is touching ground, and Bertram, standing up, utters a shout of joy. Then, with the horrid *caribes* clinging all about him, he seizes Castaña by the bridle and pulls him on to dry land, beyond reach of the demons and the stream. He leans on the horse's neck, like himself, streaming with blood, and thanks God for his escape from a terrible death. A shout from a crowd of horsemen on the opposite bank. Bertram can see Guanacho beckoning to him. He knows there is a ford not far off, and goes—still leading Castaña—for the horse totters as he walks—in the direction indicated.

The horsemen reach the ford first and come to meet him.

“You have won the race, and I congratulate and thank you. Señor Norbreck, but you very nearly lost your life,” said Guanacho, looking at him anxiously; “yet you are not bitten as much as I expected, and you are in no danger if you take care. But you will carry the marks of those fish to the grave.”

“And Castaña?”

“It will go hard with Castaña. See how it bleeds. Santissima Trinidad! how he ran. It must have been something out of common that made him so headstrong. I have known him bolt before, but never so desperately and so far, and with so little cause. Poor brute, how he bleeds! Let us relieve him of his saddle. Here, Jose.”

One of the *llaneros*, most of whom had dismounted, undid the girths. As he raised the saddle from the horse's back Guanacho rushed forward with an imprecation.

“Caramba!” he almost yelled, “that is why my horse bolted. *Mira! Señores, mira!*”
There has been foul play

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here. Look; and he pointed to a leaf lying in the middle of a pool of Blood on Castaña's spine.

It was the leaf of a cactus plant, the long sharp spines of which had fastened into the horse's flesh like hooks.

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"Foul play, señores," replied Guanacho; "that leaf must have been put there—pushed under the cantle of the saddle—just before the start. Who is the traitor, and why did he this vile thing? Know you aught this, Señor Roderigo Aguirre?"

"How dare you put such a question to me?" answered the young man indignantly. "If your hair was not white, General, I would call you to account for the doubt cast on the honour of my family. Besides, what could it profit us to play such a dardardly trick? But for that leaf my mare might have won the race."

"As for that," put in Blas quietly, who had just come up, having been one of the last to cross the ford, "though I do not for a moment doubt the señor's honour, is it not possible that the motive of the traitor, as General Guanacho very properly calls the villain who has done this, may have been to make Castaña restive, and so cause him to lose the race? There was some betting, I believe?"

"A good deal," returned Aguirre haughtily, "but you were by the horse to the last, Señor Rivaz. You should know better what happened than anybody else."

"There were twenty people about the horse for that matter," answered Blas with a dangerous look, "any one of whom may have slipped the leaf unperceived under the saddle, and why may it not have been done in the stable?"

"Impossible," said Guanacho decidedly, "he would have kicked the stable down if it had been. The deed was done after your cousin had mounted, and only a second before I gave the signal. As you say, there were many people about, and I know not whom to suspect. I know only that it is the work of an enemy—of yours or of mine, Señor Norbreck."

"How can it be an enemy of mine? I have been here only three days."

"That is true," replied the other thoughtfully; "at any rate it looks so. It must be an enemy of mine then. *Vamonos.*"

"Here, Bertram, get on my horse," said Blas, kindly, "you look exhausted."

"No," put in the General, "he will ride Jose's horse, and

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Jose will ride Castaña. But before we go we must do something with his wounds. They are still bleeding."

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After two or three handkerchiefs had been twisted round his thighs, to which parts the bites were confined, Bertram was helped on to Jose's horse, and the cavalcade moved off towards the *hacienda*.

The trail was marked by a line of red, for Castaña continued to bleed profusely, especially from a wound in the neck, which his master had tried vainly to staunch. He grew weaker at every step, and shortly after recrossing the river stumbled and fell.

Jose encourages him to rise. The poor brute, game to the last, responds to the call, half rises, then with a moan falls back on the hot ground, already stained with his blood. The riders who are slightly in advance turn back. Guanacho dismounts, watches the horse a few minutes in mournful silence, then stoops, and looks into its eyes.

Castaña was dead.

"I know not who has killed my horse, señores," said Guanacho, sternly, "but, whoever he is, let him beware, for I swear, *por dios*, that if I discover him, I will tear out his heart and throw his carcase to the crocodiles."

"The old gentleman is fierce," said Blas to his cousin in English.

"So am I," answered Bertram, indignantly. "It was a cruel and treacherous deed, and I could shoot the villain who did it with as little compunction as a jaguar or a rattlesnake."

"And serve him quite right. I expect it is one of the General's own peons—somebody who had backed Estrella—they are devils to gamble, those *llanero* fellows. Anyhow, I am glad you are so well out of it, old fellow. It was an awfully tight shave."

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CHAPTER XLVI.

A STRAIGHT SHOT.

The next day Bertram was feverish, and Guanacho strongly advised him to remain in bed, or only to leave it during the day for a grass hammock.

"Keep still, and you will be all right in a few days," he said. "To go out now might be as much as your life is worth. If we had a doctor here he would tell you the same."

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Blas rather pooh-poohed this advice, and called the General—after his back was turned—an old woman.

“You will be fit to start to-morrow,” he said, “and we may leave quite well on Thursday. A few Caribe bites don’t amount to much.”

“I shall do as Guanacho says,” answered Bertram, rather sharply, for he did not like the tone of his cousin’s remark; it seemed unfeeling, and it was not the first unfeeling remark Blas had made of late.

“All right; I am at your disposal, of course, and shall stay here as long as you like, I should be sorry for you to set out before you are quite well.”

The fact was, Bertram felt far from well. He was weak with loss of blood; and, not wanting to be laid up at El Rastro when he ought to be at Trinidad, he prudently resolved to be on the safe side, and not risk a relapse by disobeying his mentor’s advice. But though he remained indoors, he did not suffer much from *ennui*. Guanacho, who had taken a great liking to the young Englishman, often came to see him, amused him with stories of the *llanos*, and of his military experience in the many civil wars in which he had played a part. Friendly Rastreros were continually calling to ask how he was, and time being of no value to them, their visits were generally long, and occasionally tedious. Now and again, too, groups of girls, all of them with big, black eyes, and very slightly clad, some by no means bad-looking, would peep in at his door, laugh coquettishly, and then run away.

Bertram’s worst time was night. He could not get the

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race and its incidents out of his head; he hardly ever slept without dreaming of the swim across the river, of the attack of the Caribe fish, and poor Castaño’s death. One night he was awakened by a noise in his room, as if a wild animal were prowling about. Quickly lighting a lamp, he perceived that the intruder was one of the lean and hungry swine which run half wild in the streets of every Venezuelan town. His door had been left ajar, and the outer door open, and the pig had pushed his way in. After that he took care to see that his door was shut, and to place his revolver within reach. Not that he contemplated shooting the next porker that might pay him an unwelcome visit, though a

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Venezuelan pig can be a very awkward customer, but he was nervous, and the contiguity of the pistol made him feel more at ease.

We never know in what shape our blessings may come, and that long-snouted, hideous looking pig proved to be a blessing in disguise; it saved Bertram's life. The little house he and his cousin occupied was substantially built of mud, and consisted of two rooms, separated by a passage leading to the patio, in a corner of which, under an open shed, the horses were stabled and Pedro slept. On the opposite side of the way was the house of Señor Guanacho. Bertram's room possessed two windows—of course, without glass—one looking into the *patio*, the other into the road, each being furnished with rude jalousies, fastening with a wooden bar.

The third evening following the pig's visit Blas sat smoking with Bertram until bedtime. The latter was so much better that he thought he should be fit to travel on the next day, or at any rate, on the next after. Before leaving, his cousin closed the jalousies, and with a laughing allusion to *puercos* and their impudence, promised to see that the outer door was properly fastened. Bertram, who felt just a little ashamed of his nervousness, did not mention that he was prepared to receive unbidden guests, whether bipeds or quadrupeds, in a way that might possibly surprise them.

Save for the occasional long-drawn yell of a masterless cur, and the crowing of cocks (they crow all night through in Venezuela), all was quiet, and these being sounds to which Bertram had grown accustomed, they did not prevent him from sleeping, and shortly after midnight he was wakened by a creaking of jalousies that opened on the street. He thought at first, it was the effect of the wind, for they were very

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loosely hung, and he was about to close his eyes again when a moonbeam found its way into the room, and he noticed that the jalousies were being drawn back by an invisible hand. He gazed as if fascinated, hardly venturing to breathe, and wondering what would come next. He had not long wait. When the opening was wide enough a head was pushed through it; then the moonbeam was intercepted by the form of a man, which, after resting a moment on the window still, dropped noiselessly into the room and half closed the jalousies after him.

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Bertram drew his pistol from under his pillow.

The form creeps cat-like across the floor, and as it comes nearer Bertram perceives that the intruder carries in his hand a long knife. Then it occurs to him for the first time that the man's object is not plunder merely, but murder. There is no moment to lose. Quick as thought he raises himself on his elbow, points his revolver, and fires twice. At the second shot the murderer, now almost within striking distance of the bed, falls, with a heavy thud, on the floor.

The echo of the reports had scarcely died away, when Blas, followed by Pedro, rushed into the room.

"What is it, Bertram? What is it? Why have you fired? What has happened?" cried his cousin, excitedly. "Is it a pig again, or something else?"

"Strike a light, and you will see; the matches are on the table there."

Blas struck several matches without effect.

"Here, Pedro," he said at last, in an agitated voice, "you try."

Pedro succeeded at the first attempt; and as he lighted Bertram's lamp, the voice of General Guanacho was heard at the outer door.

The peon ran to let him in.

Blas raised the lamp, and his hand trembled so much that he could scarcely hold it, and his face was almost livid.

"It is a man," he said

"Yes, he was going to kill me and I fired; but I do hope I have not killed him. Does he seem to be much hurt?"

To Bertram's surprise Blas hesitated, and appeared reluctant to go near the man.

Just then Guanacho entered with Pedro.

"Somebody shot," he said; "who is it?" and taking the

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lamp from Blas's hand he held it over the fallen man's face.

"Benito Paez, the *zambo* (half Indian, half negro), and he seems to be as dead as a stone. You shoot straight, Señor Norbreck; and, see here, his hand still grasps the knife with which he meant to cut your throat."

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"Dead, is he? Are you quite sure?" asked Blas, who seemed to be recovering his self-possession.

"Sure. Look at him!"

"I congratulate you, cousin, on the accuracy of your aim. I had no idea you were such a shot, and in the dark, too," said Blas, with a carelessness of manner in striking contrast with his previous agitation.

"I am very, very sorry," said Bertram. "It was a chance shot. I did not think to kill him. If I had not seen that knife—"

"You have nothing to regret, Señor Norbreck," interrupted Guanacho, "this Benito Paez was a thoroughly bad fellow, the only *ladron* in El Rastro, I am glad to say. He has deserved death over and over again. I suppose he meant to rob you; though if you could possibly have any enemies here, I should rather say he had been hired to assassinate you. Be that as it may, you had better get away as soon as you can. Benito had political friends who might give you trouble, and as we Blues were beaten at the last revolution, my protection is not much worth just now. If you can start this morning on the *madrugada* it would be all the better. Do you think you can ride, Señor Norbreck?"

"I am sure I can, General. My wounds are nearly healed and I feel quite strong again."

"What say you, Señor Rivaz?"

"I am at my cousin's disposition. Yes, by all means let us go," answered Blas, eagerly. "Pedro, be good enough to see that the horses are saddled and ready to start at half-past three."

"You had better not go by San Fernando," observed Guanacho, significantly, "there are a great many Yellows there. Take rather the route I was telling you about the other day. You will strike the Orinoco a little further up, that's all. And you can call at the mines of Miraflores; they are worth seeing, I am told. I will give you a few lines of introduction to the manager. I made his acquaintance a few years ago at Valencia."

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BURIED ALIVE.

When the time came for the travellers to set out, Guanacho saddled one of his horses, rode with them until sunrise, and gave them minute directions as to their route. Bertram parted from him with keen regret.

“We shall perhaps meet again,” said the General.

“I hope so, and nothing would give me greater pleasure,” returned Bertram, “but unless you come to Trinidad I fear it is little likely. In any case, you may rest assured of one thing—I shall never forget your kindness, and if you should ever visit the island, and I am there, you must make my house your home.”

“That I will, right gladly. And do not forget your promise to let me know of your safe arrival at Trinidad; and if I can find out who caused the death of poor Castaña, and so nearly caused yours, I shall not fail to inform you. *Adios Señores: buen viage*. I wish you safely home.”

Bertram wished the same. He felt very much depressed, so much so that Blas found it impossible to draw him into conversation, and they jogged on several hours in complete silence. He was not yet fully recovered from the blood-letting in El Rastro, and the shooting of the *zambo* had been a great shock to him. He did not feel that he was to blame, but the idea of having killed a man weighed on him like a nightmare. Then he thought of his aunt's warning and how singularly her previsions of danger were being realised. Twice already had he been in deadly peril, peril, however, which he could not possibly have foreseen. Was the journey a mistake after all? He feared so. At any rate, if it went on as it had begun, it was likely to be the last he should ever make. But the accidents that had befallen him were really too extraordinary to continue. He would take care not to ride another race, and for the future he should sleep in the same room as Blas or Pedro. For, come what might, he must keep faith with Gladys. Not to arrive at Port of Spain well before the time fixed for their marriage would be too dreadful. And, after all, there was no reason why he

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should not. In a week they would be at Miraflores. Miraflores was close to the Orinoco. It would be easy to get a boat to convey them to Ciudad Bolivar; and even if they should miss the steamer there they would still have more than sufficient time to reach their destination by sailing ship—if all went well. Bertram tried hard to persuade himself that all would go well; and, as time wore on, and he became physically stronger, his spirits grew lighter, yet he could not get rid of a lingering doubt, which troubled him all the more that he could not confide it to his cousin, for Blas was not proving a very congenial companion. He did not improve on acquaintance. He was cynical in manner and selfish in deed, and though he protested every day, in Venezuelan phrase that he held himself “entirely at Bertram’s disposition,” he was so masterful that they had more than once been on the verge of a quarrel. At the time of Bertram’s plunge into the river, moreover, Blas had shown very scant sympathy, and that wretched *zambo*’s death seemed to give him positive pleasure. There was, however, little danger of the lack of cordiality in their relations leading to an open rupture, for Bertram was easy-tempered, and Blas had reasons of his own for keeping on good terms with his cousin. In fact, there was never a greater show of civility between them than during the seven days’ ride to Miraflores.

The mines of Miraflores were situated in a line of low hills running at right angles to the Orinoco, which, owing to their contiguity to the *llanos*, looked higher than they really were. They were wooded to their summits, and on the other side, that is to say, to the west, was a wide stretch of primitive forest.

Bertram rather objected to call at Miraflores. He wanted to push on to the great river and get as quickly as possible to Ciudad Bolivar; but when Blas represented that it was only a few miles out of their way, and that they might as well spend the night there as anywhere else, he did not think it worth while to persist in his objection.

They met with a cordial reception from the manager, a blonde, spectacled German, who had been long settled in Venezuela, and, like most of his countrymen, bore the name of Müller. The visit of a European who knew the *Vaterland* and spoke the *Muttersprache*, was a godsend to the man, and he pressed his guests to stay with him a week. But that was out of question; they must leave at the latest, Bertram said, on the following afternoon. Herr Müller, who lived in

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a rather large mud-built house with verandah, and a had a swarthy dark-eyed housekeeper, with the usual consequences, was laid up with a sprained ankle, caused by slipping on a ladder in one of the shafts. He entertained them with a history of the mines in Miraflores. There had long been a tradition in the district—which bore the singular name of Oro—that gold existed, or treasure was buried in the mountain, and a few years previously, a syndicate of German merchants at La Guayra had sent Herr Müller, a graduate of the Mining Academy of Freiberg in Saxony, to explore the country. It was he who had re-discovered the mines of Miraflores. Re-discovered them, for they had been extensively worked, either by Indians or Spaniards, ages before. The mountain was honeycombed with shafts, galleries and passages. It would be the easiest thing in the world, Müller said, for a man to lose himself in them, and he told the story of an unfortunate miner who went too far and was never seen again. They had not, however, been very successful in finding gold. It seemed to have been all got. There were traces of it everywhere, and now and then a rich specimen of auriferous quartz was picked up, but not enough to pay working expenses, and unless they soon met with better luck they would have to abandon the enterprise, as those before them had done, probably for the same reason. Müller mentioned, among other things, that they had felt two or three earthquake shocks of late, and he should not be surprised if there came some day a regular rattler.

After some further conversation, he asked his guests if they would like to inspect the mine. Bertram answered in the affirmative. Since his arrival in Venezuela he had taken a great deal of interest in mines and minerals and was making a collection of geological specimens. Blas said that, though he did not care much about mines, he was of course at the disposition of his cousin, and should be happy to accompany him.

“I am sorry I cannot be your cicerone,” said Müller, “but I will give you in charge of one of my best men, Diego Cuchillo. He is very intelligent for a Venezuelan peon, and nows the mines better than anybody else, I think. It is too late to begin the inspection to-day. Better start early tomorrow morning. Will that suit you, Señor Norbreck?”

“Perfectly, Señor Müller.”

“Good. Cuchillo will be here shortly, and I will instruct him accordingly.”

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Just as Bertram and Blas finished the rough but sufficient repast to which their host had invited them, Cuchillo, a half-breed of herculean proportions, naked to the waist, put in an appearance, and saluted the manager and his guests with the easy grace of a man of the world. Müller told him that the strangers desired to inspect the mines, and it was arranged that he should be ready to accompany them at seven o'clock the next morning.

“While you two talk about Germany,” said Blas carelessly, a few minutes after Cuchillo had withdrawn, “I think, with your kind permission, Señor Müller, I will just look round for half-an-hour.”

“By all means,” returned the manager. “I am sorry my sprained ankle keeps me a prisoner, or I should be happy to accompany you. But there is really very little to see.”

It was quite true. There was not much to see at Miraflores. A clearing on the steep of the hill, divided by a gully—a couple of horizontal holes—several mounds of *débris*—a few roofs on stilts, inhabited by the miners and their families—and some rude machinery for crushing the ore. Such as there was to see, however, Blas was a good hour in seeing it; but Bertram and Müller were so intent on their German reminiscences, that they hardly noticed his absence at the time, albeit one of them had good reason to think of it afterwards.

A couple of hammocks, slung un the verandah of Müller's house was all the sleeping accommodation he could offer his guests, but as they had slept in hammocks every night for a week past they found this no hardship; and Bertram rested as well as he had ever rested in his life, and awoke next morning in better spirits than he had known for a fortnight past, for he hoped on the morrow to be afloat on the Orinoco, *en route* for Trinidad.

Blas, on the other hand, said he had slept badly and complained of headache.

“I don't feel at all up to the mark this morning,” he said, as they sipped their coffee in the verandah, “and I fear two or three hours creeping and scrambling in those

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galleries would not make me much better. If you will excuse me, Bertram, I think I would rather stay where I am.”

“By all means. I should be sorry for you to go if you don't feel well,” returned Bertram indifferently, though not without some feeling of surprise, for it was the first time he

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had heard his cousin complain of indisposition, and he looked the very picture of health.

“Be sure you show the señor the grotto,” said Müller to Cuchillo, when the latter called for Bertram.

“Si, señor,” replied Cuchillo.

The manager explained that the grotto was a large natural cave, which they had discovered accidentally, but which had evidently been known to the ancient masters of the mine. They thought at first that it might have been used as a storehouse for treasure; but the most careful search had revealed nothing save a few bits of gold-bearing quartz and some rusty mining tools.

“How long do you suppose you will be?” asked Blas, as Bertram and his companion were leaving the house.

“Three hours, perhaps,” said Müller with a smile. “I think you will be tired by that time, Señor Norbreck. It is pretty warm inside there.”

“Say rather two,” returned Bertram. “I don't care to go very far, but I should certainly like to see this wonderful grotto.”

Poor Bertram! If he had only known what was before him.

An hour later, as Blas and Müller were swinging in their hammocks, smoking long cigars and exchanging an occasional remark, they were startled by one of the most awesome sounds that ever affrighted the human ear—the sound of subterranean thunder. To jump from their hammocks and run out into the open was the work of a moment. Müller, in spite of his lame ankle, ran as fast as Blas. The ground undulated so that they could scarcely stand, the trees on the hill-top moved as if swept by a mighty wind, and with a deafening crash an avalanche of earth and stones rolled down the opposite side of the ravine and obliterated every trace of the mines of Miraflores.

In thirty seconds all was over.

“My God! My God!” screamed Müller, tossing his arms in agony. “Those poor creatures in the mines—they are all dead men. Not one can be left alive.”

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CHAPTER XLVIII.
FAMILIAR SCENES.

IN old “Mother Redcap’s” kitchen. Joe Jessop in an armchair by the fireside. Three or four guests sitting round a big deal table with glasses before them. Joe, who is somewhat of a literary character, and subscribes to a circulating library at Carrington, has been reading aloud the description in “Rookwood,” of Dick Turpin’s ride from London to York.

“Bithmon, that wor a rare tit, that wor,” said Cracker, the carter, who had pulled up for a “standing gill” and was now in his third pint; “but th’breed’s run out, I reckon. I never seed a hoss as could gallop two hundred miles straight on end.”

“Nor nobody else,” put in Tim Bolland scornfully. “It’s a lie, mon; some chap as knows nowt abaat hosses has written that tale out of his own heyd. Th’ tit wor never foaled as could gallop fro’ London to York—to say nowt o’ jumping o’ver aw th’ turnpike gates and apple carts i’ th’road. And, what’s moor, ony chap as rides a hoss like that theer Black Bess to death deserves to swing for it.”

“Nay, I don’t think that,” said the landlord. “It says here as Torpin was most uncommon fond o’ hosses, and set a sight o’ store by Bess. I’ve allus looked on Dick as a fine fellow.”

“You wouldn’t ca’me a fine fellow, Joe, if I shoved a pistol i’ your face and axed for your money or your life, or broke into your house some neet, emptied that owd stocking as you’ve gotten upstairs, and threatened to cut yore throat if yo didn’t howd yor noise.”

“Happen not, Tim; but things wor different i’ them times.”

“I don’t see as they wor—much. There wor rogues and foos then, and there’s rogues and foos now, I reckon.”

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“You are crammed (cross) to-day, I think, Tim,” said the landlord. “What’s to do?”

“Not much. Miss Alice sauced me this morning, because th’ phaeton worn’t quite as cleyn as it should ha’bin—her

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een is as sharp as needles—and when I went to my dinner th’ wife sauced me too.”

“What for?”

“Because hoo had’nt th’ dinner ready. That’s th’ way wi’ women; they fost put on yo’ and then black yo’.”

“Never mind th’ women. Have another glass and I’ll stan’ treat,” said a big hulking bricklayer with an inflamed face and watery eyes.

“Vary weel; it’ll happen tak’ th’ taste o’ them saucings out o’ my mouth. Yo’re on th’ spree, I think, Jem?”

“Nay, I don’t know as I am. But I haven’s felt weel lattly, and I thowt as if I geet gradely weel drunk it would happen set me up.”

“Ay, that’s it,” said Cracker. “If you ailen (ail) owt knock summat into yo’ and losen yor hide. How’s th’ ponies going on, Tim?”

“Aw reyt.”

“They’re a gradely nice pair.”

“Ay, that they are, and Miss Alice would have ‘em. Owd Roger worn’t for bleeding at th’ fost; but hoo had a bit o’ talk wi’ Mr. Rooke, and I geet orders th’ next day to go o’er into th’ Fylde and buy ‘em.”

“Ay, hoo’s a reyt sharp ‘un, Miss Alice is. Has hoo gotten a chap yet?”

“Nay, I don’t think as hoo has. Jacob comes sneaking abaat wi’ a posy in his button hoyle and young Diamond drives up in his tandem; but, bless yo’ hoo’ll have nowt to do wi’ nayther on ‘em. Hoo’s allus civil and winsome, I mun (must) say; but it’s plain to see as hoo’s a foolen on ‘em for aw that.”

“Has owt been yerd o’ Bertram lattly?”

“Not for a month or two. Miss Alice expected a letter by the last mail, but hoo worn’t much surprised as there wor nowt. It seems as he’s in a country wheer there is a

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vast o' snakes and crocodiles, and sich like, but nayther roads nor railways. But he's sure to be yerd on soon; he's to get wed in a twothry week."

"Yo' think he'll not miss that," said Cracker with a grin.

"Not he. Bertram isn't th' lad to miss coming up to th' scratch, ayther for wedding or owt else, and by all accounts he's gradely bitten wi' Miss Gladys."

"There'll be some rare doings when he comes home, Tim."

"There will that, and there'll be a bonny lot o' caps

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thrown up too, when owd Roger goes out and th' young mayster comes in."

At this point a tall, rough-looking fellow dressed in a suit of weather worn velveteen, entered the kitchen.

"Ned fro' Knuzden!" exclaimed several voices.

"Have a glass, Ned. I'll stan'," said Jem. "Wheer has th' bin this long while, owd hoss?"

"Th' Haas o' Correction, to be sure."

"What for—licking th' wife?"

"Nay, not this time. I geet three months for neet hunting (poaching)."

"Oh, that wor it, wor it? why, tha' looks as fat as a pig; and when a chap comes out o' th' jug he is mostly as thin as a rail."

"Not me. I had a bad leg, and I took good care to keep it bad."

"How wor that?"

"Well, I had a sooper place under my knee, and a bit o' blue stone o' vitriol under my arm hoyle, and when th' doctor had dressed it, I allus touched it up a bit to mak' it waus, That made him think as I had bad flesh, so I geet sent to th' hospital, and put on what they callen a generous diet—porter and beefsteaks, and naa and then a mutton chop."

"By gum, that wor a manck (trick), that wor. Tha' may weel be fat. But tha'll neet hunt no moor, I reckon?"

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"Wiln't I just? What thinken yo' o' that, chaps?" and Ned fro' Knuzden drew from the inside pocket of his coat a fine hare, and held it up for the admiration of the company.

"I'll gie thee two hoaf crowns for it, Ned," said the landlord.

"Done wi' yo'," answered the night hunter, throwing the hare on the table. "It is not bad pay for abaat an hour's wark; better nur delving aw' day in a field for three shilling, and Mr. Rooke'll never miss it, I'll be bun (bound)."

"Tha' caught it i' Rushworth, then?"

"Ay, I seet a snare last neet, and pyked th' hare up this morning."

"Rushworth Moor cosses Rooke a sight o' brass."

"Rayther. He has four regular keepers, and there's oft five or six watchers afoot besides. And he hasn't been aat aboon ten times this year. He's a bad shot, too, and makes moor misses than hits. They wor reckoning up one day

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o'er at Peggy Whistler's, as every heyd o' game he kills cosses him a matter o' twenty paand."

Good shot or bad shot," said Joe Jessop, "Mr. Rooke is a fine, free-handed gentleman. He sent three sovereign last rent day for th' chaps to sup."

"Ay, and he sent five to th' Four Lane Ends Methody chapel, when they had their last preyching do—and him a Churchman."

"It wor Dicky Maas's brass as seet him up," observed a quiet-looking man, who looked like a shoemaker. "He has never looked behind him sin he geet wed to Mary."

"Dicky Maas's brass!" returned the landlord disdainfully. "Why th' interest o' Dicky Maas's brass wouldn't much moor than keep Mr. Rooke i' drink and baccy. It's shares as does it, mon, shares. He has shares i' welly everything; and I have heard say as he sometimes makes as much in a week as Dicky made in aw is lifetime."

"And he has me sent to prison for pycking up a bit of a hare as he'd miss if he shot at!" growled Ned fro' Knuzden.

"What by that? Gentlemen mun have their sport, so what becomes o' chaps like thee," answered the landlord. "Beside, if there wor no preserving there would be no

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neet-hunting. If everybody shot there wouldn't be a heyd o' game left i' th' country side for a poor chap to poach."

"That's true and if we are nabbed now and ageen, us neet-hunters gets both spoort and a living, and that's a d——d sight more than gentlemen like Mr. Rooke does. I think we've best o' th' bargain after aw."

"Well, I mun go," said Tim, rising and emptying his glass, "th' ponies will be shod by this time. Miss Norbreck is going out for a ride this afternoon, and hoo does not like being kept waiting. Good day, chaps."

Tim did not keep his mistress waiting. At the time fixed the well-appointet little carriage and its handsome ponies were at the door, and Alice, who was accompanied by Mrs. Whalley, taking the reins, drove in the direction of Carrington. They were going to call on the Earnsdales who, they thought, might possibly have had news from Trinidad.

"Travelling is pleasant, but home is sweet," said the elder lady as they reached a point which commanded a fine view of the valley of the Ribble.

"How delightful it is to revisit these familiar scenes, Alice!"

"Yes, one is very glad to see the old country again; but the

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Boboly Gardens at Florence and the Grand Canal at Venice are very nice; and I do not think I could ever tire of Lago Maggiore and the Borromeo Islands, the lake of the Four Cantons and the mountains of the Bernese Oberland."

"All very well in their way, and I am very glad you have seen them, dear. I often thin that the great advantage of travel is the agreeable memories it creates; for if you observe well, and are gifted with some imagination, you may recall at pleasure all that you have seen. Travel, too, suggests topics for conversation, and enhances the pleasure of reading. But for all that home is the sweetest. Foreign lands lack the charm of personal association. Nobody knows us, nobody cares for us. Here we are among our own people surrounded by familiar scenes, where the past speaks to us, and where, if it pleases God, I should like to end my days. You may not think this now, Alice."

"Well, I have not quite made up my mind where I shall end my days, you know," said the girl archly, "and I enjoyed myself on the Continent very much, perhaps,

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because I had not begun to feel the lack you speak of. This landscape is well enough—or would be if it were not disfigured by so many volcanic chimneys, but the climate is detestable, and you must admit, Mrs. Whalley, that Crow Nest is not gay.”

“I am not sure that life is meant to be gay,” answered Mrs. Whalley rather sadly, “there are many for whom it is weariness and sorrow—and must be to the end. But there is much quiet enjoyment to be had, even at Crow Nest, and you will have gaiety too. You are going to Miss Earnsdale’s garden party next week, and when Bertie brings his bride home there will be no lack either of visitors or invitations.”

“I think it is a great shame Bertie does not get married here,” said Alice indignantly. “It would have been so nice, and I never was at a wedding in my life.”

“Yes, I too am sorry they could not be married here; but I suppose they thought differently.”

“How strangely it has all come about! Do you know, Mrs. Whalley, that when Gladys came here with her mother and her uncle, I had a fancy that Bertie would like her, she was very nice.”

“Yes, she pleased me much, the little I saw of her. But the strangest thing of all is Bertie finding your Uncle Rupert.”

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“Quite a romance, is it not? I wonder if Mr. Rooke still thinks he is not the real Simon Pure?”

“I believe so, and I fancy your Uncle Roger thinks so too. But I don’t. Bertie is young, and perhaps too apt to take people at their word; yet he could not, I am sure, be imposed on to that extent. The change of name is suspicious, I admit, but no impostor could have the knowledge of family matters which Bertie says Mr. Rivaz possesses.”

“Bertie is quite right, I am sure,” said Alice, warmly; “and did not Uncle Rupert cure him of that dreadful fever? And why should he say he is Rupert Nutter if he is not?”

“He might hope to get money from Bertie, you know at any rate, that is Mr. Rooke’s theory; and he suggests that Mr. Rivaz may have met your Uncle Rupert somewhere, and learnt enough of his story to make Bertie believe he is your uncle.

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However, as I have said, I do not think so. Yet I rather regret that your brother has found him.”

“Why, Mrs. Whalley?”

“I can hardly tell. It is a feeling I have, very strangely—possibly because I have always thought of Rupert Nutter as a ne'er-do-well. But perhaps I do the man an injustice—let us hope so.”

They heard no news of importance of Earnsdale Park. Miss Earnsdale had received a letter from her aunt, in which it was mentioned that Bertram was still on the *llanos*, but that they were expecting him back very soon. Before they left, a tall young man with a heavy yellow moustache and a very red face, entered the drawing-room, and was introduced to them by Miss Earnsdale as her cousin, Captain Earnsdale. Though he did not shine much in conversation, he did his best to make himself agreeable; and as the ladies from Crow Nest drove home they sat in judgment on him, and pronounced him passable.

“If he is not intellectual or that,” observed Mrs. Whalley, “it is easy to see that Captain Earnsdale is a gentleman.”

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CHAPTER XLIX.
OLD FRIENDS.

ALICE little knew that Captain Earnsdale had obtained leave of absence and come to Carrington expressly to make her the captive of his bow and spear, if she pleased him—and she had pleased him. The Earnsdales, it is true, rather looked down on the Norbrecks, and Mr. Earnsdale had been heard to say that, albeit Bertram was a very estimable young man, he thought Gladys might do better than mate with old Simon Nutter's grandson. But heiresses with fifty thousand pounds *in posse* are not quite so plentiful as leaves in autumn; and when Alice came back from the Continent, as charming a little lady as ever was seen, there was a general feeling in the family that Regy might do worse than marry her, the more especially as the bold dragoon, not being quite as steady as he might have been, and having somewhat impaired the fortune left

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him by his grandfather, his friends opined that matrimony might improve his finances and have a salutary effect on his habits. Regy was communicated with accordingly. To do him justice he did not, when the project was first broached to him, regard it very favourably, he preferred to keep his liberty, he said, but in the end he consented to run down and see Miss Norbreck, and if she were really as eligible as they said she was—well, he would see.

So he came, as we have seen and, contrary to the general rule in such cases, fell desperately in love with Alice at first sight, and would have married her even if, like the milkmaid in the song, her face had been her only fortune.

“What do I think of Miss Norbreck?” he said to his uncle as they sat over their wine after dinner. “I think she is an awfully nice girl—natural, charming, and clever—and has plenty of spirit, too, I should say; and I like girls of spirit.”

“I quite agree with you, Regy; Alice Norbreck is all you say, and if the family had only just a little more pedigree, you know, I should regard her as an altogether unexceptionable *parti*. Even as it is—even as it is—” and Mr.

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Earnsdale, who had a way of leaving his sentences incomplete, paused for a reply.

“Oh, hang pedigree!” said the captain, pensively pulling his moustache; “pedigree is nothing nowadays. If you get money and beauty, what can you want more? Gad, there is many a fellow only too glad to get money without beauty, or beauty without money. Why, Tom Lynchpin, of my regiment—Lord Lynchpin’s son, you know—married a linen-draper’s widow, and deuced good thing for him, too. He has not three hundred pounds a year, and she has three thousand; and, what is more, they pull uncommonly well together.”

“Yes” said Mr. Earnsdale slowly, putting the tips of his fingers together and looking as wise as he knew how; “I think you might do worse, Regy, I do really; I think you might do worse.”

“Pon my word, uncle, I don’t think I could do better. I suppose—she looks like a girl with a will of her own—I suppose, now, you do not think there is any likelihood of her not accepting me?”

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“Not the least, Regy, not the least,” answered the uncle, with a smile of superlative confidence. The possibility of a Norbreck refusing an Earnsdale was simply inconceivable to him. He thought that, in proposing to marry Alice, his nephew was conferring on her a great honour.

“I am glad you think so,” said the captain, whose manner, however, denoted that he did not altogether share his uncle’s confidence. “In any case, I must not be long about it. My leave will be out in three weeks, and my regiment is first on the roster for foreign service.”

“The sooner the better, I should say. Nothing like striking while the iron is hot, you know.”

“If I were only sure it was hot!” muttered the enamoured warrior, as the two gentlemen rose from the table. “She is such an awfully nice girl. However, I have a full fortnight before me; was never so spoons on any girl before.”

When Alice and Mrs. Whalley were about a mile from Crow Nest they noticed a gentleman before them on the sidewalk. As they reached him he raised his hat.

“Who is that?” asked Mrs. Whalley.

“I really don’t know. Why I do believe it is Alan Cuerdale! Yes, it is. How he has altered!” and as Alice

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spoke she checked the ponies, and Alan came up to the carriage.

“We actually did not know you, Alan,” she said, smiling graciously, “and, if you had not raised your hat, should have passed you without speaking. You cannot have been here long, or we should have heard. When did you come?”

“Only yesterday. I had not been here for nearly a year. I spent the long vacation in the Tyrol with a reading party, and was hard at work all the short one. I return to Oxford next week.”

“But you will come and see us before you return?” said Mrs. Whalley.

“I shall only be glad. When must I come?”

“Oh, almost any afternoon. I suppose you have not had many letters from Bertie lately?”

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“Hardly any at all. He has been too much and too pleasantly occupied (smiling) of late to spare time for correspondence.”

“Yes, it is really too bad of him,” said Alice. “I have not had a letter—unless you can call five lines a letter—for three or four mails, and now he is on the *llanos*. But we must have news soon. Don’t forget to call, now. Good-bye.”

Forget to call! He could as easily forget all that he had learnt at Oxford, or become oblivious to the necessity of eating, drinking, and sleeping, as forget that invitation to Crow Nest. For two days he thought of little else, and if he had not feared that it might seem too soon, he would have gone that very afternoon.

Alan had indeed greatly changed. He looked so little like his old self that anybody who had not seen him for three or four years might well have been excused for not recognising him at first sight. The old ruddiness of his countenance had given place to a scholar-like paleness; his chin and lips were covered with a tawny beard and moustache, his forehead seemed higher, his blue eyes fuller and more intellectual than of yore, and he had the air and manner of a gentleman.

He went to Crow Nest on the second afternoon after he had met the two ladies. Both seemed, and were, glad to see him, as well for the sake of old times as because Alan had fulfilled the promise of his youth, and, so far, justified Bertie’s most sanguine expectations. He had passed all the schools with honours, gained a Latin, a Sanscrit, and a

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a Hebrew scholarship, and at the forthcoming final examination was almost sure to obtain a high place and a good fellowship. All this they had heard from Mr. Aidin, the vicar, himself an Oxford man, and who, like everybody else about Wellsprings, took a great interest in the young fellow’s career.

“And what do you intend to do, Alan, when you leave Oxford?” asked Mrs. Whalley, after he had given them some account of his life at the university. “Have you thought of anything?”

“I am not sure that I shall leave Oxford, Mrs. Whalley. I hope to have a resident fellowship, which will be sufficient to keep me for some years to come; and I shall

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probably do something as a private tutor or for the press. I contributed a little while ago an article to the *Universal Review*, and the editor was good enough to say that his columns would always be open to me.”

“You have no idea of going to the bar, then? Somebody said you had.”

“No. The bar is only for those who have either influence or money, and I have neither; nor am I sure that I have the qualities necessary for success at the bar.”

“Oh, Alan must be a professor and a man of letters, and write all sorts of learned things,” said Alice archly. “Fancy him a grave and reverend doctor lecturing in a gown and wig! Professors do wear wigs, don’t they?”

“Not unless they are bald.”

“It was judges I was thinking about. But if you don’t become a barrister you will never be a judge, I suppose? *Tant mieux*; I am afraid you would look too imposing in a wig. I should be afraid of speaking to you. Fancy my being afraid of speaking to Alan Cuerdale! Do you remember writing the Apostles’ Creed in Syriac and Hebrew in my album?”

Alan remembered it perfectly.

“Well, I am quite proud of it, and some day, when you are a very great man and have written what the Germans call an epoch-making book, I shall be prouder of it still. Would you mind writing something else in my album—not just now, you know, but some time?”

“With all my heart. What would you like me to write?”

“Well, it must be something very clever, of course. Let me see. How would the Lord’s Prayer in Babylonian do?”

Alan laughed.

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“I am afraid I cannot quite manage that yet, Miss Norbreck,” he said; “but I will write it in Sanscrit, if you like.”

“Thank you very much, Alan; I think that will do almost as well. What a remarkable album I shall have—English, French, German, Italian, Hebrew, Sanscrit; and when Bertie comes back he shall write me something in Spanish. But don’t I hear

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wheels in the avenue? Who is coming, I wonder? The Earnsdales, I do declare. I did not expect them so soon; did you, Mrs. Whalley? “

A minute afterwards Captain and Miss Earnsdale were announced. Alice introduced Alan in due form, and then the conversation, beginning with the weather, became discursive and fragmentary, not to say trivial. Neither the dragoon nor his cousin took much notice of Alan; perhaps because, feeling himself somewhat *de trop* in such company, he kept modestly in the background. But Alice had no idea of letting her brother's *protégé* hide his light under a bushel.

“Mr. Cuerdale is at Oxford,” she observed, *à propos* to nothing in particular, “He is a great Oriental scholar; he has written the Apostles' Creed in my album in Hebrew and Syriac, and he is going to write the Lord's Prayer for me in Babylonian—I mean in Sanscrit.”

“Indeed,” said Miss Earnsdale superciliously. She knew who Alan was quite well, and did not at all admire the familiarity with which Alice treated him. “Rather a strange idea, is it not, to convert a lady's album into a polyglot prayer book? Do you say your prayers in Sanscrit at Oxford, Mr. Cuerdale?”

“God bless me, how awfully clever!” said the captain, coming good-naturedly to the rescue. He had too often felt the sting of his cousin's tongue not to have a fellow-feeling for her victims. “It was all I could do to grind up enough French to pull through my examination. Sanscrit, that is what the fellows used to learn at Haileybury. I once thought of trying to learn Sanscrit myself.”

“Very well you did not, I think, Regy,” returned Miss Earnsdale; for if you could not learn French, I am sure you would never learn Sanscrit.”

“Exactly what I think myself, Lucy. That is the reason I did not carry out my intention.”

Before they left, Alice accepted an invitation to go out riding with the Earnsdales on the day following.

Shortly after they had gone Alan took his leave. Meeting the Earnsdales had done him no good. He went away

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with sadness in his heart, and almost sorry he had come. The greatest people in the neighbourhood were treating Alice on the footing of familiar friendship. That stupid captain evidently admired her as much as the sarcastic Miss Earnsdale despised him. Alan could see it in his eyes. It made the distance between them seem greater than ever, and brought home to him with painful intensity the madness of the hope which he still dared to cherish. But it was now part of his being, and he must cherish it to the end. Alice, he could see, had not the slightest inkling of his love. If she had she might chase him from her presence and never see him again. He would bury his love in his heart and go on worshipping her in secret. If she did not know she could not be offended, and know she never should.

“You will call again before you leave, Alan?” she said kindly when he was going away.

“I will try,” he said; “but I must leave on Friday, and there are a good many old friends who want to see me, and who, if I don’t see them, will think I am proud, and that would never do, you know, Miss Alice.”

Alan did not call again. He went back to Oxford and tried to find in hard study a solace for his hopeless love.

CHAPTER L.

A week after the ride came the garden party, and, being favoured by brilliant weather, it was a great success. Many county people were there, and Alice, who delighted in music, flowers, and sunshine, enjoyed herself exceedingly. An improvised dance was got up for the benefit of the younger guests, and she found that Captain Earnsdale waltzed a great deal better than he talked. This was on a Thursday, and on the Saturday afternoon the captain called at Crow Nest—this time unaccompanied by his cousin, perhaps because he had heard Mrs. Whalley say that she would be away from

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home on that and the following day. All the same he inquired if she was in, and being informed that she was not, he asked to see Miss Norbreck. The first thing he did on

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being shown into the drawing-room was to look at himself in the glass over the mantelpiece, arrange his hair (which he parted in the middle), and twist the ends of his yellow moustache. This done, he sat down and turned over the leaves of an illustrated book which lay open on the table. But he was nervous and ill at ease, and had hardly seated himself when he got up again, walked round the room, looked through the window, stared at himself in the mirror a second time, touched up his hair again, and gave another pull at his moustache.

As he was thus occupied the door turned noiselessly on its hinges, and Alice had the advantage of seeing her admirer's back and face at the same time.

"Good morning, Captain Earnsdale," she said with an amused smile

"God bless me!" ejaculated the dragoon. "I had no idea—good morning, Miss Norbreck. No use asking how you are; you look so well that the inquiry would be worse than superfluous—it would be almost an offence."

The captain had composed this speech in the watches of the night. But it was quite true; Alice did look well. If her features were not quite regular, they were lively and intelligent. She had a fresh and healthy complexion, large brown eyes and hair to match, which was so arranged as to show off her shapely head to the greatest advantage. Though not tall, she had a good figure, and she was dressed, as always, with perfect taste. Her gown, a soft, flowing creamy white cashmere, was trimmed with lace, and dotted here and there with scarlet bows, and she wore at her neck a single red rose and a sprig of mignonette.

Captain Earnsdale thought her perfect, and, if it had been possible, would have married her on the spot, even if she had not possessed a shilling.

"I was riding past," he went on, "and thought I would just call and see how you and Mrs. Whalley were, you know."

(He had come purposely to pop the question, and knew Mrs. Whalley was away, but everything is fair in love and war.)

"Thank you very much, we are both very well. Mrs. Whalley went away this morning, and will not be back until to-morrow night, or Monday morning. I hope Mr. Earnsdale and your cousin are quite well."

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“Perfectly—very much so, I should say,” answered the Captain rather incoherently. He was thinking how he should put it, poor man! “Aw, I—I hope you enjoyed the garden party, Miss Norbreck?”

“Very much indeed. I think you did, too, Captain Earnsdale.”

“Yes, awfully nice, wasn’t it? I shall never forget that garden party as long as I live. I shall think of it, Miss Norbreck, when I am far, far away,” and the captain sighed deeply and looked unutterable things.

“Are you going far away? I thought your regiment was at York.”

“We are expecting to be ordered on foreign service; but York, Lancaster, Chester, Manchester, Liverpool, London, Bombay, Hongkong, Burnley, Berwick-on-Tweed—anywhere, in fact, where you were not—would be far away for me. Yes, Miss Norbreck—Alice, I adore you, I do weally.”

For a moment Alice thought he was joking, but one look at his anxious face and pleading eyes was sufficient to show that he was in sober earnest, and she remained silent from sheer astonishment. This was her first offer, and it had come upon her like a bolt from the blue sky.

“May I hope?” he went on imploringly, at the same time taking her hand. “Will you, will you consent to—to adorn my fortunes—I mean share my fortunes and adorn my life—to become, in fact, my adorable wife?”

“Impossible, Captain Earnsdale,” said Alice, who had now recovered her presence of mind.

“Impossible, Miss Earnsdale! I hope not. Why impossible?”

“Why? Because I never thought of such a thing. I have not known you a fortnight; because the idea of marrying you or anybody else has never so much as crossed my mind.”

“You might marry me, for all that, Miss Norbreck.”

“What? Marry you without loving you?”

“I would take my chance of that,” said the dragoon humbly.

“Never,” said Alice energetically. “I would not do you so great a wrong. I don’t want to marry—I do not think I ever shall marry—but if I do I must love with all my heart.”

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

“I have, perhaps, been too abrupt. I will wait, I will come again—even if I have to send in my papers.”

“I should be very sorry for you to do that, and I do not

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think it would be any use, Captain Earnsdale. Think no more about it.”

“I cannot help thinking about it. I shall never forget you. But if you cannot love me you will forgive me, and—and let me kiss your hand.”

“I have nothing to forgive,” she said kindly, “and I am very, very sorry that I can neither give you the answer you would like, nor encourage you to hope for a more favourable one.”

And then he touched her hand respectfully with his lips and went sadly on his way.

Alice felt sorry. She saw that the captain was much disappointed, and it grieved her to give him pain, for though not clever or brilliant he was an honest gentleman. Yet she could not have done otherwise. She had told him the truth; she did not want to marry, had not even given the question a serious thought. She knew that some girls—perhaps most girls—marry in order to secure themselves a home and a provision for life; but her fortune made her independent; and, as she sat there, following up the train of thought which Captain Earnsdale's proposal had suggested, it seemed to her that freedom was far better than matrimony, and that, so far as she was concerned, marriage would be a mistake—unless there was somebody she cared very much for, somebody good, kind, and brave like Bertie. Bertie was her hero. But there was no such body, and she did not think there would be. Dear Bertie! He would soon be home again, and Gladys; she liked Gladys, oh, so much. How pleasant it would be when they were all together, and how much they would have to tell each other.

“Wheels in the avenue! Who can be coming now? Percy Diamond, I do declare. I have a great mind not to be at home.”

But it was too late. Percy had caught sight of her as he drove past the window, and, without giving great offence, she could not now deny herself to him. Alice did not like her cousin; she thought him, as she had confided to Mrs. Whalley, an odious little

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fat man, and she knew that, both before and after his father's death, his conduct had been anything but that of a gentleman.

Percy, on the other hand, liked Alice so well that he had determined to give her the chance of becoming his wife. She was clever and good-looking, had a handsome fortune, and her connection with the Earnsdales would increase his

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importance, and might be the means of introducing him into county society. But he was in no hurry. He had excellent reasons for not wanting to marry for a year or two, and his appearance at Crow Nest was due solely to fear of being forestalled by Captain Earnsdale, of whose visits he had heard, and of whom he felt instinctively jealous.

Percy Diamond dressed like a glorified groom, and prided himself on the bluntness of his manner and the plainness of his speech. Mrs. Whalley said he had no manners at all, and since his father's death, two years previously, he had become pompous and double-chinned, obese and overbearing. He was not the sort of man to waste much time with his wooing.

"How do, Alice, how do you do?" he said in his thick voice. "Glad to see you looking so fresh. That dress suits you to a T. Have you heard from Bertie lately? How is my mother? Only middling. Too stout to be very well, I am afraid, and devilish ill-tempered. She does not trouble me much, though. I take care to give her a wide berth. But she lets the servants have it hot, I can tell you. You seem to be alone, Alice?"

"Yes, Mrs. Whalley is away."

"Glad to hear it. I have come to see you, not her. You have been having visitors lately, I hear."

"And if we have, what then?" said Alice, who, instructed by her recent experience, began to have an inkling of what was coming.

"Take care, Alice, Captain Earnsdale is a fortune-hunter he wants nothing but your money."

"Captain Earnsdale is not a fortune-hunter, he is a gentlemen," was the indignant answer.

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"You may think so, but I know different. His property is heavily dipped. He is not half as well off as people think. Has he not said something to you, now?"

"What is that to you, Percy?"

"He has then. I knew, I knew devilish well that he was not coming here for nothing. You refused him, of course, and you are quite right. It is not Captain Earnsdale that you must have, Alice, it's me."

"You!"

There was a world of meaning in that "you," but Percy did not seem to see it.

"Yes, me. I am quite earnest. You cannot do better. The collieries are bringing in thirty thousand pounds a year.

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I have paid all my debts, and the property is quite unencumbered. You shall have your own income to do what you like with, and I will build a house for my mother in the park; I do not expect you to live with her, of course—nobody could. What do you say, Alice?"

"No—*au grand jamais*—if you know what that means," said Alice, rising from her chair, and emphasising her answer by an energetic stamp of her foot. "No."

"Nonsense; you don't mean it. You mean 'yes.' Girls always do when they say 'no'. Come, now, let us seal the bargain with a kiss;" and he caught both her hands in his, and approached his lips, redolent of tobacco and beer, to hers.

Freeing herself by a sudden movement, Alice gave him a ringing box on the ear, and then, quick as thought, ran to the bell-pull.

"Please go, Percy," she exclaimed, pointing imperiously to the door.

"Not until I have had my revenge," he said, angrily, coming nearer to her.

"Go this instant," she repeated; "if you do not, I will send for Tim Bolland, and tell him to throw you out of the window—and he will do it!"

As she spoke she rang the bell.

"Tell Mr. Diamond's groom," she said to the maid who answered the summons, "to bring his drag round to the front door, and tell Tim I want him."

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This was quite sufficient. Percy, muttering curses not loud but deep, followed the servant out of the room, and Alice was left once more alone.

The visits of Captain Earnsdale and Mr. Diamond were not likely to remain long secret; and when a few hours later, they came to the knowledge of Mrs. Norbreck, she was greatly exercised thereby, for she still cherished the project of marrying Alice without changing her name, and in the two gentlemen in question she saw potential and probably formidable rivals to her son and heir. She had often mentioned the subject to Jacob; but, though the youth admired Alice immensely, he was painfully shy and gawky—except with his intimates, and they were all factory folks—and his mother found great difficulty in screwing up his courage to the sticking point.

“You’ll be kaled (forestalled) if you are not sharp,” she said “There’s that Captain Earnsdale, he’s hardly ever off Crow Nest doorstep, they tell me. He was there again today,

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and Percy Diamond too—and Alice all by herself! Who knows what they have been saying and doing?—ten to one giving her handsome presents o’ some sort. When are you going to buckle to, Jacob?”

“I don’t know,” said Jacob, scratching his head; “what do you want me to do?”

“Speyk, to be sure.”

“Couldn’t yo’ speyk for me, mother?”

“Nay, that would never do, I would not disgrace you that much. Besides, it would be of no use. No young woman with a spirit would have owt to do wi’ a young fellow as had not courage to do his own courting.”

“But she never gives me a chance,” pleaded Jacob.

“Chance!” replied Mrs. Norbreck, scornfully; “make a chance.”

“That’s all very fine, mother; how would you make a chance ‘Just tell me that.”

“You have a chance now. Alice will ten to one be at church to-morrow morning. Put your new suit on and go, and offer to walk home with her though th’ fields. And if she is not there in the morning, go i’ th’ afternoon. And taak care yo’ open your mouth,

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now. I know if I were a young chap I'd open my mouth and wide too, if I could get a nice lass and a fine fortune by it."

So next morning, Jacob, who was by no means ill-favoured, donned his new suit—a bottle-green coat with brass buttons, blue lush waistcoat, and loud plaid trousers—and went to church. Alice was there. When the service was over he shook hands with her in the porch, and then, after a little hesitation, followed her down the road.

"Where are you going, Jacob?" she asked, as she turned into the footpath. "This is not your way."

"I thought I would just see you home—that is all. It's a lonely road by th' fields."

"I am very much obliged to you; but I can do very well by myself. There is not the least necessity for you to come with me."

Jacob made no answer, but he continued walking by her side. Alice offered no further remark; she was not in a talkative mood, and she knew by previous experience the difficulty of drawing her cousin into a conversation.

"It's a fine day," he said, at length.

"Very," she replied, absently.

Then Jacob stuck, and wondered what he should say next.

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"Do you think it'll last?" he asked, after a pause of full five minutes.

"Do I think what will last?"

"The fine weather."

"I really cannot tell. I hope so."

Then followed another pause. The case was getting desperate, the chimneys of Crow Nest were in sight, and Jacob felt that, if he did not "speyk" now, his chance would be gone, and he would never dare to face his mother.

"Cousin Alice."

"Yes, Jacob."

"Do you want a sweetheart?" said the young fellow, drawing a deep breath, and turning very red.

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Alice turned sharply round, and stared him full in the face. Was this another wooer? It seemed so. There could be no mistaking the significance of the question; and if Jacob had been a criminal taken in the act he could not have looked more conscious.

“Do I want a sweetheart!” she repeated, affecting an indignation she did not feel, for her cousin’s manner was more likely to provoke mirth than anger. “How dare you ask me such a question? What do you mean, Jacob?”

“I only thought—I—I did not mean anything, cousin,” he stammered, sheepishly. “I ask your pardon.”

“Well, then, go home, you foolish boy, and take care you never ask a meaningless question again.”

“Three proposals in two days,” thought Alice, as she walked slowly homeward. “But there is one comfort—I am not likely to have any more yet awhile. All my wooers have got their answers. What will Mrs. Whalley say, I wonder, and Bertie?”

“Well?” asked Mrs. Norbreck, when her son entered the house. “Did you speak?”

“Ay did I,” answered the young fellow, sulkily.

“And? —”

“She will not have me.”

“Oh, one refusal is nowt. You must ask again and again.”

“I’ll be hanged if I will!” said Jacob; and he kept his word.

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CHAPTER LI.

THE ROOKES AT HOME.

BLACK Care sat behind John Rooke. Like many another clever fellow, he had been too clever by half. Had he been content with his professional profits, and the income arising from his wife’s dowry, he might have become as wealthy and important as he wished to be—in time; for he had plenty of brains and few scruples. But he disdained to play a waiting game; stupid shopkeepers and thickpated manufacturers might plod if they liked—he would take a near cut to fortune. So he studied the stock markets, speculated, and won popularity by a profuse expenditure; for popularity, much

The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust.* (1885)

more than mere money, was John Rooke's passion. For a while he succeeded beyond his expectations; the more he spent the more he seemed to make, and, possessing ready tact and pleasant manners, he soon became so big a man that the Earnsdales—albeit they affected to despise him as an upstart—thought it expedient to patronise him as a rising man, and ask him occasionally to their houses. At first he speculated on the quiet, but after a time he found it to his advantage to let it be known that he was a large and successful operator. Rumour, as usual, magnified his gains, and the greater they were supposed to be the more he was courted and envied.

Then the tide of fortune ebbed—ebbed faster than it had flowed. Money can be lost very fast on the Stock Exchange, and it was not long before Rooke found himself minus all that he had made and all that his wife had brought him. But he was not the man to stick at trifles, and when his own resources were exhausted he laid his hands on the money of his clients. The thirty thousand pounds that Roger Norbreck gave him to pay off the mortgage contracted by Ralph he kept for his own purposes, and when that was done he raised further sums by fresh mortgages. In this he found no difficulty, for he had inspired his co-trustee with such implicit confidence that the latter signed, without reading, every document that the lawyer put before him. But the harder John struggled the deeper he sank in the mire, and he saw

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black ruin staring him full in the face. His liabilities were enormous; he had mortgaged the Norbreck property almost to the hilt, got possession of Roger's own savings, and the time when he would have to give an account of his stewardship was close at hand. In a few months—weeks, rather—Alice would be twenty and Bertram at home again. As yet, however, Rooke's credit was substantially unimpaired—at any rate, he thought so—and, disliking nothing so much as retrenchment and restitution, he resolved to put a bold face on it and hold on to the last. It would be time enough to throw up the sponge when the worst came to the worst—that is to say, when the heir claimed his heritage, and even then he might possibly put off the reckoning day.

Although Rooke stood very high in the estimation of his fellow-townsmen, and was especially popular with the clergy by reason of his benefactions to their churches,

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there were people who doubted the reality of his wealth—a few even doubted his honesty; but their doubts, if they ventured to speak them, would have been drowned in a howl of execration, so they shook their heads and held their peace.

Among the sceptics was Mrs. Norbreck. A shrewd but ignorant woman, she distrusted lawyers on principle, and she could never forgive Rooke for having, as she thought, wheedled her husband into making him a trustee. As his influence over Roger increased, her distrust became dislike, and when it came accidentally to her knowledge that her husband signed papers without reading them, and that he had confided his own savings to the lawyer for investment at the latter's discretion, the dislike grew into something like alarm.

“That fellow will be the ruin of you one of these days, mark me if he does not,” she said to her husband at least once a month. Not that she quite thought so, her idea being rather that Rooke was using the trust and his co-trustee as milch cows, and would one day turn round and “be nasty,” than that he was seriously wasting the estate. Still, there was no telling what such a rascal might be doing—where did he get all his money from? And being utterly unable to make any impression on Roger, who was as obstinate as he was weak, she caused her son to write the letter to Bertram of which the reader knows, a letter which puzzled without enlightening him.

Some six or eight weeks after Captain Earnsdale and Percy Diamond proposed to Alice, Rooke entertained the

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bishop of the diocese and the clergy of the town at dinner. The bishop had come down to consecrate a new church, to the building and endowment of which the lawyer had contributed a thousand pounds, and many and warm were the compliments the latter received on his liberality and his devotion to the interests of religion. Besides giving freely himself, he had consented to receive the offerings of others, and accepted the onerous (and unpaid) office of treasurer to the endowment fund, which was not yet quite complete.

“Mr. Rooke is really an excellent fellow,” said the vicar to his neighbour the new curate; “one of Nature's noblemen, indeed.”

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“And so generous and hospitable.”

“Yes, and what I particularly like about him is that he not only gives money, which for a rich man is perhaps the easiest form of well-doing, but time and trouble. He is the busiest man in Carrington; yet he consents to be one of your trustees and treasurer of the building fund.”

“Truly an excellent man, as you say, and he will have his reward, if not in this world (and an approving conscience is a priceless boon), then in the next.”

When his guests were gone Rooke withdrew to his own room, for he did much of his work at home, and often wrought far into the night. He was looking anxiously through his papers, for there was a very important one which seemed to be missing, when the door quietly opened and his wife looked in.

“Can I have a few minutes with you, John?” she said.

“Certainly,” he replied coldly; “but you must be brief, for I have much to do. What is it?”

“I found this paper on the floor this morning, after you had gone.”

It was the paper he had missed, a rough statement of his more pressing liabilities, and of some other matters destined for no eye but his own.

“Have you looked at it?” he asked, with an angry, uneasy glance.

“I have, John. I could not help it, and you may be thankful it did not fall into the hands of one of the servants.”

“You have no business to look at it. I will have nobody prying into my affairs. Do you hear that? Nobody—not even you.”

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“You forget that your affairs are my affairs, John. You have not given me much of your confidence lately, I know; but I have a right to my husband’s confidence if ever a woman had. Did I not give you all my fortune? Have I not striven to repair the defects of my education, so that I might be fit to rule your house and receive your friends? And if I have seen that paper, it only confirms what I have for some time suspected. I can read, you, John, better than you think.”

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“What have you suspected?” asked Rooke with a husky voice and an inward quake.

“That you are in difficulties; that you cannot pay what you owe; that we are living on other folks’ money.”

“That is all; she has found nothing out, then,” thought Rooke, and he breathed freely again.

“Oh, John, give it up.”

“Give what up?”

“This hollow, empty, dishonest life. Let us retrench, save up, and pay off those terrible debts. I would help you if I could, John; you know I would. If I had more money to give you, you should have it—every penny. I would work my fingers to the bone for you; go to the other end of the world for you; yes, die for you. But there is one thing I cannot do, John—I cannot lie for you.”

“Who asked you to lie for me?” What do you mean?

“Are we not living a lie every day? This fine house and costly furniture, these horses and carriages are not really ours if we cannot pay our debts. How can I look people in the face and pretend to be what I am not? I cannot, John, I cannot.”

Rooke was utterly astonished. Never before had his wife presumed to differ from him in opinion, or have any other will than his. But she spoke so decisively, her face wore such an air of quiet resolve, that he saw nothing was to be gained either by violence or bounce. he must temporise.

“Come, come, Mary,” he said in a tone of remonstrance; “this will never do, you know. Don't be unreasonable. I have lost money, it is true, and for the moment I am hardish up. But we are far from being ruined, thank God! This paper has frightened you, as well it may. It would frighten me too if I did not know that, large as are my liabilities, my assets are still larger. It is a bad time for selling out,

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and I must hold on until things mend. They are mending already, and if you will only have patience I will pay off these debts in a very short time. I am quite of your opinion about retrenchment. But we must do it gradually; otherwise people will talk, and that

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would do me harm—serious harm just now. When I have squared the bank and one or two other matters, I shall not care what they say.”

Mary had still faith in her husband; he spoke fairly, she thought, and, though not without misgiving, she acquiesced in his proposals.

“Very well, John,” she said; “let it be so. But promise me one thing. Don’t give any more dinner-parties—at any rate for a while. You have no idea how much money they cost. And sell one of the horses, and send one of the stablemen away. That won’t make people talk. And I will be as careful as I can in the house. They will say I am stingy, perhaps; but that is nothing.”

“All right, Molly; do what you think best. I will see about selling the horse to-morrow. And now (smiling) you must let me get to my work. I have a lot to do before I go to bed.”

“She is a good woman,” he muttered, as the door closed behind her, “and sharper than I gave her credit for being. What a fool I was to leave that paper about! Gad, if she only knew all! If it were not for that cursed Norbreck Trust, I might pull through after all. I will bear Leeds stock again to-morrow. If they will only go down another one per cent, I shall have the best fortnight I have had for a long time. Throw up the sponge? I’ll be d—d if I will!”

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CHAPTER LII.

A LETTER FROM EL DORADO.

WHEN Rooke entered the office next morning, and, as was his habit, glanced at the table on which lay his letters, he perceived a letter bearing a Venezuelan stamp and the postmark of El Dorado, and his heart sank within him; from whom could a Venezuelan letter come from if not from Bertram, and what more probable than that it should contain a demand for information touching his affairs, and an announcement of his approaching arrival? Then he took up the letter with trembling fingers.

“But this is not Bertram’s handwriting,” he muttered, “and he would never address me as ‘Mr. John Rooke, lawyer’. What can it be?”

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Then he opened the letter. It read as follows—:

“MR. JOHN ROOKE.

“Mines of El Dorado.

“Sir, —I write with the utmost grief to inform you that my nephew, Mr. Bertram Norbreck, is no more. After making an excursion to the *llanos*, along with my son Blas, and my most trusty servant Pedro, he greatly desired to see the mines of Miraflores, in the valley of the Orinoco, and Blas, yielding to his request, accompanied him. It is a country much subject to earthquakes, and a few minutes after he had entered the principal opening—a horizontal gallery—there occurred the severest shock that has taken place in the locality for many years, and my unfortunate nephew and more than twenty miners lost their lives in the most terrible manner, by the falling in of the mines. By what seems nothing less than a special interposition of Providence, my son, happening to be indisposed at the time, was not able to accompany his cousin. Otherwise he too must have perished.

“As Miraflores is a remote place, very sparsely peopled, and the men were nearly all in the mines, it was impossible to make any attempt to recover the bodies of the victims. So

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complete was the collapse, indeed, that a hundred men working a whole year could not have removed the *débris* that fell from the face of the mountain. But there is every reason to believe that all who were inside died instantaneously and painlessly.”

“This is the account given by my son; and, although I have not the least reason to doubt its perfect correctness, or the faintest hope of being able to throw any further light on this most dreadful occurrence, I have determined, for my own satisfaction, as well as for that of Bertram’s friends in England, to proceed to Miraflores myself and question on the spot the witnesses of the catastrophe. I will take care to acquaint you with the result of my inquiries.”

“I have deemed it better to write to you in the first instance, in order that you may break the terrible news to Bertram’s sister and uncle in a less abrupt manner than could be possible by letter. I shall also, when I can sufficiently command myself, write to Mrs. Earnsdale. God help her poor daughter!”

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“As for myself, the shock has utterly unnerved me. I looked upon the poor boy as my own son. Blas loved him like a brother, and my wife is almost heartbroken. He had indeed endeared himself to all who knew him.”

“I am, sir,

“Your obedient servant,

“RUPERT NUTTER RIVAZ.

“P. S. -Before my son left Mirafloros he procured an attested and legalised record, or certificate, of the fatal occurrence, of which I enclose a translation. The original, in Spanish, is in my possession and at your disposal.”

“R. N. R”

“Saved!” exclaimed Rooke, throwing the letter on the table; and then he sank into his chair with a sense of relief he had not known for months. “I have now a good twelve-month to turn round in,” he thought. “Alice will take all, course; but she cannot act until she is twenty-one, and then everything, except the accumulations, will have to be settled upon her. She does not touch the principal. And if she has power to appoint a third trustee, what then? She need not unless she likes, and she must not like. And she must make me her agent and man of business. I shall pull through after all. Ah! I knew I should. By gad, what a stroke of luck! I am

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sorry Bertram has come to so sad an end, though, He was a good-natured young fellow. But what is to be done now? I must go and see Miss Norbreck, I suppose. No, I won't; I will get Mr. Earnsdale to see her—talk to him about his position, and that, and Bertram's connection with his family. Hint how much better he could break the news than I can, &c. It will please the old gentleman, and spare me an unpleasant duty, and some valuable time.”

An hour later Rooke called at the Earnsdale Estate Office, where Mr. Earnsdale was generally to be found about eleven o'clock, and was ushered into his room.

“Good-morning, Mr. Rooke,” said the old gentleman pleasantly, laying down his newspaper, “what is your news today?”

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"Bad," answered the lawyer, looking as dismal as he could, "very bad indeed, Mr. Earnsdale."

"God bless me, what is it—nobody dead, I hope?"

"I have had a letter from El Dorado, Mr. Earnsdale, and there is great reason to fear that Bertram Norbreck has had a very serious accident. I might almost say a fatal accident. Here is the letter; you had perhaps better read it."

Mr. Earnsdale took the letter and read it slowly. Then, as if he had not quite taken in its purport, he read it a second time.

"Poor young man!" he murmured. "Poor Gladys!" and a tear rolled down his check.

Rooke had not given Mr. Earnsdale credit for so much feeling, and he, too, tried to squeeze out a tear, but succeeded only in making a horrible grimace.

"A very sad case, Mr. Earnsdale."

"Dreadful! The marriage day fixed and all. I fear it will break my poor niece's heart—and his sister, poor child!" said Mr. Earnsdale in a broken voice. "What is to be done?"

"Well, you see, sir, that Mr. Nutter Rivaz, as he calls himself, suggests that I should break the news to Miss Norbreck, and I am quite ready to do so, painful as the task will be. But it seems to me, Mr. Earnsdale, that it would come so much better from you. Your age, your position, your relationship to the young lady to whom poor Bertram was engaged, seem specially to point you out for the duty; and I am sure Miss Norbreck would take the attention very kindly."

Mr. Earnsdale had been very much annoyed by Alice's

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rejection of his nephew; so much that neither he nor Lucy had called at Crow Nest since. But he did not hesitate a moment.

"You are perhaps right, Mr. Rooke. I will go home for my daughter, and we will drive over and see the poor young lady at once. You may be sure that I shall do my best to break the news to her gently. May I keep this letter?"

"Certainly, Mr. Earnsdale."

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An hour later Mr. Earnsdale and Miss Earnsdale were at Crow Nest.

Alice, whom the visit so early in the day naturally took by surprise, was to the full as agitated and distressed as her guests.

"You have had a letter?" she said. "So have I."

"You know then?"

"Yes: Bertie has not returned from Trinidad. Nothing has been heard of him. I have had a letter from Gladys. She is heartbroken. Bertie told her, before he went away, that he should be back in six or seven weeks, if he lived, and when she wrote he had gone twelve or thirteen weeks, and she fears some harm has befallen him. She dreamt that he was buried alive in a cave inside a mountain, and she heard him cry, in a voice of intense anguish, that thrilled her to the soul, 'Gladys!' The cry awakened her, and she heard it three times. Such a pitiful letter it is. But it cannot be so bad as that, Mr. Earnsdale. Bertie's cousin was with him, and if anything had happened, you know, we should have heard. One of them has fallen ill, or they have been detained somewhere. I feel sure we shall hear something of him by the next mail."

The Earnsdales remained silent, and exchanged a significant glance.

Alice turned deadly pale.

"You do not speak," she exclaimed, rising with clasped hands from her chair and regarding first one and then the other. "You have heard something that I have not."

"I am sorry to say we have, my poor girl," said Mr. Earnsdale in a husky voice.

"He is dead!" cried Alice piteously. "That is why you have come. Oh, what shall I do? Bertie is dead, Mrs. Whalley, Bertie is dead! Oh, what shall I do?"

Mrs. Whalley, whose tears were flowing fast, folded the stricken girl in her arms.

"Perhaps we had better go now," said Mr. Earnsdale.

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"We will come again to-morrow, when she is a little more composed."

"Not yet, dear Mr. Earnsdale," said Alice, struggling with her emotion. "Tell me more, please. How did it happen, and what have you heard?"

Mr. Earnsdale gave her Rupert's letter.

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“Gladys’s dream was true, then. He was buried alive. But (eagerly) she did not dream he was dead, and Uncle Rupert does not say he was killed—he only thinks so. My brother may be alive after all.”

Mr. Earnsdale shook his head.

“Do not cherish false hopes, my dear Miss Norbreck. I would wish to God I could think differently, but it is impossible your brother can be alive. The age of miracles is past, and by nothing short of a miracle could he have been saved. And if he had not perished we should have heard ere this. As I read your uncle’s letter, it is quite two months since the terrible event happened, and he says clearly there is no hope. You will meet your brother in another world, my poor girl, but never again in this. It is a sore trial for you, who have neither father nor mother, to lose your only brother in this fearful way. But ‘He who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb’ will strengthen you to bear this great, this overwhelming trial.”

“Thank you, Mr. Earnsdale, thank you very much. It is so kind of you to come,” said Alice, with quivering lips. “I know you do right to tell me not to hope. But I cannot, oh, I cannot help hoping just a little.”

“I cannot forbid you; only, for my part, I do not see the least ground for hope. God bless you and help you, my dear,” and the old gentleman, putting his arm round Alice, as it she were his own child, kissed her cheek. “One of us will come and see how you are to-morrow. And now, my dear (to his daughter), it is time to think of your aunt and poor Gladys. We must write to them to-morrow. The mail leaves on Thursday.”

“How little we know people!” said Mrs. Whalley, when she and Alice were left alone. “Who would have thought that under a manner so cold and reserved there lay hid so warm a heart?”

Then Alice read the fatal letter again and again, striving hard to find in it a grain of comfort—something to sustain the desperate hope she refused to abandon—that Bertram still

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lived. Then Mrs. Whalley read it with the same intent, and albeit she could not see in anything Rupert said the slightest ground for encouragement, she had not the heart to

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forbid Alice to “hope a very little.” Alice thought the letter “very kind,” and so it was in form; but Mrs. Whalley did not like it for all that. It appeared to her altogether too artificial for the occasion; the style was too studied; the sentences were too carefully turned to be the spontaneous outcome of the writer’s heart, and she doubted much if Rupert and his family felt all the sorrow they professed. But always scrupulously fair in her judgement, she admitted to herself that she might possibly be doing the man an injustice.

CHAPTER LIII.

ARCADES AMBO.

Mrs. Whalley was quite right in thinking that Mr. Nutter Rivaz’s letter was a studied composition. When he heard of Bertram’s death his first idea was that Blas had killed him, and invented the earthquake to account for his disappearance. But when Blas produced his documentary proofs, and the story was fully corroborated by the testimony of Pedro, the peon, doubt became impossible; and even Madame Rivaz, who knew her son’s unscrupulous character, and had knowledge of the designs against Bertram’s life, was convinced that he had perished accidentally.

Rupert expressed great sorrow, and not altogether insincerely, for he had really liked Bertram—liked him so much that, had the amount at stake been less considerable, he would probably have refused to listen to his son’s proposals for removing him. For the elder Rivaz—the advantages being equal—always preferred right to wrong. He would even on occasion make a sacrifice to do right; had a strong objection to incur the dislike or disapproval of those among whom he lived, courted popularity, and liked to stand well with his neighbours. Blas, on the other hand, cared neither for right

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nor wrong; he had been brought up in an atmosphere of treachery, and, less politic than his father, he recked little whether people thought well or ill of him. He hated Bertram because he was more fortunate and better-principled than himself, because he thought the position his cousin occupied ought to be his, and, above all, because he was beloved

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by Gladys Earnsdale. Blas would probably have tried to put Bertram out of the way even if there had been no question of money—even if his death had involved no pecuniary gain, either to his father or himself. After Bertram had made his will the inducement to put him out of the way became irresistible. The earthquake had saved Blas the trouble and risk—that was all—for he had resolved that, come what might, his cousin should never see Trinidad and Gladys again.

Blas thought that his father should proceed to England forthwith and claim his legacy. The father was of different opinion.

“No, no,” he said, “that would have the appearance of indecent haste, and might give rise to unpleasant remarks, if not injurious suspicions.”

“What can anybody suspect? Armed with those papers you may convince the most sceptical.”

“Probably. But we must keep up appearances for all that. The poor boy makes his will here, in my favour; shortly afterwards he dies—accidentally, of course—in your company on the *Ilanos*, and, if I were now to show myself overeager to touch the money, people would be sure to say unpleasant things.”

“Let them; what need we care? They cannot stop you getting the money.”

“I am not so sure about that. At any rate, somebody might try to put hindrances in the way, and I don't want hindrances put in the way. No, Blas, I shall not hurry off to England right away. I shall go first to Miraflores, and make further inquiries.”

“You do not believe my story then, after all,” put in Blas hotly. “I tell you it is as true as——”

“Softly, my boy. I could not gainsay that paper, even if I doubted your word and Pedro's. But don't you see that it will look better to go? It will show my concern for my nephew, and enable me to say that I have left no stone unturned to verify your statement and to ascertain his fate, It will be a great advantage, Blas, a great advantage.”

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“Well, you ought to know best; but if I were you I should go right away and get the money. Besides, it will take you such a thundering time to ride from here to the Orinoco.”

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“Not so very long. I shall go up the coast by steamer, then by Caracas and La Victoria to Miraflores, and down the Orinoco to Trinidad, and take the mail packet to England.”

“Yes, that may do, but don't go by El Rastro.”

“Why?”

“Bertram shot a man there, that's all, and some of his friends might make trouble.”

“Bertram shot a man! You never told me that before. What for?”

“A scallywag of a fellow came into his room one night and was going to knife him, and Bertram just put a bullet into his head.”

“Bertram served him quite right. Did you know the fellow, Blas?”

“Not I. How should I know him?” replied the young fellow with a cynical laugh. “Why do you ask?”

Rivaz did not seem disposed to press the question.

“And now I must write to Mr. Rooke—it is best to write to him, I think—and Mrs. Earnsdale.”

“You will call on Mrs. Earnsdale when you are at Trinidad, won't you?”

“I suppose so.”

“Of course you must, and don't forget to say how very much grieved we are—mother and I—and that I am always at their disposal for anything. And look here; I wish you would buy a tiger's skin at Ciudad Bolivar, and present it to Miss Earnsdale in my name. They were very kind when I was there, and I ought to make some acknowledgement.”

Rupert started the next day. He learnt nothing new at Miraflores, which was, indeed, almost deserted, the mine having been abandoned: but he obtained fullest confirmation of his son's story, and everybody whom he saw was quite convinced that the workings must have collapsed at the first shock, and that all who were inside, had either been crushed or suffocated. From Miraflores he went to Trinidad, and after calling at Prospect, proceeded to England by the mail steamer. At London he saw Mr. Dunbar, to whom he gave a plausible explanation of the late falling off in the shipments of ore, had an interview with a stockbroker, and sold the remainder of his El Dorado shares, which were at a

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slight premium. This done he took the train to Carrington, where he put up at "The Earnsdale Arms."

The morning after his arrival Rivaz went out and looked curiously round, and everybody he met looked curiously at him. His tall figure, his deep mourning, the enormous diamond pin which he wore in his cravat, his gold-headed cane, his pale impassive face, long black hair, American beard, and dignified bearing, attracted general attention. Carrington was so much altered that he hardly knew it. The buildings that were new and fresh when he was a lad looked old and dingy; nearly all the familiar names and signs had disappeared, the place was bigger, busier, and smokier; the march of improvement had swept away whole streets, and those that remained were changed past recognition.

Rupert could not find his way; he accosted an intelligent and gentlemanly-looking young fellow, whose face attracted him, and, raising his hat, asked to be directed to the office of Mr. Rooke. People stared more than ever, nobody had ever been seen to raise his hat—as a preliminary to asking a question—in the streets of Carrington before. The young man, who was no other than our friend Alan Cuerdale, showed the stranger to the place he wanted, which was hard by.

Mr. Rooke was in.

"Can I see him?" asked Rupert.

"Certainy. Will you please step this way? What name shall I say, sir?"

"Mr. Nutter Rivaz."

"Mr. Nutter Rivaz," said the clerk, throwing open the door of Rooke's room.

"You did not expect to see me, I suppose, Mr. Rooke," said Rupert with a smile.

"No, indeed I did not," answered Rooke, who looked intensely surprised, and felt not a little alarmed; for the thought crossed his mind that Rivaz had come to tell him that Bertram was not dead after all. But he was quickly reassured.

"A very sad thing about my nehew, Mr. Rooke."

"Dreadful. I was never so shocked in my life as when I got your letter. His body has not been recovered, I suppose?"

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

“And never will be. As I told you I would, I went to the place myself. It was a very long and tiresome journey, but I thought it my duty. I should not have been satisfied if I had not gone. But I learnt nothing new. I told you in

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my letter all that could be told. The earthquake occurred only about twenty minutes after he had gone into the mine—the gallery, as we call it—and all was over in half a minute.”

“Poor young fellow! And his prospects seemed so bright—heir to a fine estate, and engaged to a beautiful girl of the highest respectability.”

“And so generous and anxious to do right. You are perhaps not aware, Mr. Rooke, that he made a will?”

“A will!” almost shouted the lawyer, and despite a strenuous effort to control himself, his lip quivered, and his emotion, and drew his conclusions.

“Yes,” said the other quietly, “he thought it only right that I should have something out of my father’s estate, and after he had the yellow fever, through which we nursed him, he would make his will. I did not want him to do so by any means; but he insisted, and it was executed in duplicate. One copy is among his papers at Trinidad, now in the possession of Mrs. Earnsdale, the other is here. I shall be glad if you will read it.”

Rooke read the document carefully, and while doing so contrived to compose himself, and decide what line he should take with his very unwelcome visitor.

“Very kind of Bertram, I am sure,” he said in his usual suave manner. “What do you propose to do about this will?”

“What do I propose to do?” asked Rupert, surprised in his turn. “Alice—my niece—is now twenty years old, I believe?”

“Not quite. She will be in a few weeks.”

“In a few weeks then. I presume there will be no difficulty about the admission of my claims under my nephew’s will, Mr. Rooke?”

“That is more than I can tell you.”

The Salamanca Corpus: *Ralph Norbreck's Trust*. (1885)

“More than you can tell me! Why, you are one of Ralph Norbreck’s trustees, are you not, and the legal adviser to the Trust?”

“Undoubtedly. But unfortunately the decision does not rest with me. If it did, you may be sure I should raise no difficulty whatever; for I have always thought you were hardly dealt with in being left out of your father’s will.”

“Whom does the decision rest with, then?”

“Mainly, I expect, with the Court of Probate. Until you have taken out probate the will really amounts to nothing;

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the trustees have no power to act upon it. Before you can take out probate you will have to prove that you are really Rupert Nutter.”

“Of course I am.”

“I do not say you are not. On the other hand, I am unable to swear that you are. And you will have to establish your identity by evidence that a court of justice will accept.”

“I can easily do that; there are people still living who will remember me—my sister Sarah, and I daresay many others.”

“That done, you will have to prove that the will is valid—I do not mean that it is not a forgery, but that it is a legal instrument. And there I fear you may have some difficulty. The question of domicile may arise. If Bertram, at the time he signed this will, was domiciled in Venezuela, it will have to be construed according to the law of England. And you may be required to produce the witnesses by whom it is attested.”

“Caramba! Why, they are in Venezuela.”

“Exactly. You see, Mr. Rivaz, it will not be quite as plain sailing as you may have supposed. And then there is another most important point. Will the court hold the evidence—this Spanish certificate—of Bertram’s death sufficient?”

“Why not? What can be more conclusive?”

“Well, you see, nobody saw him die, and his body has not been recovered. It might be considered necessary to send a commission to Venezuela to obtain further evidence; and, finally, the granting of probate might be opposed.”

“By whom?”

“By your niece.”

“You surely do not think she would contest the validity of this will, signed by her brother?”

“I express no opinion whatever; I merely suggest the possibility. These difficulties may not arise, of course; but there are sure to be delays.”

“I think I understand,” said Rupert, rising. “The first thing I have to do is, as you say, to establish my identity, and to that end I shall go at once and see my sister. Good-day to you, Mr. Rooke.”

“That fellow is a rogue,” was his mental comment as he passed out of the office, “and unless I am devilishly mistaken he has an axe of his own to grind. I must consult somebody else.”

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“So Bertram has left his uncle fifty thousand pounds,” muttered Rooke when he was left alone. “I expect that accounts for the earthquake. What a fool the lad was, to be sure! I do not think his uncle can get probate on that will; he shall not if I can help it. Meanwhile I must speak him fair, and not let him see my hand. He seems to be a sharp old fellow, and it would not be wise to set him at defiance.”

CHAPTER LIV.

BIDDEN TO HOPE.

Rupert's next proceeding was to call at a bank and open an account with a lodgement that ensured him the respectful attention of the manager.

“That will show I have got the sinews of war,” he said to himself, “and am not claiming my legacy because I am hard up.”

Then, after pacing the streets of Carrington for an hour or more, turning many things over in his mind, and mentally cursing the intricacies and uncertainties of English law (which, if sometimes keep an honest man out of his own, stand oftener between a

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

rogue and his plunder), returned to "The Earnsdale Arms," where he had engaged the best suite of rooms the house possessed.

"*Criado*," he said to the waiter whom he met in the lobby, "*hacerme la merced de traer el almuerzo*." Rupert generally thought in Spanish, and sometimes inadvertently expressed himself in that language.

"Yes sir, please sir, what sir?"

"Yes sir, please sir, what sir? It's clear you don't understand Spanish, anyhow. Bring me luncheon at once, and tell the landlord I want to speak to him."

The next moment the landlord—a very obsequious, fussy little man, with a little round face and a big red nose—appeared on the scene.

"Can you let me have a carriage at three o'clock, Mr. Clutterbuck?"

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"Certainly, sir; I have a very nice one-horse shay, quite at your service. I will take care that it is ready in time."

"A one-horse shay! Pray, Mr. Clutterbuck, what do you take me for?" said Rupert indignantly. "Do I look like a one-horse shay man? No, sir, I want a carriage and pair. If you have not got them, you must get them, and take care it is a good turn-out, fit for a gentleman's use."

"Yes, sir, certainly sir; you shall have the best turn-out in Carrington," returned the landlord humbly. "Might I ask where it is for, sir?"

"Diamond Hall."

"Certainly, sir. A carriage and pair for Diamond Hall at three o'clock. Certainly, sir, certainly."

Diamond Hall was a large, pretentious edifice, with extensive grounds and an avenue a mile long. The country people call it "Coyle Pit Ho," by way of commemorating the fact that the late Mr. Diamond had made his fortune out of coal.

Rupert's ring was answered by a tall footman with immense calves and a gorgeous livery, who made some difficulty about taking his card to Mrs. Diamond. She was not well, he asserted, and would not receive anybody. But Rupert insisted, and gained the point. "She will see me," he said. And she did, although she was one of those

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who had contended that Rivaz could not possibly be her brother; and that Bertram had been taken in by an impostor. But curiosity prevailed over scepticism, and the moment she saw Mr. Nutter Rivaz's card she directed that he should be shown into her room.

When Rupert first set eyes on her he thought some trick was being played on him. Surely that great obese woman, with a pasty face, heavy eyes, and white hair, could not be his once buxom sister Sarah!

For two or three minutes they scrutinised each other in silence.

"Well, Sarah, lass," said Rivaz, at length, "if I am as much altered as you are, I am not surprised you do not recognise me."

"You are Rupert," she exclaimed eagerly. "I could not have told the face, perhaps, but I should know that voice among ten thousand. I have not been called 'Sarah, lass,' for thirty years and more. I could almost have fancied it was my father speaking to me. You have got his nose and chin, but my mother's eyes and hair. What a time it is since

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you went away, Rupert! I was the handsomest lass in th'country side then, and now I am an ugly old woman; and father, and Martha, and Mary, and Alice, and all their husbands are all gone dead. Hardly any you knew are left. Where have you been this long while?"

This question elicited a long answer, followed by a still longer colloquy, at the end of which Sarah sent for her son, and asked her brother to take up his quarters at Diamond Hall. Percy warmly seconded the invitation. He espoused his uncle's cause with ardour, for he was much incensed against Alice for her rejection of his suit, and if Rupert got fifty thousand pounds left to him by Bertram, there would be so much the less for her. Rivaz, on his part, could not refuse an invitation which stamped him as the real Simon Pure, albeit he would have preferred the freedom of "The Earnsdale Arms." A few days later he received a powerful and unexpected ally in Mr. Earnsdale, upon whom, in order the further to "establish his identity," he called and reminded him of an incident that had occurred at Heaton Park races in days gone by. They had betted together, and the horse backed by Mr. Earnsdale broke down just at the finish, and Rupert won twenty pounds from him. Mr. Earnsdale remembered the incident perfectly, and he was so much impressed by the plausibility of Rupert's explanation, and

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interested in the story of his adventures, that he asked him to lunch, and kept him in talk a whole afternoon.

As for the will, it was found that nothing, save taking counsel's opinion on it, could be done until Alice passed her twentieth year.

Almost at the same time that Mr. Nutter Rivaz (he had dropped the "Doctor") was driving up the avenue of Diamond Hall, Alan Cuerdale, his "blushing honours thick upon him," was walking up the avenue of Crow Nest. He had passed his final examination with great distinction, won his scholarship, and made himself a name. An account of the brilliant university career of the Welsprings farmer's son had gone the round of the press, and the *Carrington Courier* had written a leading article about him. Nevertheless, Alan, who wore deep mourning, walked slowly and with bent shoulders, and his face was grave and sorrowful.

As his foot was on the doorstep he caught sight of a black robe at the further end of the garden, in the very Yew Tree Walk where, thirty years before, Ralph Norbreck and Alice Nutter had kept their tryst.

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"That is Alice," he muttered; "shall I go to her?" and following the bent of his thoughts, he went.

Her head was uncovered, her only ornaments a bunch of white jessamine—Bertram's favourite flower—at her neck, and on her bosom a double gold locket in which were enshrined the miniatures of her father, her mother, and her brother. She was walking with her eyes turned to the ground, and until Alan was close to her she did not see him. It was their first meeting since Bertram's death.

"Oh, Alan!" and she looked at him so pitifully and appealingly that he could hardly refrain from putting his arms round her and taking her to his heart there and then.

"You loved him, Alan?"

"As Jonathan loved David."

"And he loved you. How proud he would have been of your success, poor boy! He said you would become a great and distinguished man, and you have."

Alan shook his head deprecatingly.

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“Not yet, Miss Norbreck. But whatever I am, or may become, I owe it all to him. But for his help I should have been at a cart-tail all my life.”

It somehow jarred upon Alice to hear him call her “Miss Norbreck.” It seemed so distant, and now, in their common sorrow, they were so near.

“A noble brother and a loyal friend, was he not, Alan? What a beautiful letter you wrote me from Oxford! Nothing has given me so much comfort as that letter. It spoke to my heart. I think of it every day. I try to realise, that, though absent in body, he is with me in spirit, and—who knows? —perhaps able to read my thoughts.”

“I can see him now, and almost hear him speak,” said Alan dreamily. “And when I think of him think of you.”

“It is almost the same with me, for, lately, particularly since I got your letter, I have hardly ever thought of Bertie without thinking of you. Strange, is it not?”

“Strange, perhaps, but very pleasant for me to know,” said Alan, almost cheerfully. “For it makes me hope that, when I am far away, I shall sometimes be in your thoughts.”

“Far away! Where are you going?”

“To Canada. I have accepted the offer of a chair in a Canadian University.”

“And are you going soon?” asked Alice, with a sudden sinking of the heart.

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“Not for two or three months; but I leave for London to-morrow. I have undertaken to see the translation of an important Sanscrit work through the press, and it will keep me so closely occupied that I do not think I shall be able to pay more than one hurried visit to Wellsprings before I leave.”

“Oh, I am so sorry! I am lonely now, but I shall feel much more lonely when you are gone.”

“And I, how shall I feel,” exclaimed Alan passionately, “when the light of my life is gone out—when I can see you no more—when I am separated from you by thousands of miles of ocean? And yet it is because of you that I am going.”

“Oh, Alan! Because of me?”

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“Because I love you, Alice, with a hopeless, desperate love. I did not think to tell you; but it has come out in spite of myself. Yes, I dared to worship you when you were little more than a child, and I was driving a cart and milking cows—never thinking how mad it was to love one so much above me—one who could never be mine, And though I now realise the folly of my passion—oh, so bitterly!—I love you still. And if I would conquer my madness—if I would not let it conquer me, rather—I must go to some distant land where I shall never see you more.”

“Impossible!”

She spoke without knowing what she said. Here was a revelation, indeed—a double revelation. Alan loved her! His words seemed to strike a chord in her heart, of whose existence she had been as ignorant as of his feelings. What beautiful eyes he had, and how good and noble and clever he looked! And was he not Bertie’s best friend—and—and—Could she have been loving this man without knowing it? It seemed so; for her brain was in a whirl, she could not think, and, oh, how her heart beat!

“Of course it is impossible,” said Alan sadly, “I did not presume to offer you my love, Miss Norbreck. I have only explained why I feel constrained to go away. It was done impulsively, and I apologise for my rashness. I know quite well that you could not lower yourself to love the son of one of your own tenants, whose brother is a blacksmith, and whose sisters are factory girls!”

“It is not that, Alan. Oh, it is not that!” returned Alice, who was now all in a tremble. “I thought a great deal of my money and my position at one time, I know I did. Yes, I was proud. But since poor Bertie died everything

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seems so different. Would I not give all I have to see him one short minute? I said it was impossible because—because it seems so strange. I never thought of such a thing—and yet—and yet—oh! What am I saying-what shall I do?”

“And if I did presume—if I did make so bold,” said Alan, who had only half understood the import of her incoherent and almost inarticulate remarks—“if I did make so bold as to solicit your love, you would think, and others would say, that I wanted your money; that I was that meanest of two-legged creatures—a fortune-hunter. No! I

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

must go while I can command myself. If you were only poor! Good-bye, Miss Norbreck. Forgive my folly, and may God bless you!”

“Alan!”

He turned round, and there she stood before him with outstretched arms; and smiling, oh, so sweetly. He hesitated a moment, and then, drawing her to him, pressed his lips reverently on the girl's fair forehead.

“You will not go to Canada now?” she whispered.

“Not if you bid me hope.”

“I do bid you hope—and wait.”

“As long as Jacob waited for Rachel, if it be your will.”

And then they walked slowly towards the house, Alan's face still sad, for he could not forget his friend, but his eye beaming with a light that had not been there before.

CHAPTER LV.

IN THE MORICHE WOOD.

The incident mentioned by Gladys in her letter to Alice—the dream in which she saw Bertram in a cave and heard him utter her name—occurred about a fortnight before the time he was expected to return. It greatly alarmed her, and when the time came and he did not appear she lost courage and almost abandoned hope. It was in vain that her mother

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laughed at her forebodings, and tried to reason her out of her fears; Gladys refused to be comforted.

“You are really foolish,” Mrs. Earnsdale would say. “You forget that travelling to Venezuela is not like travelling in a civilised country. A horse might fall lame and delay Bertie a week; a swollen stream might detain him for days. He might miss the steamer by an hour; and sailing boats, besides not being always found when wanted, make very long trips sometimes. I think, too, he named too early a date for his return. I do not think, if all went well even, he could make the trip he contemplated in seven or eight

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

weeks, and he allowed no margin whatever for contingencies. There is not the least need for uneasiness, you foolish child! Make your mind easy. He will be here in ten days—mark me if he is not—and you cannot reasonably expect him sooner.”

“Oh, mother, dear I would give anything if I could think so; but poor Bertie said that, if he lived, he would be back in seven weeks, and it is now eight, and—we have heard nothing of him. And I fear, oh, I fear so much, that some evil has befallen him, and ever since that terrible dream I have had a presentiment——”

“Dream, indeed! Whoever heard such nonsense? I am really ashamed of you, Gladys. Forebodings founded on dreams are worse than ridiculous—they are wrong.”

“But I heard him calling to me as if he was in some terrible danger—heard him as distinctly as I heard you speak just now. The first cry wakened me, and I heard it twice afterwards. It is ringing in my ears yet, mother; such a pitiful cry!”

“Fiddle-de-dee! Did anybody ever hear such nonsense? You had a nightmare, that is all. Suppose all who had nightmares were to make themselves wretched about it! How Bertie will laugh when I tell him!”

“It was not a nightmare, mother,” said Gladys sadly.

“It is a warning. If Bertie had not been in danger or distress I should not have heard his voice.”

Although Mrs. Earnsdale ridiculed her daughter's fears so unmercifully, she was herself not free from uneasiness. When another fortnight passed, and Bertram came not, the uneasiness became anxiety. Ten days later, anxiety had developed into positive alarm, and she talked of sending somebody either to El Dorado or Ciudad Bolivar to make inquiries. Gladys did not seem surprised; she said very little; but her

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mother observed, with a heavy heart, that the girl's cheeks grew thinner and paler, and that, day by day, her manner became more listless, her melancholy more marked.

And so the days went on, each attenuating hope, and intensifying apprehension, until the arrival of Rivaz's letter, conveying the news, and describing the manner of Bertram's death, confirmed their worst fears.

Mrs. Earnsdale made a poor attempt to break the news to her daughter.

The Salamanca Corpus: Ralph Norbreck's Trust. (1885)

"I have news about Bertie," she said.

"You may as well say bad news, mother," answered Gladys. "I can read it in your face."

"You are right, my poor darling, it is bad news," said Mrs. Earnsdale, bursting into tears. "Poor Bertie is—"

"Dead!" said Gladys, in an intense whisper.

"And such a death. He—but you had perhaps better see the letter. You know the worst now."

"My dream was true, you see, mother; and (shuddering and covering her eyes with her hands) my poor Bertie was buried alive. Oh, mother, I think I shall die, too."

"My darling child! What can I do—what can I say to comfort you?" exclaimed Mrs. Earnsdale in a broken voice. "But you must not talk of dying. Try to keep up, if only for the sake of your mother, whose heart is breaking for you."

Gladys looked up with tearless eyes.

"I will try, mother, for your sake; but the light of my life is gone out. Buried alive! Buried alive! My poor boy!"

"Cannot you cry, dear?" said her mother, alarmed by her manner. "It would be such a relief if you could."

"Gladys shook her head, and rising from her chair, made as if she would leave the room."

"Where are you going, Gladys?" asked Mrs. Earnsdale anxiously.

"To the Moriche wood."

"I will go with you."

"Let me go alone, mother dear. It will perhaps do me good. I can think of him best there—how good he was and how happy we were!—and pray."

She went, and when she came back her mother noticed, with a feeling of inexpressible relief, that she had been weeping. Hardly a day passed afterwards that Gladys did not go up to the Moriche wood and spend two or three hours

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there. It seemed to do her good, she said; yet her melancholy increased rather than diminished; she spoke little, rarely smiled, and Marie Canton was the only friend whom she did not refuse to see. Even her she would see only occasionally.

Mrs. Earnsdale, seriously alarmed for her daughter's sanity, called in Dr. Mungo. He could give her but scant comfort.

"How can I minister to a mind diseased?" he asked. "With time and patience perhaps—"

"But can we do nothing?"

"Very little. It is a case of incipient melancholia, brought on by grief for the loss of her lover. Encourage her to talk, especially about him. Then, if you can, do something to interest her, and take her out of herself. Change of air and scene might do her good."

"Would it be well to take her to England, do you think?"

"Very likely. At any rate, the experiment is worth trying."

But Gladys absolutely refused to be taken to England. Her most cherished associations were with Trinidad. Her happiest days had been passed at Prospect; everything about it reminded her of Bertram; they had plighted their troth up there in the Moriche wood. If she left the island she should die. So Mrs. Earnsdale regretfully abandoned the project, and went with her daughter on a visit to the Countess Alvini, who shared in her anxiety for Gladys, and had been as much distressed as herself at the news of Bertram's terrible fate.

"I do not like those Rivazes or Nutters, or whatever they call themselves," she said, after she had read Rupert's letter, "and I much fear that poor Bertie has met with foul play."

"I cannot think that, Countess. If he had died in any other way there might be ground for suspicion, perhaps—but an earthquake!"

"I do not pretend to explain it, my dear, it is a very strange affair; but I am quite sure of this—that if Bertie had not made that will he would be here now, and your son-in-law."

"You do not know. I told you once that his name seemed familiar to me. I know now where I heard it. Nearly

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twenty years ago, when I was on a visit to Cuba, a party of Americans, acting in collusion with some Cuban patriots, landed on the coast, and tried to raise an insurrection. There was a fight, several were killed, and two or three were taken prisoners, brought to the capital, tried by court-martial, and condemned to death; but one of them, of the name of Rivaz, saved his life by revealing the names of his Cuban confederates. Because of his treachery six young men, all of good family and position, were shot on the *plaza*. I know the traitor was an Englishman, because he appealed to the British Consul for protection. I have not the least doubt that this Mr. Rivaz, of El Dorado, is the man, and a man who would betray his friends to save his life is quite capable of murdering his nephew to gain a fortune."

"I think so, too; but there is always the doubt whether he is the man or not."

"I have no doubt."

"But you forget that it was not his uncle who went to the *llanos* with Bertie, it was his cousin."

"I think I have heard of a proverb, 'like father, like son.' The one is probably quite as bad as the other. And as for the earthquake, it may be only an excuse, you know."

"What would you advise me to do then?"

"Send a trusty agent up the Orinoco to make inquiries on the spot."

"It is a good idea," said Mrs. Earnsdale. "I will."

But she was spared the necessity by the appearance, a few days later, of Brockmann. He came expressly to offer his sympathy and help to Bertram's betrothed and her mother, and to tell them how greatly he was grieved by his friend's shocking and untimely end.

Mrs. Earnsdale asked him if he thought it possible that Bertram had met with foul play.

"I do not think it is, Mrs. Earnsdale," was the answer. "The Rivazes are not very good men, perhaps—South American politicians and adventurers rarely are—but they are not capable of murdering a kinsman and a guest. Besides, I happen to know that Blas's story is true. I met on the *Virtuous Maiden* a German merchant, from La Guayra, who was interested in the mines of Miraflores, and he had seen a letter from Müller, the

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manager, giving an account of the occurrence, in no respect differing from that of Blas, and making special mention of the death of the young Englishman, Norbreck.”

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This settled the matter. The Countess Alvini's suspicion was clearly without foundation in fact; and when the elder Rivaz called at Prospect, on his way to England, Mrs. Earnsdale received him cordially, and Gladys, who from the first had refused to believe that her lover's kinsmen were traitors, charged Rupert with a message for Alice, and accepted the present which he offered her in the name of his son.

Rupert's visit, indeed, appeared to rouse Gladys somewhat from her lassitude; but after he left she became worse than ever. It was almost impossible to draw her into conversation, nothing interested her, she slept badly, her face grew still paler, her cheeks more wan, and it was evident that her melancholia was making serious inroads on her health. Her mother, almost in despair, tried every means she could think of to allay the grief which was eating into the girl's life. Friends were invited, visits made, excursions undertaken, but all to no purpose; and, as a last expedient, Mrs. Earnsdale was thinking of taking Gladys to England, whether she would or not, when they were surprised by a visit from Blas Rivaz. He had come to Port of Spain on business, he said, and he profited by the opportunity to pay his respects and offer his sympathy to Mrs. and Miss Earnsdale. His manner was quiet and subdued, and though several months had now gone by since the catastrophe at Miraflores, he seemed to feel the death of his cousin keenly. Rather to her mother's surprise, Gladys appeared pleased that Blas had called. She asked him many questions about Bertram, about their journey across the *llanos*, and its fatal termination. Mrs. Earnsdale, glad to see her daughter take an interest in anything, invited Blas to dinner. He came, and Gladys kept him in talk all the evening on the same absorbing topic. He would much rather have talked about anything else; but he played his part well, for he was bent on winning her favour, and before he went away she was convinced that Blas, so far from being Bertie's enemy, had been his attached friend, and sincerely mourned his untimely end.

“You will come again before you go?” she said as he took his leave.

“If you will permit me.”

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"Certainly," said Mrs. Earsdale. "We shall be glad to see you at any time."

He did go again—several times; and every time he went he fancied Gladys looked upon him more graciously. For

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Blas knew that he was handsome, and did not believe that any girl could long resist him.

Once when he went—his last visit as it turned out—both the ladies were out. Mrs. Earnsdale was at the Countess Alvini's and Gladys has gone up to the Moriche wood. He knew where the Moriche wood was, and resolved to follow her. The opportunity was one that might not recur.

She was sitting on the fallen branch of a great tree, under the fronded roof of the mighty palms, gazing with wistful eyes over the melancholy waters of Triste towards the empurpled mountains of the Spanish Main—thinking, as always, of her lost love; and longing wearily for the time when she should join him in that mysterious spirit-world whither she believed he had summoned her on the memorable night when she saw him in a dream and heard his cry of despair.

So profound was her reverie that Blas almost touched her before she knew he was present.

"Miss Earnsdale," he said, bending low and doffing his Panama hat.

"I beg your pardon," he went on, "for following you here, and intruding on your privacy; but as your mother was out, and I shall probably very soon leave Port of Spain, and may have no further opportunity of seeing you, I thought I might venture to take the liberty."

"I certainly do not like to be disturbed when I come here," she answered gently, "for I come to think of Bertie. It was in this wood—, however we can talk about him (smiling), that will do almost as well.

"D—n Bertie," Blas mentally ejaculated; but adapted himself to circumstances with a good grace, enumerated, for the twentieth time, his cousin's virtues, and related again the story of their eventful journey. But he mentioned for the first time the incident of the attempted assassination, and the death of the *zambo*—with the difference that he made himself the hero of it. According to his account, it was he who shot the *ladron*, and

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saved Bertram's life. His excuse for not telling her before was that he feared to give her pain. He hinted, too, that modesty—reluctance to refer to an adventure in which he had played the leading part—had something to do with his reticence.

"You are very good," she said warmly and with a look, as he thought, warmer than her words, "almost as good as

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Bertie, I think, and I thank you from my heart for your Devotion to him. If ever I can do anything to repay you—"

"You can, you can." interrupted Blas, in a voice tremulous with passion. "Let me take his place."

"Let you take his place!" she said, rising to her feet, and regarding him with a look of intense surprise.

"Yes, Gladys, let me love you. Let me love you, did I say? I do love you, love you more than words can tell. Let me be your slave, rather, and you will forget your grief in a new love."

"You dare to speak to me of love, and Bertram not six months dead!"

"You think I am too impetuous, that I make my avowal too soon. But you forget that I have Spanish blood in my veins. It is not in my nature to wait and woo like a phlegmatic Englishman. I worship the very ground you tread on. I have loved you since I first set eyes on you, and until you consent to be mine I swear that neither of us shall leave this wood," and as he spoke he tried to take her hand.

"I consent to be yours!" said Gladys, recoiling from him with a gesture of horror. "Oh, what have I done to deserve this insult? Blas Rivaz, I see now that you are a bad man and a false friend. I could almost believe that what they say about you is true—that you betrayed poor Bertie and caused his death."

"It is a foul slander, whoever says it," answered Blas, again approaching Gladys, who again evaded him. "What better proof could I give of my friendship than that, though I loved you, I saved his life?"

"MURDERER AND LIAR!"

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Blas, looking as if he had seen a Gorgon's head, drew hastily backward until he brought up against a palm tree, where he remained as if transfixed.

"Don't be afraid, darling, it is I—Bertram—in the flesh," and Gladys, with a cry of surprise and joy, recognised her lover's voice, and felt herself folded in his protecting arms.

"Yes, murderer and liar," repeated Bertram. "You tried to take my life, and now you are trying to rob me of that which is dearer than life itself."

Blas, finding that he had no ghostly foe to deal with plucked up his courage.

"You were not buried alive, then, after all," he said.

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"How I escaped I know not, but you have certainly left your senses behind you. Did I make the earthquake? "

"No, but your bribed Diego Cuchillo to lose me in the mine, or throw me down one of the shafts. You bribed that *zambo* at El Rastro to murder me while I slept, and it was you, and nobody else, who put the cactus leaf under poor Castaña's saddle. Again, I say, murderer and liar, treacherous host, and false friend."

"Come drop that, Bertie, or it will be worse for you," growled Blas savagely, putting his hand into the breast of his white jacket.

"What have I done to offend you?" continued Bertram, heedless of interruption. "I promised to share my fortune with your father, and I should have kept my word. I made my will in his favour and yours. I did all I could for you—why should you seek my life?"

"Because my father wanted your money, and I wanted Gladys, and, *por dios*, we will have them yet."

As Blas spoke he took his hand from his breast, and with it a glittering bowie, and made a rush at Bertram, who, unarmed, and encumbered with Gladys, was ill prepared to defend himself. But behind him followed swiftly a dark form which had emerged from the shadow of the palm tree, and as Rivaz drew back his arm for the upward stroke, a huge hand was placed on his shoulder, and the next moment he lay prone on the ground.

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Gladys screamed, and clung closer to Bertram. "Shall I crush the life out of him, master?" asked Cuchillo, putting his heavy foot on the prostrate man's chest. And the Venezuelan could have done it; he was six and a half feet high and built like a bull-fighter.

"No, Cuchillo, let him rise, but do not let him go."

Blas got up, looking very pale and very savage.

"I have done with you, Blas; but look here——"

"I have not done with you, though, and *por dios*——"

"Silence! I have done with you; but if you do not quit Trinidad in twenty-four hours I shall have you locked up."

"What for?"

"Murder."

"You cannot. You have no proofs, and Trinidad is not Venezuela. What for, I ask?"

"For attempting to murder me just now. There is more than sufficient evidence to convict you, and if convicted, your sentence will be penal servitude for life. For the shake of

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our kinship I give you one more chance, although I have not the least hope that you will turn it to good account. But I warn you that I shall be as good as my word. To-morrow afternoon, at this time, information shall be given to the superintendent of police at Port of Spain, and if you are then in the island your arrest is certain. Now go. Cuchillo, take Señor Rivaz down to Prospect, the house at which we called on our way hither, and put him in his carriage and see him off to Puerto-España. I will follow presently."

CHAPTER LVI.

A STRANGE STORY.

"Oh, Bertie," murmured Gladys, who all this time had been leaning, half fainting, on her lover's arm; "if it were possible to die of joy I think I should do so now. But I am

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sure you must be tired of holding me; let us sit down here, where I have so often sat, thinking of you, dear, and wishing I might soon follow you. Kiss me again, put your arm round me, let me nestle closer to you. It makes it seem more real. Oh, I shall never let you leave me again. But how terribly you are altered! Your cheeks are hollow, your eyes sunken, you are burnt red-black. How you must have suffered, my poor boy! It is like a dream. And to think that you should come to the Moriche wood just as a dreadful Blas was offering me his odious love. I thought him good because he seemed so much attached to you. And I was here with him alone, and he tried to kill you again! I should have killed him if he had. Who is Cuchillo? How fortunate he was with you! Tell me all about it, darling—here, where we have spent so many happy hours, but none so happy as this.”

She laid her hand on his breast, and after gazing at each other a few minutes in silent happiness, Bertram began his story. He began with the start from El Dorado, and after telling of all that befell on the journey over the *llanos* and at

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Miraflores before he went into the mine, he continued as follows:—

“The entrance to the mine was by a horizontal gallery, driven into the steep of the hill—a tunnel, in fact, large enough for a tall man to walk in upright. It went a long way into the mountain, and we passed several lateral galleries—old workings for most part—which, Cuchillo told me, nobody ever entered, except out of curiosity. After walking some time—perhaps ten or fifteen minutes—along this passage, we came to a shaft—a perpendicular hole like a coal-pit—which it was necessary for us to descend, the main workings being below. But there being no sort of hoisting arrangement, we had to go down a ladder—such a ladder—trees, or tree branches, with notches in them, and up these ladders miners had to carry the ore on their backs. Cuchillo went first. I followed slowly, for it was rather hard work, and to one unaccustomed to it, not free from danger. We were about half-way down, and I was asking my companion how much further it was, when we were startled by a peal of subterranean thunder, the most fearful sound I ever heard, and which I hope shall never hear again. There was death in

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it. At the same time the ladder to which I was clinging swayed to and fro like the mast of a ship in a high wind, and I thought my last hour had come.”

“We shall be safer here, señor,” shouted Cuchillo.

“Here’ meant the mouth of the old gallery into which he had stepped. I joined him, and well it was I did so, for the next moment a lot of rocks, each bigger than the other, came tumbling down the shaft. Two more, but less severe, shocks followed, and then all was still. I breathed again, and began to think it was not so bad after all.”

“Shall we go down or up?” I asked Cuchillo.

“Wait,” he said; “there may be another shock yet.”

After waiting another half-hour, and no more stones falling, he thought we might venture to leave our refuge.

“I wonder what has become of the poor fellows at the bottom,” he said; “they went down only a few minutes before us; but I will first go to the top and see how things are there, There is no need for you to go.”

So he put a fresh candle in his hat, and went, mounting with the agility of a monkey, though he is such a big fellow. In a few minutes he came back with a scared face.

“What is wrong, Cuchillo?” I asked.

“We are buried alive, señor; the roof of the gallery has

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fallen in, and the top of the shaft is covered with great rocks.”

“I could not believe him. ‘I will go myself,’ I said; and I went.”

“It was true; we were shut in. As well try to remove the mountain itself, as attempt to shift the mass of stones and earth that blocked the mouth of the shaft. Still, I could not believe we were prisoners. I did not even give up hope of reaching Trinidad before the time fixed for our marriage.”

“ ‘Is there no other way out?’ I asked Cuchillo when I got back.

“No, señor,’ he answered, with a gesture of despair. ‘Neither you nor I, nor anybody who is now in these mines will ever see the light of heaven again. We are all dead men.’”

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“And then, to my utter surprise, the man fell on his knees and asked me to forgive him. I shall never forget his appearance as he looked up at me in the dim light of our two candles, his face covered with thick beads of perspiration and convulsed with the agony of his mind. The earthquake, he said, had been sent as a punishment for his sins. He was condemned to die because he had agreed to commit a murder.

“But why do you ask my pardon?” I demanded.”

“Because it was you I undertook to murder—to lose in the workings or throw down a shaft.”

“What harm had I done you that you should want to kill me?”

“None, señor, none; and I should never have had the heart to do it—but I took money and gave my word. It was the other English señor. He gave me this morrocota (taking a gold piece from his pocket), and promised me two more if you did not come out alive. May the Holy Virgin forgive me!—and you, señor, will you grant me forgiveness before I die?”

“I saw no reason to doubt the sincerity of Cuchillo’s confession. It squared with facts, and it opened my eyes to many things to which I had previously been blind. My Aunt Cassandra’s warning—the cactus leaf under Castaña’s saddle—the attempt to murder me at El Rastro—all pointed to the conclusion that my murder was planned by Blas and his father before we left El Dorado; and now Blas had bribed this poor ignorant fellow to lose me in the mine—leave me in some remote working, to perish miserably of hunger. It cut

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me to the soul, Gladys, to think that these two men, for whom I had done so much, for whom I intended to do more, whom I had obliged in every possible way—men of my own blood—should be so vile as to compass my death because I had made a will in their favour. And then the full horror of my position burst upon me. Shut up in the heart of a mountain to die a death of lingering agony! In a month was to be my wedding day. I thought how you would sorrow for me. I thought of Alice and dear old Crow Nest; and in my despair I threw myself on the ground, and called your name aloud, and prayed to God for help!”

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“I heard you, darling, and saw you; but go on—I will tell you about that afterwards. Your prayer was answered.”

“I think so. At any rate, I felt better after it, and resolved not to despair without making an effort to escape. It seemed to me that in a mine with so many passages, in which, too, there were natural grottoes, there must surely be more than one road out. I spoke in that sense to Cuchillo; I tried to encourage him with the assurance of my entire forgiveness, and proposed to explore every gallery and shaft we could get at. I had a small compass with me, so that we should always know in what direction we were making. He said he would go with me anywhere; but he had no hope. He knew the mine as well as anybody, and had never heard of any way out except the one that was made up. Then we went to the bottom of the shaft, to see how it fared with the other poor fellows. Cuchillo feared they were all killed, and so they were—all save one man who lay crushed under a piece of rock, and he was dying. We did all we could for him, removed the rock, arranged him a sort of bed, and I gave him a drink out of my flask. Cuchillo said the man knew the mine well, and I asked him if he knew of a way out. No, he did not; but a few days previously he had accidentally discovered a passage leading from the grotto, of which Müller, the manager, had told us. He described its position; the opening was in the south west corner, under a heap of rubbish, and he had carefully covered it up again, intending, at the earliest opportunity, to explore it himself, in the hope that he might possibly earn the reward always given to the miner who found a fresh vein of gold-bearing quartz. ”

“We watched by the poor fellow until he breathed his last; and when we had closed his eyes, and covered his body with a layer of earth, I proposed to Cuchillo that we should pay a visit to the grotto.

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“In order to reach it we had to descend another shaft, at the bottom of which was a sort of store-room, containing a quantity of mining implements, *machetes* (cutlasses for cutting wood), bags and baskets for transporting mineral, some jerked beef, and miners' garments (for the men generally worked stark naked, and only put on their

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clothes when they went out). There were also a good stock of candles, gunpowder and fuses, and some stuff in an indiarubber bag, which I took for nitro-glycerine.”

“After passing through a great many passages we reached the grotto. It was a large cave, with a roof so lofty that Cuchillo could not touch it with his *machete*. The walls were of limestone, divided by a broad vein of quartz, but without any show of gold. The grotto had evidently been formed by the action of water; and I was glad to hear from Cuchillo that, though the mine was dry then, it made a good deal of water in the rainy season. This showed that the water came from above, and, as it drained quickly away, there must needs be a channel, probably several channels, leading to the foot of the mountain, and dipping, as I judged, in a westerly direction. Whether we could find one large enough to let us out was another question.”

“We removed the heap of rubbish described by the dying miner. The opening was too narrow to admit Cuchillo, but we enlarged it with the pickaxes and spades we had brought with us, and, as we went on, it gradually widened. Then we made a meal of jerked beef—water we procured from a little spring in one of the galleries—and lay down on some sacks. I don't know how long we slept, for I had forgotten to wind up my watch; but when I awoke, we set to work again, and terrible work it was. Sometimes we had to crawl on our bellies; every now and again we had to widen the passage, and the position we were compelled to assume was so constrained that we could only work a few minutes at a time. We dared not blast, for fear of bringing down the roof, and blocking up the passage altogether. We always returned to the grotto to sleep.”

“And so, went on for several days—how many I cannot tell, for we quite lost count of time—until, after a hard spell of crawling and hewing, we suddenly emerged into a cave nearly as wide as the grotto, and at the end of it we thought we could see a faint gleam of daylight. How we ran, and how we blessed that bit of sunshine, for sunshine it was! Cuchillo danced and shouted for joy, and I was so overcome,

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Gladys, that I lay down and wept. I saw your face in that sunshine, darling.”

“But we were not out of the wood by a long way—into it, rather. The light came from a narrow slit formed by two big rocks. There was no other way out, and the

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passage was too small to admit even me, much less Cuchillo, and we could not widen it with our mining tools—it would have taken weeks. We had widened the other channels by removing the hard sand deposited by the water, but the bottom of this passage, by reason of its steepness, held no deposit. It was as smooth and as hard as marble. ‘We must blast,’ said Cuchillo.”

“That was my own idea, and then I bethought me of the nitro-glycerine. It is fearfully dangerous stuff to handle; but as it is so much more powerful than gunpowder, and as, owing to the hardness of the rock and our inability to sharpen our tools, we could not do much drilling, we resolved to use it. So we fetched the nitro-glycerine, and we handled it very tenderly, I can tell you. Cuchillo carried it on his back the greater part of the way; when the passage was too narrow to admit of his doing so we carried it between us. This done, we drilled our holes—that was an affair of two days—charged them, lighted the fuses, and then got back as far out of the way as we could. The effect of the blast was tremendous. One of the rocks was shivered into atoms, and a passage opened wide enough for two or three men to walk though abreast.”

“The sudden rush of light almost overcame us. We felt dazed, and for a few minutes could distinguish nothing. As soon as our eyes became accustomed to the glare we went forward, and began to look about us. All at once Cuchillo stopped short, gave a great shout, and, picking up a fragment of the blasted rock, held it before me.”

“‘*Mira, mira*’ he exclaimed, ‘*el madre del oro!*’

“And so it was—‘the mother of gold,’ a piece of beautiful white quartz, studded all over with veins and bosses of virgin gold. We had brought down a huge mass of auriferous quartz. It was all alike; the walls of the cave were seamed with broad bands of it; the fragments on the floor gleamed with it, and the sand in the gully below, as we afterwards found, abounds with the precious metal.”

“There was truth in the old legend, after all. The country had not been called Oro for nothing.”

“But we did not care much for gold just then. We

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wanted to know where we were and what we should do next. We knew from the direction we had taken that we had traversed the mountain from side to side, and were now on the side opposite Miraflores. But getting back to Miraflores, or anywhere else, was another question. We had emerged at the base of the mountain. Above us were scarpd rocks, impossible to climb; before us, a pathless primeval forest, impassable as a wall. My heart sank within me. A few minutes previously, when we saw the sun after so many hours of darkness, I hoped that I might reach Trinidad, if not by the time fixed for our marriage, at any rate before you became seriously alarmed. But, hemmed in between those beetling crags and serried trees, we were as much prisoners as ever.”

“‘What shall I do?’ I asked Cuchillo.

“‘Cut ourselves out.’

“‘How long will it tale us?’

“‘*Quien sabe* who knows?’

“So we set to work. We knew that the Orinoco lay almost due south, and we guessed it to be some thirty or forty miles away, in a straight line. But we hoped before we had gone very far to strike some stream, or the dry bed of one, or a beaten track, or to come across some *hacienda* or *ranch*, where we might get help and information.

“I think that cutting through the forest was harder than the struggle in the mine. ‘The high woods’ of Trinidad and the forests about El Dorado are nothing to be compared with it for thickness of timber and rank luxuriance of vegetation. Going straight was out of the question. We had to avoid a huge tree here, dodge a bit of swampy ground there, double or climb over ‘fallen monarchs’ everywhere; at every step we had to clear away brush, and cut through the network of leaves, air plants, and vines that filled the air and stopped the way. It was almost dark, and in that stifling atmosphere—with mosquitoes buzzing about our heads, and jiggers, sandflies, and ticks sucking our blood, and burying themselves in our flesh—it was impossible to work long at a time. The forest was a regular Inferno, a place of torment; and, taking into consideration the *détours* we were compelled to make, I do not think we advanced at the rate of more than a mile a week. We slept always in the cave, for only there were we safe from wild animals and beyond reach of the winged fiends of the forest. As for food, we did not do badly.

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“Cuchillo contrived a bow and arrow with which he shot monkeys and squirrels; there were bread-fruit and wild

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banana trees in plenty, and when we wanted water we had only to tap the loop of a liantass.

“Then rain set in; and we could do nothing but lie in the cave and watch it come down. Oh, that was a weary time, Gladys! When we were working in the forest I had the consolation of thinking that every stroke of my *machete* brought me nearer to home and you. But that waiting in the cave neatly broke my heart. By way of doing something, we removed the loose stones from the floor, and I taught Cuchillo his letters by forming them with a pointed stick in the golden sand. He can read and write a little now. I taught him also a little geography and arithmetic, and gave him some notions of history. The poor fellow thinks me a prodigy of learning, and is greatly attached to me. He says he will never leave me; and there is nothing he would not do for me, even to the sacrifice of his life.

“But there is an end to everything; at last the rain ceased, and we could set to work again. This time we had better luck; we struck a stream, which, swollen by the rains, was deep enough to float a small raft that Cuchillo and I contrived to put together. In two days we were fortunate enough to reach a small clearing and *hacienda* belonging to a German—there are a good many German settlers in Venezuela—who gave us a hospitable reception and some clothes, for we were almost naked. Then I fell ill, and, ardently as I desired to go on, I was compelled to lie by nearly a month. Even Cuchillo was nearly worn out. When we were able to continue our journey, we took passage by a trading boat for Ciudad Bolivar. That was an affair of a fortnight, for the boat stopped at nearly every village on the banks of the river, and lay to at nights. At Ciudad Bolivar I called on one of the principal merchants of the place, one of whose partners I had met at Caracas, and told him my story—at any rate, so much of it as I deemed expedient; and, though I had no credentials to show him, he received me with the utmost kindness, and gave me all the money I wanted against my draft on Trinidad. He told me, amongst other news, that Müller and his friends had definitively given up all idea of working the

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mines of Miraflores, and while I was waiting for the steamer I denounced them afresh, as well as the mine I had discovered on the other side of the mountain.”

“Denounced them! What does that mean?”

“Anybody who discovers, or rediscovers a mine in Venezuela can denounce it; that is to say, by giving notice in

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a certain quarter in a prescribed form, the mine becomes the denouncer's property.”

“That mine is all yours then?”

“Yes,” said Bertram carelessly; “and unless I am much mistaken it is one of the richest gold mines in the world. But never mind that now. I have something here (kissing her) more precious than all the gold that exists.”

“You know nearly all now, I think. When I arrived at Trinidad the very first thing I did was to see Mr. Canton and inquire after you. He told me how ill you were, but he was pleased to say that he thought I should be able to cure you; and then he mentioned that Blas Rivaz was in the island, and a frequent visitor at Prospect, and he had reason to know that he was here this very afternoon.”

“I did not like that at all. The idea of Blas being with you, that he was polluting Prospect with his presence, was simply unbearable. As I knew, moreover, that there was no conceivable atrocity he was not capable of committing, I was even alarmed. So I hired a couple of saddle-horses, and Cuchillo and I rode here at best speed by the sea-shore. You know the rest.”

“Oh, Bertie, what hardships you have gone through, and how nobly you have borne them! And what a fine fellow Cuchillo is!”

“Yes, without Cuchillo's help I should never have seen you again, darling. Blas little thought, when he bribed him to destroy me, that he was taking the surest means of preserving my life.”

“It is quite a romance, Bertie; you must write an account of your life and adventures, like Robinson Crusoe.”

“Or get some fellow to do it for me.”

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“Oh, but we must go!” claimed Gladys, rising suddenly from the tree. “I am forgetting everything but you, dear boy. See, the sun is setting, and I should like to be at home before mother returns from La Solitude. Who knows what the servants will be saying?”

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CHAPTER LVII.

RIVAZ AT BAY.

When the lovers reached Prospect they found as Gladys rather feared they would, the household in a state of great excitement. Jupiter, the black butler, the only servant to whom Bertram had spoken (and nearly frightened into a fit thereby), declared that he had seen the devil and Massa Norbreck's ghost, and when Bertram reappeared there was a good deal of screaming among the womenfolks, and a general skedaddle to remote parts of the house. But Gladys soon succeeded in pacifying them; and, when Mrs. Earnsdale returned, though the excitement was far from being allayed, order was completely restored.

Gladys received her mother alone, but Bertram was not far off.

“I hope you have had a pleasant ride, mother,” said the girl gaily. “How did you leave the Countess?”

“Very well; but——”

Gladys was positively laughing. Mrs. Earnsdale conceived a dreadful suspicion that she was going out of her mind. She had not laughed for months.

“What is the matter with you, dear?”

“Nothing; only I am so happy.”

“Where the bee sucks, there suck I:

In a cowslip's bell I lie;

There I couch, when owls do cry.

On the bat's back I do fly

After summer merrily.

Merrily, merrily shall I live now

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Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.”

There could be no question of it, she was mad.

“My poor darling,” said Mrs. Earnsdale soothingly. “what has happened? You are very ill, I fear.”

“Not ill, mother, gay. What do you think? I have news of Bertie.”

Mad to a certainty.

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“Don’t talk such nonsense, dear; you only distress me. Pray don’t.”

“What would you say if I were to tell you I had seen Bertie?”

“I should not believe you.”

“What would you say if I were to tell you that Bertie is here just now?”

“I should say you were out of your mind, my poor child.”

“Bertie, Bertie, come hither!” cried the poor child, clapping her hands and dancing round her bewildered mother.

Bertram came forth from his hiding-place, and Mrs. Earnsdale, staring first at one and then the other as if she had seen something uncanny, sank into a chair.

“What—what—what?” she exclaimed, so soon as she recovered power of utterance. “Is it real—or—or only an optical illusion?”

“Quite real,” said Bertram, kissing her.

“Bertie has suffered terribly, mother. He has been buried alive, and undergone hardships and dangers that will make your heart bleed when you hear of them. But he is nearly well. I do not think I shall ever let him out of my sight again now.”

“And very happy,” added Bertram, looking fondly at Gladys.

Then he had to tell his story a second time; but as he was not *tête-à-tête* with his sweetheart he managed to tell it more briefly than on a former occasion.

“And now, Mrs. Earnsdale dear,” said Bertram, when he had finished, “I have a great favour to ask you.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“I should like to start for England by the next steamer. She leaves in about ten days, I think. I fear my Uncle Rupert may be working some mischief. The Norbreck

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Trust is almost at an end, and I must look after my affairs. But before I go I should like to be married. Everything is in order; the settlements were drawn before I started on my unfortunate journey, and we need not have a grand wedding, you know."

"I do not see why not. It is long past the time originally fixed, and the Lord Chancellor's authorisation is still valid. Yes, you had better be married (smiling), particularly as Gladys is not going to trust you out of her sight any more. What do you say, Gladys?"

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"Whatever Bertie wishes I will do, mother. After what he has suffered I can refuse him nothing, poor boy!"

A week later they were married, and their passages taken by the *Ebro* for St. Thomas, *en route* for England. Cuchillo was to go with them; Mrs. Earnsdale would follow in a fortnight.

Bertram settled twenty thousand pounds on Gladys, which he proposed to provide on his arrival in England. All that Gladys might inherit from her mother was included in the settlement, as well as a legacy from her grandmother which brought in about three hundred a year.

Among the letters that had arrived in his absence, Bertram found one from Guanacho. The *zambo* who had tried to assassinate him was not shot dead after all; he recovered consciousness, and lived long enough to make a very startling confession. He said that he had been hired to murder Señor Norbreck by the other English señor, who had given him fifty pesos, and promised him fifty more if he should succeed. But the story was so improbable, and the fellow such an *embustero* (liar and boaster), that Guanacho could not believe it without corroboration. Bertram would know better than he whether or not Bas had any motive for wanting to get rid of him, and how far the charge was likely to be true.

In reply to this letter Bertram wrote to the general a brief account of all that had befallen him since he left El Rastro. He had not the least doubt, he said, that the *zambo*'s story was true to the letter, and he felt sure that it was Blas who had put the cactus leaf under Castaña's saddle.

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Blas left Port of Spain in a *faluca* an hour before the time fixed by Bertram for his denunciation to the police. One of the objects of his visit to Trinidad had been to procure a supply of money for the service of the mines. He procured the money and a still larger sum, which he raised by “spouting” the bills of lading of a cargo of silver ore, the property of the mining company; but he did not go back to El Dorado.

This finished the company. Treffry, having no money to go on with, could not continue his operations. There was, in truth, very little to operate upon; and when he informed his employers of the disappearance, or rather the non-appearance of Mr. Blas, he told them that the veins in most of the mines had run out, and the “pots” had all been emptied. There were probably more veins and more “pots” not visible to the

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naked eye, and he was quite ready to conduct a series of explorations for their discovery—if the company would place the necessary funds at his disposal. On this the company sent out a first-class mining engineer (as they ought to have done at first) to examine and report, and his report being the reverse of encouraging, it was resolved to abandon the mines and liquidate the company. The assets did not much more than cover the costs of liquidation; but, as Dunbar observed to Lowe Middling, it might have been much worse. The syndicate had made a nice thing; most of the members of it had sold their shares at a premium, and the ultimate losers were people they knew nothing of and cared little about.

“All the same,” observed the promoter, “I wish El Dorado had been a success, but it is the fortune of war; what can you say more?”

Bertram was anxious to take his Uncle Rupert by surprise.

“If he gets word of my coming,” he observed to Gladys as they steamed past the Needles, “he may go, and unless I come upon him unexpectedly, he will braze it out and deny everything; he may do so in any case, for Rupert Rivaz is not easily thrown off his guard, and I mean to expose and discomfit him if I can.”

“But would it not be better, dear, to keep and avoid scandal—for the sake of the family, I mean. As for your uncle, I think there is nothing too bad for him.”

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“The best way to avoid scandal, Gladys, is to let the truth be known. The good opinion of people who would think any the worse of me because kinsmen whom I tried to benefit have proved basely unworthy of my kindness, is not worth having. I do not mean to publish Rupert Nutter’s iniquities on the housesteps; but I do mean to let him know that he is found out, and to expose him in such a way as to render it impossible for him to remain in England.”

“You are right, Bertie, as you always are. What is best to be done, then?”

“We must first ascertain where he is, and then try to see him before he hears of our arrival. I’ll tell you what we will do—we will leave the train at Preston, post to Crow Nest, and on our way there call at Earnsdale Park, ask where Rupert is, and act accordingly.”

“And we shall see Uncle Hugh and Lucy. Nothing could be better.”

It was evening when they reached Earnsdale Park. In order

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not to startle the inmates too much, Gladys left Bertram in the carriage.

“Miss Gladys,” exclaimed, with a look of intense surprise, the footman, an old servant, who came to the door.

“Not exactly, Thomas; but never mind that. Are my uncle and Miss Earnsdale at home?”

“Yes, Miss Gladys.”

“They are at dinner, I suppose. Anybody with them?”

“Yes, there is the Mr. Horaces (Earnsdale), the Mr. Henrys, Dr. Corktight, Mr. Prattler, the new curate, and Mr. Nutter-Rivaz.”

Gladys ran back to the carriage.

“Bertie, your uncle is here. What shall I do?”

“See him, by all means.”

“Shall I arrange it?” she asked, after a moment’s thought.

“Certainly, my pet. I leave it all to you; but do not on any account let him guess I am here.”

“Come with me, then.”

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"Can you keep a secret—for me, Thomas?" she asked the footman, with a bewitching smile. "I am sure you can. This gentleman is my husband, Mr. Norbreck."

"What! Him as was killed?" asked the man, with a bewildered look, for he had not recognised Bertram.

"Yes; but as you see, he has come to life again. Now, I don't want anybody to know we are here—at any rate, anybody in the dining-room—except my cousin, to whom I will presently send a note. So don't say a word; but send up those two portmanteaus to my old room, it is sure to be unoccupied, and tell the coachman to take the carriage round to the stables. Cuchillo had better go too (to Bertram). Speak to him while I scribble a few words for Lucy. Lend me your pencil, dear."

"See, Thomas. When Miss Earnsdale leaves the dining-room—not before—will you please give her this note? Come, Bertie, I think we may get up-stairs unobserved. But if we are seen, Thomas, we are visitors—Mr. and Mrs. Bertram."

"Shall I send you one of the maids? Agnes, for instance; you remember Agnes?"

"Of course I do. Send her by all means. I will make a confidante of her; she will be a great help."

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When, half an hour later, Miss Earnsdale read her cousin's note, she gave a suppressed scream, asked her guests to excuse her "one minute," and hurried up-stairs. At the sight of a bronzed, long-bearded man in Gladys's dressing-room, she screamed in earnest, and started back in surprise and dismay.

"This gentleman is my husband, dear," said Gladys archly. "Let me introduce him. Mr. Bertram Norbreck, Miss Earnsdale——"

"But—but he is dead and buried; you are joking; it is not possible; there is some mystification, —and yet, now I look at him. No, it cannot be! Are you really Bertram Norbreck?"

"I have that honour," said Bertram, bowing.

"And Gladys's husband?"

"I have that happiness."

"Then you were not buried alive, after all?"

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“Yes, I was; but I managed to disinter myself.”

“Oh, this is too much. What does it mean? How was it. Why did not you let us know?”

On this followed a brief explanation, and Miss Earnsdale was informed of Bertram's desire to see his uncle before the latter could have a hint of his arrival.

“Nothing easier. The gentlemen are in the dining-room—two of my uncles, the doctor, and a parson; exactly the witnesses you desire, I should say. As Pratt opens the door he will announce you, and you go marching in. Everybody will be aghast, and ask for explanations, and then you tell your story and have it out with Mr. Rivaz. It is wonderful how my father has taken to Mr. Rivaz. It is because he tells such entertaining stories, I suppose, and he is really a great social success, you know. How horrified my father will be when he knows all! But stay, we must give him just a hint of what is coming, or he will be half frightened to death. Have you a piece of paper, Bertie? Thank you. See what I have written: ‘Something very strange is about to happen. Don't be alarmed. Gladys has arrived, and she has news of Bertram.’”

“Now this shall be given to my father at once, and before he has time to speak about it you must be announced. Shall we go with him, Gladys? Yes, we will. It may not be quite *comme il faut*, perhaps, but never mind that; I would not miss the scene for the world. *Allons!*”

This plan of campaign was carried out to the letter.

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Half a minute after the note had been given to Mr. Earnsdale the butler threw open the dining-room door and announced, “Mr. and Mrs. Bertram Norbreck!”

Bertram fixed his eye on his uncle, who held in his hand a wine-glass, which he had just emptied. The glass fell on the table with a crash, and Rupert fell back in his chair the very picture of horror.

Gladys ran to her Uncle Hugh and kissed him.

“God bless me!” he exclaimed, “the age of miracles is not past, then. When did Bertie come to life again?”

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“He did not find the other world an improvement on this, so he came back,” said Dr. Corkticht, who made a point of being jocular in season and out of season.

Then all tongues were loosened, and Bertram and his bride were overwhelmed with questions, greetings, and congratulations.

Bertram, who still kept his eye on Rupert, could not help admiring the plucky way in which his uncle rallied from the shock, and the consummate art with which he played his part.

“I don’t understand it,” he said. “I can only suppose that you were imprisoned a long time in that mine, and at last by some miracle escaped. I never knew anything like it. What a happiness to see you again alive and well—married, too! I congratulate both of you with all my heart, Bertie; you also, Gladys.”

Bertram answered nothing; Gladys did not even look at him.

“Sit down, and tell us all about it, Bertie,” said Mr. Earnsdale. “How was it? Where have you been? How did you get out of that mine? Mr. Rivaz has told us some wonderful South American stories, but yours must be the most wonderful of all, I think.”

So Bertram told his story over again, hiding nothing.

When he came to the scene with Cuchillo in the mine, Rupert interrupted him.

“The man lied,” he said, indignantly. “My son is incapable of such infamy. Why should he, of all men, want to do you harm?”

“I am only relating what happened,” replied Bertram, quietly. “But wait, I have not done yet.” And then, after telling what passed in the mine and the forest, he described the incident in the Moriche wood. “You asked just now,” he said, “why Blas should want to harm me. Tell my uncle

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what Blas said in your hearing, Gladys, the fourth time he attempted to take my life.”

“Blas said that his father wanted your money and that he wanted me, the wretch!” answered Gladys, with an indignant blush.

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"It's a lie," Rupert was about to say, but, remembering the company he was in, he checked himself. "I mean you must have misunderstood my son. He could not possibly have used the words you ascribe to him."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Rivaz, he did. I heard every word distinctly, so did Bertie."

"What other motives could we have?" demanded Bertram. "If you have any doubt as to the fact, I will call in Cuchillo; he is here. And read this letter from Guanacho (throwing it across the table) about the attempt to murder me at El Rastro."

Rupert, perceiving that blank denial would not do, tried another tack.

"It is intensely painful for me to have to make the admission," he said, "but I am really afraid that what you say is in a measure true, although you must permit me to doubt the truth of Cuchillo's story; and General Guanacho's letter is not evidence. I can only suppose that Blas was so madly in love with Gladys that he forgot every consideration of honour and humanity. And he has unfortunately lived much in countries where the destruction of a successful rival is regarded as a venial offence. But that renders his conduct none the less reprehensible, and I regret beyond expression that he should have repaid your kindness with such diabolical treachery—I can give it no other word. I shall have no more to do with him. Henceforth I disown him, and if I can do anything to make you amends——"

"You forget, uncle, that one of his motives for wanting to get rid of me (the principal one, I should say), was that you might obtain the fifty thousand pounds I was so foolish as to propose to leave you."

"You surely do not think, Bertram Norbreck, that I am capable of conniving at a murder to gain a fortune?"

"I do think so. And I am sure—I may say I know—that if you did not actually suggest to Blas the idea of murdering me, you were cognisant of his designs, and fully approved of them."

"Can Blas have peached?" Rupert asked himself. It

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almost looked so. But whatever his son might have done, he would admit nothing.

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"I have borne many things," he observed with an air of proud resignation, "and I must bear this trial as best as I can. The sins of the fathers are sometimes visited on the children. In my case it is the reverse. It is not for me to be my son's accuser. But it does seem hard, Bertram, that you should bring these terrible charges against me without offering a shadow of proof. But you have been sorely tried; your anger, if indiscriminating, is perhaps natural, and I forgive you. I shall return to south America, where I have still a few friends and some little influence. Will you kindly order my carriage, Mr. Earnsdale? Thank you. I wish you good-evening, ladies and gentlemen," and Rupert, with his usual dignified bearing, walked slowly from the room.

"Did I not tell you?" said Bertram, turning to Gladys.

"I expected he would brazen it out, and I really think he had the best of the argument; but better so than he should know of my Aunt Casandra's warning. The production of her letter might have floored him, perhaps."

"I doubt it," observed Dr. Corktight, "though I have no idea what the letter you speak of is about. I do not think the production of any document whatever would floor that man. He reminds me of the Frenchman who, when he was told that the facts were against him, said 'so much the worse for the facts.'"

"You are quite right, doctor," said Mr. Earnsdale.

"Why, he took even me in!"

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CHAPTER LVIII.

JOHN FLIES AND MARY FLITS.

The next morning, John Rooke, who, as the reader may remember, lived not far from Earnsdale Park, and went out before breakfast—in accordance with his usual custom—to look round his gardens and stables, the contemplation of which always gave him a certain satisfaction, the more especially as his tenure of them was somewhat precarious.

"Heard the news, sir?" asked Giles, the coachman, after he had returned his master's greeting, and answered a question about his horses. Giles was a confirmed

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gossip, and when he heard anything of importance never knew a moment's peace until he had told it to everybody he could persuade to listen to him.

“What news?”

“Only as young Mr. Norbreck and Miss Gladys Earnsdale as was—for it seems they're married—has come back.”

“Nonsense, man! Where have you heard that cock and bull story?”

“No cock and a bull story at all, sir. They came to the Park last night—posted from Preston—arrived quite unexpected, and took everybody of surprise.”

“Impossible! There's some mistake.”

“That's what I said myself, sir. I said, says I, how can a gentleman as was dead and buried a matter o'six months sin' be at Earnsdale Park? But it seems as Mr. Norbreck was not killed, sir, as everybody thought. He got out of a mine by a sort of backway, as far as I can understand, into a forest full o'wild beastesses—him and a Hindian or somethink, leastways he is welly black, and stands seven foot in his stocking feet—called Chilly—as he's brought with him. They had him into th' house last night, and Mr. Earnsdale said he was a very fine fellow, and asked him to give a exhibition of his strength—leastways Mr. Norbreck did for him; for it seems this Chilly hardly knows a word of gradely English. So Chilly jist took Pratt the butler—and he is not a little 'un, Pratt isn't—by th' waistband of his trousers and lifted him right above his head with one hand. They say as

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Pratt holored awful, and Mr. Earnsdale laughed till tears fair ran down his cheeks.”

Rooke broke into a cold sweat; the account was too circumstantial not to be true.

“Who told you all this, Giles?”

“One of the grooms, sir. It is all the talk of the servants' hall. Mr. Rivaz was there, and it seems there was words between him and Bertram before he went away, but nobody seems to know exactly what they was about. If you had been out about two minutes sooner, sir, you might ha' seen Mr. Norbreck and Miss Gladys as was, yourself.”

“How?”

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“They drove past towards Crow Nest. It seems they meant to go there last night, but Mr. Earnsdale would have ‘em to stop at the Park, and Mr. Bertram was that anxious to see his sister as they set off this morning before breakfast. I should hardly have known him, he is that altered. His face is as brown as a berry; his beard a foot long and as black as my hat, and he looks at least ten year older. You’ll be surprised when you see him, sir!”

Rooke was more surprised than he liked already, and without answering a word he turned on his heel and went towards he house.

“What’s the matter, John?” asked his wife, as he sat down to his breakfast; “you look pale.”

“Got a nasty headache. It came on just now.”

“Here, take a cup of tea; it will perhaps do you good.”

When Rooke finished his breakfast, which consisted of one cup of tea and one piece of cold toast, he betook himself to his own room and remained there nearly an hour. Then he ordered his drag to be brought round, and asked his wife to put him a few things in his dressing-bag.

“It is possible,” he said, “I may have to go to Liverpool for a consultation with Vivian, *in re* Mildew *v.* Mouldywarp and another—a very important case. If I do I shall almost certainly stop all night, so don’t expect me until you see me. Ta-ta (kissing her). You are a good woman, Mary. I don’t think we shall remain long in this house, and you may soon have the opportunity of living in a small way and practising the economy you so much desire.” This unwanted tenderness surprised Mary, greatly, for her husband hardly ever kissed her now, and whenever she hinted at the necessity of retrenchment he answered that the time had not yet come. A little later, when she went into his room, she noticed that the grate

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was full of burnt paper, and that his waster-paper basket was crammed with fragments of letters—facts, however, to which at the time she attached little importance.

After Rooke had spent an hour in his office he took the train to Liverpool.

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Mary was not surprised that he did not return in the evening; but when he did not appear the evening following she was more than surprised, and early the next morning she went to the office to ask if anything had been heard of him there. Nothing had, and Mr. Oliver, one of the partners (the firm was now Skinner, Rooke, Oliver, and Skinner), thought it very strange that Rooke had neither returned, telegraphed, nor written.

“If he does not come by the 11. 30 train,” he said, “I shall telegraph to Vivian.”

“I shall call again at three o’clock,” answered Mrs. Rooke; “you are sure to have a reply by that time.”

When she called a second time Mr. Oliver, with a look of concern, put a telegram into her hand. It was from Mr. Vivian, the barrister whom John had ostensibly gone to consult, saying that he had neither seen Mr. Rooke nor heard of him.

Mary turned very pale, and something like a spasm passed over her face. She knew now the meaning of her husband’s parting is, of his remarks about retrenchment, and of the burnt papers in the grate.

“I’ll look into his room,” she said.

The grate was also full of burnt papers.

“Oh, Mr. Oliver!” she cried, when she came back. “John has gone, and I shall never see him again.”

“You surely don’t think he has run away?”

“I am sure he has. My heart tells me he has. We shall never see him again, Mr. Oliver,” and Mary bowed her head and wept bitterly, for, scoundrel as John Rooke was, she loved him dearly.

“You had better look into his affairs and your own. I fear you will find them very bad,” observed Mary after a few minutes’ silence, during which Mr. Oliver’s thoughts were of the gloomiest, for his eyes were now opened, and he remembered many circumstances that went far to confirm Mrs. Rooke’s misgivings, circumstances to whose significance he felt that he had been almost wilfully blind.

“It looks strange,” she continued, “that he should go away the very day after Bertram Norbreck came back. I

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hope you will find that all is right with the Norbreck Trust. Oh, John! John! How could you leave me in this way without a word—and, O God, the disgrace of it, the disgrace of it!”

And then Mary went out and got into her carriage for the last time. Rooke had always kept her well supplied with money, and she had next to no debts, but the few she had she settled, and then returned home, paid off and dismissed the servants—all save the coachman and the lodgekeeper, whom she left in charge of the horses and the grounds. That done she put on the plainest dress she had, placed a few things in a carpet-bag, and, taking it in her hand, went down to the old furniture shop in Mouse Square, in which she had always shown a kindly interest, and whom she had frequently befriended.

“I have come to see if you will take me in, Mrs. Sharples,” she said sadly, “and let me help you in the shop, I think I can earn my board and lodging if you will give me the chance.”

Mrs. Sharples' first idea was that Mrs. Rooke “had gone off it.”

“But—but—but—Mrs. Rooke,” she exclaimed, “what are you thinking on? You are making game of me, surely. A rich lady like you want to help in a second-hand furniture shop!”

“I am not a rich lady, Mrs. Sharples. We are ruined, and my husband has gone away. If you will not take me in I do not know what will become of me,” and Mary, completely overcome, burst into tears.

“Take you in! Of course we'll take you in, poor dear!” said Mrs. Sharples, crying for sympathy. “You've allus been good and kind to us, and as long as we've a bite or a sup you shall share it with us. And you'll be a great help to us when my old man's away at sales, for I'm not good at casting up and keeping books. And you're cleyn ruined; and Mr. Rooke has gone and left you! Oh, dear, dear! I feared as he were too lavish, but I never thought it would ha' come to this.”

So poor Mary's romance ended where it began, in the furniture shop in Mouse Square.

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CHAPTER LIX.

THE END OF THE TRUST.

While these things were going on at Carrington, Bertram and Gladys were at Crow Nest, receiving visits and congratulations, and telling their story to all and sundry. Alice was in the seventh heaven of delight; her brother who was dead had come to life again; Gladys was charming; and Alan Cuedale, informed of his friend's resuscitation and return, had telegraphed that he should come to see him in a few days.

Bertram went down to Wellsprings, saw his uncle, and announced that he intended to celebrate his accession to power by giving the tenants and work-people a trip to the seaside and a feast.

"It's all yours and Alice's now," said Roger. "I have done my best for your interests, though maybe not always wisely. You had better go over and see Rooke about squaring things up. Everything is in his hands."

A great deal too much so, a Bertram soon found out, for shortly afterwards there came news of the lawyer's flight, and his wife's flitting. People at Carrington were talking of little else, and rumours of every sort were flying about in all directions. It was said, and truly, that Rooke had lost, or taken with him, all the money he had received in his capacity of treasurer to the Building and Endowment Fund of St. Martin's Church; that he had "let in" the bank for a thumping sum; that he had been playing hankey-pankey tricks with clients' papers; and that, except the furniture and effects at Murton Hall, there were no assets whatever. Rumours are generally exaggerated, but this was rather under the mark, as Bertram discovered when he called at the office. Oliver and Skinner, the latter a nephew of the late head of the firm, both young men, were in a state of utter bewilderment. They were making portentous discoveries every minute; several of Rooke's victims had savagely reproached them for their blindness; more than one had accused them of being his accomplices.

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When Bertram asked how it was with the Norbreck Trust, Oliver shook his head and said "Very bad indeed, Mr. Norbreck." Every deed relating to the property had

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disappeared, and it resulted from an examination of Rooke's private ledger (which he had not had time to burn) that, besides not using the thirty thousand pounds Roger had given him to pay off the mortgage raised by Ralph Norbreck, he had encumbered the estate for a still larger sum to the British and Antipodean Insurance Company.

"It has all gone, then!" exclaimed Bertram aghast.

"Not quite all, I hope," said Oliver, "but it will be a frightful business for everybody, and you, I think, are the greatest sufferer of all."

Frightful indeed—the Wellsprings and Crow Nest estates melted into thin air. Alice's portion all gone—and the twenty thousand pounds he had engaged to settle on his wife—where was it to come from?

When he told Roger what had come to pass, the old man was wild with grief and remorse. His hatred of Rooke became greater than his previous confidence. He cursed him aloud; hell, he declared was too good for the scoundrel, and he would have his money back if he had to follow him to the ends of the earth. The only property he possessed that had escaped Rooke's clutches was some scrip, worth about a thousand pounds, which Mrs. Roger had hidden away so that her husband could not find it.

Gladys and Alice took their trouble very lightly, and did their best to console Bertram.

"There is nothing to worry about, Bertie dear," said his wife. "You have the Palmetto Cocoa Estate, you know, and with that and my three hundred pounds a year we shall do very well. Countess Alvini had not nearly so much when she first came to Trinidad, and see how well she has done. And then there is your gold mine; you said you thought it was one of the richest in the world."

"So I do, but it remains to be proved. I cannot prove it with less than twenty thousand pounds, and it is mine only on condition that I work it effectively."

"My uncle will lend you twenty thousand pounds."

"I could not ask him, Gladys. We were only married the other day, and I am too proud to begin troubling your relations for money already. They will be too much annoyed as it is. No, I must think of some other plan—if I can."

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Alice declared that the loss of her fortune did not trouble her in the least; she rather liked the idea of being poor and earning her own livelihood, and she wondered (though she did not mention it) what Alan Cuerdale would say.

Bertram's next proceeding was to consult Mr. Deepman, a solicitor of great experience and high respectability.

"It is a complicated business," said Mr. Deepman, thrusting his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, and putting on his profoundest look. "Not much daylight to be seen in it, I am afraid. However, one thing is quite clear. Skinner, Rooke, Oliver, and Skinner are responsible for the thirty thousand pounds handed by your uncle to that scoundrel for payment of the mortgage contracted by your father. It was given to him, not as a trustee, but as a member of the firm, and for a specific purpose, and his partners can unquestionably be compelled to make it good—if they have got the money. Have they?"

"I am afraid not; I must try to find out."

"As to the mortgages contracted by Rooke, I fear they must stand, if they were all duly executed by both trustees. Are you sure that they were?"

"I am not sure about anything. My uncle says that he has no recollection of signing any mortgage deed whatever; but as he admits that he signed everything Rooke put before him, it is almost certain that he did."

"I quite agree with you. At the same time the point is a most important one, and if there be a shadow of a doubt we must put it to the test. I know the solicitors to the British and Antipodean Insurance Company very well—they happen to be my Liverpool agents. What do you say to going there to-morrow, taking your uncle with us, and having a look at this deed?"

"By all means let us go."

When the document was submitted to Roger he declared that he had never seen it in all his life before, and that the signature which purported to be his he had not written. The witnesses to it were "Richard Robinson, gardener," and "Martha Newbiggin," domestic servant.

"Rooke's people, these witnesses, I suppose?" observed Deepman.

"Yes," said Roger; "I remember them very well. They got married afterwards and went to America."

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The deuce they did! Were you in the habit of signing documents at Rooke's house, Mr. Norbreck?"

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"Not exactly in the habit. I did pretty often, though."

"And the witnesses were generally his own servants?"

"Always, I think."

"And these deeds, and the other matters relating to the trust, were generally executed at his own house, I suppose—and after dinner?"

"Nearly always, said Roger simply."

"Over a glass?"

"As often as not. Rooke was always free with his wine; and well he might be, knowing as he was paying for it with other folks' brass, the rascal. If I had only known!"

"What is your opinion now, Mr. Deepman?" asked Bertram of his legal adviser, when they had parted company with Roger.

"Well, your uncle seems confident that he did not sign that deed, and a man should be able to recognise his own signature, you know. At the same time, I have great doubts as to the view a judge and jury might take of the matter. He admits that he was in the habit of signing documents at Rooke's request without reading them, or inquiring too nicely as to their contents, and that he generally signed them after dinner and over a glass. He may easily have signed that mortgage deed without remembering—I might almost say, without knowing anything about it."

"But he says positively that the signature is not his."

"Would he hold to that under cross-examination? That is the question. I think he is quite sincere, you know, and fully believes what he says; but—having regards to the circumstances and his temper—I am afraid he might be entrapped into admissions that would neutralise all the effect of his direct evidence. Then we do not know where the supposed witnesses are, nor what they would say. If they cannot be produced, that would count so far in our favour; but the company would try hard to find them, and if they should swear that both their signatures, and that purporting to be your uncle's, are genuine, it would be all up a tree. Taking everything into consideration, Mr. Norbreck,

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and looking at the case all round, I think, if I were you, I should try compromise before I threatened litigation. To say the least of it, your uncle's denial of the signature imputed him greatly impairs the value of the company's security, and I should

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think they would willingly make any reasonable sacrifice in order to obtain your confirmation of the claim. Try to compromise, that is my advice."

The next day Bertram saw Messrs. Oliver and Skinner. They did not deny their responsibility in the matter of the thirty thousand pounds. At the best, however, they would have been unable to meet so heavy a demand; and as Rooke had half ruined them, and greatly injured their business, they were in a worse position than ever. They might do something, perhaps, and would gladly do all they could; but if Bertram attempted just then to enforce only a small portion of his claim, they should be compelled to "pull up." With people who spoke so fairly and meant so honestly it was impossible to be hard. Bertram made no proposal—neither did they; he contented himself with saying that he should certainly not press them, and then he went to Liverpool to see the insurance people, for he had thought out a plan.

The British and Antipodean Company were housed in a palatial set of offices in the British and Antipodean Insurance Buildings. The enormous swing-doors were guarded by a pompous creature in a gorgeous livery, who could not have looked more important if he had been all the directors rolled into one. After running the gauntlet of an army of clerks, Bertram was ushered into the room of the secretary, a gentleman with a shining bald head, and a smiling rotund face. Bertram began by saying that, although the business he had come about would doubtless have to be laid before the company's lawyers, he thought that time might be saved and a better understanding promoted by addressing himself, in the first instance, to the company's managers. And then he went on with his statement.

He had not gone far when the secretary interrupted him. "This is a very important matter—the amount involved is large, even for the British and Antipodean. I should like you to speak to our chairman about it. He happens to be down from London, and is just now in the next room. Will you kindly step this way?"

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Bertram stepped that way accordingly. And found himself in the presence of a gentleman busied with some papers. The gentleman raised his head and looked hard at Bertram, and Bertram looked hard at him.

“Mr. Barraclough Crag, the philosopher of content!” exclaimed Bertram, after he had convinced himself that it wast indeed he and none other.

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“What! Yes—no—surely? Why you must be my young friend of the Moorcock Inn—Mr—. Mr. —”

“Bertram Norbreck.”

“Exactly, Mr. Bertram Norbreck. I am very glad to renew our acquaintance, Mr. Norbreck. Pray sit down. You are surprised to see me here, I daresay, and in so comparatively exalted a position. But I am as much a philosopher as ever, and it is to a faithful observance of my system that I owe my elevation. I told you that I had not always been a travelling Scotchman, and that I might not always remain one. Well, shortly after I had the pleasure of your acquaintance, a distant relative departed this life. He was a rich, crusty, cantankerous old bachelor, who made a fresh will every three months, and from whom I did not expect a red cent. But, to my utter surprise and that of everybody else, he left me all of which he died possessed, in testimony of his admiration of the philosophy with which Barraclough Crag had supported a severe reverse of fortune and the energy with which he had addressed himself to earning a livelihood. Acting on my principle of profiting by the opportunities Fortune throws in my way, I abandoned my beat—albeit not without keen regret—and accepted the fortune. Among my kinsman’s investments were a considerable number of shares in the British and Antipodean, which, on my principle of letting well alone, I did not disturb. I even went to a shareholders’ meeting and made a speech, and otherwise manifested an interest in the welfare of the enterprise. This led to my becoming a member of the board of directors, and a short time ago my colleagues were good enough to make me their chairman. This is my recent history, briefly told; and nothing, I think, could more strikingly exemplify the value of my philosophy and the merits of my system. And how has it fared with you this long time, my young friend of the Moorcock Inn?”

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Bertram told his story and explained his errand.

“I am very sorry to hear you have been so unfortunate,” said Mr. Crag kindly, “and anything I can do to meet you in this affair, compatible with my duty to the company, I shall do with pleasure. Now let me understand clearly what it is you propose.”

“My proposal is in effect this—that you reduce the interest on the mortgage to three per cent, and advance twenty thousand pounds more on the same terms, but without personal responsibility on my part, the whole to

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remain for ten years; in consideration of which my sister and I will recognise the validity of your security, and make it binding in any way in which the lawyers may deem expedient.”

“Simple, certainly, but very hard.”

“Quite the contrary, Mr. Crag. My proposal is only too favourable to the company. The interest is low, I admit, but you exchange a bad, or, to say the least, a very doubtful security for a good one. The rents will cover the interest, and the value of the estate is fully equal to the encumbrances, even including the additional twenty thousand pounds. On the other hand, if you fight, you stand to lose the whole of you advance except the original thirty thousand pounds borrowed by my father. I tell you frankly that I make this proposal mainly because I want twenty thousand pounds for a special purpose. I think that with twenty thousand pounds I may be able to redeem the estate, and that I should much like to do, if only out of respect for the memory of my father, whose dying wish it was that I should keep Crow Nest. And I love the old place, Mr. Crag.”

“A worthy sentiment and a noble object. Would it be too much to inquire how you propose to achieve it, Mr. Norbreck?”

“By availing myself of an opportunity which Fortune has thrown in my way, but which I neither sought nor expected, answered Bertram with a smile.”

“Well put and discreetly answered,” replied the philosopher. “You have profited by the teachings of experience, my young friend; you are fit to turn out, as they say in

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the North Country. As touching your proposal, you do not, of course, expect an answer to-day; but, assuming that the lawyers deem it feasible, I think you may take it for granted that it will be accepted; for that which I recommended my colleagues rarely refuse to sanction. We are pretty much in the position of a banker who has cashed a forged cheque, and must, I suppose, make the best of it. So much for business. If ever you come to London, do not fail to call upon me, and we will give an evening to the exchange of personal reminiscences and a discussion of the philosophy of content.”

Mr. Crag did not overrate his influence; the board gave effect to his recommendation, and authorised the acceptance of Bertram's proposal. He had already arranged to let Wellsprings Mill and sell the machinery to the incoming tenant;

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it was a necessity which he deeply regretted, but it did not seem to him that he had any alternative. The machinery, being old and run down (Roger never bought a new thing when he could shift with an old one), the sum it realised was not much more than sufficient to pay the probate and legacy duties, legal expenses, and provide for outstanding liabilities.

Bertram forgave Oliver and Skinner their debt, and they on their part undertook to manage the estate, during his absence from England, free of charge, and to guarantee punctual payment of the interest to the British and Antipodean Insurance company—and so ended the Norbreck Trust.

CHAPTER LX.

THE END OF BLAS RIVAZ.

Alan Cuerdale had written to say that he was coming down on a certain day by a certain train, and by a strange coincidence Alice happened, about the time in question, to be walking through the fields towards Wellsprings. As yet, however, she had not mentioned to anybody—not even to Bertram—what had passed between them.

They met in a secluded part of the clough.

Alan, grown bolder, not only kissed her forehead, but pressed his lips to hers.

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"Is this terrible news really true, Alice?" was almost the first question he asked her.

"What news, Alan?"

"A man was saying in the train that Mr. Rooke has run away, after all but ruining the Norbreck Trust, and that there will be very little—if anything—left for you and Bertram. He said that all the country side was ringing with it."

"Not quite so bad as that, but almost. Yes, Alan, I am poor now."

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"Never mind. I could almost say so much the better. I shall have enough for both; that Canadian appointment is still open, and no happiness can be greater than to work for you."

"Dear Alan!"

"You told me to wait, darling; but you said I might hope. Has the time come? May I speak to Bertie?"

"You guessed why I told you to wait. You felt as I felt, that while I felt his fate uncertain—while everybody else deemed him dead—it would not have been fitting for us to be engaged. But now it is different. Yes, I think you had better speak to Bertie."

They found Bertie and Gladys in the garden.

The two friends, their hands warmly clasped, looked long at each other before either spoke. They had both altered so much.

"I congratulate you on your success," said Bertram. "You see I was right; I always said you would be somebody."

"For whatever I am I have to thank you, Bertie, and I can congratulate you; for though you may have lost a fortune, you have gained (glancing at Gladys) something infinitely more valuable."

"You are right, old fellow, I have; and I assure you that I consider my lot a very enviable one. I hope you will not be long in following so good an example."

"Perhaps I shall follow it sooner than you think. Whether I do so or not depends a good deal upon you."

"Depends upon me! How so?"

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"If the ladies will kindly excuse us a few minutes I will tell you."

"I am sure they will; come this way."

"I think I understand what you two have been doing," said Gladys, who had read a tale in Alice's eyes and Alan's manner. "I like him very much, dear, and I think you will be very happy."

"I am sure she will," exclaimed her husband, whom three words from Alan had been sufficient to enlighten. "Alan Cuerdale is the only man I know who is worthy of my sister, and I say 'yes' with all my heart. He thought the humbleness of his origin might be an objection, I consider it a recommendation. It is no credit to a man born to greatness to be great, but it is a credit to a man born to

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obscurity to rise above the herd, and that Alan has done, and will do still more."

"And what do you think, Bertie?" said Alice. "Alan is almost glad that I have become poor."

"That is just like him; but you are perhaps not quite poor as he thinks. Now that I have let Wellsprings Mill there will be a surplus from the estate, after paying all outgoings, of some three hundred pounds a year. That is Alice's; and if I succeed with my gold mine there may be a good deal more. There is therefore no reason why you and Alan should not buckle to at once. I want to see you settled before Gladys and I go back to the West Indies."

"Go back to the West Indies?" exclaimed Alice, turning pale.

"Of course. How otherwise can I look after my gold mine, redeem the estate—as I mean to do—and provide for Gladys's settlement?"

"But surely, Bertie, you will not venture into that dreadful mine again!" said Gladys piteously.

"No, darling. I have had quite enough of the inside; I shall stay outside this time. My plan is to take out a firstclass mining engineer and give him the management. Eventually I may sell the mine; but I must first prove it; for I desire neither to foist it off on some unfortunate company for more than its value, nor to part with it for less than its worth; and until it is thoroughly explored nobody can tell how much it is worth. That

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will be an affair of two or three years perhaps. What will be the duration of this Canadian appointment of yours, Alan?"

"Three years certain."

"Well, then, let us agree to meet here, at Crow Nest, three years hence. What do you say, Alan and Alice?"

"It seems a very long time," answered Alice rather sadly; "but if we cannot meet sooner, let us by all means meet then."

"I say as Alice says," observed Alan; "and when the time comes let us, if possible, settle in England."

"Gladys and I are quite of your opinion," said Bertram; "sunny lands and tropic seas are all very well for a change, but there is no place like home. England is the country to live in, and live for. And how about our arrangements. Mrs Whalley may possibly like to accompany you to Canada,

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and her company could hardly fail to be a great comfort to Alice—if not, we must find a means of making her comfortable. Tim Bolland will stay at Crow Nest as caretaker. Cuchillo, of course, goes with us."

"What will Uncle Roger do?" asked Alice.

"Take a farm and stock it with the thousand pounds his wife saved out of the fire."

"Do you know what has become of the other uncle?"

"Only that he has gone; but he is a very irrepressible sort of gentleman, and I shall be rather surprised if we do not hear of him again."

In this expectation Bertram was not disappointed. A year or two afterwards he received a Spanish newspaper with a pencilled passage, in which it was stated that Señor Ruperto Nutter y Rivaz had been appointed Minister at the Court of Madrid of a Central American Republic; and that, after presenting his credentials, he would proceed to Paris in order to negotiate a loan with a group of French capitalists for developing the mineral and other resources of the country.

Blas was less fortunate. From Trinidad he went to Caracas, and on the strength of his exploits in Salvador obtained a Colonel's commission in the Venezuelan army. Not

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long after his appointment an insurrection broke out on the *llanos*, and his regiment formed part of the force charged with its suppression. In a skirmish near El Rastro he was taken prisoner by a squadron of *llaneros* under the command of General Guanacho.

“So we meet at last, *amigo mio*,” said the old soldier sternly. “I have wanted to see you for a long time. You are the traitor who tried to murder your kinsman, and caused the destruction of my horse, Castaña. You deserve instant death, but I will give you one more chance for your life—the same as you gave your cousin—you shall ride through the river.”

After Blas had made a fierce but ineffectual protest, he was led away and roped on the back of an unbroken mustang, his hands being left free.

“If you reach the other side,” said Guanacho with a grim smile, “you are free.”

When they came within sight of the river, the horse, which had been led by two men, was let go, and goaded by the spears of the *llaneros* who followed, he was surrounded

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—barring all chance of escape—he was forced to make a mad leap into the demon-haunted stream. The poor brute made a brave fight for his life—almost as brave a fight as Castaña had made—but when within a few yards of the opposite bank he suddenly sank, and neither steed nor rider was ever seen again.

THE END.