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JOHN VALE'S GUARDIAN

BY

D. CHRISTIE MURRAY

AUTHOR OF 'AUNT RACHEL," SCHWARTZ," "JOSEPH'S COAT," "RAINBOW GOLD," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

Two schoolboys on a summer morning were marching along the road from Beacon-Hargate to Castle-Barfield, in the tranquil heart of mid-England. Each bore a satchel, in which he carried his books, and a provision of cold meat, bread and butter, and hard-boiled eggs, for dinner. They were each furnished also with a broad-mouthed, frayed, old, green baize bag, charged with round pebbles; and as they swung along, they cast searching glances about the road, as if they kept a keen look-out for something. Every now and then one or other would make a dart and a stoop, would take up and examine a pebble, and then would either throw it with rare precision at a mark, or would add it to the contents of the green baize bag.

These two were of the same age to a day, and nearly to an hour, and were cousins by the mother's side. One was swarthy of complexion and a trifle grim in aspect, a boy of the bulldog British pattern; and the other was fair-haired, fresh-coloured, and gray-eyed, with an amiable, dreamy look. They were rising twelve, the pair of them, and were uncommonly well built and well set up for their age.

'Uncas,' said the dreamy boy, 'we shall have a rare old scrimmage with the Mingoes this morning.'

'Wagh!' said the bulldog boy in answer. He was naturally a youth of few words, and the part of 'the sententious savage,' as dear old Cooper used to call the Indian, suited him to perfection.

They were under the dominion of Cooper, and were soaked and saturated with the lore of Beadle's Sixpenny American Library. They had and enjoyed a daily skirmish

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with a half-score or so of the natural enemy of Castle-Barfield, and what would have been a mere undignified pecking-match without the glorious help of fancy, grew to an Indian battle by its aid.

There was no seminary for youth in Beacon-Hargate with the sole exception of a dame-school, presided over by an old woman of singularly forbidding aspect and limited learning; and when by her aid, or in spite of her hindrances, the lads had mastered words of two syllables, they were sent off to school to Castle-Barfield, whither they went daily afoot in all weathers, hail, rain, or shine, the whole year round, holiday-times and Sundays alone excepted. On their very first journey, one Sam Saunders, a Barfield boy, by profession a bird-scarer, had experienced a lively and natural resentment at the presence of boys from another parish on a high-road macadamised at the expense of Barfield ratepayers, and had hailed them with derisive epithets. Finding himself repaid in kind, he had fallen back on the argument of arms, and had stoned them from what seemed a safe distance. The youthful strangers, whether by skill or accident, had come victors out of this first fray; and Sam Saunders, afterwards elevated to the rank and dignity of a Mingo chieftain under the title of the Big Bear, fled weeping from the field. It took a week or two to make him understand that the enemy might be expected at a given hour upon the road; but when that fact at last penetrated his mind, he sent round the fiery cross among his tribe and lay in ambush. There was a great fray that morning,

and the invaders of the soil were beaten back, and forced to make a detour, which resulted in their being late for school, and bore further fruit in chastisement at the hands of a master who was none too unwilling to inflict it.
Then, in the bosom of William Gregg, the bulldog boy, awoke and flamed the fires of vengeance; and the milder soul of John Vale, the dreamy boy, took heat from his companion's fire, and they twain made a compact to live or die together; and they set up a cock-shy in the orchard of Gregg senior, and practised at the same assiduously in all

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spare moments, until they grew so accurate in aim and wide in range that the foe had fear of them. They began with a medicine-bottle at fifty boyish paces; but in a while they became so deadly that they could no longer afford so frail a target, and had to substitute an old shoe for the bottle, and this they battered daily and hourly to their hearts' great contentment, filling the exercise, as boys can and do, with a thousand warlike imaginings invisible to the eye of any adult watcher.
When they were on the war-path, they were Uncas and Pathfinder one to the other; and Uncas carried, as befitted his wild blood, a scalping-knife of lath. The gentler Pathfinder's instincts made him recoil from the use of such a weapon, but he tolerated his friend's possession of it. They got no end of bruises, and enjoyed themselves mightily, developing in this savage warfare all such virtues as war can breed—courage, endurance, resource, magnanimity, and the like, and were really at bottom less mischievously employed than the pessimist in boyhood might imagine.
They drew near that strip of the enemy's country where battle was most commonly offered, and looked to their arms; that is to say, they shook up the green baize bags and arranged the likeliest pebbles topmost. They attached a superstitious value to stones of a certain form; and a disc-shaped pebble of the size of an old-fashioned copper penny and the thickness of three or four was looked on as a precious find and reserved for moments of great emergency.
On the Beacon-Hargate road was what the country-people thereabouts call a Jacob's ladder, a stile with ten or a dozen steps to it, leading from the low-lying lane to fields on a higher level. The pathway to which this ladder led the traveller lay across a series of gently rolling fields which were called Scott's Hills; and in the middle of the fields was a fairy ring, which had so often been danced round by childish feet that the grass was worn altogether away from it and the circle tramped as hard as a board. The hundred acres of open space the fields afforded gave

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ample opportunity for advance and retreat, and the Mingoes had chosen it for their own country for years past.
The two boys climbed the Jaco's ladder warily and prospected for 'sign.' The eagle eye of Uncas detected a tousled head beyond the line of the first hill. Almost at the same moment the intrepid pair were observed by the enemy, and a wild cry of defiance was raised. Among the other advantages of the war-country was a clear echo, which returned all noises with a sudden clap of sound like a vocal box on the ear. This redoubled the

noise of warfare, and gave a sense of distance, numbers, and vastness inexpressibly delightful. The enemy appearing on the ridge of the hill in an irregular line, opened a harmless fire, to which the allies disdained reply. The distance was as yet too great for danger; but the Mingoes, with savage cunning, scattered with intent to form a wide circle and attack the advancing body from every side at once.

‘’Tis long odds, Uncas,’ said the Pathfinder: ‘nine to two.’

‘Wagh!’ said Uncas; and accustomed to every wile the foe might try, they separated, one working to the right and the other to the left, so that they might intercept the intended movement.

The precision of their fire made them dreaded, and the enemy was wary of displaying himself too freely. It was a barbarous form of relaxation, no doubt, but the schoolboys fought for their right of way, and men make war in deadlier earnest in assertion of rights and privileges no whit more sacred, and there is a great deal of human nature in boys.

The fight had varying fortunes, but the expedition forced its way at last; and its way out of the dangerous country seemed assured, when a stroke of treasonous vengeance put an end to the war for good and all, doing such serious execution, that the enemy, scared by its own act, fled into hiding-places and appeared no more. The two schoolboys joined each other at the end of the fray, breathed, flushed, and triumphant, and pursued their road with occasional turns to answer the cries from the defeated.

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This was all in order and in accord with the best traditions of Cooper and the Sixpenny Library; but the two lads fought honestly and loyally, and at the bottom of their hearts not only had no desire to hurt anybody, but had even a kind of camaraderie for the wild tribe they fought with. It was a roughish kind of game, to be sure; but it was no more than a game, after all, and there was not a shade of malice in it. But a certain hulking left-handed fellow, a new recruit on the Barfield side, had been hit a day or two before, and imported a murderous seriousness into the fun. He had taken no part in the affair of that day, but lay in wait with a stone the size of his fist until the boys went past him unsuspiciously at a distance of half a dozen yards. Then he launched his missile unseen, and dropped back into the ditch from which he had arisen. The stone struck the fair-haired lad above the ear, as he was laughing and sparkling over the combat just finished, and rolled him over as if it had been a musket bullet.

The bulldog boy his comrade, not as yet knowing what hurt had been done, but boiling into sudden rage at treachery, dashed in the direction from which the stone must have been hurled. The traitorous left-handed one rose to flee, but had no chance except to stay and give battle. The fight was brief and decisive, and the traitor being knocked down, refused to get up again. The avenger went back to his comrade, and the youthful coward in the smock-frock crawled through the hedge and ran. His late comrades drew a little nearer in scattered groups and stared with frightened eyes, for the fair-haired boy lay where he had fallen and made no sign.

‘Jack,’ said his comrade, kneeling by him, ‘are you hurt?’ There was no answer. ‘Jack! what’s the matter ? Speak to a fellow! I say, Jack! it isn’t like you to sham. Jack! Jack!’

He was crying by this time in a voice so wild and frightened, that his hearers stared with guilty and fear-stricken faces upon one another, and scattered, taking as many ways as

there were boys. The wild frightened voice pursued them, and then quavered into tears and silence.

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The road was unfrequented, and it might be hours before help came that way. John lay so still and silent that for all the other could tell he might be dead. An inexpressible pang of guilt and grief rived the bulldog heart, and the lad fell on the body of his prostrate friend and fawned upon it and kissed it and wept terrible tears. Men hardly know these extremities of grief and terror.

He had knelt for what seemed an age, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder and a voice spoke to him in a tongue he did not understand, and had never even heard before. He looked up with his tear-blurred face and eyes. 'Oh, please help me to carry him home,' he besought the stranger. 'They have killed him! They have killed him!'

The newcomer knelt upon the grass and rolled the unconscious body gently over. There was a little blood upon the cheek, flowing from a slight incision at the top of the right ear, and guided by this he removed the cap and exposed a great bump which showed with a purplish hue through the close-cut silky light hair.

'Oh, la, la' said the stranger, and felt about the bump with cautious and gentle fingers. The bulldog boy knelt beside him, staring at him with a faint dawn of hope in his heart and giving now and then a gasping sob. The stranger was like no man he had ever seen before. His skin was of a coffee-brown, and his beard and hair and eyes were as black as jet and very lustrous. He wore a shabby jacket of claret-coloured velveteen, and a gay pink-striped handkerchief tied in a loose and careless knot at his brown throat under the gay blue-striped collar of his shirt. A little billycock hat was stuck on the back of his curly tangled head, and in each ear he wore a gold ring, as fine as hair at top, and thickening at the bottom to the form of a crescent moon. He had no waistcoat, and his shabby trousers were bound about by a leather strap with a big buckle. He looked altogether strange and outlandish; but when he turned his dark eyes on the lad beside him, and his milk-white teeth flashed between his black beard and moustache in a sympathetic grimace of pity, there

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was something in his look which bred confidence at once.

'Water,' said the stranger, holding out the cap; 'get water.' He spoke the simple words slowly, and with an air of having to search for them in his mind before he found them.

The boy took the cap and ran with it to where a little reel which had its source in a field drain-pipe babbled diamond clear. He filled it and ran back with it; but it leaked so fast that for all his haste he arrived with scarcely half a pint. The stranger threw it into the unconscious lad's face, and having fumbled awhile at his collar, drew a great shining clasp-knife and slit the linen through. 'More,' he said then, and taking off his own hat, offered it. This, being made of a close-beaten felt, came back full, and the foreigner threw it by sharp handfuls into John's face until the gray eyes opened and looked about filmily with no recognition in them, and then closed again.

'His—name?' said the stranger questioningly.

'John Vale.'
'His—home ? You—know?' With the same painful slowness and the same air of seeking the words beforehand.
'Yes. There it is. The house with the red roof among the trees, more than a mile away.'
'You spick—too quick,' said the stranger. 'Find—his —home. Come back. Quick'
William Gregg threw down his bag and satchel and ran as hard as his legs could carry him, though every now and then a sob caught him at the throat and threatened either to choke him or to bring him to a stand-still. Meantime the stranger, walking to the hedge, cut a pair of stout slivers from a hawthorn, and planting one in the turf on either side his unconscious charge's head, took off his coat and suspended it above the boy's face to shade him from the sun, which was by this time growing powerful. When he had done this, he groped gently in the pockets of the coat, and having found tobacco and papers, rolled himself a cigarette, struck a lucifer match upon his trousers, nursed

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the light in his coffee-brown hands against a faint breeze that was blowing, and so sat puffing, bareheaded in the sun, with his hands about his knees. He was a well-knit, active-looking fellow of about thirty, and very small in stature. He sat like a statue of idleness for half an hour, only moving once or twice to moisten the boy's lips and temples from the water which still lingered in a crease of the felt hat, or to roll and light a new cigarette.
At length there rose a sound of hoofs and wheels, and this coming to a pause in the lane at the foot of the fields, a ponderous man in dusty gray heaved in sight, mounting the Jacob's ladder, and strode solidly towards him. He disappeared once by reason of the rolling formation of the land, but by-and-by showed again near at hand—a grave man, with outstanding eyebrows, honest, simple, steadfast eyes, and a beak like a good-tempered eagle's.
The foreigner rose and confronted him inquiringly. 'His—fazer?' he demanded.
The grave man answering 'Yes,' the stranger drew his coat away from the boy's face and slipped into it with a lounging grace. Then he picked up his hat, waved it twice or thrice to and fro, to shake the water from it, and dropped it anyhow on the top of his black curls, watching the newcomer seriously all the while.
'Poor little chap!' said the father, stooping to raise the boy in his arms. 'It's a nasty knock he's got. Pick them things up and bring 'em along, will you?'
He spoke with a sidelong gesture of the head; and the foreigner, understanding the sign and the glance which went with it rather than the words, gathered up the satchel, the bag, and the two caps, and obediently followed in the other's ponderous footsteps.
A well-horsed dogcart stood at the bottom of the ladder, and a man with a straw in his mouth and a general look of stables held the reins. The farmer having carefully descended the steps, held up the boy to him, as if the poor little figure had been no more than a feather's weight. Then he turned upon the foreigner, and holding out one hand for the things he carried, put the other to his pocket

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with a somewhat doubtful air. He looked with mild inquiry at the shabby jacket and the shabbier trousers and downward to the boots. These being dusty, unblacked, and broken, seemed to decide him, and he drew forth a little handful of silver and held it out.
'Merci !' said the stranger, repelling the offer with both hands. 'No, no, no! Sank you; but no!'
'Take it,' said the farmer, looking again at the broken boots.
The other followed his glance, and smiled with a flash of his white teeth. 'No, no, no !' he said again. 'Sank you, but no! I—have—done;' he paused there and thought for a second or two, and then found 'nossings–nossings.' He paused and thought again, and added, 'Good luck!' lifting his hat as he spoke.
'Thank you kindly,' answered the farmer. 'There's not a-many of the gypsies as would take the trouble, and fewer as wouldn't take the money. Thank you kindly.'
'No, no!' said the foreigner lightly. 'No sanks. Nossing. Good luck!'
The farmer, climbing into the dogcart, took the boy in his arms, and was driven away, turning a backward glance at the shabby wanderer who would take no money. The shabby wanderer waved his hat to him, and followed the track of the dogcart along the dusty road.

CHAPTER II

THE bulldog boy had been despatched to look for the doctor, and had started upon his search in an agony of self-accusation. He was a boy of the tenderest heart, under his dogged exterior, and as he ran panting and gasping along the road towards the doctor's house—which, by the way, lay a good three miles off—he exaggerated his own share in the feud with the young ragamuffins of Castle-Barfield, and minimised his companion's share in it,

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until at last he felt as guilty as a murderer. There was a swelling tide of remorse and terror in his heart, and if once he had allowed it to break beyond bounds, he would have had to sit down and cry helplessly and bitterly. So, being one of those determined fellows who will do what they once take to be their duty if they die for it, and seeing that his one present duty was to find the doctor with all possible speed, he choked down his fears and repentances as best he could, and ran as he had never run in his life before, in spite of his choking throat and swelling heart.
As good fortune had it, the doctor very nearly ran over him at a sudden turning of the road. The messenger could scarcely speak, but got his story out in breathless sobs somehow, and so was picked up and driven back to the farmhouse. The farmer and the injured lad had arrived but a minute or two before, and the dogcart was still standing at the gateway. The doctor jumped down, threw the reins to the boy, and entered.
Young Gregg sat in the doctor's trap and held the reins. The sun shone bright, and the trees rustled in the gay wind. Now and then a carter called to his team or cracked his whip, and there was a distant sound of jangling bells. The doctor's horse champed at his bit, and beat the roadway first with one fore-foot and then with the other. Muffled

voices spoke within the house, and sometimes the wretched listener heard the sound of hurrying feet upon the uncarpeted stairs. He was profoundly troubled, and felt as guilty as Cain, though there was a piteous exculpation of himself going on within doors all the while.
The hostler came and led off the farmer's horse; and the boy, though he longed to ask if the doctor had as yet said anything, was so weighed upon by his fears that he left the question unspoken, and watched the hostler go through the gate and away past the side of the house as miserably as though he knew that the man carried the last shred of hope with him. Then, when he had sat utterly desolate for a quarter of an hour or so, listening to all the sounds in the house with a strained and dreadful fear, he

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heard the sound of wheels and hoof-beats behind him, and turning his tear-stained face, saw a ponderous, grave, clean-shaven man in the act of pulling up a few yards away. This personage looked a great deal too big for the trap he rode in, and, indeed, had a way with him of looking too big for any place in which he might find himself. He was a man of huge physique, but he had a grave and ponderous way of magnifying himself, as it were, and seeming bigger than he was. He wore gray clothes of a severe and formal cut; his neckcloth was white; and his hat broad, low-crowned, and stiffly curled at the brim, so that he had something of a clerical or semi-clerical air. His gray eyes were keen, and had all their light upon the surface; his mouth, chin, and jaw gave unmistakable signs of an obstinate will. His face was a vulgarised copy of the great Napoleon's, and Mr. Robert Snelling himself may be fairly described as a Napoleon minus the brains which made Napoleon remarkable. That is to say, that he saw his neighbour's side of things insect small, whilst his own side looked big as Behemoth; that he had a will of iron, an indomitable selfishness, and an unusual capacity for tyranny.
Robert Snelling was a seed and corn merchant, and a first-cousin of Farmer Vale's. He was immensely respectable, and greatly respected, and he had such a mastiff-way of going straight to any worldly or social bone he wanted, that people generally made a clear road for him. He was a very remarkable person for a rustic tradesman, and had done some reading and thinking in his time. Most people were a little afraid of him, and though he passed as the keenest trader in those parts of the world, he was also held to be a model of rectitude.
He got out of his trap with a solid slow dignity, and tied up the reins to a part of the trap itself with a deliberate action in which no motion seemed wasted or delayed. There was a weight of will in his walk, in his repose, in the way in which he carried his hands, in every heavy gesture.
'Well–ah—Willyum!' says Mr. Snelling to the boy.

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His voice was of a deep drawling bass, and at the end of a phrase, short or long, it closed on a high loud note delivered with a snap as quick as the sound of a pistol, and not much softer. In conversation, this method of his seemed to indicate at once a

deliberate desire for justice and an irrevocable decision. The profound lingering basso meant choice, forethought, wariness. The loud snap at the end of it said, 'There you are! That's settled and done with.'

He saw that the boy was crying, and looked bitterly distressed; but then, boys cried pretty often, and looked bitterly distressed on grounds which, when a man gave himself the trouble of looking at them, were ludicrously small. It was probable, whatever was the matter, that the boy had done something to deserve it; or if he had not, then he would do later. That was the way with boys —to merit suffering, and to suffer.

He marched heavily into the house in that strong and wilful way of his, always as if he expected opposition and were prepared to bear it down, not swaggeringly or bullyingly, but with a deep-seated bellicose strength. There was a longish garden, full of intertangled vegetables and flowers, between the gate and the farmhouse, and the pathway between them was brick-paved and smooth and lustrous with many years of constant scrubbing. The beans were in flower like an army of black and white butterflies waiting the signal to rise and flutter in the air, and the roses and wallflower loaded the light wind with odour. Mr. Snelling gave a satisfied slow sniff as he went, and stalked into the half-gloom of the clean low-ceilinged kitchen, where pans and crocks caught stray gleams of reflected light, and dazzled in them, and a single big red rose pushed its head in at the open diamonded window.

'Hillo! House here!' cried Mr. Snelling, smiting a bare deal table resoundingly with his whip as a signal to the inmates.

'Sh!' answered a voice from above, and a moment later there began a sound of cautious steps upon the stair. These came to an end with the appearance of the farmer,

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whose face looked pained and anxious. He closed the stair-door gingerly behind him and held out his hand to his cousin. 'Our John's met with a grayish mishap,' he said. 'The doctor's upstairs with him now.'

'Oho!' said Mr. Snelling. 'And how did that come to pass?'

'Not so loud, Robert—not so loud!' cried the farmer. 'That voice of thine sets the beams a-trembling overhead. Some young Rip seems to have thrown a stone at the lad. He's been knocked quite senseless, and he's been moaning on his mother, as has been dead this three years. Dr. Haycock looks grave about it. I'm afraid the lad's sore hurt.'

'We'll hope not,' answered Snelling, moderating his voice somewhat, and looking as serious as he thought the case demanded. 'You was always a bit disposed to be tremorful and fearsome, John, and to say die before the time came. Who was the lad that did it?'

'I've had no time to make proper inquiries yet,' the farmer responded. 'It was Will Gregg brought the news.'

'Ah!' cried Snelling, ''twas him, was it? You'll have to dust his jacket for him.'

The drawl and the snap together gave this almost an air of justice; but the farmer interposed: 'I said 'twas young Gregg brought the news.'

'Yes, yes,' replied Snelling in his weighty way. 'We'll sift this.' He marched out of the kitchen into the sunlight, whip in hand, and sought the stables. There he found the hostler, who by this time had got the horse out of harness, and was hissing round him

like a whole brood of snakes as he thumped and polished him with a plaited hay wisp.
'James,' said Mr. Snelling in a magisterial manner, 'there's a young youth outside guarding the doctor's hoss. Send him in to me, and keep an eye on the trap yourself. That chestnut's a bit skittish.'
James, to whom any moment of leisure was tedious without tobacco, paused to take a short black pipe from his waistcoat pocket and to strike a match upon his corduroy trousers. Mr. Snelling, having given his orders,

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had immediately retired. He returned to the kitchen, and there, planting an armchair in the middle of the floor, sat down in it and waited to deal out justice.
'Well—ah—Willyum,' he began, as the boy entered, 'how came you to do this damage to Mr. Vale's little boy?'
'It wasn't me, Mr. Snelling,' returned William.
'We'll see about that by-and-by,' said Mr. Snelling, sternly ponderous and wise, a spectacle to strike a guilty boy with awe. A spectacle, perhaps, to strike an innocent boy with a sense of exasperation.
'Let the lad tell how it happened, Robert,' said the farmer.
Mr. Snelling gave a wordless wave of his right arm, as if to say, 'Leave an open road for Justice and for Wisdom, and leave this boy to me.'
'How came you, sir, to do this act of wicked damage?' he asked.
'Mr. Vale,' said the boy, turning to the farmer, 'I'll tell you all about how it happened—'
'And no lies, mind,' interrupted Mr. Snelling. A lie's always found out, and it'll make it a great deal worse for you. So now, go on.'
The bulldog boy looked at him rebelliously. Perhaps he may have thought on what altered lines he would conduct the conversation if he were as big as Snelling.
'Ever since we've gone to school to Barfield,' he began again, addressing himself naturally to Vale, and not to the brow-beating Injustice in the armchair, 'we've always had a fight in the morning with some of the Barfield boys on Scott's Hills. We couldn't pass without, and so we've always had a fight with 'em.'
'What do you mean,' Snelling demanded, 'by saying—'
'There was a new boy there last Thursday-' the lad went on; but Snelling stopped him with a sonorous 'Wait there.'
The boy waited, regarding him with a rebellious eye and a lowering face. He had begun to glow with his story, and would have made it all clear in a moment,

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and he had been full of honest and tender self-accusation.
'You're talking to your elders, you are,' said Snelling. 'You're not talking to a parcel of children as are ready to believe anything. What do you mean by saying that you couldn't pass to Barfield without having a fight in the morning?'

'We might have passed,' the boy answered, 'if we had taken the cowardly blow and gone round by the church. But that's a mile out of the way, and we didn't mean to take the cowardly blow.'
'You mean,' said Mr. Snelling, 'as you provoked the fight?'
'We didn't provoke the fight,' cried the boy in hot resentment.
'How dare you take that tone with your elders, sir?' asked Snelling. 'Is that the way your father brings you up!'
'Come, come, Robert,' said the mild farmer; 'have a bit of patience with the lad. Tell your tale, William; and then if there's any questions to be asked, me and Mr. Snelling'll put 'em afterwards.'
'John,' returned Mr. Snelling, with almost as solemn an air of superior age and size as he employed to the boy himself, 'you're wanting in firmness. Leave him to me. I'll get the truth out of him, never fear.' He laid his hands upon his knees and leaned a little forward, as if he were just beginning to take trouble in the matter. 'Now, William Gregg, go on, and let us have no more prevarication.'
But William Gregg was not disposed to go on, having been brow-beaten beyond the necessary, according to his way of thinking. All the self-accusation and all the tender remorseful feeling had gone out of him, and in his own fashion he could be as obstinate as Snelling himself. There is no saying what might have come of the conflict, for just when the boy's silence was growing noticeable, the doctor came downstairs, and caused a diversion.

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'I hope the lad's come by no real mischief, doctor?' said Snelling, turning upon him.
The doctor was a pale man with puffy eyelids, and looked as if he spent his nights in tears. It was no part of his professional scheme to lessen the importance of his own services by making too light of a case, and he shook his head with so mournful and despondent an air that the farmer took fright at him.
'Come, come, Dr. Haycock,' said Vale; 'it is to be hoped it isn't as bad as that comes to?'
The doctor did not say how bad it was, but he shook his head again and looked deeply serious. At this young Gregg was seized with new terrors, to which he hardly dared to give a name.
Snelling rose from his seat, and laying his two great hands on the topmost rail of the chair, bent above the doctor. 'Mr. Vale,' he said, in his deliberate deep voice, with its note of swift decision here and there, 'is not a man as needs be trifled with, nor a man as fears to know the truth. You can tell us what to look for, doctor, and we are men as can endure it.'
'It's no part of my business,' answered the doctor, 'to cast down your spirits; and it is too early, gentlemen, to pronounce a decided opinion. But I am free to tell you that I don't like the look of things. We shall know more in a little while. I will drive over this evening.'
'You'll take a glass of ale afore you go, doctor?' asked Vale. He asked less out of his home-bred country hospitality than because he seemed to cling to the doctor in his own mind, and would fain have delayed him if he could, all day.

'Well,' said the doctor lingeringly—'yes; I will take a glass of ale.' He was as mournful over that as he was over the boy's condition, and he drank the ale when it came with a grieving relish, as rustic mourners take their port or sherry at a funeral. 'I will drive over again this evening,' he said as he shook hands.
William Gregg had slipped away, and when Snelling looked round for him to renew his bullying catechism, the

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boy was not to be seen. He was very strong and undemonstrative by nature; but he had been already frightened into a storm of grief that morning, and the doctor's words and manner struck him with a new terror, so that he could not control his tears. He would rather any day have taken a flogging than have been caught crying, and so he stole away and hid himself in a barn, and there had his second burst of grief and fear all to himself.
Grief and fear were not all that filled his mind, for a bitter sense of injustice mingled with them. He knew he would have fought until he could fight no longer to save his chum from harm, and his heart so revolted at the cowardice and treachery which had done this mischief, that to find the mischief charged upon himself was a double wrong, and altogether insupportable. He hated Snelling with as much passion as his grief left room for; but he was helpless under the injustice put upon him.
There are some men, but not many, who take the trouble to realise for themselves what children think and feel. Mr. Robert Snelling was certainly not one of them, and he would have cared very little, even if he had known of the tempest he had raised. If a creature as big as the side of a house had domineered over him, had jeered him, brow-beaten him, charged him without an atom of evidence with crimes impossible to his nature, and left him without the possibility of redress or vengeance, it would have been a different thing altogether. But a boy? What does it matter what you say to a boy? What does it matter what a boy thinks, or what he fancies himself to suffer? Things would have come to a pretty pass, surely, in his estimation, if a man of middle age might not say what he pleased to a boy.
Young Gregg had sobbed and fought himself into quiet, when the farmer, wandering uneasily hither and thither, strolled into the barn and found him. The lad stood up sullenly, prepared for fresh injustice, and steeling his heart against it. But the farmer, laying a kindly hand on his shoulder, simply asked him: 'Tell us how it happened, William.'

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So William told the whole story straightforwardly and simply; and the farmer, ordering the mare to be harnessed anew, drove off with him to discover and identify the guilty author of the damage.
'You oughtn't to have had any truck with them rough lads, William,' he said, as they drove away.
'We couldn't help it, sir,' said William. 'They wouldn't let us go by without a fight.'

The farmer sighed; but he remembered his own boyhood. He was a very mild man indeed, and he had been mild as a boy; but he knew that he would have fought for his right of way, if it had been disputed.
'The proper way would have been for you to ha' told your father, and for John to ha' told me,' he answered. 'We should ha' put an end to it directly. But now, you see what comes of fighting and taking your own cause i' your own hands afore you're old enough to be wise, my lad.'
The extreme gentleness of this rebuke broke William Gregg anew, and he sobbed all the rest of the way.

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM found the time hang on his hands in a very desolate fashion, though, in spite of grief and anxiety, he slept through his nine hours in bed that night without so much as a turn or a dream, having that blessed faculty as a result of youth and perfect health. But the next morning's walk to school, and the evening walk home again, were lonely and wretched enough, with no John to run with and loiter with and chatter with. Even the savages were gone, frightened out of the field by the damage they had done, and life in general became for William as dull as ditch-water. If the dulness had been all, he could have borne it better; but his small world took occasion so to preach at him, and to show him into what danger he had led a

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quiet and inoffensive companion by his turbulent ways, and everybody so girded at him, and so prophesied evil, that at times he was half beside himself with his fears for John, and that writhing against injustice which children feel, though they get so rarely credited with it by grownup people.
What with low fever and high fever, and delirium, and paroxysms of headache, poor John had a bad time of it. But the worst of all was that he came out of his illness a changed creature, dazed and timid, and for a time he seemed 'too simple-minded to be altogether himself,' as his father owned. That unlucky blow put the mental clock back a year or two, and deranged the works somewhat into the bargain. If he tried to think too hard, his head would begin to ache and swim; and if people were too severe with him, as they pretty often were, it would seem to throw him off his mental balance altogether.
Vale was a busy man, being nothing less than farmer, miller, and maltster all at once, and with the best will in the world could give but little time to the boy. It was out of the question to send John to school again, for any little attempt to study brought on one of his headaches and quite disabled him. His bulldog companion, with that soft and repentant heart under his tough exterior, stuck to him with the fidelity of his tribe, and evening after evening, on his coming home from school, would drain his mug of milk standing, and then race off with his provender in his hands, munching it by the way, to give his injured chum society. But except for Wednesdays and Saturdays, each of which brought young Gregg a half-holiday, John's mornings and afternoons were solitary, and he used to moon about the fields and crawl into quiet corners out of the sun, and would

sit there alone and unoccupied for hours, with his own dim thoughts and fancies for his sole companions.
Nearly all the folks thereabouts were farmers or farm-labourers; and about half a mile from John Vale's house lived a farmer of the name of Day, a fat comfortable man of middle age, who had a single child, a daughter, called

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Lydia. She was at this time a wonderfully pretty little creature, with jet-black hair and eyes, and cheeks like twin roses; and a little figure so light and airy that she might have risen at any moment and gone hovering like a butterfly, without seeming to give anybody reason to be surprised at it. She was one of those laughing and dancing little spirits who are not expected to go sedately, unless she happens to be bred amongst the surliest and unhappiest kind of people. She had a wonderful ear for music and a pretty little voice; and after once hearing any tune that took her fancy, she would go shrilling about with it more like a bird than a child, and every note as clear and true as the song of a thrush.
It happened one day that whilst poor John sat in a retired place watching the tadpoles in a pool, this fairy pipe came tuning down the lane, and the owner of it drew up alongside with a certain fearless way she had, and set her hand on John's shoulder, the better to steady herself to look where he was looking. John put an arm about her waist and drew her towards him, and in a little while the child sat down and sang musingly. John said nothing, but he drew her a little closer and kissed her. She kissed him back frankly, and having stayed as long as she felt inclined to stay, released herself, and went rummaging amid the hedges, returning by-and-by with a bouquet which she pressed hot from her own chubby little hand into his. John took it gravely, and looked kindly at her, but still he said nothing.
'You's very twiet,' said Miss Lydia, surveying him with an elderly air—'very twiet.'
'Yes,' said John; 'I'm very quiet. Will you sing again?'
She stooped to smooth her tiny apron, and then folding her plump small hands behind her, and looking over John's head, she sang a wordless tune, her face mighty serious and business-like, but not in the least shy or bold, her rosy mouth open, and her little milk-teeth gleaming behind them, and her body swaying to the tune. When she had finished, she took the two corners of her apron firmly between the

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tips of the thumb and finger of either hand and made a courtesy, with her grave gaze diverted from the distance, and set full on John's mild gray eyes. A minute later she was fluttering along the lane again, hovering hither and thither, and singing till her voice died away on the quiet of the fields.
This was their first encounter, though each knew well enough who the other was; but their acquaintance ripened fast, and they became great friends. Many a time that autumn the young Gregg, beating about to discover his companion and munching his rations as he went, was guided to him by the sound of the clear little beautiful voice piping in the fields and lanes. In the evenings especially, through August and early September, when

the air was warm and the autumn stillness was on everything, he could hear for quite a long distance, and allowing himself to be guided by the sound, he would always find the raven curls somewhere in the neighbourhood of the tow-coloured head of young John, she pretty generally making a breeze about her for the curls to dance in, and he, sitting still and solemn, watching her.

Now the bulldog Gregg was at an age when it comes natural to boys to look upon girls with an extreme and deep-rooted disdain; and if he had made Lydia's acquaintance under other circumstances, he would no doubt have dropped it without loss of time. But seeing that John took pleasure in her society, he condescended from his height of years and sex, and before he knew it, had become the child's bond-slave. She ordered him about as if she had been a little duchess, and he did unquestioningly what she told him, though he was by no means one of the most naturally obedient boys in the world. She on her side waited upon John, and obeyed him as if she had been his spaniel.

John lived in a kind of mental twilight, in which he was happy enough, save when his elders troubled him. Things that came before him naturally, he observed clearly and remembered clearly; but when once he knew that he was expected to master anything, it was all over with his

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chances of grasping it. The one thing that could quiet little Lydia down from her restless high spirits was a tale; and it was a pretty sight to see when she and John sat side by side, she nestling up to him with her bright eyes wide open and full of wonder, and he with his arm round her like a father or a sweetheart, spinning her some yarn of his own invention, or thrilling her young soul with the adventures of Uncas and Pathfinder, or making her laugh and clap her hands together with the story of how the old woman got home that night.

William also could spin a yarn; but if he were allowed to tell his story once, it was as much as the imperious Miss Lydia would accord to him. If ever she wanted a second hearing, it was John who was the chosen narrator. Sometimes he would wander from the track, or would bungle the story altogether, and she would set him right again. He had no shyness with these two companions, and the exercises they shared with him did him as much good, perhaps, as he was likely or able to get anywhere just then.

Things went so prosperously with him, that but for the interference of Robert Snelling, his uncle, John might possibly have come round again in a month or two. That interference, which led to grave and even tragic consequences, came about in this way.

The days were beginning to draw in and the nights to grow cold, and John and his repentant chum spent most of their evenings indoors. On a certain Saturday they were playing draughts together, when the farmer, who had been into town for the market, came home with a brown-paper parcel under his arm. 'Clear away now, lads,' he said, when he had watched the game to a finish. 'Here's something better than checkers for you.'

They both looked on with interest whilst he laid the brown-paper parcel on the table and unfolded it, with his deliberate heavy fingers fumbling at the string which bound it round, and his kind eyes smiling as he gazed from one eager face to the other. The

parcel turned out a splendid puzzle-map of Europe, half as large as the kitchen table, such a toy as no boy of that district had seen the like of

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till that glorious evening. The two fell upon it with tumultuous joy, and got the Hebrides into the Grecian Archipelago, and fitted bits of the Mediterranean into the Baltic, and corrected one another's errors, and squabbled lovingly over his new treasure, until John grew tired.

The farmer sat in the corner with his pipe and his pewter tankard of home-brewed ale, and looked on well pleased, when on a sudden Uncle Robert walked ponderously in, and nodding a salutation to him, moved over to the table to see what the boys were doing. Vale sat in the firelight with his slippered feet reposing on the steel fender, and the two candles which illuminated the room were on the table at which the lads were seated. The puzzle puzzled Mr. Snelling for a while, and he stood silent to examine it. When he had made up his mind about it, he stooped over the table and examined a piece of it by the candlelight, having put on his gold-rimmed spectacles for the purpose. 'Now, John,' he said, drawling magisterially, and straightening himself to his great height, 'where is Calabria?' He had never known the place until that moment, but he looked familiar with it, and the boys thought him learned and terrible. 'Come, come, my lad'—with a pompous and offensive pity. 'Where is Calabria? What is Calabria? Is it a country, a city, a river, a mountain?' Then seeing that neither of the youngsters could answer him, he grew learnedly jocose: 'Is it anything in the inside of a pig, John? Come, come! Calabria?'

John began to turn pale and to fidget with his hands and his jacket buttons. He had been excited, and was easily tired and overwrought. The patronising Snelling frightened him, with his drawl and snap, his ponderous voice and prodigious stature.

'Don't bother the lad, Robert,' said the farmer from his chimney corner. 'It might be the French for a firegrate, for aught I know. Leave the lad alone.'

'Come now,' said Snelling, enlarging himself, though he was big enough in all conscience already. 'Calabria, my lad? Calabria? Where is it? What is it? Town, city, river, sea, mountain, country? What?'

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John burst into helpless tears. Young Gregg hated the Colossus already, and his heart was so hot with pity that for a second or two he had wild thoughts of hurling himself against him and going for him tooth and nail. The farmer rose from his chair, and interposed himself between John and Uncle Robert. 'Leave the lad alone, Robert. He's weakly and tired. He's not fit to be troubled.'

'Weakly?' said Snelling. 'That's no wonder.' He bent a disapproving glance on young Gregg. 'That's what comes of evil companionship; that's what it is to have a roysterer for a companion.'

'Robert,' the farmer interrupted mildly, 'you're too hard upon the lads—too hard on both of 'em.' He bent over John and kissed him with a whispered 'Be a brave lad, John,' and then stood stroking his hair for a time. 'It was a cruel blow. But never thee

cry for it, Will, my lad. 'Twas no fault of thine, any more than mine. It's a sore affliction, but I reckon we can be honest with it.'
'O John, John!' said Snelling, allowing for him in his superior way, 'you're a bit too soft yourself, John.'
'Like enough,' the farmer answered in his gentle way. 'None of us is perfect.'
The truism was mildly advanced, but Snelling seemed to find a personal affront in it. 'Theer's none of us perfect, to be sure,' he said. 'But theer's some of us as is less imperfect than others—thanks be to goodness. I should like to see you stronger, John—resoluter.'
'It's as like as not I might be the better for it,' the farmer replied. 'Will, my lad, John's tired, and had better go to bed. You can run away home now, my lad; and thank you kindly for coming so often. You can come up again o' Monday and have a new play with the map, if you feel that way.'
Snelling had found his way to a cupboard, and from one of its shelves had taken down a box full of long-stemmed clay pipes. He snapped a stem in two at the end of this speech of his cousin's, and threw the useless fragment into the grate with an emphasis which young Gregg felt to be directed injuriously at himself. He disregarded it, how-

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ever, though he gave himself a combative second or two to think that one of these days he would be grown up and a match for anybody. The boys whispered together for a minute or two, and then William stole out; and John having packed up his puzzle made as if he would go to bed; but his father, stretching out his hand, drew him between his knees and held him there for a time, patting his shoulder now and then.
'I'm—ah—afraid--ah—John,' said Snelling, stooping forward from the chair he had taken, and turning the boy's timid face towards himself with a powerful thumb and finger applied to his chin—'I'm afraid I put you about a bit just now. I didn't mean it, lad—I didn't mean it.' His manner was unusually hearty and sincere, and John believed in him at once. 'Theer's a bit o' colour coming back,' cried Snelling, pinching lightly the side of John's face which was the nearest to the fire and reflected its clear glow—'a bit o' colour coming back. Eh? That's right. And when do you think o' going to school again? Eh? We mustn't pass all our young days in idleness, John. We must use up the golden hours. Eh? Youth's the time when learning comes easiest, you know, john.'
'I doubt if he's altogether fit for school as yet,' said the farmer. 'What do you say, lad?'
John said nothing; but a kind word had so much force with him, that he had already obeyed Snelling's hand, and was nestling up to the big waistcoat in a manner altogether confiding and affectionate.
'It's a pity,' Snelling went on, 'as theer's no nearer school than Barfield. It's a big trudge from here to theer, for a lad as happens to be a bit out of sorts. You'd find the walk too tiring, wouldn't you, John?'
'I should like the walk,' said John; but the lessons make my head ache.'
'Ah!' replied Snelling. 'Do they, now? We must tackle 'em bit by bit, John. Here a little and theer a little.' He was very kindly and considerate now, and John was altogether reconciled to him. Snelling sat staring at

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the fire with his big hand still on John's shoulder, when a knock came to the door.
'That'll be Isaiah,' said the Colossus, turning round. 'I told him if he'd call here I'd give him a lift home.'
The farmer cried, 'Come in;' and the man who had knocked, entered, and taking off his hat with both hands, as if it were a great weight, lowered it slowly and held it before him. 'Shut the door, and take a seat, Isaiah,' said the farmer. 'How are you?'
'I'm pretty middling, gaffer,' responded Isaiah, seating himself in a comfortless fashion, and placing his hat between his feet. 'Nothing to complain about in particular, but nothing to brag about neither.'
Isaiah was a man of a hard and shiny complexion like that of a wax-apple. He was bald to the nape of the neck, and a stubbly collar of gray beard ran round his throat from one ear to the other.
'You'll take a glass of ale, Isaiah?' asked the farmer.
'Well, gaffer,' Isaiah answered in a non-committal manner, 'I won't say I won't.'
This being accepted as an affirmative, the newcomer was supplied. He accepted the tumbler, and throwing back his head, poured the ale into his mouth with as much sign of satisfaction as if he had poured it into a cask.
'I'll tell you how it might be managed, John,' said Snelling, renewing the conversation. 'He might come and stay a time with me. Then he'd be nice and handy to the school, and he might work half-tides there. Mrs. Winter 'ud take good care of him, and he might go to school of a morning. It's a pity to see a bright lad wasting the best hours of his youth.'
John Vale the elder looked at John Vale the younger, as if to ask his mind about the matter. Uncle Snelling drew the boy a little closer to his enormous waistcoat and made much of him.
'What do you think, John?' asked the father. 'Would you like to go and stay at your uncle's for a bit?'
'He'd get no harm theer,' said Snelling. 'Isaiah is a

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God-fearing man, and very proper in his walk and conversation.'
'I shan't do the boy any harm,' said Isaiah, who seemed to have followed the drift of the speakers.
'No, no, Isaiah,' the farmer answered; 'I'm not afraid of that. I shall find it a bit lonesome myself, I reckon. I take it kindly, Robert; but you've got no children of your own, and a lad about the house might put you about.' He sighed, and tapped the ashes from his pipe on one of the topmost coals of the fire. 'We'll think it over,' he said then, 'me and John together.'
Snelling seemed to think this equal to a refusal. 'It's theer,' he said, 'to take it or leave it, as you and John see fit.'
'Father,' said the boy.
'Well, my lad?'
'I think I should like to go to Barfield.'

'That's a lad!' cried Uncle Snelling.

CHAPTER IV

THE night was dark, cold, and clouded, when Snelling climbed into his trap, and Isaiah following, took his place alongside. The lamps on either side threw a broad light upon the roadway, and the horse dashed off confidently at the retreating wall of darkness which lay before him.

'It's a pleasant sight, gaffer,' said Isaiah, 'to see relatives living together in unity and doing kindnesses one to another. Ain't it?'

The big man turned his head on his shoulders and tried to study Isaiah's countenance; but the night was too dark for him to see more than a pale blur. 'What do you mean by that?' he asked.

'It is a pleasant sight, ain't it?' Isaiah answered. 'I suppose theer's hardly a warmer man to be found anywhere for ten miles around than Mr. Vale.'

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'And what do you mean by that?' demanded Snelling.

'You're fifty?' said Isaiah. 'Then he's sixty-five. Ah! it's a pleasant sight relatives living together in unity and being friendly towards one another. You're a very hale and hearty man, gaffer; and it's amongst the likelier that you'll make old bones. It's struck me lately that Mr Vale looks frailish.'

'It has, has it?' demanded the Colossus gruffly.

'Yes, gaffer, it has,' replied Isaiah.

'Then I'd advise you,' said Snelling, with a deliberately vicious cut at the horse, 'to keep your tongue betwixt your teeth, mind your own business, and think about them things that concern you. Do you hear?'

'Nicely, thank you, master,' Isaiah answered.

'Then, obey,' said Snelling with weighty authority; and for a time they rode in silence. When they had travelled two or three hundred yards, Snelling gathered the reins in his left hand, as a preparative measure, and then slashed the horse savagely with his whip.

'Hit him again,' said Isaiah; 'he won't tell anybody.'

Snelling, who had flogged the horse into a pace so wild as to be dangerous, pulled him to a moderate speed.

'Riled at me,' pursued Isaiah, 'for seeing through him, like a pane of glass. That's what he flogs the hoss for.'

'You can take a month's warning, Isaiah,' said Snelling.

'Right you are, gaffer,' replied Isaiah. 'So I can. But you might say that once too often. I might do it one o' these days.'

'Do it now,' cried his employer.

'I should sleep on that, if I was you,' the man answered, with an exasperating tranquillity. 'Come now. Do you mean it? A month from this here 21st October? Say the word.'

'Can't you keep that foolish tongue from wagging?' Snelling asked him sullenly.

'Why, you ought to know that, gaffer, as well as most men,' said Isaiah. 'You ought to know, if anybody does. You and your month's warning! Offer me that again, and I'll take it.'

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'You're a born aggravater,' Snelling declared; 'that's what you are—an aggravater born and bred.'
'A month from this here 21st October,' Isaiah reiterated. 'Is that the bargain? Am I to take it?'
'Take it or leave it,' Snelling growled.
'No, no, gaffer,' said Isaiah. 'It wasn't me as put it there. Take it or leave it yourself.'
'Very well, then,' his master answered. 'You've got a pretty good berth, haven't you?'
'Did I ever say anything again it?' asked Isaiah. 'But I'll take that month next time it's offered to me, as sure as I'm alive.'
Affairs being thus adjusted, they rode in silence for the remainder of the journey. As they reached the gas-lit High Street of Castle-Barfield, Snelling turned upon Isaiah and sulkily scanned his face. The man looked before him as if he were unconscious of the scrutiny; and the master flogged the horse anew, restraining him the while, as if he found some relief for his own feelings in that contradictory proceeding. In front of his own house he pulled up with a jerk and ordered Isaiah to get down.
'You didn't think I was going to sit here all night, did you, gaffer?' the irritator asked as he descended with a purposed and laborious slowness.
Snelling returned no answer, but dismounting in turn, strode to the shop-door, and thrusting it open, started a jangling bell. Half-way into the shop he turned, as if he had meant to say something, but restraining himself, he disappeared, slamming the door behind him so violently that the bell struck the woodwork and cracked, as the sudden harshness of its tone declared. Isaiah chuckled without the disturbance of a single feature of his face, and led the horse in at a gateway beside the shop. Then, having closed and barred the gates, he left the horse in the dark whilst he went to the stables for a lantern, and returning, released the poor brute from the shafts, led him to the stable, and there groomed him.
A single gas jet burned dimly above the counter, and by its light Snelling walked into the sitting-room, which lay immediately behind the shop, and commanded a view

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of it through a glazed door. There a small but cheerful fire was burning, and supper was laid out upon a snow-white cloth upon the table. The big man sat down to unlace his booth by the firelight; and a woman entering with a taper in one hand and a jug in the other, set the jug upon the table and lit the gas. She was a pale-faced, timid-looking creature of about fifty years of age, dressed with scrupulous neatness in a black stuff gown and a white apron. Her gray hair, which had not a sign of a curl, was brushed close to her forehead and gathered in a neat knot at the back of her head; and a white kerchief was pinned about her shoulders by a silver brooch no larger than a sixpenny piece. She lingered for a minute, touching the things about the table, and once or twice

glancing at Snelling, as if she expected him to address her; but observing that he kept his eyes studiously turned away from her, she made a movement towards the door.
'Wait there,' said the master of the house suddenly. The woman paused. 'You can tell your husband, Mrs. Winter,' Snelling began in a bullying and angry voice; but when he had got so far, he stopped short and threw his boots towards her. 'Take them away,' he said, thrusting his feet into his slippers. 'Never mind Isaiah to-night. I'll have it out with him in the morning.'
The woman stooped to pick up the boots, and left the room submissively. Snelling, with a wrathful face, thrust a chair up to the table and took his seat there. He attacked the cold meat with a lively appetite, and seasoned it with angry grumblings; but growing more composed by-and-by, lit his after-supper pipe, drew his armchair to the fire and rang for a glass of brandy-and-water. Under the soothing influences of this beverage and the pipe and the fire, he grew more and more composed. At length he felt himself in a mood for relaxation, and so, walking into the shop, he unlocked a safe there, and taking from it a bulky ledger, applied himself to the study of its pages with every sign of satisfaction. After an hour's enjoyment he put back the book, made a pilgrimage round the house, to see that everything was safely locked and barred, and went to bed.

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He made no renewal of the night's misunderstanding (or understanding) with Isaiah when he arose in the morning, but contented himself with an added weight and gravity in his instructions for the day.
'And now,' he said in conclusion, 'you can harness the horse. I'm going to drive over to Mr. Vale's, according to arrangement.'
Isaiah's face was absolutely expressionless; and Snelling's mastiff glance, which seemed to challenge a renewal of hostilities as it dwelt upon him, discovered no sign upon which to fasten.
Castle-Barfield and holiday would have made a sort of winter paradise to John, and nothing much more beneficent than the change and stimulus it might have brought him could very easily be fancied. It was a quiet sleepy place enough in those days, with its mile and a half of straggling High Street, where the shops and the private houses shouldered each other all along except where they were broken by the fields. But to a boy bred upon a farm it was full of all those strange and delightful things which towns offer to the rustic intelligence. Everything is comparative. A Cockney thinks Birmingham a little place; Birmingham thought Castle-Barfield a hamlet; and to Castle-Barfield, Beacon-Hargate was an unpeopled desert. But when Beacon-Hargate folk went to Barfield, they talked about going into the town, as if there were no other in the kingdom. It had one bank in the middle of the long sleepy street, a solemn ancient edifice, which John had been in the habit of passing daily on his way to school and home again. When he read of the Bank of England and the bullion in its cellars, he thought of the bank at Barfield, and the one was no richer or more magnificent than the other, to his fancy. Then at the other end of the sleepy street was the police station, where the tramps called of an evening for their relief tickets, and the loafing, brown-faced, barefooted ragamuffins and their mournful female companions were to be seen

hanging about for an hour or so on fine evenings, waiting the hour of issue. Thither on Saturdays the small malefactors of the district

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were brought up for trial at Petty Sessions; and there was always a noisy crowd of the idlers and good-for-noughts of the neighbourhood, picturesque in the mass, and interesting and profitable to a boy of an inquiring and reflective mind. On Saturday evenings there was a market, through which it was a privilege to wander, which made sixpence look amazing small in view of all the tempting things for show and sale, though sixpence was a mine of wealth at other times and places.

John looked forward to a life amidst these surroundings with a pleased interest and expectation. The shops; the bustle in the streets; the coach, which ran twice a day in lingering, obstinate opposition to the railway; the railway itself, with its monster locomotives rolling past with trucks clanking with the iron produce of the district of fire and smoke so near at hand, and the express thundering past the station at a pace which made the air whirl and the solid stone platform quiver beneath the feet—all these sights were delightful in anticipation. Then Uncle Snelling's shop itself, with its bins and bags and drawers of seeds of every kind, and its dusty and subdued aroma: it would be pleasant to be on terms of intimacy with that abode of wonder, which, though no more than a corn-chandler and seed-merchant's shop to the adult intelligence, was a kind of fairyland to a boy. Then, again, there was an Assembly Room, to which John had once been taken on an afternoon, when all the windows were artificially darkened, to see a panorama of the Holy Land. It stood over against the bank, and made that part of the street doubly rich in association.

When Uncle Snelling drove over in his trap to carry John away, the boy was on the tiptoe of delighted expectation, and the lethargy and self-distrust which his mishap had left him disappeared for the moment. Uncle Snelling pulling up at the gate, solemnly barked for James the hostler; and James appearing from the stables, held the horse whilst the corn-chandler marched up the paved path into the farmhouse kitchen.

'It's understood between us, John,' he said, addressing

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the farmer, 'that the golden hours is not to be altogether wasted?'

'Just so,' Vale answered. 'He'll try the school of mornings, and see how he gets on with it. But he mustn't be drove too hard at first. And let him have a day or two's rest, to get used to the place before he starts. Let him begin on Monday.'

'So be it,' said Mr. Snelling—'so be it, John. You can leave him safe with me. He'll be well looked after, and well took care of.'

'That I have no manner of a doubt of,' the farmer answered. 'Ready, lad? Give your old dad a kiss, then, and off you go.'

John, comfortably greatcoated, gloved, and mufflered against the weather, threw his arms about his father's neck and kissed him, and then walked out to see the box which contained his belongings stowed away in the back of the dogcart. He had never slept from under the paternal roof, and the parting was full of romance and wonder. He

mounted the dogcart, and sat in readiness a full five minutes before Uncle Snelling, who was engaged with a mug of home-brewed ale, emerged from the house. When Uncle Snelling came, he put the springs of the cart to a good test, climbing ponderously in, and pulling the vehicle down on one side until it seemed as if he must overturn it.

'Good-bye, Robert; good-bye, John,' cried the farmer from the doorway.

Snelling's bass and young John's treble sounded together; the hostler slipped away from the horse's head, Snelling drew the whiplash lightly along the sorrel's flank, and away the travellers bowled on a firm smooth road. Every inch of the way was familiar to young John, and yet everything had a new look upon it, and the journey, though it was one of hundreds, felt memorable and like a surprise. Castle-Barfield High Street had never looked before as it looked then, and never more had quite the same aspect to him. He had an affection for the loungers at the street corners, and felt so expansive beneath his

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small waistcoat that he could willingly have called out to the passers-by that he was going to live at Uncle Snelling's.

And indeed for the earlier days, life at Uncle Snelling's was an almost unmixed joy. Isaiah had a good deal of driving about to do in a tall trap; and John, to his great contentment, was allowed to go with him, and to hold the reins whilst Isaiah descended for the transaction of business. When he got back from these excursions in time, he went to the gates of the school playground and waited for young Gregg, and tramped a mile or so on the way home with him; and after a week's leisure he himself was sent to school again to work half-times there—a favoured pupil, who had light tasks set him, and was free both of scolding and the stumpy bamboo cane which Mr. Macfarlane carried, and was a trifle over-fond of using. Boys who had known other schools were gloomy about this bamboo, for it had properties the commoner growths of cane did not possess. Pins and hairs, though never so carefully introduced amongst the dry splittings at its end, failed to shiver it when it came into contact with the palm. Resin rubbed upon the skin was no protection against its sting. There was a general murmur and rebellion at it, as being an intrusion on the established rights of boys; and the commoner scholastic weapon would have been less detested if it had been even more frequently employed, though that, by the way, would not have been easy. Nowadays, when a schoolmaster cannot administer deserved chastisement to an incorrigible without a fear lest the boy's father shall 'take the law of him'—and when, apart from that consideration, the law which governs children has grown less harsh —the master's sceptre and wand of office is held in no such terror as it used to be. But Macfarlane was one of those

Who always, always, spoiled the rod,
And never, never, spared the child,

if he could help it ; and John, whose shaken and addled brains were unequal to any great weight of study, had reason to be thankful for the fatherly injunction which kept him off the punishment roll that quarter. There is scarcely anything which will continue to be wonderful if you look

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long at it, and yet it continues to be something of a wonder that a grown man should take a pleasure in beating children. Macfarlane did, though he always declared he didn't, and his youthful victims had the profoundest distrust in the phrase in which he announced the mercifulness of his own heart.

'Now, boy,' would Mr. Marfarlane say, taking a right-handed grip of the boy and a left-handed grip of the bamboo, 'this hurts me as much as it does you. But your conduct is of such a nature, that—'

Macfarlane's boys could never be got to credit that formula, though, Sundays excepted, they heard it every day of their lives. These floggings had a baleful effect upon John, who was naturally sensitive to other people's pains. They stunned him and made him dizzy, so that sometimes, for an hour after, he would sit with lack-lustre eyes staring upon his task, and seeing nothing and understanding nothing, except that there was a sick and pitiful muddle in his head which would not let him think.

Uncle Snelling during this time was pompous, and was disposed to take a boy at a disadvantage by the production of sudden posers in way of grammar, history, arithmetic, and so forth; but on the whole he was endurable. Isaiah was always friendly, and his wife cockered young John famously. So, on the whole, things went very fairly with him until the Christmas holidays drew near; and then, one morning, bringing all the greater terror and dismay because it was so utterly unlooked for, the trouble of his life fell upon him, and Uncle Snelling found himself face to face with a horrible temptation.

CHAPTER V

IT happened on that particular morning that an unfortunate who was pretty constantly in trouble was seated at his desk at the very bottom of the class, and as far away from the

fire as the confines of the room would permit. He was a gaunt and bony boy, who wanted a prodigious deal to eat, and rarely got it, his guardians being of opinion that it was well to teach children to repress their fleshly appetites early. He was a boy who grew very fast—which perhaps accounted for his being so constantly hungry—and there was always a lacuna between the bottoms of his trousers and the tops of his highlows, whilst his jacket was never within a size or two of his needs, so that his great red hands and bony wrists stuck out beyond his sleeves. He was a cold boy—he thought for his own part that insufficient nutriment left his circulation languid—and being at the farthest corner from the fire, he essayed to warm himself by a surreptitious beating of his limbs. Mr. Macfarlane's desk stood beside the fire, and Mr. Macfarlane was comfortable enough to make this behaviour on the boy's part seem scandalous.

'Jenvey,' said Mr. Macfarlane, 'you are warned.'

The bony boy went quiet, and tried secretly to warm his fingers by blowing upon them from a distance, but met no great success. By-and-by Mr. Macfarlane turning away to tweak another boy's ears, Jenvey saw his chance, and began to beat his shoulders with his tingling fingers, whilst he kept a keen look-out on authority. Authority was one too

many for him; the ear-tweaking had been no more than a cunning ruse, and when Macfarlane turned suddenly round, there were the guilty Jenvey's arms going like windmill sails. A frantic plunge to stop midway, and to assume an air and attitude of profound study, bettered the case from Macfarlane's point of view, inasmuch as it sent a leaden inkstand flying from the desk to the floor.
'Jenvey,' said Mr. Macfarlane, softly and persuasively, 'come out, sir.'
Jenvey, ruefully sucking his chilled knuckles, numbed by their sudden contact with the inkstand, came out, filled with dire forebodings.
'You were warned, Jenvey,' said Mr. Macfarlane regretfully and politely—'you were warned.' Jenvey knew his ways, and came on with the forebodings deepening. The

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schoolmaster took up the bamboo from the desk, and gave a firm resounding slap with it, to quicken Jenvey's lingering footsteps and encourage him. 'Now, sir, will you be so kind as to explain this conduct?'
'I was cold, sir,' said the wretched Jenvey; 'I'm always cold, sir.'
'You will not be cold,' returned Mr. Macfarlane with a soft reflectiveness—'you will not be cold, Jenvey, in a little while from now.' Jenvey gave a short sharp yelp, as if to say he knew he wouldn't, but on the whole would prefer to be; and the schoolmaster, taking a business-like grip of the jacket collar with his right, raised the dreadful left with the bamboo in it. 'Now, Jenvey,' said Mr. Macfarlane, 'you know that this hurts me as much as it hurts you, but-----'
'It's a lie!' bleated the desperate Jenvey.
The whole schoolroom was silent for a moment. The boys were petrified with astonishment and fear, and the schoolmaster himself was frozen by the impious horror of this rebellion. In the middle of this awful stillness, a laugh sprang up, a wild excited ringing laugh.
'Vale!' cried the schoolmaster, 'you dare to laugh at this unparalleled and shameful affront? Stand up, sir.'
But Vale laughed the more, for the luckless Jenvey was his next-door neighbour and a chum, and overwrought sympathy and terror had already brought him to such a state that Jenvey's unexpected outbreak had thrown him into a sort of hysteria.
'Stand up, sir!' thundered Macfarlane, and the voice of power was strong enough to frighten hysteria away and to silence the shrieking laughter. 'Take your place upon that form, sir; I will attend to you directly.'
John obeyed. He could not have told, to save his life, what he had laughed at, but he knew that he could not have helped it. He was very pale, and his breath was troubled.
'Now, Jenvey,' said Mr. Macfarlane. It was a brief exordium, and Jenvey could have wished it longer, not being yet learned in that philosophy which teaches that

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where an ill is unescapable, it is best to have it over. And whatever want of faith the ill-starred youth was conscious of in regard to Macfarlane's inward sufferings, he would have admitted, if it had been put to him, that the schoolmaster's prophecy had come

true, and that he was not cold any longer. Macfarlane certainly bore his own pangs like a hero, and bated none of them. It sounded from outside as if a savage tribe had turned carpet-beaters, and timed the service with war-whoops. The most pressing sense of duty could not sustain Mr. Macfarlane's powers for ever, and he found his strength failing him. The spirit was still willing, but the flesh was growing weak.

If everybody had not been so entranced by the excitement of the scene it might have been known earlier that a loud and exigent rapping sounded at the schoolroom door. As Jenvey grew hoarse and Macfarlane grew tired, the noise from without grew louder. Then it ceased suddenly, the door was thrown violently open, and Isaiah appeared in the doorway. The schoolmaster let fall his uplifted arm and looked magisterially at the intruder.

'I'm sorry to spoil sport,' said Isaiah. Whether he were serious or satirical, his face showed nothing. 'You can finish when I'm gone, sir, if there's anything left to do. I want Master Vale at once.'

'Master Vale, I am sorry to say,' returned Mr. Macfarlane, 'is at present in disgrace.'

'Well,' said Isaiah, 'he'll have to come out of it. We've just got news as his father's asking for him, and–' The rest of the sentence was whispered into Macfarlane's ear, Isaiah sheltering the whisper with his hand.

'Vale,' said Macfarlane, 'you are wanted at home.' John seemed to take no notice of this statement. It appeared, indeed, as if he had not heard it. 'You are wanted at home, Vale. Do you hear?' cried Macfarlane.

'What hast done to the lad?' Isaiah demanded, seeing that John stood still upon his form with an altogether vacant air. 'John! Master John! you come along with me; you're wanted. Your father's asking after you.'

'This is obstinacy,' said Macfarlane.

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'It looks a good deal worse than that to my eye, gaffer,' Isaiah answered. He made his way to where John stood, and taking him up in his arms, bore him to the middle of the schoolroom and set him down before the fire. The wretched Jenvey was still moaning and whining, and was rubbing himself with many contortions. When he had rubbed for a second or two at one place, he seemed suddenly to remember another, and transferred his attention to that with an exasperated feeble yowl like that of a frightened cur.

'Never mind, Jenvey,' said John with a face strangely grave.

Jenvey left off rubbing and stared at him in mere amazement. The schoolmaster was puzzled and troubled; but Isaiah put an end to the scene by taking the boy's hand in his own and leading him away. Caps and overcoats and satchels were hanging up outside the schoolroom in a little corridor, and selecting John's belongings, Isaiah helped him to put them on, and led him into the street, through the long narrow playground and past the big green-painted gates. There stood the tall trap, with a small boy at the horse's head; and Isaiah, having given the boy a penny, lifted John into the trap, mounted after him, and drove away with many sidelong glances at his charge.

'Has the school-gaffer been beating you?' he asked, stooping sideways towards him.—John shook his head.—'Then what's put you into this state?'

'He beat Jenvey,' said John, breaking silence for the

first time.
'Well, yes,' said Isaiah; 'he certainly did beat Jenvey. What did he do it for?'
'Jenvey broke an inkstand,' John answered. The open air and movement were restoring him, but he spoke in an odd dream-like way. 'Then Mr. Macfarlane called him out. Mr. Macfarlane said it hurt him as much to punish Jenvey as it hurt Jenvey to be punished, and Jenvey said it was a lie.'
'That was it, was it?' asked Isaiah. 'Jenvey'll grow

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wiser by-and-by than to show his wisdom. But what made you fret so about seeing Jenvey catch it?'
'I don't know,' said John. 'It makes my head swim; everything turns round, somehow.'
'That's how it is, is it?' Isaiah responded. His features did not lend themselves readily to the play of any emotion, but he looked often towards his young companion, as if he were disquieted. There was silence between the two for the space of perhaps a mile.
'Where are we going, Isaiah?' John asked him then. 'Are we going to father's?'
'Yes,' said Isaiah; 'that's where we're agoing to. We're agoing to your father's, Master John.'
Then there was another silence, and now, in place of Isaiah looking at him, John often looked at Isaiah; but he was busily intent upon the horse, and seemed to have no attention for anything else in the world.
'What are we going to father's for?'
'What are we agoing to your father's for?' Isaiah repeated, with that elaborate air of frankness which some people assume when they have anything to hide. 'Why, I suppose we're agoing to your father's because your father sent for you.'
'Do you know why father sent for me?' asked John.
'Why,' replied Isaiah, turning round to look more frank and open than before, 'because he wants to see you.'
'Yes,' pursued John, frightened by Isaiah's manner without knowing why. 'But what does he want to see me for?'—Isaiah hesitated, and looked confused.—'Is there anything the matter?' cried John.
'Well, in a way theer is, Master John.'—The boy laid hold of his coat sleeve and looked up at him.—'Your father's been rather badly hurt this morning, and he wants you at home. A chain broke, somehow, at the mill, and a sack of flour fell on him. Come, come, Master John; he won't like to see his little b'y acrying; he'll expect his lad to bear up and be brave; that's what he'll naturally look for.'

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'Is he—much hurt?' the boy asked, pausing, as if he hardly dared to put the question.
'Well, from what James told your uncle Snelling, he does seem to be rather badly hurt,' returned Isaiah. A sack of flour is a weighty thing, you see, Master John, and falling from a height, it would do a deal of damage to anybody it fell on. That's only natural, ain't it, Master John?' He spoke as if he vaguely expected the boy to find some sort of

comfort in this; but if his own hard visage, enamelled with soap and weather, showed anything, he seemed to find but little comfort for himself in it.
'Will he die, Isaiah?' the boy asked in a terrified whisper.
'Dear, dear!' returned Isaiah, avoiding his eye again. 'What has put such a thought as that into your head? We've all got to die, Master John; but there's none of us as will die afore the time comes.'
'Did it strike him on the head, Isaiah?' John in asking this question put his hand to his own head; and Isaiah, transferring the whip from his right hand to his left, put his hand on the boy's further shoulder before he answered, and patted him twice or thrice.
'No, no,' he answered after a pause, in which a keener observer than young John might have thought that he mistrusted his voice. 'It wasn't so bad as that. He happened to be stooping at the time, James told us, and the bag fell on his back. It was a nasty thump, of course, and they had to carry him home. James drove down to tell your uncle Snelling about it, and so your uncle Snelling went on ahead, and sent me to fetch you with word to follow.' When Isaiah had got as far as this, he began to recover himself somewhat. He continued with friendly cunning: 'A man of your father's age, Master John, can't get a blow like that without suffering a good deal from it. Now you listen to what I'm saying, Master John, and try to remember it, because it's for your father's good, and what's for your father's good is for your own good. It's like enough that your father won't be able to tell at first whether he's bad hurt or no. If he sees you frightened,

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he'll think you've heard somebody say as he's hurt very bad indeed, and then, don't you see that may cast him down? So you must just be as brave and quiet as you can, Master John.'
'I'll try, Isaiah,' said John, sobbing and trembling a little; and Isaiah put the horse to his best speed.
John looked anxiously at the house when they came in sight of it, and saw that the blinds of his father's bedroom windows were drawn down. Hostler James stood at the gate, guarding the doctor's chestnut mare and Uncle Snelling's sorrel. Isaiah catching the hostler's eye, gave an almost gesture of the left thumb, indicating John, and executed a ghastly grin of warning.
'What's the news now, James?' he asked as he alighted and fastened the reins to the fence.
'Young master's wanted upstairs,' James answered guardedly; and John entered the house and climbed the stair with so strong a certainty of the worst imprinted on his mind, that he often recalled it in after-years, and thought it strange. The corridor at the head of the stairs was dark, and he had to grope for the bedroom door. When he had found it, he knocked softly, and Dr. Haycock came to open it. After the clear wintry sunlight without, with everything made bright and dazzling by a coat of dry powdery snow, the room looked dark, and John could only make out the great old-fashioned mahogany four-poster with its canopy and hangings of dark maroon as if it had been a cloud in twilight.

'Is that John?' his father's voice asked faintly. He knew the voice, and yet it was strangely altered; all the manhood had gone out of it, and it was weak and low. 'Bring him where I can see him.'
This request and the gloom of the chamber and the silence of the dim twilight figures there all seemed like a continuance of the dread certainty which had fallen upon the boy in the darkness of the stairway. Uncle Snelling's great bulk reared itself beside the bed on the far side. The housekeeper stood on the near side, her white cap a little clearer than other objects against the dark bed-

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curtains; she took young John by the hand. Why so gently, unless that awful sense of certainty were true ?
'Put him on the bedside,' said the farmer. 'Give me a kiss, lad. I'm glad thee gottest here in time.'
There was the certainty again, but John stooped and kissed his father without a sob or a tear. He found his cold hand, and held it in both his own, fondling it softly, as if he had been the elderly man and the sufferer had been the child.
'It's a mercy I'm in no pain,' said the farmer in that changed voice. 'I should ha' thought a man would ha' suffered.' He paused for a time and then called 'Robert.'
'Well, John?' asked Snelling, stooping over him.
'You'll find everything straight and orderly. You'll be sole executor, and John's guardian until he's twenty-one. I've left you a thousand pound in ready money, in testimony of our friendship and the esteem we've had for one another.'
'Thank you, John,' said Snelling; 'I take it kindly of you. I've neither chick nor child of my own, and John will get it again when my time comes, and something to the back of it.'
'The rest,' said Vale, 'goes to John. I leave him to your charge, Robert. You've been good to him always; but now you'll have to stand for everybody. He's got nobody else i' the world. Be good to him, Robert.'
'Make your mind easy on that score, John,' Snelling answered; 'he shall be taken care of.'
'It's a great blessing to be out of pain,' said the farmer after a long interlude of silence. 'I should ha' thought a man would ha' suffered more.'
Young John heard, saw, and noted everything that was to be seen, heard, and noted. He was aware of no unusual interest, and yet he remembered years afterwards the position and aspect of things about the room.
'You'll find yourself remembered, Mrs. Herrick,' the farmer said, turning his eyes upon the housekeeper. 'So will James.'
Except his eyes and his pale lips, not a feature stirred,

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and his head and limbs were as immobile as if he had been dead already. The eyes rolling round the darkened chamber, and the face otherwise motionless, frightened the boy, and he clung tightly to the cold hand he held. The eyes turned towards him.

'Kiss me again, lad. Good-bye. Be a good lad, John. You'd better take him downstairs, Mrs. Herrick.'
'No, no,' John besought him in a whisper.
'Let the lad stay,' the dying man said feebly. 'Poor little chap. I'm all that's left him, and he won't have me for long.'
Snelling, moving noiselessly, crossed to the doctor, and whispered to him. The doctor shook his head, and the two stood side by side in the twilight looking down. Suddenly the farmer spoke out clear and loud: 'Robert, you'll do your duty by him?'
'Make your mind easy about that, John,' Snelling answered. 'I shall do my duty by him.'
With that Vale sighed and closed his eyes, and the elders looking at him saw that his chin had fallen. The housekeeper took young John by the hand and led him away. He knew as well as she did what had happened, and wept bitterly. He had good reason to weep, being thus robbed of that kindly father; but if he had seen into Uncle Snelling's mind, he would have found a better reason still.

CHAPTER VI

THE difference between your big Napoleon who curses a continent, and your little Napoleon who makes life intolerable for somebody in a mere corner of the world, is not at all a difference in will or spirit, but only in brains. At bottom in either case there is a sublime conviction that the earth and the fulness thereof are for him, and not for other people; that the good things of this life in the possession of another are misplaced, and that on him they are naturally

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and fittingly bestowed; that there is somehow vested in him an inherent right to everything, and that the ownership of property or the exercise of will on the part of any other creature under heaven is more or less of an injury to him.
Mr. Robert Snelling was mentally a very small creature by the side of the grand Napoleon, but morally he was a very faithful copy. If young John's hairs had been estates, his cupidity would have had stomach for them all. Mr. Snelling looked reasonably at things. For instance: here was this puling boy, who cried if he had a geographical question closely pressed upon him, and whose head was as soft as a boiled turnip—a mere infant, who knew nothing of the value of money or the use of lands—and there on the other side was he, Robert Snelling, keen to enjoy the possession of property, an excellent man of business, in the prime of life and the full possession of his faculties. Now, to whom, in the name of Justice and Common Sense, would it be reasonable to suppose that the property ought to fall? To the puling boy? Ridiculous! To Robert Snelling? Assuredly! A wayfaring man, though a fool, could not go by the question in a hurry without being able to decide it.
By the great rights of Reason and Propriety, John's property ought to have belonged to Robert Snelling. Absurdly enough, it belonged to John, and there was John to claim it. One of those irritating, ridiculous, and unescapable positions the Napoleonic order of

mind is compelled to gird at, and if there be no means of curing it, to endure. After all, were there any means of curing it? Perhaps there were.
Now, if things to the full as abominable and villainous were not done every day, it would be pleasant and satisfactory to hope that they were never done at all; but the plain English is that Mr. Snelling had determined to hold John's property by the simple expedient of keeping John in such a mental condition that he should never be fit to hold it. Of course he never said that plainly to himself, because it is one of the unfailing characteristics of a mean villain never to confess himself to his own soul.

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He disguised his intent under the formula that he meant to do his duty by his charge. He was going to do that duty fearlessly and justly. He did not mean to let any foolish consideration for the boy's fads and fancies come in between him and the wishes of the boy's dying father. John was going to be educated—pitilessly. And monstrous as it seems, and monstrous as it is, in the contemplation of the slow crushing and destruction of the boy's mind with the clear understanding that Robert Snelling would profit by it in the end, he did actually throw a veil of virtue over his intended scoundrelism, and persuaded himself, clearly enough for all practical purposes, that in that way and in that way only he would be doing his duty.
If he had dared to let his own ugly purpose stand there naked, and had had the hardihood to look at it and acknowledge it every day, it would have been there no whit more clearly. The disguise he put upon it no more hid it from his intelligence than a bandage on a wound will hide pain from the nerves. The crookback Richard owned openly, 'I am determined to be a villain,' but then the crookback had a sense of humour, and made that fell avowal in a biting, wicked jocularity which left it earnest. Mr. Robert Snelling had no sense of humour, and so was compelled to cloak himself from himself, and to look respectable to his own interior eye.
John Vale the elder had been widely known and respected, and a large following of old friends saw him to the grave; but John the younger was his only real mourner. John the younger, in a puzzled nightmare, followed the body to the churchyard, seated in a sombre coach with Uncle Robert and two neighbouring farmers, and watched the ceaseless rain and the wildly waving boughs of trees and hedges, which tossed in the wind with the expression of just such a despair as slumbered somewhere in the recesses of his clouded mind. No more, no more; grief unspeakable—grief, grief, grief beyond hope or solace. The howling wind and plunging rain and tortured leafless branches spoke for the dumbness of his heart; but he could find no voice to answer them.

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He saw the body committed to the earth, and did not cry or make a sign of grief. He went back to the chill house which had been home, and sat at table with the funeral party, who ate heartily, and without being more barbarous than other funeral parties, talked pretty loudly after dinnner, and smoked long pipes round the table over the heavy decanters of port and sherry, and the steaming glasses of hot brandy-and-water. They had respected the dead man in his time, and they were there to show it. The elder John

Vale himself had made one of such a party in his day, and had assisted in the decorous jollification which
followed on the funeral.
Snelling sat at the head of the table, and the local solicitor, who had drawn up Vale's will, sat at the foot, and before the pipes were lit, the farmer's simple last testament was read.
'It's a heavyish charge to be left upon a man,' said Snelling, with his slow deliberate drawl; 'and for what is to be done for the lad, a thousand pound is no great payment. If I was to look at it in that way, I should feel a right to be disappointed. But I knowed John's intentions; and if his turn came first, I was willing to bear the burden. It's only putting the two fortunes into one basket, for I make no secret of it that young John'll have everything that I can leave him. I'm a lonely man, and he'll naturally come in for everything.'
'That's how to look at it, Mr. Snelling,' said Farmer Day from half-way down the table.
'That's how I look at it,' answered Snelling.'I shall do my duty by the lad. He's got to be educated, and I shall see as his education isn't neglected. Education's come to mean more than it did in our young days, gentlemen, and no man can afford to neglect it.'
One man near at hand was of opinion that this here education was too much run after, but Snelling came down upon him ponderously. 'You're behind the time, Mr. Tonks; you're behind the time, sir. And whatever I might think about the question, gentlemen, I haven't got to consult my own desires alone. It makes little difference to me

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that my desires happen to go in the same way with poor John's, for whatever his might have been, I should have thought it a sacred duty to see his wishes carried out. "I look to you," he said to me the day he died—"I look to you, Robert, to carry out my wishes, and to do your duty by the child." His wish was that young John should receive a first-rate education; and a first-rate education I shall make a point of giving him.' He was paving the way towards his own justification, and his appeal to the dead man's last words gave him no qualm of conscience.
'Young John,' said Farmer Day, 'don't look to me as if he'd do credit to a lot of educating. Sence he got that crack on the side of the head, he's been a bit stupid and mythered, like.'
'I'm afraid that's so,' Snelling answered. 'But the best must be made of such material as there is to work upon. If four mile an hour will do twenty mile in five hours, three mile an hour will do one-and-twenty mile in seven.'
Two or three of the funeral guests were impressed by this, and said that that was how to look at it.
'Depend upon it, gentlemen,' said Snelling, 'that is how to look at it. Make the best of your material. What speed can't do, application may. You've heerd the story of the hare and the tortoise? I shall have to make that my motto with my nephew, I'm afraid. But I shall see his father's wishes carried out; and as far as in me lies, and as far as in him lies, I shall try to make a scholar of him.'
This declaration met with general approval; and the one man who did not approve of education was in so marked a minority that he felt impelled to say that Snelling was

most likely in the right. He had never bothered himself much about these things. Educating hadn't come up much in his young days, and he didn't know as he was much the worse for it. He was as warm as here and there one, and had contrived to carry his cup upright. His lad Jabez could read handwriting like print; and since there was more handwriting going about than there used to be, that was no doubt a convenience.

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Before this conversation had begun, John had stolen away to the little room in which he had been used to sleep, and curling himself up on the bed, had found relief from the heavy stupefaction of his sorrow in tears. He cried until he fell asleep; and lay there forgotten and alone until the guests began to call for their traps, and to struggle into their overcoats, and to unpin from their hats the heavy black silk streamers with which they had been decorated for the funeral. Like careful saving people as they were, they carried these home for their wives, who saved them up for dresses. The black silk of a farmer's wife would sometimes represent in its voluminous folds a score of dead acquaintances, more or less.

Whilst the good-byes were going on, Snelling called for Isaiah, who came in from the kitchen, where he had been regaling with other servitors. 'Find Master Vale,' said Snelling, 'and tell him to get ready. Then harness the trap, and find the lad something to put over his shoulders will keep him dry. We shall have a wettish drive.'

This carefulness for young John's welfare was born of the presence of the guests; and when it seemed to be accepted as a matter of course, and excited no comment, the tender creature added: 'The poor little chap'll want taking care of. He's little likely to be able to take care of himself, I fancy.'

'It's lucky for him as he's fell into the hands of one of his relations,' said one bluff kindly-faced farmer, 'and not into them of a stranger.'

'Ah!' Snelling replied magnanimously, 'it's a sore loss for the lad, and I mustn't grumble at the bit of trouble.'

The early winter evening was falling fast, and candles were lit already. Isaiah, peering hither and thither about the darkening house, and failing to find young John, took a light at length and mounted to the upper story. He walked into two or three deserted rooms, all of which seemed to have the new chill of loneliness and loss upon them, and at last entered the chamber in which the boy lay asleep. The sense of solitude and awe impelled

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him to go on tiptoe; and when he had pushed the door gently open, and had caught sight of the figure on the bed, he moved yet more softly, and shaded with his hand the light he carried. John's eyelids were red with tears, and reddened channels were clearly to be seen on his pale cheeks. His lashes were still moist, and a shivering sob now and again broke the level cadence of his breathing. He was fast asleep; and Isaiah, still shading the candle, bent close over him and peered into his face. The man's inexpressive visage showed little, but he shook his head at intervals, and sighed once or twice, as if in pity.

His master's voice awoke him from a day-dream, and he answered, 'Coming.' The call awoke John, who sat up on the bed with a forlorn and wondering air.
'Come along, Master John,' said Isaiah. 'We're agoing home.' John began to cry again, and Isaiah looked at him in a wretched perplexity, scratching his head rather viciously the while. 'Crying won't mend it, you know,' he said at length. 'It was to be, and it was. All the crying in the world won't fetch him back again.'
There was no denying the philosophy; but it was cold comfort, and young John's tears seemed to fall the faster for it.
'Isaiah!' cried Snelling from below in a tone of angry impatience.
'Come along, Master John,' said Isaiah. 'There's the gaffer acalling, and we must go home.'
'It isn't home, Isaiah,' John answered with a burst of tears; 'this is home.'
Snelling shouted again from below stairs, and came after his call with a heavy footstep, solid, slow, and purposeful, like his voice and manner. The light gleaming through the open door guided him to the chamber.
'Am I to wait here all night, Isaiah?' he demanded.
'What do you want?' asked Isaiah snappishly, glad of a chance to relieve his sensations by a brush with his employer. 'Do you want me to take the orphan by the scruff o' the neck and chuck him downstairs? Or would you rather as I should wait for him a bit till he gets ready?'

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Snelling contented himself with a wrathful glance, which had as much effect upon Isaiah as it would have, had upon the wall.
'Come, come, my lad,' he said, addressing John, 'we must be going. Theer's no use in idle tears, though you was to sheed enough to fill a pond.'
Isaiah had offered the same wretched consolation; but there are ways and ways of saying things, and the man's voice had sounded kindly, while the master's sounded pitiless and hard. For one reason or another, the harsh voice had the greater effect; and John, stifling his sobs, took the hand which Uncle Robert extended to him, and suffered himself to be led from the room.
'Now get the trap ready, Isaiah, and look sharp about it,' said Snelling when they reached the kitchen. 'Everybody's gone, and there's nothing left but to follow 'em, and lock up.' Isaiah went into the rain with a loose sack thrown over his shoulders, and Snelling, still holding young John's hand, sat down. He was not utterly unfeeling—nobody is—and John's distress made him angry. 'I thought I'd asked you to give over crying,' he said therefore. 'You'd better do as you are bid, or else I may give you something to snivel for.' This speech showed so clearly that he had more to cry for than he had hitherto guessed, that John, who had been struggling hard against his grief, broke out afresh.
'Very good, John,' said Uncle Robert—'very good. We shall know how to tame this disobedient spirit by-and-by.' With that he released him, and a wheel of dull pain began to whirl in the boy's head. It acted like a narcotic, stilling all thought and emotion; and before Isaiah came back to say that the trap was ready, John had ceased to cry, and had fallen into mere vacuity and dulness. Snelling thrust a candle towards his face and bent

forward to scrutinise him. The face he looked at was troubled with recent tears, but except that it was sad and helpless, bore hardly any expression. It was obvious to the mind of the observer that this was the way to take with him, and he said with a calm and weighty decision, by way of keeping

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the veil of respectable intention over the ugly figure in his mind: 'One of my duties is to teach you obedience, John, and you may rely upon it as I shan't forget it.'
Isaiah appearing to announce that all was ready, was bidden to prepare John for the journey, and obeyed in silence.
'Safe bind, safe find,' said Uncle Robert, locking the door and pocketing the key. He turned to look at the house, when he was half-way down the path, and stood a moment or two in the pouring rain, thinking already that the desirable freehold tenement and farm-lands surrounding and adjoining were as good as his. At the sight of John seated in the trap, his gorge rose; he meant so vilely by him that he could not do less than hate him, and he began to hate him at that instant. What right had he to be in the world at all, blocking up Robert Snelling's way to prosperity? It was abominable in him even to be there to be disposed of, soiling a man's conscience. Though, when Mr. Snelling caught himself at that fancy, even for a second, he wrenched himself wrathfully away from it, and fixed his single eye on duty. He was going to educate that boy and do his duty by him; but he knew beforehand that the boy would so ill repay his cares that he would be good for nothing all his lifetime.
The sick wheel of dull pain ran round in John's head until it ran down of itself, and he fell asleep again in the rain and darkness, with the tears of the mournful night upon his face.

CHAPTER VII

HOWEVER fully Mr. Robert Snelling was bent upon doing his duty by his orphan charge, he was not able to set all his benevolent machinery at once in motion. The Christmas holidays stretched a merciful interval between John and schooldays, and Uncle Robert had too righteous a fear of public opinion to begin immediately to press the boy

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with home lessons to such an extent as to make life an actual burden to him. The boy's state of mind was critical and curious, and Uncle Robert was not quite the man to understand it. But as no intimate knowledge of the art of watchmaking, for instance, is needed to enable any clumsy fellow to spoil for good and all the most delicate mechanism, so no great power of penetration was necessary to Snelling's plan. It was part of his method to have John a good deal on evidence, and to draw pitying attention to his mooning vacant ways.

'Upon my word,' he would say, 'I don't know what I shall make o' the lad at all. I'm sore afraid he'll never be good for much. It would ha' been a grief to his father to have seen him i' this state; and it's my belief he gets worse every day.'
He had found, dull as he was, that an ostentatious pity had more effect upon the boy than the most open bullying, and this discovery pleased him greatly. Nature played into his hands. Knowing—in spite of the hourly renewed veil of respectability which he hung between his motive and himself—what a thorough-going villainy he was bent upon, he was naturally very careful of public opinion, and it was so much safer to pity than to bully, that in a little while he gave himself wholly over to that course.
'Dear, dear!' he would say, when once he had blundered on the use of this unexpected weapon. 'It's a dreadful pity you got that knock on the head, John; I'm afraid it's made next door to a fool of you for life. D'ye feel it anywheer? What is it? What's it like?'
This sort of thing was doubly effective before strangers, because it threw John into a dreadful state of helpless vacancy, and at the same time helped to establish Uncle Robert's reputation for gentleness of heart, and showed how sad he was over the boy's misfortune. But Mr. Snelling expected schoolmaster Macfarlane to be of great assistance to him, and looked forward anxiously to the reopening of the school. A day or two before the time appointed for that event, his business led him by Macfarlane's residence, and he made a call upon him. 'I've called,'

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he said, when he had taken his seat in the schoolmaster's little parlour, 'to have a word or two about this poor young nephew of mine, Mr. Macfarlane. I'm afraid as of late he has been a bit back'ard in his studies.'
'That is certainly the case, Mr. Snelling,' said Macfarlane; 'but I must ask you to take into consideration the fact that the late Mr. Vale particularly desired that the boy should not be pressed forward too rapidly.'
'Please, understand,' Snelling answered with a wooden condescension, 'that I am not ablaming you, sir. I am fully aweer of Mr. Vale's desire. But the youth is now in my hands, and I am desirous to see him pushed forrad a little faster. I am now his guardian, and I feel the responsibility hang upon me pretty heavy.'
'That is quite natural, Mr. Snelling,' returned the schoolmaster.
'I don't want to be told, sir, whether it is natural or no,' said Snelling. Maybe everybody would feel the responsibility as heavy as I do; maybe they would not. That, sir, is neither here nor theer. The point with me is, as I do feel the responsibility, and as I desire to discharge it.'
'Exactly so,' replied Macfarlane.
Mr. Snelling looked as if he would have liked to contradict him, but on reflection seemed to think better of it. 'Having had the b'y,' he proceeded heavily—'having had the b'y under my care sence a considerable while before his father's death, I have been able to come to a bit of a judgment upon his character.'
'Precisely,' said the schoolmaster.
Again Mr. Snelling looked as if he would like to defy the schoolmaster, and again, not seeing his way to it, he suppressed himself. 'His father's opinion was,' he continued, his

solemn drawl and decisive snap growing more solemn and more decisive, 'as the condition of the b'y's mind was such as would not bear with pressure.'
'Just so,' said Macfarlane, and this time Snelling saw his chance and stopped him.
'No, sir; it is not just so. It is not just so, nor any thing like just so, if my opinion is to be took at any value.'

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'If you should counsel the pursuit of another method, Mr. Snelling—'
'If I should counsel the pursuit of another method,' Snelling broke in, 'you can hear what I've got to say in case you should care to listen to it. If not, I daresay I shall be able to find a place where the lad can learn as much maybe as you could teach him.'
'I beg your pardon, Mr. Snelling,' said the schoolmaster submissively; 'I simply intended to signify my general agreement with the principles you were laying down.'
'You can signify your general agreement, sir,' Mr. Snelling answered with his own dull dignity, 'when you know what them principles amount to.'
Macfarlane could not afford to quarrel with his visitor, and was, indeed, as a general thing, too discreet to quarrel with people who were stronger than he was, or who could in any way be either of damage or service to him. He kept silence, therefore, and listened, smilingly attentive, whilst Snelling expounded his views.
'As a teacher of youth,' that ponderous personage continued, 'you are likely to be acquynted with the fable of the hare and the tortoise. My nevew has become a bit of a tortoise, in consequence of the smack on the side of the head he got in the meadows on Scott's Hills in the course of last summer. But that's no reason why, if he's pushed judicious—I say judicious, mind you—he should not at the end of the year be on level terms with them that has greater advantages. If five hour at four mile an hour will enable a b'y to do twenty mile, seven hour at three mile an hour will enable that same b'y to do one-and-twenty mile.'
The schoolmaster made a motion of assent, and Snelling paused.
'I beg your pardon; I thought you was going to make a observation.'
'I simply intended to signify my entire agreement, Mr. Snelling.'
'The b'y,' pursued Mr. Snelling, 'has took shelter, as a b'y is apt to do, under his father's weakness. The b'y-

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as most b'ys are—is inclined to take it easy, if he gets the chance. In short, sir, he has grown lazy with indulgence. That is what's mainly the matter with him; he has grown lazy with indulgence. Now, what I wish, sir, is that that theer perclivity should be conquered in him. The last words his father said to me before the coroner's inquest was held upon his body was these: "Robert," he said, "I look to you to do your duty by the b'y. I know," he said, "that it is and will be a arduous task; but," he says, "I look to you to do it. I shall expect you," says he, "to be a second father to him, and I repose full confidence in you." Now, sir,' continued Mr. Snelling, with a bullying air, 'I intend to be worthy of them words, and to do my duty in the spirit as it was confided to me. I

desire John to be pushed forrad, and though I shan't ask you to exercise any undoo severity, I shall look for results from this here conversation.'

He was so portentously slow, that Macfarlane, who was glib of speech and warm of temperament, felt inclined to hurry him. 'I grasp your idea, sir,' he said when he was quite sure that his visitor had finished, 'and I will do my best to carry out your instructions. I have had backward boys in my charge before to-day, Mr. Snelling, and I think I may say that I have been tolerably successful with them.'

'We shall see, sir,' returned Snelling—'we shall see. You will find him inclined to wander, and you may be took in by that, as I was took in by it, unless you are forewarned. He has been allowed to wander, and that's wheer the mischief has come in. His mind must be kep' upon his task; he must be shown as he will not be allowed to wander.'

'I will bear your instructions in mind, Mr. Snelling,' said the schoolmaster. 'I have observed that tendency in John.' He took a retrospective look. 'I have observed that tendency, and but that his father's instructions were emphatically towards leniency—I may say towards indulgence—I think I should have been able to correct it.'

Mr. Macfarlane was a survival, and not a very late survival either, of those days when a man who had failed

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in every other walk of life was still held good enough to be a schoolmaster. There was not a country town in England at that time which did not own one pedagogue to whose care the welfare of a score or two of boys was confided, without his having either special training or special learning or special temper. A brass plate and a prospectus were stock-in-trade enough to start with; and if the man who displayed these essentials to the world had not the others, they were supposed perhaps to come with practice, or perhaps their presence or absence was not supposed to matter much. Macfarlane wrote a copper-plate hand, spelled accurately, and was dreadfully distinct and anxious about his aspirates, so that he passed with the easy-going Castle-Barfield folk not merely as a scholar but a person of high-breeding. When a man not only breathed hard on 'him' and 'whom,' but was actually compelled by his sense of responsibility to the language to wedge a laborious aspirate into 'we-heelbarrow,' it was evident that he was a person of no common training. The homely folks would have felt that in anybody but a schoolmaster a care so constant would have something too much of a reproach for common people who had something more than their hs to think about; but in a preceptor of youth it was excellent, and gave him just that happy difference from other men which a white tie gave the parson.

Whether the idea were born with him, or inspired into him, or whether it grew merely as a result of habit and custom, and was confirmed by experience, Macfarlane's educational fetich was the bamboo cane. Without bodily suffering, he really did not see how boys were to learn anything. He was quite honest in this belief, as many worthier men than he had been before him; and since he was so, it was well for him, if not for the urchins who lived beneath his rule, that he felt as much pleasure in inflicting punishment as some men do in spreading happiness. The enjoyment of other people's pain is like the habit of dram-drinking or opium-taking—it grows with practice, and

nature demands an increasing dose. The schoolmaster had enjoyed twenty years of arbitrary power,

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and to make some young soul wretched, or some young body to smart and tingle, had grown into a daily necessity with him. To have at the back of his keenest relish a firm and rooted belief that he was doing an imperative duty whilst he enjoyed himself, was delightful.

All that Snelling knew or cared about him was that he was a strict disciplinarian, who, being led to suspect that a boy shammed dulness, would be likely to be hard with him. For his own part, he had said nothing that the most affectionate and dutiful of uncles and guardians might not have said of a child whom he wished well from the bottom of his heart; but turning over the theme in his dull mind, he thought he saw a chance of protecting himself against possible suspicion, and took it, not without some inward tremors.

'You see, sir,' he said to Macfarlane, 'theer's a thing that lays a extry anxiety upon my shoulders. This b'y is heir to a very considerable property, and I am his sole guardian. I am his sole relative; and if his education should be neglected, and he should live to grow up as soft as he is now, theer's them in Castle-Barfield as is quite low enough in their minds to say as I neglected him with a eye to my own interest. Theerfore, I feel it needful to be severe with him, and to push him forrad harder than I should do.'

'I think I may say,' replied Macfarlane, rising as his visitor rose, and escorting him to the door, 'that I fully appreciate your anxiety. The boy needs a firm hand.'

'That is what he needs,' said Snelling — 'a firm hand.'

'He will find it here, Mr. Snelling; he will find it here. Good-morning, Mr. Snelling.'

It happened that John went to school at the opening day of the new year's business there in unusually good spirits, and that he joined in a romp with his schoolfellows with something of his old abandon and jollity. Macfarlane, tying on his black satin stock at a bedroom window which overlooked the playground, observed this, and stored it up for use. It is not doing the good man any injustice to

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admit that he felt eager to begin the cultivation of his patch of boyhood, or to acknowledge that he resolved that if the bamboo had anything to say to it, John should advance as rapidly as his comrades. The bamboo was not the end, but only the means of culture, a plough which prepared the ground for the reception of the seed of learning. Tickle the boy with bamboo, and he laughed with a harvest of verbs and moods and tenses.

Above the awful desk of state at which he sat, Macfarlane had a board which moved upon a hinge. It bore on one side the word 'Work,' and on the other the word 'Leisure,' each legibly printed in black letters on a white ground. It displayed one side or the other in obedience to the tug of a cord which lay within easy reach of the schoolmaster's hand, and either in rising or falling it struck a circular spring from which a bell was suspended. The bell rang, and dead silence or wild clamour of tongues succeeded.

The boys were already marshalled to their desks when the master entered, and took his customary place amidst a deafening hubbub. The cord was pulled, the bell rang, the board showed the dire legend 'Work,' and the labours of the schoolboy year began.
'You may have heard, boys,' said Mr. Macfarlane, who, bereft of authority during the month of holiday, and forced to abdicate from his throne, felt all the happier on coming back again, and was gifted at such times with a dreadful jocularity—'you may have heard, boys, that it is a practice amongst Her Majesty's judges, when they visit a town at which criminals are ordinarily brought before them to be tried, and when, contrary to the general rule, they find that no breach of the laws has been committed, to assume a pair of white gloves. Now, I should very much like at the end of the present session to be able to assume a pair of white gloves myself. I should be proud and pleased if for once in my dealings with you I should find it unnecessary to inflict punishment upon one of your number. Crowther! stand up, sir! What do you mean, sir, by those hideous contortions?'

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'Kenrick's put a pea in my ear, sir, if you please, and I can't get it out, sir.'
'Indeed,' said Mr. Macfarlane. 'Thus early in the history of the half-year—even upon its threshold, I find my hopes dashed to the ground. Kenrick, I will ask you to be good enough to report yourself to me after morning school-hours. These little ebullitions of holiday feeling must be checked, Kenrick; they must be checked, Kenrick, and you may rely upon it that they shall be checked, and sternly. There is always one misdemeanant who must be the first to suffer in any half-year of work upon which we may enter, and you, Kenrick, have promoted yourself to that bad eminence.'
Being thus early assured of any fear he may have had of getting out of practice, Mr. Macfarlane descended from his desk and marched among his forces, and every boy who felt him hovering over his shoulder would have run for shelter, as chickens run from the shadow of a hawk, if he had had any protecting wing to fly to. The laborious tongue which followed the up and down stroke was withdrawn from sight—for it was a playful trick of Mr. Macfarlane's to chuck the chins of offenders in this respect—and the pen faltered wofully under that cruel eye. The passing shadow of the master's presence scared the toiler at the rule of three, and shook with polar chills and equatorial burnings the student of geography.
What a blessing it is that the memory of a boy is so short, and the memories of men are so illusive! Men reared under the cruellest training look back to their youthful days with kindness, and remember even their tyrants with no bitterness of heart. It is well for the world at large that this is so; but it is none the better for the tyrants, but rather the worse, for it is well for no man to escape the just punishment of his offences. There are fewer impostors in the noble scholastic realm than used to walk there. There are fewer rages in innocent helpless hearts, and fewer and less bitter tears shed by childish eyes, than in those bad old days, but the tears are remembered somewhere, and the provoked offences of the innocent

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are not forgotten. And there are still professors enough of the harsh school to make it worth while to ask how much the better they are for the heart-hardening regimen which made their childhood bitter.

Mr. Macfarlane was a dutiful man, and had had young John especially recommended to his faithful care. Poor John had forgotten what his elder very well remembered; they had parted with bad blood between them, and only the accident of his being called away from school had saved John from a flogging for that hysterical sacrilegious laugh when Jenvey had given his mad denial to the schoolmaster's pet formula.

In the course of his strollings hither and thither, Macfarlane kept his eye upon his specially recommended pupil. The specially recommended pupil was apparently diligent, and was seated with his head in both hands and his eyes bent upon his book.

'Vale,' said the schoolmaster, coming up with him and laying a hand upon his shoulder, 'your uncle is very little pleased with the progress you have been making, and I have promised to devote particular attention to your studies. Little birds that can sing and will not sing will have to be made to sing. I shall have to see that you keep full pace with your comrades. You have had ample consideration on account of your accident, and you will now begin in earnest. You understand me, sir?'

'Yes, sir,' John answered.

'It will be well for you if you do,' Macfarlane responded, 'for I shall visit severely any tendency I may observe in you to shirk your lessons.'

At this the wheel began to turn in John's head, but he made shift to answer: 'I beg your pardon, sir. I'll try; but I'm afraid I can't learn as fast as the other boys. It makes my head turn, if you please, sir; it's turning now.'

'I have no doubt,' replied Macfarlane, with a relish how much superior to that he would have got out of a retort to a creature of an equal size!—'I have no doubt we shall make it turn to some purpose before we have done with it.'

It began to turn to some purpose now, and turned so

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industriously that John sat in a sick whirl until it came to his turn to be examined, by which time his mind was as blank as Sahara, and Mr. Macfarlane found it necessary to test the stimulative powers of the bamboo. But weeds of confusion and tares of helplessly rebellious pain were all that grew beneath it, and the end of the first day found the boy sullenly empty.

'The lad's head's a waste,' said Uncle Robert to Isaiah that evening. 'I'm sore afraid he'll never come to be anything but a fool as long as theer's breath in his body.'

He thought in his heart what an able unconscious ally Macfarlane was likely to be, and looked over his cousin John's accounts later in the evening with an enjoying relish.

CHAPTER VIII

IN the course of a month or two, John being by this time regarded as hopelessly intractable, Uncle Robert began to see that Fortune looked upon him with a smiling face. Nobody accused him, nobody blamed him, nobody suspected him of desiring to do anything but his duty by the pitiable and worthless creature left to his control. It was

generally known that the boy was 'soft,' that is to say that he was almost but not quite an idiot. The bullying, mocking, pitying regime had brought him to that pass in so short a space of time.

To tell the truth, this rapid realisation of his hopes removed all sense of criminality from Uncle Robert's mind. There had never been any very oppressive sense of his own wickedness there—as, indeed, how should there be, when John's position and his own had been so evidently in need of rectification? He felt such a claim upon the property on the grounds of justice and common-sense, that any measure which transferred it to his own hands looked right and reasonable—almost. And the thing being so easily done, looked as if it must have happened in any

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case. He sturdily refused to believe that he had hastened the catastrophe; and that amazing inward effrontery which everybody has, more or less, enabled him to tell himself that he had never meant to hasten it, or taken anything but common-sense means against it.

If there was anything which disturbed his felicity, it was the reflection that John would be a burden upon the estate; but he comforted himself with the reflection that the charges would be but small. He knew a case where a well-to-do father had left his estate in equal parts to his twin sons. One of them had grown up with a weak intellect; and the other boarded him at a farmhouse and paid a hundred a year for his maintenance; whilst he himself lived in a big house and kept his servants and carriages. Nobody thought the worse of this gentleman, and it was certain that the unfortunate brother had as much as he wanted or knew how to enjoy.

Before the body of John Vale the elder had lain three months in the ground, John Vale the younger was the unresisting fag and butt of half his schoolfellows, and Mr. Macfarlane's tool of mental culture was more employed upon his wretched little body than upon that of any other two of the little crowd subjected to his tyrannies. But he had one friend whom his feebleness could not alienate, and who stuck to him the closer because of the ills that fell upon him. Master William Gregg fought his battles, and accepted the responsibility for many an act of helpless mischief, and did his lessons until it became quite useless to do them any longer, and generally played his part of protector with a bulldog fidelity natural to him. It became so certain that any boy who wanted to bully John had first of all to walk over the prostrate body of Master Gregg, and that youth was so difficult to walk over, and would be to-morrow so completely oblivious of to-day's defeat, that out of school-hours the forlorn innocent was at last left alone. In the days of health, he had been the brightest and cleverest lad in the school, full of courage, gaiety, high spirits, and mild dreams. He could jump farther in those days, and run faster, and learn his lessons with less effort than any one

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of them, and to the bulldog Gregg he had been a sort of Admirable Crichton. Everybody has seen and known these ungrudging romantic admirations and friendships amongst boys. John's fall from glory only made William Gregg the more loyal to him; and

William went on his way in life in pretty constant heart-burning, because of the ill-usage his chum suffered. His days and nights were filled with dreams of the time when he would be as big as Macfarlane, and would be in a position to revenge himself for all the purposeless thrashings John now took at his hands. You cannot expect to have all the bulldog virtues and to escape all the bulldog shortcomings. Master Gregg was fully assured that as soon as he saw the remotest chance of repaying the schoolmaster, he should do it, and he hoarded up capital of wrath and added compound interest at such a rate as was warranted by no rules of arithmetic into which Macfarlane had yet inducted him.

The explosion came before he had meant it to come, for on a certain brightly showery day in April, the schoolmaster was in more than common form, and had John out three times. On the first occasion, Master Gregg's sense of compound interest was worked at the usual extravagant rate, but no more; on the second, it assumed proportions which would have appalled the greediest of usurers; and on the third there were no figures to express it.

'Walk this way, Vale,' said Macfarlane, with an air of resigned fatigue, bent upon duty. 'I had hoped that the day's warning would have been sufficient, and that you would have been induced to prosecute your studies with some slight willingness and attention. I observe with regret that it is not so, and that I must repeat the lesson.' All this was wasted on the hapless John, who did not even know that the magistral voice was addressed to him, or what it said. 'Vale!' roared the bully, glad of the opportunity for flying into a passion, which this indifference gave him. He loved a rage, for it was the only outlet he knew from the tedious routine of his life. Nothing else lighted his blood to fervour, or quickened his heart-beats, or in any way fanned the ashes of his inward fires. 'Come here,

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sir!' He smote the desk with his cane so fiercely that every boy winced and winked.

The wretched John lifted his dull pale face with the grime of tears all over it, and arose. Young Gregg rose also, with a face even paler. He held in one hand a ruler, and with the other he fished a leaden inkstand from its hole in the desk before him, and stood with the ink dripping from his fingers. His heart beat with such monstrous thumps that every pulse shook him from head to foot, and his voice quaked as he spoke: 'Stop where you are, Jack.'

Only that New Englander of Lowell's who figured to himself a potato 'all on end at being boiled' could find a figure to do justice to the schoolmaster's amazement. It positively took his breath away. The boys looked on in wonder and wild awe, as at some dread cataclysm in nature. Gregg and the schoolmaster looked at each other in silence.

'Vale,' said Macfarlane, 'I will attend to you later on. Stay where you are. Come here, Gregg.'

Gregg, with the dripping inkstand in one hand and the ruler in the other, stepped backward over the form, and walked slowly into the open space between the front desk and the firegrate.

'Put those things down,' said Macfarlane. The boy shook his bulldog head and kept his glittering wicked eye upon the schoolmaster's, but said nothing.
There was a dreadful combat, but it was all unequal. So long as there was an ounce of fight left in him, the bulldog fought, and so long as Macfarlane could thrash he thrashed. In such a battle, blows fell anywhere, and the boy's face was wealed and streaked with blood when it was over.
The schoolmaster retired, leaving further discipline in the hands of the usher. Master Gregg, gathering himself together, walked to the desk and helped himself to water from the master's carafe and tumbler. He was white, except for the flushed and swollen streaks on his face, and trembled so much that he rattled the glass and water-bottle together noisily and spilled a good deal of the water when he drank. He propped himself against the desk, and from

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time to time drew the body of his hand gingerly across his face and then looked at the blood upon it. The usher was awe-struck, and hardly dared to take notice of him. He was a young man of constitutional timidity, and was not overfed. The boy's dogged ferocity and quiet had frightened him, and perhaps in his heart he was not altogether on the tyrant's side.
An hour went by before Macfarlane came back. He had been busy in the interval with diachylon plaster, vinegar, and brown paper, and other such mild curatives for abrasions. Master Gregg looked at him as he entered; but the schoolmaster went by him without notice and took his customary seat, but with something more than his customary care.
'Boys,' he said, 'you have seen the punishment which is inflicted upon insubordination. You have witnessed an attempt to violate and set at nought the salutary and necessary discipline of the school. It is now my duty to show you that nothing can subvert that discipline or overthrow it. Vale, come here!'
'Stop where you are, Jack,' said the dogged chum. If anything, the awe and amazement that fell upon the listeners transcended the first shock. Somehow, Master Gregg had provided himself with another ruler. He spat upon his hand and clutched it, workmanlike, twisting it until he had a firm hold upon it, and he looked so very unconquered that Macfarlane was more than half afraid of him.
'This has all to be gone through again, Gregg, has it?' he asked with an attempt at humour which sat rather uneasily upon his face and rang rather false in his voice.
'Seems so,' said Gregg, with an accent which sounded a hundredfold more daring and insolent for being purely commonplace. 'I shan't stand by and see him licked. He can't learn his lessons, and you know he can't learn 'em. It's no use licking him,' he concluded in an almost argumentative tone.
'I should have thought, Gregg,' said the schoolmaster, 'that your lesson would have sufficed you.'—Gregg shook

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his head with perfect solemnity.—'Do you presume to imagine that you will be allowed to dictate the discipline of the school?'—Gregg shook his head again.—'If I am compelled again to administer chastisement, I shall not spare you, Gregg; but I am not disposed at present to inflict further punishment if I can avoid it. Go to your seat, sir.' A third time Gregg shook his head.

'You won't lick Vale again, sir,' he said, as if he had made up his mind upon the question.

Macfarlane, for the first time in his life, concluded reluctantly that nothing but bamboo would meet the case. There was another battle, which ended as the first had done, and ended sooner. Master Gregg's nerves had broken down, and he was sobbing and weeping at the end of this encounter; but when Vale was called again, he got to his feet and spluttered, 'Stop where you are, Jack,' with as wilful a determination as ever.

'Mr. Johnson,' said Macfarlane, addressing his assistant, 'I shall be obliged to you if you will make a personal visit to Gregg's father and inform him that I have been compelled to expel Gregg from the school.'

The usher whispered that the hour for the dismissal of the school had passed, and the schoolmaster welcomed the intelligence.

'You may go, boys,' he said. 'I will deal with you to-morrow, Vale.' And with that he withdrew.

Master Gregg got home with difficulty, and found that the usher had been there before him. Gregg, senior, who was all for the sustenance of authority, conceived it to be his duty to horsewhip William, and did it—thereby setting more machinery in motion than he dreamt of; for if it had not been for this supplementary flogging, Uncle Robert's delightfully simple plan would in all probability have prospered, and such starved root of wit as lived in young John's brains would have perished altogether.

When William had digested his flogging, he was allowed to take his supper and retire to rest without much further notice. The first thing he did on reaching his bedroom was to lock himself in, and being thus safe from observation

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or intrusion, he set to work to pack up sundry simple necessaries, which he tied together in a handkerchief. Next, from the bottom of a small wooden trunk which belonged to him he extracted a glazed earthen money-pot, which gave forth a heavy muffled noise as he shook it. After having vainly tried to coax the coins it held through the slit at the top by means of a straw, a folded leaf of his copy-book, and the end of a lucifer-match, he laid the earthen treasury upon the bed and there broke it with a tap of the poker, having previously laid his jacket over it to dull the sound of the blow. He gathered up the shards and hid them carefully beneath the firegrate, pushing them as far out of sight as they would go. Next he counted his treasure, and made out three shillings and fourpence in coppers, and one shilling and sevenpence in threepenny and fourpenny pieces. From his trousers pockets he drew such a variety of miscellaneous articles as boys love to carry, and amongst them a solitary penny piece, sticky with cobbler's wax and toffy. Having counted it over with extreme silence and caution several times, in the vain hope of making more than five shillings of it, he tied it all together in a strip of rag

and put it under his pillow. Then he undressed and got into bed, and after some sore-sided tumbling and tossing, fell asleep.
It was pitch-dark when he awoke, but he was out of bed in an instant. He lit his candle and dressed with great quiet and expedition; and so with his bundle in one hand, his boots in the other, and his handful of money bulging out one of his pockets, he stole noiselessly downstairs. The clock ticked sternly at him, and the housedog's cold nose thrust suddenly into his hand in the dark brought his heart into his mouth. The lock and the bolts of the door were rusty, and creaked dreadfully as he withdrew them; but though he listened with all his ears, he heard no sound of movement in the house. The night gaped at him, black, chill, and starless, when the door was open, and the widespread world looked cheerless enough. But he had made up rather an unusual mind for a boy of his years, and perhaps had rather an unusual mind for a

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boy of his years; and stifling any misgivings that may have assailed him, he slipped into the open air, closed the door behind him, and stole away.
He looked back once at the house he was leaving, and found suddenly that he had no rancour in his heart. But he turned round again to the bare world he had made up his mind to face, and trudged on in a growing darkness until he reached the Jacob's ladder and mounted to Scott's Hills. There he sat down upon a stile to wait for daylight—which proved a weary business. He dozed several times, and awoke, nipped to the bone by the chill air of early April; but at last, in spite of sore bones, and cold, and the loneliness which was worse than anything else or all other discomforts put together, he fell sound asleep again, until the morning sun shining full into his eyes awoke him
He rose to his feet, shook himself, and pursued his way towards the town. Arrived there, he found the earliest inhabitants already leisurely taking down their shop-shutters, or sweeping out their shops or leaning on their brooms to exchange the slow-going news of the place across the street. He could not rid himself of a sense that everybody was aware of his intent, and that he was running away from home; and this feeling, if anybody had noticed him, might have given him a furtive look as he sped along the High Street towards Robert Snelling's house.
Snelling's house stood three or four doors from a side-street which branched off from the main thoroughfare; and from this side-street branched off in turn a narrow blind alley, in which were situate a bakehouse, a wheelwright's workshop, a stable or two, and a granary. Doors opening off the alley led to the back-yards of dwelling-houses, and in one of them, as fate would have it, young Gregg saw the chum for whose sake he had suffered, languidly and dreamily blacking a pair of boots. It was part of Uncle Robert's household economy that the young should have this kind of office imposed upon them, and he had set John the task with all the greater willingness because the boy had never been accustomed to it, and it hurt his pride.

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The runaway tried in vain to signal his companion by whistlings and rappings, and at length growing desperate, ventured within the yard and called him by name. At that John turned and came towards him.
'Come outside,' young Gregg whispered. 'Come with me.'
Young John obeyed unquestioningly; and when William began to run with a backward inviting glance and gesture, he followed. They ran up the by-street until they came to an open piece of waste land with three or four abandoned houses on it, deserted by some bankrupt contractor, and long since left to fall to ruin and decay.
'Where are you going, Will?' he asked then.
'I have run away from home,' Will answered. 'I am going to seek my fortune, if you'll come with me. Do come, Jack. What have you got to stay for? Macfarlane will give you a hiding if you go back to school. He'll always be doing it. You can't learn your lessons, Jack; it's no use trying. Will you come?'
John looked frightened, and hesitated.
'Come along,' the other urged him, taking him by the hand. He obeyed the impulse, and they set out together. 'I'll take care of you, Jack.' The bulldog heart was as warm and tender and valiant as ever yet a heart was in the world. 'You cheer up, old chap; they shan't hurt you any more.'

CHAPTER IX

THERE might have been a certain elation of spirit produced by running away from home under other circumstances; but John was so dull that he seemed only half to realise what he was doing, and Will was so sore with yesterday's handlings that walking was difficult to him. John's spirits could fall but little lower, and Will had his inward fires to keep him going; but they were both solemn and silent.
'I'm beastly hungry, Will.' said John, when they had

travelled some two miles. They had struck into the great southern road which led Londonwards, and Will was bent on pressing onward, for the road was dangerous for the next three or four miles. Any moment might bring a passer-by who would recognise them, and set pursuit upon the track.
'All right,' Will answered; 'you shall have something directly.'
They sighted by-and-by a little wayside house where the legend 'Ginger beer sold here' was wafered to the window-panes; and a half-dozen bilious-looking buns of suspicious yellowness were exposed with a few nuts, a wooden measure with a body of unnecessary density, and some bottles of acidulated drops, which in long neglect and solitude had learned to stick to each other. There was a picture in the window, where people with lettered bladders floating from their lips were supposed to express the highest admiration for the qualities of the ginger beer. One gentleman held a bottle in both hands with a stream of the inspiring liquid bursting from it; and another gentleman balanced the escaped cork at the extreme tip of his nose; and all the other gentlemen and several ladies lifted their hands and looked supremely unaware of everything.

The boys entered the shop, and an old woman in spectacles and pattens came clattering out of the kitchen behind it.
'Now, then,' said the old woman, as if their entrance there were an aggression and she resented it bitterly, 'what do you want?'
'How much are those buns?' Will asked, constituting himself spokesman.
'They're a penny apiece,' said the old woman. 'Very cheap and light and wholesome.'
'They're very stale, by the look of 'em,' the boy answered.'I'll give you twopence for three.'
'They're a deal more wholesome than if they were new,' said the old woman. You shall have three for twopence-ha'penny, deary.'

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'Twopence,' said Master Gregg stolidly. 'I've got to make my money go as far as I can.' There was something so aged and severe in this, that the old woman capitulated at once, and set the buns upon the counter, where they sounded like plaques of wood.
'How much is the ginger beer a bottle?'
'A penny a bottle, my dear, and very brisk and strong.'
He ordered two bottles; and the old lady having found two heavy tumblers, opened the ginger beer, which concealed its fiery properties with great meekness. It had a faintly milky hue, and drank like rain-water very faintly spiced and sweetened. The yellow buns, in spite of their rich appearance, were dry and sawdusty; but the boys despatched them somehow, and went their way, with hunger and thirst appeased for the time being. But this first drain upon his resources set Master Gregg thinking. Fourpence a meal was not an extravagant price to pay; but fourpence a meal meant a shilling a day, and at that rate he could last for five days only. Running away from home was all very well in its way; but the three diurnal meals were something, after all. Yet he was running away from bitter injustice and cruelty, as well as from home, and he had made himself responsible for John, and had promised that nobody should hurt him any more. He would keep his promise. Somehow, John should have enough to eat, and he would find and keep a shelter for him. A shelter? There was another consideration. What would it cost to get a bed? His financial possessions began to look wofully small.
Whatever other thoughts he had, he had no dream of turning back again. Let the future look as black as it might, he walked towards it, and when he thought of his companion, pity and justice stirred his heart and lent him new courage. The great majority of people are content to think of boys as if they were creatures who will come alive one of these days, and begin to think and feel at some undefined epoch of existence. But the boy is alive already, and is thinking and feeling with an intensity to which the average man is a stranger. He has so much and so many

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things to learn, that he is sure to forget with great rapidity, and so he seems inconsequent and fickle. He is a great deal better than the adult as a rule—more honest, more affectionate, more in earnest, more loyal, than he will ever be again. A man throwing up every chance in life to defend a trampled friend would be an heroic figure.

A boy doing the same thing looks only rebellious and thoughtless. I warn the reader of this chronicle that I am going to treat this exodus from the land of injustice and oppression au grand sérieux.

The two wayfarers struck the great town in something like an hour and a half from the beginning of their journey, and in another hour had walked through it and come upon the country once more. Master Gregg began to feel easier in his mind with respect to the chances of pursuit, and had ceased to look behind him whenever a vehicle of any sort made itself audible in the rear. The day was pleasant enough, dry, and bright with a spring-tide brightness. The first signs of spring-tide life were gay in the hedgerows, and the birds were busy, and made the fields vocal with their pipings. The sun shone, though not too warmly, and there was a merry vagrant wind abroad.

'Will,' said John, putting an arm through his companion's, 'where are we going?'

'We'll go to London, Jack,' said Master Gregg with more cheerfulness than his thoughts warranted. 'There's a bell ringing. D'ye hear it? What does it say, Jack?'

They stood still to listen, and a bell rang in the distant town.

'Turn again, Whittington,' John suggested.

'No,' said Master Gregg; 'whatever else it says, it doesn't say that. "Go along both of you," perhaps. It must be ten o'clock by this time. You'd have had a hiding before now, if you'd gone to school, Jack. Old Macfarlane promised you one, didn't he? He doesn't often forget his promises, old Macfarlane doesn't.'

'I'm very glad I came,' John answered wistfully after a little pause.

'That's right,' said the protector. 'I say, Jack, now

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you're with me, and haven't got anything to be afraid of, nor anybody to bullyrag you, you'll get brighter every day. Won't you? You ain't so bright as you used to be, are you, Jack?'

'No,' said Jack submissively; 'I'm not bright a bit. Do you think I shall ever be?'

'I should think I did and all. It's only Uncle Bob and old Macfarlane. Don't you mind, Jack. You'll never see them any more. We'll get something to do in London. I wonder what we shall have to be? London's a port like Liverpool. We might go to sea, and be cabin boys. That would be jolly, wouldn't it? But then they wouldn't want two in the same ship, and that wouldn't do, unless you went as a stowaway. I could hear you tap when we were three days out, so that that would be all right, wouldn't it?'

Before John could reply to this, a tall trap rattled by, and pulled up in a cloud of April dust; and there in the trap sat Isaiah, staring backwards with a face of wooden astonishment.

'Hillo!' said Isaiah. 'What brings you two here?'

Master Gregg's first natural thought was that Isaiah had been despatched in pursuit, and his question hardly served to dissipate it.

'Where are you going to?' asked Isaiah. 'What brings you so far away from home, the pair of you? It's my belief,' he added aloud, but with an inward tone, 'that they're running away, the pair of 'em.'

'So we are,' said William doggedly.

'You are, are you?' cried Isaiah. 'That's pretty cool,

that is. And where do you suppose you're agoing to, the pair of you? And what do you suppose you're going to do when you get there?'
To this neither of the fugitives returned an answer. John looked timidly at his companion, as if appealing to him for support, and Master Gregg looked sullen defiance at Isaiah, but said nothing.
'Look here, you know,' said Isaiah, climbing out of the trap and throwing the reins over his arm. 'This won't

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work a bit, this won't. It won't act at all. I've no authority over you, you know; but I must take Master John back with me; that's what I've got to do. Come along, Master John. Get into the trap.'
'We're not going back any more, either of us,' said the captain of the expedition, gathering stoutness. 'And if father and old Snelling and old Macfarlane took us back, we should run away again.'
'Oh!' returned Isaiah. 'That's settled, is it? Now, to begin with, what are you arunning away from? And—to go on with—what are you arunning to? What are you arunning away from, for a start?'
'Old Macfarlane licks him every day,' said the boy hotly. 'He can't do his lessons, and it's no use pretending that he can. And old Macfarlane licks him because he can't do them; and he licks me because I won't let him lick Jack.'
'Oh!' said Isaiah again. It was an odd-sounding slow exclamation, and seemed as if it had something friendly and understanding in it. If even the faintest flicker of a smile had gone with it, it might have been reassuring. 'You won't let him lick Jack, won't you? And how do you hinder that, young master?'
'I didn't let him yesterday, anyway,' the young master answered. 'Did I, Jack?'
'No,' said Jack gratefully. Isaiah looked from one to the other, and scratched his whiskerless cheek, with a wooden distortion of his face, but said nothing.
The bulldog boy went on with a sudden intense earnestness: 'You don't know what it's all about. I've heard my father say that if Jack doesn't get better, old Snelling will have the handling of his money; and it's my belief he don't want him to get better, and he pays old Macfarlane to bullyrag him, and keep him like he is, and make him worse.'
'Well, upon my sayso!' said Isaiah. 'You're abeginning to take away your elders' characters pretty early in life, you are! That's a very pretty idea to have hit on at your time of life.'

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'Don't take me back, Isaiah,' John besought him feebly.
'Don't you be afraid, Jack,' cried his champion; nobody'll take you back again.'
'This is all rubbish, this is,' said Isaiah. 'You can't be let go wander all over the country like a pair o' babes in the wood. Have you got any money?'—William nodded.—'How much?'

'Four-and-eightpence. I don't know whether Jack's got anything.' Jack, it appeared upon investigation, had threepence-halfpenny. 'I shall get something to do; I shan't let Jack want for anything.'

'You're a good plucked un, you are,' said Isaiah with the same unmoved visage. 'But it won't act, you know. You've got to go home again; that's what you've got to do, you know.'

Neither of the boys made any answer to this statement; and Isaiah, scratching his cheek and making hideous faces, looked at them in turn. He had felt it necessary to protest against the dreadful accusation young Gregg had hurled at his employer; but he was not so sure as he would have liked to feel that there was not a touch of truth in it. The boy himself, of course, had no idea of its full enormity. A responsible accuser would have hesitated, because he would have understood. The irresponsible boy-mind went straight to the mark simply because it could not understand the appalling nature of the truth. The more Isaiah looked at the ghastly suggestion, the more he was inclined to give it credence. It was horrible; but it was like Snelling, somehow.

'Look here!' he said after a while. 'I can't afford to stop a-idling and a-trifling here. If you young gentlemen'll get into my trap, I gives you my word—honour bright, mind you!—that I'll let you down again, and won't try to stop you, and won't try to take you back, and won't tell on you. But we'll talk it over while we go, and we'll see what is to be done. If you makes up your minds to go back, I'll take you back; and if you makes up your minds to go on, why, we must think of somewheres for you to go to. I can give you a six-mile lift, anyway.'

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'Honour bright?' asked William, and Isaiah answering, 'Honour bright!' the two boys climbed into the trap and were driven onwards.

'Now, tell us all about it,' said Isaiah; 'tell us what started you. Let's see where we are.'

In response to this invitation, William told the story of yesterday's conflict and its results in his own mind. Isaiah made him take off his coat and waistcoat in a lonely part of the road, and himself unloosed the boy's neckerchief, and undid the collar and wristbands of his shirt, to seek ocular demonstration of the truth of the tale.

'Put 'em on again,' he said brusquely, after a mere glance at the lad's arms and shoulders—'put 'em on again. Was it Macfarlane worked your face i' that way too? Um!'

After this, he stared straight before him in silence, occasionally clenching his fist and drawing his right arm back with a threatening gesture. He accompanied this gesture with a grunt of angry scorn, and was probably having it out with the schoolmaster in his own mind.

'Had any breakfast?' he asked suddenly, and being answered, grunted: 'Buns and ginger beer! What's buns and ginger beer? Can't live on buns and ginger beer. Buns and ginger beer, indeed!'

He pulled up at a wayside inn, and ordered eggs, bread and butter, and coffee, which the wanderers consumed with a relish, though they had still some mistrust of Isaiah's ultimate intentions. He in the meantime smoked a contemplative pipe, and drank a mug

of ale standing at the kitchen fireplace, and scratching his bald head in an occasional frenzy whenever either of the boys looked at him.
When they had finished their meal, he paid and drove on again; and when they were a good twelve miles from his employer's house, he pulled up suddenly and announced that he had made up his mind. 'You see that lane?' he said, indicating a grass-grown thoroughfare to the right. 'You go down that lane for about two mile, or maybe two mile and a half, and you'll come to a village with a church

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in it. When you come to the church, you'll see a shop, shop opposite, a little shop, a greengrocer's. You ask there for Mrs. Winter—that's my mother, and tell her Isaiah sent you. She'll take care of you, and I'll come over and see you on Saturday night. Out you get! It's more than my place is worth to be seen with you. I'll make it right for you at home; and there's half-a-crown apiece for you.'
'No, thank you,' said Master Gregg, taking up from John's unyielding palm the coin Isaiah had already thrust into it. We shan't go there. You're very kind, Isaiah; but you can't make it up at home, and you can't keep old Macfarlane from licking John. They don't want him to get bright again, and they won't let him if he goes back to 'em.'
'Burn my taters!' cried Isaiah in a high state of exasperation, 'I don't know what to do. You'll have to go home again; that's what you'll have to do, you know. Why, it's madness, letting two kids like you wander off into the wide, wide world. It can't be done, you know.'
'You promised you wouldn't try to stop us,' said William. 'You said, "Honour bright."'— Isaiah half groaned, half grunted an assent.—'I shall never let John come to any harm.'
'What's the use of talkin'?' cried Isaiah. 'How can you keep him from harm?'
'I shall find some work to do,' replied William stoutly; 'and I shall do it.'
'Well, now,' said Isaiah, 'will you do this? Will you promise me, you'll buy an envelope and a Queen's-head at the very first bookseller's shop you come to? Will you write on it Isaiah Winter, Post Office, Castle-Barfield? And will you send it to me if you get into any sort of trouble?'
'If you'll promise not to tell where we are.'
'Yes; I'll promise that,' said Isaiah, scratching so savagely at his baldness that he tilted his hat into the roadway. John gravely handed it up to him, and he slammed it on with an air of utter desperation. 'Mind

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you, if ever you're caught, you don't say a word about having seen me. That's a bargain?'
'That's a bargain, Isaiah; and thank you very much.'
'Well, there's five shilling apiece for you, and the Lord help you!' said Isaiah. He threw four half-crown pieces into the dusty road and drove away without a backward glance.
'You're a man, you are,' he told himself; 'you're a pretty creetur to set up to live outside of a lunatic asylum, ain't you, letting two innocents like them go trapseing about

the world?' He stared forlornly forward, and then responded angrily, as if the reproach had been addressed to him by some unjust and stupid person: 'What was a cove to do, Isaiah? Come now; what was a cove to do? Take 'em back again? Take him back?' he grunted in profound derision. 'As if anybody but a fool would ha' let 'em go like that. Well, I can't help it. They'll precious soon get through what bit they've got, with their buns and ginger beer, and such-like notions of living, and then they'll write. They won't go far. They'll be all right; and if anybody had told me as Isaiah Winter was such a fool as he's turned out to be, I'd ha' knocked his head off his shoulders.'

CHAPTER X

IT may be supposed that Isaiah made a purposed detour, or that his business led him away from the high-road. In either case the boys saw no more of him, though they bore straight on for some seven or eight miles before resting. They were excellent pedestrians, both; and after their parting with Isaiah they walked in better heart than before. They had an elder's sanction for their enterprise, however reluctantly expressed; and even John felt a little the brighter for the encounter, though in a twilight kind of way. They bought the envelope and the postage stamp,

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according to promise, and William wrote the address at the stationer's counter in his round school hand.

They were dusty and a little footsore when at sunset they entered the old-fashioned town of Warwick. Its cobbled streets and ancient gables looked unhomelike to William's eyes; and John clung to his protecting companion's sleeve, as if the strangeness of the place frightened him. Will's first business was to secure a lodging for the night, but he was shy of making inquiries, and looked about rather hopelessly. People who walked briskly in the streets seemed too busy and important with their own affairs to be accosted, and idlers looked too unconcerned and unsympathetic. The two lads drifted hither and thither, reading the legend 'Lodgings for Travellers' or 'Beds for Single Men' in windows in some of the by-streets, but repelled by the aspect of the houses. Will was afraid of the inns because of the slenderness of his resources; and from a native and cultivated prejudice in favour of cleanliness could not bring himself to face the lodging-houses. The spring night was closing fast, and the air was growing chilly. It had been passably fine all day, but now a cold sprinkle of rain and a keen wind gave a spur to his halting intent. The street they stood in was quite lonely, and lights behind the blinds of the houses made the outer night doubly dreary by comparison with the possibilities of comfort and warmth within.

'Come along, Jack. We'll speak to the next we meet, and ask where we can get a bed.'

A brisk footstep sounded at the end of the darkening street, and they moved towards it.

'If you please, sir,' said Will, and the passenger pausing, looked down upon him, 'can you tell me where we can get a lodging for the night?'

'Where you can get—' The stranger paused inquiringly.

'A lodging for the night.'

'I do not—know him,' said the stranger slowly. 'What is he?'

'We want to sleep somewhere; we want a bed.'

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'A bed? To sleep? Oh yes. Come wiz me.'
By this time Will knew him. It was the stranger who had found him on Scott's Hills on the morning of John's disaster. If it had not been for the change in the foreigner's dress, he would have recognised him earlier; but, whereas, three-fourths of a year ago, he had looked altogether shabby and vagabond, he was now rather a dandy than otherwise, wearing a glossy silk hat and gloves, and carrying an umbrella. He made no claim on his acquaintance, but followed him silently, wondering at the chance, and feeling it to be a little adventurous and spicy.
The stranger walked briskly for a hundred yards or so, and then turned a corner, looking round his shoulder to see if the boys were following. A few yards farther on he thrust open a door which led from the street into a darkened passage. 'Come in.'
Will lingered, not altogether certain that the spice of the adventure had not a flavour of danger in it. A strange town, a lonely street, a dark house, a foreigner! A favourable combination for dealings not altogether favourable to safety.
'Come in,' the stranger repeated.
Will entered, and John followed, holding him by the
sleeve. The foreigner closed the door, and left them in the dark. By-and-by they heard him calling: 'Madame! Madame Vigne!'—A female voice answered, in a foreign tongue.—'Pouvez-vous me dire—' began the foreigner, and then plunging down a set of stairs, he became inaudible. There was a rapid smothered colloquy down below, and for all Master Will could have told, it might have related to the sauce he and John should be cooked with. He wished he had not had the chance to address a foreigner, and had already formed some dim idea of bolting into the street and slamming the door behind him, when a streak of light appeared, and, a second or two later, a prodigiously fat woman, carrying a candle. She was still young in spite of her ponderous size, and she had a handsome face, so alight with good-humour and kindness that all the boy's vague fears vanished at the first glimpse of it.

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Now it happened that Macfarlane's curriculum included a study of the French tongue for such as had parents who were prepared to pay for that luxury as an extra. Will had been a member of the French class for three or four years past; and had so profited by his studies that he had actually been able to identify the only words he had heard in the house as being fragments of the French tongue, and was inspired to conciliate this fat and smiling lady by addressing her in her own language.
'Noo voodrongs oon lee,' he said, therefore; and the fat woman, dropping as if she had been shot, plumped upon the stairs and laughed, with the candle held out towards the two young wanderers. She laughed with so extreme an abandon and helplessness that she seemed to hold out the candle in a comically despairing hope that somebody would take it from her; and John stepping forward relieved her of it. But at this she laughed the more; and since neither of the boys had the remotest idea of what it was that so tickled

her fancy, they were a little inclined to think her mad. The swarthy-skinned, blue-eyed little foreigner stood by smiling, and the boys stared open-eyed.
'He speaks French, the little one,' said Madame Vigne in her own language, 'with what an accent! Oh, but with what an accent!' She wiped her eyes upon her white apron, and rose breathlessly from her seat upon the stairs. 'Where are you going, you children?' she asked in excellent English, with but the faintest tinge of a foreign tone. 'Where do you come from?'
'We are going to London,' said Will, 'and we want to get a bed for to-night, if you could tell us where, please.' He was not hurt or angry at the fat woman's laughter. Now that it was over, indeed, it seemed to make him more at home with her.
'You are going to London?' she repeated. 'What are you going to London for?'
'We are going to look for something to do there,' Will answered.
'They have run away from home,' said Madame in a

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rapid aside in her own tongue. 'Where do you come from?'
'From towards Liverpool, ma'am,' said Will, with perfect verbal truthfulness, but deceptive intent.
'Oh!' she answered, taking the candle from John's hand and looking first at his boots and then at Will's. 'You have not worn your shoes much to have travelled so far. What is your name?'
'William Gregg.'
'And yours?'
'His name is John Vale.'
'He can answer for himself, I suppose. What is your name?'—John said nothing, but looked at her in a mild vacancy.—'What are you going to do in London, if ever you get there?'
'I shall take care of him, ma'am,' said Will; and John put a hand through his arm, as if accepting the proffered protection.
Madame Vigne laid her left hand on John's shoulder and turned him round, surveying him from top to toe. Then she went through the same performance with Will. 'They are respectable,' she said then, in another rapid aside, in her own language. 'They have run away from home, the little rogues. You have money?' she asked a second later, addressing herself to John again.
'We haven't much, ma'am,' Will answered; 'and we must make the most of it.'
'Well,' she said, thrusting open a door which led from the narrow little hall, 'go in there. Are you hungry?'
'Not very, ma'am,' Will responded.
'Not very,' she answered, hopping to a chair and pulling down a sliding gas bracket; 'but a little. Very well. You shall have something to eat. Are you a little hungry too, you boy—you with nothing to say for yourself? Are you hungry?'
'Yes, ma'am,' said John.
'Then you shall have something to eat also.' With that she lit the gas, and hopped from the chair to the floor with great apparent ease, but so heavily that she made the

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floor shake and the ornaments on the chimney-piece to clatter violently. 'Wait there, and see what I can do for you. Keep an eye upon them,' she added to her small countryman, and so went from the room with a hop, skip, and jump, in odd contradiction to the massiveness of her figure.
'Be seated,' said the smiling little foreigner with a long pause between the two words, and a momentary triumph at having found the second. The boys obeyed him, and he, seating himself opposite to them, leaned his arms upon the table and looked from one to the other. 'I have—seen you,' pointing to John; 'and you,' pointing to Will, 'before.'
'Yes, sir,' said Will; 'I know you have. I was very much obliged, sir, and so was John. This is the gentleman who found us, Jack, the day that you were hurt. I told him all about it, sir, afterwards.'
'Ah!' said the little foreigner. 'His fazer—where is his fazer?'
'He's dead, sir.'
'Eh, la, la! Zat is bad—bad; oh, very bad. Poor boy! He was good man, his fazer? Not?'
'Oh yes; indeed, he was, sir.'
The little foreigner nodded sympathetically and looked grave. He forbore to question further, but mechanically searching in his pockets, found the materials for a cigarette, and began to roll one with a supple dexterity of the fingers. When it was made he set it between his lips and rose to light it at the gas jet; but at the sound of Madame Vigne's footstep on the stair, sat down again without having done so. Madame appearing with a tray, set it upon a side-table, and proceeded to lay a snow-white cloth, upon which she set a dish of cold meat, a loaf, a jug of water, and plates and knives and forks for two.
'Pitch in!' she said when she had carved a liberal portion for each of the boys; and seeing that Will rather stared at this form of invitation, she dropped into a chair and laughed herself quite helpless. 'I hope that is English,' she said breathlessly as she wiped her eyes with

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her apron. 'You can understand? Very well. Eat. There is plenty there, and plenty more.'
The boys began to eat, gingerly and delicately, in defiance of appetite, feeling her eyes upon them.
'They are gêné,' she said, turning away and addressing her countryman. 'They will be right by-and-by, if we leave them to themselves. You boy, you who speak French, do you know what I am saying?'—Will's stare was certificate enough of ignorance, and she turned round again to her companion.—'They are not quite little gentlemen, but they are respectable. They have run away from home. We must take care of them, and find where they come from, and send them back again.'
'I have met them before,' the little man answered her. 'Did I tell you about the boy with the wounded head?'—Madame Vigne nodded.—'That is the quiet one. The other is the boy who was with him. They tell me that the quiet boy's father is dead. He looked well-to-do, and drove a beautiful horse. He offered me money for watching by the boy; I do

not know how much, but a little handful of silver. I was indifferently dressed; I was rambling to sketch.'
Madame Vigne nodded again. 'You must expect to be treated like a beggar if you look like a beggar. You dress yourself to be despised, one would think. Oh, you are better now.'—This was in answer to an appealing odd little gesture which called her attention to his personal appearance.—'You are sure these are the same boys?'
'One of them knows me again,' he answered; 'and I know both of them.'
The fat good-natured woman turned and looked at the young wanderers with a new interest. 'Wait a little,' she said. 'I will not spoil their appetite by questioning them now; but I will find out all about them by-and-by.'
It was noticeable that John did what Will did, and that he kept a watch upon him for that purpose, as if he founded himself upon him consciously or unconsciously, and depended upon him in all things for guidance. When

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Will pushed his plate away, John followed his example; but they had both done ample justice to the meal.
'You have finished?' asked Madame Vigne. 'You have had enough? You can eat as much as you like. You will not eat any more? Very well. Now we will talk. Your name is William Gregg, and yours is John Vale. Very well. Where do you come from?'—No answer, but John and Will looking uncomfortably at each other and stealing shy glances at Madame.—'Ah you will not say ? Very well. Why did you run away from home?'—Still no answer, but an aspect of increased guilt on both.—'Boys cannot be allowed to run away from home. It is very naughty in boys to run away from home. You must be kept until your friends ask after you, and then you must be sent back again.'
'We're not going back again, ma'am,' said Will very quietly, but with extreme resolution. 'We can pay for what we have had, but you mustn't stop us, ma'am. If we were sent back fifty times, we should come away again every time.'
He had tied up the four half-crowns Isaiah had given to him and his companion in the same strip of rag with the money he had originally started with, and drawing this from his pocket, he began to unroll it with trembling fingers.
'Oho!' cried Madame. 'Fie for shame! A well-bred boy to offer a lady money. No, no. I did not mean to hurt you; but put up your money and come to me, and let us have a talk. Now, sit down there and tell me. I will be your friend. I will not be unkind to you. Do you think I am cruel? Now, look at me and tell me if you think I am cruel?'
'No, ma'am,' said Will, looking up, with a fat coaxing forefinger under his chin.
'Very well,' she answered. 'I am not cruel, and I will be kind if you will let me. Now, you must know that you are silly boys to run away from home.'
'No, ma'am,' said Master Will with mighty seriousness, 'we were not silly, really. It was quite necessary, ma'am.'

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'Oho!' cried Madame again, 'it was quite necessary? Now, what made it quite necessary?'

'They want to beat Jack every day,' said Will; but this struck him as being so inadequate to the case, and he felt so helpless to explain it all, that he went quite doggedly silent. Madame leaning forward, put an arm about him, and made a motion to draw him towards her. At that he winced and gave a quick short breath, at which Madame released him with a sudden raising of her eyebrows and a glance at her companion.

'Well,' she said, 'you shall go to bed now. You are very dusty and dirty with your walk, and you must wash first. Come with me, and I will show you where you can sleep. Go thou, Achille, and find Monsieur Vigne.'

The April shower beat noisily at the window, and the little man raised a hand and made a gesture to indicate it. 'Later on,' he said tranquilly.

Madame lit her candle and marshalled the boys upstairs into a clean bare little room. There she superintended in a motherly fashion their toilet for the night, kissed them both, and left them to undress, warning them that the candle would be taken away in ten minutes, and bearing their shoes with her, as a precautionary measure against any attempt on their part to escape.

'Madame,' said the little man when she descended, 'permit me to tell you that you are a woman of a thousand. You have a good heart, Madame.'

'Is it to be a woman of a thousand to have a good heart?' Madame demanded.

'Ma foi, yes,' he answered. 'Your sex charms, Madame, and that is so much the worse for us. But the majority of you are not good for much. You are an angel; I admit it, I proclaim it. One woman? Yes. But women? Bah!'

Madame accepted the personal flattery and impersonal blame with composure, and flourishing from her pocket a piece of knitting, began to work at it. Suddenly she looked up. 'The rain has ceased. Find Monsieur Vigne for me, Achille.'

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He got up obediently and went out, returning in the course of an hour in company with a long lean Frenchman of about fifty, a stately man, so withered and dry that he might have been carved out of wood.

'Achille has told you of our little adventure of this evening?' his wife asked him.—He nodded in answer. 'You approve of what I have done?'

'Assuredly.'

'Come with me,' she said, pinching her lips and twisting her jolly face into an expression of mystery; 'I will show you something. But tread quietly; the children are asleep.' She led him to the chamber in which the boys were lying, and having first set the candle she carried upon the floor, softly turned down the bedclothes, and with a delicate womanly hand drew Will's sleeve higher than his elbow. Then she raised the candle and beckoned her husband, who raised his hands and his eyebrows and drew an inward breath.

'The poor little body is so from head to foot,' she whispered. 'I have looked. His face is so. Poor child!' She rearranged the bedclothes and beckoned her husband away.

'Who knows?' said he, turning to whisper on the landing. 'He may have merited it.'

'Jean!' she answered scornfully, 'how can a child of his years have merited that? He has not lived long enough to merit it, if he had been born wicked. It is only these English

who treat their children so. If a man of our country did it, the people would tear him piecemeal.'
'There is cruelty everywhere, my dear Mathilde,' said the husband mildly.
'Jean,' said Madame Vigne, thrusting the candle upon him so that she might use both hands in wiping her eyes with her apron, 'if our poor little Hector had lived, and we had died—'
'My dear,' said Monsieur Vigne appealingly, 'why harrow me with these thoughts? Whatever you do, I shall approve it.'

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CHAPTER XI

IN the early morning, Madame Vigne crept quietly into the room where the two wanderers lay, and looked at them with an air which was motherly and almost proprietorial. They were both sound asleep, and they certainly looked innocent enough to awaken all the good creature's womanly sympathies. John, with his fair hair tumbled about his forehead and his cheeks a little flushed with sleep, lay with outcast arms and upturned face, breathing softly and regularly. His skin was of exquisite fairness, and he pleased Madame's eye more than the swarthy and bulldog William, who even in his sleep wore a look of resolution, and lay curled up doggedly with his face half-buried in the pillow, as if he slept with a purpose, and were determined to have full value for his time
Madame Vigne herself was of a swart complexion. Madame Vigne was of Marseilles, and came of swart people, and had lived most of her life amidst a swart population. So John's delightful English fairness made him charming to her; and when she had stood looking at him for a time, she went round to his side of the bed, and sitting down there, caressed his hair with her dark plump hand, and smoothed it with great gentleness so as not to awake him. 'You will take care of yourself wherever you go,' she said to herself, nodding her curly head at Will, and silently apostrophising him. 'But this poor innocent!—'
The little Hector of whom she had spoken last night had had raven hair and lustrous black eyes and cheeks like a berry; but she found a likeness to him in John, somehow, as women will, and took a tender fancy to the boy, which was all the more pronounced because of her memory of his helpless looks of the night before.
When she had looked her fill, Madame stole softly from the room and, closing the door behind her with great

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caution, went silently downstairs. There, aided by a rosy-cheeked damsel of thirteen or so, who answered to the name of Sar'anne—a Frenchified mutilation of Sarah Anne — she busied herself in household preparations until a moon-faced kitchen clock which struck the quarters announced half-past seven. At that she slid upstairs again and knocked softly at three separate doors. M. Vigne answered grumpily from behind the first; the little foreigner responded chirpily from behind the second; and from behind the

third, which was situated in the garret, no answer came at all. Madame opened the door and whispered: 'Mr. Orme! Mr. Orme!'
A voice which sounded as if it were obscured by bedclothes, answered 'Hillo!' and a snore followed so close upon the exclamation that it was evident that the speaker had gone to sleep again at once.
'Mr. Orme!' repeated Madame in a sibilant whisper, 'if you do not answer at once, I vow there will be no breakfast for you.'
'What's the matter?' asked the inmate of the chamber in a voice at once unctuous and husky.
'It is time to get up,' responded Madame. 'Dress very silently; there are two children asleep below you, and I do not wish them to be wakened.'
Mr. Orme, with a yawn which sounded midway between a moan of anguish and a groan of indignation, stirred in bed, and leaning over, artfully paddled with his hand upon the floor to impress his landlady with the belief that he had arisen.
'I know better than that,' said Madame, holding the door slightly ajar. 'Come and tap; I shall not believe you until you do.'
The invisible Mr. Orme yawned again, and this time the note was all submissive. A moment later, a shuffling footstep crossed the room, and a set of tremulous knuckles rapped at the inside of the door.
'Be very careful,' Madame whispered, 'and make no noise.'
A yawn like the growl of a caged bear, with the words

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'All right' somehow muffled in it, responded to this injunction; and Madame, stealing downstairs again, peeped in passing into the room in which the young wayfarers lay, and finding them both still sound asleep, continued her downward course. A quarter of an hour later, M. Vigne, the little foreigner, and Madame were seated at breakfast; and when they were half-way through the meal, Mr. Orme appeared. Mr. Orme had so balloon-like a figure, and his arms and legs were so stiffly attached to it, that he had an air of being inflated, and could hardly have surprised anybody much if at any given moment he had floated upward and bobbed his bald head against the ceiling. There was a contradictory sloth and weight in all his movements, and his face expressed a contradiction equally pronounced. Whether he were originally made to express the bitterest discontent with things in general, and had been persuaded after trial to accept his troubles comically; or whether he had been intended for a spirit of mirth, who had found his humour crushed by adverse circumstances, his face bore such a blending of humorous opposites that it would have been impossible to say. At one time the corners of his mouth would take an almost tearful downward curve, whilst his moist eye trembled, and his eyebrows twitched with what looked like hidden laughter; and at another the moist eye would express the profoundest melancholy, whilst the other features of his too rubicund visage seemed to be struggling with a hidden smile. His nose seemed to be on fire and to lend an actual radiance to the chamber; but the rest of his face was wofully pale in comparison; and these signs, coupled with the tremulous motion of his hands, seemed to indicate a fairly confirmed habit of intemperance.

'One can see where you're going, Mr. Orme,' said the lady of the house severely. 'It is no fault of mine if your coffee is cold; and I suppose it is useless to offer you anything to eat.'
Mr. Orme's pale baldness was sparsely interrupted by tufts of disreputable gray hair of that peculiar tone which seems never to belong to respectable or successful people.

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He put up his shaky hands and clutched a few of the tufts on being thus addressed, and groaned softly to himself.
'You will get no pity,' said Madame. 'Take your coffee and go to your work.'
He helped himself to milk and sugar with an air at once surreptitious and apologetic and drank in silence.
'The children, my dear Mathilde?' said M. Vigne, speaking in his native language. 'Have you thought of anything? Have you decided upon anything?'
'You know, Jean,' Madame Vigne responded, 'that I shall not dream of deciding upon anything until I have consulted you.'—M. Vigne nodded solemnly in assent to this statement.—'I ask myself first,' pursued Madame, 'what is my Christian duty. Perhaps they are young marauders.' She looked hard at her husband; and M. Vigne looked searchingly at her. When he had decided that he was expected to shake his head at this, he shook it vehemently. 'I knew,' she said triumphantly, 'that you would not think so. Perhaps they have been driven from a harsh home by abominable cruelty.'
'It is very probable,' said M. Vigne.
'I think so too,' Madame responded; 'but I will question them this morning and find out what I can about them.'
'That,' returned Monsieur, 'is what I should have desired.'
'Evidently,' said Madame, 'or I should have asked you first.'
Mr. Orme, during this brief colloquy, except that he had groaned softly to himself at measured intervals, like a human timepiece constructed to compute the moments in that dismal fashion, had kept silence, turning his moist eye upon Madame when she spoke, and upon her husband when he answered.
'Who are the children, Madame?' he asked in English. 'This is the second time I've heard of 'em.'
'I do not know who they are,' Madame answered. 'They were brought here last night by M. Jousserau, who met them in the street. They have come on foot from some-

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where'—waving her fat hands hither and thither, as if to indicate complete incertitude as to the direction from which the wayfarers had arrived. 'They are respectable; they are dressed like little gentlemen. One of them is marked from head to foot—do you hear me?' (with a tragic wrath before which Mr. Orme shrank and cowered)—'is marked from head to foot with cruel blows.'
'I daresay,' said Mr. Orme, 'that somebody has beaten him.'
Madame hailed his inspiration with a glance of so much scorn that Mr. Orme withdrew into himself and avoided her eye whilst he sipped the remnant of his coffee.

'It is time we went,' said M. Vigne, rising and addressing his compatriot.
'Do you hear that?' said Madame, turning upon her English lodger. 'You understand French fast enough when it is not your business. You are an omnibus to go to work, and an express to leave it.'
Mr. Orme gathered himself shakily together and arose. 'I was only waiting, ma'am,' he said, standing before her, with his elbows glued to his sides, and his hands waving feebly like the flippers of a seal—'I was only waiting, ma'am, to indicate that in case either of the young gentlemen should be in want of employment, and should be qualified to undertake the very simple functions—'
'You will be late,' said Madame, cutting him short. 'In point of fact you are late already.'
Mr. Orme said no more, but after one or two false starts, pottered aimlessly to the door, sighted a dingy silk hat upon a hook in the hall, pottered towards that, and after an interval for reflection, took it from the hook and put it on. Then he pottered towards the door with a curious air of going there by accident, and slipped furtively into the street.
Madame paid two or three visits to her protégés before they awoke, but at length found them half dressed. She kissed them both in a business-like way, and stood by to superintend their toilet, as she had done on the previous evening, retiring for a moment to bring up their shoes, which had been cleaned and polished with great fineness by

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the hands of Sarah Anne. When they were fully dressed, she ushered them downstairs, and the little domestic appeared with a second edition of breakfast: a pot of coffee, by no means too strong, for Madame Vigne's purse was narrower than her instincts of hospitality, a great bowl of milk, a big loaf, and a small pat of butter. Both the boys had healthy appetites, and in spite of their hearty meal of the night before, they attacked these simple provisions with a gusto at which Madame looked on well pleased.
'And now,' said Madame, when Sarah Anne had cleared away, 'I must have a talk with you little men. What do you little men mean to do?'
'We mean to go to London, ma'am,' said Will.
'And what do you mean to do when you have got to London?'
'I shall find something to do there, if you please, ma'am.'
'Perhaps you may, perhaps you may not,' Madame responded. 'London is a big place, my child, and all big places are cruel. Do you know anybody in London?'
'No, ma'am,' said Will. The question cast him down more than a little, and his face showed it. 'We don't know anybody in London.'
'Well now, tell me,' said Madame, drawing her seat nearer, and laying a kindly hand upon John's light head while she questioned his companion, 'why did you run away from home?'
There was something so very motherly in Madame's kindly face, something in the gesture with which she caressed John's curls, something even in the cushioning proportions of her overgrown figure, which invited confidence. Will began to explain, and she to question, and in a little while the whole story became tolerably clear. Madame looked more and more troubled, though none the less affectionate and kindly, as the tale went on.

'I do not know what I am to do,' she said perplexedly. 'It is not possible to find it in the heart to send you back again, and it is not possible to find it in the heart to let two babes wander all over the world alone. You must

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stay here until dinner-time, and then my husband shall decide about you.'
The boys were none too eager for a renewal of their march, for the first day's walk had left them sore-footed and stiff-limbed. Even Will was contented with an hour or two's respite from the road, and by-and-by John was perfectly happy and absorbed.
'Stay here,' said Madame; 'I will find you something to do.'
She bustled away, and in a little while returned with two frames, in either of which a clean unmarked sheet of drawing-paper was tightly strained over a sheet of glass. These frames being set in the window, a design in outline strained at the back of the glass came clearly into view. Madame produced two needles set in cork, and instructed the boys to prick upon the clean paper over the outlines indicated below.
'Now,' said Madame, 'anybody who chooses to be careful can do this work very nicely; and anybody who chooses to be careless can spoil the paper by pricking in the wrong places. That I am sure you are too kind to do, for the paper is cartridge paper, and every sheet costs threepence. Look! Let me show you to begin with.' And Madame, taking one of the cork-set needles, pricked over the edge of a leaf in the left-hand top corner of one of the frames. John watched with great interest, and when she turned smilingly towards him, asking if he thought he could do that, he reached out his hand eagerly for the home-made stylus and set to work at once with great care and diligence. When he had pricked out the stalk on which the leaf depended, he turned round to Madame for approval.
'That will do excellently,' she said, clapping her fat hands together in applause. 'And now let me see what you can do.'
Will also received his lesson, and set to work; and Madame having watched for a minute or two went away to her household concerns. She sailed in at intervals to see how the work progressed, and was lavish in enthusiastic

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compliment, so that both the boys were contented with their labour and felt in a very little time quite accustomed to it. It was a simple and easy task, and to John's blunt mind it seemed even delightful. There was a bird upon the bough he had been set to trace, hovering with outspread wings above a nest from which were thrust half a dozen callow heads and open bills. This enticed him so strongly that he must needs desert the other parts of the design for it, and he worked away with bright eyes and eager face and parted lips until he had followed every line of it actually. Then he let off an exultant crow, and turned so vivid a look upon his companion that Will was quite amazed at him.
'Why, Jack,' he said, 'you're like what you used to be.'
'Am I?' said Jack, without paying much heed to the exclamation. 'Look at it! Ain't it jolly? Wouldn't you think she was just flying? I say, how the chaps that do this must

watch the birds. It isn't like drawing from a copy, because they won't keep still a second. She wouldn't be like that longer than it would take to clap your hands together.'
'Yes,' said Will, 'it's jolly pretty.' Then, after a lengthy pause: 'Do you think this is work, Jack?'
'I don't know,' Jack answered. 'It's jolly easy, if it is, and jolly nice as well.'
There was no trace upon him of the settled dulness into which he had fallen for months past, and he went back to his labour with the warmth and light of this new enthusiasm still upon him. But in a little while he tired among the intricacies of branch and leaf, and leaning his head on Will's shoulder, fell to watching him dreamily whilst he pricked away with a dogged and careful persistence thoroughly characteristic of him. With occasional renewals of enthusiasm on John's part, and slow, conscientious persistence on Will's side, the work lasted the morning through; and Madame professed herself delighted by their skill and industry when she came in to lay the cloth for dinner. There was such a community established between John

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and Madame in this brief space of time that he took her by the hand, and dragged her to the window to exult in his work with as little shyness as if he had known her for a year. Whilst she bent with clasped hands before it with ejaculations of simulated delight, John put his arm round her fat waist, and rubbed his head against her shoulder; and at these signs of confidence and affection she fled precipitately to the kitchen, where she threw her apron over her face and rocked herself to and fro for a minute, surrendering herself to memories of the little Hector. From these tender reminiscences she emerged instantly into a condition of beaming good-fellowship, and went to and fro in her preparations with such a swirl of petticoats that the house seemed full of her. Mr. Orme looked like a balloon and travelled like a sloth. Madame in repose looked immovably weighty, and waltzed hither and thither when she gave her mind to motion as if she were built in sylph-like lines and texture.
A few minutes after the hour of one, Vigne and Jousserau came in together, and shortly afterwards Mr. Orme presented himself. He brought with him a faint odour of rum, and was less depressed than he had been earlier in the day. Madame with much vivacity displayed the work of the morning and called upon everybody to praise it. It seemed that the whole household took its cue from her in most things, and a little more enthusiasm and admiration were expressed than perhaps the boys' labours actually called for. When due tribute had been paid, she whisked away, and returned with a tureen in which steamed the contents of a capacious pot-au-feu. The liquid, which was rich in floating shreds of vegetables and in pepper, was served first; and the solids of the dish, which were not quite so plentiful, came afterwards. Eked out by the great hunches of bread which Madame carved, there was enough for all; and when the meal was over, the four elders sipped a rather feeble black coffee, whilst the two Frenchmen smoked cigarettes, and Mr. Orme puffed solemnly at a short well-blacked clay pipe.
'I was about to observe this morning, Madame,' said

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Mr. Orme, gently caressing that incandescent nose of his, as if he warmed his fingers at it—'I was about to observe this morning, ma'am, when you reminded me that it was time to go, that there is an opening at the office for a youth. I do not know what your views in respect to these young gentlemen may be, but for an industrious and respectable youth there is an opening—an opening, Madame.' He described the opening with his trembling hands, as if it were something circular.

'I do not know,' said Madame, frowning thoughtfully, 'what M. Vigne will decide upon.'

M. Vigne bad only spent twenty years of his life in England, and since he had resolved from the first that it was the business of people who desired to converse with a Frenchman to be acquainted with the only language worth speaking in the world, he had very easily contrived to remain in complete ignorance of the insular tongue.

'Jean,' said his wife, addressing him, 'it is very hard to know what to do. I know the whole story of these poor little beings now, and it would be shameful and impossible to send them back again.'—M. Vigne nodded in his stately and assenting way.— 'M. Orme tells me there is a place vacant at the printing-office. They want a boy there. Do you think the dark one could go, and the light one stay here and make patterns? They would earn their bread. We may know better what to do with them in a little while, and the fair boy is so good, so gentle, so docile. He reminds me of our—' There Madame choked a little, and the too ready tears of sympathy made her black southern eyes twinkle with sudden moisture.

'My dear,' replied M. Vigne, 'you have your health only to consider. It will put extra work upon you, and I sometimes think that you have too much already.'

Madame set her thumb-nail behind her glistering white teeth and snapped it triumphantly. 'That for my health!' she said. 'I thought that you would agree with me.'

'My dear,' said M. Vigne, with stately gravity, 'you are invariably right.'

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CHAPTER XII

WILL had his doubts as to the sufficiency of the distance between his new quarters and Castle-Barfield. London, both by reason of its magnitude and its distance, looked safe, and Warwick looked too small and too near to afford a secure hiding-place. But John's evident contentment with Madame's proposals, and the limited extent of his own funds, combined to persuade him; and before the little party left the dinner-table it was decided that Will should become a candidate for the vacant situation; so he and Mr. Orme left the home together in search of the latter's employer.

Mr. Orme, with his greasy hat set rakishly on one side, and his shabby neckerchief fluttering in the April wind, shambled on in silence for a time with his left hand in his trousers pocket. A slow chinking of coins there, and an air of profound reflection in his face, seemed between them to indicate a close calculation of ways and means. The result would not have appeared to be altogether satisfactory, for Mr. Orme, with a long-drawn sigh, withdrew his hand from his pocket and passed it across his lips, shaking his head somewhat dolefully meanwhile. His shuffling step took a more decided accent; but by-and-by the hand stole irresolutely back to the pocket, the slow chinking of coin

began again, and his moist eye took once more the far-off glance of profound calculation.
'Your name, I believe, is William,' said Mr. Orme, returning to a knowledge of common things, though still partially absorbed—'William. Ah! yes. Exactly. William. Quite so. I have a call to make, William, a call to make. You will wait here for a moment; I will not detain you longer.' The call he had to make was at a corner dram-shop. He was out again in less than a minute with a bright and satisfied air. 'The gentleman was not there,'

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he murmured, smoothing his bibulous lips; 'I shall have to call again.'
Will marched on unsuspiciously beside him, and in the course of a few minutes found himself standing in a disorderly and unprosperous-looking stationer's shop, where a long limp man, with an aspect of resignation to unnumbered sorrows, sat behind the counter.
'I have found a boy who will probably suit you, Mr. Varley,' said Mr. Orme.
The long man arose limply and looked over the counter at Will, and sank back again despondently, as if the spectacle were almost too much for him. 'Very well, Mr. Orme,' he said mournfully. 'You can teach him his duties; and if the boy likes he can begin at once. The wages are five shillings a week, and the hours are from eight to seven, with an hour from one till two for dinner, and half an hour from five till half-past for tea.' He made this brief announcement as if it were of the most sorrowful import in the world, and added with a heart-broken resignation which depressed Will's spirits for the remainder of the day: 'Saturday is a half-holiday.'
Mr. Orme, being one of those people who find it difficult to bring an interview to a close, lingered for a while, and inspected the dusty cheap periodicals on the counter. He had a look of having something upon his mind which it was necessary to say, and of being shy of saying it. The look lasted until he had touched every article on the shabby counter, and then, with a sudden air of having said the thing, he shuffled off, taking Will in his train. They passed behind the counter and entered the domestic precincts. A whole tribe of children were playing at horses in the passage, and a boy of eight or nine nursed a Japanese idol of a baby whilst he drove in a harness of knotted cord a herd of six. Mr. Orme becoming entangled in the harness, the team resolved itself into a body of Mayday dancers, with the new arrival for a maypole, and circled round him with obstreperous cries. This entertainment lasted until the sorrow-stricken proprietor of the establishment appeared upon the scene, when the children went suddenly

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quiet; and Mr. Orme, released from his entanglement, took his shambling way into a weedy little desert of a garden, with a pig-sty at one end, and a small barrack-like building of two stories at the other. The windows of this edifice were made of small square panes, which overlapped each other, and a fair half of them were broken. The breakages were patched with papers of all colours, so that each window had the look of a polychromatic advertisement sheet with half the divisions blank.

Such a limited wilderness of disorder as the interior of this building presented Will had never seen, or so much as dreamed of. A little regiment of broken and battered ink-cans stood in one corner, and every one of them seemed to leak—a thick gluey exudation of red, blue, black, green, and mauve. In an opposite corner was a great pile of waste-paper, into the base of which the waste water from a washing sink had run, apparently for years past, so that for nearly a foot upwards the paper was yellow and rotten with moisture. There were two old-fashioned printing-presses grimy with ink and oil and rust and dust, and looking as if they had been unused for a score of years past. Half a dozen rough wooden tables leaned forlornly to this side or that, their surfaces encrusted with old dirt; and the square brickwork of the floor was splintered everywhere, as if it had been beaten with a hammer.

A shaky flight of stairs led to an upper room, the crazy confusion of which made the apartment on the ground floor almost orderly by contrast. The unevenly boarded floor was half an inch deep in mourning under dust and ashes, and numberless little formes of type had been set upon it to be kicked into disorder. Ramshackle shelves laden with worm-eaten wooden types held an insecure and precarious hold upon the walls; cases of metal type, meagre enough in number, stuck out from a rack at every conceivable angle; and every case seemed to be employed as a shelf for flat bottles, broken clay pipes, neglected granitic crusts, old pamphlets, tattered newspapers, old slippers, and half a dozen other ragged, tattered, and disgraceful articles of attire. A stone surface near the front window

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was cracked from end to end, and covered all over with an assortment of types of every size and character the place afforded.

In the middle of the room a stove was burning. It had at one time been too far heated and allowed to cool too suddenly, so that its cast-iron sides had broken into a blistered yawn, and the upper part was half severed from the lower. It was mounted insecurely on a shallow pan of sheet-iron, crammed full and overflowing with yellow ashes; and the pan in its turn was raised from the floor by half a dozen broken bricks. The stove-pipe was maudlin drunk, to all appearance, and swayed so far out of the perpendicular that it would have fallen but for a wire-hook, which, suspended from a piece of knotted string, hung from a rafter in the roof. Its wretched joints were held together by pasted brown paper, discoloured by heat, and in places almost dried to tinder. The leaky gas brackets had been repaired in the same orderly and efficient manner, and it would have been difficult to invent any sign of laziness and shiftless shift which the place did not include within its limits.

Mr. Orme, removing his hat and coat, rolled up his sleeves, and ducked his head through the tape of an excessively dirty black apron. Will thought at first that this article had gone black in service; but a second glance assured him that the black was genuine and original, and that only the grayer tints upon it were the results of employment. When he had inducted himself into this workman-like garment, Mr. Orme lit a pipe, and setting a shallow oblong box on end near the stove, took his seat there and smoked like a man on duty. 'If you've got any ambition, William,' he said, 'this is the shop to come to. Here's your avenue.'

'It's a printing-office, isn't it, sir?' asked William.
'That's what they say outside, my boy,' responded Mr. Orme. 'You haven't got an apron, have you? Well, you'll have to get some. In the meantime, you can go downstairs and find a sheet of stiff brown paper and a piece of string.'

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William did as he was bidden; and Mr. Orme, first telling him to take off his jacket and roll his sleeves up, tied him in the brown paper wrapper as if he had been a clumsy parcel. When he had done this, he surveyed William with critical approval, and fell into a doze over his pipe. He woke from this to instruct his new lieutenant to feed the fire.
'And now,' he said, 'you're going to be initiated into the mysteries. Give me that sheet of copy on the long-primer upper case.'
William, discerning what he wanted by his glance and gesture rather than his words, brought him a thumb-marked scrawl, which he perused sleepily.
'Take that stick,' he said. 'No; not that thing. The slip of mahogany with a brass slide on it. Now, you see the bottom rack, left-hand side; pick the word "furniture" out of that.'
The letters in the rack were all higgledy-piggledy, and half of them were face downwards. By dint of five minutes' searching, Will found the necessary letters, and arranged them in the wooden composing-stick.
'Bring it here,' said Mr. Orme. 'That's lesson number one. You've got all the letters turned the wrong way; but that's all proper and natural for a beginner. That's how they stand—on their heads. Do you see? If they didn't stand on their heads in type, they'd stand on their heads on the paper, and then anybody who wanted to read the bill would have to stand on his head to do it. The doctors won't allow that, because they say it's unwholesome for elderly people. Now, I want "Monday, May 10." You can get that out of the fat expanded Egyptian.'
'Yes, sir,' said Will, and stood expectant. Mr. Orme, in his intense enjoyment of his pipe, dozed a little, and woke up with a start.
'Well,' he said, 'have you got the date?'
'No, sir,' said Will. 'You didn't tell me where the—the gentleman was, sir.'
The tutor twinkled all over, and taking a fallen cinder

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from the stove fire, threw it dexterously on to a line of dirty metal type.
'That's the fat expanded Egyptian. "Monday, May 10." Put a comma after Monday, and another after 10.'
'I can only find one comma, sir.'
'Put a full point, then,' said Mr. Orme. 'They'll
think the tail has broken off. Put the full stop after "Monday;" it'll look more natural. Now you see, William—your name is William, isn't it?—you're learning the art and mystery dirt cheap. If I were selfish, I should do all this myself, and keep you in the dark. You understand that, don't you, William?'
William said 'Yes, sir' quite smoothly, but had his own opinion none the less.

When Mr. Orme had made William do all that a boy so uninstructed and inexperienced could manage, he went lingeringly and unwillingly to work himself, and William stood by to assist, handing him all manner of oddly named articles: little bits of battered wood that were for some no-reason called 'furniture,' hollowed cubes of metal called 'quotations,' and finally being despatched in search of a mysterious article called a 'shooting-stick,' which turned out to be a degenerate splitting of boxwood bluntly frizzled at both ends.

This brought Mr. Orme to tea-time; and Will was despatched to the house with a tea-pot, which, like everything else about the printing-office, was beaten out of shape and discoloured by long service, with instructions to get it filled from the kitchen with boiling water. Mr. Orme kept a little assortment of tin cans for tea, milk, sugar, coffee, and the like, and had a small loaf, a pat of greasy butter, and a rusty, broken-bladed table-knife in a drawer. From these materials he made a meal, singeing slices of bread on the top of the stove, and growing quite unctuous and shiny with warmth and butter before the repast was over.

A fat watch this industrious workman carried seemed chiefly useful because it could be made to indicate any hour its proprietor desired. He generally beat it upon his knee and held it to his ear before consulting it; but he

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professed as great a faith in it as if it had been the clock of a cathedral or a Greenwich chronometer. The minute-finger was dislocated, and could easily be induced by a persuasive shake to go backwards or forwards five minutes at a time, so that Mr. Orme, by shaking it forwards once before tea-time and twice backwards after tea-time, secured an extra quarter of an hour's idleness, and at the same time comforted his conscience with a sense of the strictest punctuality.

When a proof-sheet of the auctioneer's bill had been pulled, a process in which Will was profoundly interested, Mr. Orme put on a huge pair of spectacles and read the printed document solemnly aloud to the boy, who checked it by the manuscript. Divers corrections were made, and Will was then sent down to the shop with a revise. He had left Mr. Orme apparently in the highest spirits, and was surprised to find him seated in an attitude indicative of the greatest personal discomfort at the bottom of the crazy stairs, where Mr. Orme not only rocked himself to and fro with great violence, but emitted a very hollow and sepulchral groan. His assistant became really anxious and alarmed, and proposing to summon their employer, actually set off for that purpose. Mr. Orme darted out after him with an unexpected agility and called him back.

'Don't tell the governor, William,' he besought him with a serious mien. 'If Varley knew that I was subject to these attacks—I don't want to take his character away, but Varley is not a sympathetic man, William—if he knew that I was liable to this, he might suppose that I was not quite equal to the work. I can endure it, William; I can endure in silence.' He had dodged out after William into the weedy little garden, and now went back into the office, leaning heavily upon his shoulder, and uttering low moans expressive of suffering and fortitude.

'Isn't there anything that would do you good, sir?' asked Will, to whom these distressing symptoms were altogether novel.

'There is a remedy,' Mr. Orme replied, with a writhe so complicated and so agile that in a man of his figure it was quite

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phenomenal—'there is a remedy, but it is costly. I have expended too much in charity this week, William; but tomorrow is pay-day, and I had hoped from the symptoms—I am familiar with the symptoms—that the attack would have delayed itself until at least to-morrow evening.' Then he groaned again, and laid himself out face downwards upon the waste-paper heap, where he groaned at intervals like a minute-gun.
'Can't I do anything for you, sir?' asked Will, whose unsophisticated heart was quite pierced with sympathy.
'No, no, my child,' Mr. Orme answered in a voice of anguished resolution. A moment later he straightened himself, and averting his head and grasping his waistcoat with both hands, abandoned himself to soliloquy. 'To think,' he said, 'that I should suffer thus for the want of ninepence.'
'O sir,' cried Will, 'I've got ninepence!'
'You have?' cried Mr. Orme wildly. 'You will preserve me. Run upstairs. There is a flat bottle. A cork rim inside. A glass stopper. Seven cases down from the top, beneath the stove-pipe.'
Will tore upstairs with an agitation perhaps more than equalling Mr. Orme's own.
'Rum!' gasped the sufferer. 'They fill the bottle for ninepence. Turn to the left as you leave the shop, and the place is at the corner.'
The mere prospect of the remedy did Mr. Orme so much good that he rose with every trace of his disorder banished, and to the tune of Vilikins and his Dinah waltzed slowly and solemnly round one of the rickety tables. He was dreadfully faint and ill again on the messenger's return, however; and it was not until half the contents of the bottle had disappeared that he could persuade himself that all fears of a relapse were at an end. By this time he had mounted to the upper story, and was well enough to sit by the fire, and even to smoke a pipe, whilst he sipped rum-and-water from the gallipot in which he had taken his tea an hour earlier.
'Alcohol, William,' he said with impressive solemnity,

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'is one of the most valuable of therapeutic agents. Like fire, it is an excellent servant, but the worst of masters. I use it medicinally myself, and I find, employed in that way, that it does me good.' He arose with the apparent intent of stowing away the bottle, but was so suddenly arrested by an unexpected renewal of his pains, that he was compelled to finish it upon the spot. 'Say nothing of this at home, William,' he said, as he restored the empty bottle to its place. 'I prefer to suffer the pangs which are occasionally incidental to approaching age in silence—in solitude and darkness, William. I would not willingly become an object of compassionate scorn.' His solemnity was so great at this moment that his speech was scarcely so clear as it had been, and the weakness superinduced by his suffering was so marked that he tottered a little in his gait. 'Be careful, William,' he observed, with an almost tearful earnestness. 'Even the dictates of

a philanthropic heart would urge youth to be economic. I shudder to think of what the consequences might have been to me if you had been unable to come to my rescue; if the natural affection of the youthful appetite for hardbake, ginger beer, and lollipops had overcome your economic instincts. Remember, William, that a strict economy once enabled you to be of marked and striking service to a fellow-citizen, who is, unhappily, long past his prime, but who, believe me, William, is not ungra'ful.'

CHAPTER XIII

SNELLING, taking his seat at the breakfast table punctually at eight o'clock on the morning of John's disappearance, folded his paper conveniently for the study of the market quotations, poured out his coffee, and attacked the dish of ham and eggs provided for him like a man who meant business. He did a little Corn Exchange gambling in his way, and the quotations of that morning were unfavourable

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to his speculations, so that he was a little out of temper, and was prepared to be something more of a martinet than usual. A little temper, as he found by experience, gave an edge to appetite, and he cleared the dish before him with unwonted expedition. When he had finished, he gave an angry jerk to the bell.

'Where's that boy, Mrs. Winter?' he asked, swelling himself with offended and offensive dignity. 'I look to you to teach him better manners than this—keepin' his elders waiting.'

'You don't seem to have waited, sir,' said the housekeeper.

'Hillo!' returned Snelling, 'you're a-beginning to chop logic, are you? I should ha' thought you'd had enough of that with that husband of yours. When I talk of the b'y keeping his elders waiting, I talk of the b'y's intent, and the hobvious natural result of his action. Send him here at once; and tell him that if he doesn't come along pretty sharp, he'll find a flea in his ear when he does come. Just you tell him that, and don't take the trouble to answer me back again in future when I speak to you.'

The pale housekeeper accepted this with becoming meekness, and left the room. After the lapse of some ten minutes, Snelling rang again, and she returned.

'I've looked for Master Vale everywhere, sir, and he isn't in the house.'

'Very well,' said Snelling. 'Tell him there's no breakfast for him when he comes. Children must be taught orderly habits. I was taught orderly habits myself when I was young, and I've lived to be thankful to them as instructed me.'

Mrs. Winter set the breakfast things upon a tray, and was about to leave the room, when her master again addressed her. 'Isaiah's got his orders for the day, and I've got business to do at Lichfield. I shall be back by teatime. You needn't trouble to cook anything. You and Master Vale can make shift with the cold mutton, and we'll have it hashed for to-morrow. You can go.'

There was something which soothed his vanity inordinately

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in the burly patronising dismissal with which he always closed an interview with a dependent. He was better tempered after this slight show of authority than he had been before it, and he set out upon his two-mile walk to the railway station in tolerably good spirits. He rarely for a moment forgot in his waking hours that fell intent of his with regard to his ward and nephew, though he never allowed the veil of respectable purpose which overhung it to be withdrawn for more than the merest flash of time. It was not his fault, he told himself, if, in spite of the most earnest application on the part of John's schoolmaster, and of the most constantly tormenting vigilance on his own, the boy grew sillier and more vacant day by day. Mr. Snelling had good hope, though he told himself that he had a serious fear of it, that in course of time his ward might degenerate into mere idiocy. He spoke about this with a weighty aspect of decent sorrow to a dozen people whom he met that day; and one or two of them, over a pipe and brandy-and-water after the farmers' ordinary, agreed that it weighed on Snelling's spirits, and was a sore affliction to befall any man who had neither chick nor child of his own.

He did his day's business, and went home again, to learn that Master Vale had not presented himself at dinnertime. Without being much disturbed in any way by this intelligence, but thinking that it might open up the way to wholesome discipline, he took his hat and walking-stick and strode off to see Macfarlane. The boy had not been to school. Even yet, there was nothing very surprising or remarkable. The day had been unusually fine for the season of the year, and Snelling decided that John had played truant.

The schoolmaster told him something of the events of the previous day, and Snelling nodded in grave approval of the history. 'He's played truant,' he said, 'to avoid a hiding. Now, if I had to do with a boy's education, that'd be as short-sighted a policy as he'd ever learn how to start upon.'

'Why, yes, sir,' Mr. Macfarlane assented; 'it is not a

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long-sighted policy. But boys, Mr. Snelling, live very much in the present, and are not accustomed to look far into the future.' Macfarlane offered this pearl of wisdom to his client with a manner so impressive that Snelling received it quite respectfully.

'You are experienced in their ways, Mr. Macfarlane,' he responded, 'and I mek no doubt that you will be able to give an account of my nevew John when the time comes.'

So they parted with the mutual unexpressed understanding that whip and rein should be applied to nephew John with increased severity; and Snelling went home to await the truant's return, and on his way prepared an address for which he augured the most pleasing results in his own interest.

When the early spring dark had fallen and John was still absent, the good man was troubled by conflicting hopes and fears. There was a railway cutting in progress in Castle-Barfield in these days, and a month or two before, a boy had been killed by a clay-laden line of lorries running down a steep incline. The memory of this disaster dwelt in Snelling's mind, and if anything like it should have befallen John, he felt that it would only be fitting and natural. Providence would have dealt well with him in removing that absurd obstruction which stood between him and the estate he had so strong a moral right to. He was not an imaginative man by nature, but fancy woke at this

delightful possibility, and he saw with unusual clearness the things that would happen if his thought were true. He even planned John's funeral, and practised a little bit of economy by a second employment of the gloves and hatband he had worn at the funeral of John's father. Then fancy carried him a little further, and he saw himself established in the house of the late John Vale, farming his own land, and respected on all sides as a typical English yeoman. If he had known better how to be ambitious, his ambitions might have soared higher with him; but beyond that estate of English yeoman he knew not how to carry himself in imagination. There was a desire in his mind—so deeply rooted that he was nine-tenths unconscious that he was

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unconscious of its value—to own land, to be an actual proprietor of so much soil. Very few of his ideas presented themselves with neat edges. He was a stupid man, and most of his mental perceptions were blurred; but the joy of being absolute master, lord, and owner of a single acre presented itself with a definiteness which hardly any other conception could have commanded.

He was an intensely respectable man, and went to church with admirable regularity every Sunday, and there welcomed the creed that he who wishes the death of another is in his heart a murderer. But there is nobody so morally hopeless as the man who being gangrened considers himself sound.

Snelling had his lecture ready; but John never came to hear it. He waited until midnight, and was more fluttered by his imagination than he ever had been in his life before Isaiah had long since returned from his business excursion in the country, and Mr. Snelling found himself at length so moved that he was impelled to send for him and ask his opinion of the case.

'Well, gaffer,' said Isaiah, when Snelling, with a laborious concealment of his own hopes, had laid the position of affairs before him, 'I should think the best thing to be done would be to give notice to the police.' He offered this advice half in uncertainty as to the wisdom of his own action.

'The lad may have stayed somewhere,' said Snelling, who was in too pleasing a state of doubt to desire to dissipate his own hopes too early. 'Him and young Gregg at the Hargate Hollow was always great companions; and as I learn at the school, where I've made inquiries already, John and young Gregg was both chastised there yesterday, and they may have played truant together in revenge. Then, it's quite as like as not as, being loaded with a guilty conscience, the b'y may have got himself smuggled in by his companion.'

'Well,' said Isaiah, with an air which might have betokened guilt to a more intelligent observer, 'it's like enough that there might be something in that idea, master.

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Perhaps I might walk over to Farmer Gregg's in the morning and make inquiries?'

'You may, Isaiah,' said Snelling, with all the dignity appertaining to the position he had held in fancy for the last two hours. 'You had better set out pretty early. In the

meantime, it's quite onlikely that we shall hear any thing more of the lad to-night, and we'd best go to bed.'
'Very well, gaffer,' said Isaiah; 'I'll set off first thing.'
Snelling stopped him before he had reached the doorway. 'Hold on,' he said; 'I'll go myself. Have me called at six o'clock, and tell your missus to get a cup of coffee ready.'
This terminated the interview; and Isaiah, who was unused to concealment, was not sorry to escape. His wife was full of womanly doubts and terrors, and he had hard work to keep his secret from her.
Snelling set out next morning, according to promise, and found Farmer Gregg at breakfast. Gregg was a man whose long association with cattle seemed to have bred a certain bovine likeness in himself, a short-faced, red-complexioned man, with something of the immovable rigour and dull angry resolution of a bull going at a gate. He was thick-necked, thick-set, and short-sighted, and carrying his head always a little bowed and thrust forward, looked with his myopic scowl as if he were ready to charge anybody or anything at any moment. He was not a bad-hearted fellow in the main; but he had been bred in the harsh old school, in which pain was somehow supposed to be a good thing for children; and he thought that he did no more than his fatherly duty by carrying on to the account of his son the bitter and cruel sore a father built on his own pattern had so rigorously kept with him. For the rest, he was the soul of honesty and bull-headed self-opinion, as obstinate as he could stick, and utterly loyal to the convictions which had been born with him, whether they led him to despise the new-fangled invention of oil-cake, to reverence the Church and Queen, or to hate and despise all foreigners.
In his own way he had been disturbed by his son's dis-

appearance. The open door, the broken money-pot, and the ransacked box in Will's chamber, had already told him the story of a probable flight. So far, for he was a man who never thought in a hurry, he had resolved on nothing more than to repeat the dose which, to his mind, had brought on the disease. If any boy of his were so obstinate as to persist in refusing to be cured by that medicine, it was likely to go hard with him; and any notion of changing the treatment according to any symptoms exhibited by the patient was out of the question.
'That thee, Snelling?' said he, when his Castle-Barfield neighbour appeared. 'What's the news with thee?'
'I thought it might have happened,' Snelling answered, 'my nephew and your son Will being such close companions, as the lad might have been here. He's been missing all night; and seeing that he's no better than a bit of an idiot, and can't rightly be held responsible for his actions, I thought it my duty to make inquiries about him.'
'He's missing too, is he?' asked Gregg, glancing shortsightedly at his visitor from under his brows, as if he were making ready to butt at him, and only waiting to choose the spot where action would be most effective. 'Ah! there's a pair on 'em, then.'
'You mean to tell me as your lad's gone too, Mr. Gregg?' asked Snelling.
'Yes,' the farmer answered; 'he's made a clean bolt on it. He's broke his money-box, packed up a little parcel o' things, and was off yesterday morning afore daybreak. I gin

him a lacing the day before yesterday, and I suppose he's took offence at it. I run away from this 'ere very house myself when I was a lad; but my feyther he ketched me up at Stafford, and gi'e me such a hiding then and there that I settled down in great contentment afterwards, and was no more trouble to him. I remember it as if 'twas yesterday.'
'Ah!' said Snelling slowly, 'they've gone away together, have they? And what do you reckon to do about it, Mr. Gregg?'
'Reckon to do about it?' the farmer answered. 'Well,

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I don't know as I reckon to do anything about it in particular. To look for a runaway lad about the country'd be like looking for a needle in a haystack. He'll come back, I reckon; and when he does, we shall make up our accounts together and go on again. I don't bear the lad no malice for pluckin' up a bit of a sperrit; and when he's got tired of being hungry, he'll find his way back to the manger, and then we'll see who's master, him or me.'
Whether on the whole it were not as well that John should run away and be no more heard of, as that he should be got out of the way by any lengthier process, Snelling could not say for the moment. There was the possibility of a doubt everywhere. If he stayed at home, he might recover his wits in spite of the best intentions; and if he ran away he might come back one of these days to claim his own. There was a plaguy absence of certainty about the business as it stood.
'We must do something, Mr. Gregg,' he said solidly. 'If there's no news of 'em in a day or two, we shall have to advertise.'
Gregg had a great respect for Snelling's intelligence. Snelling was not over-educated, to his mind, but had yet a trifle more book-learning than the run of people in his condition. There was a sensible difference between his English and that of the majority of his compeers; and though he talked in a good old-fashioned Barfield accent, he never condescended to thee and thou with anybody, and being a competent, solid, and well-to-do man, this reticence in familiarity helped to give him a certain personal weight. The idea of advertising was novel to the farmer, and on that ground alone would have seemed objectionable. Still, there was no denying that the world was changing, and that progress was the order of the day; and if so respectable and conservative-minded a neighbour as Snelling thought it was the right thing to advertise, perhaps it might be.
'Thee wootn't have had breakfast yet, Snelling,' he said, when he had given these dim reflections time to form.

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'Thee'st better sit down and pick a bit. Theer's a cold goose i' the cupboard, and the beer's my own brewing.'
Mr. Gregg had never yielded to the effeminate innovations of tea and coffee, and he counted good ale among the greatest blessings which had been bestowed on man. In his childish days he had heard his grandfather speak with scorn of the village Squire who had 'gone foreigneering and had brought home yarbs to make slops with;' and the

grandfatherly despite had entered into him and become a part of him. Snelling assented to his invitation, and did justice to the cold goose when it came. Before he left, it was decided that if the boys were absent for a week, handbills should be printed and placed in the care of the police, and that a joint reward of ten pounds should be offered for such intelligence of the fugitives as should lead to their return.

'It's to be understood, look thee,' said Gregg, 'as if my lad comes back and thine doesn't, I find a fiver for the man as brings him; but if it's thy lad as is found and not mine, it's thee as pays the money.'

Snelling agreed to this, and they separated to await events. Nothing being heard of the boys at the expiration of a week, the services of the Barfield auctioneer, who was an acquaintance of Snelling's, were called into requisition over a glass of grog and a pipe; and a description of the missing boys was drawn up, from which it might have been inferred that young Gregg was a hardened habitué of the Old Bailey in aspect, and that John was an idiot of theatrical pattern. Both the boys' names, their ages, and their dress were accurately set forth, and the names and addresses of Robert Snelling, Corn-Factor, Castle-Barfield, and William Gregg, of Hargate Hollow, Beacon-Hargate, were set forth in evidence of the responsibility of their owners. The hand-bills were scattered far and wide; but week after week went by and nothing came of them. Month after month went by and nothing came of them. Snelling made a mighty to-do in his own slow, respectable manner, as might have been expected of him. Farmer Gregg being tempted by the peculiar suppleness of a riding-whip offered

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him by an itinerant vendor on a market-day, bought it and laid it by as a means of welcome for Will's home-coming. But as the slow days and weeks and months dragged on, and brought no tidings, his mind changed slowly, and one night, about Christmas-time, he broke the whip into pieces and burned it, for his dour heart misgave itself, and some dim stirrings of fatherly affection made themselves felt there. But he said nothing, and was supposed to feel nothing; whilst Snelling was pathetic about his bereavement, and was popularly believed to be somehow aged by it.

It was in the likelihood of things that with every day that passed him by, his hold upon John's belongings should seem more and more secure, and that in a very little while he should begin to feel as if the landed and funded properties were actually his own. He was sole executor, and there was therefore nobody to come in between him and his dreams. In case of the boy's death or disappearance, he was heir-at-law, and he had undisturbed possession already.

When John had been absent for a year, Uncle Robert found an excellent opportunity for disposing of his business as a corn-factor. He had put a farm-bailiff into the house of his deceased cousin and had run the farm for a year past. He gave this personage a quarter's notice after the sale of the business, and installed himself in the farmhouse with Mrs. Winter as housekeeper, and Isaiah to assist in the superintendence of the mill and malt-house. He lived religiously on his own income, and kept books in which he set down to a farthing the receipts of his nephew's property. He was fond of displaying these to his cronies, and of saying what a pretty penny the lad would have come in for if he had

never taken it into his poor injured head to wander off, Heaven alone knew where, and leave these fair possessions behind him.
'Dear, dear,' Mr. Snelling would say, 'if this had only fell into my hands 'ears ago, I might have married a second time and had children o' my own. And now, even if the poor lad should never turn up again, what's the good of it

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to me? I've more than enough of my own, and riches is nothing but a trouble to a lonely man.'
So altogether Mr. Snelling was highly respected, and grew in favour and repute.

CHAPTER XIV

IT had been the unfulfilled dream of Mr. Orme's lifetime—a sort of hope too good to be true, too good even to be practically sought for—to find somebody who would do his work for him and allow him to draw his pay. He was not a man of strong passions, but he hated work and loved rum. Rum was only to be had, along with the other palliatives of existence, by labour, and Mr. Orme felt that his lot was pitiable. But before Will had been a week in the printing-office, the veteran skulker began to think that the dream of his lifetime might find something like a fulfilment in his old age. Will was so quick and eager to learn, took such a pride in every forward step he made, and found such an actual pleasure in work, that Mr. Orme looked forward with complacence to a time when he would have nothing to do but to sit upon his box at the side of the stove and give directions. Will, without altogether accepting Mr. Orme's declaration that a selfish man would have done the work himself, was yet grateful for the instruction he received. There was a battered little book on the premises called the Printer's Grammar, from which he learned enough to persuade him that Mr. Orme's method of management was in some respects faulty. It would have taken half a dozen skilled workmen a week to have put the ramshackle little place in good order; but Will, inspired by the Printer's Grammar and a sense of personal pride, worked so hard and learned so rapidly that in a month or two he attacked the fringes of the desert of disorder, and conquered here and there a square foot of chaos. In one of his earliest readings in the Grammar he learned that the

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most hateful thing about a printing-office, the one ever-greatening dragon to be relentlessly fought with, was called pie.'
'What's pie, Mr. Orme?' he asked, as he and his preceptor walked homewards together.
Mr. Orme explained that pie was made up of type which had been suffered to fall into disorder; and Will saw at once that the dragon had been allowed to assume formidable proportions. At a moderate computation, a fourth of the office plant lay useless; and Master Will, who was one of those people who can do nothing with satisfaction to themselves unless they do it with their whole hearts, determined early to slay that dragon. It was this resolution on his part which dissipated the half-formed visions of

Mr. Orme. It was about the middle of July, and the weather was prodigiously hot and oppressive. The aged idler felt even less disposed to work than usual, and even his perch upon the box, though padded with a folded press blanket, was so little luxurious that idleness afforded him no comfort.

'William,' he said, 'you're getting on very nicely, and in time you'll make a very good workman; but it's time you began to think about display-work. Now, I've never let you tackle display-work yet; but here's a bit of a circular that the governor's rather particular about. Let me see you have a try at it, and I'll help you with a bit of advice when you want it.' This was spoken with great friendliness, and with an almost deceptive air of conferring a favour upon William.

But to Mr. Orme's astonishment and grief the boy declined to accept the kindness. 'I'm going to kill this dragon, Mr. Orme,' said Will; 'I'm going to get this pie under. I can never do it if I do your work for you.'

This black ingratitude so struck Mr. Orme that he was silent for a quarter of an hour, and rising with moans of resignation, he shuffled listlessly about the place, carrying his box with him, and seating himself at intervals whilst he picked languidly amongst the fancy types.

This was his second disappointment; for, a month or two before it, Will, whose supply of money had been

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exhausted in the purchase of a cheap suit of working clothes, had been unable to find the necessary ninepence for his medicine, and the poor sufferer had been compelled to rally by his own unaided natural forces. He had felt that first failure to be bitter at the moment, but he knew now that it was not to be compared to the later affliction. William stuck resolutely to his pie, and was only to be drawn from it by legitimate claims. Mr. Orme's dream was shattered, and he went back to the dull realities of life with something like a resigned heartbreak. Before six months were over, the boy was his master, and ordered him to his work relentlessly. The melancholy Varley never knew how it was that the work of the office came to be turned out so much more expeditiously than of old.

As he worked, Master Will sang and whistled with a shrill disregard of melancholy, and felt his heart as light as a bird's. His experiment was succeeding in a wonderful way, and John was changing for the better daily. It was curious, and not a little touching, to see the two lads together. Will had the gravest fatherly air, the queerest little tender bulldog ways of watchfulness and devotion. The two took long rambles together on Saturday afternoons in the beautiful Warwickshire country, and John always carried a scrap of paper or two and a pencil with him, and made strange wooden-legged sketches of the cattle in the fields, and funny lopsided drawings of old farmhouses. These M. Achille Jousserau was in the habit of correcting for him, and he did his corrections with so much skill and spirit, that after a dozen strokes from the master's hand, the drawings looked altogether beautiful and perfect to the pupil's eyes.

M. Jousserau and his friend and compatriot M. Vigne were both of the town of Arles, and each said of the other, 'Il est mon pays.' They nourished for each other that curiously strong friendship which exists between exiled Frenchmen of the same

province, and makes them hoard together even in their common capital. The good phrase does not say, 'He is of my country,' 'He belongs to my country;' it is ever so much stronger and more tender:

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'He is my country.' He brings its flavour with him; he means home, childhood, everything that knits a man to the memories of his native place.

M. Vigne was a solid, plodding, trustworthy draughtsman in an artistic glass manufactory, and Achille was an artist in the same employment. He was a trustworthy workman also; but there was a difference between them. The younger man had inventiveness, a passion for his work, and an ambition outside it and beyond it. The elder drew with a laborious painstaking and accuracy, but invented nothing, and had no ambitions, and the younger earned already five times his salary. But when they had met three or four years before, the heart of each had warmed to the old home accent. 'Tiens, tu es un pays, toi!' they sang out together; and in ten minutes, with flashing gestures and exuberant enthusiasm of speech, had recounted half their family histories. So Achille went to live with M. Vigne, and helped out the meagre resources of his establishment more than a little.

Achille took John in hand quite seriously, and gave him lessons in drawing, by which he profited so much that in a while the wood got out of the legs of his cattle and into his pictured tree-trunks, which was perhaps the best place for it. This kindness of the young artist's was very naturally and easily rewarded, for he began to pick up English as fast as a pigeon picks up peas, and even acquired a little of John's Barfield accent, at which Madame, whose ear was sufficiently habituated to detect it, would clap her hands and laugh with great merriment.

The good-hearted French folk lost nothing by befriending the two young wayfarers, for the boys earned enough to pay for their simple and unluxurious keep. John's pricking out of patterns saved M. Vigne many a weary and unprofitable hour, and enabled him to put his spare time to more paying uses, so that the family benefited rather more by the efforts of the weaker than of the stronger youngster.

'You don't have any of your headaches now, do you, Jack?' Will asked him one day. It was a Saturday half-holiday, and they were in the fields together, midway to-

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wards Stratford. It was a lovely afternoon, and made the brighter for both of them by John's unusual contentment. Achille had laid out a shilling for him in the purchase of a real sketch-book, and the two had tramped thus far in search of something worthy to be transferred to its first page. If he had had but his ordinary scraps of paper, John would have been firing his trial shots left and right; but he felt bound to find something unusual and charming for the beginning of the book. He looked round brightly at his companion's query, and answered with a shake of the head.

'I'll tell you what, though, Will,' he said, sliding an arm through one of his friend's, with a certain nestling way of seeking protection into which he had fallen, 'if anything bothers me to remember, I get that nasty swimming back again, just as if I had a wheel

in my head—an enormous wheel. You wouldn't believe how big it is, Will. It's as big as a cart-wheel; and it begins quite slowly, and gets faster and gets bigger, till at last I don't know anything and can't think of anything. But when I get like that, Madame always makes me lie down, and I go to sleep almost directly. I should have headaches, though, and jolly bad ones too, Will, if old Macfarlane was here.'
'I guess you would,' his companion answered; 'but old Macfarlane ain't here.'
They walked on in silence for a little time.
'I say, Will,' said John, 'I should have been bad if it hadn't been for you. I used to be afraid that I was going silly; and if I'd stopped at old Macfarlane's, I believe I should have gone.'
'It wouldn't have been his fault if you hadn't,' Will answered, 'nor old Snelling's either. When I'm grown up, I mean to go back and take it out of old Macfarlane.'
This idea held firmly in Master Will's heathen mind, and indeed he never actually overgrew it until, in after-years, he discovered how very big he himself had grown, and how very small and gray Macfarlane was. But the story of that interview deserves to be told in its proper place.

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'It's my belief,' Will added, 'that old Snelling didn't want you to get better. I think he wanted to make you worse.'
'What nonsense!' answered John. 'Why should he?'
'Ah!' said the young bulldog jeeringly, 'why should he? Why, father used to say—many a time I've heard him say it—how rich Bob Snelling would be if you never got any better and couldn't use your own money. Do you think my father's as rich as yours was, Jack?'
'I don't know,' John answered. 'But if Uncle Robert really felt like that, he must be an awful horrid beast. I don't believe it, Will; I don't believe it.'
'I do,' said Will doggedly.
It was perhaps only the brutal, unquestioning frankness of a boy's mind that could very well have lighted anybody to this suspicion. A more elderly critic would have felt the terrible responsibility of the judgment; the cold and cruel enormity of the crime would have staggered the adult inquirer, and he would have sought and found a reason for Snelling's conduct in the crowded pages of the chapter of human stupidity. Yet the boy's horrible guess was true, and the elder observer's gentler judgment would have been mistaken.
'You must think your uncle Bob jolly thick-headed,' said Master Will, 'if you fancy he didn't know what he was doing. Any fool could see he was driving you silly. Of course he was, and old Macfarlane was helping him. I knew you'd get better when you got away from 'em, and how should I know, if they didn't?'
This conversation cast a gloom over John's spirits for a half-hour or so; but it rolled away of itself, and he settled down to his field-work with ardour, and took home a feebly pretty little sketch, which Achille touched into strength for him in places, and guided him into strengthening with his own hand in others.

'You will make an artiste, you,' said M. Jousserau, flashing his white teeth at his pupil, and beaming at him with his black southern eyes as he laid both hands upon his shoulders and gave him a shake expressive of friendliness

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and approval. 'You have not the hand. That is absurd—who could ask it? Not yet. That comes with work, work, work. Peep, peep, peep at everything, always, always, and is never done with. I am beginner. I shall be student when I am old, old man, gray, stooped all over—' He could not find the word he wanted, but ran his rapid fingers about his face to indicate wrinkles, and dropped into so comic an imitation of decrepitude that John answered his mimicry with a peal of laughter.

Though that was the first occasion on which Will insisted on Snelling's villainy in his companion's hearing, it was by no means the last, and every member of the little household was aware of his convictions and in a lesser or stronger degree shared them. It is quite likely that they might not have accepted his sole testimony, but they had Isaiah's to back it. When once Will had found himself fairly settled down under Mr. Orme's tutelage, he had written to Isaiah, who had answered the letter in person on the following Sunday. Isaiah had a natural and excusable belief that French people—who represented all the foreign races of the world to him—were savage and heathen; and he was vastly surprised to discover that on the whole they were really very much like English men and women in their ways of living and feeling. He and the stately M. Vigne were a great spectacle together. Monsieur handed him a chair with a bow on his first arrival; and not to be outdone in politeness, Isaiah bowed back again; and this exchange of civilities, which was the only one possible between them, since Monsieur knew no more of English than Isaiah did of French, was repeated with a comic frequency. Madame began to talk of it when the visitor had gone; and Will and John went through a grave mimicry of the scene, bowing to each other like a solemn pair of toy mandarins, until the good woman fell into one of her helpless fits of laughter.

After this, a month rarely went by without a Sunday visit from Isaiah, who learned to drink their southern wine without overmuch creasing his features, and to smoke the cigarettes rolled for him by one or other of his hosts. It

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got to be quite a common bit of comedy pantomime, when they were alone with Madame, for one of the boys silently to roll an imaginary cigarette, and then rising, proffer it with a profound bow to the other, who would rise and bow in turn. It was a simple form of amusement, but it never failed to elicit a laugh from that jolly, fat-sided Madame Vigne, who was, as we have seen already, of a nature readily moved to mirth.

Isaiah gave such an account of John's possessions that the good people became half-terrified at the responsibilities they had assumed; but John's improvement was so evident, so smooth and constant, they put their fears on one side, though they all had some dim dread of English law, and were hardly certain that they were not laying themselves open to some terrible, vague punishment.

Mr. Orme was, of course, pretty frequently present at the time of Isaiah's visits; but since the latter had given it as his opinion that Snelling would give a hundred pounds to have John back again, and would certainly repeat his old methods with him, it was felt wise to keep the aged idler from details which might lead him into temptation. Madame could have no creature about her for whom she would not grow to have some kind of affection; but Mr. Orme was looked upon with a sad indulgence, and was not particularly trusted. Perhaps it was natural in Mr. Orme to resent this a little. Perhaps the dull mill-round of his own life was not sufficiently interesting to occupy his thoughts. Anyway, observing that conversations were broken off upon his entrance, and that there was an air of mystery preserved with respect to Isaiah's abiding-place, he began to be curious and to prowl about suspiciously in his own sloth-like way with intent to smell out the secret. He was good enough, on one occasion, to accompany Isaiah to the railway station; but that worthy had had Madame's advice beforehand, and paused so often on the way to shake hands with him in friendly adieu, that the old boy was compelled to take leave at last without even learning the direction taken by Isaiah's train.

He knew very well that the boys had run away from

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their homes, and their speech and manners were a sufficient guarantee that they had been decently bred. Will had unguardedly said something to the effect that John would be rich some day; and though it is probable enough that Mr. Orme would have attached no importance to this if the boy had persisted in the story, he did attach considerable importance to it when Will went suddenly silent, and steadfastly refused to be lured into a revival of the conversation. In fact, the whole household was on its guard against Mr. Orme; and he, casting about in his own mind for a reason for this caution in respect to himself, arrived at a natural conclusion. The idea evidently was that if he were let into whatever secret happened to be going, he would betray it. Now, that in its turn implied that it was worth betraying, and this in its turn meant that somebody, somewhere, would pay him for betrayal. As he followed this line of thought, it became abundantly clear to Mr. Orme's intelligence that he was being shamefully defrauded of the chance to turn an honest penny. He thought of his own hard and thankless lot, the scarcity of rum, or rather of its plenitude and his own inability to get at it—which is likely to have been the more harrowing form—the dearness of tobacco, and the miserable and degrading exigencies of labour. With such spurs as these to gall his curiosity, he became very curious indeed, and began to develop quite a. new phase of character, miching hither and thither in sloth-like dexterity to surprise conversations not intended for his ears, and industriously sleeping for hours together on the occasion of Isaiah's visits, in the hope of lulling suspicion as profound as that which he himself feigned. Unhappily for his purpose, he was a poor pretender, and not having had the advantage of self-examination in this particular, he could not be supposed to know that in his really somnolent hours he had a snore which seemed to communicate a faint vibration to the very door-knocker. His ruses, in short, were altogether too obvious and artificial, and did nothing but deepen the suspicion with which he had been regarded from the first.

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But, as often happens, apparent chance did for him what no ruse on his own part could effect, and one day, rambling past the town police station and pausing to strike a lucifer match, he cast an idle and careless eye upon the proclamations posted at the door, and in the very act of moving forward again, stood, arrested at the names of 'John Vale and William Gregg aforesaid,' followed by a statement that the above reward would be paid on the discovery of the boys on application to Robert Snelling, Corn-Factor, of Castle-Barfield, or William Gregg of Hargate Hollow, Beacon-Hargate. Beacon-Hargate was a mere hamlet, and Mr. Orme knew nothing of it; but Castle-Barfield was a considerable town, and was but a little over an hour's journey by rail. It was Saturday and a half-holiday, and he had money in his pocket, his week's wages, newly drawn, and as yet diluted only by a single fourpennyworth. He tried to make out the amount of 'the above reward;' but the hand-bill was evidently old, and had been pasted over and over by other announcements. It would in all probability long since have been hidden altogether but for the fact that it had been fixed to a lower corner of the board.

Mr. Orme fairly trembled with excitement at this fulfilment of his suspicions. What might the reward amount to? Ten pounds? Twenty pounds? Fifty? A hundred? He flushed and shook to think that he could make a bargain of it, and bestirring himself to an unusual activity, he made straight for the railway station.

CHAPTER XV

MR. ORME was a stranger in Castle-Barfield, but he had no difficulty in finding the High Street, and went shuffling up and down it with an eye of inquiry for the shop sign of Robert Snelling, Corn-Factor. Somewhere in the dim middle of his mind a sense that he was acting shabbily was strong enough

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to keep him from asking questions even of strangers who could not possibly know anything of his business. He blustered at himself, as that kind of shabby sinner will. The boys ought to be at home again, the young rascals. What business had they to be running unprotected about the country, earning their own living, whilst their relatives were obviously well-to-do, and were willing to pay hard money for the privilege of having them at home again? He salved his conscience by the reflection that he was not in any way betraying confidence, because no confidence had ever been reposed in him.

'They should have let me into the secret,' said Mr. Orme, 'and then perhaps I mightn't have sold them.'

He had never been fond of pedestrian exercise, and if he had known it, the Hindu proverb would have suited him to a hair: It is better to stand than to walk, better to sit than to stand, and better to lie than to sit. Barfield High Street is a mile and a half in length, and Mr. Orme choosing to look in the busier part of it, went lazily strolling up and down there until he grew hot and tired. He was always thirsty, but heat and fatigue made him thirstier; and exhausted nature, after a quarter of an hour's uneasy rambling, so cried out for rum-and-water, that he let it have its way. The dram-shop into which he

turned was empty of customers, and Mr. Orme, with secret sidelong glances, beckoned the man behind the bar into a corner, and there furtively rubbing the back of his hand on his bristly lips, inquired secretly for the address of the man he wanted.
'Snelling?' said the barman, 'Robert Snelling? Why, he's left the parish months and months ago.'
At this Mr. Orme's countenance fell dolefully; and the barman, throwing open a door in the rear of the shop, shouted to some invisible person in the interior of the house to ask where Snelling the corn-factor had moved to.
'Sh-h!' said Mr. Orme, with a rum-and-watery fear lest the query should be overheard in Warwick, thirty miles away.
The man took no heed of him, and a voice shrieked back that Snelling had gone to live at Beacon-Hargate.

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Learning that Beacon-Hargate was rather better than four miles away, which meant to his intelligence rather worse, and discovering that no train or public vehicle ran in that direction, Mr. Orme turned pale, and felt that he must either abandon his enterprise or fortify himself with more rum-and-water. Whilst he drank his second glass, the prospect of an eight miles' walk so chilled him, and the thought that ten pounds lay at the middle of it so warmed him that he was like one submitted to alternating douches of hot and cold water. At last he screwed his courage to the sticking-point, and having received full instructions as to the route he was to take, he lit his black clay-pipe and set out. Once clear of the town, the road offered pleasant going even for so lazy a personage as Mr. Orme. The trees and the tall flowering hedges cast an agreeable shadow, and the grassy banks now and again invited him to sit and think. He thought about the ten pounds reward, and its magic always plucked him on to his reluctant legs again and set him going, though he always renewed the way with groanings. He was beginning to believe that the people of that district were so rootedly facetious in their habits as to set their milestones purposely apart for the deception of strangers, when he came to a decent cottage, where a woman sat upon the doorstep knitting at a half-yard of gray worsted stocking.
'Mr. Snelling?' said she in answer to his inquiry. 'It's five or six score yards farther on, master, on the right-hand side. You'd see it easy now if it wasn't for the trees.'
The reward looked so delightfully near at hand that he went on quite jauntily; but, as fortune would have it, just as he left the woman with a nod of acknowledgment, Isaiah dropped into the road from a stile at a little distance, and recognising him, stood with a broad astonished stare to watch him until his balloon-like figure hobbled round the corner and disappeared. Anybody who has watched the workings of the rustic intelligence has noticed in what a curiously disproportioned way it is liable to astonishment. There was nothing so profoundly out of the common in

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Mr. Orme's appearance in that quiet district, after all, but it hit Isaiah like a hammer.

'What's that chap want?' he asked, advancing to the woman. 'He's a stranger hereabouts.'
'He was asking for your master, Mr. Winter,' the woman answered; and Isaiah stood nearly transfixed. His first idea was to run away; for, in spite of his impertinences to his employer and the immunity which attended them, he was afraid of him It was evident at the first glimpse of things that Mr. Orme could have no business with Snelling which was not associated with the boys, and Isaiah's mind shot at once to the half-forgotten reward which had been offered for their discovery.
'The fat's in the fire now and no mistake,' said Isaiah to himself; but being at bottom a man of courage, he pulled himself together in a while and marched resolutely towards the house, doing his best to look unconscious, and succeeding better than he knew. His facial expressions were less various than he supposed, and he had a kind of ox-like immobility which had been of frequent service to him in his skirmishes with his employer.
Short as was the interval between Mr. Orme's arrival at the gate and his own, Isaiah found the way clear. The messenger of exposure had already entered the house. Snelling's big voice boomed through an open window as Isaiah closed the gate. 'Well,' said Snelling, 'and what might be your business?'
Isaiah, under the pressure of anxiety and fear, did what he would never have dreamed of doing in less pressing circumstances; he hopped from the tell-tale brick pathway into the middle of a flower-bed, and ran with the stooping shoulders of stealth and secrecy to the corner of the house. There he couched by the open window, scarcely daring to breathe.
'I am resident in the town of Warwick,' Mr. Orme was saying—'a temporary resident.'
'Well,' said Snelling, in his slow, surly, magisterial way, 'what has that got to do with me?'
'My name is Orme,' pursued the visitor, in a tone which

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sounded frightened and propitiatory to the listener's ears, 'Tobias Orme.' He paused, and rubbed his hands with an ingratiatory pale smile. He was not at ease before the big, sulky, domineering man. His emotions tamed the heyday of colour in his cheeks, but his nose shone like a beacon. 'Orme, sir,' he repeated, seeing that Snelling made no reply—'Tobias Orme.'
'Well,' hummed Snelling, 'what's that to do with me?'
Mr. Orme smiled fatuously and rubbed his hands. Isaiah, conscious of his own guilt, listened with a beating heart outside.
'I believe, sir,' said Mr. Orme tremulously, with a roving eye in search of unprocurable stimulant, 'that some considerable time ago you issued a hand-bill, offering a reward for the discovery of two boys.'
Isaiah had been as certain as he knew how to be of anything that this was the object of Mr. Orme's visit, and yet the proclamation of it seemed as dreadful as if it had been an altogether unexpected thing.
'Oh, that's it, is it?' said Snelling. 'What about it?'
He, at least, with that sullen, vulgarly Napoleonic mark of his, clean shaven, healthy coloured, and respectable, looked altogether unmoved. It is true enough that the wish is

father to the thought with most men at one time or another; but there are men in whom desire, uncontradicted for a little while, will breed a faith which looks to themselves unshakable. Snelling was a man of this type, and his circumstances were peculiar. He had had undisputed control of his nephew's property since the death of John Vale the elder; and since John Vale the younger had run away, the land and the money he held in trust had grown into him, and become such a part of him as no honest belongings of his own could ever have been. There was nothing in the world a thousandth part so desirable to his mind as the ownership of land. Mere money wealth, the next thing in sweetness to it, was far and far behind it in its capacity for yielding pleasure. He had been gathering landed property in a small way all his life, and a half-

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ownership was a great sweet mixed with an incredible bitter. A mortgage was a loathing to him until he had cleared it away. A peppercorn quit-rent would have galled him. The only poetic fancy that had ever stirred his depths of commonplace came with the reflection that his ownership ran in an absolute solid wedge to the earth's centre. He bought lands with the mines and minerals thereunder, or would not buy at all, and the hidden uncomeatable parts of his purchase fed his heart better than the productive paying surface. There was something so prodigiously solid in the fancy of the dark, unmeasured, unmeasurable distances, unsunned, unseen, but covered every inch by his ownership, and sealed as it were for his, whenever his foot touched the surface, if it were but of a bare bald cottage-building plot twenty yards by twelve!

As week after week had gone by after the issue of the offer of reward, and the world at large thereby appealed to had remained obstinately silent, his nephew's freehold acres had grown more and more absolutely his own. Young John had gone off to sea and had been drowned; or he had fallen sick by the way somewhere and had died. Anyhow, in one way or another there was an end of him. That had grown to be quite certain in Snelling's mind; and the appearance of the fat, disreputable, little red-nosed man, with evident news of the wanderer, was a tremendous shock to him.

Neither his face nor his voice betrayed him, but he sat in sullen dignity, chilling the soul of Mr. Orme, who, without having dramatised the situation for himself, felt vaguely that he had expected a greater show of warmth and interest.

'Go on,' said Snelling. 'If you've got anything to say, say it. You can't expect a man to sit here all the hevenin' while you stare at him.'

Thus encouraged, Mr. Orme proceeded: 'The boys have been resident in Warwick, sir, for quite a considerable period. Master Gregg'—he was moved to a respectful tone by Snelling's aspect, and partly by the size of the house and the character of the furniture—'Master Gregg

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has found employment in the establishment in which I am myself engaged. Master Vale works at home under the direction of a French gentleman, who is not unassociated with the fine arts.'

'Supposin' that to be the case,' said Snelling, 'how comes it that this is the first time you make any move in the matter? A reward of ten pounds has been offered for a many months. How is it as you never saw fit to earn that money till to-day?'
Mr. Orme rubbed his hands and explained glibly. He had all along been sure that the boys were above the station they had taken, but he had never seen the hand-bill until that afternoon.
Snelling put up one hand to his double chin, and nursing an elbow with the other, fell deep into thought. Mr. Orme sat and waited, wondering a little in his bemused mind, but not daring to jog the big man's memory, except by an occasional movement of the feet or a faint-hearted cough.
'It's the idiot boy,' said Snelling, waking of his own accord at length—'it's the idiot boy, you say, as stops at home, and does something with the Frenchman?'
'The — the — eh?' Mr. Orme interjected feebly. 'The—'
'The idiot boy,' said Snelling, with a sort of dogged fierceness and resolve.
'Master Vale, sir?' queried Mr. Orme.
'Yes,' said Snelling—'John Vale. D'ye mean to tell me he isn't an idiot? If he isn't, he's not the boy I advertised for. He was an idiot when he ran away from home.'
'I should indeed be disposed to think so, sir,' said Mr. Orme, looking round the roomy apartment and taking note of all its signs of comfort. 'A very foolish boy indeed. But youth, sir, is sometimes inconsiderate and careless of its own best interests—even reprehensibly so,' Mr. Orme made haste to add with a jerk, suddenly pierced by Snelling's cold eye and made mightily uncomfortable.
'Do you mean to say,' said Snelling, bullying him with head and shoulders, 'that the lad is not accepted for an

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idiot wherever he may be? Openly took for an idiot? Openly known as such, and for such derided?'
'Dear me, sir,' returned Mr. Orme, 'quite the contrary, I assure you.'
'Then it's not the lad I'm in search of, and you may go about your business.'
At this the visitor fell back in his seat and stared quite vacuously until the thought of the reward brought him to himself again. 'I beg your pardon, sir,' he said then, 'but the boys advertised for are William Gregg and John Vale. The names tally, the personal descriptions tally, the ages tally. There is no doubt about these boys being the boys.' He was almost tearful in his energy. He thought miserably of the long four miles he had walked—a desert bare of stimulant—and despairingly of the return journey.
'What's the lad doing?' Snelling asked.
Mr. Orme considered, with a half-frightened eye on his interlocutor. To give too close and intimate a clue might be to set this big man on the scent. The big man looked capable of dismissing him contemptuously as soon as he had learned enough, and might then hunt up the missing boys at his ease and defraud the informer of his rightful wages. A certain aspect of reasonableness in this, providing the cases had been reversed, strengthened his fears.
'If the information,' said Snelling, appearing to divine his thoughts, 'turns out to be worth anything, you'll get your money.'

He was not in the least hurt when he supposed that his visitor suspected him of an intention to play false. When schoolboys make a bargain, it is not unusual for each to demand a partial handfast of the objects bartered for, and Mr. Snelling's methods of business were so far barbaric that he had always clung to that practice in his intercourse with the world. It was fitting and natural to suspect everybody.
'Tell me all about the lads,' he said, 'and have no fear about your money. If it's earned, it will be paid, and paid on the nail.'

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Even yet, Mr. Orme had some misgiving; but he saw no help for it, and so told all he knew. Isaiah, crouching outside, drank in every word, and jumped so at the mention of his own name that he set a branch near him rustling violently, and trembled with apprehension lest the sound should bring Snelling to the window.
'There's a person,' said Mr. Orme, 'who visits the young gentleman occasionally—invariably upon a Sunday, sir—a country person, an Isaiah Winter.'
'Oh!' said Snelling, with a world of meaning in his tone, 'that's where he goes to, is it? Them's his relatives as lives just the other side of Hampton.'
'You know the person, sir?' asked Mr. Orme.
'I know the person,' Snelling answered heavily; 'and the person'll know me afore the night's out. Go on.'
'I have observed, sir,' Mr. Orme continued, 'that there has been what I might describe as a conspiracy in the house. You may have seen the phrase in the newspapers, sir—a conspiracy of silence. It has gone the round of the newspapers, Mr. Snelling. That is what I have observed in the house—a conspiracy of silence, directed against myself, sir. I believe that everybody else has been in the secret all along, but I have never been admitted to it.'
Snelling knitted his brows anew at this and dropped into his former posture. If these people had learned that young John would be wealthy one of these days, they might very well have resolved to maintain him in the hope of being paid hereafter. He had so persuaded himself of the feebleness of John's intellect that he was quite sure it must be patent to everybody. This timid fat man with the red nose was obviously a fool, and Snelling was contemptuously wrathful of his stupidity in not seeing that John was a hopeless imbecile, and utterly unfit to control his own belongings, not merely now, but fifty years hence, if he should live so long. These other people, the foreigners the man spoke of, saw it well enough, and saw their interest in it. About that he was as well assured as if he had held the key to their souls and had the secrets of their hearts unlocked before him.

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'Now,' he said deliberately, coming out of his reverie, 'I'll tell you what I'll do with you. I'm not going to pay you now for finding out what may be no more than a mare's nest; but there's five shillings for you, and you can get a comfortable bed at the Farrier's Arms, within half a mile from here on the Barfield Road. I'll take you up there in my trap to-morrow morning and drive you to the railway station. We'll take the train to

Warwick, and you shall point out the house to me. When I've got hold of the lads, you shall have your money.'

'You'll excuse me, sir,' said Mr. Orme, 'but that is a programme which does not represent itself to me at all, sir, if I may use the term. It does not represent itself to me at all, sir. For three years past I have enjoyed a comfortable home in the house of Madame Vigne; I have found, Mr. Snelling, that my little comforts have been very well attended to; and to split with them would be worth more than ten pounds to me—a great deal more, sir. I'll tell you what, sir,' Mr. Orme continued with an air of persuasion, 'you cheque to-day, sir. It could be stopped at the bank on Monday morning, if my statement should not be verified by the facts, sir. I think, Mr. Snelling, that arrangement would be superior to the other —highly superior. I could then return to-night, sir, and there would be nothing to associate me in their minds with your appearance.'

'If you attempt to cash that cheque,' said Snelling, 'with anybody that knows and respects my name, you know the consequences.'

He had no doubt in his own mind of the veracity of the story Mr. Orme had told him, and he made out the cheque and handed it over then and there. He wrote down in his pocket-book at his visitor's dictation Madame Vigne's address, and then nodding coldly, told him that he could go. Mr. Orme, not unwillingly availing himself of the permission, took up the disreputable old silk hat he wore, and dangling it by its flaccid brim, retired crab-like with repeated salutations, and edged himself obsequiously from the room.

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Isaiah from his hiding-place saw him pass through the gate, and followed him with an eye to the immediate settlement of the difference which had so swiftly and unexpectedly declared itself. Snelling, unsuspicious of having been overheard, rose and tramped heavily about the room. The essence of the land he had taken for his own was in his blood and fired it like an ardent spirit. Every hour's seeming ownership had made his grip close tighter. The fallen, in his pious self-tortures, will grasp an object so long that at last he has no power to let it go, and Snelling's moral muscles had grown to a like condition. A sudden tide of desperation surged through all his pulses, and he struck the wall heavily with his clenched hand. He did not speak a word, but he made his compact with the evil one at that moment. He would have the land by hook or by crook, his own for good and all, and was resolved to stick at nothing.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. ORME, with a joyful tremor in his mind, fumbled with thumb and finger at the cheque in his waistcoat pocket. It was drawn, as he had already observed, upon a Birmingham bank, and he promised himself a sweet Saint Monday, the morning of which should be devoted to a journey for the purpose of cashing that valuable strip of paper, and the afternoon and evening thereof should be given over to manifold pleasures, among which rum-and-water and the theatre shone conspicuous. He was just entering the gilded emporium of Messrs. Moses and Co. in the free realm of fancy, bent on refurbishing himself from head to foot as a preparative for the pleasures of the town,

when Isaiah walked up beside him. Mr. Orme looked round a little startled, and fastened the single button which remained on his shiny old coat as a protection to the cheque.

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Isaiah's aspect was enigmatical and perplexing. By way of salute he gave a nod which might have meant anything, and to Mr. Orme's imagination suggested mischief. The two knew each other perfectly well, and had been accustomed to exchange salutations when they met. Mr. Orme's guilty mind alone made him uneasy, for he did not so much as guess that Isaiah had overheard his treason. Even if he had, the treason was at its most a very small one, for Tobias was in no way bound to fealty, and could not reasonably be supposed to break a bond into which he had never entered. But Isaiah walking at his side, with that unchanging countenance of enigmatical meaning turned constantly towards him, filled him with distinctly uncomfortable sensations. He began to wish that at Isaiah's first coming he had found presence of mind to salute him. It was eminently awkward not to do it now, but he felt that it was too late, and that any greeting he might offer would sound forced and unreal. He shambled on, therefore, feeling guiltier and more openly detected every second; and Isaiah twisted the sidelong enigmatical accusation into him relentlessly, as if it had been a gimlet.

By the time a hundred yards had been covered in this comfortless fashion, Mr. Orme had begun to feel that the position was downright intolerable, but he saw no way to mend it. To rid himself merely for a moment of Isaiah's intrusive eye, he made an elaborate search for his pipe, and having found and lit it, went on with as good an air as he could assume of being unaware of his companion's neighbourhood. But Isaiah, stretching out a deliberate hand, possessed himself of the pipe and threw it over the hedge. Mr. Orme's soul quaked within him at this open declaration of hostilities, but he was too fond of peace to resent it. Whether in the hope of rousing Mr. Orme to war, or simply from a desire to relieve his own overwrought feelings, Isaiah sent the flabby silk hat after the pipe.

The victim groaned feebly, and climbing over a stile, made a silent search for his missing property, whilst Isaiah watched him from the road. Still uncomplaining, Mr. Orme returned, and resumed his journey with Isaiah at his

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side. He walked all the dreary four miles and more which led to the town, and Isaiah kept him in voiceless company. When they passed the dram-shop at which he had refreshed himself in the afternoon, he felt in such urgent need of comfort that he made an effort to enter it; but Isaiah, skipping nimbly round, intercepted him, and sent him onward by a single significant gesture of the thumb. The victim groaned again, and shambled dismally towards the railway station, his unwelcome companion still clinging to him.

'Got your ticket?' said Isaiah, breaking silence for the first time.

The wretched unresisting little fat man nodded. There was a moist appeal and terror in his eye which would have moved a soul less sternly set than Isaiah's. His persecutor

took him by the arm as if he took him into custody, and led him to the window of the ticket office.
'Third-class for Warwick,' said Isaiah. 'That's where we're agoing to, ain't it, companion?'
Mr. Orme in a scarce audible murmur answered that he supposed so; and Isaiah, who had taken an unexpectedly facetious air, led him to the platform. When the train came up he bundled him into the carriage with an exaggerated helpfulness which Mr. Orme felt to be more cruel than open violence; and all the journey through Isaiah sat on one side of the carriage smiling forebodingly at his captive on the other. When the dreadful journey was over, he took him into custody again and led him homeward. There was no room in the mind of the miserable Tobias for further doubt. And he, who had never felt particularly courageous towards anybody, unless towards a boy of exceptional delicacy and cowardice, had never dreaded anybody as he dreaded Madame Vigne. He knew now beyond hope of error that he was to be ushered into that lady's dreadful presence, and to be exposed there as one who had attempted to wreck her plans.
Isaiah's knock at the door was answered by Madame in person.
'What is the matter?' she demanded severely, recognising

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her lodger in the dusk. 'You have been misbehaving yourself again; you have been drinking. I told you last time that I would forgive you no more. Go to your bed, and on Monday you shall leave. I will have my house respectable.'
'I don't think he's been drinking much this time,' responded Isaiah.
'It is you, Mr. Winter,' cried Madame, in a tone of surprise. 'Come within-doors. What brings you in Warwick on a Saturday?'
Isaiah, gripping his captive more firmly, struggled with him through the doorway, Madame recoiling in surprise before them. In the little parlour Jousserau and Vigne sat playing at chess together. The boys were sitting at a side-table, John drawing, and Will leaning over his shoulder. Everybody looked up as Isaiah and Mr. Orme came tumbling clumsily in together; and when Isaiah knocked his captive's hat off and forced him into an armchair with unnecessary violence, they all stared in astonishment. Madame had delayed a moment to close the street door, and entering in time to catch Mr. Orme's hat in her arms, stood amazed.
'What is the matter?' she exclaimed.
'This is the matter, mum,' returned Isaiah. 'This gentleman—this nice old gentleman—has been to Castle-Barfield. What's more, he's been to Beacon-Hargate. What's more, he's been to see my gaffer, old Bob Snelling. And what's more,' Isaiah continued, by this time in the highest conceivable state of exasperation, 'he's sold the lot of us for a cheque for ten pounds, and he's got the paper in his pocket at this here very instant.' With that he began forcibly to fumble Mr. Orme, as if with intent to rob him of his gains; but Madame intervening, her husband and the young artist rose together to her assistance; and the three, interposing between the victim and his assailant, made so loud an inquiry that for a minute there was no understanding anything. Mr. Orme sat quiet, with an anxious eye. He directed his glance once toward the door; but the observant Isaiah precipitated himself in

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that direction, and closing the door with a loud bang, set his back against it.
'Now,' said Madame in rapid French to her husband and the artist, 'what is the use of everybody talking at once? Leave him to me, and let me find out what has happened. Tell me quietly,' she continued to Isaiah; 'let me understand.'
'This party,' said Isaiah, scornfully indicating Mr. Orme, who sat in the precise position in which he had been placed and made no attempt to depart from it—'this party has been to my master's house at Beacon-Hargate, and I heard every word that passed between 'em. He told my master that we was all in a plot together to keep the boys away from him. He mentioned me as a visitor here every Sunday. My master's coming over by the first train to-morrow morning, and he's given this fellow ten pounds for the news.'
Madame translating this intelligence for her husband's benefit, M. Vigne stood by for orders, reserving his opinion of Mr. Orme's conduct until his wife should express her own. Madame's views were always good enough for Monsieur, and he made it a sort of point of honour to have none of his own until hers were clearly set before him.
'I am sorry,' said Madame, shaking her head reproachfully at the traitor—'I am sorry to bear these things of Mr. Orme. He has been kindly treated in this house these three years, more kindly treated than he has deserved. He has not deserved it, and he knows it—well. Oh, right, right well he knows that he is not deserving.'
Mr. Orme looked vacantly in many directions, but forbore to encounter any of the glances fixed upon him.
'He knows,' Madame continued, with a theatrical gesture of the right hand, before which Mr. Orme blinked feebly, in anticipation of physical violence—'he knows that the children were kept here because they had been vilely ill-used at home. He knows that whatever has been done here has been done in kindness and at our risk. He knows—' Madame was going on at a great rate, and had grown quite parliamentary in accent and in gesture, and

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was turning from right to left, to impress her audience with a sense of Mr. Orme's enormities, when her eyes lighted suddenly on John's face, and her eloquence was stayed in mid-torrent. The boy was white and terror-stricken, and the old look of bewildered vacancy, which nobody had seen now for half a year past, was on his face again.
'N'aie pas peur, mon enfant,' she said, in a tone suddenly grown soft and caressing, as she ran to him and put her big motherly arms about him; 'thou shalt come to no harm.'
'My cherished,' said M. Vigne, 'you are right, as always; but what is to be done?'
'We will talk it over between ourselves,' Madame returned. 'Achille, mount guard over that Infamous, and do not permit him to leave the room. Come with me, M. Vintare. Come with me, my children. Come with me, my husband.'
She swept out her brood before her; and turning back from the door in the very act of closing it behind her, bent a look of anger and contempt upon Mr. Orme, and suddenly

snapping her thumb and finger under his nose, in token of unspeakable derision, caused him in the suddenness of his recoil to strike his head with some violence against the mantelpiece near which he was seated.
'Oh!' said Madame, 'you disgracious, you thankless, you good-for-nothing old man!'
Mr. Orme said nothing, but explored his waistcoat pocket to make sure his cheque was there. The action was mechanical; but the touch of his thumb and finger on the paper awoke him to the fact that by to-morrow morning the document would have grown worthless to him. At this reflection he gave a sudden whimper, and Madame, with a new snap of her fingers, swept from the room.
Jousserau, having first locked the door, sat down facing the frustrated informer, and producing a sketch-book from an inner pocket, began immediately and with an intensely business air to translate his lineaments to paper. Mr. Orme, fretfully resenting this, and feeling as if it were an

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undeserved indignity, turned away; but the artist, rising from his seat, and laying down his drawing materials, rearranged him as if he had been a lay-figure, and cautioning him with a forefinger, resumed his place and his occupation.
'You are nice man, eh?' said Jousserau. 'Not? What? Eh?'
Tobias was less afraid of the small artist than either of Madame or of Isaiah, and infinitely less afraid of him than of the other two in combination. 'It's no affair of yours,' he said sulkily.
'Ah!' returned Jousserau, shaking his lead-pencil at him—'traitor!'
'I won't have it,' said Mr. Orme—'I won't put up with it. I am not a traitor. I have done nothing to merit so ignominious an appellation.'
'No?' said Jousserau, in mild inquiry. 'You are nice man. Very. Eh?'
'If,' said Mr. Orme, with an air of virtue—'if any confidence had been reposed in me, it would have been a different thing.'—Jousserau responded with a satiric 'Oh!' as if he admitted that this explained everything.—'I had a right,' pursued Mr. Orme, 'to expect that confidence would be reposed in me. I have been an inmate of this house for three years, and have always been treated with consideration until now. If the other inmates of the house had seen fit to continue their consideration, they might perhaps have had a right to expect that my conduct should have borne another stamp. As it is, it does not appear to occur to anybody that I am an elderly man, gaining a wretched subsistence by a distasteful occupation, or that the present enterprise lands me, I can assure you, Mr. Jousserau, not less than nine-and-eightpence out of pocket.'
A part of Mr. Orme's pathetics was wasted upon the artist, but he knew enough English to follow the concluding statement. He was so barbarous as to clap his hands at it and to cry out 'Good!' with a look and accent of the liveliest satisfaction.
'Ten bob, less fourpence,' pursued Mr. Orme, with a

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downcast air. 'You can leave the fourpence out of calculation. It isn't worth being considered under the circumstances, and ten bob represents two-and-a-half days' work.

I might as well have done two-and-a-half days' work for nothing, and for a man of my years, Mr. Jousserau, that is a painful reflection.'
'It is the years that make the difference,' Jousserau answered with a cheerful air. 'I like to think of it. That is, because I am younger.'
In view of this hopeless persiflage, Mr. Orme went silent; and the smiling artist continued his sketch at his ease.
Meanwhile, Madame, her husband, and Isaiah were holding counsel together in the kitchen, Madame, by right of sex and volubility, presiding. There was the clearest belief in everybody's mind that Robert Snelling had intended neither more nor less than to make himself master of his ward's belongings. Nobody doubted for a moment that he meant to achieve this purpose by driving John into a condition of idiocy. That had become a creed with Isaiah, who was not without evidence for his belief; and Madame and Monsieur had long since grown to share his convictions fully. The elders had championed the boys, and if for no other reason than that, would have been strongly attached to them; but there were other and worthier reasons for liking, and the good Madame Vigne in especial was overflowing with affection towards both her charges. The idea of surrendering one of them to so pitiless a master as stood in her own mind for Robert Snelling never for a moment occurred to her, and in the heat and affection of her partisanship she was ready to go all lengths and run all risks.
'We must remember the law, my dear,' said M. Vigne at the beginning of the conference; but Madame flamed out so at this that he dared to say no more. 'The law!' cried Madame. 'What do I know of the law, here or anywhere? I know what is the law of the heart; I know what is the law of heaven! If I were to go to prison for the rest of my life, I would not resign this poor angel into that monster's hands.'

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'Precisely, my cherished, precisely,' M. Vigne responded, and so sank out of the discussion.
'That villain,' said Madame, turning to Isaiah, whom of course she addressed in English, 'must never be allowed to find the boy. My husband talks of the law; but the law shall never make me say a word. The children must be got out of the way—that will be easy enough. They can earn their own living. They have never cost us a penny that their diligence has not repaid. And for the matter of that, we are not so poor that we cannot afford to keep them for a little while if there should be need for that.'
'I've got the sack,' said Isaiah, 'as safe as houses.'
'What sack?' Madame asked, with a bewildered look. 'What houses?'
'It's an English saying, ma'am,' responded Isaiah. 'I mean I've lost my place for certain.'
'Oh, I fear so, for certain,' Madame answered. 'I am very sorry; but I hope it does not matter greatly!'
'The place was well enough,' said Isaiah; 'but it wasn't so good that a man need die before finding a better. I've saved a bit, and I've had a bit willed to me, and altogether I'm pretty well, thank you. If there's anything to pay to keep the lads out of harm's way, I can find my share; and I'd as soon hand John over to the Old Un at once as give him to

his uncle's care. There's no turning Bob Snelling; and it's my belief he doesn't know what mercy means. As for the law, the lads ran away from home of their own free-will.'
'Ah!' said Madame, 'but we helped them. I do not know the law in England; but if we were in France I am sure we could be punished.'
'But then you see we ain't in France, ma'am,' Isaiah responded. 'We're in a free country, wheer an Englishman's house is his castle. As I was saying, the boys ran away from home of their own free-will; and they're game to do it again, if we only tell them wheer to run to. Ain't you, boys? Now, what do you say, Master William?'
'Oh, I'll go anywhere,' said the bulldog youth. 'I

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know what'll happen if old Snelling catches Jack. Let him wait till I'm his size, that's all. And old Macfarlane.'
'Whatever is done,' said Madame, 'must be done quickly. Listen, Mr. Vintare. My husband has a fellow-countryman in Oxford. He is of the same trade, and John would be useful to him as he has been here. He has a kindness for me, and will do anything I ask him.' Madame blushed at this, and added laughingly: 'He wanted to marry me once; but that was years ago, and he has married somebody else; but we are very good friends. The boys shall go to him. There are plenty of printing-houses in Oxford, for it is a place of learning, and William will find something to do there easily. They shall go tonight, and M. Jousserau shall take care of them.'
She translated the scheme for her husband's benefit; and the good easy man consented. There was a mighty bustling to and fro whilst the boys' belongings were packed together, and there was a moving scene when Madame took leave of them. John clung to her almost despairingly, and the kind creature had at length to unwind his embracing arms. She cried plentifully when they were gone, but found a little comfort in upbraiding Mr. Orme. That personage felt that he had brought his pigs to a poor market. Spurred by the promise of reward, he had walked until he was chafed and footsore. He knew that he was going to be on short commons for a week or two to come; and being easily susceptible to the opinions of other people, he was oppressed by the belief that he was very worthless and had disgraced himself. It was not a very profound sentiment, but the phantom threat of thirst stood at his elbow, and its presence was enough to lend poignancy to any trouble.

CHAPTER XVII

THE sun was setting in a great skyey field of ruby and topaz when Robert Snelling, scrupulously attired for out-

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of-doors, stood at his own gate an hour or so after his interview with Mr. Orme. He was not a man who at any time made much outward show of his inward sensations, but just at this moment there was an air of solid purpose about him which might almost have been called portentous. The dark-blue cutaway coat, buttoned tightly over his massive

chest, revealed a mere segment of sprigged white waistcoat, not as yet too portly, but giving such promise of girth and weight as a typical British yeoman of Snelling's inches might reasonably desire to show among other signs of comfort and prosperity. His dogged chin settled itself with its own air of bullying resolution in the cleft of a faultlessly starched high collar, over a bird's-eye necktie secured by a small gold pin. As to his nether man he was equipped in brand-new cords and boots. His hat, a shade broader in the brim and lower in the crown than common, gave a proper finish to his figure. From head to foot he was solid, prosperous John Bull, a thought too pompous and too dictatorial, even in repose, but looking rectitude and competence all over.

He was not thus splendidly bedizened for any common occasion, and the solemn bucolic dandyism of his attire was indeed in itself enough to proclaim to all the thoughtful and experienced of the neighbourhood the intent of the wearer. It was known, and had been known for a month or two past, that Snelling 'hung his hat up'—that is the local phrase—at the abode of Ephraim Shorthouse, whose daughter Cecilia was grown to a marriageable age, and was known to have coming to her, one of these days, a very pretty penny. Not a word had been spoken on either side, but in such a case the most elaborate statement could have made things no clearer than they were. A pretty girl, a handsome jointure, a widower yeoman of middle age turned seriously dressy on a sudden, and riding over with the regularity of Time himself to the house of the lady's father for six months on end as surely as the Saturday night came round—who needed to ask an explanation of these things? One would as lieve have asked for an explanation of the pretty girl herself as to the change

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in Robert Snelling's aspect or the purpose of his weekly visit.

He wore no spurs, but he carried in his ungloved right hand a heavy and supple riding-whip with which, now and again, he slapped his trimly booted calf resoundingly.

'D'ye mean to be all night bringing that mare round?' he shouted at length, without turning.

'Coming, gaffer, coming,' a voice responded from the region of the stables; and shortly after, the nondescript groom and man-of-all-work led the mare delicately clicking over the bricked pavement of the yard.

'How comes it you keep me waiting i' this fashion?' Snelling demanded.

'She put her off-hind into the stable bucket, gaffer. That white stocking takes a deal o' polishing to look nice.'

The man stood at the bridle; and Snelling, putting his foot into the stirrup, mounted solidly, and settled into the saddle with an air of being twice as strong and twice as ponderous as he really was.

'Where's Isaiah?' he asked with surly majesty.

'I haven't sin him since this morning, gaffer,' the man replied.

'Tell him,' said Snelling, 'to be indoors when I come back again; I have a word to say to him.'

The fellow touched his forelock, and the master rode away, a personable and commanding figure.

He had been accustomed all his life to set his purposes ahead of him and to go straight towards them, and having once resolved, had very rarely troubled himself to look behind or to examine anew the motives which had started him. But the news of the afternoon had stirred and shaken him more than he cared to confess, and in the very midst of the assurance and resolve which he told himself he felt, there were all sorts of earthquaky tremors, and now and then a fear which might have been inspired by conscience. But the one thing which most animated his spirit was a settled glow of wrath against young John. It was no part of Snelling's character to desire to understand his own emotions, and he did not pause for a second to inquire

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why he was angry with his ward. If he had made such an inquiry, the answer would have been simple and easy to find. Young John stood between him and his desire. He had a right to stand there, and Snelling had no right to the desire, but that made no difference worth speaking of, unless some underlying latent sense of it lent fuel to the flame. What right had the young brute to have a right at all? What right had anything or anybody to stand between that grasping Ego and his wish?

He had kept strict account between the estate and himself of every farthing, partly because of a rooted business instinct, but partly as a guard against a possible accusation. No neighbour should be able to tell him, at such or such an hour you began to think this property your own; and if ever claim or investigation should arise, he was safe and clear. But almost from the moment of John's disappearance the houses and the land and the incomings therefrom had taken that sort of root in him which a man's own property is apt to take, and by this time it had grown to be a part of him, so that he felt it was no more easily separable than a living member of his body. Of the two, if the choice had been given him, he would rather have sacrificed a limb. It is imaginable that there are many people in the world who would do as much as that to retain their own, or even to become possessed of other people's property; but there was an unusual grip in Snelling's character, and wealth was a passion with him.

And now, on the top of security and ease, this abominable news of John's health and mental prosperity came with a sort of shock which seemed to justify any intensity of hate and anger. To get the boy back into his own hands was the first prime necessity, and beyond that he pretended to see nothing, though in the hidden recesses of his mind he kept one fixed and wicked purpose. He might as well have given it the whole daylight field of fancy to roam about in. If he had acknowledged to himself this villainous offspring of his greed, he might have encountered it less often, and have been less troubled by it; but forcing it to lurk and hide, he had to force himself

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to keep an eye upon it; and it was the very centre of himself, and occupied him altogether with a torturing insistence. 'I am here,' said the black phantom—'here, ready and waiting for your bidding, and you know the purpose you mean to put me to.' Not to listen, not to see, not to admit to himself that the thing was there, was a constant grinding preoccupation to him.

The clean-shaven calm face, with its healthy red and white and resolute shallow eyes, told nothing. He rode at serious jog-trot through the scented summer dusk, and presented to all whom he met or overtook the same image of portly rectitude and prosperous honesty. There are many sorts of men who in rural districts would have fallen under suspicion if they had been situated as he was. To be in trust of valuable estates for a boy reputed to be of weakish mind, and to have that boy mysteriously disappear within a few months of his natural protector's death, would have looked too lucky to be natural; but Snelling's probity was beyond doubt or cavil. There is nobody so suspicious as a rustic, nobody so fond of evil surmise and scandal; but his neighbours left him tranquilly alone, and nobody saw so much as a movement of Robert Snelling's little finger in the fortune which had befallen him Isaiah and his wife, for their own sakes, had kept their own counsel, and nobody else had a gleam of light about the matter.

Snelling had some four miles to ride, and at the end of his journey the cosy lights of curtained windows peered at him through a network of darkened foliage. The click of the mare's shoes had hardly come to a stand-still when a door was thrown open, and a fat man appeared in the doorway, standing like a comic silhouette against the glow of the lamplight.

'Who's there?' said a voice.

'It's me, Shorthouse,' Snelling answered.

'I had a notion as it might ha' been. I'll send somebody round for the hoss in a minute.'

With that the fat man disappeared for a moment, and by-and-by his voice was heard uplifted in the back premises. A farm-servant

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came shambling out and led the mare towards the stables. The host reappeared in the doorway, and stood there to welcome his visitor.

'You'rn a bit late to-night, Robert. Come in.'

'Yes,' said Snelling; 'I'm a bit late. I've been delayed by business.'

'Here, Cecilia!' cried the host; 'come and tek Mr. Snelling's hat from him.'

'No, no,' said Snelling, with ponderous politeness; 'I can hang my hat up without a lady's help.'

'You'rn cliverer than I be, if you can,' returned Short-house chuckling. 'In my day, a young fellow had to get the gell to help him.'

This, in the fashion of the country, was quite a delicate hint as to the position of affairs; but Snelling kept silence in a stately resentment of it. Cecilia was there already, waiting with outstretched hand. She was standing with her back to the light, and Snelling from his superior height saw her head directly against the lamp, which made a dazzling halo round it, and kindled certain wavy locks into live gold.

'If you will give me your hat, Mr. Snelling—' she said.

'I take it as an honour, Miss Shorthouse, of which I am unworthy.' He surrendered the hat with a rustic bow, and she slid away with it. Snelling stood in the middle of the roomy floor with his feet planted somewhat apart, and his shoulders squared with a sufficient air of self-importance, pulling off his left-hand glove, and bending first one knee and then the other to ease the tight embraces of his riding cords.

'Yes,' said Shorthouse, as if translating the solid swagger of his visitor's demeanour, 'theer's no mistake about it, Robert; you'rn a fine figure of a man—a very fine figure.'
'That's well to know,' returned Snelling stolidly; and placing his gloves and riding-whip upon the table, he drew up a chair and stood with both hands resting upon it until Cecilia returned and took a seat beside her father. Then, with another rustic bow, he sat down.

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'Fine ripening weather, Short'us.'
'Pretty middlin',' Shorthouse answered, and pushed a leaden tobacco-box across the table towards him. There was a solemn filling of pipes. 'The girl handed a lighted spill to each, and then there was a solemn silence. After a lapse of five minutes, the lover renewed his courtship.
'Got the Hilly Piece drained yet, Short'us?'
'Very nigh.'
'Toughish bit o' work it's been, I reckon?'
'Ay!' Shorthouse responded; 'toughish.' Three minutes later he added: 'You may call it toughish, and say none too much about it.'
'Yes,' said the courtier, 'I suppose so.'
After this outburst, the impassioned affair went on as before. The two men smoked as if that were the sole business of their lives, and the girl folded her little muslin apron into aimless plaits. She was a pretty little creature, and looked as if she could have taken part in a livelier entertainment. Once or twice she lifted her eyes to look from her father to the stalwart gentleman who came a-courting. A momentary gleam of mirth lit her face, but she dropped back instantly to an expression of the demurest primness, and her fingers went on mechanically with their idle business.
'Just call for supper, Cecilia,' said her father, when the courtship had gone on upon these lines for perhaps an hour.
The girl obeyed; and a substantial joint of cold roast beef was set upon the table, together with a home-made loaf and a great jug of foaming ale. When the meal was over and the table cleared, Cecilia kissed her father, shook hands with Snelling, and retired. Then there was more smoking and another silence, until the courtier dropped one hand heavily on the table and turned towards his companion. 'Short'us,' he said, 'a word with you.'
'At your service, Robert.'
'You've took notice, I daresay, as I've been calling here pretty regular of a Saturday evening for some time past?'
'Why, yes,' said Shorthouse, with the tone and aspect

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of a man who is not willing to commit himself too far; 'I won't say as I've let that go by altogether onregarded.'
'I've had a purpose in it,' Snelling pursued, 'as you may or may not have lighted upon.'
'Precisely,' said the other. 'I may or I may not have lighted upon it, as you say, Robert.'

'I don't suppose,' said Snelling, 'as you'd have any particular objections to regard me in the light of a son-in-law?'
'No,' answered Shorthouse, with drawling deliberation; 'theer's nothing particular agen you, Robert, so far as I know.'
'Very well, then,' said the ardent lover, 'we may look on that as settled; and I'm willin' to talk business whenever you've a mind to.'
'Hold on a bit,' rejoined Shorthouse. 'Fair and softly rides far. As for looking on it as settled, that's more than I can say. Theer's the little gell to be considered, and it's more her affair than mine.'
'Cecilia,' said Snelling, with more than common solemnity and slowness, 'can hardly have mistook my meaning. A well-conducted young woman would naturally take steps to put a finish to a courtship if it was distasteful to her.'
'There's something in that,' returned the elder. 'Cecilia's a sensible gell. Her knows very well as you haven't come and took your victuals and smoked your pipe every Saturday hevenin' for the last six months for nothin'.'
'Just so,' said Snelling. 'I suppose I may leave the matter i' your hands?'
'Her'll hardly ha' got her frock off yet,' said papa. 'I'll go up and fetch her down.'
'No, no,' responded the lover. 'Theer's no such hurry as that comes to. You can speak about it i' the morning.'
'Very well, then,' returned the father, who was anxious to show at least as business-like a composure as the other displayed. 'I'll give you a word about it i' the hevenin', if you'll ride over.'
'I'm not quite sure about to-morrow,' answered Snelling;

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'I've something in hand as won't bear waiting, and I've got a bit of a journey to take to-morrow.'
'Very well, then,' returned papa; 'make it Monday. I'll have it out with Cecilia in the morning, and you can come for your answer when you please.'
Snelling had not meant to be so precipitate in his declaration; but he had a reason for accelerating the pace of love's impetuous chariot. If he proposed whilst it was still an understood thing amongst his neighbours that the property he held in trust was virtually his own, he thought that he stood a better chance of acceptance. He was solidly well-to-do without the farm, the mill, and the malthouse, and was quite conscious that he was no bad match for any girl of his own rank in the whole country-side. But he was persuaded that John Vale's acres would have their due weight in Shorthouse's mind, and in his daughter's also, and the events of the next day or two might seem to take them from him. He had vowed already that nothing should take them finally away, and his whole mind was fiercely dedicated to that vow.

CHAPTER XVIII

SNELLING rode home, revolving these and other matters in his mind. He was filled with a stolid wrath against Isaiah. 'He was always an impident feller,' mused Mr. Snelling; 'but I never thought as he would turn agen me and take up with a parcel of

foreign strangers. I shall have to be rid of him. I'll have no feller round me as work agen me behind my back.'
He was not a clever man, or shrewd at reading other people's motives; but even whilst he pretended to be struck with wonder at Isaiah's treason, he understood his motives perfectly.
'They keep the lad away from me,' he growled inwardly, 'as if I'd meant him a mischief. What harm, I should like

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to know, should I ever ha' done the boy? He's my own flesh and blood; and his father's last words was to say as he expected me to take good care on him. Me hurt the lad? What had I got to hurt the lad for?'
His clumsy mind put on airs of virtuous indignation, and he told himself whatever seemed likely to influence the judgment of other people. In a while it all began to seem reasonable, and even impregnable.
'Here's that Isaiah, as my father bred from a boy, been spreading evil reports and thinking evil things about his gaffer.' He felt dimly a mingling of scorn and pity for Isaiah stir within him. 'I should ha' thought better of him; I should ha' thought Isaiah would have acted square; I should ha' fancied as Isaiah would have come to me plain and straightfor'ard.' He shook his head mournfully over his servitor's moral shortcomings, and jogged on, nine-tenths persuaded of his own rectitude. 'For two pins I'd warm his jacket for him.'
Here came reflection, and the current of his righteous wrath grew cool, and began to roll sluggishly. If he parted with Isaiah suddenly, it would take him a month or two to seize and gather up all the business threads which would be left loose. He began to cast about in his mind for excuses for delaying the faithless servant's discharge, and finding none, saw more clearly than ever how ill-used he had been. It was awkward to part with a trusted servant in such a way that he could force from him nothing but a formal surrender of his trust. In his business habits, Isaiah was kindred with the mole—he liked to work underground. He would make slow, tentative approaches towards a bargain, and Snelling knew from old experience that he might have half a score of profitable little business enterprises almost ready, about which, if he were abruptly dismissed, he would naturally say nothing. These reflections, of course, made Isaiah's treason only the more obvious, and his own attitude of righteous anger the more tenable.
Isaiah was not at home; and his injured, wrongfully suspected employer sat down in wrathful patience to await him. He dismissed to bed the servant who admitted him,

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and sat over his sober glass of grog and his pipe in a severity which grew momently more and more magisterial. To vindicate his own outraged honour, he would have to suffer pecuniary loss; but he was prepared to bear it. Slowly there grew up in his mind the image of Robert Snelling, British yeoman to the core, generous, well-meaning, the holder of a solemn trust, who meant at any cost honestly to discharge it, and who had been traduced by a vile suspicion. Curious as it may seem, he grew actually to believe

in this personage, and the only note in all his thoughts which jarred with that belief rose in a murmur so faint as hardly to be audible to his inward ears: 'Theer's nobody in the world as has got a grain of evidence agen me.'
He sat late into the night, and there still being no sign of Isaiah, he locked and chained the front door. Then returning to the room in which he had been sitting, he scrawled the words 'Half-past seven' upon a sheet of paper; and leaving this in the centre of the table, went upstairs to bed. That sterling figure of the British yeoman looked altogether credible to his mind. The monster who would have attempted to injure his own kith and kin grew altogether improbable, unbelievable, and he fell asleep in the consciousness of his own unblemished reputation.
He was awakened at the hour he had indicated, and having breakfasted, attired himself with as scrupulous a care as he had displayed the night before.
Mrs. Winter appealed to him for news of Isaiah.
'I don't know where your man is, my good woman,' Snelling answered; 'but I can go so far as to tell you that I do not care. If he was only aware of it, he's got the best o' reasons for keeping out o' my way. If he comes back doorin' my habsence, you can tell him as I've found him out. I fancy he guesses as much already.'
'I'm sure, Mr. Snelling,' said Isaiah's wife feebly, 'as Isaiah's done nothing as he knows to be wrong.'
Mr. Snelling's only answer was a scornful grunt. The good woman was too much afraid of him to push her inquiries further, and he left her in great uneasiness of

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mind. He rode into Castle-Barfield; and having seen the mare comfortably stabled at an inn, made his way to the railway station, and in due time took train for Warwick. Isaiah's all-night absence seemed strange to him; but he did not as yet connect it with Orme's appearance, and was fully persuaded that he was about to take by surprise the foreigners who had harboured his ward. He found with very little difficulty the street they lived in, and identified the house at once. He sounded an important summons at the door, and Madame Vigne answered it. The two looked at each other for quite a considerable little time without speaking. The colour in Madame's plump cheeks had all drawn into two hectic-looking spots. Her lips were tight set, and her eyes sparkled dangerously. Snelling was prosperous rustic dignity all over, and having no nerves to betray him, he was by far the more self-possessed of the two.
'Well?' said Madame brusquely, when she had inspected the stranger so long that her own silence had made her feel awkward and embarrassed.
'I want a word or two with you, ma'am, if you please,' said Snelling, mounting the first step of the snow-white little flight of three which led to the doorway.
'Will you be so good as to enter?' said Madame, standing on one side to make way for him. She was as ready to fight for the children as a hen for her chickens. She would have fled from a mouse in abject terror, but for a mere man she had no fear.
Snelling marched in solidly; and Madame, closing the door behind him, led him to the sitting-room. The apartment was furnished sparsely, rather after the continental fashion than the English, and gave the untravelled man a false estimate of the people with whom he had to deal. A little foreign-looking man, spare and dark, with jet-black hair

and eyes, and teeth that flashed like ivory under his moustache, rose as he entered the room and bowed. The little man held a small-sized sketch-book in one hand and a pencil in the other, and when he resumed his chair, as he did immediately after his salutation, he sat toying with

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these whilst Madame placed a seat for the visitor. Snelling waved it away, and Madame gravely took it for herself.
'Your name, sir?' she asked.
'Robert Snelling is my name.'
'Pardon,' said the little man from his corner. 'You do forget, sir. Your hat.'
Snelling took off his hat and laid it on the table; and Madame followed up her first question.
'Your business?'
'My business, ma'am,' said Snelling, 'is very easily stated. I am the guardian of a youth—a young youth,' he added, so that there might not be any mistake on that point, 'by the name of John Vale. He was so misguided as to run away from home a twelvemonth back, and I'm given to understand as he's been living here. I want to see him.'
The long drawl of his speech, with its decisive and authoritative snap here and there, had the same kind of deliberate weight here which it always carried. The ponderous figure, the respectable dress, the clean-shaven face, the very bunch of old-fashioned seals he played with as he spoke, all helped. He stood there like a picture of British respectability. Jousserau and Madame Vigne had vaguely expected to encounter somebody quite different—something meaner, smaller, more cunning.
'The boy is not here,' Madame answered.
'That is as may be,' replied Snelling; 'but here or no, I have reason to believe that here he has been, and I want him delivered over to my care.'
'Yes,' said Madame, 'I suppose so.'
The little dark man in the corner laughed; and Snelling's attention being drawn to him by the sound, he grew aware of the fact that the coal-black eyes were fixed upon him with an unusual wary intentness which he could not fathom. As a matter of fact, Achille was sketching the visitor, and was studying his lineaments for that purpose; but Snelling felt the gaze to be at once penetrating and insolent, and repaid it with a scowl of dogged anger.
'I suppose you are aware, ma'am,' he said, turning to

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Madame Vigne, 'that by the law of this country you have no right to take a boy away from his natural and proper guardians?'
'From his natural guardians, yes; from his proper guardians, yes,' said Madame; and Jousserau gave an approving grunt at the close of each brief sentence.
'The father of this youth,' said Snelling, 'was my first-cousin. He trusted the lad to me on his deathbed, and he trusted him to me by his last dying will and testament. I am his

lawful guardian; and, moreover, the lad has his rights as well as I have. It doesn't take much to understand what you mean. The lad will be well-to-do one of these days, and you have some hopes of keeping hold upon him.'
'That,' said Madame Vigne, 'is a wicked lie.'
'I am not here to bandy words with you, ma'am,' said Snelling, with his best air of dignity; 'I am here to claim my rights. I have the law behind me, and if you resist, you'll suffer.'
'We know,' said Madame Vigne, 'why you want the boy again. You want him to ill-use, to frighten, to make him so that his poor little brains will work not; to make him so that you can say, "He is an idiot; he cannot use his money. I will take care of it for him for good and for always." Oh yes, we know why you want the boy; and we know why you will not have him. You speak of the law? I speak of the law. The law is good and sensible; the law is generous and wise. You cannot frighten us with your law. What! You say I shall be punished for taking a poor heart-broken little child and helping him. I feed him, clothe him, love him, make myself in all things his mother, and I am to be punished? Oh! a likely story. And you, you take him from his father's hands, you break your promise to the dead, you try to crush the poor little brain and the frightened heart, and you—you shall punish me!'
Madame was up, and in the whirl of her excited progress to and fro about the room had overturned a spindle-legged table and a chair or two. She took no heed of

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these things, but wound up her oration face to face with Snelling, seeming so to threaten him with the vehement French gestures of her hands that he fell back a pace or two.
'Are you mad, woman?' he asked when she paused from mere want of breath. 'I hurt the lad? What cock-and-bull tale is this? I never laid a finger on him in my life.'
'You made others do it,' she flashed back at him.
'You're a knowing kind of person, you are,' he answered slowly; 'you know more about my affairs than I do. I tell you again there's law in this country, ma'am. You shall prove your words before you're done with me. It's come to this, has it? A blameless man's character's to be took away by a pack o' foreign trapsers coming from no man knows where, and going no man knows whither. Find the man that says these things about me, and I'll flog him within an inch of his life.'
'Oh! you are big,' said Madame; 'but we are not afraid of you. Achille, tell Mr. Vintare to come here.'
Isaiah's entry at this moment was so strikingly appropriate that it seemed more than probable that he had been listening at the door.
'You're here, are you?' said Snelling.
'Yes, gaffer, I'm here,' Isaiah responded.
'It's you,' said Snelling, 'that's been setting flying these reports about me.'
'I've set no reports a-flying,' Isaiah answered; 'I've believed 'em maybe.'
'Believed 'em, have you?' said his employer. 'Look me in the face, Isaiah Winter. How long have you been i' my service, man and boy, and in my father's service afore mine?'
'A matter of thirty year,' returned Isaiah.
'Did you ever in all that time know me to do a man a wrong?'

'Nothing onlegal,' responded Isaiah guardedly.
'Did you ever know me want a penny as belonged to another?'

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'The law's always been o' your side.'
Snelling, finding his witness thus refractory, tried another tack. 'You lived i' the same house with John and me from the time of his father's death for'ard, till he was that misguided as to run away.'
'I say nothing about misguided, gaffer.'
'You lived there all that time?' Snelling demanded.
'I lived there—yes.'
'Did you ever know me raise a hand agen the lad?'
'I've seen you mek him cry five hundred times.'
'How, and what for?'
'The what for's best known to yourself, gaffer.'
'Very well,' said Snelling. 'It's pretty plain where all these stories come from. I shall see my lawyer i' the morning, and I shall make you prove your words. You as well, ma'am. Meantime, you'll do what you like about the lad. You own as he's been here, and as good as own that you know where he is. You'll have to hand him over, and I'll see you punished as far as the law can go, if I spend a thousand pound.'
'All right,' returned Isaiah. 'If I'm to be hanged, I'll have my money's worth; and I tell you to your face I misliked Farmer Vale's will from the very hearing of it. I never thought you the man to be trusted with a soft-headed lad as had got such a heap o' money.'
Snelling looked down at him gravely. 'You mean to tell me, Isaiah Winter, that believing me to be a man of that sort, you stopped in my employment? Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.'
'Well, now you come to remind me of it, gaffer, so I am.' Isaiah thought so highly of this retort that he nudged Jousserau to call his special attention to it.
'Very well,' said Snelling. 'I can trust my neighbours; I can trust my record. I've done the square thing from the time as I can first remember, and no man's got the right to wag a finger at me. You've got the sack, you have; and we'll see whether a discharged servant's word is good agen my own. You've got yourself into mischief, my lad, and I'll give you cause to remember this day as

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long as your life lasts. Why, you silly fool, who do you think's going to believe your story? Who's going to back it for you?'
'All the lads in Macfarlane's school is going to back it,' said Isaiah. 'D'ye think folks'll believe Macfarlane 'ud ha' leathered the lad as he did, in his father's lifetime? D'ye think as he'd ha' dared to do it agen a man like you without he'd had the word to do it?'
That shot went home, and for a mere instant Snelling stood confounded. 'Good!' he said, recovering himself. 'I shall see my lawyer before I make a move; he'll teach you a thing or two. Good-morning to you.'

He could not convince himself that he had made any great impression upon his auditors. The figure of perfect rectitude which he saw so clearly seemed invisible to them. But for himself the interview had done something. He had formulated his figure, had given it bulk and outline. He was permanently certain of himself. He had meant well from the beginning. The actual dark knowledge that he meant evil now did nothing to flutter his peaceful fancies.

CHAPTER XIX

TOBIAS had intrenched himself in his bedroom, and had rammed against the door the disreputable old trunk in which he carried about his belongings. It was a feeble sanctuary, for at any moment Madame might rail at him from without, and her voice was only a trifle less terrible to the detected sinner than her presence. The wicked old man had had no rum that morning, and to be without rum of a morning was to be the mournfullest sport of destiny. Under such conditions Tobias knew himself liable to mix the false and the true. Familiar things took lurid shapes. The harmless poker would assume a threatening curl upon a sudden, and display the liveliest powers of motion. Old acquaintances, who had been dead for many years, and

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whose bodily presence was on that account at least improbable, held fugitive interviews with him. He had a general knowledge that his apprehension of outward things was tinctured with error; but he was powerless to resolve his surroundings to their true elements. A little rum would have cleared everything; but it was Sunday morning, and there was no hope for him until an hour after mid-day.

Whilst he sat meekly enduring a hundred shameful discomforts, he heard Snelling's loud summons at the door of the house, and shortly afterwards his big voice humming and booming in the hall. Now, he thought, Madame would have her hands full; and now, if ever, there was a chance to steal away. He tugged the disreputable old trunk from its place by the door, and was horrified to see it rise on a pair of shadowy hind-legs and to hear it bark at him. It took him a minute or two to recover from the effects of this dreadful phenomenon, and even when he had fairly done so, he walked on tiptoe round it, fearful of awaking new demonstrations. He made for the door, keeping a timorous eye upon the demoniac portmanteau. He had already turned the handle, when he awoke to the fact that he had forgotten his hat. The flaccid thing drooped at him with a high-shouldered leer from the mantelpiece. He was nine-tenths afraid of it, badge and emblem of respectability as he knew it; and to get at it he had to pass the trunk of diabolic surprises. He stepped gingerly, sweating and trembling, and anticipatory of horrible change. Nothing happened. He was safely outside the door, with the venerable relic round his brows. There was something horribly suggestive in the smooth curve of the banisters, and he was uncertain as to what might happen next. But Madame's voice was pealing through the house, and acted on him like a tonic. He slipped through the front doorway, closed the door with a nervous click behind him, and came upon the street.

For a while he pottered about aimlessly, but by-and-by, discovering that his unconscious footsteps had led him in the direction of the railway station, he began to think that he had a chance of encountering Mr. Snelling there,

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and of at least making good his expenses of the day before. His thoughts were humble, and soared no higher than that. Isaiah's discovery of his scheme had pricked the inflated, exaggerated hope of Saturday. The fairy realms of Moses and Co. were closed to him, and those smiling, shining rows of barmaids who were to have dram-drinks from him on the morrow had melted into air. The station doors were closed, and he lingered outside the building, furtively smoking a dirty clay, which he hid on the approach of any person of respectable exterior. If Tobias had only known it, he had not been cut out by nature for the shabby old sinner he was. He had miserably misbehaved himself all his life long; but he had so ardent an esteem for the respectable, that the game he played never paid for the candle. The way of transgressors is always hard. There is scarcely a fragment of real truth anywhere for which you cannot find a corollary everywhere. It is as true in morals as it is in business that lazy people take the most pains.

The nervous fingers of poor Tobias went fumbling by nature in one direction or another at most moments. He was one of those men who at any moment of mental emptiness explore empty pockets, not in hope of finding anything, but in shambling excuse for vacant idleness. His hands went prowling now about his shabby old coattails, his gray-lipped trousers pockets, and the dog's-eared pouches of his waistcoat. In the course of these purposeless excursions, his shaking fingers lighted on Snelling's cheque. He drew it out and looked at it with alcoholic tears, as a pilgrim might look at a cancelled passport to the promised land. So little a time ago, and it had meant so much. He remembered the weary way between Castle Barfield and Beacon-Hargate, and the return journey, still drearier and more comfortless. There was an impersonal pity in his thoughts, as if it were another, and not himself, who had trodden that toilsome road.

Time went uncertainly with Tobias, and he was not sure how long he had wandered about there when the doors of the station were thrown open by a rosy-cheeked,

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corduroyed porter, who whistled a popular revival hymn tune. A minute later, Snelling broke in sight, walking erect, with his shoulders a little more squared, and his head a little more thrown back than usual. There was something so stern and resolute in his aspect that Tobias would have feared to accost him; but, to his amazement, though hardly to his relief, Snelling bore straight down upon him.

'You're here, are you?' he said. He was not original in greeting, and had offered that affirmative query to Isaiah only a little while before. It was a formula which he employed with people much below him in social rank, and marked at once and decisively their position and his own.

Mr. Orme touched the flaccid brim of the silk hat, and made a delicate show of raising it. 'I had not expected, sir,' he said, 'the honour of an encounter; but if I might enjoy the privilege of a word or two, sir.'
'Say what you've got to say, my man,' said Snelling, not displeased by Mr. Orme's extreme humility.
'Thank you, sir,' said Tobias.'I desire to remark, sir, that it was not my fault if I was discovered yesterday by Mr. Winter in the performance of my duty.'
Mr. Snelling had set himself a part to play, and was not subtle enough to play it by halves. He had adopted the genial role, and geniality was only tempered and softened by the reflection that he had been misunderstood and ill-used. He was blusteringly amiable, therefore, in his manner, but the bluster was a trifle chastened.
'Say out what you've got to say, my good fellow. Speak up! Theer's no need to be afraid of me.'
He still carried the riding-whip with which he had set out that morning, and having slapped his booted leg with it, stowed it under his left armpit with its silver-gilt head projecting. Mr. Orme's attitude and expression displayed a full cognisance of Snelling's splendours of demeanour. The little fat abject man drew the cheque from his dog's-eared waistcoat pocket.
'In respect to this, sir?' he said feebly.

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'Keep it,' said Snelling; and Tobias, in the whirl of glad excitement, only half heard the words which followed: 'I'm a man as pays a fair day's wages for a fair day's work. You did your dooty, and I make no doubt we shall come up with the lads in a day or two. I shall set my lawyer to work with that view; and if they're contoomelious, they'll have to suffer for it, as I've told 'em. In the meantime, if you pick up anything as may be of service, you've got my address, and you can drop me a line. I'm a man,' said Mr. Snelling, somewhat carried away by his new conception of himself, 'as never neglects to repay a service. You act square by me, my man, and I shan't forget you.'
'Thank you, sir,' said Mr. Orme, stowing the cheque away in secret haste, lest the big man should suddenly veer from his intention. 'You may rely upon my humble services.'
Snelling bade him a majestical good-morning and walked into the station. He felt generous and self-approving, and saw that his action was on a par with his best opinions of himself. But slow and dull as he was, he saw the necessity of a bolder strategy than he had yet discovered. Somehow or other, Isaiah had lighted upon the truth about him; and let him scout the notion as he might, and let him bury his own vile purpose in as deep and dark a recess as he could find, he had to own a danger. The crime looked natural—as it could only look to one to whom it had been possible. Isaiah's story was grounded on probability, and if it were spread abroad, his neighbours might believe it. If young John Vale came back into his charge, there was nothing possible but the kindest and most fatherly treatment for him. He should have it, or at least he should seem to have it. But—
In the meantime he had to disarm suspicion. He must act, and act decisively, before Isaiah could get back with his story. In Snelling's dull, vulgar, egotistic mind, the thoughts of the whole world pointed in his direction. Nobody is so careful of public

opinion as a certain sort of egotist, for his self-opinion puts him on a fancied pinnacle where all eyes behold him.

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Now, how to trick Isaiah? How best to be beforehand with him? The theory of a discharged servant's spite would help him somewhat; but looking at it, he thought it wanting in strength. He recalled suddenly Isaiah's mention of Macfarlane. Whatever real ill-usage had befallen the boy had happened to him at Macfarlane's hands. He would repudiate his own orders. He saw an opportunity and a way of doing this at once. The idea fired him, and his sluggish brain moved more rapidly than common. He matured his plan as the local train bore him idly homewards, and before he had reached Castle-Barfield, he was ripe with it, and eager to put it into practice.

Macfarlane had been a Presbyterian in his Scottish youth, and when he had migrated southwards, had made a spiritual resting-place for himself amongst the Congregationalists. He brought a sort of gloomy fervour to the church he joined, and did a good deal of honest hard work in its Sunday school. After years of probation, he had been elected superintendent. Snelling knew that at the time of his arrival scholars and teachers would be gathered together for their afternoon's duties. He was bent upon publicity, and could nowhere secure it so swiftly as by bearding Macfarlane among his subordinates there.

The superintendent was in conference with the mild old minister, and perhaps a dozen of the elders of his staff, when Snelling walked, unannounced, into the room in which they sat. He himself was known as a church-goer, not particularly regular, but prejudiced enough against intrusive outer creeds, and his presence there was a little startling. Macfarlane bustled to him and shook hands.

'We are seriously engaged, Mr. Snelling,' he said, pressing him a little backward, as if he would lead him from the room.

'I venter to think,' returned Mr. Snelling, 'that you can't be engaged too serious to spare a minute to clear a fellow-townsman's character. There's a shameful story got up agen me, gentlemen,' he added, raising his voice and looking round him, 'and so far as I can gather, Mr. Macfarlane is mixed up with it.'

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'Really, sir,' the minister protested, 'this is not the place or the time—'

'I know no better,' cried Snelling; 'I know no other.

I'll have my case tried here and now.' There was a weight and force about him which made themselves acknowledged. The deep deliberate tones and solid presence were answerable for something, but the overbearing will did more.

The parson drew his watch from his fob and looked about him irresolutely. 'The opening exercises of the school should begin,' he said, 'in five minutes' time from now.'

'Less than five minutes' time will serve my turn,' said Snelling. 'The matter's as serious to your superintendent as it is to me. No company of honest men should lose a minute in

looking into it. I'm no hand at a speech, gentlemen,' he continued, 'but I can tell a plain story.'
He stood with his broad-brimmed glossy hat in his left hand and his riding-whip in his right, and now and then emphasised his tale by a motion of one or the other. He could not have found anywhere a stauncher representative for that figure of high honour he pictured in his mind.
'Most of you know that when my cousin, John Vale, died, he left me his sole exekiter and the guardian of his child. The b'y had had a blow upon the head, and went soft and stupid. Mr. Macfarlane had the schooling of him; and the b'y, stimilated to the rash act by a young rend-all of the name of Gregg, run away from school. The story they was told to tell was that Mr. Macfarlane had beat the lad often, like a savage and without a cause. They was set on furthermore to say that this was done in obedience to my orders. The whole wicked story comes to this, that I, Robert Snelling, plotted with you, Alexander Macfarlane, to drive the soft lad softer, so that his property might never come into his hands, but stop in mine. Now, I ask you, face to face, Macfarlane, and I call on you to answer like a honest man—Is theer a word of truth in that?'
'Not a word!' gasped Macfarlane—'not a single word.'
'You hear, gentlemen,' said Snelling. 'This is no light thing, gentlemen. If you'll turn it over in your minds,

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you'll be hard put to it to think of a wickeder charge to bring against two respectable men. I've sacked the fellow as trumped-up the story, and I can do no more. I look for'ard to having the lad home again in a day or two, and my conduct'll prove what truth there is in the tale. Onfortunately, gentlemen,' he pursued with a tone and manner of mournful allowance, 'our friend Macfarlane's hand is known to be a bit heavy on the youth he deals with. Not a word agen our friend Macfarlane, gentlemen—not a word. His severity is always meant well; but for once it seems to have had a bad effect. It has lent colour, gentlemen, to a tale which every right-minded man will call owdacious.'
If at this time there were any protest against the rule of Father Stick at all, there was certainly no more than enough life in it to stir the zeal of his defenders. If Macfarlane had flogged a slow and stupid pupil, what other stimulant had ever been discovered for a dull intellect? Your dull ass will not mend his pace for beating; but your dull boy may at least be made to serve as a beacon of terror and warning to boys not dull. The wisdom of Castle-Barfield's forefathers had found no better uses for dull boys at school, and the modern men were not disposed to be newfangled. Snelling's protest looked a little un-necessary to most of them.
'A heinous charge, Mr. Snelling,' said the minister—'a most heinous charge, and I make bold to say a most unfounded one. Your own known character refutes it, sir. As for our friend Macfarlane, he is safe in our judgment of him. We have known him too long to change our opinion at the bidding of any scandal-monger.'
'I had a grave charge put upon me, sir,' said Snelling with becoming dignity, 'when the b'y's father died. It was a sore blow to me when the b'y run away from Mr. Macfarlane's school. I felt that I could do no other than put my heel on the snake's head here, amongst gentlemen, some of which has known me from my b'yhood's hour. I am

cheered by your confidence, gentlemen, and I shall take no further notice of the story. I could wish, not as our

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friend Macfarlane had been less severe, but as the boy's temper might have permitted him so to be. Good-afternoon, gentlemen. Your hand, sir'—to Macfarlane —'I will not believe for a moment as it is unworthy to rest within my own.'

As he walked back to the inn where he had left the mare, and as he sat there over a somewhat comfortless midday meal, to which an appetite two hours deferred compelled him to do more than average justice, he surveyed the scene in memory and approved his own conduct of it warmly. Whatever blame there might seem to be in the matter, he had shifted adroitly to Macfarlane's shoulders, and in the very magnanimity of his forgiveness had strengthened his own case.

In a little while he doubted nothing but that young John would once more be under his guardianship. There would be watchful eyes upon him now, and evil tongues to distort his acts, if anyhow they should be capable of distortion. The day of severity was over, and his first crude and pitiless plan had gone to pieces.

None the less his purpose held. The essence of the land had grown into his blood. He had no scheme ready, nothing but one dark and vague determination. But if John Vale grew up to stand between Robert Snelling and the acres he had set his heart on, it would be the worse for him.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN the enemy had retired, Madame swept about the room in triumph, talking vehemently the while. Oho! that Mr. Snelling of whom they had heard so much! Well, my friends, we have beheld him, and what did we think of him? That for him! Madame with great deliberation set the tip of her thumb-nail behind her white front teeth and snatched it away with a click.

'That for him, to be sure!' cried Isaiah, and snapped

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his fingers in derision. It was noticeable, however, that Isaiah went suddenly solemn after this demonstration. Madame walked about declaiming, and he listened, with no air of conviction. 'I tell you what it is, mum,' said he after a while; 'we've acted for the best; but if my opinion goes for anything, the gaffer's got us in the pot, and can put the lid on at any minute.'

'What do you mean?' Madame asked scornfully.

'I mean, mum,' Isaiah answered, 'that if Robert Snelling likes to try to do it, he can ruin the lot on us. I know him, mind you. He says he'll win if he spends a thousand pounds.'

'That for his thousand pounds!' Madame answered valiantly, with a repetition of her former gesture.

'That's all very well, mum,' replied Isaiah; 'and I'm no more for giving in than you are. But theer's wit in wood-choppin', and reason in the roastin' of eggs, and we've got to look things in the face, mum.'
'Very well,' said Madame cheerfully. She dropped into an armchair, and set her plump hands upon her knees. 'Now then—look them in the face. What do you see?'
'I see, to begin with,' Isaiah responded, 'that we can't keep the lad away from him. The law's on his side. Master John's father willed him into Snelling's care along with the property. It's a chancy thing to meddle with the law.'
'Are you so much a coward,' Madame demanded with flashing eyes and kindling colour, 'that you counsel to give back the poor innocent to this monster?'
'It'll matter very little what I counsel,' said Isaiah, scratching his head viciously. 'He'll have him back, and nothing we can do can hinder him.'
'That is so,' said Jousserau from his corner. 'But look, my good sir, if— No; I cannot exprime my thoughts in English.' He flashed round upon Madame: 'Look you, dear friend. This man can do what he will. He has the law on his side. Even if we should uproot ourselves and become vagabonds, he can trace us.'
'What?' cried Madame wrathfully. 'You also?'
'Listen! The monster does not want the child at all,

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unless it is that he should do him a mischief. And yet it is his right to have him, and his duty. Now listen, I beseech you. Let him have the child, since no better can be done; but let us warn him: "You shall be held responsible for whatsoever happens to the boy." Vigne can find employment at Castle-Barfield. He is a sound good workman, and will be welcome anywhere. We will go and live there. We will stand over you monster in constant terror. We will defy him: "Lay a hand upon the boy, do a thing to hurt him, and we will rouse the land against you." If you ask me what I advise, it is, that we see this brutal giant without a day's delay, that we tell him to his face: "You shall have what you want, you Snelling, but, at your peril, you shall do your duty."'
The little man rose to his feet, and gesticulated against the imaginary Snelling with such ferocity that Isaiah felt his blood run cold. He had never reconciled himself to the southern vehemences, and found it hard to believe that so explosive an energy could find a vent in mere words. He was persuaded that in his calmer moments Jousserau would not hurt a fly; but whenever the small man and his pays got into an animated discussion, he half anticipated murder. Especially at the dinner-table he dreaded controversy, for there the two bosom-friends flourished their knives and forks against each other with such passionate demonstration of apparent hostility, that he had a round score of times risen to intervene between them; and though he had been laughed at for his pains, and though Madame had assured him that these seemingly bloodthirsty antics were compatible with the tenderest affection, Isaiah had always had his doubts about it. He shook his slow-going midland British head at Jousserau's present attitude.
'No, no!' he said decisively; 'no threats, no bloodshed. I'm a law-abiding man.'
Madame, half laughing and half impatient, turned upon him to explain. She laid Jousserau's scheme before him, and in the very act of telling it, herself caught fire at it.
'There's something in it,' said Isaiah.

'Something?' cried Madame. 'It is the only thing.

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Look, Mr. Vintare: in Castle-Barfield there is the greatest of all the houses that make decorative glass in England. My husband has been offered work there; and only that that end of the town is so black and dirty, and the sky there always so dark, he would have gone long ago, because the pay is better. Mr. Jousserau is leaving us; we have been obliged to send away that wicked Mr. Orme—he has his week's notice now—the children are away, the house will be lonely. In Castle-Barfield there are two or three hundred of our fellow-countrymen. There is a French colony there. We shall be within two or three miles of the child, and we can watch over him. The surrender will be no surrender. I wish now that we had not troubled to send the boys to Oxford.'

'There's something in it,' Isaiah repeated. His intelligence was of a slower order than that of Madame or Jousserau. He was not accustomed to allow himself to be persuaded to a new opinion in a moment. 'I shall live about there,' he added, after an interval of reflection. 'I think between us we can defy the gaffer to hurt the lad. He dar' not do it in the face of what we know.'

They talked eagerly for an hour or more, devising all manner of schemes for the defence of young John against his guardian, until at last Isaiah gave his knee a resounding slap and broke out: 'I've got it!'

'What have you got?' Madame asked him.

'It's all right, mum,' Isaiah answered. 'I've got it! The lad's as safe with the gaffer as Daniel was i' the den o' lions. Leave it to me; I've got it.'

Madame was naturally curious; but Isaiah declined to say a word in elucidation of his project. He nodded and winked repeatedly, and once or twice his inexpressive features creamed with a smile of successful cunning. When he took leave of his hostess, he shook hands with unusual warmth, and drawing her towards him, whispered: 'I've got it; it's as good as done for,' and so disappeared, bearing his secret with him. Riding homewards in the slow local Sunday train, he repeatedly hugged his knees and chuckled, and his scheme so inflated him that he

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altogether forgot the troubles his own championship of the runaway boys had brought him.

Arrived at Castle-Barfield, he walked sturdily off to the house of Farmer Gregg. It was the farmer's habit to honour the Sabbath by eating an unusually solid mid-day dinner and going to bed after it; and when Isaiah arrived, be was informed by the serving-maid that the master was asleep, and must on no account be disturbed.

'Fatch him down,' said Isaiah; 'I've got news for him.'

'I dusn't wake him for my life,' said the girl.

'Fatch him down,' repeated Isaiah. 'It ain't every day of his life he gets news of a runaway on'y son that's been away a twel'month.'

'Oh, be gracious!' said the maid, 'have they found Master William?' and Isaiah responding by the woodenest of nods, she stuttered violently upstairs and fell to hammering at her master's door.
The farmer came down, angry-complexioned and short of breath, his eyes yet half sealed with sleep, and his iron-gray hair raying from his head in a hundred different directions. The maid, who was of an emotional turn, was weeping and beating her hands together over the unexpected news.
'What's it all about?' cried the farmer. 'Here, somebody, send this calf to the cowshed. Let a man hear his ears. What's it all about?'
'I've brought you news o' William, Mr. Gregg,' said Isaiah smoothly.
'You have, have you?' the bereaved father answered. 'It's time somebody did. Wheer is he?'
'He's at Hoxford,' returned Isaiah, with a careful aspirate in deference to the reputation of that seat of learning. 'He's well and hearty, and being took good care on.'
'That's a blessin',' returned the farmer, taking down his pipe from the mantelpiece. 'Is he a-comin' back again?'
'Well, that's as may be,' Isaiah replied. 'I reckon it depends a bit on whether he'd be welcome or no.'

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'I'll mek ready for him,' said the farmer. 'Theer's summat i' pickle as ought to be pretty ripe by this time.'
'I say,' said Isaiah, 'do you know what he run away for?'
'Yis,' replied the tender parent. 'He was too proud-stomached to tek a hiding from his own feyther.'
'Not he,' said Isaiah. 'I'll tell thee all about it.'
He was diplomatist enough in telling his story to avoid for the time being the mention of his own part in it. The farmer stared at him, open-mouthed and open-eyed, and in the extremity of his astonishment, dropped his pipe. It broke into fragments at his feet, and he stared from Isaiah to the pieces and back again without so much as an exclamation.
'It was thy Will's pluck an' good sense,' said Isaiah, 'as saved the lad.' He was developing traits of cunning not expected even by himself, and was full of admiration for his own wiliness. 'You remember what poor young John was like before he run away?'—The farmer nodded, staring with wondering, indignant eyes.—'Well, now,' said Isaiah, 'he's as bright as a new-scoured kettle. He's that cliver of his head and his fingers it's a wonder. It's all thy Will's doin'; and I tell thee, thee's got a right to be proud of him.'
The farmer offered no reply to this, but clapping both hands to his mouth, bellowed for his boots. They were brought to him, and he pulled them on, turning purple in the face.
'Now,' he said, 'I'm goin' to pick the heaviest ridin'-crop theer is about the house; and if thee'dst like to see a bit o' sport, thou'rt welcome.'
'What are you going to do?' cried Isaiah.
'Do?' cried the farmer. 'What do you think I'm going to do? I'm going to hide Bob Snelling.'

'Not of a Sunday, gaffer,' cried Isaiah persuasively. 'Leave it for to-morrow. It ain't a work o' necessity—it's a work o' pleasure.'
'It won't keep, Isaiah,' said the farmer; 'it won't keep lad.'

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'Bless you, yes,' urged Isaiah, 'and be the better for it.'
To give an unlooked-for piquancy to the discussion, Snelling's great form loomed in the doorway at this moment.
'Afternoon, neighbour,' he said, perceiving Gregg.
'You come in handy,' his neighbour responded, and began to look about him with a threatening eye.
'I've got news for you,' said Snelling, advancing into the room.
'Hast?' cried the other. 'I've got news for thee.'—Isaiah placed himself between them.—'Let me get at him!' the angry man stammered. 'Let me get at him! I'll flog the coat off his back.'
'Oh!' said Snelling calmly, balancing his riding-whip in his strong hand. 'This is my discharged servant been spreading lies about me. That's the man I sacked this morning, and he comes here, a-poisoning my repitation. You believe him agen the word of a man you've known all your life, a fellow as goes sneaking round, lying behind his old master's back.'
'Look here, Bob Snelling,' said Isaiah, shaking a denouncing forefinger at him; 'I've spoke behind your back, and I'll speak before your face.'
'Don't call me Bob Snelling,' returned his late employer sternly.
'I wouldn't,' said Isaiah, 'if I could find anything worse than your own name to call you by. You want to know what I've been saying behind your back? It's what I said afore your face this morning, and what I'll say afore your face again. John Vale trusted you with his boy, and trusted you with the boy's land. You tried to rob the lad of his land, and what's more, you tried to rob him of his brains. You've got the law of us, but we've got the whip-hand of you. The lad's coming back; but you've got to take good care of him this time. Raise a finger on him, and I'll rouse the parish.'
Snelling turned white, but he held his ground. 'The man's a spiteful madman,' he made answer. 'I won't

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demean myself by talking about such rubbish. My neighbours know me, and I can trust 'em. As for you, Isaiah, you shall pay for this.'
'Thee shalt pay,' cried Gregg. 'I'll take the lad's word agen thee, any minute. I was comin' straight to gi'e thee a weltin', Bob. Oh! it's no secret. Be'est welcome to the news. I'll know the rights o' things. I'll wait till my lad comes home.'
'As for a hidin', Mr. Gregg,' said Snelling, with a rude slow dignity, 'it doesn't become a man o' my years and inches to brag before a man o' yours. I should be loth to hurt you; but about that I'll say no more. If you're so blind you can't see where this chap's spite comes in, I'm sorry for you, and that's my last word.'

'It ain't mine,' said Isaiah. 'I'm your discharged servant, right enough. But what did you sack me for? I served you faithful, as I served your father afore you. I never was slothful i' business, nor wrong by a penny. I know my work, and you can tek on a better man when you can find him. You sacked me, gaffer, when you found I knew the truth about you; and afore we part, I'll tell you one thing for your comfort. You called the lad a idiot in my hearing yesterday. He was that or pretty near it a year ago. But we know the difference now. There's no cliverer or brighter lad for fifty mile round, and that's what a twel'month away from your clutches has done for him. Now tek him back agen, and let me see a sign that you're frightening him back into what he used to be, and then I'll show you something. As big men as Bob Snelling have seen the inside of a lock-up afore to-day.'

'Was it my fault,' Snelling answered, 'as that young brute threw a stone at my nephew two years ago? Is it any wonder that the lad's got better? If he has, is there anybody as has got such a right to be pleased at it as I have? Let the lad come home again. Let the parish see how he's treated. When your own lad ran away with him, was that my doing? It was him as tempted John away; and he started, if all tales be true, because you thrashed him. I'll talk no more about it. Change your

mind about floggin' me, farmer, and so good-bye to the pair o' ye.'

He walked home, proud enough to look at, but feeling altogether foiled and broken. He raged bitterly against the suspicions which surrounded him, and appealed to his own part for a defence against the opinion of his neighbours. What right had any man to believe this shameful charge? The mere right of truth was nothing to him, for they could only suspect. It was nothing that their suspicions were well founded. He alone could know that.

The boy was coming back again, and watched as he would be, he must needs treat him kindly. The black and dreadful phantom hidden in his mind took a forward step or two, and seemed to whisper, 'You will have need of me.' As yet, he dared not look it in the face; but he learned to own to his own soul that the awful thing was there.

CHAPTER XXI

AND now, if you please, for a while we will go into pleasant company. Who pleasanter, this pleasant summer morning, to begin with, than Miss Cecilia Shorthouse, trimly attired in a pink spotted cotton print, going demurely about her preparations for her own and her father's breakfast? Pink is not the colour the best suited to a blonde, but it has a neat fresh brightness of its own, and a pretty girl of an honest complexion will contrive to look well in almost anything.

The summer brightness lay outside on the wide fields, the scattered cottages, the well-kept farmyard, and the rambling disorderly old garden. Roses pushed into the diamonded window, and soft flecks of sunlight stealing in between their close tracery went sliding and glancing about the red-tiled floor of the kitchen. The scrupulous cleanliness of that apartment combined with Cecilia's own neatness of aspect to flatter her talents as a housewife. The polished steel fender glowed ruddily in the light of a small

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clear fire. The odour of coffee and the snizzle of frying bacon pleased ear and nostril with appetising suggestion. The brownish napery of the table had a country freshness in its look, and an odour of the country, caught from the grass on which it was bleached after every washing. The rough table service was lustrous with mere cleanliness, and Miss Cecilia, moving deftly here and there, looked like a pretty genius of household order and comfort.

The farmer her father came clamping over the brick-paved footway which led between the untrimmed masses of flower and shrub from the gate to the kitchen door. He brought a field-appetite with him; and as he stood at the doorway scraping the soil from his boots, a grunt escaped him, expressive half of expectancy and half of satisfaction. 'Breakfast ready, wench?' he asked, with a tone of approval.

'All ready, father,' said Cecilia.

The farmer hung up his hat, and took a seat near the table, with a hand on either knee. Cecilia set before him a mighty dish of fried bacon; and whilst he transferred a portion of it to his plate, poured out his coffee. He set to work gravely, like a man who meant business, and his execution by no means belied his air. Eating was too serious a business with Mr. Shorthouse to be mixed with anything so trivial as mere conversation; but when the meal at length was over, he pushed his plate aside, and heaving a full-stomached sigh, turned half round from the table, and fixed his daughter with a glance which was both bovine and kindly, and had a distant, nine-tenths hidden gleam of humour in it. 'Well, my wench,' said he by way of exordium.

'Yes, father,' Cecilia answered.

'Thee'st been thinkin' for a fortnight,' said Shorthouse, with the slow contentment of a well-fed man. 'Hast made up thy mind upon the matter yet?'

'What matter, father?' asked the demure Cecilia.

The distant look of humour in the farmer's eye flickered nearer, and darted inward again. 'Fill me a pipe o' 'bacca, my dear.'—The girl took a long clean clay from its place

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upon the mantelpiece and obeyed his request.—'Now give me a spill.' He pulled slowly at the fragrant bowl, resting an elbow on the table, with the stem of the pipe poised lightly in the cleft prepared for it by a broad thumb and forefinger. 'Sit down. Let's have a talk. There's Mr. Snelling waiting for his answer. How long dost mean to keep him?'

The girl made a faint motion with head, hands, and eyebrows. The compound gesture seemed to signify that the query was of no moment, and that she had not thought about it.

'Oh, tut, tut! my gell,' said Shorthouse. 'Fie, fie! It'll niver do to treat a man's offer in that sort of way. You'll be getting' a name for coxcombishness. Snelling's a good chance, Cecilia, and there's many and many a gell would jump at him. He's warm and he's solid, and what's more, he's an out and out John Bull. It's true he ain't as well off

as we thought him since young John Vale's turned up again; but he can play at countin' ha'pence with most folks hereabouts, and he'd win with nine out o' ten of 'em. He's old enough to know his own mind. He's made one woman a good husband already, and there's little doubt as he could please another. I think very high of Robert Snelling, Cecilia; and as for the lyin' stories that are abroad about him, I value 'em less than I do a puff of this 'bacca. Annyway, it's the part of a good wench to let the man have his answer. Think about it. Come now. Is there anything in your mind agen the man?'
The girl gave the same curious no-answer as before.
'Come, come!' said her father. 'Thee can't find a Yes or a No. I've niver been the man to persuade a gell to marry agen her own wishes. I've seen mischief come o' that sort o' thing i' my time; and if you can't like him, you can give him a civil "No, thank you." I shall be a bit sorry if it comes to that, for I've a kindness for the man, and I should like to see thee settled.'
Cecilia, who had taken a seat opposite to her father after filling and lighting his pipe for him, now rose slowly with downcast eyes and began to clear away the breakfast

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things. She had never read a play, a love-poem, or a romance in all her life, and she had always quite naturally supposed herself to be a young person of a business turn. The proposed marriage was practical enough, and looked likely to be prosperous. She could have the handsomest of dresses. There was a dashing trap to drive about in. None of her schoolmates or acquaintances had made so excellent a match as was now offered to her; and half the girls of the district would have been ready to pull caps for the favour of so eligible a groom as here came a-courting. But very dimly and vaguely the girl felt there was something wanting. A little course of romantic reading might have told her what it was; but, as has been said already, her maiden fancies had received no help of that sort, and she was left to her own resources. These seemed to help her very little, if at all. There was nothing to be said against the marriage, and there was very little more than nothing to be said in its favour. She was sufficiently happy and contented as she was; and Snelling at least had no power to spread over the cold outside world which lay beyond the home of childhood and maidenhood that wonderful glamour of hope and yearning for which every woman looks instinctively once in her lifetime. Love is not a thing of looks exclusively, and the experiences and confidences of lovers would find their way through the world without the aid of the romancer's art. Certain tender, foolish little secrets had been breathed to her by old school-companions who had been led across the boundary of love's golden realm. She knew by intuition that there might be more in marriage than a mere change of home and companionship; and the sentimental whispers had found an answering echo in her heart. Experimentally, she knew nothing. It goes without saying, since she was a pretty girl, that at least half a score of the young men of the neighbourhood had made sheep's-eyes at her. She had thought them infinitely ridiculous and tiresome, as girls will do until Mr. Right comes along, as the country phrase has it, when, somehow, they find the same airs and appeals on a sudden grown infinitely touching and pleasing.

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But Mr. Right had never presented himself even for a moment within the bounds of Cecilia's horizon. She walked in maiden meditation, fancy free, and when the middle-aged lover came with his solemn respectable ways and his round balance at the banker's, she knew not what to make of him or what answer to give him. The merest hint of experience would have told her that she was shockingly indifferent, and that a marriage under such conditions would have been a crime against herself. A sensible mother would have enlightened her in a day; but as it happened, she had no guide at all.
'Come!' said her father, when he had watched her for a minute or two as she moved about the room, 'try and mek up a mind one way or another, Cecilia. You hurt a man's pride in himself, keepin' him waitin' i' this wise.'
'I don't know, father,' Cecilia answered. 'My mind goes shilly-shally. I don't think I like Mr. Snelling well enough to marry him. I'd sooner stop at home. I don't want to marry anybody. You don't want to get rid of me, do you, father?'
'The sakes forbid!' the father answered. 'Do what you like, my gell. Only mek up your mind. See if you can't mek it up to-day. I'm away to market; and I shan't be back afore night-time. It's a hundred to one I shall meet Snelling there; and if you'll promise me as I can give him his answer to-morrow, it'll be a load off my mind. Now, theer's a good wench—let it be Yes or No to-night.'
Cecilia stood before him with the coffee-pot in one hand and the sugar-bowl in the other, looking downwards. She paused for a second or two before replying, and in her fluttering indecision her colour came and went. 'I'll try, father,' she answered; and almost as she spoke the words she looked up with a sudden air of resolution: 'I'll give you an answer when you come home this evening.'
'That's right!' cried Shorthouse, rising from his seat and patting her fondly on the shoulder. 'Thee'st have the wull day to think on it; and if I see Snelling, I'll tell him he can come to-night for his answer.'
'Don't do that, father,' she replied. 'You can take it

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to him. It will look more friendly, and perhaps it might hurt his pride less.'
'That sounds like No,' cried Shorthouse.
'Don't plague me now, father,' said Cecilia, with an unaccustomed touch of pettishness. 'I hate to think about it. I'll tell you to-night.' She extended the coffeepot and the sugar-bowl widely apart, and half-laughingly, half-poutingly pecked him with a kiss. 'Go away to market; I'll tell you to-night.'
Her father chucked her under the chin and drove away to business, revolving things in his dim mind. He was not a peculiarly intelligent man at any hour; but he was fond of his girl, and his one hope in the whole business was that she might choose for her own welfare. He had a sort of idea that she stood on a higher platform than himself, and that she saw things differently. He had sent her to a spruce and quakerish finishing school, where she had learned to speak without the broad drawl, and in an accent which seemed to him to resemble that of a fine lady; though, to a finer observer than Farmer Shorthouse, it was still rustic enough in all conscience. He was a little bit afraid of her, and she had always from her infancy upwards exercised a tender tyranny over him. If he

had felt at any time that he was being governed, he was the sort of man to resent it; but the reins with which she guided him were coloured light, and so skilfully managed, that for a fair half of the good man's time he took her way under the devout impression that he was going his own.

The girl being left to herself, went about her duties for an hour with something less than her customary sprightliness; and at the end of that time, having loyally finished her household tasks, sat down to face the question: to marry, or not to marry? There was nothing to draw her, nothing to repel. She would as lieve be left alone as be troubled by the proposal, and would almost as soon have received the proposal as not. She put on her sun-bonnet and walked into the garden in a grave inquietude. Her father wished for the marriage, and had often urged her to

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it during the past fortnight, even whilst he had told her all along that his one desire was that she would take her own way and be happy in it.

There was a summer haze abroad, which the heat of the sun had not yet dispelled, and the gentle eminences which closed in her view on the side towards Harley were suffused with a soft brilliancy. There was always an invitation and a mystery in the presence of these distant hills. In a landscape so generally level, and even monotonous, they were a constantly evident landmark, and from her childhood upward they had stood for her in evidence of the barrier which existed between her own simple life and the great wide world beyond. She stood looking at them now with half-closed eyes, with their tender greens and grays shot through and through with softened sunshine, and a sudden yearning seized her to be beyond them and to pierce the mystery they hid. There was a pleasant sadness in her thoughts, she knew not why. A couplet of an old hymn floated into her fancy:

Had I the wings of a dove, I would fly
Far, far away, far, far away.

The beauty of the distance, and the mystic sense that something lay beyond for her, drew her unconscious feet from the garden into the lane. The dog-roses broke there into a riot of colour, pink and white and red; and the wild honeysuckle, then opening, made the air heavy with its odour.

The quiet lane, with its overarching hedges, and the great moss-grown boles of its forest trees here and there, was like a secluded walk in some wild garden. The banks were hidden with fern and foxglove, and a hundred exquisite weeds delighted the senses with perfume and colour. The girl walked in a waking dream, with the hunger of youth in her heart. It was a new sense, and not strong enough to be painful. The natural, wholesome country odours, the warm still air, the dancing flakes of sunlight on the road, the pleasant shadows, the hues and perfumes which surrounded her, and the hazy glories which dwelt upon the distance, all gave it nourishment in equal part.

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She forgot her promise and the matrimonial pros and cons, and wandered on, almost unconscious of everything but that faint, pleasurable unrest, the pure, unconscious budding of her body's soul.

She was walking on in this wise when she was suddenly startled by a wild whoop as if of victory, and looking up, beheld two boys in the act of charging down upon her. For a mere second she was startled; but a moment later she found herself shaking hands with Messieurs William Gregg and John Vale. The two boys were in holiday attire, and looked happy, contented, and well cared for.

'We've come home!' says Master Will in a tone of pride not unpardonable in a boy who has run away from home, has kept away a whole twelvemonth, and, to his own prodigious astonishment, has escaped parental chastisement on his return. Somehow or other, to run away from home is a boy's highest heroism; but if the act of escape has something of the rocket's rush and roar and glory in it, the home-coming is pretty often humiliating, and resembles the fall of the stick. In most cases, indeed, it provokes the fall of the stick in another sense; and Master William, though a staunch boy, as we have seen, had had his reasons for looking forward with some misgiving to a meeting with his father, and was proportionately rejoiced when the encounter was got through with nothing more than an affectionate and admiring growl. As for John, he lived in clover, and was beginning to believe that nobody had ever tripped on such a blunder as he had fallen into when he ran away from Uncle Snelling. For of all the indulgent guardians from whom misguided wards have run away in the history of boyish romance, none, surely, had ever been so forgiving, so amiable, and so bent on making the recovered home pleasant as Robert Snelling. The two youngsters were agreeably conscious of their own high feat, and still more agreeably conscious of the unusual fact that rebellion had brought with it pleasant consequences.

Cecilia lectured them gently as in duty bound; and they, like the good boys they were, listened with a pretence of downcast contrition which lasted for ten seconds, and

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was then dissipated by the appearance of a weasel, who paddled across the road at a little distance in front of them, and of course imperatively demanded to be stoned.

Cecilia was not sorry to be delivered from her own fancies. The boys brought a healthy rush of the air of common life with them, and were so full of the high spirits proper to their age, that she herself caught the infection.

Young John, attracted by something or other, ran forward, and suddenly diverging from the track, climbed half over a five-barred gate, and began to chatter with extraordinary vivacity in an unknown tongue. A man's voice answered him from the field, and Master Gregg raised a howl of delight.

'There's old Jousserau!' he cried. 'I'll bet he's painting. He said he was going to.' The boy was alight with pleasure and excitement, and seizing Cecilia with both hands, he tugged at her eagerly. 'You must come and see him. He's no end clever. He won't mind you a bit. He's the kindest fellow in the world.'

'Who is he?' asked Cecilia, hanging backwards, and allowing the boy to pull her.

John heard the query, and scrambling down from the gate, dashed towards her. The two opened their conversational batteries at once, and were so vividly descriptive that she could understand neither. At length she silenced one of them, and so succeeded in making out the history from the other. It was this old Jousserau who had found John on the morning on which he had received that cruel blow upon the head; perhaps he had

saved his life, at least both the boys were of that opinion, though it was not probable that Jousserau himself shared it with them. It was this same old Jousserau who found them weary and footsore in the streets of Warwick, and had taken them home to the kindest and most hospitable shelter. It was he, further, who had taught John drawing and painting.

The narrative concluded, both boys seized upon her and dragged her forward. She went willingly enough, being spurred by some curiosity concerning a personage who had such a double claim to distinction in those parts as to be

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at once a foreigner and an artist. She made some laughing protest too; but the boys haled at her, and brought her to the gate.

Jousserau, who had been at work seated on a camp-stool before a small field-easel, had risen, and stood facing the gate with a palette, a maulstick, and a sheaf of brushes in one hand, and a single brush in the other. Cecilia had formed some shadowy idea of him in her own mind, and he contradicted it completely. The boys had called him 'old' Jousserau, and she had expected to find herself face to face with a patriarch. Seeing that he was young and handsome, she became momentarily confused, and would fain have run away if that act could by any means have been made compatible with her sense of dignity. The sense of dignity was not helped by the manner of her introduction to the stranger, the boys tugging at her as if they pulled a carriage, her sun-bonnet a little disarranged, and some of her hair, rebellious in spite of most assiduous dressing, flying loose beneath it. Jousserau raised his hat, which of itself was a startling and unusual thing; but she had self-control enough to respond by a courtesy, at which Jousserau stared a little. John began to patter in French and English, making the two strangers known to each other. The artist raised his hat once more, and again Cecilia courtesied.

'Lovely day,' said the artist, in his slow, queer-sounding English. 'Beautiful spot, mees.'

Cecilia responded rather shyly, and the little Frenchman went back to his work. The girl wanted very much to escape, but was hindered by her own shyness. The boys went quiet, and stealing behind the painter, watched him eagerly, craning their heads hither and thither to make out at what particular object he was at work. Cecilia, partly excited by their interest and partly moved by a desire to be out of the painter's sight, took up a place behind.

Good-breeding, as a thousand social philosophers have observed already, is very much a matter of nature, and Cecilia did not find her awkwardness of long endurance. By-and-by she began to be as much absorbed in the novel work before her as the artist himself. The boys were as

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quiet as mice, and Jousserau seemed to have forgotten their presence. But on a sudden he turned round upon his camp-stool and arose, hat in hand. 'Pardon, mees,' he said, 'if I should ask a great favour. I feel I am an impertinent. I cannot say it. My friend John shall say it for me.'

Friend John being appealed to in the artist's native language, translated. Cecilia's pink dress was the thing above all others the artist desired for his sketch. He would be immensely obliged if she would seat herself upon a felled tree half-way across the meadow, and would allow the two boys to be grouped by her. He would not detain her a quarter of an hour—perhaps not more than ten minutes.

'I am an impertinent,' said Jousserau again, standing hat in hand before her with his black eyes smiling and his white teeth flashing, and his hands and shoulders raised in a little shrug of appeal; 'but—'

'Look here,' said Will, laying hold upon her anew: 'that's where you've got to sit;' and straightway bore her off, all blushes and confusion. She walked across the meadow feeling hoydenish, and somehow guilty of a breach of the proprieties. She took her seat in the place indicated; and Jousserau, calling to the boys, directed them as to how to place themselves in her neighbourhood. They obeyed; and for a minute or two a solemn silence reigned. Cecilia was quite ashamed of herself, and was convinced that this swarthy young foreign person had no right to submit her to such an ordeal. The boys retained, with a somewhat sheepish quiet, the poses Jousserau had directed them to take. The painter, bending assiduously over his work, shot every now and again a keen glance at the group, and once or twice fixed it for some seconds at a time, so that Cecilia's embarrassment seemed to have reached its highest point. But in a very short time, in spite of these disagreeables, she found the séance over. The artist, rising to his feet, took off his hat. 'Sank you,' he said; 'I have finish.'

'Come along and look at it,' cried John; and Cecilia was once more pulled forward. She was bending blushingly over the sketch, not quite making out its meaning in

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her confusion, when a sound of hoof-beats made itself audible in the lane, and looking up, she saw the head and shoulders of Robert Snelling above the flowering hedgerow. He was lowering at the group with what she took for an expression of serious disapproval; and when he caught her eye, he gave a mere curt nod and rode on again.

CHAPTER XXII

THIS made things worse for the moment; but by-and-by it made them better. She was certainly doing no wrong, and Mr. Snelling had not yet the right to express in so pronounced a fashion his disapproval of anything she might do.

'I should know it was you, Cecilia,' said John, indicating the pink figure in the sketch.

'I don't know how,' answered Cecilia; 'you can't see the face.'

'No,' said the boy; 'but you turn your head in that way.'

'Very—pretty—attitude,' said Jousserau in his halting English; and stooping over the canvas, he laid a careful touch upon the figure with his brush.

Cecilia blushed; but now that she came to think of it, it really was rather a taking attitude. She had not the advantage of reflecting mirrors at her toilet, and except for what the looking-glass showed her frankly when she fronted it, could form no idea of her own personal aspect. In a general way, she approved of it, and she had her curiosities, like the rest of her sex. It had even occurred to her—as if it had been an idea

entirely of her own invention—that it would be agreeable to be aware of one's personal appearance all round. The report of the most tasteful and trustworthy companion with respect to the condition of one's back hair, for instance, was less satisfactory than one actual ocular demonstration might be. This being sketched was

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one way of realising the vision, and so far it was eminently satisfactory. There were a grace and charm about the pictured figure which she had not had vanity enough to claim.

Jousserau was the better satisfied with the figure because it was his own handiwork; and Cecilia was far more interested in it than she would have been if any one else had sat as model.

'Charming!' said the artist, laying another touch upon it. 'Very. Yes. Oh, very.'

He was obviously a discerning young man, and the girl was impelled to steal a look at him. His frankness of compliment was new to her experience; but she liked it none the less because of its novelty. He was so very easy with it, and seemed to express his admiration so naturally, that it was scarcely embarrassing at all.

'This,' said Jousserau, indicating the picture with his brush, 'is not my force.' He turned and spoke in his own language: 'John, what is the English for paysage?'—John shook his head to express his ignorance, and the artist was compelled to get on without his help.—'I do not do at my best when I do this. Trees—I am no good. Fields, hills —no good. I paint the face, the robe, the hands. Oh, with a great difference!'

'Indeed?' said Cecilia, not well knowing what else to say.

'At this,' continued Jousserau, indicating the landscape, 'I practise, and shall be better. Oh yes. In time. Without a doubt. But I am not yet strong.'

'I think it is very beautiful,' Cecilia answered honestly. It was not only beautiful, but quite wonderful in her eyes.

Jousserau snatched the sketch delicately from the easel, poising it between both palms, and held it out to her. 'If mees approves,' he said. 'It is nothing. But—if mees would like it.'

'Oh no; I couldn't,' she cried, shrinking back. 'I couldn't even think of such a thing.'

'Why not?' he asked. 'Pray. Yes. It is nothing. It is bad, oh, very bad, but that makes so easy to accept it, and so hard to say no.'

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'No; thank you,' she answered. 'I couldn't rob you of it.'

'Ah!' he said, artfully feigning deep humiliation. 'It is too bad to take. It is not worth your while. I beg your pardon. Shall I srow it a-vay?'

'Please, don't do that, sir,' said Cecilia; 'but I cannot take it. It is very beautiful, but I must not take it.' The young man had begun to be nearly embarrassing, and there was evidently but one way to be taken with him. She fell back upon rustic candour and dignity. 'I have been told you have different manners in your country, and I daresay they are nice for those who know them. But in England girls do not take presents from young men.'

'Presents?' queried Jousserau. 'Oh yes. Gifts. Can you call this a gift? It is nothing.'
'Thank you very much indeed,' said Cecilia, so decidedly that he returned the sketch to the easel and forbore to press her further.
'I am—what you call it?—rude,' he said. 'It is not good any more in my country than here. I do not mean harm, but I am savage.'
He looked so very humble and contrite, that she smiled at him; and straightway his swarthy handsome face beamed in answer, and he made a new movement towards the easel. She shook her head seriously, and he paused midway, again as suddenly contrite as a child.
'Not to show,' he asked, picking his way carefully over the treacherous boulders of the foreign language, 'that I am pardon.'
'You are very kind,' she said; 'but English people always say what they mean. We never say No and mean Yes, or say Yes and mean No.'
'True?' asked the little man, smiling once more. 'You are wonderful people. With us, we do often so; and the young meesses—oh, always!'
'So they do here, Mr. Jousserau,' said Master Will.
'Not if they respect themselves,' answered Cecilia dryly. Then, with great sweetness: 'I have overstayed my time;

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I must wish you good-morning, sir. Thank you for having let me see you paint.'
'It is I who must say sank you,' said Jousserau, raising his hat and bowing. 'I hope I have not frighten you with my savage ways?'
'Not at all,' the girl answered, half laughing.
She had not heard the hurried returning hoof-beats, and no one else seemed to have noticed them; but just at this moment Snelling's voice was heard calling from the road: 'Miss Shorthouse, a word with you, if you please.'
'If you please, Mr. Snelling,' Cecilia answered, turning and moving towards him.
Snelling rode to the open gate, and there dismounting, led his horse by the reins into the meadow. His brow was black with anger, and his clean-shaven lips were tight-set in the effort to repress it. 'Considerin', Miss Shorthouse,' he began, and then stammered and halted.
'Considering.' She prompted him rather coolly; but then his face and manner hardly indicated friendship, and she felt anew that he had no right to look at her as he did.
'Considerin' the question that stands as yet unanswered betwixt you and me, do you think it a fair thing to stand here listening whilst my character is took away by a law-breaking vagabond as I could ha' sent to prison a fortnight back, if I had had the mind to do it?'
'I don't know what you mean,' she answered. 'Your name has not been mentioned.'
'My name has not been mentioned?' he repeated in angry astonishment.
'Nobody has spoken about you, Mr. Snelling,' she answered; 'or,' she added with the true Midland directness, 'thought about you either, so far as I know.'
'That's as maybe,' he said surlily. 'At anyrate, that fellow's no fit company for a young woman as may one day be my wife.'

'It's early days to talk like that, Mr. Snelling,' returned Cecilia. 'I am obliged to you all the same.'
'Obliged?' said Snelling surlily. 'As how, if you please?'

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'You let me see what I had to look forward to, Mr. Snelling. I wish you good-morning.'
The courtier had not bargained for this; and he began to see that he had gone too far. Cecilia was young enough to be his daughter, and in his own thoughts he had always taken an authoritative air with her. In his own thoughts he took authoritative airs with everybody, and it seemed to him that nature had given him rights that way. Even if he had been her lover as well as her suitor, her quiet disdain of his interference could hardly have pricked him deeper; but it was necessary to take another tone.
'Miss Shorthouse,' he said, 'you may not know it, but I have better excuses than you think for. If there is another man in the world who has been as sorely tried as me this two weeks past, I know how to be sorry for him. I have had lies upon lies heaped on me by the whole neighbourhood, and the man that stands there'—pointing towards Jousserau with his whip—'is answerable for a round half of 'em. So fur as I can find, he has talked to nobody in this parish or its neighbourhood sence first he came here without striving to take away my character. I put that as my excuse for speaking to you as I did.'
'He has said nothing to me,' Cecilia answered. 'Your name has not been named between us.'
Now, so far Snelling had made his *amende*, and the girl, who was of a placable nature, had frankly excused him. Her father was the suitor's partisan, and she had naturally imbibed his opinions. If she had entertained so much as a doubt of them, the question of Mr. Snelling's proposal would have been settled in a moment.
But Snelling could not let well alone. 'I shall ask you, Miss Shorthouse,' he said, 'to permit me to see you home.'
'Do you think that needful, Mr. Snelling?' the girl asked him, with a little flash of mischief in her eyes.
'I conceive it,' said Snelling clumsily, 'to be my duty to take you out of the way of undesirable acquaintances.'
'Not yet,' said Cecilia; and in the heat of the moment she did what she would not have done on reflection—she

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walked towards the trio of onlookers and shook hands with them all round. 'Good-morning, sir,' she said to Jousserau. 'Thank you once more. Good-morning, William. Good-morning, John. You must come and see me when you can find time, both of you.'
Then, with a demure little courtesy to the foreigner, she left the meadow without so much as a look or a word for Snelling. He, beating his corduroyed leg with his whip, and timing the blows with an emphatic motion of his foot upon the grass, looked after her until she had passed the gate, and then turned his face upon Jousserau. It would have been an exquisite consolation to have been able to flog his traducer, who not only spoke

the truth about him, but was a foreigner into the bargain, and therefore doubly hateful and despicable. The fingers of his left hand seemed to itch for a grip on the little man's collar; but even in the rage of his anger and discomfiture, he had self-control enough to see how little a brawl would help him, and how little excuse the moment offered. He turned abruptly away and marched to the road, the bridle hanging loosely from his arm, and his horse tractably following him. He caught a glimpse of Cecilia as she passed the first bend of the lane; and throwing himself into the saddle, he jogged after her, repressing with difficulty the temptation to provoke a quarrel with his steed.

He was not accustomed to lose his self-control, but from the hour of Tobias Urme's visit with news of the boys, nothing had gone satisfactorily with him. He had discharged Isaiah, and found a hundred little tangled strings in business which without his confidential factotum's aid he had no power to unravel. Isaiah had of course taken his wife with him; and Mrs. Winter had been so excellent a housekeeper that he found it difficult to replace her. The woman he had hired in her stead knew nothing of his habits, and he felt himself doomed to months of discomfort before she could learn them. The neighbours were formed into clans about him, some believing in the villainy charged against him, and others deriding the story. However warm his friends were, he met cool greetings enough to anger him

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a score of times a day. And worst of all, that pernicious young John was back again under conditions which made it imperatively necessary that he should be treated with at least apparent kindness. He hated him so that all the gall in his system—and there was much of it—seemed to flood his own heart whenever he looked at him; and yet he had to speak him fair and treat him softly, as if he loved him. It had been his one vile purpose to cow the boy into incurable dulness, and now his fear was lest he should frighten him into a mere momentary sign of it. Life was like a bed of thorns to him, and wherever he looked he saw or suspected an enemy.

Cecilia looked round as he approached her, and being already a little repentant in her own mind, stood still until he gained her side, when she walked slowly on again.

'I'm sorry, Miss Shorthouse,' he said, bending down from the saddle, 'to find you so mistook my meaning. I meant no impidence. It's clear you took offence, and I daresay you had a right to; but I give you my word as none was meant.'

'I was quite sure of that, Mr. Snelling,' she answered; 'and I shall be thankful if you'll say no more about it.'

He sat upright and breathed a great sigh of relief. She heard it, and stole a look at him. Perhaps he cared for her. She did not know. Men had strange ways. She was a little sorry for him and the troubles he had spoken of, and was not well pleased with her own conduct of the morning. She thought she had been forward and unmaidenly. It was presumptuous of the stranger to have set her in his picture. It had been foolish and forward on her part to allow him to do so. She was in a compound mood, such as only women know by actual experience. In plain English, she had shot her bolt, had brought down her quarry, and, woman-like, regretted victory. None the less, she had had a sight of Snelling in a new character, and had made up her mind about him finally.

'It seems, Miss Shorthouse,' said he, 'that I made a mistake in riding back again; and now, with your good

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leave, I'll turn round again, though I'm loth to quit you.' This was the nearest approach to a love-like speech he had ever made to her, and he felt awkward and stupid when she returned no answer to it. 'I expect,' he added, speaking simply to relieve himself of this embarrassment, 'I may light upon your father in town.'
'He has gone to market,' said Cecilia.
Snelling turned his horse half round in the lane and looked down at her indeterminately.
'He put my question afore you a fortnight ago, Miss Shorthouse?'
'Yes, Mr. Snelling.'
'And when may I look to get your answer?'
'I have promised my father for to-night,' she responded, looking away from him, her face hidden by the sunbonnet.
'I hope,' he said, 'as what has happened this morning'll make no difference?'
'I think not,' she answered, with her face still hidden. 'No; it will make no difference.'
On that they parted; and Snelling put his horse to his best speed to make up for lost time. Miss Shorthouse's acres shone just then as the one bright spot on his horizon. He felt that he had behaved with great want of tact, but congratulated himself on having smoothed away the effects of wrath and suspicion by apology. After all, he acknowledged, the girl had only behaved with proper spirit. She was free as yet, and he thought none the worse of her for refusing to obey the bridle before her time came. As Mrs. Snelling, she would learn to yield him a natural and befitting obedience. So long as she was Miss Shorthouse, she had a right to set a value upon herself. He thought himself somewhat magnanimous in looking at things in this way, and rode on in fair hope.
He met Shorthouse at the market, as he had anticipated, and the two dined together at an ordinary frequented by the better class of farmers, Snelling insisting on paying for the dinner, and ordering up after it a bottle of curious old port, with which they accompanied the after-dinner pipe in true barbaric fashion.

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Over the cheering vintage, Farmer Shorthouse grew first passably confident, and then cock-sure, and over the final glass clapped Snelling on the shoulder. 'It's all right, my boy,' he said. 'It'll be "Yes" to-night for a fiver.'
'Let's hope so,' said Snelling; but though he took it very calmly and gravely, the father's opinion fortified his own. 'We'll see,' he added comfortably, not wishing to appear too anxious—'we'll see how it turns out. I'll ride over, if you like, towards nine in the evening.'
Having arrived at that understanding, they parted in pursuit of their separate affairs; and in due time Shorthouse, having finished his business, rode home. The bovine unsentimental man was always a little more disposed to be kindly on a market night than on ordinary evenings, because, with his weekly journey to the town, he allowed himself a something extra in the way of dinner, and comforted his heart with a glass of

grog amongst his friends before starting homewards. He was a sober creature enough for the rest of the week; but on market nights he reckoned to warm himself like his neighbours; and neither he nor they—good easy folk—thought any harm of it. He jogged on, a little muzzy in his thoughts,—foolish and kind—thinking what a good fellow Snelling was, and what a nice girl was Cecilia, and how he himself would do his heart good at the wedding, and shine at Sir Roger de Coverley after it; and so in the golden evening sunshine reached his own gate, and, surrendering his horse, dismounted.
Cecilia was out of the way somewhere; but a substantial tea was laid, and a substantial serving-girl was there to see to her master's comforts. She tendered the boot-jack and his slippers; and the good man, having made himself comfortable, sat down by the round of cold boiled beef and the teapot and made himself more comfortable yet. His meal over, he lit his pipe and strolled out into the garden, and there amongst the early roses was Cecilia. She nodded to his greeting, but did not seem very anxious to meet him.
'Come here, wench,' said the farmer; and she obeying lingeringly, he put an arm about her waist and gave her a vinously affectionate kiss. 'Hast made up thy mind yet?'

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'Yes, father.'
'Well, what is it? Yes or No? No or Yes? Which is it? I'm game for a dance at the weddin'.' And he began to foot it heel and toe, humming an old-fashioned dance tune, and keeping time with the stem of his long Broseley.
Cecilia was looking away to the rosy after-glow of the sunset over the hills, and the farmer's face was turned in the same direction.
'I hope you won't be disappointed, father.'
'Eh? It's a match, ain't it?'
'No, father. I've been thinking about it all day, and I can't marry Mr. Snelling.'
'Rubbidge, my wench! Clear rubbidge!' cried Shorthouse.
'No, father, dear; I can't marry him.'
There was the noise of a crunching step upon the gravel, and they both turned. Snelling had approached them unheard, walking for the most part on a moss-grown path. His face looked gray, and his eyes were full of a gloomy anger. 'Well and good,' was all he said. 'I've heard my answer, and I've got nothing to wait for.' He turned upon his heel and walked into the gathering shadows.
The two—father and daughter—watched him blankly as he moved away, and the shadows seemed to drape him round at first and then to hide him. But deeper and denser than the outward shadow rose the inward. He shook his fist towards his own house when once the hedge had altogether hidden him. 'I owe thee this wi' the rest, nevew John,' he said; 'and I'll pay thee for it.'

CHAPTER XXIII

TOBIAS had taken a day's holiday without troubling his employer with the formality of asking for it. St. Monday was a familiar of his. He had booked for Birmingham by

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an early train, had slunk furtively into the bank, and there presented his cheque with a manner so shy and guilty as to draw upon himself the suspicion of the cashier, who narrowly examined the document before rendering it into coin of the realm. The fat man trembled with anguish at the thought that he might be seized and that Snelling might deny his signature. When the ten golden sovereigns were shovelled on to the counter, he took them up with shaky fingers and carried them out into the street in his moist hand. His pockets were never very trustworthy, and the last had given way that morning, so that he was compelled to carry the remnant of Saturday's wages in the lining of his hat, where half a dozen penny pieces, conspicuous among the scattered silver by their size, galled his baldness. He made his way straight to the great emporium of ready-made clothes, whose portals he had so often entered in fancy, and there ordered new raiment. It was not an easy thing to fit Tobias's figure off-hand, but the shopman made an approach to success; and in the space of half an hour he emerged upon the street in a new suit of gleaming black, a new cheap silk hat, new boots considerably too large for him, a new false front with high shirt collars, and a new cravat of violent colours. He bore his old discarded garments folded into a neat brown paper parcel under his arm, and made by instinct for the nearest place of public refreshment. There he took a glass of rum-and-water, and left his parcel in charge of the barmaid on duty, whom he charmed by the sesquipedalian fluency of his converse and the affability of his manner.

Mr. Orme knew nothing of the Philosophy of Clothes, but he felt that his new garments made a new man of him, and as he rambled through the sunshiny streets, his bosom dilated with the thought that his exterior aspect defied criticism. He determined to spend the day in sightseeing, and made a virtuous resolve against the enemy Rum. It would not be dignified to take too much of that seductive liquid whilst the gloss of newness remained upon his clothes. He would have at least one day of respectability, and he thought with inward sighings how well he could

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decorate en permanence the life upon which his resources only permitted him to linger for a few brief hours. To be always idle—always to have money at command, and to be at no employer's beck and call—these were things unattainable, but his being groaned for them. The Present, at its splendid best, bore the dim shadow of the Future.

His ideas of holiday-making were not the most brilliant in the world; but he rode about for hours on the tops of different omnibuses, and ate shrimps at lordly leisure from a brand new Turkey-red handkerchief. At certain happy moments he wondered what people took him for, and felt like a nobleman at large. In the course of time this enjoyment palled upon him. His money burned in his pocket; the gilded signs of public-houses called him with urgent, almost audible, appeal. What was a poor Tobias, with his wrecked nerves and Rum-drowned conscience, to do, even though habited in the most respectable raiment and animated by the best intentions?

The luckless money, fruit of treachery, lasted a week. The new garments found their way to the pawnshop, and the old, pocketless, frayed, white at the seams, bagged at the knees, and oily at the shoulders and elbows, once more enshrined their owner's figure.

Mr. Orme was not entirely devoid of grace, and was ashamed to go back to his employer. The produce of the pawned garments helped him to drag on through a week's dull repentance, and then he was without resources. He wandered about asking for work, but finding none, and was on his last legs, when somebody offered him a berth for a day or two in the capacity of broker's man. If he could have relied upon the position for a permanence, it would have come very near to his picture of the Ideal Life, and as it was, it came in as a welcome relief from thirst and hunger and the dread of downright starvation. He accepted the work with alacrity, and was at once despatched upon his business.

He was taken by his new employer, the broker, to Castle-Barfield, and there a trap being chartered, the two were driven for a mile or so along the identical route Mr.

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Orme had travelled a little more than a fortnight earlier when he had paid his visit to Snelling. Half-way along that road the trap made a turn to the right, and then, after a mile's drive along an umbrageous lane, pulled up before a farmhouse, passably well-to-do in aspect. Here they alighted; and the broker, bustling up to the gate and along the path, tapped at the open door with the crook of his walking-stick. A middle-aged woman answered the call, and a solemn child appeared in her rear.

'What do you want, master?' the woman asked.

'Two hundred and fifty-two pounds, thirteen shillings, and fivepence,' chanted the broker, 'for judgment, costs, and expenses granted in the suit of Robert Snelling versus Henry Day.'

'My man ain't at home, master,' the woman answered. 'Thee can come in, since thee'st got to. We've been expecting thee.'

The broker walked into the house, signalling Tobias to follow. The woman dusted a chair with her apron and drew it a little forward; then she sat down with an immovable expressionless face, and suddenly breaking into tears, threw her apron over her head and rocked herself to and fro. The solemn child ran to her, and taking one of her hands, kissed it, and stood staring with round black eyes at Tobias and his employer.

'That's the judgment, missis,' said the broker, drawing a folded paper from his pocket and opening it. 'You'd better take a look at it.'—The woman drew away her apron, ceased her tears for a moment whilst she looked at the document, and then covered up her head again.—'That's a copy of the dockeyment,' pursued the broker, addressing Tobias, 'and that you keep. You know your duty, I suppose? You leave the house when you're paid two hundred and fifty-two pounds, thirteen shillings, and fivepence in cash, and not before. You claim five bob for every day or part of a day you wait here, and you see that nothing is took away from the house.'

Mr. Orme, fascinated by the dark eyes of the solemn

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child, nodded in answer, but said nothing. The function be had entered upon had a little while ago seemed altogether desirable; but now that he had actually begun with it, he thought otherwise. He was a poor creature, and good for very little, but he would never

have had the heart to claim his own by any such step as this. There was not much room in him for pity; but a crying woman was a terror to him, and to keep one in company for an indefinite space of time was a disagreeable occupation.

The broker went about the house and premises as if the place belonged to him, and passed audible comments on the furniture, afflicting Tobias with a feeble sense of vicarious shame. When he had examined things to his heart's content, he went away, leaving his subordinate still fascinated by the child, who scarcely removed her eyes from his face, and seemed to regard him with a grave and understanding scrutiny which settled more and more into disapproval. It was not long before the disapproval found words. The woman had ceased to cry almost as suddenly as she had begun, and drawing her apron from her face, wiped her eyes, and began to move about the room, arranging and dusting mechanically.

'I don't like him,' said the child decisively. 'He's got a red nose. What has he got a red nose for, mother?'

'It's indigestion with some of 'em,' the mother answered; 'but with the main part it's drink. The child's chokeful o' questions,' she added in a commonplace tone of explanation to Tobias, 'and her niver knows how to rest till her gets her answer. You mustn't mind the child. You'll git used to her, maybe. Lydia, you shouldn't ask sich questions afore strangers. What d'ye think folks'll think of a little gell as asks questions about people's noses?'

Tobias travelled with a thoughtful forefinger over the feature thus brought in question, and cast a sidelong downward glance upon it, but said nothing. By-and-by the woman of the house produced a great roll of stocking and began to knit, with the same expressionless countenance she had worn at first, until without warning she began to cry again, and hid her head beneath her apron. This was

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too much for Mr. Orme, who rose fretfully and walked to the doorway. A single step landed him in the garden; but he came back in a mighty flutter lest the door should be closed against him, and his possession of the house and its chattels be thereby made null and void. But finding that no notice whatever was taken of his movements, and not being bound by any very rigid sense of duty at the best of times, he pottered out again a moment later, and from that time forward made a series of timid excursions into the open air, until he became persuaded that no attempt would be made to lock him out. A swift and furtive examination of the back premises showed him that there were three separate means of ingress to the house on that side; and deciding that if need were, he could stutter back again before all of them could be closed against him, he ventured to stroll about the garden.

The weather was bright and pleasant, and not too hot. The yellow-banded bees went buzzing from flower to flower, pointing no moral of industry for Mr. Orme, but fretting him with nervous fears of being stung. He went gingerly about the moss-grown paths with a constant frightened eye turned backwards to mark whether or not the feeble house garrison was preparing a barricade against him. In the course of some half-hour he gathered courage from immunity, and having lit a pipe, went ballooning along the garden paths in a state of beatific idleness. By dint of nearly half a century's pursuit of

rum-and-water, his life's chief good, he had almost obliterated any original powers of thinking which nature may have bestowed upon him; but an obscured process of memory and sensation still did duty in his mind. He noticed that he was here at the instance of Mr. Robert Snelling, and mused muzzily on that fact as on a strange coincidence. He began to cast his own possibilities up and down in his mind; and by dint of a good deal of thumb-and-finger counting, he arrived at the conclusion that five shillings a day represented one pound fifteen shillings per week. If that gorgeous income should endure for but a fortnight, he would be able to redeem his clothes and to enjoy at least another week's

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drinking. Fired by this prospect, he walked more briskly, and even dared to extend his journey to the end of the garden.

There he observed a curious thing, the significance of which he did not for a moment understand. This was no particular shame to him, for a keener and more observant man than Tobias might have gone by without giving it a second thought. But there, in the far corner of the garden, the surface-earth for a rough square of some four or five yards had been dug away, and a shining black bed, irregularly quarried, lay exposed to the daylight. The shining black bed consisted obviously of coal, and Tobias's first idea was that the bankrupt household kept a queer sort of open-air coal cellar. He had neither fancy nor invention; but for once a habit of poking his nose into other people's business served him as well as either of them could have done; and after a moment's investigation, he satisfied himself that the open-air coal cellar was of mother Nature's making. In point of fact, it was neither more nor less than the cropped-up edge of a coal-seam.

An anonymous philosopher has remarked with a profundity as real as it is apparent that a good many things go to everything. It had happened, something like a year before, that Mr. Orme had been employed to set up in type a pamphlet of sixteen pages octavo which dealt with the position and formation of the Great South Staffordshire Fault. Now the Great South Staffordshire Fault is not a moral failing, but neither more nor less than a great outcrop of stone which puts an end to the Great South Staffordshire coal-field. It had been a moot-point for years amongst practical mineralogists and engineers as to whether the coal-bed were simply interrupted by this fault or actually closed in, determined and ended by it. Trial shafts had been sunk beyond it with results disastrous to the fortunes of the speculators, who had in some instances encountered live sand, and in others had sunk until they had come upon signs of the absence of coal which were regarded as final. The history of these endeavours, with certain philosophisings upon them, had made up the subject-matter of the pamphlet

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which Tobias's industry had helped to give to the world. He had not only put it into type with his own fingers, but, with the assistance of the office boy, had acted as his own proof reader. When the pamphlet had been sewn and cut, he had preserved a copy of it amid the archives of the ramshackle old printing-office, and often in moments when

work had become more than usually distasteful, he had beguiled his stolen leisure by studying its pages. So far as a knowledge of the author's views could carry him, Tobias was an authority upon this question. Once, indeed, he had discoursed with so much learning and fluency on the subject to three or four practical men whom he had found refreshing themselves in a wayside public-house in the neighbourhood of Stratford-on-Avon, as to carry astonishment and conviction to their minds, and to leave them under the impression that he was quite a shining light of science.

At first, he hardly dared to think of what the discovery of this curious hole in a farmer's back garden might mean. Even if his own crude ideas were true, and the little bared shelf of coal before him really indicated immeasurable riches, the wealth was none of his. Yet, for all that, he was staggered by his own conceptions. Here, perhaps, lay millions upon millions of pounds, and he perhaps was the first man intelligently to discover that enormous store. Perhaps? It was almost a certainty. What should bring a man with the sheriff's bailiff in his house for a trifle of two hundred and fifty pounds, when he had such treasure as this upon his own land?

'The fool's got coal,' Tobias gasped, 'and he doesn't know it.'

He did not know how much the discovery had excited him, but he was actually beginning to perspire and tremble, when a farm labourer came lumbering down the garden path with a battered iron bucket in one hand and a pick and shovel over his shoulder. The man gave an uninterested glance at Mr. Orme, and stepped into the hole, which on its shallower side was little over a foot deep, and began lazily to peck at the surface and to shovel the fragments he struck off into his bucket.

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'Would you mind telling me, my friend,' said Tobias ingratiatingly, 'what that is?'

'What what is?' asked the yokel, staring up from his task.

'That—ah—that curious shiny black stuff?' said Tobias.

'Got eyes in thy head, hasn't?'

'Why, yes,' said Tobias tremulously. 'Under ordinary circumstances, my friend, I find my ocular arrangements sufficiently satisfactory. But are you sure it's coal?'

'O' course it is,' the man answered.

'Ah! Yes. Quite so. Precisely. And will it—will it burn?'

'Yo' can sit on the back kitchen fire and have a try at it.'

'Really?' said Tobias.'Indeed? Ah, yes. Quite so. Precisely. And is it what you would call a good coal, my friend?'

'Good enough, for all I know,' the man answered.

'And will you tell me, my friend,' asked Tobias, 'how you happened to light upon it?'

'They started to dig a well a week or two ago,' answered the man. He had lazily filled his bucket, and taking it up together with his pick and shovel, he stepped out upon the garden path.

Mr. Orme tremblingly intercepted him. 'Can you inform me, my friend, as to the proprietorship of the land in this neighbourhood?'

The man, to whom this query might as well have been addressed in Greek, simply stared at him and made a motion to get round him.

'No, no, my friend,' said Tobias eagerly. 'Don't go for a minute.' He held his shaky hands out towards him, and would actually have laid them upon him, if it had not been for the man's look of ill temper and unwieldy strength.
'Is Mr. Day the owner of this land? Is it his own property, his very own? Has he the right to dig into that coal?'
'It's his own land,' the man responded, 'and was his feyther's and his grandfeyther's before him.' With that he

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pushed by, and Tobias made no further effort to restrain him.
'The fool's got coal,' he gasped again, when the man was out of earshot, 'and he doesn't know it.'
The mystery of the Great South Staffordshire Fault was solved, and he was the discoverer. There were millions below his feet, millions, millions! His head began to whirl, and his hands shook as if he had been smitten with a palsy. His knees were loosened beneath him, insomuch that he found it necessary to sit down on an old disused beehive near at hand. His bemused mind seemed to grope in its own recesses with a blind and greedy avarice. Was there nothing for him in all this?—no means of enriching himself? He was an old man—he was getting to be very old. He had to work for a living, and there was nothing before him but the workhouse: a cold and cheerless habitation for one who, like himself, had cultivated a lifelong fondness for rum and society. There were tears of senile pity in his eyes for the poor old man who had to work for his living. He had always felt that to be hard, but he had never felt it to be so hard as now. Millions upon millions, and he to have found them, and still to be poor! He tugged at the ring of gray hair which surrounded his baldness in a frenzy of impotent desire, and then all on a sudden became aware that he was feeling very sick and cold, in spite of the warm summer sunshine which poured upon him. He got up and staggered along the path towards the house with his feeble knees still trembling and his face all blanched, except for one rubicund spot upon his nose, which on this novel background stuck fiery off indeed. The woman of the house cried out at him as he entered at the doorway.
'Lauks-a-mercy! what's the matter with the man?'
'I am unwell, ma'am,' sobbed Tobias; and indeed the ghastly pallor of his face and the cold sweat which had gathered on his forehead gave warrant to the statement. 'A little brandy, a little rum—anything.' He clasped his stomach pitifully with both hands, and stared appealingly at her with his features twitching.
The woman without a word ran to a cupboard, and

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laying hold of a great stone jar, poured out a glass of whisky.
Tobias seized it greedily and emptied it. The colour flowed back to his face, and heaving a tremulous sigh, he set the glass upon the table.
'What is it, master?' the woman asked him, kindly enough. 'Bee'st better? You looked like death a minute ago.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' he answered; 'I am a little better. I am subject to that kind of attack. A malady contracted in early youth, almost in infancy.'
'It is to be hoped it does not come on often,' the woman answered.
'It does not frequently happen,' said Tobias, 'that the attack is so serious as it was upon this occasion.'
He was beginning to feel like himself again, and there was a new illumination in his mind. It was at Snelling's instance that he was here, and Snelling was a man of capital. He had a hold already on the owner of the land, and he would give fifty pounds to know this news. Fifty? He would give a hundred. Tobias sat quite dazzled by this sudden prospect of wealth; but by-and-by his mental eye grew used to it. The capitalist who knew of his discovery first of all could make a gigantic fortune, and a hundred pounds was a poor recompense for the original finder. His thoughts swept on to two, three, four, five, and the mental barque almost came to shipwreck when it struck a thousand.
The woman of the house having cast two or three inquiring glances at him, being moved thereto by his wild looks and an occasional moan or muttered exclamation, withdrew from the room in pursuit of some household duty, taking the child with her. Moving on tiptoe, Tobias made a stealthy raid upon the whisky jar. His nerves wanted steadying; he must give himself the power to think. He filled the tumbler almost to the brim with the real spirit, and gulped it down in a thievish haste and fear lest he should be discovered. The potent drink brought tears to his eyes and set him coughing; but it seemed to fill his blood with refulgent colour, and to strike a thousand bright and victorious fancies into his mind. He was his own man

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again, and more. The potentialities of wealth inspired him. In all his sordid shabby life he had known no moment of exultation comparable to this. His thoughts soared fearlessly. He would claim a partnership. The sense of power and triumph grew unbearable, and he felt that he must put his project into instant execution.
He marched, erect and vigorous, from the house and into the road, and there a momentary confusion seized him. He was not quite certain of the direction of Snelling's house, but he had never felt so prompt and daring. It almost seemed to him that whichever way he took it could not fail to lead him to his destination. He struck out courageously, and walked on encircled by radiant dreams. But he had drawn his inspiration from a treacherous fountain, and was in a while stupidly surprised to discover that whilst the radiance remained, the reason had vanished from his mind. That was all right, however. Everything would have been all right if the summer sun had been a little less powerful.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE two boys were living in clover, and enjoying all sorts of privileges and immunities hitherto foreign to their experience. They were inseparable companions, and were both getting rarely tanned by summer sunshine, and rarely strong on an unlimited diet and a life spent almost entirely in the open air. On that particular day on which Mr. Orme made his great discovery, John, under Jousserau's guidance, had got out his sketch-

block, and with borrowed water-colours and brushes was dashing away victoriously at landscape, with a whole new world waking into wonder and beauty about him. At intervals Master Will would take up his post behind the aspiring artist, and look on with a never-failing approval. Between whiles he was ruining his garments and strengthening his limbs in the great

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schoolboy art of bird-nesting. He was back from one of his excursions with an empty starling's nest; and Jousserau, who had an unusual tenderness for all feathered creatures, was complimenting him on having chosen a season for his excursions when he could rob the parent birds neither of their eggs nor of their young. Master Will was listening quite unrepentantly to his sermon, when, from a field or two away, there rose upon the perfumed summer air an amazing shrill sweet piping of a child's voice, singing a hymn-tune, at first scarcely discernible for what it was. The singer had changed its time and its measure, and led it the giddiest heated race imaginable. Jousserau lifted his hand and turned to listen.
'There's Lydia,' cried John.
'Hush!' said the artist, and the boys stood quiet. 'What a wonder!' said Jousserau in his own tongue when the song had finished. 'Is it a bird? A child? An angel? What is it?'
'It's only a little girl we know,' Will answered. 'She's got a pretty voice, and she'll sing for anybody. Lydia!' he called, 'Lydia!'
There was a shrill cry in answer, and a second later a tiny figure was seen impetuously climbing the gate of the meadow; and the solemn child came fluttering over the grass with a quick dancing step, to which her hands kept a flickering time, as though she moved to some inward inaudible music. She paused before the trio, and Will and John shook hands with her in schoolboy fashion. She went through that function gravely, looking at Jousserau meanwhile.
'Whose pretty child are you?' said the Frenchman in his quaint accent.
She made no answer to this inquiry, but offered her hand to him with an air of staid decorum. He took it smilingly, and drew her towards him; and she, allowing her serious glance to wander all over him with an air of scrutiny, at length settled her regard upon one of the fine gold earrings he wore. When she had looked at it for some time, she touched it with a forefinger, as if to assure

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herself of its reality; and then walking gravely round the camp-stool on which he sat, inspected the earring on the other side and touched that also.
The artist's smiling bright face followed her motions attentively. 'Well?' he said.—The child folded both hands behind her and shook her head.—'You do not like—them?'
'No,' said the child decisively. 'Women wear earrings, not men.'
'And princesses,' returned Jousserau in his own language, 'are born to be obeyed.' He took a purse from his pocket, slipped the rings from his ears and put them away. 'Now?' he asked.
'I like you better,' the child answered.

'A la bonne heure!' cried Jousserau. 'Was it you who sang just now?'—The child nodded.—'Will you sing again?' She nodded once more; and drawing a step or two away, still keeping her hands behind her, struck up with that wonderful sweet clear pipe of hers the air of an old Huguenot hymn. Charles Wesley's pious hand had gathered it into the hymnology of his people, and its lovely passionless strain was as familiar in the Black Country of England as in its native Pyrenees. Jousserau heard it with a strange emotion, for his mother had sung it to him many a time in his childhood as she dandled him on her knee. When the little songstress had brought her tune to a close, he drew her towards him and kissed her with glistening eyes. 'So pretty child as you are,' he said, 'must have a bon ami. What is bon ami in English, young John?'
'Sweetheart,' responded young John, having cudgelled his brains for a moment.
'Ah, yes!' cried Jousserau. 'Sweetheart. You have a sweetheart, pretty child? No?'
'Yes,' she said, gravely and lingeringly.
'True?' said Jousserau. 'Who is he?'
The child stretched out a hand and took hold of young John. 'John is my sweetheart,' she said with perfect simplicity and gravity. 'He has been away for a year;

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but now he is come back again, we shall be married when I grow up.'
'Luckee dog!' said Jousserau, with an accent so quaint and a look so comic that the two boys burst out laughing.
At this point another voice arose from a little distance, this time an adult male organ, purposely gruff and surly: 'Wake up here! Wake up, I say! What brings a man lying in the road, stoppin' up the traffic i' this way? Dost want to get run over by the first wagin as comes this way?'
'That,' explained Lydia, with her customary gravity, 'is the old man from father's. He has gone to sleep in the road.'
The boys scoured off to see what was the matter, and in a second or two were heard shouting to Jousserau, both together: 'It's Mr. Orme! It's Mr. Orme!'
At this Jousserau ran also to the gate, and beheld Isaiah Winter in the act of stooping over Mr. Orme, with both hands under his armpits. Isaiah was red in the face, and was tugging with all his might, but unavailingly, to raise the disreputable rotund figure.
'The man's either very ill,' said Isaiah, relinquishing his task for a moment, 'or else he's stone intoxicated. He smells powerful strong o' liquor; but that's such a regular usual kind o' thing with him, it's nothing to judge by. Lend me a hand, Mr. Jousserau.'
Jousserau vaulted the gate, and by his aid Isaiah succeeded in bringing Mr. Orme to his feet.
'Run away, you boys,' said Isaiah, 'and take the little gell with you. This is no wholesome sight for childern. Come up, you good-for-nothing. What brings him here, in the name of wonder?'
Mr. Orme being vigorously shaken to and fro, opened one eye and gazed uncertainly about him. By-and-by, Isaiah came within his sphere of vision, and he smiled. His ordinary smile, as has been said already, was piteous and almost lachrymose; but now for a brief instant he twinkled with an actual jollity, though he went out with a startling suddenness, and falling back unexpectedly on

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Jousserau, gave the small man as much as he could do to balance him.
'There's a barn close at hand,' said Isaiah; 'we'll put him in among the clean straw and let him have his sleep out. Come along, you temperance lecture!' So saying, Isaiah took Tobias firmly by one arm, whilst Jousserau guarded him in a similar fashion on the other side, and between them they marched the degraded old wreck along the lane until they came to the outbuilding of which Isaiah had spoken. The doors were open, and there were piles of clean straw within. They laid their burden down here, and were about to leave it, when Jousserau observed the dirty clay bowl of Mr. Orme's constant companion protruding from the waistcoat pocket.
'Not safe,' he said, and confiscated the pipe at once.
On this hint they rifled the worthless old gentleman in a search for matches, and he, waking up under the operation, protested blandly. 'Don't give yourselves any further trouble, ge'lmen,' said Tobias; 'I am not worth it.' On this reflection he wept, and said that he was a dreadful moral lesson, and that he hoped that his friends would take example by him. Then he cleared with marvellous quickness, and said that he was a millionaire. 'Help me up,' said Tobias, 'and I'll tell you something.'
Isaiah, not quite understanding the request, which was very indistinctly mumbled, but thinking that he understood Mr. Orme's gesture, tugged him to his feet.
'You'd like to know,' said the sordid spectacle, clinging to him, 'but you won't.' He put on an aspect of great cunning, and steadying himself with difficulty, winked twice with painful elaborateness. 'You won't know anything. If you want to know anything, shouldn't throw man's hat over the hedge. That'll cost you thousands, Mr. Winter. Hundreds thousands.'
'Let go o' me,' said Isaiah disdainfully. 'What are you chattering about?'
'Chattering about?' echoed Tobias thickly. 'I'll tell you,' with an air of sudden confidence. 'Coal, my good friend, has been discovered on this side the Great South

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Staffordshire Fault. On this side.' He tried to emphasise the word by a stamp of the foot, and in doing so, lost his equilibrium altogether. He and Isaiah releasing their hold simultaneously, he fell back upon the straw, and continued, unconscious of his change of posture: 'It's in Farmer Day's back garden, on the surface. The owner of the land,' he explained elaborately, as he peered for Isaiah's face among the rafters, 'is unscientific; he is unaware of the value of his discovery.'
Isaiah was in a state of prodigious excitement at this intelligence. It was obvious that the little wretch was absurdly drunk, but in spite of that fact, the amazing intelligence he gave might still be true. He seized him by the coat and dragged him into a sitting posture. 'What's that you say? There's coal in Farmer Day's back garden? Why, the man's a bankrupt, or next door to it; and if that's true, he's got a fortune. Say it again, you scandalous object; say it again.'
'No,' said the scandalous object, shaking his head with an aspect strangely compounded of regret and cunning; 'you might have known all about it, Mr. Winter, if you'd treated

me properly. But you assaulted an elderly man, Mr. Winter, an elderly and defenceless man. I am constitutionally timid'—it took him a mighty effort to achieve the word—'and your conduct shocked me, shocked me. Mr. Winter, I shall tell you nothing; I shall keep my news for Mr. Snelling. Mr. Snelling is a gentleman, and he and I are going halves.'
Isaiah once more deposited Mr. Orme upon the straw, and beckoning Jousserau from the barn, made his way into the lane.
'What is it?' Jousserau asked. 'I do not understand.'
Isaiah explained to him as they went along; and the little artist had no sooner understood, than he caught the infection of Isaiah's excitement. 'He is scoundrel, that fat drunken Orme,' he cried. 'If the coal is there, it is to Mr. Day. Is Snelling so much villain he would buy the poor man's land and say nothing?'
'Mr. Snelling's a pretty smart man of business,' Isaiah

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responded. 'Nobody would think the worse of him for doing that.'
'I should,' Jousserau protested. 'Look at that.' He held out his nervous little brown right hand. 'That is all I have; that feeds me, clothes me, helps poor friends, does all. You shall chop it off here,' marking the wrist with a vivid forefinger, 'before I will be so base. Oh no! Justice is the greatest thing.'
'Perhaps you're right,' said Isaiah phlegmatically. 'I'm going to do the straight thing, anyhow. I've got a few cool hundreds at the bank, and if that little fellow's news is true, I shall put 'em at the farmer's service. I've got two or three cool hundreds.' He walked on energetically, and Jousserau kept equal pace with him.
'Tell me,' said the Frenchman, 'if there is coal beyond this—what do you call it?—Fault—is it everywhere under our feet?'
'Most likely,' Isaiah answered.
'Then it will spoil this side, and make it black like the other? Everywhere the dark cloud, everywhere the smoke, the noise, the dirt?'
'Yes,' said Isaiah; 'it'll stretch the Black Country for miles and miles.'
'Then I will hope it shall not be true,' said Jousserau.
'A bit o' dirt's cheap bought,' said Isaiah philosophically, if you can feed a million people out of it. Look at Brummagem—it lives on coal. Look at 'Hampton, Bilston, Wedgebury, twenty others—coal keeps the lot of 'em. I can remember many and many a hundred acres growing nothing but grass and thistle, as is covered now with streets and houses, with thousands of happy and contented people in 'em. It's a bit black, to be certain, but what's that matter? It's wholesome. If you'll look at it, Mr. Jousserong, you'll see as we're a pretty stalworth set o' people. There's no harm in a bit o' dirt.'
They were at Farmer Day's gate by this time, and Isaiah entering with a rapid step, caught sight of the farmer himself as he passed the kitchen door, and gave a loud 'Hallo!'

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'Hallo!' cried Day in answer, appearing in the doorway. 'Oh, it's thee, Isaiah. Come in, lad. There ain't much to ask a friend to nowadays, but what there is, thou'rt welcome to.'
'I'll tell thee what,' returned Isaiah. 'If what I've heard is true, I'm the welcomest man thee'st clapped eyes on this twelve months. Where's that coal-hole o' thine?'
'Coal-hole?' returned the farmer. 'What coal-hole?'
'I've heard,' said Isaiah, 'that you've found coal on the surface in your back garden.'
'We've lighted on some coal, to be sure,' the farmer responded. 'We was digging for water there. It appears to me,' he added drawlingly, 'as somebody must ha' laid in a boat-load in old time. It's most likely been theer so long it's got growed over and buried and forgot. It's all growed and welded into one solid lump.'
'Let's have a look at it,' said Isaiah. 'Come along. Wheer is it? Bring a pick with you.'
'Go round,' said the farmer, with no touch of the excitement which consumed the other. 'I'll meet thee at the back-door.'
A minute later they were standing above the exposed coal-bed. Isaiah bore the pick, but he made no use of it. He looked in silence for a full minute, and then stepping into the hole, took up a fragment from the bed and broke it in his fingers.
'Farmer,' he said, 'you came to me a week or two ago to borrow two hundred and fifty pounds.'
'Well?' said the farmer.
'Same mind still?' demanded Isaiah laconically.
'Yes, lad; more than ever.'
'All right,' said Isaiah. 'You can have it, and a couple of thousand to the back of it. There's a fortune here.' He raised his hand high, and threw down the lump of coal he had taken up a minute earlier. 'I'm standing here,' he said with a solemn face, 'for all I know, or thee knowest, above uncounted millions. The Bank of England couldn't buy what this means.'
The farmer fairly gaped at him, and without the

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slightest warning, broke into blubbering tears. He was so surprised at this, that his own amazement checked him, but he could do nothing but stare at Isaiah like a man distraught.
'They put a bum-bailiff i' the house this morning,' he said, when he had recovered himself a little. 'That Was Bob Snelling's doing. I thought he'd ha' been better-hearted than run an old friend to ruin for two hundred pound. Fifty he's counted for costs, and I've paid him a hundred a'ready. There's a mortgage falling in for fifteen hundred in ten days. I reckoned on going back to the plough-tail, or turning bailiff for somebody. I dar' not think about th' old woman and the little wench. D'ye think it's true, Isaiah?'
Isaiah fumbled in his pocket and drew out a chequebook, greasy with long repose there. He stopped to dust his coal-smeared thumb and finger upon his trousers, and then fluttered the leaves of the cheque-book. 'Come indoors,' he said, 'and I'll show thee whether I think it true or no. I'll take the mortgage here and now, and I'll lend you five hundred to go along with. You give me a paper saying I'm your partner, halves and halves, and we'll work this thing together.'

The farmer shook hands with him, almost frantically, and Jousserau, who was as excited as either, shook hands with both.
'Who's that?' Day asked Isaiah, drawing him on one side and speaking in a whisper.
'He's a lodger o' mine for the time being,' responded Isaiah, 'and as good as gold, though he is a foreigner; and what's more, he hates Bob Snelling like poison.'
'Then he's a friend o' mine,' said Day. 'Young man, I'm pleased to mek your acquaintance. Come indoors.' He had betrayed himself once already, and having had time to think about it, was profoundly ashamed of his own emotion. He went rolling into the house, therefore, with a dogged and inexpressive countenance. 'Missis,' he said, addressing his wife, 'the money troubles seem to be all over. Mr. Winter will tell you all about it.'

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CHAPTER XXV

IF Robert Snelling had not already fallen into monomania, he was at least rapidly on the way to it. The shadow of his ward obscured his mental sky from horizon to horizon, and wherever he looked he seemed to see nothing else than that. First and foremost, the boy had profoundly injured him in daring to be born at all. If John Vale the elder had died childless and without a will, his property would, beyond a doubt, have gone to Snelling. Even if he had made a will, he had had nobody else to whom to leave his belongings, with the exception of an inconsiderable legacy or two. In the next place, young John had done him immeasurable wrong by recovering from that blow upon the head, which had at one time promised to bring about such excellent and desirable results. Apart from these things, which, to do him justice, he looked upon as being injuries of the negative sort, the boy had inflicted all manner of positive wrongs upon him. It was through him that that part of the county was alive with scandalous stories concerning his guardian's cruelty, and through him that half Snelling's acquaintance gave him the cold shoulder in street and market. If it had not been for John's disappearance, he would never have left his prosperous business in Castle-Barfield, and though he had sold it to advantage, he knew that he could have made more of it by keeping it. It was by John's fault, again, that he had lost a safe and trusted business manager. And yet once more, it was by John's fault that his accustomed housekeeper had left him to the mercies of a strange woman who did not know his ways. And yet once more, and worst of all, it was by that same malevolent influence radiating out of young John that Jousserau had met Cecilia, and had spread to her mind the scandal which had turned the balance of her fancy against him. For nothing in the world would have persuaded him

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that Miss Shorthouse would have given him 'No' for an answer after a fortnight's waiting but for that fancied interference.
Men lying in long-drawn agony with a wound or a broken limb have been known often enough to take a fierce pleasure in augmenting their own anguish; and Snelling, with a heart already scorched with rage and hatred, consciously heaped fuel on the flame. The

very thought of the boy was like gall and wormwood to him, his name was a nausea, and the sight of him aroused a bitter and impotent passion of revolt. If he had been free to show a sign of his real feeling, his hatred might have dwindled to a merely angry and disgusted distaste; but being compelled to treat him kindly, he grew to loathe him more and more.

There was at no time an actual scheme or even a hint of a scheme in his dull mind; but for all that he looked forward to a time when, by cunning design or happy accident, his way should be clear, and he should become the actual possessor of the property which he now merely held in trust. The solid earth itself was not firmer than his own inward conviction that had things been but fitly and properly ordered, right was on his side. The sun in heaven shone no clearer than that centre of his hateful, greedy creed. That is the singular thing about your true egotist, who, happily, is a rara avis. Whatever stands between him and his desire, whether it be abstract justice or a mere live heart and soul, is hateful and wholly in the wrong, alienated from the chance of having right on its side. If any one had known the workings of Snelling's mind, and had asked him plainly, yes or no, had his ward a right to his own, the mental part of him would have answered 'Yes.' But the inward man would have risen in a passionate protest against the thought. How could he have rights to what belonged to him, when Robert Snelling coveted it, and would almost die to have it?

If the way of transgressors is hard, honest folks at least have no right to be dissatisfied; and even the transgressor himself, if he did but know it, finds his one chance of safety in the whip that scourges him. The man's greed and hate

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left life scarcely tolerable. They poisoned his food, they distorted his mind, they shrouded him from the very light of heaven, and brought dreadful visions to his sleep. A brute had roared, so tortured; but he had to bear it all and give no sign.

He sat in the room he had made his own, brooding over a set of accounts which Isaiah's sudden dismissal had left anything but clear to him, and every now and again the one preoccupying thought returned to his mind with the irritating persistence of an insect to a sore. Isaiah's method of book-keeping had been beautifully accurate and clear so long as Isaiah himself had been there to explain it; but his records and memoranda would have puzzled a cleverer accountant than his master. In point of fact, Isaiah's system was purely of his own invention, and though the inventor had been marvelously proud of it, it was no less than a man-trap for any unillumined successor. Whilst Snelling sat beating his brains in vain over the confused tangle of accounts before him, a rap sounded at the door, and in answer to his gruff command, his new housekeeper entered the room. She was an elderly woman of extremely plain exterior, and to judge her by her face, had spent some fifty years in the loquacious exposition of a standing grievance.

'What is it now?' asked Snelling unamiably.

'Why, sir,' began the woman, 'I'd ha' spoke to Master John about it myself, but he's gone gallivantin' off with young Master Gregg the minute as he'd swallowed his bread and milk for breakfast.'

'Well, what about him, woman?' her master demanded.

'There's this about him, sir,' the woman responded; 'he'll have we all roasted in were beds. He's reading in bed reg'lar every night, which is a practice as I can't away with nor yet abide. He's found some sort of a old lamp somewhere, as he's filled himself from the tin in the back kitchen; and if he ain't been burned alive a'ready, it's a mercy, and no fault o' hisn.'
Snelling was about to answer, bidding her to take the lamp away; but at that moment a knock was heard at the

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front door of the house. 'See who that is,' he said, 'and then come back to me.'
The personage at the door was no other than our friend Tobias. He was hatless, and had a few straws clinging to his clothes in memory of his last night's couch. The elderly but unvenerable wreck was a little uncertain as to what day of the week it was, and was altogether undecided as to the hour. He was conscious mainly of a terrible thirst and a splitting headache; but his waking hour was firm to his last resolve, and he was here to lay the news of his discovery before the capitalist who was to be his partner.
'Will you kindly inform Mr. Snelling,' he said in his blandest and most oily manner, 'that a person by the name of Orme is here, and that he has intelligence to convey to him of a most pressing and valuable nature?—Mr. Orme, Mr. Tobias Orme, madam, on business of importance.'
He looked so little likely to have business of importance to the housekeeper's mind, that she put the chain upon the door before carrying his message to her master. She returned a moment later, however, with orders to admit him. Snelling raised his eyebrows at his visitor's appearance, and held out the palm of his hand towards him, as a sign that he was not to approach too near.
'You may go,' he said, nodding to the housekeeper; 'I'll talk to you about that other matter later on. Now, then'—turning round in his chair upon Tobias when they were left alone—'what's your business?'
Mr. Orme passed a hand across his lips, and essayed to moisten them with his tongue.
'You're a pretty figure,' said Snelling, 'to come into a respectable house. Tell me your business, and get it over.'
'Excuse me, Mr. Snelling,' began Tobias, 'my appearance is not in accordance with my prospects. I am aware of it—fully aware of it, Mr. Snelling. I believe, sir, that I have every right and title to announce myself as a harbinger.'
'Have you been drinking?' Snelling asked him sternly.
'No, sir, no,' returned Tobias. 'I daresay, sir, that my

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appearance betokens some excitement; but it is not alcoholic, Mr. Snelling.'—Snelling regarded him with a doubtful and disliking eye, but for the moment said nothing.—'I believe, sir,' Tobias continued, 'that I am the bearer of intelligence of the most striking and remarkable order. I do not believe, sir, that you have ever received such intelligence in your lifetime.'
'Well,' said Snelling, 'out with it.'

'I beg your pardon, sir, but I cannot consent to part with my secret, with my discovery, until I am assured that I shall be well treated.'
Snelling turned his chair bodily round, so as to face his visitor, and dropping one hand on the table beside him, wired him fixedly in the face. 'If you come here,' he said, with a drawling slowness of delivery unusual even with himself, 'with any idea in your mind as you can threaten me, you're the most mistaken man as walks.'
'Threaten, sir!' cried Mr. Orme; 'there is nothing further away from my ideas and intentions. I have made a wonderful discovery, Mr. Snelling; I have made a discovery which means hundreds of thousands of pounds.'
'You have, have you?' Snelling answered. 'And you want half-a-crown for a drink on the strength of it? You've come to the wrong shop, my man; you can walk.'
'Mr. Snelling!' cried Tobias, driven into directness of statement by the fear that the interview might be precipitately closed, 'I have made a discovery worth thousands of pounds to you—hundreds of thousands of pounds to you. There's no possibility of mistake about the affair, sir. I know all about it. In my own humble way, sir, I have been regarded as an authority upon the question.'
'Hold on,' said Snelling. 'Answer my questions. You're neither mad nor drunk, to begin with, eh?'
'I assure you, sir,' Tobias began in answer; but the other cut him short with an imperative wave of the hand.
'Either hold your tongue, or answer me Yes or No. Are you mad or are you drunk?'
'I am neither the one nor the other. I am labouring under no hallucination.'

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'Now, now!' cried Snelling, seeing that Tobias was charged with further speech, 'that's enough. You've made a discovery, you say, that may be profitable to me?'
'Profitable is hardly the word, sir,' returned Tobias. 'It opens up, Mr. Snelling, visions of magnificence of which the Arabian Nights—'
'Hold on!' commanded Snelling. 'Stop there. You say that this discovery is a secret? Nobody knows of it but you?'
'Not a soul seems to have had the brains to appreciate its value; but it's lying there to be seen, and may be seen at any moment. If it is beheld by mortal eye—'
'Hold on!' Snelling cried again; but this time Tobias was not to be silenced.
'If it is beheld by mortal eye—'
'Stop!' roared Snelling.
'If it is beheld by mortal eye,' Tobias insisted, 'you lose it.'
'Oh!' said Snelling, 'that's it, is it? You've seen something that lies for everybody to see. It may be worth a pile of money. M—m! It wants money to get it, whatever it is, I suppose?'
'Yes, sir. It will naturally demand a considerable outlay and expenditure.' There was silence for the space of half a minute, and Snelling sat with thoughtfully frowning brows.
'I only desire to be assured of one thing,' said Tobias. 'If it should prove to you, sir, that the intelligence in my possession is of enormous value to you—and there is not the

slightest doubt of that, not the faintest doubt of it, I assure you—may I ask, sir, what you would propose to do with me?'
'I can't buy a pig in a poke,' said Snelling. 'Let me know what you've got to sell, and then maybe I'll make a bid for it.'
Tobias astonished his interlocutor, and even astonished himself a little, by the business-like directness of his answer: 'I have a fortune to sell, Mr. Snelling. I am open to an offer of a percentage on your actual gains.'

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Until that moment, Snelling had not been absolutely sure in his own mind that he took Mr. Orme in real earnest. 'That sounds like business,' he said, when he had turned it over; 'but I can't be buyer and seller, my man. You must put a price on things, and then I'll talk to you.'
Mr. Orme began actually to tremble from head to foot, and his tongue almost refused its office. 'Will you give me a mere five per cent, Mr. Snelling, on all your actual gains?'
'That sounds like business,' said Snelling. 'If you've got any information to give me that's as valuable as you say it is, you'll be well-to-do for a man in your position in the world if I give you one per cent. That's what I'll do with you. If there's anything in your story at all, I'll give you one per cent on what I make out of it.'
'Four, sir!' said Tobias.
'One!' said Snelling.
'Three, sir! You ought to make it three. I am an elderly man, Mr. Snelling. I am alone in the world, and I only ask it for my lifetime. Make it three, sir. I shan't last long. I am a person of—of irregular habits, and I shan't last long. Try and make it three, sir. Do, please, try and make it three.'
'One!' said Snelling once more. 'I don't believe there's anything in the story; but if there is, I'll give you one per cent on my profit, whatever that may be.'
'I can't sell it for one per cent,' said Tobias groaningly. 'It's worth thousands and thousands and thousands; and whilst we're talking about it, somebody else may find it. If anybody with a brain the size of a pin's head were to see it, he'd know what it meant.'
He was in an actual frenzy; and Snelling, cool and wary as he was in all matters of business, began to catch fire from him.
'You know very well,' he said, shaking a heavy forefinger at Mr. Orme, 'that you're not the kind of man to bring a tale like this with overmuch likelihood of being believed. If what you say turns out to be true, and I find my advantage in it, I'll pay you two per cent on actual

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profits, and not a penny more. if you don't like that, you can take your story-book elsewhere, and offer it to whosoever likes to spend his time in reading it. There you are. Take it or leave it, and let's have no waste words about it. There's not a many people of business as'll give a minute to a man of your appearance, and that you know right well. Two per cent. D'ye take it?'
'Yes,' said Tobias; 'I will take it.'

'Very well. Now, what's your secret?'
'I must tell you in the first place,' Mr. Orme began, 'that I have been guilty of a slight dereliction of duty in coming here at all. Nothing less urgent than my business would have induced me to abandon the trust reposed in me. As a matter of fact, sir, pressed by a necessity which I trust will be no more than momentary, I am officiating temporarily as a sheriff's bailiff. I was placed yesterday, at your suit, Mr. Snelling, at the house of a farmer in this locality who bears the name of Day. I respectfully submit, sir, that in deserting my post I sought your own advantage.'
'That'll depend,' said Snelling, 'on how things turn out. Go on, and let's have as few waste words as you can manage. There's more husk in your grain than I remember to have seen afore.'
'You already have a hold on Mr. Day, sir,' pursued Tobias, 'and I have no doubt that in his extremity he will be willing to sell his land at a disadvantage.'
'Well, what's that got to do with me, even if it's true?'
'The mysterious and much-discussed question of the Great South Staffordshire Fault is solved, sir,' Tobias proclaimed, with a rare blending of dignity and enthusiasm. 'There is an open coal-mine in Farmer Day's back garden, and I can assure you, sir, from actual inspection that it is of the finest quality.'
'Coal! There's no coal in this country-side,' cried Snelling, rising to his feet.
'There is indeed, sir,' returned Tobias; 'and what's more, sir, I believe it's the real old ten-yard Staffordshire. It crops up to the top, and you get the edge of it. I've

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son six yards of it with my own eyes, without a break, without a flaw.'
'You've told nobody of this?' Snelling demanded.
'Not a creature,' said Tobias, and, so far as he knew, be was speaking truth.
Snelling strode across the room and threw open a door. 'You get in there. I'm going to lock you up. If you've been fooling me, I shall have to deal with you for two things; and if the tale's true, I'll have no risk of your running about babbling it.'
'I recognise your motive, sir,' returned Tobias, trembling. 'Believe me, sir, I do honour to your motive. I am willing to submit to a limited period of incarceration. But for the love of our common humanity, Mr. Snelling, do not lock me up without a drink. I am an elderly man, Mr. Snelling; I have been greatly agitated and excited, and a drop of something short, if I might take the liberty to suggest it, would be the making of me.'
'You'll get nothing out o' me,' returned his patron, 'until I know the truth or falsehood of this story. Get inside; and if you're thirsty, there's the water-bottle.'
There was nothing else for it, and Tobias obeyed. He was locked in, and from his prison chamber heard Snelling bustling about and shouting orders to his groom. A few minutes later he saw him pass the window on horseback.
Snelling, half on fire with excitement, put in spurs and rode for a mile at a headlong pace; but then, fearing to betray himself by any appearance of haste, slowed down to a trot, and fought his own impatience as best he could. Nearing Day's house, he was smitten with sheer amazement to see a dozen coal-grimed fellows lounging in heavy flannels at the garden gate. He rode on until he came amongst them. 'What brings you chaps here?' he asked, looking round and addressing the company in general.

'They're come on coal this side the Fau't,' one man responded. 'Mr. Proctor's here, the big engineer from Dudley Wood. It's gi'en him the notion as this side's just as rich as t'other. It's the real old Stafford thirty foot, and no mistake about it.'

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'Hold my horse, one of you,' said Snelling, dismounting. He pushed his way into the garden, walked rapidly round the house, and came upon a scene of surprising disorder. The garden flower-beds were obscured by great mounds of earth, and from one of them a half-buried fruit-tree forlornly pushed its maimed and broken branches. There was a further gang of a dozen or so of flannel-clad, coal-grimed men scattered about the mounds, leisurely eating from earthenware basins and drinking from tin bottles. He paused for but a single glance of astonishment, and walking briskly on, came in sight of Isaiah, Farmer Day, and a gentleman of quiet business exterior engaged in eager conversation.

'Hillo, Snelling!' cried the farmer. 'You needn't trouble to send the bum-bailiff back again. I'll count your money down in five minutes' time from this.'

Snelling made no answer, but stood looking at the exposed surface-coal. 'You're Mr. Proctor, I believe, sir?' he said after a while, turning upon the stranger, who contented himself with a simple nod in reply. 'There's no mistake about this?' Snelling waved his hand to indicate the coal.

'None in the world, sir,' responded Mr. Proctor, with a strong Scotch accent. 'It's been my belief for twenty years that there's coal, more or less, under every yard of this district, and now I know it. Ye may say good-bye to your flower-beds and corn-fields, farmer; in a score of years' time there'll be no such thing in sight o' ye.'

'I've got a matter of four or five hundred acres,' said Snelling, 'within a mile of this. Freehold, down to the very centre.'

'Then, sir,' returned the engineer, 'ye deserve to be congratulated. Ye're a very wealthy man, if ye never were before.'

'That's good enough for me,' was Snelling's answer. 'I'll give you your quittance, Day, when you're ready.'

So said, so done. He rode away with his money in his pocket in crisp notes new from the bank, and as he went, a fierce, slow exultation surged through him, and was

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arrested suddenly. The main part of the land under which this newly discovered treasure lay belonged to his ward. There, again, the boy stood between him and fortune, and even into this cup of sweetness his hand poured gall and wormwood.

The boy was in his mind, and anything that belonged to him was welcome to his thoughts as food for hatred. When he reached home, he walked into John's bedroom to look at the lamp of which the housekeeper had spoken.

'Ah!' he said slowly to himself. 'It was the fellow to that as burnt and set fire to Mrs. Winter's bedroom. This chap made the same spluttering noise, and that's why it was put away. I remember. It was thought to be dangerous. I remember.'

He walked slowly back to his own room, and by the way encountered the housekeeper. 'What about that lamp, sir?' she asked him.
'There's more safety in it than there would be in a candle,' he responded. 'Let the lad have it. He's got a thirst for knowledge, Mrs. Wilkins, and it's a bad thing to stunt a growing mind. You can give him a word to be careful on it.'
Perhaps Providence might help him.

CHAPTER XXVI

THERE was quite naturally a considerable hubbub and excitement in the district over a discovery which promised to change both the character of the inhabitants and the face of the country. Tobias felt himself to be the author of it all, and was windily eloquent in many bar parlours over eleemosynary rum and tobacco. What he did not know about the Great South Staffordshire Fault, he atoned for by a fluent invention, and he was looked upon in some quarters as quite a light of learning. Enormous crowds of sightseers flocked from the neighbouring towns to look at

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the outcrop; and on Sundays especially, Farmer Day's back garden was like a fair. At first he made an angry effort to drive the curious away; but learning, by the experience of a few hours only, how impossible that was, he surrendered himself to circumstances, and in the first week saw his garden trodden as clear of flowers and grass as if it had been a macadamised high-road.
After the necessary habit of the district, gangs of miners worked night and day. Some rough machinery was adjusted, and the foundations of an engine-house were dug in an adjoining field. Isaiah was a man of great importance, and was actually in conference with the traffic manager of the local line of railway with respect to a side-extension. Meanwhile, wagons drew the produce of the mine to the railway station, and the new coal being put upon the market was found to be of excellent quality.
The tide of good fortune touched Farmer Shorthouse with the rest, and bade fair to carry him into regions of prosperity which he had never so much as dreamed of inhabiting. He farmed his own land and owned the mines and minerals thereunder. Some one of his forebears had gifted the family with a pretty wide stretch of waste, and for this he was now offered what seemed to him extravagant prices. The offers warmed his heart as well as if the money they represented had actually lain at his banker's. He had always been well-to-do, and was rather of a saving turn than otherwise; but under these new conditions he launched out a little, permitted Cecilia to buy new curtains and a new gown, executed a somewhat expensive change of horses, and gave himself the luxury of a new suit of clothes, blue cloth, brass-buttoned, cords with a primrose bloom upon them, and a pair of top-boots. In his new raiment and his unexpectedly prosperous new condition, it came easy to the good man to think well of himself; and since to think well of one's self is with any honest and open nature the best of preparatives for thinking well of other people, the farmer was excellently satisfied with the world at large.
He was walking about his lands one agreeable afternoon,

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when, leisurely climbing over a gate, he beheld a trespasser. The trespasser had brought a camp-stool with him, had set up some species of framework in front of him, and was obviously engaged in some sort of occupation. It was impertinence enough that the man should have ventured on to the farmer's land at all in a place where there were no footpaths to warrant invasion; but that a man should actually set up his workshop, whatever his pursuit might be, on another man's land looked like the very crown of insolence. 'I'll have a talk to that feller,' said the farmer to himself. He took his walking-stick by the middle, and advanced at leisure, going softly and noiselessly over the grassy carpet. The stranger was so absorbed in his occupation, whatever it might prove to be, that he never so much as looked away from it for a moment. The farmer, indeed, was at his elbow before the man was aware of his presence. When he became so, he turned, and nodded with so sunny a smile and so evident and perfect an unconsciousness that his position there was in any way assailable, that the farmer was fairly nonplussed.

The stranger was painting, and the farmer, being a little puzzled as to how to begin his exhortation, stood by in silence, and speedily became so interested that he stood with rounded eyes and half-opened mouth and actually snored. The business was quite new to him, and the stranger, to his eyes, looked like an absolute master of his craft. There was a group of cows in the picture, and they looked like actual denizens of the fields. One of them, a white beast dappled with reddish spots, stood pensively facing the spectator, with its under lip awry, as if in the act of chewing the cud, and there was something so patiently and kindly bovine in its expression, that the farmer felt half inclined to caress it.

'How long has it took you to make that, young man?'

'Plaît-il?' said the stranger. 'I beg pardon. What?'

'How long have you been over that bit of work?' He stuck out the point of his walking-stick towards the picture, and Jousserau warded it off.

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'You must not—touch it,' he said. 'It is wet. I have been two whole day at that picture.'

'It takes a deal o' patience,' said the farmer.

'Oh no!' said the swarthy little man, looking up with his engaging little laugh. 'It takes not patience if you are lover of it. It is the night, when I cannot work, that takes me patience.'

'Do you make a living at that sort of work, young man?' the father demanded.

'Yes,' responded Jousserau. 'It is my trade.'

'Funny occupations theer is in the world,' said the farmer contemplatively, and again stood by in silence to look on. He became so devoutly interested that he followed all the dexterous motions of the brush with lollings of the head this way and that way, accompanied by elaborate motions of the tongue, as if by that motion he guided the movements of the artist's hand. When the little man had worked with great industry for perhaps half an hour, he laid down his palette upon the grass, and having rested the tips of his brushes delicately on its edge, began to roll a cigarette in his lithe brown fingers.

This operation was also new to the farmer, who began to think that he had lighted on a creature altogether strange and remarkable.
'What do you reckon to get for a harticle like that?' he asked, pointing his stick once more towards the picture.
Jousserau put his head on one side and surveyed his own work critically. 'Not much,' he answered with candour. 'It is not worth much. At this I am beginner. There are many sorts of painting—many, and this I do for to amuse myself alone. To my own trade, I paint the face; that is my proper work.'
'Oho!' said Shorthouse, and instantly being genially filled with a sense of his own competence, began to turn over an idea in his mind. An idea, with Farmer Shorthouse, was something of a rarity, and it was always a bit of a wonder where it came from. The present notion was altogether novel and fanciful, but it tickled his brain agreeably, though it excited a certain bumpkin sense of bashful-

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ness. The late Mrs. Shorthouse, who had been a pretty woman in her time, as Cecilia's mother had an ample right to be, had been painted years ago by a travelling artist. Her portrait still hung in the seldom used best parlour, with a yellow gauze about the gilt frame to preserve it from the flies. It represented an amazing wooden simper, with a bulb of hair and a prodigious high comb on top of it, and on either side a short curl, like a neatly arranged black shaving. The subject was attired in a long bodiced gown, apparently made of court-plaster, with leg-of-mutton sleeves; and at the bottom of the picture a pair of hands which might have belonged to a magnified wax doll were mechanically crossed one over the other, with a chrome-yellow ring on every finger. The memory of this work of art came clearly into the farmer's mind, and the new idea was to have his own presentment put upon canvas as a pendant or companion to it. The two, he thought, would make an excellent heirloom for the girl. But if he were painted at all, it crossed him that he would like to be painted in his habit as he lived, and not in that cold stately company splendour in which Cecilia the first was represented. That was well enough for a woman, for it stood to nature that women should be fond of state and finery. For himself, he would go as far perhaps as the new blue coat with the brass buttons, but he would mollify that glory by the introduction of a jug of home-brewed with the foam upon it and a long clean Brosely. Then he thought of the cords and the tops, and the longing seized him for a full length, but that seemed almost too much. There was a vanity of ostentation in it which frightened him. He would have it cut off somewhere about the finish of his portly waistcoat. And being on the question of waistcoats he thought of the red plush; that, with a gold albert chain across it, would look no less than imposing.
'You mek a trade o' portrait-painting, eh?' he said after a long silence.
'Yes,' returned Jousserau, 'that is the work I do best.'
The farmer hesitated, fluttered, resolved, withdrew, resolved again, withdrew again, and then made the final

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plunge. 'If you don't happen to be particular busy,' he said, 'I'd like ye to come up to my house and have a look at the portrait o' my missus. It's been i' my mind for some time to have my own done to set alongside of it. I've got a da'ter as'd be glad o' summat to remember me by.'
'So, yes. I will come,' said Jousserau; 'I will come presently, in half an hour.'
'You'rn a foreigner?' said Shorthouse, after another pause.
'That is true,' said Jousserau, with one of his quick smiles. 'I am foreigner here. You would be foreigner if you were in my country.'
The farmer was staggered into silence by this amazing proposition: that he, a Briton born and bred, reared in the very heart of the English midland, could by any stretch of fancy be considered a foreigner anywhere was almost beyond him. 'I shouldn't belong to the country, to be sure,' he made answer; 'but as to being a foreigner—'
'It is only not belonging to a country,' Jousserau answered, 'that makes foreigners.'
That sounded as if there were something in it, but the rustic intellect was perplexed. Ideas were growing too common with it. The farmer was conscious of a plethora, a feeling of mental indigestion. 'There's different sorts of foreigners,' he remarked a little later, manfully wrestling with the new theme. 'There's no offence meant, young man, but what sort be you?'
'I am Frenchman,' said the little artist amiably 'I come from Arles. You do not know of him? No?'
'No,' said Shorthouse; 'I never heerd of it.'
There the conversation ended; and Jousserau went on with his work for about the promised half-hour, and then, having packed his easel and camp-stool into a convenient little parcel, put up his palette and brushes, took his picture by a strip of canvas at the edge and announced himself ready.
'Be you a-living hereabouts?' Shorthouse asked, by way of renewing the conversation.

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'Yes,' answered Jousserau; 'I am lodger with Mr. Vintare.'
'Who's he?' asked Shorthouse. 'I know most of the folks hereabouts; but that name's strange to me.'
'Mr. Vintare,' repeated Jousserau—'Mr. Isaiah Vintare.'
'Oho! Ay! ay! Isaiah? I know him, of course; but you sounded the name so strange I could make nothing on it. So you'rn living with Isaiah Winter, eh?'
That would be handy for the portrait-painting, if anything were to come of it, for Isaiah had set up his habitation within easy walking distance of Shorthouse's house.
The farmer led the artist to his house, and ushered him into the best parlour. It was a sombre chamber, chastening to the spirit in its gloom, its vault-like odour, and the prim, unused, and awkwardly regular array of its furniture. It was as unhomelike as an upholsterer's shop, but on company occasions among men of Farmer Shorthouse's class it is not en règle to be at ease. A little discomfort in respect to posture and shirt-collar would seem to be peculiarly desirable.
'Theer's the portrait,' said Shorthouse, when he had drawn the heavy curtains aside from the window and had admitted a little of the outer light. 'Now do you think as you could do anything like that?'

The artist stood looking at the work with a serious face. 'No,' he said; 'I do not think I could do anything like that, even if I tried. I will do you something a leetel better than that, if I do for you anything at all.'
'These things,' said the farmer, pointing to a daguerreotype on the mantelpiece, 'is good for nothing. I don't want to go down to them as may come after me mekin'
'em believe as their grandfather, or maybe their great-grandfather, was an 'Ottentot. Look at that, now; who'd tell that for a pretty gell's picture? A pretty gell her is, though, though I say it. That's my da'ter, and about as much like her as choke's like cheese.'
'Ah!' cried Jousserau, turning quickly, 'you are then Mr. Short-house? Ah yes! I have met the young lady with my boys.'

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'Like enough,' the farmer answered, not quite comprehending him. 'But now, tell me what you'd charge me for a picture o' myself, drawed natural and coloured, the same size as that? I'm not a man to beat any tradesman down in his price, but I look to you to be reasonable. I paid ten pounds for that un, and the man as did it sent it home without the frame. He said that was the way of the trade, and so it may be for all I know. I'm game to pay a ten-pound note for mine, that is if it's drawed and coloured natural. If it's as like nature as them cows, it'll suit me all over.'
Jousserau would probably have asked for a good deal more than the farmer was disposed to give, in which case the negotiations would have been brought to an immediate close; but the sight of the daguerreotype and the news that Cecilia was the farmer's daughter had an influence upon him. Truth to tell, this young southern gentleman was curiously susceptible, and Miss Shorthouse in a single interview had made a considerable inroad upon his fancy. It would be pleasant to meet her again, and that ox-like head of the farmer's would make an excellent study. The reflection decided him. He was in no immediate want of money, and he need not go about making a practice of painting farmers on their own terms.
'You'll oblige me with your name, if you please, young man,' said the farmer; and Jousserau produced and handed to him a card with a little flourish of politeness.
'Ah!' said Shorthouse, settling his glasses on his nose to read it, 'that's convenient and comeatable. Pretty handwriting.' He conceived the copperplate inscription to be the artist's own handiwork, and nodded over it approvingly. 'It's a sensible thing,' he said, 'when a man's got a funny name like that to have it wrote down ready. It's convenient to strangers. And now let's settle about the time when it'll be handiest to have the work gone on with. If you'rn a early riser, young man, I'll give you from seven to nine every morning till it's done.'
'That will do,' said Jousserau. 'I will go to-night to the town and will buy a toile—what you call it?—a cloth, to paint upon, and I will begin to-morrow morning.'

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'Right,' said the farmer. 'That'll suit me proper. Mind you, mister, it's to be done on approval.'

'I shall paint your portrait,' said the artist, nodding his head with great gravity, 'and I shall paint it like you, and I shall paint it well. What I cannot make, I do not pretend I make.'

They went back to the kitchen, through which they had entered, and there found Miss Cecilia, bending interestedly over Jousserau's cattle-piece. He had placed it by chance in a good light upon one of the kitchen chairs; and the girl having drawn another seat towards it, was absorbed in its contemplation. She heard and recognised her father's step, and spoke without turning: 'What a pretty picture, father! Have you bought it?'

'No, my gell,' he answered. 'It's this young man's handiwork. He's made a bargain to paint my portrait, to hang up alongside mother's.'

Cecilia rose in a little becoming confusion, and Jousserau bowed to her, quite in the grand manner. Cecilia dropped him a little courtesy.

'Charmed once more to meet Mees Short-house,' said the artist. 'I must go now to buy my cloth. I will be here to-morrow.' He gathered up his belongings, bowed once more, and was gone.

'Why, Cecilia!' cried her father, 'you curcheyed to the young man as if he'd been a lord.'

'Mr. Jousserau is a gentleman in his own country, father,' returned Cecilia. 'A real artist is a gentleman in any country.'

Here again was yet a new idea for Farmer Shorthouse. He said nothing, but he felt as if things in general were shaken and uncertain.

CHAPTER XXVII

As a matter of course, the farmer's cronies came to know that his portrait was being painted; and when at the end

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of the second sitting the head was put in, in a very firm and resolute fashion, quite a little stream of them dribbled in at odd hours to look at it. There were all sorts of doubts and surmises as to what was to happen to the unfinished parts of the picture, but about the live portion of it there already there was no doubt whatever. The actual Shorthouse seemed to look out of the canvas, ruddy and tanned and lined, honest, prejudiced, thick-headed, and kindly, a type of the old-fashioned rustic Midland man, hardly to be excelled in value. The farmer knew nothing about schools of art; but he had gone to a passionate realist, and ignorant as he was, he could hardly fail to see some of the differences between the pale, timid, and stupid conventionalities of his wife's portrait and the masterly veracity of his own. The idea that Jousserau was, as his daughter had suggested, possibly a gentleman, had taken possession of him, and he called him 'young man' no longer. Where and when he had learned as much as that, he would have been puzzled to tell; but he was somehow aware that a Frenchman claimed the right to be addressed as 'mossoo,' and that title he bestowed on Jousserau, to the painter's great amusement and enjoyment.

When the antique silver flagon with its rim of foaming beer, the blue coat and the red waistcoat, the Broseley pipe, and the tumbler were all set upon the canvas, the farmer's

self-congratulation was almost without bounds. Day by day, as Jousserau finished his morning's work, he put the canvas away in the best parlour, turning its face to the wall, and exacting a promise that no dusting should be done while it remained there. Half a dozen times in the course of the day the farmer would turn the work round, handling it as tenderly as if it had been a new-born child; and sometimes he would spend a whole half-hour in the contemplation of the work. The tankard looked as if one could actually lift it; the pipe was fragile and slender as it was in nature; the glass of beer, with its encircling ring of dying foam, looked drinkable. The red plush waistcoat was like plush, the blue coat like blue cloth, the brass buttons like brass buttons. The picture bade fair to be a source

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of perennial enjoyment to him, and he thought that he had never laid out ten pounds to such advantage in his life.

The morning hours spent in the farmer's kitchen—for there, for the sake of the light, Jousserau insisted on pitching his easel—were not without their sentimental effect upon the artist. Monsieur Jousserau's experiences in affairs of the heart were varied, and his aspect toward the sex was variable and inconsistent. He was either over head and ears in love with some one of its charming members, and ready for her sweet sake to forgive all her sisters the faults he charged against them; or he was for the moment a confirmed misogynist, armed with epigrams by a hundred of his fellow-countrymen. His action in courtship was rapid and decided, and three or four interviews with any lady who took his fancy served generally to bring him to the point of declaration. No one of the dozen or two to whom he had proposed under these conditions had as yet found this brusque and lively method of wooing satisfactory, and the good little man had indeed been unfortunate in the fact that a fair half of the ladies of his choice had been already bespoken. Finding his offer set aside, he returned to his misogyny, and contemned all women for at least a fortnight.

Perhaps he was learning something from experience, or perhaps he was inwardly aware of something more serious in his conditions than he had hitherto observed. Be these things as they may, he made no matrimonial overtures to Cecilia, and it is possible that, like the immortal parrot of the story, he refrained from speaking because he thought the more. His one overt act was to hint to the farmer that it would be a pleasant thing to have a portrait of Mees Cecilia. Shorthouse took kindly to the notion, and the painter presented himself with a new canvas before the girl herself had been made aware of the project. She resisted it at first, but feebly, and gave her first sitting to a running accompaniment of blushes, which to Jousserau's mind became her especially well. The young lady gave her séance later in the day than her father had done, and

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the farmer absented himself from his affairs to play propriety. He would stand pipe in mouth behind the painter, watching him with untiring interest, and became more absorbed in the picture's progress than he had been even when he had been himself the subject. He had never known how pretty Cecilia was, and probably never would have

known if nobody had come to show him; but she made a lovely picture, and there she was in actual flesh and blood evidence to justify the painter's reading of her. Jousserau had caught her with a certain half-pensive smile, which Farmer Shorthouse would never have had the eye to notice.

'It's thee to the life, Cecilia,' he would say a dozen times a day. 'I've seen thee lookin' like that hunderds an' hunderds o' times. It's the very spit on her. It ain't like a picture; it's like another gell a-sittin' there, the very livin' image on her.'

The farmer paid, and Jousserau received with perfect gravity his twenty pounds for the two pictures, as if that sum had really represented the value of his work. But when the work was done and the visits to the house were all over, he became unutterably mournful and distrait, wandering about the yellowing lanes in solitude, and composing in his own language sonnets to his mistress's eyebrow.

The cronies who had come to see the farmer's counterfeit presentment came also to see Cecilia's. They were all critically admiring; but for the most part the merits of the Brosely pipe, the silver tankard, the red plush waistcoat, and the glass of beer pleased them better than the delicate beauty of the second work. The farmer was uncertain in his own opinion, and wanted a sound criticism to go upon. So one morning when the two works were freshly framed, and he stood in the best parlour surveying them and debating their respective merits in his mind, the voice of the vicar came like an inspiration to him.

Now Parson Heathcote was a personage in those parts, being no less than first-cousin to my Lady Barfield. He was a man of wealth and taste, and everybody knew

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that the parsonage boasted a fine collection of pictures. The farmer hailed his arrival, therefore, and at once inducted him into the parlour to give judgment on Jousserau's handiwork. The polished cleric put up his eye-glasses with a fine want of interest, but had no sooner looked at the canvases than he changed his manner. 'Why, Shorthouse, Shorthouse! what are these? Where did you find the man who did these?'

'He's a Frenchman from foreign parts,' Shorthouse answered. 'I found him a-drawing and colouring the cows in one of my fields.'

'A wandering artist,' said the vicar. 'Come, this is interesting. What does he make you pay for these?'

'Ten pounds apiece,' said Shorthouse. 'I don't think it's out of the way, sir.'

'Rather curiously out of the way, to my mind. Do you know, my friend Shorthouse, that you might pay five hundred and get no better work? What's the man's name?'

'I've got it wrote out here somewhere,' said Shorthouse. 'I don't seem to sound it like he does. I can't get my tongue round it. It's wrote out on a piece of pasteboard,' he continued, groping in his waistcoat pockets. 'Ay, here it is.'

'Jousserau!' cried the vicar, 'Achille Jousserau! What brings him over here? Why, he's the designer of the great memorial window for Lord Barfield, which is to be unveiled for next Sunday. Let me tell you, Shorthouse, that he must be particularly fond of you to paint your portrait for ten pounds. He wouldn't paint mine for ten times that.'

The farmer began to think more than ever of the pictures after this decisive verdict.

'Father would hardly believe,' said Cecilia, who had followed to look and listen, 'that Mr. Jousserau was a gentleman.'
'A gentleman?' said the vicar. 'Of course he's a gentleman. A man of very good family, and many accomplishments. A very charming little fellow, and a great friend of mine.'

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The farmer felt horribly abashed that he should have called a friend of the vicar's 'young man,' and that he should have patronised him.
'Dear me!' he said. 'To think as he should be a friend of yours! Why, theer's 'Zaiah Winter, as has known him for over a twelvemonth, gives out as he lived in Warwick with a workin' foreigner there, quite poor and lowly.'
'Ah, yes, my friend,' said the parson; 'but the man he lived with was his fellow-townsman. That is a great tie between Frenchmen who are living out of their own country.'
'The young gentleman dresses nohow,' said Shorthouse.
'Like an artist—like an artist,' said the parson. 'A bit of a Bohemian, but a charming and good little fellow. You're in luck, Shorthouse.'
'Excuse me, sir,' said the farmer. 'Theer's no offence meant, and I hope as none will be took.'
'I hope not. What is it?'
'These here foreigners, I'm told,' said Shorthouse with great gravity, 'is papists, all and sundry. I shouldn't ha' thought as a papist would be let paint a window for a Christian church.'
'Well, that's a point, to be sure,' the vicar answered, laughing; 'but it happens that Mr. Jousserau is not a papist. He's a Huguenot, Shorthouse, and as good a Protestant as you or I. You'll see him in church next Sunday, I daresay.'
Here were more ideas. The world was growing embarrassing.
But the most amazing bepuzzlement awaited him on the Sunday. It was a soft gray morning after rain. The church bells were ringing, and from any little bit of rising ground the country-folk might be seen straggling towards the church in answer to their invitation in rather more than their usual numbers. In the old days, the Earl of Barfield had sat through the morning service of half the year round in the family pew; but since the late Earl's decease and burial, the Quality had left that part of the county, and their presence at church was a rarity. They

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were to be there that morning in honour of the inauguration of the great memorial window. The young Earl of Barfield was expected with the Countess, and Sir Ferdinand de Blacquaire, the county member, with her ladyship his wife, who was as yet known to none of the good people of Beacon-Hargate.
Cecilia had started on ahead with the daughters of a neighbouring farmer, and Shorthouse was solemnly waddling along alone, when he found himself accosted by Snelling. They had seen but little of each other since the latter had taken his answer from Cecilia, and Shorthouse at first was a little embarrassed by his friend's greeting.

'I want a word with you,' said Snelling; 'and if you'll take what I'm going to say kindly, I shall be obliged to you. I've heard as that young Frenchman has been a good deal at your house lately.'
'Yes,' said Shorthouse, who was aware of the feud between Jousserau and his companion. 'He's been paintin' my portrait, and Cecilia's.'
'Faithful are the wounds of a friend,' quoted Mr. Snelling; 'but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. If Providence had blessed me with a daughter, Shorthouse, that's not the sort o' young man that I should allow to come anigh her.'
'No?' demanded Shorthouse.
'No,' said Snelling.
'And if not, why not?'
'Well, I'll deal square with you,' Snelling answered. 'The man's been taking away my character, and anything I say agen him might carry less weight than it would if I was supposed to have a likin' for him. But that won't hinder me from tellin' what I know to be the plain truth about him: he's a low scoundrel, and has no right to cross a decent man's doorstep.'
'You're mistook in the young man,' said Shorthouse. 'Parson Heathcote claims him as a friend, and speaks most high of him.'
'I took you for a man o' sense, Shorthouse,' said Snelling. 'The idea o' you believin' a cock-and-bull tale like that!'

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'Cock-and-bull, or no cock-and-bull,' Shorthouse returned, 'it was the vicar himself as told me so. I reckon he knows whether a man's a friend of his or whether he isn't. He said he was. Parson says he's a gentleman. You've quarrelled with the man, and you're willing to lend your ear to anything.'
This staggered the vulgar traducer for the moment, and lie saw that if Jousserau really had powerful friends, it might be wise on his own part to leave him alone. But a rather singular and altogether unlooked-for thing had happened to Snelling since he had taken his dismissal from Cecilia. He had proposed to marry the young lady's prospective acres rather than herself, and had looked upon her final acceptance of his suit as being almost certain. Except as an unusually prosperous stroke of business, he had hardly cared to think about it. But from the moment at which he had heard her answer, he had been growing more and more into a desire of her. It began first in a dull anger and resentment, in which he wished for nothing but the power to rule her, and bend her or, if need be, break her to his will. It was a natural part of the man's egotism to feel that a woman put the worst of possible insults upon him in refusing to marry him. He had not the faintest wish in the world to understand himself, or to trace to their source his own emotional processes. But if he had had the will and the power to do that, he would have seen resentment turn to hatred, and hatred in its turn change into some distorted semblance of love. So long as he had had but little doubt that she would take him, he had not cared for her; but now he saw how impossible she was for him, he began to hunger for her. And since any kind of real passion is more piercing and discerning, because more alert, interested, and observant than average feeling, his inert and sluggish mind woke suddenly to a new perceptive faculty. He was far and away too stupid and

self-satisfied to trust to instinct; but instinct somehow told him that Jousserau was or would be his rival, and his own nature taught him to stab the rival before he had a chance to strike. It made matters none the easier for him to know that Cecilia would in all probability

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be a score of times wealthier than he had supposed her to be when he had still thought her property worthy of being joined to his own. The prize had turned out to be infinitely more valuable than he had fancied, and he had missed it. In spite of the girl's disclaimer, he believed that Jousserau had poisoned her mind against him, and he was not the man to submit to an injury without retort.

The churchyard was full from the lichgate to the porch, for nobody dreamt of entering until the great people should have arrived. The bells changed their measure, and then stopped, all but one, which tinkled rapidly, as if to hurry up the delayed magnates. The carriage drove up at the last second, and from it alighted, amid a respectful and curious silence, the Earl of Barfield, who assisted the Countess to descend. Then came Sir Ferdinand, the county member; and all necks were craned for a first look at his bride, when, to the wonder of everybody who knew him, M. Jousserau descended from the carriage, glorious in lavender gloves, a silk hat, and a frock-coat, carrying those splendours with no embarrassment or look of rarity, and being in nowise moved either by the curiosity he excited or by the exalted company in which he found himself.

Snelling could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes, and Shorthouse fairly gaped in his astonishment. As for Cecilia, who was a most honest and simple-hearted creature, she felt these great folks to be so far above her that to have been on terms of week-long intimacy with anybody who went familiarly about with them exalted her with wonder. The painter wore a kind of halo to her fancy. He raised his hat to her as he went by, talking to Sir Ferdinand in his own tongue. A moment earlier, he had worn the bright and pleasing smile she had seen so often; and on a sudden, as he saw her, there was a touch of sadness, humility, apology in his manner—she knew not what. She had no time to think of it, and in the midst of her astonishment, she had not even the wit to think of it; but there was something in his salute, and something in the look accompanying it, which seemed to say that though he

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was at obvious ease with these great people, he was less at ease before her. The girl's heart began to beat, and—she could not have told why for the world—but Jousserau, if he had only known it, had grown in that passing moment to be a personage in her eyes; and from that instant forward she never thought of him without the latent understanding that he was cleverer, handsomer, and more distinguished than the common run of men. Only that; and yet, if he had known it, that was something.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PRESTO! A change from the yellowing lanes and whitening wheat-fields of late summer to a glistering field of snow. Trees and hedges bare of foliage, but sparkling thick with rime after a night of frost and fog. Snelling sat in his own room chafing his knees before a great coal-fire and staring into the shapes that formed there. One of the chance-presented faces bore a grotesque likeness to Tobias Orme; and Snelling, after glaring at it wrathfully for a second or two, took up the poker and demolished it with as much gusto as if it had been a living bugbear. Snelling knew by this time, what was known to the whole country-side, that the wretched Tobias had betrayed the secret he had meant to keep, and instead of enriching his patron and himself, had enriched the rightful owner of the land on which his precious discovery had been made. Within reach of Snelling's hand lay a letter; and when he had destroyed Mr. Orme's imagined likeness, he took up this missive with an angry fretful jerk and glanced over it contemptuously. It was written in a somewhat shaky handwriting, which had once been clerkly, and a good deal over-informed with flourishes, and it was couched in the most involved and polysyllabic phrases the writer could discover. It came from Mr. Orme himself, and perhaps that fact had helped Snelling to identify his

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correspondent's inflamed countenance in the glowing coal. The letter announced the writer's approaching arrival.

'Plunged,' wrote Tobias, 'from the loftiest pinnacle of hope into the profoundest abyss of poverty, scarcely able to predict at the moment of time at which I indite these despairing lines by what providential opportunity I shall succeed in acquiring the wherewithal whereby to secure the necessary Queen's-head for its despatch, I venture, sir, with all fitting respect, but at the same time with all the energy of which language is capable, to beseech you to recall from memory the promise made in happier days. In the hope, sir, that that promise has not utterly escaped from your remembrance, I shall venture to present myself to-morrow morning at the hour of eleven, as near as I can make it, at your door—a door, alas! once hospitable, a door to which I have twice borne tidings of the utmost importance to its owner, but a door at which, I fear, I can no longer look forward to that warmth of welcome to which I once fondly dreamed that I might have a perpetual authority to aspire.'

Snelling was not an English stylist, and in spite of his bitter grudge against Tobias, a mournful admiration touched him. He knew for his own part that he might as well have tried to fly as to write that letter. 'That's where drink can carry a man of learning,' he said half aloud, as Mr. Orme's sordid figure and sodden countenance presented themselves to his memory. 'Why, with a power of expression such as that man's got, he might ha' been anywhere at his time o' life if he'd only kept himself sober. I reckon I shall have to see him when he comes; but he's been bitter harm instead o' good to me, and he'll have to suffer for it. If he'd ha' kept his tongue betwixt his teeth, he'd ha' been a rich man this minute.' He turned and struck a bell which lay upon the table. 'Mrs. Wilkins,' he said to the housekeeper who silently answered the summons, 'I'm expecting a person of the name of Orme. He's been here before, and you'll know him when you see him. He's pretty shabby, I reckon, but you'll show him in when he comes.'

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He had not long to wait, for the housekeeper had scarcely retired a minute when she returned and tapped at the door: 'The person you expected, sir.'
Snelling wheeled slowly round and took stock of his visitor mercilessly from head to foot. The wretched Tobias wore boots that gaped; his coat was out at the elbows, and his trousers were broken at the knees. He had some dreadful kind of black stuff, grayed with dirt, wound about his neck and stuffed into the bosom of his waistcoat. The toper's glow had faded from his nose, the tinge of which had deepened under the winter cold to a pinched purple. He dangled in one hand a wretched relic of a hat, and looked altogether so piteous, that Snelling, who had fully made up his mind to give him nothing, could afford to be compassionate.
'You've brought your pigs to a pretty market,' he said, with well-fed, well-warmed complacency. 'You're better than a sermon agen drink, you are. This is what you've come to.'
'Yes, sir,' answered the wrecked Tobias, 'this is what I've come to.' He took a terrible old red handkerchief out of his hat and wiped his eyes with it. They were watering, half with cold and half with his inward spirituous pathetics. 'You can hardly find it in your heart, sir, to be hard upon a man like me.' Here Mr. Orme's knowledge of human nature at large, and of Robert Snelling in particular, failed him. It was precisely upon a man like him that Snelling could find it in his heart to be hardest.
'You said you'd come,' Snelling answered, 'and here you are. I wouldn't say I wouldn't see you, for I'm a man as likes to do things straightfor'ard and above-board. If you think you've got anything in the natur' of a claim on me, let's have it in plain words. I made a bargain with you to give you two per cent on the profits of the news you brought me last summer-time. Where are the profits? If I was to claim two per cent on the losses up to this minute, you wouldn't fetch the money if you was rendered down and sold.'
'The losses, sir?' asked poor Tobias. 'I hope, sir, that I have led you to no losses?'

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'It matters very little what you hope, my man,' returned Snelling, contemptuously dignified. 'It matters very little whether you hope at all, or whether you don't hope at all. D'ye know what your confounded news has cost me? Up to date, not a penny under seventeen hunderd and fifty pounds. Whether I shall ever see a penny on it again is more than I can tell, and more than any man can tell me.'
'But there's coal, sir!' cried Tobias; 'there's coal everywhere.'
'Yes,' said Snelling, nodding at him in a chill anger, 'there's coal everywhere, maybe. That ain't the question, my man—that ain't the question. There's coal there, like enough, but there's sand on top of it.'
'Sand, sir?' asked Tobias, meekly and feebly.
'Yes, sand—a dry, live sand as runs like water. You might as well try to dig a hole in a horse-pond as sink through it. They're making a try to fathom it this very day; but for all I know, it runs down to the bowels of the earth. That's what your discovery has done for me, my man. It's landed me on a job as might break Rothschild. If you'd kept sober

and brought me the news you could ha' brought me twenty hours earlier, you might ha' been riding in your own trap by now, like my man Isaiah.'
This intelligence seemed mentally to annihilate Mr. Orme for the time being; he stared piteously straight forward, shivering a little with cold, but saying nothing, and except for his utterly dazed look, giving no sign that he felt anything. But in a while he began to whimper, his under lip protruded little by little, and his tears began to flow.
'Look here!' cried Snelling, on whom a display of this kind could be expected to produce but one effect, 'if you want to sheed tears, go and sheed 'em outside, where it don't matter. I won't have you crying over my new carpet.'
'O sir!' cried Tobias, roused once more to a knowledge of himself by his patron's voice, 'you can't expect to prosper if you leave me to starve.'

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'Can't I?' said Snelling gruffly. 'I'll chance that, my man.'
'You can't! you can't!' Tobias moaned. 'I am the Columbus of this America, Mr. Snelling. Nobody will ever do any good with my discovery if I am left to starve; I know they won't; I'm sure of it.'
Now this view of things was natural enough from Tobias's standpoint, but less natural from Snelling's; and yet it struck the latter with an oddly superstitious feeling.
'I'll tell you what I'll do with you,' he said. 'You've got no more claim on me than I should have if I was to go to Barfield Hall and ask my lord for his title. But if you'll undertek to keep away and niver to bother me any more, I'll mek a bargain with you. Provided I get news as this sand can be passed through, I'll give you a ten-pound note; and if it isn't passed through, I shall give you nothing. You've got no more claim to that ten-pound note than you've got on the clothes I'm wearing; but I'll do that much for you. I' the meantime, you can sit i' the back kitchen and have a bite and a sup theer, and I'll give my housekeeper orders to see to you at once. That's the last you've got to look to, and that ain't certain, nor can't be for some hours to come.'
'If you would be so extremely good, sir,' said Tobias, 'as to allow me to wait and see—'
'You can sit i' the back kitchen if you like,' said Snelling; 'you'll be in nobody's way there, and you'll have a bit of a fire to sit by.' With that he rang the bell and gave pompous orders for the bestowal of his miserable guest.
It was out of no pity for Mr. Orme's discomforts or disappointments that he did this; it was a kind of sop to circumstance or bid to fortune. Snelling would have scorned the open statement that there was any such thing in the world as that blind foolish deity of luck whom in his soul he desired to propitiate. A man's genuine belief is not by any means that of which he is logically persuaded. The absurd and unreasonable fancies which move him to action are beliefs more settled and profound than the most cherished dogmas which leave him inactive. So Snelling

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believed that the foolish deity might diminish or increase the obstacle which lay between him and his hope in accordance with his treatment of Tobias. It was like the

gambler's consultation of the cards before the game, likelier than not to have its predictions falsified, and yet none the less to be regarded with hope and fear.

He had an appointment that day with Proctor, the renowned engineer, who had been called in to determine whether or not it were worth while to continue the operations. If the verdict went against him, it meant a clean loss of at least a thousand pounds. He had exaggerated things in talking to Tobias, and felt as if he were justified in setting off the figures of great sums against the background of that unfortunate's poverty. If the verdict went in his favour, he was no longer merely a man of solid substance but a man of wealth. He had no need for wealth, and knew as little as any man alive how to put it to any uses profitable to himself; and yet he yearned and burned and thirsted for it. The student of human nature finds himself confronted by many difficult problems, but there are not many of them so puzzling as that presented by the love of money for mere money's sake. Snelling did not propose to himself to do anything with his prospective riches, even to live better or lie softer. It would have been hard to exaggerate or increase by any amount of wealth his sense of personal importance and majesty, and except that he intended generally to make money breed money, he had no designs at all respecting it. And all the same he coveted it, as a saint longs after virtue, or a repentant sinner after forgiveness, or a young artist when he thinks of fame, or a lover who looks forward to his union with his sweetheart. There is nothing desired of men which creates or can create a more preoccupying longing for possession than money excited in his mind.

In due time he mounted and rode away towards the shaft at the bottom of which his hopes lay hidden in darkness. In the neighbourhood of Beacon-Hargate the whole country undulates gently into hill and vale, but the Beacon itself tops everything, and from its summit on a clear day

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there is an uninterrupted view of at least a dozen miles on any side. Snelling's road led him past its crest, and when he had reached the summit he paused for a moment and looked round on the familiar landscape. The discovery of the earth's hidden treasures had as yet done but little to alter its character, and the broad field of snow almost obliterated even these signs of change. Half a dozen pit-stacks and an engine-house were in course of construction; but the hard winter weather had stopped the work, and they stood tranquil, with no signs of life about them. Day's farmhouse had vanished from the landscape, to be sure; and near where it had used to stand, the furnace fires of the new engine sent up a column of smoke, and the panting of the engine itself throbbed faintly audible on the quiet country air. Gazing in that direction, Snelling half regretted his engagement with Orme. He would have given something to have been first in the field, and much to have gone swaggering with the proclamation that he was the first to have recognised the riches of the district. It was Tobias's folly which had robbed him of that splendid chance. Yet he dared not altogether be wroth with him just then, lest the foolish genius he courted should choose not to be propitious. He stifled his anger and rode on.

His own shaft lay at the foot of the Beacon Hill, and within two hundred yards or so of the local line of railway. As he trotted towards it, the engine began to pant and the wheel over the shaft to revolve, and thinking that somebody might be coming to the

bank with news at that moment, he shook his reins and hurried onward. There were two or three loungers at the side of the shaft warming their hands at the fire heaped in an iron brazier made by the simple expedient of punching an old bucket full of holes.
'Any news?' Snelling asked as he dismounted.
'Mr. Proctor's down, sir,' one of the men responded. 'One of the chaps was up just now. It seems the soundin'-rods was forgot, sir. Better leave the hoss inside, if you mean to wait, sir.'
There was a raw desolate hovel built for shelter, constructed

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of all manner of odds and ends, and into this Snelling led his horse. There were one or two clumsy stools overturned on the floor of beaten earth, and against one wall a primitive fireplace had been erected. The fire which lay in it filled the rough-cast room with smoke, and Snelling banged the door angrily open before he sat down. He waited for half an hour, and at the end of that time his impatience mastered him.
'Let Mr. Proctor know I'm here,' he called; and the fire by this time burning clearly, he drew up to it and fell to brooding. The great mining engineer's entrance awoke him from his thoughts. There had been a misunderstanding, Proctor said. The man instructed to bring the sounding-rods had not obeyed his orders. A messenger had been despatched for them, and might be ready at any minute.
'Look here,' said Snelling, 'I've got other business than this to see to. Give me a Yes or No as soon as you can, if you please.'
'My dear-r sir-r,' the engineer responded, 'I can tell ye nothing till I get the sounding-rods. Then I'll let you know in an hour. In the meantime I've a bit o' business with Messrs. Day and Winter. I'm due there in half an hour, and I must get away.'
'My affairs,' said Snelling surlily, 'are about as pressing as Messrs. Day and Winter's.'
'Ay, ay, sir!' said the man of science. 'To you, sir, but not to them.' He buttoned up his overcoat and bustled cheerily from the place.
Snelling was left alone with his anxieties for an hour, and at the end of that time a messenger came to say that an accident had happened to the sounding-rods, by which they had been twisted. It would take three or four hours to put them into working order. The anxious man arose in wrath, and an oath escaped him. He had not been guilty of such a falling-off from respectability for a score of years past; but his nerves, tough and dull as they were, were at a terrible tension. He sat torn between the dread of heavy loss and the expectation of unmeasured gain, and

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his suspense was almost unendurable. He went outside the hut and tramped up and down, up and down, up and down, wearing a long track in the otherwise unsoiled snow of a neighbouring meadow.
The engineer came back again, and they waited together; and Snelling, too proud to display his anxiety further, sat down in slow torment and scarcely spoke a word for hours. One of the men brought them some coarse food, and the engineer, accustomed to rough fare, attacked it cheerfully; but Snelling waved it voicelessly away.

At long last, as the winter dusk was falling, two men came down the road bearing a dozen lengths of jingling iron on their shoulders.
'Here they are!' cried Proctor; 'and now we'll know in a jiffy.' He made ready to descend.
Snelling felt that he could not bear to look on the slow work of preparation. He shut himself resolutely indoors and stared at the glowing coals. The hungry horse champed at his bit and now and then gave a rattling shiver. Voices from outside told how the preliminary work was going on. Then the engine throbbed for a little while, and there was silence.
The next half-hour was an agony of covetousness and foreseen failure, but the man sat in the dark like a statue.
'If it's all a mistake and the money's lost,' he told himself, 'they shall see no sign in me.'
The engine got to work again and paused again; and Proctor, bearing a lamp, shouldered abruptly into the hut.
'Well?' said Snelling without turning.
'We've proved five-and-twenty fathom sand,' said the Scot; 'and I should just counsel ye to give it up and sink elsewhere. Ye might drop all ye've got into that hole and never see a penny of it.'
After all, Snelling was not without heroism in his way; he reared his great bulk and settled his coat about him. 'If that's so, it's so,' he said quietly. 'Good-night to you.' He shook hands, led out his horse, and mounted. There was a snow-light in the air, but otherwise the night was dark, without a star. He rode calmly enough for a while;

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but by-and-by his head and shoulders began to droop, and the horse, falling into a foot-pace, jogged on wearily, as if his master's depression touched him, as perhaps it did. Nearing the top of the Beacon, Snelling heard a wild clatter of hoofs before him beyond the ridge of the hill. He glanced up, and behold the sky was ruddy. Even whilst he stared at it, a figure came galloping wildly over the crest, black against the wild glare of the sky.
'Look out!' roared Snelling. 'Where are you coming to?'
The rider pulled up with difficulty, and cried out in a breathless voice to him if that were Mr. Snelling.
'Yes!' cried Snelling with a fierce foreboding. 'What's the matter?'
'The house is afire, sir. A lamp burst in your neveu's bedroom. Mrs. Wilkins heard the crash, but she couldn't go in: the place was swimming with fire. There's nothing will save the house, sir, and we can't find Master John nowheer.'
He heard the news without a word, and rode on. Was it possible that fortune had at last so far befriended him?

CHAPTER XXIX

WE must go back a step or two to find out exactly what had happened. Isaiah in his new-found prosperity was not unmindful of old acquaintances. Motives were mixed

with Isaiah, as they are with most people, and though he would never have dropped the Vignes under any conditions while circumstances put them within his reach, he was all the better pleased and the more willing to visit them when he could drive to their door in a two-horse brake of his own, and could present himself before them stiff and shining in unaccustomed broadcloth.

The Vignes had gone to live, as necessity bade them, near the great establishment in which Monsieur had found

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employment. It was a grimy, dirty, and smoke-darkened district, and as little like their last abiding-place as it well could be. They were placed in the centre of a straggling street a mile long or thereabouts, where every here and there an unkempt field broke the line of houses, and left open to the eye an expanse of country dotted with pit-stacks and heaped with mounds of refuse. The mud of the street was black with coal-dust, the very brickwork of the houses was sodden with old smoke. Day and night, and winter and summer, a pall of smoke hung over the land, and a feeble haze of blue was a midsummer day's dream.

Vigne went to his new employment with excellent testimonials, and made better money there than he had ever earned before, so that the ugliness of his surroundings was not without compensation. He was in the midst of a French colony, too, and in that portion of the street in which he lived his native language was more commonly to be heard than English. Madame had taken upon herself the household arrangements, and had created a cheerful home over an undertaker's shop. Thither, on the afternoon on which Snelling sat waiting in the hovel at the top of that disastrous shaft of his, drove Isaiah, in the brand-new brake and the brand-new raiment behind the pair of horses, not too well assorted in point of size, colour, or style, but glorious to their owner's eyes. The undertaker received Isaiah with respect, and sent out a boy to lead the equipage up and down, to prevent the horses from catching cold, whilst the visitor mounted to Madame Vigne's apartments. The good lady, who was already attired as if for a journey, gave Isaiah a cordial welcome.

'I shall ask you one thing, Mr. Vintare,' she said, laying a hand on each broadclothed shoulder. 'I have seen Achille, and he has told me that to get to your new house you can pass by my boy. The road is only a little longer. Do, please, pass by my boy. I will not trouble you more than that. I will not want to see him or to speak to him; but let me go by where he lives. That shall content me altogether, because when I think of him he will not any longer be in no place. I shall have a place to put him in

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when he comes into my mind. He is often in my mind,' said the good creature, emotionally, 'for Anatole and I we have no children.'

'All right, mum,' responded Isaiah. 'It's only two or three hundred yards out of the way, and with a pair o' steppers like them, two or three hundred yards ain't much. Come and look at 'em.' He waved Madame to the window, and pointed a finger towards the muddy street. 'Look at that brace o' steppers, mum; ain't they prime?'

Madame, who had no notion as to what Isaiah was pointing at, lifted her eyebrows and laid the palms of her hands together in pure complaisance.
'I bought that pair of hosses, mum,' said Isaiah, 'for sixty-five guineas, money down, and throwed in a very old dogcart as the hoss-dealer took a fancy to. Call it seventy pound, and tell me it's a bargain; and if you can't say so in your heart of hearts, you're no judge of hoss-flesh.'
Madame being thus enlightened as to the identity of the pair of steppers, acknowledged their excellence volubly with her hands in the air. 'Ah, Mr. Vintare, you have prospered!'
'Yes, I have, mum,' said Isaiah. 'And I'm humbly and respectfully thankful for it.'
'You will not forget my boy because you are rich?' she said, searching for a handkerchief to wipe her eyes.
'I don't think he'll grow up to forget me,' Isaiah answered. 'He'll be one of the richest men for miles and miles round before he's one-and-twenty. I shall have no temptation to forget Master John. Apart from which, I've got a kindness for him.'
'Oho!' said Madame, with her hands in the air again, 'you nice, dear, stupid, English people, who will sooner die than say you love anything. Come along to the pair of steppers; I am quite ready.'
Isaiah opened the door and led the way downstairs into the street. Two or three dozen slatternly women with babies had come out to see the show, and looked on whilst Madame mounted and bestowed about herself the plenteous supply of rugs with which the vehicle was provided. Isaiah assumed the reins, gave a crack of the whip, and drove away.

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The purpose of his visit to Madame Vigne was to introduce that excellent person to his wife. Mrs. Winter had heard much from her husband of Madame's virtues, and was, as a natural consequence, rather ill disposed to her. She had on several occasions flatly declined to encounter Madame; but had, unfortunately for herself, based her sole objection on the ground that the lady was a foreigneering Papist. This figment having been dissipated by the vicar, whose authority was of course beyond dispute, Mrs. Winter was left without defences, and was compelled, though sorely against her will, to accept the visit.
She had her compensations in the fact that she was by this time inhabiting a house which by its splendours could do little less than crush the female invader who ventured on her territory. Isaiah had always been a solid man, and within his own limits was intensely respectable, so that when his circumstances enabled him to do justice to his own conceptions, he furnished his house in a solid and intensely respectable way. He bought the stickiest and shiniest mahogany to be had for love or money, and had it upholstered in the stiffest and most uncompromising horse-hair, a stuff that would be glacial even in the summertime, and penitential all the year round. The carpets and wall-papers were of the brightest patterns. There was a chest of drawers of brass-fitted mahogany in every room of the house; and in the drawing-room there was a rosewood pianoforte with a surface like that of court-plaster. Nobody in the house could play upon it, and that, considering the internal quality of the instrument, was perhaps rather a

blessing than otherwise. Everything was rigidly and exquisitely uncomfortable, and Mrs. Winter and her husband were proud in proportion to the distress their new surroundings gave them.
'You will not forget,' said Madame, belaying a finger on Isaiah's arm when they were once clear of houses and had come upon the open country—'you will not forget to pass my boy's house?'
'No,' said Isaiah; 'I shan't forget. As a matter of fact, I've niver done it yet, because I don't want to look like

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bragging over him. He gi'en me the sack only a few months ago, and here I be as well-to-do as he is, or anyhow as well-to-do as I want. I've had good-luck, and he's had bad; and if I was to drive by him too often with a turn-out like this, he might tek it into his head as I was bouncing. I don't care,' pursued Isaiah, with a defiant crack of the whip, 'what Bob Snelling teks it into his head to think about me; but I'll tek care, and jolly good care too, as he has no right to it.'
The afternoon shadows were growing deep already as they bowled along the smooth and well-kept country road. 'We're comin' to it,' said Isaiah in a while. 'It's the next house round the corner on the right-hand side. I'll slow down a bit, so as you can get a good look at it. Master John won't be at home yet a while, because the gaffer's sent him to school in Birmingham. He goes to the Grammar School there, and wears a mortar-board atop of his head, like a parson. It's half-past five before he's at home, because he has to catch the train, and it's a mile from here to the railway station. Look there; that's his bedroom. No; not upstairs; on the ground-floor. I used to sleep i' the same room afore Bob Snelling gi'en me the sack. He thought,' said Isaiah, lowering his voice, 'that he was going to hurt me when he did that; but if he'd never done it, it might ha' been many and many a bright thousand in his pocket.'
Isaiah's new house was within half a mile of Farmer Shorthouse's residence. Tea was laid out in lonely splendour in the arctic parlour, which even the generous coal-fire could not warm. But if it failed in that direction, it succeeded admirably in another, and brought out the odours of French-polish to perfection. Mrs. Winter was pilloried in a stiff black silk, and was on such terms of ceremony with her visitor that no overtures of foreign good-nature could make a passage beyond her intrenchments. Isaiah nudged, frowned, and nodded, and once or twice offered a stage direction in a stage whisper: 'Brisk up a little bit, missus; don't spread the company-manner too thick.'
Madame's visit under these conditions was not likely to

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be prolonged. The hostess's best approach to geniality was made when she appraised the furniture. 'We warn't brought up to it,' she explained to her guest; 'and I doubt whether Providence will tek it kindly. I've no mind for show myself; but our Isaiah is a man as'll have his way anywheers, and allays would. It's his doings, and I humbly hope as worldly pride may not have a fall.'

'My boy will be at home by this time,' said Madame, when the chilling function was once more seated in the brake behind Isaiah. 'Let me see the house while he is in it; it will be more home-like then.'
Isaiah, anxious to atone for the cold magnificence of Madame's reception, assented willingly. 'It's pitch-dark now,' he answered, 'and the gaffer can think nothing of my driving by.'
A thin snow was in the air, and Madame Vigne veiled herself from it until Isaiah pulled his horses to a walk and touched her with the butt of his whip. 'Theer,' he said—'theer's a light in his window. Why, theer's Master John his very self! Look! D'ye see him? He's pulling up the window.'
In effect Master John was there, in a glow of lamplight. He wore the college cap of which Isaiah had spoken, and a broad white collar over his jacket, and looked remarkably trim and healthy. He had opened the window, and had laid a hand on each of the outer shutters, when Madame called out to him: 'John, my dear!'
'Who's there?' he asked, peering into the darkness. The lamp of the brake gleamed redly through the winter mist, but he could see nothing beyond.
'You know me,' said Madame in an eager whisper. 'Come for a moment. Give me one kiss, and I will go.'
John climbed out at the casement, drew down the window, closed the shutters from without, and ran on tiptoe into the road. A minute later, he had climbed into the brake, and they were hugging each other to their hearts' content.
'Where are you going, Isaiah?' John asked in a hushed and cautious voice.

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'I'm driving her home,' said Isaiah, with a jerk of his elbow to intimate Madame. 'It's rather better than five mile.'
'You'll drive back again, won't you?' said John. 'It won't take much more than an hour to do it with those horses. Uncle isn't at home, and he wouldn't mind much if be were. Let me go with you.'
Madame hugged him anew for the suggestion, and immediately began to pack her rugs about him. Isaiah, well pleased, whipped up the horses; and away they all three rolled together, Madame, prodigal of affection, with a fat and comfortable arm round her protégé's neck.
All this time, Mr. Orme, sitting neglected and alone in the back kitchen, awaited Snelling's return. Once or twice the housekeeper passed through and treated him to an indignant sniff, at which the meek Tobias curled one foot round the other, and set his thumbs twirling in a feeble appeal against her judgment. She obeyed her master's orders, and set a copious jug of table beer and a joint of cold meat before the visitor. The plentiful good cheer and the fire atoned for ennui for an hour or two; but after a time Tobias began to weary. The hours of waiting dragged more and more as the day went on, and he began to think himself altogether forgotten. Somewhere about three or four o'clock in the afternoon he fell asleep and allowed the fire to go out. When he awoke the room was dark as pitch, and he was chilled to the marrow. For the first minute or two he failed to remember where he was, and went groping about in some

terror before he identified his surroundings. Even when he had done so, he had insane fears lest he had somehow been decoyed into confinement and left to perish.
In the course of his gropings he came upon the handle of the door, and found, to his relief, that there was at least no obstacle of escape. The house was silent as the grave; but the stillness hummed in his ears with a dreadful and disturbing noise. The door he had opened led upon a corridor which ran the whole length of the rear of the house. At the far end of this corridor shone two

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distinct rays of light, one beaming apparently through a keyhole, and the other through a crack between the matted flooring and the bottom of a door. Tobias, with stealthy footstep and hands outstretched on either side, approached these friendly signs and listened. There was not a sound of life within; but he saw that the door was off the latch.
'If you please,' he murmured, and tapped humbly with a single knuckle. There came no response in answer, and he tapped again. Then he thought he heard within the murmur of a voice whispering in a peculiarly level and monotonous tone. He tapped rather more loudly than before and coughed apologetically. Still there was no answer, and he ventured to push the door a little wider and again to signalise his presence by a cough. A little scared by the continued silence, he pushed the door a trifle wider yet, and slowly and with extreme caution, guiding that fiery nose of his across the lintel, he peeped into the room. Not a soul was there; but, to his surprise, the sound of the level and monotonous whisper still went on. After a moment's wonder, he traced this noise to the lamp, which kept up an unintermittent hissing as it burned. Tobias's nerves had never been of the best this thirty years, and he was shaken now by unusual privations, so that if his heart began to flutter and his blood to twitch and sting at the remote suggestion of a fiery serpent, there was nothing in the world for him to wonder at. A keen, swift travelling wind from some open door was wafted by him, and in a second the fiery serpent flashed into a fiery dragon. In fine, the lamp burst with a hideous shock of noise, and after a second's darkness, the whole room was ablaze with burning oil.
The most hopeful of men could not have expected Tobias to cover one half so quickly as he did the ground he passed in his retreat. How he found himself in the open air he never knew; but he was at some considerable distance from the house when his hazy wits returned to him. He looked in the direction in which he supposed it to lie, and could discern nothing in the darkness; but as

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he stood, he heard scream on scream, as if from within the house; and a second later, the same voice calling 'Fire!' in the open air. There were distant shouts in answer; and shortly afterwards a dull glow spread like a red blot upon the blackness of the night, and died away again. It spread itself abroad once more, and grew, second by second, more vivid. Sudden jets and lances of light began to dash through the red blot hither and thither; and in the intervals of the screaming voice he heard distinctly the crackle of burning wood. Then something which he judged to be the chamber window went with a

loud crash and the night was alive with fire. The house was three hundred years old, oak wainscoted, and as dry as tinder.
Tobias turned and ran for dear life, not knowing in what direction he was going.
John and Isaiah had seen Madame safe home, and were returning. They were within a mile of the house, when they came easily to the top of a gentle rise, from which a large extent of country was visible in the daytime.
'I'll get down here, Isaiah,' said John; 'I can get home in ten minutes, and you can go the nearer way. I don't want uncle to know that we have been together.'
'Hillo!' cried Isaiah suddenly, 'what's that? That'll be a rick afire. No; it ain't! There's a window. Look! That's the flash of a window. There it is again! Send I may live, if it ain't Bob Snelling's house!' He dragged John back into the vehicle, and flogged his horses to a furious pace. 'I can tell him as I give you a lift,' he shouted to John, 'afore I saw the fire. He can find no harm in that at such a moment.'
Three or four minutes found them in front of the burning house. The housekeeper was in hysterics in the lane, and one or two women from the neighbouring cottages had taken charge of her. Some half a dozen loungers in smock-frocks stood about smoking and staring at the fire.
'Where's the gaffer?' roared Isaiah.
'Sam Duke's rode off to fetch him,' one of the loungers answered.'He's been at the new shaft all day long.'

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'Well!' cried Isaiah angrily, 'can't none of you do anything? Isn't there one of you as has got the brains to know as fire don't like water?' He dismounted as he spoke, and marching his team to a field-gate at a little distance, tethered the horses there by the reins and came bustling back again. 'Lend a hand here, lads! There's summat to be done, summat to be saved.'
'What's the use on it, Mr. Winter?' one elderly labourer asked him. 'The well's fifty foot deep. It teks two minutes to get a single bucket up.'
Isaiah stared at him for an instant and then nodded. 'It's a pity,' he said sadly, 'to see the old place burn; but that's all there is for it, I reckon. My blessid!' he cried suddenly, 'there's the books!' Before a man could divine his intention or a hand could be stretched out to arrest him, he was half-way up the path towards the door of the burning house, shielding his face from the fierce heat with both arms as he ran. The door was volleying a red smoke, and he disappeared in the midst of it. John dashed after him with a cry, and stood powerless with fear at the gateway. There was an awful pause, and in the middle of it Snelling rode up with the messenger behind him. He saw young John standing at the gate, and he noticed that no man had an eye for him. Everybody was staring with fixed and breathless interest towards the door; and as he followed the general gaze, a figure came plunging through the volleying smoke and staggered down the pathway.
The handful of onlookers raised a husky cheer; and Isaiah, clinging to the gate, gave himself over to an heroic fit of coughing and sneezing.
'What's this?' demanded Snelling in a tone of wonder. 'What brought him there?'
'That's thee, is it, old un?' said Isaiah, recognising the voice and looking up with streaming eyes. 'I just happened to be passing. They told me you wasn't within call, and

I happened to bethink myself of the books, so I just went in and fetched 'em. Here's the deed-box and cash-box into the bargain.'

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Snelling dismounted slowly. 'I was a bit of a fool, I reckon,' he said, 'when I quarrelled with a man like thee.'
'Sayest?' said Isaiah, holding out his hand. He had risked his life to serve the man, and that meant death to malice.
Snelling took the proffered hand and wrung it hard.
'It was a lamp burst in your neveu's bedroom, so they sayin', Mr. Snelling,' said one of the bystanders.
'Ay, ay!' he answered; 'so I'm told.'
The boy was there still, and he himself was houseless by his own vile handiwork.

CHAPTER XXX

SNELLING had plenty of time for thinking as he stood bridle in hand and watched the house burning. He made no doubt whatever, when he saw young John standing there unharmed, that the burning of the house was a chastisement and warning direct from Providence. That was at first and whilst the shock was new. But Isaiah gave another current to his thoughts by a mere phrase. 'You'll be glad you was insured now,' he said. 'You fought agen me pretty hard when I wanted you to do it.'
Why should Providence deal in chastisements which fell upon the wrong shoulders? It would be the insurance office which suffered, and not he. The only things which the insurance could not and would not have covered had been rescued by Isaiah. Providence was on his side rather than against him.
'Who give you the right to use that lamp, Mr. John?' he asked.
'Nobody, sir,' the boy answered; 'I found it in the lumber-room.'
'Well,' said Snelling, pointing with his riding-whip towards the fire, 'that's what comes of a lad acting without

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his elder's knowledge. Thee'st burned thee and myself out of house and home, my lad.'
'I can put you up for the night, Mr. Snelling,' said Isaiah; 'and I shall be glad to do it.'
'Very well, Isaiah,' he answered. 'After this night's work, there should be nothing but good-will on my side. I'll say "Yes" to your offer, and be thankful for it.'
'My horses'll be catching cold,' said Isaiah. 'Tumble up into the brake, Master John. There's nothing there to stop and look at, gaffer. Come along.'
Snelling put his foot into the stirrup and looked across his horse at the still burning house, whilst Isaiah put the rescued books and the cash and deed boxes into the brake. He had fallen into a brown-study when a new call aroused him, and he swung himself slowly into the saddle. Two or three of the yokels offered him a sympathetic 'Good-night, sir,' as he rode away.

'Good-night, my lads—good-night, and thank you kindly,' he answered as he rode away. He knew that he was acting solidly and as became a man.
Mrs. Winter stared at the arrivals, and was by no means disposed to receive Snelling graciously. Even when she heard the news, she was chill and prim with him, remembering the quarrel between him and her lord and master.
'If you'll take a seat here, gaffer,' said Isaiah, 'me and the missis'll see about house-room. Come along, missis, and bustle up a bit.'
'I'm a Christian woman, Isaiah,' said Mrs. Winter, pausing at the foot of the stairs outside, 'and if he was poverty-struck and couldn't afford to pay for a lodgin', I could find it in my heart to give him shelter. But it's no business o' yourn to be fetching your enemy into your own house.'
'I've noticed this twenty year back,' returned Isaiah, 'that when you're going to say anything nasty you start with bein' a Christian woman. Now never you mind what sort of a woman you be, but just remember that the man's in trouble. This ain't the first facer he's had to-day.

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He's come on live sand in the shaft he's sinkin', and that'll be a heavy loss to him, let alone the disappointment. Just you put a bright face on it, missis.'
'You're too good for this world, Isaiah!' his wife made answer; 'you'd let anybody put on you.'
'Not much, I wouldn't,' Isaiah returned; 'and when you see me being put on, it'll be time enough to tell me.'
With the assistance of the serving-maid they got ready the guest-chamber, which had never yet been slept in and was of a ghastly newness. There was a great funeral emblem of a bed, with French-polished pillars and French-polished foot-board, and heavy sombre curtains which closed it in all round. The rest of the furniture was in keeping with this gloomy catafalque, and the whole chamber was as provocative of cheerful fancies as a family vault. But when a great fire had been lit upon the hearth and candles set upon the chimney-piece, it wore an aspect something less gloomy, and Snelling, being inducted into it when all was ready, nodded approval of it.
'By the time you've had a wash,' said Isaiah, 'supper will be ready. You'll find your way down again.'
At table, Mrs. Winter stood to wait upon him as of old, but he refused this flatly. 'I'll take neither bite nor sup in the house till you sit down, Mrs. Winter.'
She took her seat, not without pride at meeting her old master on equal terms, and was glad that Madame Vigne's visit had given her an opportunity of airing the new black silk. Mr. Snelling might, if he liked, think that she wore it regularly; and for the matter of that, Isaiah could have borne it if she had chosen to be extravagant.
Little was said during the meal; and when, after it, Snelling had smoked his nightly pipe and drunk his glass of whisky-and-water, he asked for the rescued books and carried them upstairs. Then he sat down beside the guest-room fire, and drawing the two candles together, began to study his accounts. 'That's lucky,' he said. 'Three hundred and twenty against Dixon. I shouldn't have thought it was more than a couple of hundred. Why, there's Beasley again. Six hundred. I should never have

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had the face to tell him it was more than three, unless I'd had the book to back me. My patience! Here's Ready. I should ha' been forty or fifty out on that.' He went over page after page, tracing the lines with a heavy forefinger as he read. By-and-by he took out a pencil and began to figure on the back of an old envelope. 'If Isaiah hadn't saved the books, I should ha' been two or three thousand pounds out of pocket,' he mused. 'He's a high-couraged chap is Isaiah. I doubt if I should ha' had the heart to face that fire myself. Theer's a servant for a man to have thrown over! The little chap's worth his weight in gold. If it hadn't been for the lad, I should never have lost him.'

The day's long waiting, with the crushing loss and disappointment at the end of it, the episode of the fire, his guilty hope, and its failure of fulfilment, all weighed heavily upon him, and bore his spirit down into a sort of dull meekness. His hatred and his egotism alike seemed dead.

He burned the scrap of paper on which he had made his calculations, and stowed away the books beneath his pillow. Then, more than half mechanically, he thrust the window curtains aside and drew up the blind to look upon the outer night. He had not known in what direction he was turned until the glowing mass of the ruined house half a mile away met his gaze. It looked less distant than it really was, seen through the dense darkness; and a bare winter tree or two, silhouetted against its brightness, gave it an aspect infinitely mournful and dreary to his fancy. Now and again a flame played up from the red smouldering pile, and brought hidden things fantastically to light.

He had never been aware of any affection for the place; but it came to his mind now that his mother had been born within its walls and had spent her girlhood there. That touch of memory brought a strange heaviness to his heart. Things were not going well with him. He doubted if he were doing well with himself, and he thought simply that his mother would have been sorry to have known him as he was, with his foiled purposes, and all these disasters

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about him, and the sense of estrangement and loneliness which oppressed him.

He drew down the blind again, closed the curtains, and undressed for the night. Sleep had always been averse to him in a strange room, and the events of the day had been unusually disturbing. He tossed and tumbled in the close gloom of the enfolding hangings, until at last he could bear their confinement no longer. He got out of bed and drew the curtains close to the poles, to admit the light of the fire, and having done this, went striding up and down the room. Isaiah had left a nightshirt for him, which reached no lower on his big frame than the kilt of a Highlander, and every time he passed the great mahogany wardrobe, he caught a grotesque reflection of himself in the mirror which fronted it, striding bare-legged in the semi-darkness. He took vigorous exercise in this way for half an hour, striving to banish thought, and finally plunged into bed again. There was still no hope of sleep for him; and his glance wandered about the room until it lighted on a cornice, the harmless bravura plaster scrolls of which somehow, in their own murky corner, assumed the semblance of a death's-head with eyes in it. The thing

had a strange likeness to his nephew John, and he lay and stared at it like a man fascinated. We are all cowards in the dim midnight of our thoughts, and there is something perpetually at the elbow of the bravest man alive which may at any moment overwhelm him with an unspeakable fear. Had the fire been placed this way or that by the distance of a yard, the harmless plaster scrolls could have worn no such aspect as they owned. The man knew that; but the live, staring, horrible, accusing eyes—John's eyes—dwelt on him with an insupportable appeal. They seemed to search him to the marrow, and there was a something denouncing in them, a promise to speak his secret to the world. His soul lay bare to the mystic eyes which light and shadow had created in that corner, and he sweated and trembled in a waking nightmare. Providence for him? Providence on his side? In what had he prospered since that demoniac thought had taken hold of him? He was so much poorer in this last

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two years that another eight or ten spent in the like manner would ruin him and leave him a pauper. He was isolated from the world; and if he had known the lines, they would have seemed apt to him: 'There is no creature loves me, and when I die no soul will pity me.'

He lay shaking in a tragic pity of himself. He would break with this lust of wealth, this fiend of avarice which had tempted him. He would leave the lad alone, and covet that which was his no longer. The watch under his pillow ticked a furious warning, the gloomier shadows hid denouncing faces, the hum of the quiet night was thick with threatening whispers. A veil, which had never fallen before, seemed drawn aside, and the supernatural unknown was everywhere. He dreaded lest it should grow tangible to touch and visible to sight, and it was the more horrible that it did neither.

He slept at last, and even in the act of falling to sleep, when he could not resist for weariness, he had a horror of his dreams. No dreams came; but in the cold gray light of the winter morning he felt that he dared not pass another night in that chamber.

By the morning light at the breakfast table, Isaiah appeared a little smoke-begrimed and singed. 'I knowed nothing about it at the time,' said Isaiah; 'but I've lost half a whisker, and my cheek's that raw I haven't got the pluck to rub the grime off of it. I reckon the hair'll grow again, and if it don't, I must trim the other to suit it.'

'You've ruined your new black broadcloth overcoat,' said his wife; 'you'll niver be able to put it on your back again; and if Mr. Snelling's the man I've always took him for, he'll do no less than pay for it.'

'My blessid!' said Isaiah. 'Better is a dinner of herbs than to dwell with a contentious woman on the house-tops. Why, missis, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.'

If Snelling had been a sensitive man with regard to other people's feelings, this small passage-of-arms might have made him reluctant to announce his intention of leaving the house. As it was it helped him. 'Me and Isaiah will have a settling-up, Mrs. Winter,' he said quietly.

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'Never you fear about that. At the same time, mum, it was my business to find that out and not yours to tell me. You might have trusted me to do it. There's been a good many things said agen me of late; but nobody till now has ventur'd to tell me as I didn't pay my way.'

The pair of steppers legitimately exhausted Isaiah's accommodation; but he had contrived somehow or other to stable Snelling's horse; and when his old employer expressed a wish that it should be brought round to the door, he himself saw that that service was performed. Before mounting, Snelling shook hands with him.

'Your missis,' he said, 'was always a bit of a tartar in a quiet way, and as long as her lives her'll never forgive me for offering you the bag. After last night, you and me, I tek it, are likely to be friends. I must ride away and get a thing or two to keep myself decent; and in the meantime I shall put up at the Barfield Arms.'

'As you like, gaffer,' returned Isaiah, and went within-doors to deliver his mind to Mrs. Winter.

Snelling's way to the Barfield Arms led him naturally past the ruins of his house. There was quite a crowd about the gateway, and Farmer Shorthouse was conspicuous there in a tall dogcart, with Cecilia by his side. The rejected lover had never spoken a word to the girl since the night when he had overheard her conference with her father. She held out her hand to him now with a sympathetic look; and when he leaned over in his saddle to take it in his own, she gave him a warm and friendly pressure.

'Oh, Mr. Snelling,' she said, 'I am so sorry for you! The house your mother was born in! Father has been telling me. Such a beautiful old place too. I know that you must feel it deeply.' She had never been so kind to him in her life, and her voice and face and the pressure of her hand awoke a new hope in him. She might not be indifferent to him, after all. Perhaps it had been no more than the foolish tyranny of his own manner when he had been excited by finding her with Jousserau which had frightened her away from him. If his proposal had seemed wholly impossible in her sight, she would never have taken

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a fortnight to consider her answer. On the very day on which her refusal came, her father had been confident of her consent. And since with him to ask and not to have was the surest way to longing, he was hotly in love with her by this time.

'It's been a bit of a blow,' he answered; 'I don't deny it.' He was bent on showing himself in a favourable light, and her reminder of his mother helped him to remember his last night's thoughts. 'The money loss is covered; but there's things gone there'—pointing to the ruins—'that no money can buy back again. As you say, Miss Shorthouse, my mother was born and lived up in them old walls. I thought of that last night, and it give me a sore heart, I promise you. Just you think, Shorthouse,' he added, addressing the farmer, 'how one man may be mistook in regard of another. There was Isaiah Winter, whom I gave the sack to, believing him to be my enemy, and it's him that fetches my books and deeds and cash-box out of the fire at the risk of his own life. He saved me two or three thousand pound by that—maybe more. He might ha' let 'em burn, and never have been ill thought on. I slept in his house last night, and yet it's only like yesterday that we parted ill friends.'

'Well!' cried the farmer, 'I'm glad you've come to be of the old mind again. Isaiah's a good sort, always was, and ever will be. But Bob, old lad, thou'lt hardly have a place to eat thy Christmas dinner in. Come and tek it along with me. You've never put foot across the threshold sence—'
Cecilia's warning hand restrained him from completing the sentence. Snelling looked at her, wondering if she would confirm the invitation.
'Pray, come, Mr. Snelling,' the girl said innocently; 'we shall be very glad to see you.'
'Well,' he answered, 'I will, and thank you. There's my hand upon it.'
She gave him the same friendly pressure as before, not guessing what fancies her manner aroused in him. To her own thinking, the past was dead and buried, and she did

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not so much as dream of a revival of it. But Snelling rode on more than half triumphant. If his misfortunes had wakened kindness in her heart, they were easily to be borne, and even welcome. He had never expected to feel as he did about Cecilia. So long as he had felt certain about her, he had been indifferent; but when the certainty had been shifted to the other side and stood against him, it grew to be another matter. Thousands of men have discovered that middle age is the true time for the growth of a royal passion; Snelling made the discovery in his turn, and wondered at himself.
'I was never the man to be beaten,' he said as he rode on, invigorated by this new thrill of feeling, and enlivened throughout the whole of his burly and muscular frame by the keen winter air. 'I won't be beaten now. If she'll think better of it—and she looks as if she might—there's little I wouldn't do to get her. There's coal below that land of mine, I know, and if man can get at it, I'll do it. As for money, I'll find her enough for a titled lady; and as for men, if that's in question—' He squared his great shoulders exultingly and looked down at his massive limbs. 'That's an arm could take care of a woman,' he said to himself, stretching his right hand abroad. 'I'm none o' them whipper-snapper chaps as thin as a turkey's leg, as looks as if you could crack 'em like a stick o' sealing-wax. There's pith and substance in me; and if I cared to know my value, I daresay there's a many young woman as might ha' looked kindly on me.'
So, all things considered, he rode on in high feather; and once alighted at the Barfield Arms, ordered rooms there for a month to come, and beat the landlord's prices down in quite his old victorious manner. When his arrangements for his stay were completed, he sent a messenger in search of Mr. Proctor; and that gentleman appearing in answer to his call in the course of the afternoon, he hailed him with a cheerful countenance. 'Look here,' he broke out; 'can't we circumvent that sand?'
'We can try,' said the cautious Scot. 'Ye don't want

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another sand-mine. There are surface indications more or less; and if you wish it, I'll make a careful survey.'
'Yes,' said Snelling, 'I do wish it. I'm bad to beat; and I'm not agoing to see my neighbours get all the plums out of the pudding and me get nothing, if I can help it. You

can get a plot of my land and my nephew's from Roland, the surveyor, and I'm game to make another try whenever you decide.'

'Well, Mr. Snelling,' said the engineer, 'you're acting with courage, but I think ye're acting wisely. From what I've seen of the opening up of the district, I'm not inclined to think that the sandbed is a large one. I think on the north-west we're safe from it. We'll be farther away from facilities for cartage; but that will really matter very little. I'll have a good look at things, and let you know my opinion as soon as maybe.'

Snelling's heart was full of happy augury. In spite of failure and disaster, he had never felt so hopeful. A kind look, a kind word, a friendly pressure of the hand had done it all. If he won her, he would abandon his schemes against his nephew. With Cecilia's fortune in his hands, and the mineral wealth of his own land laid open, he would have enough. He would live at peace with mankind. He would be content with his own.

CHAPTER XXXI

M. JOUSSERAU had been to Paris, and was now expected back again. He had devoted the whole of the late autumn months to the execution of a picture of English country life, nothing less than a harvest-home supper; a rather difficult subject, it may be confessed, for a French artist to handle. He had made studies from a score of the yokels of the neighbourhood, and had found ample opportunities of studying his theme en bloc at the feasts given by Shorthouse, Gregg, and Day. He had had no mind to

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wait until spring for the exhibition of his work, and indeed at this time the school he represented and the authorities of the Salon were not very much in harmony. Courbet was rising to his glory; but the poetic school, with Corot at its head, still held its place, and, for a poetic school, had a good deal of fight in it. The salons of the great picture-dealers were the nursing-ground of realistic genius in those days, and M. Durand-Ruel gave Jousserau's picture a home and a welcome in the Rue Lafitte. French art was a little more home-loving thirty years ago than it is even to-day, and when painters ran abroad at all, they went to Constantinople, to Naples, to Madrid, or Cairo. None of them had dreamed of invading England, where the local colour was popularly supposed to consist of one dim universal gray; so that Jousserau's little bit of truth, cut out of the living panorama of English life, took Paris quite captive for a week or two. The little man was feted and stormed at, praised and abused beyond his merits or demerits. He became quite a personage, and his picture was sold at a price which astonished nobody so much as the painter, before it had been on exhibition a fortnight.

He had written a painfully worded letter announcing his return, and Isaiah was at the railway station to meet him, pleasantly conscious of the increased importance of his own personal aspect, and prepared for Jousserau's astonishment at the pair of steppers. These he had left in charge of a street-boy whilst he warmed himself at the waiting-room fire. He had not been there long when he became aware that a shuffling step had paused upon the platform, and that a nose was flattened against one of the window-panes. Somebody outside was peering at him, and he was not long in discovering that

the somebody was Mr. Orme. Tobias was hatless, and his gray unvenerable wisps of hair were waving hither and thither in the frosty wind.
Isaiah, deserting his comfortable place by the fire, walked on to the platform to look at him. 'Hillo!' he said, with no great favour. 'What brings you here?'—

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Tobias stretched a pair of dirty blue hands abroad, and stood there trembling.—'What's the matter with you?'
'Mr. Winter,' said Tobias, 'I am a wretched outcast. I have only had one meal for three days.'
'Eh?' returned Isaiah. 'What?'
'Don't think I mean to be impertinent, sir,' Mr. Orme pleaded; 'but if it hadn't been for me, sir, you might have adorned a very different sphere. It was my discovery, Mr. Winter, and you profited by it. If I had had only a little money, I might be rolling in thousands now.'
'You've got no claim on me, you know,' said Isaiah. 'You've got no right to come and ask me for a penny-piece.'
'I know I haven't, sir,' the wretched object answered, weeping; 'but I'm in great distress. I had to walk about the fields last night, Mr. Winter. I'm nearly dead. I wish I were. I was brought up by respectable parents, Mr. Winter, who never expected me to come to this.'
'Ah!' returned Isaiah, 'you've lived to be a credit to 'em.'—It was needful to be gruff with Tobias, because he meant to help him.—'There's a shilling for you.' He dropped a coin into the dirty outstretched hand and turned away; but Tobias came shuffling after him.
'I beg your pardon, sir; you have made a mistake; you have given me a sovereign.'
'Well,' returned Isaiah, with an open burst of anger, 'can't you hold your jaw? D'ye think I'm such a fool as that? Get out with you, and let me hope I've seen the last on ye.'
'Yes, sir,' returned Tobias, and so vanished, hugging the sovereign greedily. He was back two minutes later, held in ignominious custody by a porter.
'This chap, sir,' said the porter, touching his hat in respect to Isaiah's broadcloth, 'has been trying to change a quid at the booking-office. He says you give it to him, and I've been sent round to make inquiries.'
At this Isaiah was conscious of a violent shame, and to cover his confusion, shook his fist threateningly at Mr. Orme. 'Look here,' he cried, 'I won't be bothered with

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you. Stupid old owl! Why couldn't you change the money somewhere else?'
'I was very hungry, sir,' Tobias answered.
'Get out o' my sight!' roared Isaiah. 'It's all right,' he added to the porter; 'let him go.'
This time Mr. Orme vanished finally; and the train shortly afterwards arriving, Isaiah sought the platform, and saw Jousserau alight. The little man was in a state of beaming pleasure, and shook hands with his host a good half-dozen times.

'I have good fortune at Paris,' he said gaily. 'News? Oh yes —the best of news. My picture is paid for, thousands. Not pounds. Shillings. Fifteen thousand.'
Isaiah bent his brows in calculation. 'Why, that's seven hundred and fifty pound,' he said.
Jousserau nodded with a smile, not knowing that he was over-estimating his own gains. 'I shall paint two more,' he said, 'for the same man He is Englishman in Paris. A lord. Very rich, and very kind. Oho! I tell you I am made man, Mr. Vintare.'
'So am I,' Isaiah answered. 'There's a pair on us. Where's your luggage? Is all that yours? It's well I brought the brake with me.'
'I have many things,' said Jousserau. 'Some little things for everybody. For Madame Vintare,' he added in a delighted whisper, 'a bonnet. Oh, such a bonnet! The very last bonnet of Paris.' He made a vivid sweep with both hands, as if he were describing the bonnet's outline, and it were the size of a church steeple. 'Nothing was like it, ever!' he said, laughing outright. 'Madame Vintare shall be proud. There is something else for you. You, my friend, shall be astonish. You shall wait to see.' With this he hurried up a porter, bewildering the man with instructions; and saw all his property transferred to Isaiah's brake.
The two had no sooner reached home than the little man set to work to unpack; and Mrs. Winter, who had received word of the bonnet from Isaiah, stood by in natural feminine expectancy. A wonderful structure came

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to sight. It was designed, as students of the fashions will remember, on the principle of the Norman arch. The top of the archway was filled up with the most exquisite artificial flowers. The whole edifice was rich with lace, and at the bottom was an enormous bow of the finest pink satin. Mrs. Winter, beholding this work of art, clasped her hands together in a blending of wondering admiration and dismay.
'Is that the sort of thing the women gone about in wheer you've been?' she asked.
'Yes,' said Jousserau gravely. 'All the ladies wear it now—all the ladies of the great life.'
'Oh!' returned Mrs. Winter with a long-drawn sigh; 'it might do for them; but a woman 'ud be hooted as wore it in a civilised country.'
Jousserau found this declaration so amusing that he threw himself helplessly upon the horse-hair sofa and laughed with peal on peal. Mrs. Winter felt her dignity offended, but she was on the look-out for further wonders and could not afford to say anything. The little man's remembrance for Isaiah was packed in a long wooden case which had a sliding top. This being removed revealed a quantity of soft paper-wrapping; and this in turn being taken away, displayed a bronze figure, draped, poised on one foot and holding the right hand on high. In addition to this there was a tiny clock, with a polished steel rod projecting from it. Jousserau set the bronze figure on the mantel-shelf, and then by an artifice which some Parisian clockmaker had made known to him, attached the rod to a bit of straightened wire-spring the bronze lady held between finger and thumb, and lo! the clock itself became a pendulum, with no apparent source of motion. The good couple sat down before this marvel in a delighted wonder, and there was for a time no end to their admiration.

'You see, Madame Vintare,' said Jousserau, 'it is only in civilised countries people know to make these fine things.'
Whilst they were still at their height of wonder, Shorthouse dropped in, and announced that he was on his way to see Snelling.

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'Do not go yet,' cried Jousserau. 'There is somethings for you from Paris, of which I will pray that you accept. Behold it.' He had bought for Shorthouse a noble meerschaum pipe, with a long cherry-wood stem and an amber mouthpiece. The bowl had a Russia-leather silk-lined case to protect it whilst it was being smoked or handled, and the pipe altogether was a very gorgeous affair indeed. 'Will you do me the pleasure to smoke sometimes this?' he asked.
'I should be almost afraid to handle it,' returned the farmer. 'Excuse me, Mr. Jousserong, but do you mind a plain man asking a plain question?'
'Why, no,' said Jousserau, looking up at him with raised eyebrows.
'Our vicar,' said Shorthouse, 'is a judge of them things, and he tells me I might ha' paid ten or twelve times as much as I did for them pictures, and have got no better. Now nothing for nothing is most folks's motto. You don't find these things'—holding up the pipe—'growing on the hedges in your country, any more than we do here. Now I want to know, and there's no offence meant, Mr. Jousserong, what you pick me out to do these favours for?'
'I do not pick you out for favours,' said the little artist. 'For the pictures, it was pleasure to paint them. You, my dear Mr. Short-house, are English. You are so much English—excuse me—I cannot tell where else to find you. You are, as they say, John Bull. I want to paint John Bull. I find John Bull; I paint heem. Shall I charge money for what I want to do myself to please? For Mees Cecilia'—he blushed a little here, but not one of his auditors noticed it—'she is charming young lady, very beautiful, and I had great pleasure when I made her portrait.'
'He's got an eye for things,' said Isaiah. 'I never noticed it particular till I see your picture; but I've thought it since, and said it to the missis, many a time, a John Bull-er lookin' sort o' man I never looked at than he's drawed you out to be. It's as like as one new six-

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pence is like another, and it's John Bull all over. He's right, Shorthouse, he's right.'
'Well,' said the farmer, with a complacent waggle of his head, and a smile which would have way in spite of him, 'perhaps he may be.'
If Jousserau had searched for a year, he could have found nothing more flattering to tell him. It was the farmer's pride and boast to be thought English to the marrow, and it cheered him likewise to know that his qualities were evident even to a foreigner. 'You keep an open mind, Mr. Jousserong, and you'd seem not to be afraid to speak it.'
'Why not?' the artist asked. 'There is no harm in an Englishman being English. I would not be anything but French of the south if I could help it.'

That was a proposition which in Shorthouse's mind would stand much chewing before it could be assimilated. An Englishman was naturally proud of being an Englishman, but that a foreigner should be proud of being a foreigner, and should not envy a freeborn Briton his characteristics and privileges, was hardly to be believed.
'Come,' said the farmer; 'the kindness can't be left o' one side. I shall be glad if you'll eat your bit o' Christmas dinner along with us. Isaiah, I shall count on thee and the missis also. Now, that's a bargain, if you please.'
The invitation was accepted on all sides, and the farmer went away, bearing his new pipe in its cardboard box along with him. After the space of two or three minutes, he came back again, thrusting his head round the parlour door and calling ''Zaiah!' in a hoarse and hollow murmur. Isaiah turning at the voice, the farmer beckoned him by a backward motion of the head, and having thus drawn him from the parlour, signalled to him with a certain finger to close the door, and then nodded him sideways down the passage as if in search of a place for private conference. Isaiah followed him to the front door of the house, and there he paused, with a wink of serious and subtle meaning.
''Zaiah,' he said, 'I've got a notion.' He laid a hand

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upon Isaiah's sleeve, and leaning forward, breathed a hoarse inquiry: 'Do you think as that young chap can be asparking up to my Cecilia?'
'N-o-o!' said Isaiah, in a long-drawn growl of almost scornful wonder. 'What's put that maggot in your head?'
The farmer tilted his hat and rubbed his hair with a look of perplexity; then he nodded two or three times with a scowl of indecision and went away without another word. He cast the question he had asked Isaiah up and down in his mind as he drove, and succeeded in coming to no conclusion. He had business with Snelling at the Barfield Arms, and went straight thither. He was not quite certain as to whether he had done wisely in inviting Jousserau since Snelling had already promised to be his guest. He knew something of the distaste which existed on both sides, and began to think that he might have proposed to bring gunpowder and fire together.
'I don't think ayther of 'em 'ud quarrel before the women-folks,' he said; 'but I'm afraid I've made a bit of a fool of myself all the same.' He decided finally that he would speak of the matter to Snelling, as if it were the most casual thing in the world, and wait for him to offer an objection in case he saw one.
'Bob, ode lad!' he broke out on arriving, 'I just looked in at 'Zaiah Winter's on my way here. That young French chap's back again, and I've asked 'Zaiah and his missis and him to come and tek a bite with us on Christmas day. You and 'Zaiah having made it up again, I thought it was a friend-like thing to do.'
'I shall be glad to meet Isaiah,' Snelling answered quietly; and since he made no allusion to Jousserau, Short-house made none either, and the question was allowed to slumber.
It took and kept a place in Snelling's thoughts, however, and the more he looked at it the less he liked it. 'Short-house means kindly,' he said; 'but he's a dunderhead. He's got no more thought of insulting me when he asks me to dine with an enemy than he'd have if he asked me to dine with a friend. The man's a fool, pure and simple.'

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He grew so hot at times that he vowed over and over again not to go. He would not sit at the same table with a foreign scoundrel who believed and had spoken the truth about him. It was curious, perhaps, but Snelling could not help thinking it rather base on Jousserau's part to have believed the truth. He was quite certain that he himself would have been less ready to suspect evil, and with that amazing dexterity which the foolishest casuist has at his command when he excuses his own wrongdoing, he made out that though the crime with which his enemies charged him was not anything particularly terrible, it was altogether horrible to accuse a man of it on less than the directest proof. In another man, the intended offence against young John would not only have been inexcusable, but as vilely and basely criminal to Snelling's mind as to that of any normal and right-thinking creature. But he was conscious of his own excuses. If another man had meditated the crime, he would have known how to think about it.

Shorthouse had offered him a chance of reinstating himself on something like the old footing with Cecilia. The girl seemed kinder than she had been, and perhaps repented herself of the refusal. It would be unwise to throw away the opportunity afforded him, and yet his pride could hardly stomach Jousserau's presence.

'Why doesn't he stick to his own folks?' he said savagely. 'If the man's a gentleman, and has a right to hobnob with Sir Ferdinand and my lord, why doesn't he stop among his own people? I reckon the lords and ladies in his own country wouldn't have anything to say to him, and that's why he comes over here, lying away honest men's characters, and poisoning girls' minds against their servants. I won't sit at the same table with the fellow.'

He stayed in this mind obstinately, with occasional feeble gusts which blew the other way, until Christmas eve. He said nothing of his intention to Shorthouse, but relied upon himself to find excuses.

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CHAPTER XXXII

'MERRY Christmas, sir,' said the man who brought in Snelling's shaving water. The occupant of the bed grunted an answer which by its sound had little merriment or cordiality in it; but the man who waited on him was either in a resolute Christmas humour or did not notice Snelling's tone. 'Lovely morning, sir, real reg'lar downright old-fashioned Christmas, sir. Snow six inches deep, sir, everywhere; and the wind that cold, sir, it cuts you like a razor.'

'What's there to be merry about in that?' growled Snelling.

'Don't know, sir,' the man returned. 'Christmas weather, sir. It's the fashion to be cold at Christmas, sir; and a man might as well be out of the world as out of the fashion.'

'Very well,' said Snelling. 'You needn't wait; I don't want you chattering here.'

The man retired, so far unabashed that Snelling heard him whistling in the corridor outside.

'What's Christmas to him, the fool?' he thought. 'What's it likely to be to me?'

He was not the man he had used to be. He had found out his nerves, and that is a woful discovery for any man to make. He slept ill, and had dreams which he could not remember, but which he knew were horrible. The sense of them clung to him in his waking hours and irritated and depressed him. He began to find himself liable to many fits of anger when things went wrong, and he knew very well that his chill rustic dignity of a year back would have served his turn better with the world.
He dressed and went downstairs to a lonely breakfast in the coffee-room. A keen north-easterly wind was blowing, and the chimney smoked. At the first mouthful of

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breakfast he took, his teeth grated on a morsel of burnt coal which had fallen into the dish. He rang the hell angrily and rated the waiter; but the exercise afforded him little relief, if any. Other people were looking forward to a day of pleasure. He was looking forward to a day altogether blank and purposeless, a lonely and unsocial time beguiled by no occupation. The feeling of other people's contentment and happiness emphasised his solitude, and he felt bitter with the whole world. The landlord came in whilst he was marching gloomily up and down the room.
'You'll be going out to dinner, of course, Mr. Snelling?'
'Who?' said Snelling. 'Me? No.'
'Not going out to dinner on Christmas day, sir?' said the landlord.
'I suppose,' his guest returned, straightening himself, 'that a man may dine where he pleases.'
'Oh, certainly, sir—certainly, sir! To be sure, Mr. Snelling—to be sure. But unluckily, sir, I've given the cook a holiday, and she's gone already.'
'That's very pretty management,' Snelling answered angrily. 'So a man's to go without his dinner because it's Christmas day?'
'I never thought, sir,' said the landlord.
'Then you ought to have thought,' said the outraged customer. 'You ought to ha' come to me and be taught what to think. You've got a man staying in your house, and you send your cook away without asking by your leave or with your leave! You must give me leave to tell you, sir, you don't know how to keep a house of entertainment.'
'Really, Mr. Snelling,' said the landlord, 'I never supposed—'
'That's what I'm telling you,' returned Snelling. 'You don't seem to have the sense to suppose.'
'I'm very sorry, sir,' returned the landlord. 'But if it comes to that, I've kept this house for thirty years without any help from Mr. Snelling, and I shall look

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respectfully for'ard to keeping a roof over my head without his help in future.'
'Enough said,' Snelling answered. 'I shall quit the house when it suits my pleasure. We need say no more.'
He and the landlord, who had been neighbours since his boyhood and excellent friends hitherto, parted with bad blood between them. He was in a mood less like Christmas than ever, and last Saturday's newspaper, blotted, limp, and tattered, made him but an

indifferent companion. When all's said and done, he had a superstitious reverence for the social superstitions of the day. It was a day on which to eat and drink and be merry, and not a day on which to mope alone and to live on the cold scraps of the larder. Christmas had never been particularly merry to him personally, so far as he could remember, for he was not a merry-making man; but he had a rooted respect for the social tradition, and Christmas without its roast sirloin, its turkey and sausages, and its plum-pudding, was a mere monstrosity of time. The very paupers had their beef and plum-pudding, and made their hearts merry on that one day of the year.

In an hour or two the landlord put in a second appearance. He was attired by this time in his best clothes, and was evidently ready to pay his Christmas visit. 'I hope there's no ill-will betwixt us, Mr. Snelling,' he said. 'There's none o' my side. It was natural in you to be a bit angry, and I suppose it was natural in me to tek offence at it. I'd wish you a merry Christmas with all my heart, if it looked like much chance of your having one.'

'Theer, theer!' returned Snelling with half a sigh; 'let's say no more about it. You'd have asked if you'd ha' thought about it. It's not your business, nor yet your way, to be disobliging. I was a bit too peppery, I daresay.'

'Come!' said the landlord, 'that's comfortable. I've got a drop o' brown sherry in the private bar, the like of which you don't see often. Just a glass now, Mister Snelling. It's Christmas morning, and that's what you can't say every day in the year.'

Snelling assented; and he and the plump landlord and

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the meagre landlady drank a glass of wine together and wished each other a merry Christmas. He had never felt so lonely in his life, and he could have clung to the landlord for company's sake. The pair drove away in their dogcart, and he waved them from the door. Then the one servant remaining in the house locked the place up and retired to her own quarters. The silence of the house was oppressive, and the loneliness and monotony of the minutes grew to seem scarcely endurable. The fear lest he should incense Shorthouse by his absence, and through him, should offend Cecilia, had always been present to his mind, but never so strongly as now. His lonely misery pushed him towards company, and was strong enough to have made the worse appear the better reason. If, as he more than three-fourths suspected, Jousserau was his rival, he himself was doing a foolish thing in staying away, and in giving his enemy a chance to put as dark a complexion as he could upon his character. On a sudden it seemed an act of madness to stay away. The one chance he had of a reconciliation with Cecilia lay in this Christmas dinner. If Jousserau's rivalry were real, and not a mere creation of his fancy, his one course was to let her see the two pretenders to her hand together and judge between them. He was very far from being afraid of comparison, for he was simply powerless to judge of the faculties and charms which were on the artist's side.

'The wench'll want to marry a man, I reckon,' he thought, as he surveyed the reflection of his own stalwart shoulders. 'I could break that little chap across my knee. What's she likely to see in a fellow like him, a little black-a-vised chap the colour of a piece of coal? She'll want to marry a white man if she marries at all. If it got into her head as I was afraid to face him because of what he said about me—why, I've been no less than a

fool to think of shunning him. The only way's to face her, and never to give her a minute alone with him if I can help it. I'll put Shorthouse up to it too. He's not the man to let his daughter marry a foreigner.'

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Animated by this new resolve, he rang the bell, and the lonely servant answered from her distant quarters. 'I'm going out, young woman,' he said, addressing her, 'and I mayn't be home till midnight. See there's somebody left to sit up for me.'
The girl promised, and retired; and he went up to his own room to dress. He attired himself with scrupulous exactness. The fire had destroyed his wardrobe, and he had been obliged to provide himself with a complete outfit, so that everything he owned was brand-new. Since he took rather an unusual pride in his person for a man of his social position, the things were of the best. When he was fully attired, he surveyed himself with complete approval; and then summoning the girl anew, ordered her to undo the fastenings of the door, and so passed into the street. A four-mile walk in bright winter weather would make by no means a bad preparation for dinner. The six inches of snow upon the ground made little difference to him; but for comfort's sake, he carried a change of shoes neatly done up in brown paper under his arm.
He found, like most men, that bodily motion in the open air lent a brighter colour to his thoughts; and as he walked, his courage rose so fast that, by the time he had reached the old church in the vale and had so got fairly into the country, he felt like a man foredoomed to conquer. In his lower moods these fluctuations disturbed him, and he recognised his own changeableness of temper with great misgiving. But when the pleasanter hour recurred, it fed and warmed him like meat and fire, and he was always persuaded that the change was permanent.
He reached the house, and found that he had only just arrived in time. Jousserau was there already, and so also were Isaiah and Mrs. Winter, who had brought young John with them. There also was a Beacon-Hargate lover with his lass, a young lady from Heydon Hey, an old schoolfellow of Cecilia's, who obviously triumphed in her engagement, and audibly instructed her fiancé in table matters.
'George, pour out your wine into the little glass, not

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the big one. George, don't leave your napkin folded on the table. George, don't eat with your knife; I do declare you make me shudder.' By these and similar exhortations, the young lady from Heydon Hey made the dinner-hour a time of joy, and indisputably established her superiority of breeding over the young gentleman from Beacon-Hargate.
Cecilia sat at one end of the table, and the farmer at the other, and Snelling was rejoiced to find himself placed on the girl's right. Jousserau sat by the farmer at the other end, in a position where he could not even exchange a glance with her. The yeoman addressed most of his conversation to his fair neighbour; and his alternate drawl and snap sounded pretty constantly, as he regaled her with a disquisition on the breeding of beef, a subject which arose naturally from the presence of the roast sirloin.

'Theer's nothing like the rough Scotch for flavour, when they're in prime order and have been rested and well fed. A man 'ud no more think of buying 'em as milchkine than he'd think of marrying an ugly old woman for love.' This was Mr. Snelling's notion of gallantry, a genial mixture of implied compliment with solid converse. 'Mixed with the South Devon, I've known 'em do pretty well in that way even; but as for milk, for yield and quality, there's nothing like the Hereford.'

Jousserau talked with even less fluency than Snelling; but Cecilia thought that if he had been seated near her, he might have chosen other and more attractive themes. It is hard to be an unfavoured rival. The poor creature can do nothing right. The stupidest banalities of the chosen one will shine brighter than his most brilliant repartee, and if he happen to be the dull man of the two, the lady's conception of him is indeed mournful. Snelling flowed on unconscious so long as the dinner lasted, and conceived himself to be immensely entertaining and polite.

When at last the meal was over—and a Christmas dinner in that part of the world is not a thing to be hurried or to be treated lightly—the gentlemen sat down to a bottle of port, and the ladies retired to the best parlour

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for tea. The whole meal was strange to Jousserau, and be remarked it and its incidents with a humorous interest. It was about his ordinary hour for breakfast; and the appetites displayed by Isaiah, Snelling, and the farmer, and even by the young man from Beacon-Hargate, astonished him. The young man from Beacon-Hargate was at a disadvantage by reason of the watchfulness of the young lady from Heydon Hey; but he was a trencherman of no mean quality, and gained Shorthouse's cordial good-will by his strict attention to the business of the moment.

The little artist drank his single glass of wine, and found himself reproached by his host. 'The bottle's with you, Mr. Jousserong,' said Shorthouse. 'Fill up and pass it on. Niver keep your neighbour thirsty of a Christmas day, of all days in the year.'

'Thank you,' said Jousserau. 'I have drink enough. I do never drink of a morning. I have not your English head.'—Snelling sat warm, full-fed, and self-satisfied, and complacently despised him.—'If you make no objection, I will join the ladies and take with them a cup of tea.'

'Let him go!' cried Snelling. A fellow who could hardly put two words together, who shirked his bottle after the first glass at a Christmas dinner, and stood five feet four in his stockings, was a creature a true-born Briton might safely despise.

'Oh, come!' said Shorthouse; 'we must mek a better Englishman o' you than that. That ain't how you keep Christmas in your own country.'

'We do not much keep the Christmas in our country,' Jousserau answered; and the four who heard this statement fell back in their chairs and stared at him. Here, indeed, was a heathen state of things, an utter barbarism, the like of which they had never dreamed of.

With few further excuses, the foreigner was permitted to withdraw. The better-instructed Britons remained behind, and got solemnly and stupidly bemused on the heavy and ripe old port which was the pride of Shorthouse's heart, and had been in his cellar when his father died. By-and-by they were aware of music in the adjoining

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room, to which the women-folk and Jousserau had withdrawn. This made them all the more comfortable and contented with themselves, for they knew that if they had been in the chamber where the music was going on, they would have been expected to sit mumchance and to look solemn. They looked solemn, and sat for the most part silent now; but then there is all the difference in the world between doing a thing because it comes natural at the moment and doing it in obedience to an ordinance you despise. Not one of the quartette knew anything about music, or cared more than he knew. The heady old port, the after-dinner lethargy, the warm fire, and the angles of the chairs into which they had fitted themselves, all inviting.

When Jousserau entered the best parlour, he found Mrs. Isaiah holding forth on the ailments incidental to early infancy, for the benefit of the young lady from Heydon Hey. Cecilia was seated by the fireside, rather languidly turning over the pages of a book. Her piano stood open near where she sat, and M. Jousserau, scheming to be near her, made a pretence of that fact, and strolling over to the instrument, turned over the pages of a volume

of music which stood upon it. 'Oh, you have French songs,' he said, suddenly turning to her. 'Do you speak, then, French?'

'Oh no,' she answered. 'There are English translations to all of them.' She turned round in her chair and read aloud the first line at which he had opened the volume: 'It was Dunoy, the young and brave.'

'A thousand excuses,' said Jousserau. 'Dunois. I beg your pardon. Perhaps it is Dunoy in English.'

'No, no,' said Cecilia; 'I am sure it is not. There is no such name in English. I am really obliged to you for telling me. I should like to be able to sing the French. We were supposed to learn at school; but I have forgotten, if ever I knew anything.'

'If I could have the pleasure to give you lessons,' said Jousserau eagerly.

The girl blushed, and at that the little artist blushed

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and began to flutter curiously. If he had kept his own old free-and-easy ways, he would have spoken his mind long ago, for in that respect he had been as quick in action as Denys of Burgundy himself. But there was a nimbus about this particular maiden, a sacred protecting light which half frightened him.

'You sing?' she asked, to cover her own confusion. 'Will you sing that for me, Monsieur Jousserau, and show me what the accent should be like?'

'I will try,' he answered modestly. 'But you must not laugh at me; I sing a little for my own amusement.' He took his seat at the piano, and struck out boldly the opening chords of En partant pour la Syrie. He had a mellow and powerful voice, fairly cultivated, and he sang, as might have been expected of him, with spirit and feeling. When he came to the last lines of the first verse, Cecilia was sure that one half the soldier's petition was already granted to him, and Jousserau was quite certain that he had the other:

That I might be the bravest knight,
And love the fairest fair.

Cecilia, though not yet aware of the character of her own sentiments, admired the little man beyond description. It goes without saying that she had never seen anybody like him; and in affairs of the heart, novelty goes for much. It counts for more when all the novelties are admirable, and Jousserau was not merely an astonishing artist, and vouched for by the vicar and his own manner as a gentleman, but he was alive from head to heel, unlike the bovine men she had lived amongst from her childhood, who knew neither how to feel nor express an unselfish interest in anything. The girl had never seen anything like his quick southern smile; nor anything, again, like his deferential and courteous manner; nor anything, again, like his generous, unpretending absence of any assumption of superiority over the rougher and less cultured people with whom he chose to mingle.

When Snelling and his convives came in at last, Jousserau was telling stories of his native Arles, and putting so much

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quaintness, verisimilitude, and fun into them that the two girls and the elder woman were brimming over with laughter.

'We've got nothing to thank you for, Isaiah,' said Mrs. Winter; 'but if it hadn't been for Mr. Jousserong we might have been as dull as ditch-water. I will say this for Mr. Jousserong,' she added, still laughing with both hands spread out upon her knees, 'he's the best good company I ever met.'

The phrase stung Snelling, and left a dull, slow, burning pain of jealousy. Cecilia, like the others, was beaming with good-humour, and he thought with a pang that she had never looked so in his presence, and that he had no power to move her in that way. Very good, then; let a solid man show his own particular qualities. This foolish froth of fun, over which two silly young women, and one silly old one, were cackling with enjoyment was not the only thing in the world. The solid man did his best, and talked parish politics in that bassoon-like drawl of his, with its rise and snap in the middle of every sentence. Everybody listened perforce, but nobody laughed. He had killed the innocent and harmless gaiety, and Cecilia looked bored and weary. She went back to her book again, and began to turn its leaves over as listlessly as before. The orator resented her want of interest angrily; but he had neither the will nor the means to show his disapproval. The girl had been happy whilst she talked with Jousserau. Was it possible that, after all, breadth of limb, length of purse, and solidity of character were not the only things to woo a woman to a marrying mind?

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE last departed Earl of Barfield had been something of an eccentric and a good deal of a miser, and the new lord was disposed on coming into his estates to strew what the

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old man had gathered. For years, Barfield Hall had slept with closed eyes in the care of one or two servants on board-wages. Now, its old-fashioned saloons were thrown open

again; an army of workmen had invaded the place; and in the course of a four months' occupation, had so far refurbished it that it was hard to recognise. Van-load after van-load of furniture was discharged at its doors; and tons of venerable rubbish were carted away and consigned to a new oblivion. When the old Earl had been twelve months in the family vault, his successor came down with the young Countess and took possession, to the much rejoicing of the local tradespeople, as well as the smaller local magnates, who had long mourned the absence of their natural chieftain.

His young lordship, as it was the fashion to call him, was by this time well into the forties; but he was apparently determined to make the best of such time as was left to him, and went in heartily for all sorts of social entertainment. Dinners, social and political, luncheons ditto and ditto, garden-parties, carpet-dances, ceremonious balls, private theatricals, whatever he could think of for the enlivening of the country-side and the entertainment of his guests, his lordship offered.

Amongst other public posts he held was that of Lieutenant-Colonel of the County Yeomanry Cavalry, and with his new scope for generosity, and his native desire to be agreeable to everybody, his lordship took upon himself to hold the annual yeomanry ball in his own house. Hitherto, the ball had been promoted by subscription, and had been held in the local Assembly Rooms, a dingy establishment, given over for the greater part of the year to the uses of a cart and coach builder, and cleared of its stock on one or two occasions only in the whole round of time between January and December.

Snelling was a yeomanry corporal, and received with the rest of the people interested a ticket for himself and a ticket for a lady. He would have offered the latter to Cecilia; but he knew that Shorthouse, as a private of twenty years' standing, would have his tickets also, and

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that the courtesy would be useless. Members of the troop were of course understood to appear in full parade uniform, and Snelling's clothes having been destroyed with his other belongings in the fire, he was compelled to order new ones. Cecilia was certain to be present; and since Snelling thought rather better of himself in his spurs and scarlet than in any other attire he had the right to wear, he made the life of the tailor to whom he took his instructions a burden. The clothes came to the Barfield Arms two days before the date fixed for the ball, and being tried on, and not turning out absolutely to his satisfaction, were taken back again with instructions that they should be altered.

This care about detail threatened for an hour or two to rob Snelling of the ball, for the amended regimentals came home only in the nick of time. Even the fashionable arrivals, who had a prescriptive right to be later than the common people, had put in their appearance when Snelling reached the Hall. He was unaccompanied, meaning to leave himself entirely free to devote his evening to Cecilia. It was not his way to look on anything as hopeless because it had once eluded him, and in point of fact if the prize he sought had fallen at once into his hands, he could never have taught himself to care for it. It was the refusal and the risk which stirred him; and they stirred him so deeply, that if he had secured Cecilia now, he would never again have grown indifferent to her.

Almost the first person he encountered was Shorthouse, with a face as red as his tunic. The good man clung heroically to the tunic and waist-belt of five years ago, and

refused, in spite of the strangling testimony they afforded, to admit that he had grown in girth by a hair's-breadth. Their tight embrace made his breathing a little difficult, and he wheezed at his friend and neighbour in an unaccustomed voice.
'Bob, ode lad, I want a word with you.'
'Two, if you like,' said Snelling, who was in a better humour than common at the thought of a free hour or two in which to prosecute his courtship.
'Come into one of these here corners,' said the farmer,

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'and sit down. Now, listen to what I'm going to say. Bend down a bit; I don't want nobody to overhear.'
Snelling, resting his busby on his knees, leaned forward with his ear at Shorthouse's lips.
'Art in the same mind thou wast in six months ago?' the elder man asked him.
'As to what?' Snelling queried, turning his face towards him.
'About my gell?' Shorthouse whispered.
'I'm as much of that mind,' Snelling answered gruffly, 'as a man needs to be, if I could see my way towards it.'
'Very well,' said Shorthouse. 'I'm game to lend a helping hand. I'll have no foreign chaps sneaking after a gell o' mine. Her'll marry an Englishman, or her'll stop single.'
'You've seen that, have you?' asked the disappointed suitor.
'Seen it?—yes. I put it to 'Zaiah Winter two months gone by, and he asked me what sort of a maggot I'd got in my head to think of such a thing at all. I've found her to-day with a book I'd never seen afore. I took a look at it, and it turned out to be a Bible. It's done in French and English, and it's got a cover in bone or ivory, or summit o' that sort, with angels and tree-boughs and all sorts of things cut into it. That French chap had gi'en it to her, and her never said a word to me about it. I said nothin' neither; but I can put two and two together. I've got a father's feelin' for the wench, and somehow her bein' motherless meks me softer with her; but sparked up to by a foreigner her shall not be; I'd sooner see her in her coffin.'
'That's how anybody who knows you,' hummed Snelling in a slow deep murmur, 'would expect to hear you talk. But what's going to be done in the matter? You can kick him out at any minute, and what he's after is plain enough; but what kicking him out will do for me, I don't see.'
'Bob,' said the elder, 'you've made a sad waste o' time i' that particular. You've niver studied the ways of the petticoats. A gell's "No" counts for nothing. Cecilia's poor mother said "No" to me three times, till at last I

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went up to her, and I said: "Look here," I said. "Make a hend o' this," I said. "Tek me or leave me." Her took me for better or worse that instant minute; and better it was, for her father farmed the thinnest bit o' land between here and Coldfield; and though I say it as shouldn't, there warn't a likelier chap than me within six mile. The young generation's a bit better; but they was a weedy lot about Hoyden i' my marrying days. A gell's "No"

is just a sort o' "Follow me, lad," and that I found out when you was going about in corduroys and a round jacket.'
Hope began to knock at Snelling's heart again; but he contrived to keep his common aspect of massive self-possession. 'You think,' he asked, 'it's worth my while to speak again?'
'I'll mek it so,' said Shorthouse, 'if I've got any v'ice i' the matter. I'd sooner lay her cold in her grave than let her wed anybody but an Englishman. I wonder at the young fellow's folly. He says to me one day at 'Zaiah Winter's house, himself: "You're John Bull, you are, inside and out. A John Buller man than you be," he says, "I never see." And yet in spite o' that, it's as plain as the nose on your face as he comes a-courtin' Cecilia. He's here to-night.'
'What?' Snelling snarled, in a voice which drew half a dozen pair of eyes upon him.
'Hush, hush!' the farmer warned him; 'tek it easy, lad—tek it easy. I'll see no mischief comes o' it. They was talkin' together at the other end o' the room when you and me run agen one another. Don't go yet, Bob; wait a while. I've another word to say to you. You'rn not quite so young as you used to be, and you've got a bit perhaps too solemn a church-going style about you. Spark up a bit; smarten thyself, ode lad. Why, i' my courtin' days, I'd have a dozen wenches on the giggle afore I'd been five minutes among 'em. They like a merry-hearted man, Bob. Thee canst tek that for gospel.'
'What brings him here?' said Snelling, who had but little merriment to waste on anybody.
'I don't know,' the farmer answered.'I found him a-

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jabberin' away with Sir Ferdinand and Sir Ferdinand's lady; and her ladyship in special piping like a jenny-wren, in his own foreign lingo, and swayin' and laughin' and smilin' at what he said as if he'd been a hemperor. They seem inclined to mek a lot of him; and I ain't one of them as sets himself up against his betters. The young man's all right, I mek no doubt; but "hands off" is my word to him. Now, Bob, brisk up a bit, get away; you've got my good-will.'
Snelling rose slowly, with a single nod in answer. He looked quite soldierly in his handsome uniform, and was as well set up by nature as most men can be by the exercises of the drill-yard. As he approached the upper end of the ballroom he saw Jousserau in the act of presenting Cecilia to Lady Blacquaire, who took the girl's hand kindly and with no air of patronage. Cecilia bore herself perfectly; but it was evident for all that that she was a trifle scared by immediate contact with so much greatness.
'That's where it is,' said Snelling to himself. 'The silly little thing's got it into her head that because he's friends of a sort with that kind of folks, she will get amongst them too. Her head's a bit turned with the notion, and that's where he gets the advantage over me. She'd never have thought about him if he hadn't come to church in my lord's carriage.'
He dared not intrude himself while Cecilia was with her ladyship; but when once they had parted, he strolled towards her, and made a stiff half-ironic inclination to her in imitation of the manner of his officers and other people of quality. 'This is better than the Assembly Rooms last year,' he said, by way of opening a conversation.

'Very much better,' Cecilia answered. 'It is very kind of his lordship to have the ball held here; but we can't expect him to do it always, and it will spoil us for next year.'
At this instant the county member, in passing, shook hands with Snelling, whose vote and influence were worth conserving, and tapped Jousserau on the shoulder. 'Excuse me, Mr. Snelling,' he said; and then to Jousserau in

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his own language: 'I want to introduce to you a friend of mine, a great admirer of your last picture, by the way. He is an excellent fellow, but—'
All Sir Ferdinand's acquaintances were excellent fellows, and they all had a 'but' to their excellences.
'Shall I find you a seat, Miss Shorthouse?' Snelling asked, when he and Cecilia were thus left to themselves. 'You'll be getting tired if you stand between the dances.'
Cecilia took his proffered arm. He conducted her to a seat and sat down beside her. He wanted to follow Shorthouse's advice and to make himself brighter and livelier; but he could think of nothing to start upon. His rival was in his thoughts, and his unexpected appearance at the ball was irritating. 'I hadn't expected to find our French friend here,' he said. 'What brings him at a yeomanry ball, I should like to know?'
'I suppose,' returned Cecilia laughingly, 'that none of us would be here if we had not been asked. Mr. Jousserau has been telling me that he means to paint pictures of English life. He thinks that a yeomanry ball would make a very brilliant scene for a picture, and I fancy that he is here chiefly to make observations.'
'Well,' returned Snelling, 'that's what I should call as rare a bit of impudence as I ever heard of.'
'Impudence!' said Cecilia, in a tone of astonishment. 'What can you mean, Mr. Snelling?'
'I'm a part of this assembly,' he responded, 'and I've an objection to being stared at and took stock of by anybody as wants to make money out o' me without my free gift and permission.'
'Really, Mr. Snelling,' said the girl, 'I think you are a little too sensitive.'
'Perhaps so, perhaps not,' he answered. 'Anyway, that's my feeling.'
Cecilia said nothing; and a moment later Shorthouse appeared and took a seat beside his chosen son-in-law. He nudged Snelling with his elbow, and gave him a wink and a nod towards Cecilia, as an intimation to begin to make himself agreeable. Snelling not putting these instructions

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into immediate practice, the farmer began an elaborate pantomime, clumsily expressive of an invitation to dance. Snelling, fearing lest his companion's motions should be observed by the girl, put an end to them by a nudge of the elbow and a warning frown. He was in the very act of turning to obey the dumb injunction, when the band struck up the first bars of a polka, and there was Jousserau standing before Cecilia. The girl rose, and the two sailed away together in time to the music. Snelling, in blank astonishment,

turned on Shorthouse, and he and the farmer stared at each other in a mutual indignation.
'Is that company manners?' Snelling demanded. 'A young lady is sittin' talking with one man, and another comes and whirls her off from under his very nose!'
'I suppose the man had axed her beforehand,' said Shorthouse. 'Why didn't you ax her yourself, when I told you?'
'I was turning round,' Snelling responded angrily, 'when he walked her away from under my very nose. I shall give that young man a piece of my mind.'
'Thee'lt help nothing by meking a row here, Bob, my lad,' returned the senior.
'It's not my way to mek rows anywhere,' Snelling answered; 'but I shall give that young man a piece o' my mind, and a good-sized piece into the bargain.' He got up and strode away to the buffet; and there, not caring that his angry face should betray him, he forced an aspect of hilarity, and clapped one or two of his comrades boisterously on the shoulder. Lord Barfield did things liberally, and there was an ample, and even more than ample, supply of champagne. Snelling thought but lightly of that beverage, and altogether underrated its effect. He knew, indeed, very little about it, and had tasted it perhaps half a dozen times in his life; but if any man had told him that he could possibly take too much of it for sobriety, he would have laughed the idea to scorn. He was hot and excited, and one servant or another filling his glass as often as he set it down, he drank more than he knew, and in a surprisingly short space of time the wine was buzzing in

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his head, and there was an altogether unaccustomed flush upon his face. His deep voice was always louder and more powerful than he fancied, and now it rang out so noisily once or twice that one or two of his comrades warned him.
'I say, corporal, don't make that row; we shall have his lordship here.'
It never entered the man's head that he had been drinking, or that the wild flush of gaiety with sudden flashes of ill-temper was attributable to the wine. Champagne was a beverage for women, and a solid man like himself could surely drink a dozen of it and feel nothing.
Shorthouse was at his elbow, and took him by the wrist as he laid his hand upon a bottle. 'Come back into the ballroom, Bob, and leave that alone.'
'Leave it alone?' Snelling answered. 'What for? Why should I leave it alone?'
'Well, if you want to know,' Shorthouse responded bluffly, 'you've had enough on it. It's beginning to tell on you.'
'What, that stuff?' cried Snelling with a great roaring laugh. 'That's a good un, and no mistake.' He bent in his vinous mirth, clipping his thighs with both hands, laughing obstreperously. 'Why, I could tek a hogshead of it and never come to harm.'
'You be said, Bob, and come along,' the farmer insisted. 'You've had enough on it.'
But Snelling looked down from his own superior height over Shorthouse's shoulder, and his glance was so intent and wrathful that the farmer turned round to see at what it was directed. Jousserau was standing there, talking to Sir Ferdinand, and in the act of clinking glasses with him. Snelling shouldered his companion out of the way and laid a

ponderous hand on the artist's arm. 'I'll thank you,' he said, 'to let me take the liberty of a word with you.'
'Assuredly,' the artist answered, looking up at him.
'What you are,' said Snelling, 'and who you are, I neither know nor care. Parson Heathcote, I'm told, gives

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you out for a gentleman; but that you're not, and I'd lay my life upon it.'
Jousserau saw his condition at a glance, and he had heard some hint of his proposal to Cecilia. 'Do not let us talk of that,' he said. 'You shall have what opinion you please. I am engaged.' He turned once more towards Sir Ferdinand, who was staring wrathfully at Snelling.
'Oh, but we will talk about it; I am going to talk about it.'
'I must really beg your pardon, Mr. Snelling,' said the county member. 'You may state your opinion elsewhere, but you shall not state it here. Please, understand that.'
'I know you, Sir Ferdinand,' said Snelling, brandishing his arm, 'and I knew your father and your grandfather afore you. I know who you are; but who this chap is I don't know.'
'Captain Hawkes,' said Sir Ferdinand with great smoothness, addressing one of the astonished bystanders, 'I suppose that this person being in military uniform, and you being in uniform also, that he is amenable to your orders. I am not a military man myself; but I should presume that to be the case. Will you kindly have him taken away somewhere? He is intoxicated, and as you observe, is creating a disturbance.'
'Intoxicated!' shouted Snelling. 'Me? If there's e'er another man here dares to say so, I'll knock him down.'
The gentleman appealed to by Sir Ferdinand made a mere motion of the hand to one or two of the yeomanry troopers, and in an instant half a dozen stalwart fellows were about him.
'Come along, Snelling,' said one of them with persuasive good-humour. 'Don't let's have any trouble about it.'
Snelling had not exceeded so far that he had lost all sense of personal dignity. 'I'll have no scuffle,' he said, with unexpected calm. 'I'll take Sir Ferdinand's word for it that I'm not wanted. As for that little jackanapes yonder, I can state my opinion of him at some future

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time, maybe.' So saying, he saluted his captain and walked from the room steady and erect.
'That's a very unusual condition for Mr. Snelling, surely,' said Sir Ferdinand, addressing Shorthouse.
'It's a condition I never see him in afore,' Shorthouse answered. 'The truth is, Sir Ferdinand, the poor fellow's done no fault, but been overtook in a misfortune. He looked on this here champagne wine like so much ginger pop, and it never entered into

his mind to think as it could hurt him. There isn't a more respectable man, Sir Ferdinand, not for twenty mile around.'
An assenting murmur ran about the room.
'Evidently an accident,' said the county member. 'But, Jousserau,' he added in French to his companion, 'what had you done to make the man so angry?'
'My faith!' said Jousserau, 'nothing that I know of, absolutely nothing!'
Snelling meanwhile was raging across the park, with occasional fierce pauses. 'I'm not fit company,' he said over and over again, 'for a place where that foreign monkey can show himself and be made much of. I've had enough of this. I'll change it. I've been soft and quiet long enough. I'll change it all; I'll find a means to be revenged on that fellow.' He shook his fist madly at the lighted Hall, and turning again, plunged on through the darkness with the actual lust of murder in his heart.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE more Snelling thought of it that night, the more definitely he saw how shamefully ill-used he was, and how distinct a right he had to be revenged. The morning's reflections brought with them a gnawing sense of shame, for he could not doubt that his conduct had seemed to justify his expulsion. That of course made things none the better for his adversary. It is no cure to hatred to

find itself altogether in the wrong. It is easy for the man who has right on his side to be magnanimous. When the disputant has not a dialectic leg to stand on, it is only in human nature that he should lose his temper. Neither real love nor real hate stops to ask questions: each is its own supreme reason.
Snelling heaped up a store of hatred which he held in reserve against the innocent cause of his disgrace. If the thing could have been done with safety, he could have killed him, and that looked so far removed from likelihood that he gave himself the satisfaction of openly admitting as much to his own mind. If the means had lain ready to his hand, he would not have dared to contemplate them; but since they did not, and were never likely to come within his grasp, he allowed himself to covet them.
If it had not been for his ward, Jousserau could never have come into his life at all. And there—as if there had been a need of it—was another reason for his hatred of young John. From the hour since he had first taken charge of his nephew's fortunes, no good thing had befallen him. He had encountered nothing but libel, defeat, and shame. If it had but occurred to him to think that there was not an event in the whole history which was not clearly due to his own villainous first intention, the reflection might have been of service to him.
Amongst other petty annoyances came the difficulty of finding a new house for himself. The winter was a hard one, and unusually protracted, and for months it was impossible to begin the rebuilding of the old place, which lay in unsightly ashes. He was compelled to live on at the Barfield Arms, or to go into lodgings; and little as he liked the former course, he preferred it to the other. He had a long-drawn dispute with the Insurance Company, and since he could produce no complete inventory of the goods lost in the

fire, it was made clear to him that he would have to sit down with a considerable loss on that score.
He passed months in miserable anger, and developed a standing grudge against the world at large. John stayed with Isaiah Winter, and his guardian was contented to see

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but little of him. Of Jousserau he saw nothing whatever, and only heard that he had fitted up as a studio a large room in the upper story of Isaiah's house, and was working there in almost complete retirement. There was just one drop of sweetness in his cup: the Frenchman visited no more at Shorthouse's. The old farmer had made up his mind by this time as to Jousserau's intentions, and when he had talked of his suspicions to Cecilia, he had seen enough to make him believe that she was growing dangerously interested in the foreigner. He put his foot down, therefore, in John Bull fashion, and with no periphrasis forbade Jousserau the house.
Things were in this state when the spring came slowly up that way, and stayed in that position until the beginning of summer Then two things happened which set Snelling's cup of bitterness fairly brimming over. In the first place, Proctor came with a beaming countenance to announce the discovery of precisely such another outcrop of coal as had been found on the land of Farmer Day. As in the former case, the coal lay against the great stone wall of the Fault, and was immediately workable at a startling profit. But it was on John's land, and not on Snelling's. It was, in point of fact, at the very limit of John's property, and his guardian owned nothing within two-thirds of a mile of it.
'The boy's in luck,' said the mining engineer. 'By the plot you've given me, he has five hundred and seventy acres, and I make no doubt there isn't a yard of it that won't pay—and pay well—for the getting.'
'Yes,' said Snelling darkly, 'the lad's in luck, as you say.'
How he hated him for it is beyond the power of words to express. Proctor went on to explain that the discovery was equal to the proof of coal on Snelling's own land. Passing beyond John's workings, where they were developed, he would be able to reach his own coal, and to work safely under the sand-drift which had impeded his first operations.
'He'll be rich before I shall,' said Snelling.
'Yes, sir,' returned Proctor, rubbing his hands, 'that's pretty true. In point of fact, Mr. Snelling, the lad's rich already.'

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This was the first phial of bitterness, and Snelling in tasting it made no wry faces, at least in public. It was Parson Heathcote who brought the second, and who held it so repeatedly to his lips that he could not forbear a sign or two. The summer weather had barely set in, and the bricklayers were at work raising new walls on the foundations of the old. Snelling naturally rode over from time to time to see how the work was progressing; and Master John, with a boy's native longing for danger, was naturally there on half-holidays to run about the bare rafters which already stretched over the cellars, and to climb anything which looked particularly breakneck and inviting. Snell-

ing rode there on a Wednesday afternoon, and found his nephew perched on a dangerous eminence at the south-west corner of the old house, where the wall had by some accident or series of accidents escaped the fire.
'You'll break your neck one of these days, Master John,' said the uncle in a tone of good-humoured remonstrance.
'I'm all right, uncle,' John responded. 'I've been up here a dozen times. Haven't I, Patsy?'
'Faix, ye have, then,' one of the workmen responded; 'but not with my good-will, young gintleman.'
Snelling took no further notice of the boy, but calling the man in charge, sat in the saddle to listen to his account of progress. Whilst the two were talking, the vicar jogged up on a steed as comfortable and as highly polished as himself.
'Good-day, Snelling,' he said. 'Rebuilding the old place, I see. I was glad to hear you were insured.'
'They're pretty slow in paying,' Snelling growled. 'I can make nothing out of 'em as yet.'
'Oh, they'll pay you—they'll pay you!' said the vicar. 'Very just and liberal office. Hillo! who's that perched up there? Snelling, Snelling! that's dangerous. Do you see your nephew there? Come down, you young rascal; come down at once. Upon my word, it makes me giddy to look at him.'
'It's all right, sir,' piped John. 'There's no danger. I've been up here lots of times.'

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'Curious!' said the vicar, 'how the repetition of an offence appears to justify it to the boyish mind. Take care there, sir! The boy puts my heart in my mouth. Really, Snelling, you should exercise more authority; you shouldn't allow him to peril his limbs in that way.'
'Ah!' returned Snelling angrily, 'there's one blows hot, and one blows cold. The whole country-side gets filled with lies about me because I want the lad to learn his lessons; and I suppose I'm up to some wickedness now because I let the young monkey have his way.'
At this instant, John, half-way down from his perilous height, missed his foothold, and fell, bringing a handful or two of loose rubble down with him. The vicar cried out in terror; but the lad was on his feet again in a second, laughing. 'No harm done, sir, unless I've spoiled my jacket. It's lucky, though,' he added, 'that I fell into the mortar, and not on to the stones.'
'Come here, sir,' said the vicar sternly; and John approaching, took hold of the reverend gentleman's stirrup-leather and looked up at him with so fearless a good-humoured candour that wrath was more than half disarmed.
'If I were your uncle,' the vicar said, 'and had charge of you, I should follow an escapade of that sort by a smart application of the cane, Master John. You have shaken an elderly clergyman's nerves, and that is a thing, let me tell you, which, from the elderly clergyman's point of view, merits punishment.'
'Really, sir,' John urged, 'it's quite safe. I've been up lots of times.'

'His neck won't get broke that way,' said Snelling with a pretence of a rough bonhomie he was far from feeling.
The vicar shook his riding-whip at John, who smiled at him in the certainty that no harm was coming.
'The soundest whipping won't dust that jacket for an hour or two,' said the parson, smiling also in spite of himself. 'No more mischief now, do you hear?'
'I'll be careful, sir,' the boy answered, and so moved away.
The vicar moved his horse a foot or two nearer to

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Snelling's. 'By-the-bye,' he said, 'this reminds me. They tell me that coal has been found on your nephew's land. He will be a wealthy man one of these days. You mustn't take offence at what I'm going to tell you, Snelling; you're much too sensible a man for that, I know. But even if it were otherwise, I should feel it my duty to speak.'
'Say on, sir, if you please.' It galled him to be told that John was going to be wealthy. The bitter avaricious grudge against the boy was always in his mind.
'You are John's guardian,' pursued the vicar, 'and it is your plain duty, and will of course be your pleasure, to breed him up in accordance with his prospects. Now this is all very well if he were going to be farmer, miller, and maltster, like his father before him; but, as I gather, the boy will have so much money that the education he is receiving will be scarcely finished enough—scarcely fine enough—to meet the case. He has the local accent rather strongly, and here he can never get rid of it. You should send him to one of the public schools. Let him have a tutor for half a year, and then send him to Rugby. Rugby's pretty close, you know, and he wouldn't be out of your sight there. Then in half a dozen years he might go to Oxford. You must really make a gentleman of the boy, and give him his chance in the world.'
'He's being bred,' said Snelling, 'as well as he's got any right to ask to be, better than his father was afore him, and better than I was. I don't want a young jackanapes from Oxford lording it over me. If he learns enough to manage his property when he comes into it, he'll have no right to grumble.'
'Believe me, Snelling, you're wrong. The whole district will think so. You have not merely the boy's best interests, but your own reputation to consider. By the time he comes of age, your nephew will be one of the wealthy men of the county, if all tales be true; and you must rear him in accordance with his expectations. Things have been said, you know, Snelling—I don't believe them, I never have believed them. If I had believed them, you may take it for granted that I shouldn't be sitting here

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and talking to you now. But the things have been said all the same, and you have your own reputation to consider.'
'Hold hard a minute,' said Snelling, in his heaviest tones. 'We'll have a look at that matter, if you please, sir, and we'd best go to the fountain-head. John!' he cried, raising his voice, 'come here a bit, while I talk to you.'—John came, and his guardian turned

upon the parson. —'There he is; ask him anything you like. If you'd prefer it so, I'll ride away.'
'My dear sir,' said the vicar, 'I don't wish to ask the boy any questions.'
'Very well, then,' said Snelling with a surly persistence, 'I do. John, you've got nothing to hide; you can tell the truth without fear, favour, or affection. Have you got anything to complain of?'
'No, uncle,' the boy answered—'nothing.'
'You ran away from home the better part of two years ago, didn't you?'—John spread out his hands and made a little grimace, as if protesting against this raking up of bygones.—'What made you do that?'
'I should have got a thrashing if I hadn't,' said John, somewhat shyly.
'Who from?' his guardian demanded. 'Me?'
'No,' said John; 'Mr. Macfarlane.'
'Now, answer me truly; did I ever lay a hand upon you in my life?'
'No,' the boy answered; 'never.'
'Sence you've come to know and understand, sence you've come back to live with me, have I ever spoke one unkind word to you?'
'No, uncle,' John said again; 'never.' It was hardly accurate, but it was true enough in the main, and a happy boy's memory for reproof is short.
'Now,' resumed Snelling ponderously, bending over in the saddle and emphasising his question with his riding-whip, 'do I treat you harsh or do I treat you kind? Is there anything you've got to find fault with?'
'No, uncle.'
'Very well, then,' said his guardian, turning once more

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towards the vicar. 'You can put them questions to him by yourself, sir, if you like it better, and he'll answer 'em the same way.'
'You mistake me altogether,' the vicar answered. 'You can run away, John. I never charged you in my own mind with unkindness to the boy; I only wanted to hint to you that people are watching your guardianship of him in some quarters a little jealously, and that you are expected to do your duty by him. You can only do that by giving him an education of a higher kind. Don't you see, my good fellow, that the case demands it? The boy will be wealthy one of these days. Not merely well-to-do, but rich; a dozen times better off, perhaps, than his father ever fancied. He must have his chances. Now think over what I have said, like a good sensible fellow, as you are; and so, good-morning. I hope we are none the worse friends or neighbours for what I have said; but I had to discharge my conscience. Think over it, Snelling; think over it, and you'll agree with me.'
Isaiah trundled up in the brake, behind the pair of steppers, as Snelling, with rather a bad grace, shook hands with the vicar. The clergyman saluted Isaiah with a cheery 'Good-morning, Winter,' and a motion of his whip, and then jogged away, as unconscious, good easy man, of having laid fuel to Snelling's murderous fires as ever man was in this mixed world of the result of his interference with another's business.
'Now wheer do you think I've come from?' said Isaiah genially.

'I'll tell you when I've time to think about it,' Snelling answered, wheeling his horse round. But then, suddenly remembering that he had not too many friends in the world, and that Isaiah, in spite of the fact that he housed his two enemies, was the one man on whom he could rely for kindly feeling, began to objurgate the vicar.
'Don't mind me,' he said. 'That parson's put me out o' temper. He runs that eagle-beaked nose of hisn into everything. You were going to tell me something, 'Zaiah; what is it?'

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'Why!' said Isaiah, readily pacified, and accustomed from of old to his ancient employer's moods and tempers, 'I've been over to Brummagem to mek a bid for Tallymount Hall.'
'Tallymount?' repeated Snelling. 'What do you want with Tallymount? The place is in ruins.'
'It ain't so bad as you'd fancy,' said Isaiah. 'There's four rooms there as sound as nuts; there's three or four more as fifty pound 'ud put right for the next twenty year. As for the ruins, there's seventy or eighty of 'em; but they don't count. There's a stable in fair repair—you could do it up for a fiver—and there's a noble kitchen, just like it was left in old times, when the Tanants had got money in their pockets. There's six acres of the old park-land left, there's two acres o' garden, and a biggish paddock. If a bachelor has a fancy for living wild and lonesome, he can do it there as well as anywheer.'
'I reckon you're i' no danger o' being a bachelor again, Isaiah,' Snelling answered.
'No,' returned Isaiah, laughing. 'It ain't for me; it's for my lodger. Between you and me, gaffer, them painting chaps is the queerest kind o' cattle as lives. He's seen the place, and he's took a fancy to it, and he's wild about it. He says he could live and die and lay his bones there with pleasure. I told him only yes'day—"Here you are," I says, "in a house brand-new, furnished from top to bottom, with the mortar hardly dry on the walls," I says; "and everything brand-new from the roof to the kitchen poker; and here you be," I says, "mad to live in a tumbledown, old haunted place as nobody's looked at this thirty year." But he's fell in love with it, and there's no shaking him. He's got me to do the business for him; and I've as good as done it. I'm standing out on a matter of fifty pounds on a seven years' lease; but young Tanant wants the money; and I think he'll tek what I've offered. You might as well pour water into a sieve as money into that young man's pocket.'
'Isaiah,' said Snelling, with a smile of meaning, 'in matters of business I've always found you pretty close

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until now. If I meet you to-morrow, you and me will have a laugh about this.'
'As how?' said Isaiah.
'I'll tell you when we meet again,' Snelling answered. 'I'm a bit pressed by business for the moment. That meddling vicar has kept me here for a good half-hour. Good-morning, Isaiah.'

Isaiah returned his salute, and sighting young John, bade him come home to change his clothes. Meantime, Snelling rode away. Here at least was a chance of placing a thorn in his adversary's side. If Jousserau wanted to live in a ruin, he should at least pay for that privilege. He would raise him by a hundred pounds or two, and if he lost the money entirely, he could afford to do it for the gratification of his hate.

A half-hour's ride helter-skelter along the country road, and at a decorous jog-trot through the town, brought him to the land-agent's doors. Snelling knew the doors well, for his own bank stood opposite. He threw his reins to a street boy and dismounted.

'Tallymount Hall's to let; what's your price for it?'

The clerk he accosted looked up from his work, referred languidly to another clerk, and looked down again. The second clerk advanced, and leisurely turning over the leaves of a volume made up of printed scraps and manuscript entries, turned it round upon the counter voicelessly and stuck an uninterested finger on a page.

'Seven years' lease,' said Snelling. 'No repairing covenant. Three hundred and fifty pounds. Give me a pen, young man, and draw up a receipt.'

He drew his own cheque-book from his pocket and filled in a leaf of it, standing there at the counter. 'Send somebody across the road with that,' he said gruffly, throwing down the leaf he tore from the cheque-book.

The clerk, staring a little at the heavy emphasis with which he spoke, took the cheque in to his employer, who, recognising the name of the signator, came out smiling. 'We are in treaty for this already, Mr. Snelling.'

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'My money's as good as another man's, I reckon,' said Snelling; 'and here it is.'

'Your money is quite good enough for me, Mr. Snelling,' responded the man of business. 'You can have a receipt in the meantime, and the formal receipt can be ready to-morrow.'

'There's one spoke in the Frenchman's wheel!' said Snelling to himself as he waited. There was no trifle too small to soothe his hate; but he looked about in his own mind in vain for the draught that would quench it.

CHAPTER XXXV

ONE fine afternoon Cecilia had put on her bonnet and was leaving the house by the front door, when her father presented himself at the gate and barred her egress for the moment. They were not on as perfect terms of friendship as they had used to be, and the girl knew that her father watched her outgoings and incomings with a suspicious jealousy. So, when he cocked his eye at her with a marked aspect of inquiry, as careful robins eye the delver's toil, Cecilia blushed faintly, not because she was thinking anything at that moment of the forbidden theme, but because she read the suspicion of her father's look. The farmer thought the blush ominous, understanding very little of woman, and spoke his mind straightway.

'Wheer are you going to?' he opened gruffly.

'Mrs. Day was here last night,' began Cecilia, rather tremulously.

'I didn't ask you who was here last night,' returned her father, 'nor who wasn't here last night. I asked you wheer you was going to.'
'I was going to tell you, father,' Cecilia responded meekly. 'Mrs. Day was here yesterday, and told me that poor little Lydia has been very unwell, and I promised to go up this afternoon and see her.'

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'Ah!' said the farmer; 'and I suppose you're none the slacker in going because 'Zaiah Winter lives close by? Look here, Cecilia; it's not a bit o' good you letting your mouth water over that young Frenchman. You'll never get him to a husband as long as I'm alive. Now don't tell me. I know the meaning of them bits of ribbon and them pretty gloves. Lures to catch geese, they be.'
'Father!' cried Cecilia, on the point of tears, 'you are very cruel. I wonder how you can find the heart to say such things. You used not to be like this.'
'No,' said Shorthouse; 'I have been a fool i' my time, to be sure. I used not to be like this, nor anything like it; but I'm like it now, and I'm going to continue like it, and that you may mek up your mind to.'
At this Cecilia began to cry outright and to mop her pretty eyes with her handkerchief.
'My wench,' said papa, a little mollified by this sign of his own victory, as he construed it, 'I've about as much notion of being a cruel father to thee as I have o' cuttin' my own nose off. Thee knowest that as well as I can tell thee. But I'm a long way off from bein' blind yet, and I've seen the pair on ye makin' eyes at one another—in church, above all places in the world! Now that's a thing as I'm determined to mek a hend of. Understand me now. I'll have no carryings-on wi' that young foreigner; and to put it in a word, I forbid you to speak to him.'
'If he speaks to me, father,' sobbed Cecilia.
'If he speak to thee,' said Shorthouse, 'thee canst give him a civil good-mornin', or a civil good-hafternoon or hevenin', as the case may be. Now I've spoke my mind in the matter, and I look to have to say no more about it. Theer's nothin' to cry about, as far as I can see; but afore you go out, I want your promise. Will you do as I tell you?'
'Yes, father,' said the unfortunate Cecilia.
'That's all right,' said the farmer; 'and now, thee canst dry thine eyes and go about thy business.'
He walked into the house secure of victory, and left Cecilia still crying a little on the garden path. Perhaps

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Cecilia did not take him quite au grand sérieux. Perhaps she relied vaguely on time, or firmly on her lover to bring about some change in the aspect of affairs. Perhaps she was even undutiful enough to have a mind of her own in the matter. Anyway, it is certain that in less time than might have been expected she had dried her eyes, and that in a little while she was walking towards Farmer Day's new house with a decidedly resolute step, and an occasional carriage of the figure which betokened at least an inclination towards resistance.

The child's indisposition would have seemed to be anything but serious, for she was already planted in a wicker armchair on the lawn in front of the house. She wore a cottage bonnet, and was shaded from the sun by a high privet hedge. She had been trying to cut out patterns from a sheet of white paper, but now lay back in her chair rather listlessly, with the instruments proper to that undertaking in her lap. Cecilia kissed the child, and kneeling by her, strove for a little while to draw her into conversation; but whether the small patient were languid or perverse, or simply disinclined to talk, as more elderly invalids might have been, the girl had no success with her, and in a while entered the house to make a call of friendly ceremony upon Mrs. Day. That good woman had entered into rivalry with the wife of her husband's partner, and would not allow Mrs. Isaiah Winter to own anything of which she herself had not a replica. She was a person of no originality, and being compelled, therefore, to follow Mrs. Isaiah's lead, had contrived to make the two houses so alike that a visitor might well have mistaken one for the other. In each establishment there was the same glacial show of unwrinkled horsehair, the same shiny mahogany legs to the table, the same brass-bound, brass-knobbed mahogany chests of drawers, the same all-pervading odour of French - polish. Mrs. Day carried her rivalry further, and dressed after Mrs. Winter, with this difference, that what the latter lady wore only on occasions of ceremonial, the former sported always of an afternoon; and at any time after the one o'clock dinner, Mrs. Day's black silk

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was in evidence to prove to the haphazard caller that its wearer had become a lady.
The odour of the French-polish was a little overmastering, in spite of the fact that the windows of the best parlour were open on the little lawn, whence there flowed in a far more agreeable perfume of rose and honeysuckle and wholesome country air. Cecilia sat near the window, almost within hand's-reach of the child on the lawn below, and there talked uninteresting nothings with feminine vivacity with the mistress of the house. Suddenly she heard a click at the outer gate, and then a voice from the garden seemed to send all her blood to her heart.
'Aha!' said Jousserau—for of course his was the only voice which could so have disturbed her—'the leetel Lydia!—the poor leetel Lydia. She has not been well. Oh, that is too plain to see. Where is it, the pretty red that was in the cheeks? We must have it back again, the pretty red. We must have it back quickly. You will give me a kiss? No? That is for that I smell of cigarettes. What do we do here? We cut shapes from paper? Oh, that is where I am clever; that is where I am at my best. Now you shall see what you shall see.'
Cecilia, with a fluttering heart, peeped round the curtain, drawing it aside by a mere fraction of an inch with a gloved finger-tip. Jousserau had seated himself on the dry smooth turf beside the child's chair, and with that bright and charming smile which became him so sweetly to the watcher's eyes, was holding out his hand for the scarred sheets of paper which lay in Lydia's lap. The young patient was interested already, and with parted lips and solemn eyes she handed the sheets to her companion.
'Ah!' said Jousserau, rejecting the scissors the child proffered, 'when one is great artist he must have fine tools. I shall use my own scissors. There! Saw you ever any like

these?' He took from his pocket a pair of folding scissors in a small morocco sheath. These he opened and adjusted before Miss Lydia's wondering eyes, and having brandished them with a preliminary flourish, folded one of the sheets of paper into an intricate form, and began here

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and there to snip at it with an exaggerated care and delicacy, looking up at the child-patient every now and again with that swift and vivid smile.
Mrs. Day, who at the moment of Jousserau's arrival had been entertaining her guest with a discourse on the value of the herb hoarhound, sunk her voice to a confidential whisper at his coming; and Cecilia, who nodded now and again, and now and again raised her eyebrows, seemed to make a most excellent listener, though she heard not a single word with understanding. Through the little crevice between the blind and the window-frame she kept a constant look-out on her sweetheart, who, having cut and snipped away with great industry for a minute or two, now began delicately to unfold the paper. There upon it was a tree and a church spire and a goose or other bird of abnormal proportions, dominating the horizon, and a small boy behind the bird holding his arms in the air. That this wonder might be observed the better, Jousserau took off the black soft felt hat he wore and laid the filigree-work against it. The patient clapped her tiny hands together with a laugh.
'Dear me!' cried the mother within-doors, 'there's our Lydia a-laughin', I declare!' She moved to the window to see what had provoked the child's outbreak of merriment. 'Come here, my dear,' she cried, 'and see what Mr. Jousserong's cut out of paper to please the child.'
'Sh!' said Cecilia, raising a finger to her lips and assuming a frown of warning.
Jousserau looked up at Mrs. Day, and nodded to her in salutation. 'She wants to be interested,' he said, nodding again towards Lydia. 'Look! She has her roses back already.'
'I've been trying to cut a pig,' said the child poutingly. 'Can you cut a pig? This is nothing like it.' She held up an ill-shaped barrel on two pegs, with a curved spout, probably meant to represent the porker's tail, projecting from one end. Jousserau took his orders gravely, and carved the required object with so much dexterity that the child shrieked applause.

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'What is it, my dear?' asked Mrs. Day, approaching her visitor and speaking in a covert whisper. 'Don't you want the young man to know you're here?'
'No,' said Cecilia, in great distress at the question. 'He mustn't know. Oh, please, don't ask me anything.'
The hostess's face was full of questions, and Cecilia saw it; but she had misread her woman very much indeed if she supposed that any mere plea for silence would persuade her to stifle her curiosity.
'Why, my darlin',' whispered Mrs. Day, who had as good a nose for romance as any of her neighbours, and was ready to scent a love-affair anywhere, 'I thought you'd got

quite a kindness for the young man. It's true as he's a foreigner, but that's a thing as he can't help—for none on us can choose wer birthplace, nor yet wer parents, or else we might be kings and queens o' England and Great Britain, the wull lot o' us; which 'ud be clean against the meaning o' Providence, because some must command and some obey. There's 'Zaiah Winter, always in a state o' wonderment about the cleverness in the young Frenchman's fingers. 'Zaiah's always been a truthful man; and seeing as he's now my husband's partner, I should be loth to say a word agen him; but yet there's hardly any believing the tales he tells about the money that young man can earn. For my own part, I don't see no harm in foreigners; if it wasn't proper as there should be foreigners, the Lord wouldn't allow 'em; and theerfor, my darlin', to talk agen 'em is a-flying in the face o' Providence, which is a thing I never could abide.'

'Isn't there a back-way from the house?' Cecilia asked, in growing distress at Mrs. Day's open innuendoes. 'Can't I get away without his seeing me?'

'No; that indeed you can't, my dear,' Mrs. Day returned. 'Nor yet do I see why you should do so neither. The young man don't bite, I reckon; and a virtuous and right-minded female can always be her own protection. The young man won't stop long a-talking to a infant like our Lydia; though I must say he's got a rare kind heart, and a face like sunshine, though his complexion's swarthy.

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I'm told as it's the sun as does that, which is a thing as stands to nature; for I've seen our John that burnt after three days in the harvest-field you wouldn't know him, with the skin on the tip o' his nose wrinkled up like shavings, or like the hend o' a young bit o' celery.'

'I must stay till he goes,' said Cecilia. Then, not because she was an atom more deceptive than her sex commonly is, but in mere maidenly instinct of self-protection: 'You mustn't think there's anything between us, Mrs. Day; but my father doesn't like Mr. Jousserau, and he has told me not to speak to him.'

'Oh, drat these men!' cried the elder woman; 'they've come to the bottom o' my patience years ago. A man as has got no grown-up experienced woman to manage him, like your father, and to fettle him up as he ought to be fettled, why, his head gets to be like a parlour as is never swep', as full of spider-webs as it can hold.'

The good woman pumped Cecilia in emphatic inquiry, and Cecilia answered evasively, or answered not at all. All the while Jousserau had been chattering in his simple halting English to the child, and Cecilia had better ears for his good-humoured and amiable nonsense than she had for nonsense of another sort. The artist's very voice had suddenly grown dear to her, and to hear him speak was a pleasure. This was the first result of her father's British wisdom of outspokenness; and if that capable farmer and excellent man had only known as much as his daughter could have told him, he might have adopted a different method with her. The course of true love never did run smooth, and the laughter-loving deity who presides over the affairs of courtship may well take pride in the truth of the adage. The seeming unattainable is always the desirable. Bluntly to say, 'You shall not have,' is with ninety folk in a hundred equivalent to saying, 'You shall desire.' The thing given never looks so worth having as the thing withheld.

'All the paper is gone,' said Jousserau; 'and here, this is quite a garden of hearts. He is a good elephant. What? See his curled trunk and his one leg in the air. The tail

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of the pig does curl as nice as his best friend could desire that it should curl. Ah! you are sad again and tired again. Now you should not be sad or tired. If I had my fiddle, I would play to you, and you should sing a leetle. You sing so very pretty, my nice child. Not? But my poor fiddle—he is miles and miles away.'
'There is grandfather's fiddle in the house,' said the child with a new eagerness. 'I should like to hear some music. Do you know new tunes?'
'Yes, yes,' said the kindly little man; 'and old tunes that you do not know. Shall I play to you? That will be pleasure to me. I have not played this long while. Here is mamma again at the window. Shall I play, Madame Day, for your leetel girl? She says to me that there is in the house a fiddle.'
'I'll hand it out to you this minute,' said Mrs. Day, in spite of Cecilia's beseeching gestures, which she feigned not to see.
Two or three minutes later, Jousserau was playing old Provençal airs, and the little Lydia's bird-like voice was roaring excitedly in repetition of them.
'Mother!' cried the child suddenly, 'make Cecilia come. She likes to hear me sing. I will sing her a new tune. Make Cecilia come.'
The mother frowned, winked, and nodded; and these signs made Jousserau's mere guess a certainty.' Mees Shorthouse is here?' he said, rising from his seat upon the turf.
'Yes,' responded Mrs. Day; 'but we're busy talkin', and you mustn't interfere with us. Go on with your music.'
'I must go,' said Cecilia, whispering from behind the blind; 'I must go at once.'
She ran precipitately from the parlour, but hesitated in the hall. Jousserau, by some fine lover's instinct, caught the rustle of her dress, and differentiating it from all other possible rustles of all other possible dresses, handed the bow and the violin to the child, and walked to the flight of well-whitened steps which led to the doorway. There he saw her, shrinking and blushing in the hall.

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'Good afternoon, Mees Shorthouse,' he said humbly, raising his hat as he spoke.
She found a sudden courage, and ran nimbly down the steps. 'Good afternoon, Mr. Jousserau,' she said. 'I am going home.'
'I have business that way,' Jousserau responded. There was no actual deceit in this, though he made his business on the spur of the moment, and it was neither more nor less than to walk with Cecilia.
'Good afternoon, Mr. Jousserau,' she said, stammering and blushing and holding out her hand. 'I must go at once.'
'Pardon!' he said. 'There is something the matter.'
Her flushing cheek, her fluttering bosom, and the humid eyes which for a mere second begged him not to think unkindly of her, seemed suddenly to speak the truth to him.
'Permit,' he said, 'that I go no more than twenty yards with you.'

She answering nothing, but suddenly turning pale and beginning to tremble, he opened the gate and stood hat in hand for her to pass. Then he followed her into the lane and took a place at her side.
'Am I an impertinent,' he asked, 'if I guess what has arrived?'
'Pray, let me go, Mr. Jousserau,' Cecilia pleaded—'let me go alone.' Her eyes spoke differently, if ever eyes spoke in the world. 'Do not think ill of me.'
'I have not very well understood your father,' said the little man, bracing himself at last; 'but from what he has said to me, I have stayed from your house. Has he told you now that I am not to speak to you—that you are not to speak to me?'
'Yes,' said Cecilia, with the same beseeching look. 'I cannot help it. Pray, come no farther.'
'Mees Shorthouse,' said Jousserau, baring his head once more and speaking slowly, but with a resolute though tremulous voice, 'obedience to a parent is a sacred duty to a child. I will say nothing, not one word to change you.

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If you say to me, "Go away, and do not seek to change my father's mind," I will go away, and you shall see me never more. But if you do not tell me that—I will—I must—do what I can to change it. May I try?'
Cecilia said not a word, but looked at him half in despair and half in hope, and altogether in a girlish shyness and confusion.
'I will try if you do not tell me no,' he said. He held out his hand, and she took it in her own for an instant with downcast eyes; then without a word she moved away.
'That is "Yes,"' said Jousserau.

CHAPTER XXXVI

'You do your business pretty smart, gaffer,' said Isaiah, meeting Snelling a day or two after the encounter between them last recorded. 'You don't let the grass grow under your feet, you don't.'
'No,' returned Snelling, with a self-satisfied drawl and smile. 'When I know what I want, I pretty generally take it. I told you, you and me would have a laugh.'
'Let's have it now,' said Isaiah, with immovable solidity of countenance. 'Deadly funny, ain't it?'
'I closed my bargain,' Snelling said, 'the very day you spoke to me.'
'Closed it?' Isaiah echoed. 'Yes, and opened it too. I've been there, gaffer. It's no use drawing the wool over my eyes. I reckon you've got your knife into Mr. Jousserau.'
'If Mr. Jousserau wants the place,' said Snelling coolly, 'he can have it by paying for it. I shall want to make a bit out of my bargain. If he don't want it, I can find a use for it. The country-side's opening up, and I can let the new house directly it's finished. I've been to Tallymount and looked over it, and I can make eight or nine

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rooms habitable for fifty pounds. I can go and live there, if so be your friend ain't willing to pay my price.'

In effect, it proved—Isaiah being entrusted with the negotiations—that Jousserau was by no means willing to pay the increased price Snelling set upon the property. He had been attracted by the picturesque look of the ruined house and the wild luxuriance of the neglected garden, and almost as much as by these, by the extreme cheapness of the place. He laughed a little to think that in striving to do him an ill turn, his overreaching rival had pinched his own fingers, and so dismissed the whole matter from his thoughts.

Snelling, finding the place thus left upon his hands, set to work to make its remaining chambers habitable; and when the glaziers and masons had done with it, he furnished half a dozen rooms, and taking young John from Isaiah's tutelage, established himself in his new home. The main road from Heydon Hey to Castle-Barfield ran by the rusty gates of iron scrollwork which afforded the only visible indication of the residence to the wayfarer. The house itself stood far retired at the limit of its own grounds. There were legends respecting it which might have deterred a nervous or imaginative man from making a home within the remnant of its shattered walls. The last Tanant who had lived there was currently reported to have led a life of unexampled wickedness, and had been killed in his own bed by lightning fifty years ago. The house had taken fire and had burned itself out. For half a century no effort had been made to rebuild or repair it; and the ghost of the wicked Squire, naturally and properly, was supposed to haunt the scene of his dreadful death and no less dreadful life.

The whole demesne was surrounded by a lofty wall of the local stone, a coarse and splintery granite, whose harsh outlines the years had softened with mosses, grasses, wildflowers, and trailing plants, until its original barren ugliness was altogether lost and hidden under the luxuriant touch of nature. Overlooking this wall on the western side there stood the fire-scarred relics of a turret, with one chamber

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intact, and above that tons of picturesque masonry, which seemed to hang together by a miracle. At the bottom of the turret was an arch of solid brickwork, which had formed the main entrance to the rear of the Hall, and still as bravely propped up its burden as on the day when its coping-stone was laid. A flight of stone stairs ran with a broad sweeping curve to the one tenantable room which this old arch supported. Its lower steps were tangled with blackberry vines; and wherever Nature's minutest finger could plant a seed in a crack, flourished some wild-flower or grass-knot, until the solid slabs were forced by the soft insidious pressure of sprouting seed and swelling root from their original lines.

This turret, with its supporting arch, stood full thirty yards away from that remnant of the Hall in which Snelling had set up his new abiding-place; and in the interval between the two, where the main part of the building had once reared its splendid bulk, dog-rose, bramble, and thistle and poppy, foxglove, fern, and quaker-grasses, climbed or clung about the low walls of the ruin.

From the first, young John took a boyish fancy to the turret chamber, and there Will Gregg and he, as became two adventurous youthful spirits, enjoyed the long-drawn pleasures of many days' starvation upon rafts at sea, sustained protracted sieges from

invisible foes, took the scalps of imaginary Indians by the bushel, and alternated the parts of Crusoe and Friday on a desert island of their own fancy's making. When the midsummer holidays came round in their season, the two boys almost lived there; and Snelling, in some hope the place might prove to be dangerous and come tumbling one of these fine days about their ears, left them in undisturbed enjoyment of it.

The man in these days seemed living on a whirlpool. His own thoughts bore him round and round one dreadful centre, and his mind fixed itself always on the gulf that opened there, with a crazy longing to be hurled into it. His own projects were foiled on every hand; and he had upon him a constant sense of injury, which exasperated him

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madly. Everywhere his ward was responsible for his ill fortune; and the boy seemed to prosper in direct inverse ratio with his own hungry evil wishes for him. Proctor brought the most favourable intelligence about the discovered wealth on John's estate. Unthinking friendly neighbours congratulated him upon the find, solidly and heartily, meaning him no evil. Suspicious neighbours congratulated him with an under-meaning in face and voice, and he was prone to read that under-meaning everywhere. Avarice, hate, revenge, swelled and seethed about the keel of that devil's craft he had embarked on, and though to his own eye he seemed no nearer to its centre, every circle brought him nearer to it. His soul plumbed its depths at last, and he had no fear of them. From the zenith to the horizon of the firmament under which his dark soul rode towards its dreadful aim, there shone no star, whether of pity or foreboding.

Every man is two men at the least, and sometimes in us the better creature stands aghast at the incredible promptings of the baser. In him the two had made insensible approaches, and as it were without his knowledge, and now at last they were of one accord.

It was by no act of his that John had chosen the lamp which might have put an end to his life by its explosion at a fitting time. It was by no act of his, again, that the boy had made his playroom of a chamber which a thoughtful man would have looked at twice before he ventured to enter it. These were things for which he had no responsibility; but might he help Providence ever so little, and by doing so make himself rich beyond old dreams, and put that hated object out of sight without incurring so much as a breath of censure or suspicion?

The house had been built two hundred years ago, in days when the work of men's hands was meant to last. The mortar seemed to have grown to be an actual part of the brickwork and masonry it held together; but the chamber John had chosen overhung its supporting arch a little, and seemed to be held in its place by a mere cohesion of parts and half in defiance of gravitation. The two boys

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ramped and rushed about there and never shook it; and Snelling, watching their gambols sometimes from a distance, cursed the old builder's too honest workmanship.

Could he help Providence a little? Ever so little? A mere line of bricks taken out from the interior of the arch, for example? Taken out one by one in the night-time, and

replaced, until some night the whole thickness of the arch, one brick deep, should be easily swept away, and the chamber, with its superincumbent tons, should only wait the pressure of a foot to hurl it down? Surely, Fate tempted him. He knew, in his own dull uninventive mind, that if he had set all his wits to plot a scheme, he could have discovered or invented nothing so simple, so safe, so sure. Fate, fortune, luck, whatever name he chose to give it, had put this power within his hands.

He went to bed with the thought clear in his mind. The whole house lay asleep while he tossed and tumbled with that hideous fancy for his sole companion. The house had been furnished hastily, and the blind of his bedroom window fell some six inches short of the sash, so that on moonlit nights a gap of light was there, breaking the gray dimness of the window's oblong. He lay and stared at it, and if in his uneasy plunges, as some blunt spur of conscience pricked him, he turned his back upon it for a moment, an instant fear took hold of him, and made him look once more in that direction. A pointed, glittering, ghostly something reared itself like a crooked forefinger over the edge of the window-sash; like the peak of a ghost's head-dress, with phosphoric fires upon it; like an inexorable forefinger that moved one way without remorse or pause; like the point of a sword wielded by some righteous spirit conscious of his purpose, and threatening from afar to shear his soul in twain. No duller man, no man less fanciful, no man less conscious of the hell and heaven he carried in his bosom, laid his head upon pillow within twenty miles that night, and yet each and all of these strange fancies crossed his mind. He knew the while that the glittering point was no more than the horns of the

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crescent moon traversing the little space of exposed sky before him.

He would have it for a forefinger that beckoned—he would have it so. It should mean that, and neither less nor more. It beckoned towards the ruins. He chose that it should be inexorable, and having chosen so, he needs must follow it. Such tricks can fancy play the dullest embodiment of hate and avarice when the thoughts rise to murder. He rose, and moved about his own chamber noiselessly, like a midnight thief. He dressed himself roughly, and carrying his boots in hand, stole down the stairs. There he listened, with the darkness vast about him, and a whole blank black universe leaping at every heart-beat with murder at his ears. His own purpose appalled him; but that was nothing. Some insistent inward voice seemed to whisper that the thing was as good as done already. Some foolish perverted proverb of his youth was in his mind—'As well do it as think it'—a scrap of wisdom wrenched to folly's uses.

He found matches, a lantern, and a stump of candle. The harsh lock and harsher bolt shrieked warning as he opened the door with a laborious caution. He pulled his boots on outside, and trod with a thievish step upon the grass, not daring to let the loose and scattered gravel of the pathway prate of his whereabouts. Half-way he paused and turned, remembering that his bare hands were useless against the solid masonry. There was a lean-to shed which held garden-tools built out from the house, and here he found the broken prong of a pitchfork, as likely a thing to suit his purpose as he could have expected. The door of the tool-house hung upon a single hinge, and grated on the ground as he reclosed it. He trembled at the noise, and stood sweating and shaking for a full minute, when he bethought him to have every right to be abroad, and that the

excuse of any fancied noise about the grounds would easily explain his presence there. Even now he was resolute and collected enough to know, however, that the work of more than one night lay before him, and that his being observed once only might cast suspicion on him. No

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surcease of caution then. Step lightly. Listen with throbbing ears that detect a tracking footstep in the echo of your own. Find your own harsh breathing suddenly cast afar and changed to the breathing of an unseen watcher. Dread every rustle of the slumbering night.

He was underneath the arch, and safer, half sheltered from the bright night. The thing was not yet done, and for one moment he hung upon the edge of his abyss. It was altogether vain and foolish to question now whether he should plunge over or go back again, and yet he did it. A man in the maelstrom might as well have questioned—Shall I sink? Shall I swim? The steep looked dizzy, and whilst he hung above it, he was down.

He chose his place, and began to work. The first brick came out more easily than he had fancied possible. The mortar had crumbled somewhat with two hundred years of changeful weather. The next bit hard. His forehead was damp, and his unaccustomed plump hands were hot with labour before he had detached it from its place. The third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, succeeded. Then the whole vast chapter of life's accidents seemed opened. He saw himself ruined for a thousand reasons, sought for, called.

Enough for one night. He set the bricks back in their places, painfully picked up the larger fragments of mortar, dropped them in a corner crevice of the ground, and noticed with a disproportioned terror that the turf upon which he had stood looked trampled. He bent and brushed it with his fingers, and then stole back again. His fears stung him at every pore, but he reached his room in safety; and crawling noiselessly into bed again, fell to horrible dreams, in which the ruins tumbled upon him as he worked, crushing him with terror and with torture, and yet without effect on life or limb. Over and over and over again he broke the arch, and over and over and over again the ruins tumbled and overwhelmed him. Vaguely, in his dreams, he thought the way to peace and riches hard.

If the mingling of the forces of human nature were less

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grotesque and extravagant than it really is, the intrusion of the sordid comedy of Tobias Orme into the sordid tragedy of Robert Snelling might seem altogether wild. But Tobias served his purpose here, and might, for all one can tell to the contrary, have been born for no other end. The sovereign which Isaiah had bestowed upon that disreputable old person had not long staved off the attacks of thirst and hunger. He had fallen desperately ill by the wayside, had been found helpless and almost insensible with cold and privation, and carried to the workhouse infirmary. There the vital spark bade fair to quit its tenement; but after two or three months of flickering, now up, now down, grew feebly steady once more. The workhouse authorities, of course, were in favour of shipping him off to his own parish, and but for the doctor's energetic protest that he

could not possibly survive the journey, would, at a dozen of their weekly meetings, have voted for his transport.
The knowledge of his narrow escape from death frightened Tobias terribly and set him thinking. Rum-and-water had brought him to that dreadful pass, and the frightened wretch made tearful profession of his fault to the chaplain, and signed a pledge of total abstinence with eager trembling fingers.
The chaplain became interested in him; and discovering him to be a person of some education, and now that he was no longer bemused in drink, of some intelligence, would sometimes sit and listen to Mr. Orme's reminiscences, which were not always perhaps so truthful as they might have been. Tobias had read a good deal of imaginative fiction in his day, and it was as easy to say that his father had been a dissenting clergyman as it would have been to describe him as a small greengrocer and retail coal-vendor in Whitechapel. Perhaps it came as easy to Tobias to lie as to tell the truth. Perhaps no faculty can be cultivated to excess without danger to its opposite. A vocalist can elect to cultivate his voice upwards or downwards; but when once he has fixed his register, he will find it hard to change it.

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It was not in the least likely that the slowly convalescing invalid should omit from the confidences with which he furnished the chaplain the one fact in his career which made him important in his own eyes.
'Humble as I am, sir,' said Tobias oftentimes in speaking of the newly-opened coal-fields, 'I am the Columbus of that America. I think I may fairly say, sir, that my present condition is a monument of human ingratitude. Thousands upon thousands of pounds are being drawn every week from the bowels of the earth, and not one penny would ever have been touched if it had not been—I say it respectfully, sir, but whether I say it myself or whether I leave it for other people to say makes no difference, sir, to its veracity—not an atom of the money which has made poor men rich and rich men richer, would ever have gone into a human pocket if it had not been for my perspicacity and intelligence.'
This rather appealed to the chaplain; and the good man made inquiries of Isaiah Winter, who confirmed the story willingly enough, but shocked his questioner by an open avowal of his opinion with regard to Mr. Orme's character at large. The chaplain urged that it was hardly fitting that the man should starve whilst other people profited so enormously by his discovery.
'I'll talk it over with my partner,' said Isaiah, 'and we'll see what we can do.'
As a result of the chaplain's intercession, Tobias came out of the workhouse infirmary to the receipt of a weekly income of eighteen shillings, provided in equal portions by Messieurs Day and Winter. The spring was well advanced at the time of his discharge, and though he was still very feeble, and went quavering about on a pair of walking-sticks, the genial weather and movement in the open air soon set him up again. Wonderful to relate, he stuck to his promise of reform. The dread of death in a ditch became a monomania with him, and he grew miserly in his ways, depriving himself of all manner of creature-comforts, that he might save up something for the remnant of his days.

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CHAPTER XXXVII

TOBIAS, being now a gentleman at large, and having reached that blissful lubberland of dolce far niente towards which he had all his life long looked with yearning but hopeless eyes, it seemed to him the most natural and befitting thing in the world to settle near the scene of his discovery and to pose there as a personage. The public-house was the readiest place to pose in, but his mind ran away from the thought of its temptations as a whipped dog runs from a shaken stick. He took cheap lodgings in a labourer's cottage, and hoarded up a whole half of his weekly income.

A few months ago he would have spent his last threepence on rum without so much as troubling to ask where the next might come from. Now, with that suddenly developed eye for the future, he began to exercise a thousand mean precautions. The summer was barely beginning, but beyond the summer, winter lay, and he looked with dreadful prophetic eye towards the time of rain and snow and cold.

'I ought to be supplied with coal for nothing,' said Tobias; 'but I am too well acquainted with the heartless ingratitude of men for that. I shall be expected to disburse a pecuniary consideration for it.'

He began betimes, therefore, and was at all hours to be seen prowling about the roads on which the coal-wagons travelled. He carried with him a tattered old carpet-bag, and stooped for any fragment of coal which had fallen, if it were no bigger than a hazel nut. Rotten branches, bits of stick of any sort, found their way into this receptacle, and at night he would sometimes empty out half a dozen pounds weight. From the time of the beginning of this habit, nobody ever saw Tobias without the carpet-bag, which he lugged about with an unflagging industry.

One fine day he found himself by a breach in the hedge

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beside a great mossgrown wall, and seeing a biggish handful of half-rotted hedge-stakes, dry and ripe for burning, within reach, he took a cautious look about him and scrambled through the breach. The land sank here, and was thick with brush and bramble; and lying there, hidden for who knows how many years, were the remains of an old gate, which had fallen almost to matchwood. Tobias went for this prize exultantly, and filled his bag with fragments. He was in the very act of rising from his knees, when a sudden vista opened up before him. A stone had been removed from the wall, and through the hole thus made he could see into the grounds beyond it. He peered with interest, and could see an archway with a heap of picturesque ruins over it. This was not in itself a fascinating spectacle, and he had already satisfied a feeble momentary curiosity, when Snelling came in sight, with an aspect so stealthy and a face so pale that Tobias knelt and stared as if rooted to the spot.

The horrors of the night had been too much for the intending criminal, and Snelling had no courage to face them anew. But now, with the housekeeper being away for her marketing, and John by special leave picnicking with Will Gregg and divers others of

his companions in the Quarley Woods, he had full three hours clear. He had determined to finish his deadly work that day; but lonely as he knew himself, he was in a fury of fear lest he should be discovered at it. At every step he looked to right and left with a guilty horror which filled Tobias with wonder; and there was a something so stealthy and yet so threatening in his whole motion and aspect, that the amazed watcher could make neither head nor tail of his own surmises.

The first thing Snelling did was to enter the archway, and there, drawing a newspaper from his pocket, he unfolded it and spread it like a carpet on the grass, pushing it closely against the wall and folding its edge upward there. When he had done this, he came out, stepping on tiptoe, with face and gesture so marked with guilty fear, that a child could not have misread him. He looked hither and thither, and listened with bent head. Next, he

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drew a small pointed implement from his pocket, and returning to the arch, began to pry at the wall. He had not worked a minute, when some fancied noise arrested him, and he came stealing out on tiptoe.

What in the name of wonder could it mean? Like a ray of light the thought came—Buried Treasure!

'I will have a finger in that pie,' said Tobias.

It was all very well for the little Jousserau to resolve valorously on facing Shorthouse with a request for his daughter's hand; it was another thing to storm the breach of British prejudice.

'I shall have to put my self-love in my pocket,' said Jousserau. 'I shall have to put my patriotism in my pocket too. If I am accepted at all, and that is not very likely, I shall be taken faute de mieux and with a desperate sorrow.'

He knew something, but not all, of the Midland rustic's invincible ignorance of things and people outside immediate ken. He had been told in pretty plain language already that he was an outer barbarian. He knew that his neighbours for the time being regarded him as a sort of innocent, harmless savage; and though he was one of the best-humoured and sweetest-hearted fellows in the world, the self-satisfied ignorance with which the good stupid folk patronised their social and intellectual superior did really sometimes gall him. If it had stood entirely by itself, it would have been pure comedy to him; but it weighed heavily against his best hopes, and so was merely droll no longer.

On the day after his parting with Cecilia, he attired himself as if for a visit of ceremony, and with a heart alternately full of resolute courage and despair, made his way to Shorthouse's residence. Since the achievement of his portrait, Shorthouse had realised a fondness for the crimson plush waistcoat and the blue cloth coat with brass buttons such as he had never known before. He had begun to be awake as to their artistic value, and liked to pose in them to himself, and to sit in his own armchair

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with pot and pipe, looking as like his own picture as possible, and feeling fully conscious of the resemblance. It was a simple kind of vanity to assail a man of his

years; but he found a great pleasure in it, and it hurt nobody. The best clothes were not to be worn lightly and without occasion, and so the treat was not one of every day; but on the morning of Jousserau's visit, Shorthouse had a call to pay, and could afford himself the treat.

Cecilia saw her lover's arrival from her own chamber window and was overwhelmed by her emotions. She dreaded to think of what would happen, and she of course admired Jousserau's courage, whilst she despaired of the effect he might produce. Her father's opinions were not easily changeable; and with regard to Jousserau's offer, he was likely to be as obdurate as he had ever been about anything in his life. It may be confessed that Jousserau's task was easier than the girl's. It was he, to be sure, who had to face the dragon opposition; but meantime, as always in the best authenticated fairy stories, the maiden waited tremulous, powerless to strike a blow for her knight's life or her own freedom. In the authenticated fairy stories the knight always wins, and the damsel is always delivered; but in real life it is not so. The dragon of British prejudice was very unlikely to yield, she thought, to a French assault of arms.

The servant - girl announced Jousserau's arrival; and the farmer quitted his pose hastily and took up his position on the whitened hearthstone before the kitchen fender.

'Show the young man in, Jane,' he said gruffly; and Jousserau, standing at the door, heard feelingly the unpromising tone in which he spoke. 'Well,' said Shorthouse gruffly, 'what can I do for you this morning?'

'I wish to ask,' said Jousserau, standing uncovered before him, 'if you will give me five minutes of your private time?'

'Jane,' said the farmer, addressing the girl, 'you can find something to do in the dairy, I daresay. Take a cheer, Mr. Jousserong.'

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He remained standing, and Jousserau naturally followed his example.

'I should desire,' the artist began, 'in the first place to say to you what are my hopes and expectations, and what is my position in the world.'

The farmer, turning half-way round, deposited his long Broseley on the tall mantelpiece, and ramming his clenched fists into the pockets of his riding breeches, faced his companion anew with a look of dogged waiting.

'Some months ago,' pursued Jousserau, who had taken great trouble with his English, and had all night long rehearsed the scene in his mind—'some months ago I gave up a situation which brought me twelve pounds a week. I had held it for four years, and had saved sixteen hundred pounds. I have now two thousand pounds at the bank of Castle-Barfield. I can make by my work half as much every year. In time it is likely that I make more—perhaps much more. My father, who lives at Arles, in France, is there landed proprietor, and is worth six hundred pounds in the year. He has no child but me. That, sir, is my position.'

Shorthouse's gaze had grown more and more dogged as the artist spoke, and under his uncompromising stare speech was increasingly difficult. 'Well,' said Shorthouse, 'that being so, you're pretty well-to-do. But now, what's all that got to do along with me?'

'If I should marry,' said the artist, 'I should settle upon my wife my whole belongings. I am Protestant. You can inquire of my character of all who know me, and I will give you every ease to do that.'
'Yes,' said Shorthouse; 'I see where you're a-driving. Go along.'
'It is in short, sir,' Jousserau concluded, 'that I present myself as a suitor for your daughter's hand.'
'So I supposed,' said Shorthouse. 'I'll tell you what it is: you can present yourself at home, with "No" for a answer.'
The manner of the speech was as bluffly insulting as its matter, and Jousserau felt it. But it was robbed of

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half its sting by the fact that he had expected it, and he was too firmly set upon his purpose to allow himself to lose temper or to be beaten finally at the first assault.
'Sir,' he said, therefore, 'I shall ask you to think something of Mees Cecilia's happiness before you decide. I did meet Mees Cecilia yesterday, and she was distressed, and did not speak. I took the liberty to ask of her if it was that you had forbidden her to speak. She told me "Yes." I said then that I must try to change your mind.'
'You did, did you?' said Shorthouse. 'Well, if you'll be advised, you'll save a deal o' trouble. You might just as well get up and tell this house to walk away as ask me to change my mind about that. I'm not a man as changes his mind that easy.'
'Pardon me,' Jousserau went on, desperately but quietly, and with every outward sign of self-possession. 'Mees Cecilia has obeyed your wish. She is dutiful daughter, and will continue to obey your wish. But forgive me, sir; I know you a man of a good heart. You will not wish to make your child unhappy. If Mees Cecilia wishes that I say no more, I will not trouble her again, or you. But it seems to me just that I should ask, "Will you speak to Mees Cecilia?"'
'No,' said Shorthouse bluntly; 'I won't speak to Miss Cecilia; and I won't have you speaking to Miss Cecilia neither. You've mended up your English a bit lately, and it seems by this time as if you could understand what was said to you. Now you tek this from me, plain and straight: If ever my gell says "I will" at the marriage altar, her'll say it to a brother-Englishman. D'ye see me? D'ye understand? I've nothin' agen you, so far as I know. I don't want to put the thing no rougher than it has got to be put; but when I've got to say a thing, I like to say it. I've said what I've got to say this time, and I look to ha' done with it.'
Did ever the fatherly dragon encounter the knightly suitor with more uncompromising defiance? Cecilia listening on the stairs melted into noiseless tears, and stole back to her chamber despairing. Jousserau stood pale

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and troubled, and for a little time said nothing. By-and-by, however, he drew himself together, and then he said an unwise and unguarded thing: 'We are both young, and we can wait.'

'Look here, young sir,' cried the farmer; 'you shall do none of your waiting about my doorstep. I warn thee now, mind me, if I catch thee at that it shall be the worse for thee. I'll have no maggoty fancies put i' my gell's head. You'd best go back to your own country and wait there. If I catch you sneaking about my place, you and me will quarrel.'
'Sir,' returned Jousserau, self-possessed again, 'it will take two to quarrel; and I shall not quarrel with Mees Cecilia's father.' He bowed.
The farmer turned round to take his pipe again; and the suitor went his way, naturally depressed by the result of his interview. Not a scale of the dragon's armour had been dinted, but the errant knight was wounded sorely, and the imprisoned damsel wept in her turret.
'Cecilia!' her father bellowed upstairs after a lengthy pause. 'Come down here; I've a word to say to you.'
The girl sponged her eyes with fresh water, and making what hasty pretence she could of being her natural self, ran downstairs with reddened eyelids and new tears in her eyes.
'What's the matter with you?' Shorthouse demanded firmly.
'Nothing, father—nothing.'
'Ah!' said papa; 'I see. Thee'st been a-listenin'. I can save myself the trouble o' talkin', then. Tell me the truth. Thee know'st what's happened?'
'Yes, father'—in the faintest frightened whisper.
'And that's what thee'st been cryin' for?'—No answer this time, but only a fresh outburst of tears, and a blushing face hastily covered up in a handkerchief.—'All right, my gell.' He walked a pace or two up and down the room, then struck a lucifer match and applied it to the bowl of his pipe, and so sat down puffing stolidly. 'You think it's hard, I dessay,' he went on philosophically. It

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came easy to him to be philosophical, for he was not the one who suffered. 'In a year or two, Cecilia, you'll be thankful for what I'm a-doin' for you now.'—The girl thought otherwise, but said nothing.—'What d'ye think 'ud happen to you hereafterwards if I was to let you marry a foreigner now? Anybody, to look at you,' he continued scornfully, ''ud think as you was a-bein' ill done-by. What d'ye think I'm doin' except for your own good, ye baggage? D'ye think it matters to me who you marry? I ain't a-goin' to marry a Frenchman. It's me as is a-savin' you from all manner o' troubles and worries, and here you sit a-cryin' at me as if I was a-hurtin' you.'
Poor Cecilia thought that if she had wanted to be saved from marrying the Frenchman she might have felt differently. But she did not want to be saved from that doom. And to hear Achille spoken of as if he were something beneath the run of common men, in place of being so infinitely above them as her lover was sure to be, was surely hard for any girl to hear. There was something romantic and fine in having a sweetheart who was a foreigner, and the sentiment was none the less real with her because she loved her lover for better qualities than that, and had a very fair understanding of his general worth. He was an artist—a man of genius—a gentleman—infinitely better than the crowd of men she knew. She would no more have dreamed of setting the one solid

English pretender to her hand on the same level with Jousserau than she would have dreamed of evening a hind from her father's fields with Snelling. Mr. Snelling was all very well in his way, no doubt; and if she had never seen Achille, she might even have married him, in deference to her father's wishes. But then where would have been the tender enthusiasm, the adoring worship, the timid heart-beat, the rapturous silent acknowledgment of a look or word which blessed her now, and made life a constant succession of delightful emotions? The little Jousserau was like a king among men, to her raptured fancy. And quite properly and naturally, the more he was denied to her, the more she cared for him, until the

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affection, which if left to itself would have flowed on tranquilly and equably, stormed along in a series of cascades as big and noisy as the young lady's nature could find room and voice for.

'I'll tell thee what it is,' said papa, who was just the man for extreme measures. 'Thee'lt never get this nonsense out o' thy head till thou'rt provided with a husband. I'm a-goin' to tek this matter in hand myself, and I shan't be long afore I make a bend of it. I picked out a man for thee months ago, and you kep' him shilly-shallyin' with I wool and I won't, and at last give him a "No" without rhyme or reason.' He set his pipe on the table with so much emphasis as to shiver it in a dozen pieces, took his hat from the peg on which it hung, and walked straight out of the house, bent on heroic measures. He took the way which led to Tallymount Hall, and finding the iron gates there locked against him, began to shake at them and to roar alternately 'House!' and 'Snelling!'

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE voice of Mr. Shorthouse reached Snelling's ears, and those of Tobias Orme also, for it was at this time that the murderous plotter was engaged upon his guilty work. Orme saw him start and stare out of the archway with eyes of terror. Then he saw him huddle up the newspaper he had spread upon the turf to catch the falling fragments of mortar, and cram it away into the centre of a clump of thick gram bushes near at hand. Next he restored to their places the bricks he had removed from the arch, and coming out upon the open sward, stood still for a moment, manifestly endeavouring to remove all signs of emotion from his face. When he thought he had succeeded, he answered Shorthouse's repeated calls with a boisterous 'Hilly ho!' and walked in the direction of the gate, leaving Mr. Orme in his hiding-place, full of the wildest conjectures as to the

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value of the treasure-trove which could so excite a man of Snelling's wealth and solidity of character.

'What bee'st locked in for i' this way?' Shorthouse demanded as Snelling came in sight.

'Anybody as finds the gates open,' Snelling answered, 'thinks he's got a right to come in here and poke his nose anywheer he likes to. There's nobody about the place but myself just now. I'll let thee in, in a minute. This fastening's a bit rusty.'

'Bob, ode lad,' said Shorthouse, 'thee been't looking well.'
'I'm worried,' returned Snelling growlingly, as he tugged at the rusted fastening of the gate—'I'm worried. I don't eat my victuals; I can't sleep o' nights.'—He looked, if Shorthouse had had the fancy to think of it, like some wild thing tearing at the bars of his cage.—'Come in,' he said, when he had at length withdrawn the fastening. 'I'm glad to have anybody about; I'm not so good at being lonesome as I used to be.'
'That's a stroke at what I'm here for, Bob,' returned the farmer. 'Let's go into the house. Gi'e me a drop o' beer. Theer's nothin' meks a man so dry as anger.'
Snelling drew a jug of ale from a cask in his housekeeper's room and set it before his visitor. Shorthouse took a lengthy pull at it and returned it noisily to the table. 'Bob,' he said, 'be you i' the same mind as you used to be in about marryin' my Cecilia?'
'Is it any good for me to be o' that mind?' Snelling asked in turn.
'Yes or no?' cried Shorthouse, beating on the table with his clenched hand. 'Be you i' the same mind?'
'I'm not one o' them featherheads as are o' one mind one day and another the next,' said Snelling.
'Very well,' said Shorthouse. 'You can marry the gell in four weeks' time from now.'
Snelling, who had taken a seat on the opposite side of the table to his visitor, rose at this and thrust out his right hand with a fierce gesture towards Shorthouse. The farmer rose also and accepted it, and the two shook hands across the table.

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'That's a bargain,' said Shorthouse. 'Theer's blood in it too,' he added, laughing. 'What ha' you been doin' at your knuckles, Bob? You've gashed 'em somehow.'
'It's nothing,' Snelling answered. 'I was a-doin' a bit o' rough work this mornin'—and my hand slipped. I hit my knuckles agen the wall, I reckon. I hardly knowed about it.'
'I'll tell thee what I'm goin' to do,' said Shorthouse. 'That wench o' mine has got her head full o' that young Frenchman. Me an' her's had a bit of a shindy this mornin', and I've told her as I'm goin' to put a finish on all her nonsense. If yourn willin' to tek her just as her stands, with her craze about the frog-eater as well as everythin' else her's got, I'll start this hour, and see as the bands is cried in church next Sunday mornin'. I've got a very pretty penny, Bob, and when I'm gone, yer'll have the lot on it.'
'Never mind that,' said Snelling; 'all that's nothing to me.'
'You've changed, then,' said Shorthouse dryly.
'Yes,' said Snelling, with a suppressed rage in his face and voice; 'I've changed. Time was I wouldn't ha' married her, or dreamed o' marrying her, without her lands. You can send her now as naked as a robin, if you like. I can't eat,' he flashed out; 'I can't sleep. I'm a fool about the wench.'
'That's how the cat jumps, is it?' Shorthouse answered, laughing. 'I've allus heard it's pretty hard on the middle-agëd uns; but I never remember to ha' seen a case afore. All right, Bob. Come along wi' me; we'll get that bit o' business o'er at once.'
'Sit there a minute,' said Snelling. 'I'll get a wash and come back directly.'
The unexpected turn of fortune coming on the horrible emotions of the last half-hour had set him shaking like a woman. He would fain have been alone, to realise in his own

thoughts the chance that had befallen him, and yet he was so far afraid of himself that he clung to Shorthouse's companionship.

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The two went to the parish clerk together and there gave instructions for the calling of the banns of marriage between Robert Snelling, widower, and Cecilia Shorthouse, spinster; and then and there separated to go their several ways. Snelling could not go back to his horrid work again that day; he had no nerve for it; and Tobias waited and pined in vain, until sheer hunger drove him home.

The farmer, re-entering his own house, hung up his hat, searched for a new Broseley, filled and lit it, and sat down contentedly, altogether satisfied with the masterly stroke he had just played. None of your contumelious daughters for Farmer Shorthouse. He knew how to manage 'em. The whole country-side would know what he had done, and he would be cited as a pattern of parental authority whenever foolish girls ran counter to it. As for the girl being unhappy when once she was married and settled, that, of course, was all nonsense. He was in no haste to communicate his news to Cecilia; but he was in no dread of it either; and when the girl, with swollen eyelids and scalded cheeks, came down, in obedience to his call, to the mid-day dinner, he gave her his news with a cheerful unconscious brutality which was at least as easy to endure as any finesse could possibly have been.

'I've been to see Bob Snelling,' he said, as he plunged the carving-fork into the sirloin before him, 'and him and me has been together to put the bands up next Sunday and the two Sundays following for your wedding along with him.' He spoke deliberately, carving the while, and set a plentiful portion before the girl. Then he helped himself and fell-to with a robust appetite.

'Father,' said Cecilia, in a tone so low that at first he scarcely heard her, 'I shall never marry Mr. Snelling.' Her face was deathly white, and there was a look in her eyes which her father had never seen there before.

'That, you see, my wench,' he responded, with his mouth full of beef and greens, 'is wheer you and me is of two different opinions.'

'Father,' she said again, 'I shall never marry Mr. Snelling.'

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'You're mistook, my gell,' he responded with a cheerful indifference. 'You and Bob Snelling'll be married next Monday fortnight. You can begin a-thinking about the wedding dresses as soon as ever you like. Theer's all your mother's things upstairs as you can pick and choose from. Theer's a silk or two up there in the big press as'll stand by 'emselves, and has got a hundred years o' wear in 'em.'

'You don't know what you're doing, father,' said the girl, rising with her resolute white face and frightened eyes—'you don't know what you're doing.'

'Rubbidge, my wench, rubbidge,' responded the farmer, and went on comfortably with his dinner after Cecilia had left the room.

That afternoon Jousserau, with very little heart for his work, sat at his easel with a typical yokel posed before him. He knew that he was painting badly, and that every-

thing he did would have to come out again; but in spite of that knowledge, he went on with no other object than to hold thought at a distance. Somewhere about three o'clock, Isaiah came tapping at the door, and being admitted, showed a countenance of unusual gravity.

'You can do without this lad a minute,' he said. 'Best send him down into the kitchen. I've got summat important to say to thee.'—The yokel being dismissed, Isaiah sat down with an air of mystery and importance, but almost immediately rising, took a bottle of cognac from a sideboard, poured out a glass from it and set it on the table.—'In case you should be in want o' that,' he remarked, 'it's handy. It might do you no harm if you was to tek it now.'

'What is the matter?' Jousserau asked him in surprise.

'Why,' returned Isaiah, 'I've just happened to pass by the parish clerk's; and him bein' a oldish chum of mine, and me not liking to be 'aughty with the man because I'm a bit better off than I used to be, I dropped in, so to speak, to have a word along wi' him. I meant to pass the time of day with him, and no more; but all of a sudden he up and tells me a thing as knocked me as high as a kite. "Mr.

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Snelling," he says, "and Mr. Short'us," he says, "has been here this morning," he says, "to put up the bands o' marriage between Robert Snelling, widderer, and Cecilia Shorthouse, spinster." You'd better take that drop o' brandy, Mr. Jousserong; it'll do you good.'

'I do not understand,' said Jousserau, waving the proffered glass aside. 'What is it, the bands of marriage?'

'Bob Snelling and Miss Shorthouse,' explained Isaiah, 'are going to be cried in church next Sunday. The names'll be called out three Sundays running; and then, in the natural course o' things, the two'll get married.'

'I will not believe it,' cried the artist, rising to his feet.

'You've got to believe it,' Isaiah answered. 'I've seen it in the clerk's own handwriting. It's only possible to believe as the young woman has gi'en in her consentment; and what you've got to do, Mr. Jousserong, is to pluck up a sperrit and think no more about her.'

'No,' said Jousserau staunchly, 'that I shall not believe. She has not consented. They have done it without her will, without her knowledge. She does not care for Mr. Snelling.'

'That's like enough,' returned Isaiah. 'But if her's been frightened into it, her ain't the first young woman that has happened to.'

'I will not believe it,' said Jousserau again, and indeed his whole heart rose in revolt against the fancy. 'You know?' he said, tapping at his breast to indicate himself. 'I have never spoken a word about it; but you know, and that is why you bring this news to me.'

'I know?' said Isaiah. 'The parish knows. It's talked about at the town-pump, if that's any comfort to you.'

The two sat silent for a while; and Jousserau, mechanically taking up his palette and brushes, laid an absentminded touch or two upon the canvas with an air of profound

study; then he laid his tools down again and turned to face Isaiah. 'I shall go and find out,' he said; 'I will know the truth.'
'Don't you make a fool of yourself,' Isaiah advised in rough friendship.

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'I must know the truth; I will know the truth,' cried Jousserau, rising. He spoke with a fierce gesture, the southern flame flashing out of him for the first time.
'Yes, yes, yes,' returned Isaiah; 'so you may, but you mustn't make a fool of yourself, all the same. I'll tell you how we'll manage. Mrs. Winter and Miss Shorthouse has allus been pretty good friends. It was mere hazard as I found out what happened. Old Shorthouse'll never guess as the missis'll know anything about it, and her can mek a call on Cecilia and spy out the land, d'ye see.' Isaiah gouged this idea into Jousserau with elaborate workings of the thumb, and accompanied it with many persuasive winks and nods. Jousserau hailing it eagerly, Isaiah went out upon the landing and shouted to his wife to ascend.
'Cecilia Shorthouse marry Bob Snelling!' cried Mrs. Winter shrilly, when Isaiah had communicated his news to her. 'Never i' this world, with her own good-will. No, no, Isaiah; never you believe it. Go down and find out for you, Mr. Jousserong? To be sure I will. Her shall never marry that hunks, as I suffered and trembled under for 'ears and 'ears, if anything I can say can put a stop to it. Why, I do assure you, Mr. Jousserong, I've knowed that man grumble for five months on end about a button as was off the back of his shirt-collar. He's never twice i' the same mind about his breakfast bacon the wull year round; and as for his heggs, he'll have 'em hard-biled one morning and soft-biled another morning, enough to drive you mad with worry.'
Mrs. Winter lost no time in assuming the black silk of ceremony, and even on this occasion dared to wear the wonderful bonnet which Jousserau had brought home from Paris six months before. My Lady Barfield had appeared in church in a structure less splendid and imposing; and the county member's wife had worn a bonnet which, as Mrs. Winter declared, might have been twin-sister to her own. The flower-stuffed Norman arch was sanctified by fashion; and the good woman put it on and carried it down the lanes with pride.
Shorthouse was away from home when she reached his

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door; and Miss Cecilia, who was occupied with her tears, had locked herself in her chamber and would at first see nobody. The big ruddy servant-girl told the visitor enough to assure her that the match Shorthouse was forcing on was unwelcome to his daughter. The servant knew nothing about the reason of her mistress's tears, but said she: 'Miss Cecilia's a-crying like a watering-cart. I've knocked at her door three times and her teks no manner o' notice.'
'I'll have a try,' said Mrs. Winter, and so mounted the stairs and knocked at Cecilia's door. The servant-girl pointed it out to her and stood agape with interest.
'Go away!' said a weeping voice from within. 'I don't want anything. Leave me alone.'

'My poor dear darlin',' said Mrs. Winter, beginning at these mournful accents to sniffle on the outside of the door. 'It's me as has come to say a comfortin' word to you. Let me in, there's a love.'
The maid, like the foolish fat scullion in Sterne's immortal story, blubbered into sudden tears and ran away with her apron over her head.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE key turned in the lock, and Cecilia stood in the half-light, with swollen eyes and tearful face and disordered hair, like a blurred picture. Mrs. Winter, conscious of old social differences, but emboldened by the bonnet, embraced her on the spot; and the girl clung to her piteously with fresh tears, not as yet knowing the meaning of her visit, but scenting sympathy and friendship.
'Now, you won't cry no more, my love,' said Mrs. Winter, wiping her own eyes and turning the key in the lock. 'I can tell you one thing, my dear, as ought to do your heart good. Young Mr. Jousserong, up at our house, is in such a state o' mind that I'm sure as Isaiah's more

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than half afraid of him. As for this 'ere marriage as your father talks on, it 'ud be no less than a sinful crime to carry it through. And all the fathers in the world, my dear, might talk from now till Judgment Day, but they'd never mek it law as a gell could give her hand where her heart could never be. Why, my dear, if you was to drop a line to the vicar, or, for the matter o' that, if I was to do it, do you think as he'd cry the bands in church next Sunday? Not he. I can tell you a thing or two about Robert Snelling, my dear, as 'ud never let you marry the man, not if every hair of his head was hung wi' diamonds. He's as cantankerous and contrarisome as he's high, my dear, and that ain't sayin' a little, for he's the tallest man in the parish. He's got that notions of himself as he might be Lord Barfield or the Pope o' Rome and yet be no prouder. There's nothin' satisfies the man; and to think o' throwin' away a pretty blossom like you, my dear, on such a rubbish-heap as that meks me sick to think about it. Never you fear, my darlin'; theer's them about as'll take care o' you.'
'I wo—won't marry Mr. Snelling,' sobbed Cecilia; 'I'll die first.'
'Highty-tighty!' said Mrs. Winter, 'who's a-talkin' about dyin'? We'll marry our own sweetheart first, that's what we'll do, won't we? You listen to me, my dear. I'm a old experienced woman, and I can talk to you. You let Mr. Jousserong do what young Squire Tanant did when he ran away with Miss Featherstone. Her father was agin the match, and he wanted her to marry a lord, as was older than he was, though you'd hardly believe it, and had led a dreadful life; and the young Squire he went up to London, and he paid a hundred pound for a special license at Doctors' Commons; and he came down with it in his pocket; and he married the lady at ten o'clock in the mornin' the very day afore the old lord was to have wedded her. He killed her with his wild ways afterwards, and ran through her fortune in three years; but that's how he got over old Featherstone and married the girl of his heart.'
To this consolatory and hopeful narrative, Cecilia gave

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attentive ear. She seemed to see a spark of hope in it; and yet, desperate as her affairs looked, she was hardly prepared to defy her father in that way. 'I don't know what to do,' she said helplessly. 'I only know that I'll never marry Mr. Snelling.'
'Come, my darlin',' urged Mrs. Winter, 'you're fond of Mr. Jousserong, ain't you? I'm sure he's as pretty a figure of a man for a little un as you'd see anywheres. He's got a good round lump at the bank, as I know from Isaiah, and as good a livin', seemingly, in them clever fingers o' his as if he owned land and houses. Now come, my dear, tell me, ain't you fond of Mr. Jousserong?'
It took a great deal of persuasion to draw out the truth. Cecilia confessed at first that she liked Achille, and then acknowledged that she liked him very much indeed. Finally, by dint of some art and much persistence, Mrs. Winter elicited the statement that Cecilia would never, never, never marry anybody else.
'Now, my dear,' said Mrs. Winter, when this result was attained, 'will you let the young man do his best to help you out of this sore trouble? I'm sure he's got the willin' heart to do it. You could know that only by lookin' at him, at least a old discernin' woman like myself can. Now will you, my dear, just say "Yes" to that? Will you tek what help your friends and your sweetheart can give you?'
Perhaps if Jousserau had been there to plead his own cause, the affirmative answer might have come more easily than it did; as it was, it came at last, but only after an infinity of persuasion.
'Theer's a love,' said Mrs. Winter approvingly. 'Now dry them pretty eyes, and Flit away, sorrow, for love comes now.'
Right at the finish of this scene of consolation, the Roman Father came home again, and standing at the foot of the stairs, roared for Cecilia in a tone of noisy bantering good-humour.
The girl clung to her new-found ally. 'Here's father! What shall we do? He'll know that you are here.'
'Oh yes, my dear,' said Mrs. Winter, with a prophetic

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little shiver, 'he'll know I'm here. I'll let him know that this instant minute.' Therewith, in rustling silks, she sailed undaunted to the door, and from the landing her voice sailed before her satirically shrill. 'What d'ye want, to beller at the gell i' thatnin for?'
For the moment the farmer stood aghast at these unexpected accents; but by the time his daughter's champion had descended, he had recovered himself; the wonderful bonnet gave him a chance at once. 'Bess o' Bedlam's fine to-day,' he said, as a greeting to his visitor. The lady's voice had conveyed a challenge, and he was not slow to accept it.
Mrs. Isaiah, forgetful of the black silk gown, planted her knuckles on her hips and faced him with arms akimbo. 'I wonder you ain't ashamed,' she began, 'to look a decent woman i' the face.'
'Fetch one in and try,' he responded with ready impoliteness.

But for this, there would have been an immediate outburst of oratory; but the retort was so swift, sudden, and unexpected, that the good woman was checked in the very beginning of her flight.
'You've heerd the news?' said Shorthouse, with a sardonic grin. 'All right. I know what ye think about it, and you can save yourself the trouble o' talkin'. If I'd got a jaw as slack-hung as a female's, I could say it all myself as well as thee could'st. If I might tek the liberty o' saying so, mum, you're one o' that family o' poultry as does the cackling for other hens' eggs. You've been known for that this thirty 'ear.'
'I'm not one o' them,' retorted Mrs. Winter, 'as puts their fingers into other folk's pies.'
'"I'm honest, quoth Tom Pickpocket,"' responded the farmer.
'But this I will say,' pursued Mrs. Winter, ignoring the interruption, 'that I never met such a gallus ode fool as you be in all my born days. My Isaiah called o' the parish clerk this mornin', and heard what you and Bob Snelling had done between you. Oh! you can pretend to tek it

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easy'—for the farmer had taken down his Broseley and was filling it with an air of philosophic reflection—'but nayther you nor no man can afford to forget what his neighbours think about him. The wull parish'll cry "Fie" upon you. You've got a name a'ready to be a bitter hard un; but I ain't afraid on you, and I'm glad to be the first to speak my mind.'
'Dear me!' said Shorthouse, pulling at his pipe and throwing one leg comfortably across the other, 'how this does remind me of old times! I could almost think as my missis was alive agen.'
'You're treatin' your child,' cried Mrs. Winter, 'wuss than the beasts of the field! You're a-passin' your own flesh through the fire unto Moloch, that's what you're a-doin'.'
'Look here,' said Shorthouse; 'you go and spend your spite agen the chap as sacked your man, elsewheer. I've got nothing agen Isaiah, if he hadn't married you; and bein' a widderer myself, I can afford to pity him.'
'Pity!' cried Mrs. Winter; 'it ain't under your skin. You've got the prettiest gell i' the parish somehow or other—though it's no thanks to your beauty, to be sure—and you want to throw her away on a man as is old enough to be her father; and a contrarier heart can't be found in six parishes. D'ye think as the vicar'll cry the bands if I was to speak a word to him; and I will, mind you. Have your wicked way, you shan't, Ephraim Shorthouse.'
'Tek yours, my good woman,' the farmer answered—'tek it quick, and stop on it. It'll never cross mine, with my good-will. I've always thought well of Solomon's family wisdom, but never so well as now. You go home and read what he's got to say about the contentious woman.'
'You quote Scripter, you villain!' cried Mrs. Winter, goaded to an almost wordless wrath by the farmer's constant victory. 'I've no patience with you.'
'That's what I used to think when my father give me a hidin'. You ain't expected to have any patience, missis. If you've got common-sense left enough to find your way, go and seek it.'

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Mrs. Winter retired, vanquished, and yet victorious. The plot was laid already, the insolent, cruel farmer undermined, and she had spoken not a word about it. Once or twice she had been sorely tempted openly to prophesy disaster to his plans, but she had resisted the temptation.

The conversation the good lady reported at home bore but little resemblance to that which had really taken place, for before she reached her husband's door, she had found a perfect response to each of the farmer's seemingly unanswerable satires, and had quite convinced herself of the truth of her own version. She poured it all out upon Isaiah, who laughed, and took pride in her verbal smartness; and Jousserau descending, joined in the laughter, anxious as he was.

'If you're ready, Mr. Jousserong,' she said, 'Cecilia's willin'. It took a mighty heap o' trouble to drag it out of her; but if you'll go to London and get a special license, her'll marry you, if nothing better can be done.'

The artist expressed his readiness to do anything to rescue his love from a fate so terrible as that which threatened her. Banking hours were over, and there was no drawing the money that night; but here Isaiah came to the fore, and offered manfully to cash his lodger's cheque for two hundred pounds upon the spot. He volunteered, moreover, to put the pair of steppers into the brake and drive Jousserau to the railway station.

Jousserau scrawled his cheque, and ran upstairs to dress and pack. When he descended again, the money lay already in gold and notes upon the table; and Isaiah was outside, hurrying on the preparations for the drive. Their way led them past the farmer's house; and Cecilia, hearing the sound of wheels, peeped out of window, and saw her knight flying away to find arms for her deliverance. Jousserau kissed his hand to her as he was borne swiftly by, and she responded to his farewell in a like fashion and shrank blushing behind the curtain.

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CHAPTER XL

ABOUT noon on the following day, young John, accompanied by his fidus Achates, rushed up to Isaiah's house and with great empressement demanded to see Mr. Jousserau.

'Mr. Jousserong's gone to London, my lad,' said Isaiah, who himself answered the summons of the boys. 'He can't be back afore nightfall, if he gets back then.'

At this the two visitors stared at each other with faces so ludicrously crestfallen and wondering, that Isaiah was moved to ask what was the matter.

'Why,' said John, 'it's Madame Vigne's birthday, and Mr. Jousserau invited her and Monsieur Vigne and Will and me; and we were all to picnic at Quarley Woods together. We have waited more than an hour already. He was to meet us at the Quarley Arms. He can't have forgotten.'

'He must ha' forgotten,' Isaiah answered, 'for he's gone up to London on very important business. It's most likely put the picnic out of his head. I've heerd him talk about it; but I don't remember what day he fixed it for. You're sure it's to-day?'
'Yes,' John insisted. 'It's Madame's birthday. She knows her own birthday.'
'Hm!' said Isaiah, scratching his head and staring downward at the boys. 'That's a rum start, that is. What are you going to do?'
'I don't know what we can do,' Will answered disconsolately. 'We can't send them back again.'
'Well, no,' returned Isaiah with a long-drawn drawl. 'You can't send 'em back again, I reckon. Wait a bit; I'll talk to the missis about it.'
The result of the conference was that Isaiah offered the hospitalities of his own house to the disappointed guests, and undertook to explain to Madame the reason of Jousserau's

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absence. The brake was harnessed to convey her and her husband from their present resting-place. The boys were sent into the garden to await his return; and Mrs. Winter and her maid plunged into the kitchen to make ready for these additions to her table. In something over half an hour Isaiah came back, having explained the position of affairs to Madame with perfect success. That excellent personage was profoundly interested in Achille's love affairs, and proved to be already deeply in his confidence. Mrs. Winter, having brought matters to such a pass in the kitchen that she could safely leave the maid, assumed her company attire, and related triumphantly the revised and improved story of her interview with Farmer Shorthouse. Madame laughed until her fat sides shook again, and was so appreciative of Mrs. Winter's aftermath of wit, that the hostess corrected earlier impressions and took the warmest fancy to her. The story was, of course, privately discussed; and the boys, as being too young to be entrusted with so important a secret, were shut out from the conference.
After the mid-day dinner, John was eager to show Madame Vigne his new abiding-place, and above all, to display the splendours of that half-ruined turret which belonged wholly to himself.
'Ah, but,' said Madame, shaking her sage head, 'your uncle does not like me, my child; and perhaps I am not very fond of your uncle, and altogether it may be best that I should not go.'
'But uncle isn't at home,' John protested eagerly. 'He went away on horseback before I came out. He has gone to Birmingham to the exchange, and when he does that, he never comes home before night-time.'
The boy was so eager, that Madame, after her own good-natured fashion, gave way to him. Mrs. Winter, to whom Tallymount Hall had been a sealed mystery all her life, was eager to see it. She had passed the locked gates scores of times in her childhood, and had known the story of the wicked Squire and his ghostly revisiting of the grounds ever since she could remember. She, being assured

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of Snelling's absence, was as eager to go as John was to take her; and Isaiah being easily persuaded also, the whole party made off to the ruined Hall. John led them to his turret chamber, and displayed his small museum of birds' nests, home-preserved skins of stoat and weasel, the doleful results of an attempt of his own to stuff a kestrel, and other wonders of the like nature. When everything had been inspected, and everybody had been put into a certain position to admire the view from the window, the visitors, who were about to leave, were astonished by the sudden entrance of the master of the place.

Everybody thought him a little pale and worn; but he assumed an aspect of unwonted jollity. 'Showing your friends about, John?' he began. 'That's right, my lad. Make 'em welcome—make 'em welcome.'

His first thoughts had leapt to the idea of some perquisition into his intended crime, and the sound of voices in the chamber had rooted him with terror for a moment. But standing below to listen, he had learned that all the voices were gay and friendly, and he began to see his own advantage in this unexpected gathering. If he had planned it for himself, it would never have been a hundredth part so valuable as it might be now. When he put his plan into execution, and the turret chamber came down with young John in it, he would have the testimony of the boy's best friends to the apparent safety of the place. He would have their testimony, too, as to his relations with his ward; and he tried, by a boisterous, half-hysteric cordiality, to show that they were altogether friendly.

'This is a niceish sort of a place for a young chap to have all to himself, Isaiah,' he said, slapping his old henchman on the shoulder. 'Fine place for a lad to sport about in. I should ha' been rare and proud, when I was a lad, to ha' had the run of anything like it.'

His geniality was a little overdone; and the friendly clap on Isaiah's shoulder was altogether miscalculated. In place of setting Isaiah immediately at friendly ease, he made him wonder, the friendly freedom was so unlike Snelling.

'The gaffer's been a-drinkin',' Isaiah whispered, a minute

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or two later, to Mrs. Winter, when, after some difficulty, they had succeeded in manœuvring her into a corner.

Mrs. Winter formed a voiceless 'No' with her eyes, and then touching her wedding ring with the tip of a forefinger, smiled meaningly.

'Ah!' said Isaiah in a cautious murmur; 'most like you're right; I never thought of that.'

'Well, mum,' said Snelling, turning upon Madame Vigne, with his respectable bulky swagger a trifle overdone, as everything was doomed to be with him that afternoon, 'here's your lad, ye see. He doesn't look as if there was much the matter with him, does he? Turn your face up, lad, and let the lady have a look at you. There he is, mum, as bright and healthy a lad as you'd desire to see.'

'Ye-es,' said Madame, 'he is looking very well; he is looking very happy.'

'Your uncle Robert hasn't eaten you up yet; has he, lad?' said Snelling with a noisy laugh.

Messieurs John and Will both broke out laughing at this; and Madame, who had been looking a little doubtful, permitted herself to smile.

'He's been a twel'month under my care now,' cried Snelling. 'Ask him how he likes it. Pretty contented, John, my lad, eh?'
'Pretty contented, uncle,' John answered, still laughing.
The ease and informality of this response, and a little gleam of affectionate humour in the boy's eyes as he made it, did more to convince Madame than Snelling's blustering proclamations could have done in a day.
'I shall be very glad to think, sir,' she said, 'that I have been mistaken.'
'Come now,' answered Snelling, 'that's pleasant hearing. I'm not the man myself to nurse a spite agen anybody, and I'm going to let bygones be bygones all round. I'm sure you meant well by the lad, though you might ha' done much better, maybe, by sending him home again. But that's neither here nor there. You've proved a kindly meaning; and if I hadn't been afraid that you'd be hurt by it, I should have asked to pay you for it, long ago.'

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CHAPTER XLI

FOR all that rather wild cordiality of his, Snelling never seemed to forget that he was a kind of grand seigneur among his guests. Isaiah and Mrs. Winter had for years obeyed his orders; and Monsieur and Madame Vigne were people who, at least to his fancy, were so far beneath him socially that he was bound to have a patronising manner towards them. But Madame, at the suggestion of payment, put up hands expressive of such a stately negative, that he was a little abashed and disconcerted. He turned away, and saw Master Will in the act of slipping from the room.
'Hillo!' he asked, with a fierceness even more unexpected than his bonhomie had been; 'where are you going to?'
'I wasn't going anywhere in particular,' Will answered.
'Stop where you are, then,' said Snelling sternly. The arch below showed such evidences of his handiwork that it brought his heart into his mouth to think of the multitudinous chances which might lead to his exposure. Nobody so likely to go prowling round there as a boy, and nobody much more likely to proclaim what he had seen, though he had not the faintest idea of its purpose.
'That boy,' said Snelling, trying to force his voice back into a friendly tone, 'is the very imp for mischief. Such a bird's-nesting, high-climbing, limb-risking young rascal theer never was before. What was you going to be up to, eh?' He ruffled the boy's hair with forced hilarity; and Master Will got away from him, voicelessly resenting this familiarity, and more than half suspicious of its meaning.
The mere hint of danger had set the would-be murderer's nerves at work; he feared detection everywhere, and felt as though a bird of the air might have carried the matter.
'Isaiah,' he said, 'you'll stop and have a cup o' tea, you and your missis, sence you're here. If Mrs. Vigne will

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join in, I shall be her grateful servant. What d'ye say now, ladies? I can give you a very good cup o' tea, I believe. I drink no finer than my own, wheerever I happen to have the pleasure to sit down.'

Madame did not like her host, and would in all probability never have brought herself to like him; but she could not help a twinge or two of remorse as she thought how far she might have misjudged the man. She did not think him agreeable, and she thought that perhaps he might have been at once harsh and inconsiderate with the boy; but she had long acquitted him of the dreadful charge which Will Gregg had brought against him. The facts of the case had never been strong enough to support that terrible theory, and a boy's fancy was hardly evidence enough on which to hold it. So, altogether, Madame was willing enough to accept her old enemy's advances towards reconciliation.

'Yes,' she said. 'Thank you; I will drink a cup of tea with you with pleasure. I did not think to find you so friendly; but since it is so, I will gladly be the same.'

Somehow, Snelling's efforts to patronise Madame Vigne seemed to meet with less than their expected result. Even in the criminal whirl of all his thoughts, he hated her for her self-possession and the independence of her manner.

Snelling led the way downstairs. The half-ruined flight led directly away from the arch, and his wicked handiwork was visible from no part of it. He marshalled all his visitors nervously away from the place, growing noisier in his affectation of good-fellowship. 'Queer old place for a lonely man to come and live in, this,' he said, addressing himself to Madame. 'I've cautioned John about it pretty often; but he's not a venturesome boy, like young Gregg yonder, or otherwise there might be some danger for him. I caught young Gregg the other day a-walkin' across that bit o' ruined wall there with a balancing pole, like a juggler at a fair. It turned my head giddy, and I was afraid to call out to him lest he should tumble. Don't you ever let me catch you at them tricks, John. You recollect as the neck betwixt your head and your shoulders is the only one

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you've got. Learn to take care of it, my lad—learn to take care of it.'

There was not much accommodation for visitors in Snelling's house, and there was a good deal of laughter about the scarcity of cups and spoons. John and Will were sent into various apartments in search of chairs; and the party on the whole sat down rather jollily, though the * loud gaiety was curiously fitful, and he was liable to * of gloomy silence. Whenever these fell upon him, he roused himself with a great effort; but, excepting that his amiabilities were overstrained, as they well might be, considering the curious relationship of his visitors to himself, his manner passed unnoticed. As a matter of fact, the four elders were conscious of their own secret, and felt a little guilty over it. It is possible that their own mirth was a little forced, and that they felt somewhat ill at ease under Snelling's loud hospitalities. They were all tacitly helping to betray him; and though they were sure that they had right on their side, they were not altogether comfortable.

The summer day was drawing to its close, and the shadows were fast lengthening in the fields.

'Our pleasant day is over,' said Madame; 'and it is time that we walk to the railway station. That saves three miles, Mr. Vintare, and for a person of my figure that is something.'
'Walk to my house, mum,' responded Isaiah gallantly, 'and I'll drive you back to the house in a brace o' shakes.'
'May I go with Madame Vigne, uncle?' John asked.
'Yes, yes,' his uncle answered; 'go if you like. See you don't get into mischief. Isaiah, you might come and smoke a pipe and have a bit o' supper with me to-night. I'm pretty lonesome here at times, I can assure you.'
'Thankee,' returned Isaiah. 'I don't mind if I do look in.' After all, how should Snelling ever know that he had cashed the cheque which bought Jousserau's special license?
Since his discovery of the intruders upon his premises, Snelling had done nothing without a purpose. He thought it fortunate now that the pressure and hurry of his own

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thoughts had brought him home an hour or two earlier than customary. The visitors would be witnesses to one or two things which it was important to have established in the public mind. They would have to declare, if appealed to, that he had been on terms of perfect friendship with his ward. They would have to declare that the turret chamber was apparently quite safe.
He meant to finish his work that night. His plan was all made ready, and he had even invited Isaiah to supper that he might have one more witness to the purely accidental nature of the catastrophe which should overwhelm young John. Now that he was left alone, he sat down and thought it all out with a diabolic clearness.
He would have no flaw at all in the tale which should be told hereafter. It needed but a mere moment's work to clear away the bricks he had loosened, and that should be done at once. Then the building would hang merely by its own cohesion and by the support of one beam. He had examined it a hundred times, and was certain that when the support was removed a footstep would bring the whole place down.
But he must have his reason ready for sending his nephew into the chamber when he had completed his own share of the labour, and he knit his brows to think it out. If any breath of suspicion should touch him later on, he must be able to justify himself at every step. It would never do to send John in search of an object which an after-search could not discover. It would never do, indeed, to send him at all; the boy must be made to volunteer.
Whilst he sat thinking thus, he was toying with his spectacle case, turning it over and over in his fingers and examining it with great apparent minuteness, as men will do with trifles at moments of great absorption. Suddenly he saw the thing consciously. That would serve perfectly. If he set this spectacle case in the turret room, and having done so, swept away the bricks he had already loosened, he would but have to mention the fact that he had left his glasses in John's hearing and the boy would volunteer.
It was growing dusk already, and Isaiah might well be

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expected back at any moment. Now was the time. His ward's fortune, for which he had panted, yearned, and burned these two years past, was in his grasp. He rose quietly, took his hat, and sauntered into the garden, hiding the spectacle case within his sleeve. He had neither ruth nor fear, and somewhat to his own surprise, was little interested. He had worked at his wicked task in such an agony that he had expected the last stroke of all to cost him an almost unspeakable pang; and now that he was actually about it, it cost him nothing.

He looked about him as he stood at the foot of the winding broken staircase, and assured himself coolly and collectedly that he was unobserved. Then he mounted, stepping carefully in the dim half-light, and came upon the chamber. Where should he set the case down? Surely at the far end of the room, where an intruder's weight would tell most. There was a table there beneath the window, and the placid sky with a hint of daylight still shining in it was sprinkled with a pale star or two.

He might have turned back even then and have saved himself. He thought so; but he had gone too far to turn. No man swims up the maelstrom's dizzy whirling slope. A single step forward and the floor swayed beneath him. There was a crack like the report of a gun, and then, with a score of noises, groaning, shrieking, rending, and rushing round him, the place was down.

CHAPTER XLII

THE miserable Tobias, with all thoughts of buried treasure shaken out of him, sat before the coroner for the southern division of the county.

'The last witness has told us that you were the one person found in the grounds of Tallymount Hall at the moment at which the building fell. Be good enough to tell us, if you please, what brought you there.'

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'I meant no harm,' Tobias quavered.

'Your expressions at the time would seem to indicate that you were responsible for the fall of the building. You are not bound to say anything that may criminate yourself; but it is the business of this Court to make as full and complete an inquiry into the circumstances of the case as may be possible; and if you were there without a guilty intention, you cannot do better than tell the truth.'

'I saw Mr. Snelling,' began Tobias, 'on two occasions doing something at the wall; he was dislodging the bricks, and I thought that something was buried there.'

'You thought there was something buried? Where?'

'In the wall.'

'Something of value?'

'Yes, sir; something of value.'

'What led you to that belief?'

'Mr. Snelling looked anxious and disturbed, sir. He never worked more than a minute at a time, and would constantly leave the place to look about him. He worked in the archway, sir, and moved one brick at a time. When he had once got it free, he generally put it back again, and that made me wonder, sir, what he was doing.'

'When did you first begin to observe the actions you attribute to the deceased?'
'On the Thursday of last week. I was gathering firewood, and there is a hole in the wall. I showed it next day to Mr. Winter, sir.'
'Come to the evening of the disaster. What brought you at that time in Mr. Snelling's grounds?'
'I thought there was treasure hidden in the wall, sir.'
'Here is a plan of the building; show me where the deceased was at work. Now, on your oath, what was your belief as to the meaning of his action?'
'I thought he was looking for something.'
'And you went into the grounds—for what purpose? To see what the something was?'
'Yes, sir.'
'What did you do there?'

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'I meant no harm, sir. I hope the Court will believe I meant no harm.'
'What did you do there?'
'I took out the bricks Mr. Snelling had loosened, sir.'
'Well?'
'That was all, sir.' The wretched man looked round the Court with a roving eye. The upper room of the inn was crowded—the inquest was held at the Horns at Quarley—and Shorthouse sat in a corner rubbing his nose with a tight-rolled copy of that day's newspaper. The members of the jury were all attentive; every eye was turned upon the witness.
'When you had taken out the bricks, what happened?'
'I heard a footstep, sir, and ran outside the archway.'
'Well?'
'The step went upstairs, and the whole building fell. I meant no harm, sir. I hope the Court will believe I meant no harm.'
'You say you first began to observe Mr. Snelling's actions on the Thursday of last week, and that you were gathering firewood at the time. It is rather an unusual thing to gather firewood at the beginning of August.'
'I don't know, sir. I was putting by for a rainy day.'
'Tell me exactly what led you to the belief you profess to have had—the belief that Mr. Snelling was looking for buried treasure.'
'He looked so anxious, sir. He was in and out of the archway every minute, looking about to see if anybody was coming. He spread a newspaper on the grass, sir, to catch all the little bits of mortar that fell from where he was working.'
'Were you aware that anybody used the room above the archway?'
'No, sir.'
'Did it occur to you to think that the stability of the whole of that part of the building depended upon the archway?'
'No, sir. I thought Mr. Snelling would know best about his own house.'

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'How long a time elapsed between the fall of the building and the time at which you were given into custody by the witness Winter?'
'I don't know, sir. Perhaps Mr. Winter could tell that better than myself, sir. I am an elderly man, sir, and I have had a recent illness, and I was very much shaken by the melancholy event.'
'By what means did you obtain admission to the grounds?'
'I walked in at the gate, sir. I was not observed.'
'What right did you suppose you had to investigate the nature of the deceased's proceedings?'
'None, sir. I was animated by curiosity.'
'Quite simply, no doubt!'
'I thought there might be something to be made by it. I am an elderly man, sir, and I have known hardship.'
'Now,' said the coroner, 'I will read over to you the deposition you will have to sign. Is there anything you desire to add to that? Is there anything you desire to alter?'
'I should like to add that I am an elderly man, sir, and that I meant no harm.'
There was not much to go upon, and yet there was everything to go upon, and bit by bit the dreadful truth pieced itself together in the minds of the jury. They refused to return any other verdict than that the deceased died by the hand of God.
The truth which pieced itself together in the minds of the jurymen grew little by little in the mind of Farmer Shorthouse. He sat like a stone, and seemed neither to hear nor see, when once the truth had been brought home to him. The verdict was recorded; and the jury, splitting into scattered groups, whispered about the case, and filtered slowly from the room. The coroner packed up his papers and drove away. The public left the chamber in which the inquest had been held, and talked over the evidence in the bar and the bar-parlour. Farmer Shorthouse sat forgotten in his corner, until a barman, engaged for the day

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in anticipation of an increase of business, came into the room by accident, and made a great clattering of pots in order to awaken him. Then he rose and walked homewards without a word, and reaching his own house, sat down wordless in the kitchen for an hour or two.
The news of the general belief had reached Cecilia, and she moved about the house horror-stricken and silent. The great kitchen clock, which had always had a cheerful voice till now, ticked with a threatening ghostly tone in the middle of the stillness.
'Tea is ready, father,' said the girl. She had tried to find courage to speak to him a score of times before.
He looked up at her with a scared face.
'Tea is ready, father.'
'My wench,' said the old man slowly, 'it's no comfort to a father to say as much, but I've been an old fool. It's no fault o' mine as thee bissent married to a murderer.'
'Don't speak of it,' Cecilia answered in a whisper, as if the time had been midnight and the theme an awful secret.

'I've done wi' whatever will I ever had i' that way,' said her father. 'Please yourself, my gell, and you'll never hear a word from me.'

The farmer, now shaken as to the stability of his own judgment, even as regards 'furriners,' referred of course to Cecilia's proposed marriage with the clever French artist, which soon became an accomplished event. The household of the Vignes rejoiced greatly, the more so that the boy John Vale, once again deprived of legal guardianship, found comfort and protection as formerly in the arms of the warm-hearted Madame, under whose roof he took up his abode. Nor was his property unattended to, for it was Mr. Winter's pride to give the lad the benefit of the long experience he himself had had of farming in the days before he purchased his 'steppers.' And so, in unrecorded peacefulness, their lives moved on.

THE END