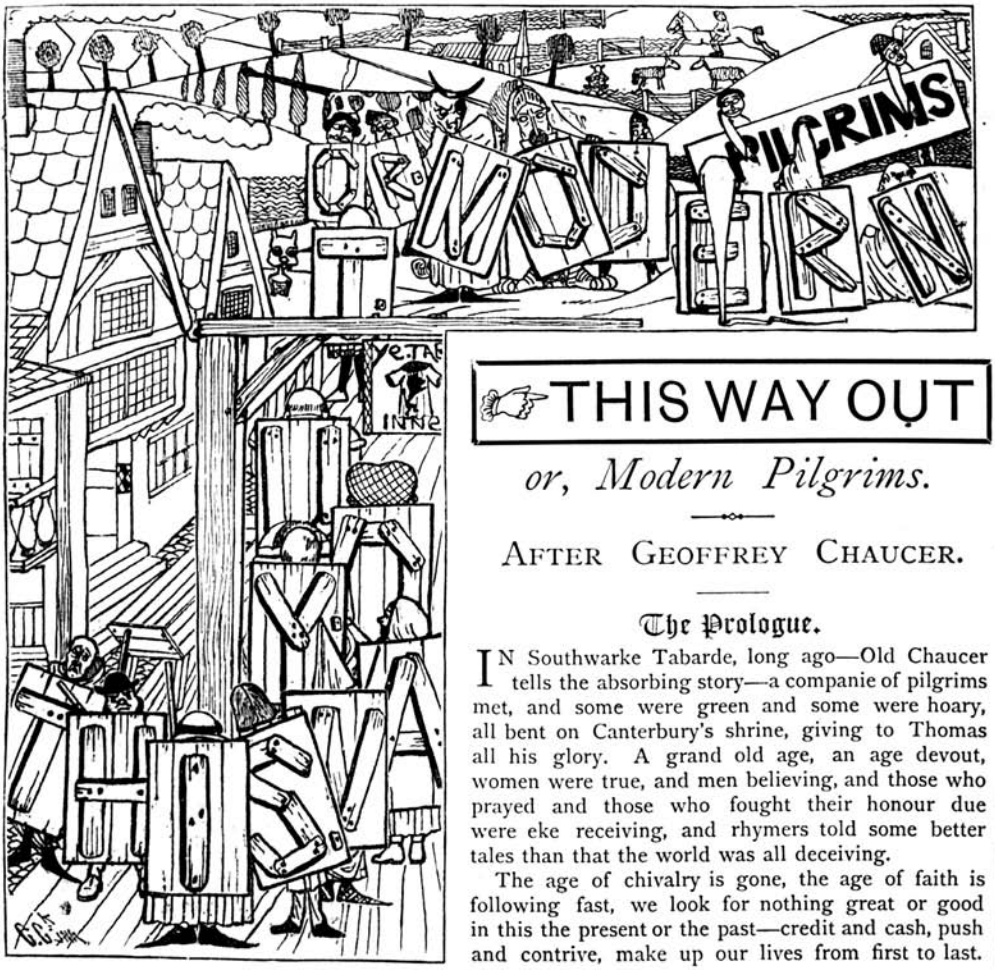
BEETON'S CHRISTMAS ANNUAL



THIS WAY OUT

or, Modern Pilgrims.

AFTER GEOFFREY CHAUCER.

The Prologue.

IN Southwarke Tabarde, long ago—Old Chaucer tells the absorbing story—a companie of pilgrims met, and some were green and some were hoary, all bent on Canterbury's shrine, giving to Thomas all his glory. A grand old age, an age devout, women were true, and men believing, and those who prayed and those who fought their honour due were eke receiving, and rhymers told some better tales than that the world was all deceiving.

The age of chivalry is gone, the age of faith is following fast, we look for nothing great or good in this the present or the past—credit and cash, push and contrive, make up our lives from first to last.

What will you give? what will you take? be crafty; crime is less than blunder; quick, bargain sharp, and cheat and lie, we have no fear of Heaven's thunder; give wealth its due, honour the king—King Cash the monarch we serve under.

But after all, and on the whole, quite open to your yea or nay, it may be craft, it may be guile, may perhaps have darkened many a day, and troubled many a gallant soul who went upon the good old way. Perhaps those who sought St. Thomas' shrine, paying their offerings at his altar, were not the best of all mankind, nor deeply read in breve and psalter, and some among them might deserve a hempen tippet called a halter. Perhaps there were those who hugged their gold, cozened the poor, the greedy sinners; perhaps those who in life's race had failed and talked with scorn of all the winners; perhaps those who nothing loved so well as good old wine and jolly dinners; perhaps wives among the faithless found cajolling their demented mates; perhaps husbands shrewd, and in their cups lamenting their unhappy fates; and others who would break a head, but had respect for their own pates.

Perhaps women were women, perhaps men were men, in those old days of long ago—hated and loved, slighted and blighted, as those we know; and a smooth tongue did not always show who was your friend or who your foe. The great sea tumbles, and rolls, and foams, as it has done ever since it was made; its awful voice and crested wave have never a changing fashion obeyed. As we speak of it now, so men spake of it then,—all has been written, all has been said. The sea is the sea, the mighty sea, since to the dry land the sea was wed; the all-coloured ocean is ever the same, ever its own wild will has led—and will roll the same, and tumble and foam, till at the great summons it yields its dead. So is the ocean of human life—still is it open for yea or nay, that a heart is a heart, and a life is a life, whatever we be or whatever we say; and must still be the same in its depth of depths, be it sorry or be it gay.

Under the sun there's nothing new, it rises and sets on the self-same world; the human race is the human race whatever the banner be unfurled; the men and the women are all the same, all the same in this self-same world. All the same and ever the same,—ever the same since Cain killed Abel; no matter for the dress they wore, or whether the skin was white or sable, ever the same in history true, mimicked again in hatch-up fable.

And so at the Tabarde the pilgrims met—near about to St. Mary's Ferry; and there for awhile they rested all; and some were sad and some were merry, and some were rich and some were poor, but all were going to Canterbury. And so to lighten their journey long, they stories told and beguiled the way, and they rode through the fairest part of Kent, and each of the band had something to say—and the *somethings* were matter that still lives on, and will live on for many a day. They told their stories one and all, and some were naughty and some were good, but most of them used such phrases free as of course nowadays nobody would, and made allusions as plain as print to delicate matters which nobody should. Ah me! 'tis very rude to call—a rake a rake, and a spade a spade. Ah me! but in these our purified times more respect to good manners is paid—and impudent words are never heard to drop from the lips of a man or a maid. It is good to be honest, and good to be pure, white as snow in all sincerity, but when this is aped and caricatured, it rouses a little sharp asperity, for folks there are so wondrous modest they blush at the thought of a naked verity.

There was the Knight who told his tale, a tale of love and of knightly deeds; then came the Miller, in waggish mood, with all the mishaps to which naughtiness leads; and how even a Priest may come to harm who Ovid instead of his breviary reads. A comical story next there comes, a little jest at the Miller's cost, a merry conceit compelling a laugh, and by a good laugh there is nothing lost. Then the Cook must tell us of Gamelyn, and how to the friar he played the host.

Of Constance and of constancy a Lawyer hath a tale to tell, of Christians in pagan days, and what strange wonder once befell, till trial was over, and the king with Constance did in 'England' dwell. And then the Dame, the buxom dame from Bath, must tell her curious story, wife of five husbands; she would fain have us to think that she is sorry—save to increase and multiply in human glory,—so on, with more, and more, and more, the friar raising sumpter's ire; the Merchant and the Shipmaster, the Franklin, Clerk, and eke the Squire, something in all and everyone; something to ponder and admire.

And thus at the Tabarde the pilgrims met—men of the field, the Church, and of commerce, and they spake out in honest phrase, in nothing separated from us; and with loves and hates, and with doubts and fears, told their tales on their way to shrine of St. Thomas.

His shrine drew pilgrims from all lands to give and gaze with awe and wonder, ablaze with jewels' gorgeous wealth, mocking the poor clay that lay under, stiff and cold since murderous hands body and soul had rent asunder. Midas and Crœsus might have seemed beggars beside that wondrous pile, arranged with judgment, taste, and skill, in all magnificence of style: and pil-

grims came and wore the stones, kneeling but gazing all the while, the while they prayed and counted beads, and thought perchance of road that leads from sandy wastes to pastures green, where the Great Bishop *His* flock feeds.

The shrine is gone, and all its glory—sure such a treasure would not tarry the heaped-up wealth of centuries gone, when Faith's Defender played old Harry, and disestablished, disendowed, the gospel-loving Anne to marry. The shrine is gone, but there remains the site on which the shrine once stood, and in the ceiling o'er the spot, a crescent's carved in foreign wood, allusion to the prelate's birth, his Saracenic motherhood. And in the transept there's a stone, a plain square stone, which marks the spot whereon the bishop fell to die beneath a vengeance—cruel—hot, of men—assassins—who for this deed, in vilest shame, their guerdon got.

Here stand we in the time-worn church, looking upon this simple stone, thinking upon the cruel deed, and find that we are not alone, but with strangers—brother-pilgrims—each one of them to us unknown. Did the pilgrims know each other, who at the ancient Tabarde met? Not they, until circumstances led to tales we can't forget. May we not, my brother-pilgrims, dine together; what doth let? We, for such things sometimes happen, may have stories too to tell, with decanters slowly moving, we may feel Chaucerian spell, speak out manfully and truly what once upon a time befell.

Have we a knight among us here? We have—he never broke a spear. An alderman who loved good cheer,—a Reve, a bailiff?—here he stands, at the big fire warms his hands, and talks of cattle, corn, and lands. And here our widow—Wife of Bath—a trifle stouter than a lath—makes the best of this life's path. Here a poor parson to say grace, and with a holy reverence trace the sins and sorrows of our race.

Around the board we gathered are, and now for silence host beseeches; we're each to tell in turn a tale, a tale that something hints or teaches—and sure the plan may have its charms—'tis better far than making speeches. Ere we begin, we fill each glass, and stand—but what can this be for, sir?—stand, and in silence drain the cup—

To the Memory of Old Geoffrey Chaucer.

Trusty and Truelove.

SOMETIMES KNOWN AS PALAMON AND ARCITE.

WHETHER women ever love one another is a problem to the solution of which the writer of this narrative would never apply himself. There are some things best unknown. The women say they are warmly and tenderly attached to one another. The terms of affection they mutually employ are the strongest in the vocabulary; they will embrace, they will kiss, they will sit hand in hand and review—with how much of humility and compassion, who shall say?—the smaller or larger delinquencies of their female acquaintances; this is, of course, and must be, a beautiful and edifying sight: two virgin hearts exchanged; two spirits bound each to each by the floral chains of love and joy and peace! But the sceptical and the unbelieving *do* say—ah, what will they not say?—that deep down in the natures of most ladies there lies a spitefulness against their sisters, which never fully allows of the cohesion of two souls.

Now with men it is altogether different. Men come a-wooing to the women, and win them or lose them as the case may be. When they win they often subsequently wish they had not won; and when they lose, although they use strong language and make dismal allusions to suicide, and write operatic poetry, embellished with the customary amount of blighted spirits, broken hearts, blank

futures, and similar expressions, they soon settle down to their fate, and are perfectly satisfied; masculine energy overcoming emotional passion, that if Polly will not have them, Sarah will, and that Jenny would jump at the chance! But when a man's stern, strong, vigorous, noble and yet susceptible nature, meets with a kindred spirit, a nature the very counterpart of itself, then love is seen in all its grandeur—not as a passion or a sentiment, but as a vital principle, and those two men will stand fast and firm by one another till death do them part.

It is generally in the early youth of manhood that such friendships are made. There are many instances to be found in ancient history, but our own days are not without them, and concerning such a friendship is the story now to be told.

I.

"GIVE you joy, Jack; got your commission!"

"Same to you, old fellow; you have yours."

The speakers were very young men, and the scene was Birdcage Walk. Jack, or, to give him his proper name, John Trusty was a fine, well-grown young man, with light hair, blue eyes, a peculiarly delicate complexion, and a slight moustache. Old fellow, or, to furnish his proper title, Henry Truelove, was dark, swarthy, singularly handsome, a well-knit frame to which training had given force and scope. Both young men were of the same age, both had fortunes, both had passed the same curriculum, both were gazetted as cornets, and both were in the same regiment. They had not a secret between them. They knew each other through and through. Always together, knowing the same set, they were inseparable. Wheresoever, at boat-race, Chiswick fête, opera, was John Trusty, there was Truelove; and wherever Truelove was seen you might safely reckon on the immediate appearance of Trusty. When Trusty was down with fever, Truelove would admit of no nurse but himself; when Truelove met with a serious accident, Trusty watched by his bedside for a fortnight.

See these young men in the bravery of their spic and span new uniforms! How they admire—not each one himself,—but each the other; and Moggridge, their man—one valet between them—stands and admires both, and says he thinks there is not a pin to choose between them; and when they draw their sabres, with a great flourish, and favour Mr. M. with a specimen of broadsword exercise, he claps his hands with delight, and swears it is as good as a play—and better.

There was a lot of good fellows at the mess; a little reserved, at the first—very properly—one must know who's who. Gentlemen must be gentlemen and associate with gentlemen; it would be a grievous thing to make a companion of a new comer, to lounge with him in Pall Mall, or in the bow window of the club, and afterwards ascertain that he was the offspring of a retired dealer in boots or butter. There! that would never do—it would make a miserable mess of "Ours." But it was soon known that Truelove and Trusty were of the correct brand. They were young shoots from an old tree which grew out of the loins of a Plantagenet. They had lots of cash to lend and spend, and wrote their autographs nobly on bits of paper which Hebrews loved. They lived jollily enough, making great fun of some of the fellows when they were alone, and played together a game of cribbage, on the identical old-fashioned cribbage-board whereon they had played at school long ago. And perhaps it is no grave offence that the countenance should be less than the fiddle's length, and that men should laugh, should run the gamut of merriment, and still not be very terrible transgressors after all.

II.

WELL, it happened once on a time—and it is printed in the Gazette, so that you may satisfy yourselves about it—that part of the regiment to which Trusty and Truelove belonged was ordered to the neighbourhood of Devizes, while the rest of the troops remained at Knightsbridge, or somewhere in the Knightsbridge locality. Of course it was a change; and Trusty, who was then sent off to Wiltshire, was rather pleased, except on one account—namely, that of his separation from his friend Truelove. And Truelove was as sorry as sorry could be to part with Trusty; but the Horse Guards are inexorable, and, whatever they might say to a Lieutenant-Colonel, are remarkably strict with young subalterns. So Trusty had to go down into Wiltshire, and wrote a long letter to Truelove about Stonehenge. Truelove wrote back a letter quite as long, containing his experience of Druidical remains, something about the tumuli, near the Porto Saint Tronde, or Terlemont and the Antiquities of Morbihan. But the next letter which reached him contained no reference to stones, but was light and gay, yet chequered here and there with a dash of melancholy. He had been present at a county ball, he had got in with a capital set, he had been visiting at a Squire's house—a gentleman who was a gentleman, for he had done nothing all his life but fill his bag and convict poachers. Then there was a good deal of sentiment, which had never before fallen from the tongue or the pen of Trusty, and then the statement that the Squire had a daughter, that her name was Emily, and that he was getting particularly fond of her. He did not say this in so many plain words, but his language did not disguise his thoughts, and Truelove saw through it as plainly as he saw through the glass of the mess-room windows.

Truelove was a tender, good-hearted fellow, and seeing, as he expressed it, "a case" with his friend, wrote back pleasantly, saying he was glad that the tedium of provincial duty had been in some degree relieved, but that he soon expected the troops would be exchanged, and the dulness of the country exchanged for the gaiety of town. Back came another letter somewhat sharply written, in which Trusty disdained the idea of being bored in Wiltshire, and went off into raptures about Emily, finally inviting his friend down —Squire's own invitation enclosed—just to wake up a covey or two—and see Emily.

Truelove contrived to get away, and speedily found himself in Wiltshire, and a hospitable host in Squire Thesus. The Squire kept a first-rate table, and—Moggridge, who had come down with Truelove, was fain to confess—an excellent cellar. He had good horses, good dogs, and had a way of dwelling on the virtues of the good old times, and keeping up the good old ways in the good old fashion.

But Emily—ah! she was really beautiful, almost a saintly face, such as might be painted on a church window. And she had golden hair, with a wreath of red and white flowers to set it off. Truelove was smitten, "a hit, a very palpable hit," and he was gloomy over the meats, and did not recover himself till he had drank pretty freely.

He paid his devotions to Emily in the drawing-room, and Trusty stood apart, surprised, bewildered, but not angry. Certainly his friend occupied his place, but then he was his friend, and what harm could there be? Trusty had spoken so plainly to Emily, had seen so much encouragement in her demeanour towards him, had been so rallied by the Squire, that he almost considered himself as an accepted suitor; of course Truelove was only a stranger, and it is courteous and proper to be entertaining to strangers. Still even the best of things may be carried too far, and when Emily and Truelove were very much together the next day, and the next day after that, and so on for a week, Trusty grew anxious. An early opportunity presented itself; he said to Truelove, they were alone:

"Well, my boy, what do you say to Emily?"

"Say? that she is the freshest beauty I ever saw, and I love her dearly."

"Love her!" said Trusty, with a laugh that sat badly on him; "there you are in jest."

"Why so? I was never more in earnest."

"You must not think of that, and the sooner you go back to town the better, old boy."

"I shall not return to town for rather more than a fortnight, To speak plainly, Trusty, Emily has won my heart. I shall try conclusions, my boy, with the Squire, one of these days—feel my ground, eh?"

"I cannot believe you to be in earnest."

"It is perfectly true, I assure you, and I shall look for your help to further my suit."

"My help?"

"To be sure. We have always stood by one another; in all sorts of ways we have served each other's interests as two friends should—sworn brothers—now help me to make myself agreeable to the lady."

"Never! It is false—it is traitorous—you are no true friend!"

"Trusty!"

"I love this lady——"

"So do I—precisely my case."

"I loved her first—I love her, and will serve her till I die."

"You are hasty. You and I are soldiers and lovers; and all things, you know, are fair in love and war. I will not ask you to assist me, but mark you, I shall do the best I can to win the lady's hand."

"In the face of all I tell you?"

"In the face of everything that opposes me."

"This is most unjust."

"It is all fair. Of course if Emily is yours, you are safe. Have you her promise?—for the sake of old times tell me."

"No."

"Thanks; then you see, dear Cornet Trusty, we are on level ground."

III.

TRUSTY did not at all enter into his friend's view of the subject. He had been everything, he had gone everywhere, with Emily—he had felt sure she would not refuse him; and now this man—this Truelove—whom he, in the innocence of his heart, had invited down to see his queen, *he* was diverting the affections of the lady, and venturing on open rivalry with him. Good wine turns to pure vinegar. The old friendship changed to bitter animosity. He would watch closely for the next day or two, and judge for himself.

This close watching made him bad company for the Squire, and his manner became so strange that Emily positively avoided him, while she showered attentions on Truelove. Once or twice the desperate idea of openly declaring Truelove's purpose occurred to him, but second thoughts prevented the disclosure. His miserable state of mind became worse every hour; he was getting absolutely rude. As he saw, or fancied that he saw, Truelove's steady advances, Trusty began to consider within himself what he should do. Could he resolve to stay and hope the best—stay and be satisfied to look on the beautiful face he loved, to listen to the sweet voice which made his heart thrill, and yet approach no nearer than a stranger? Had he known all, he would have found that Truelove was much in the same condition of mind;

that he loved Emily there could be no doubt, but to win her, of that he was by no means sure. So Trusty pondered on the matter: to go, or not to go—that was his question. Sometimes he would almost convince himself that Truelove would fail if he began his suit to Emily—sometimes he felt equally sure that he himself would fail should he attempt. Would it not be better to fly from the place—better to be absent—better to forget, than linger on in hopeless attachment? Still, if refused, it might comfort him sometimes to see her—to see her in all her beauty—see her the bride of another—nothing to him but a sweet memory, the fragrance of dead rose-leaves. Suppose she could belong neither to Trusty nor Truelove, which then would be the sorest pain or softest pleasure, to see her sometimes or never? If one could stay and one must go, which were the harder fate? At last he made up his mind. He exchanged into a regiment ordered for the Crimea, and so bade adieu to the Squire and went to say good-bye to Emily.

Emily was sorry he was ill—she did not say she was sorry he was going; he mentioned that he had been much troubled in mind, that he had been disappointed, that he cared not what became of him. She politely expressed her regret. He stated in a general way that no one cared for him, and she reminded him of Cornet Truelove—"Your own chosen friend," she said, "of whom you have always spoken so highly, and who fully bears out, papa says, the noble character you gave of him."

Enough! He rises stiffly—he will not denounce the villain—he will make no allusion to his perfidy.

"Good-bye, Miss Thesus,"

"Good-bye, Mr. Trusty."

"You have nothing to say, Miss Thesus?"

"Nothing. Oh, stop—if you meet Truelove in the park, please send him here. I want him to go with me sketching on the plain."

IV.

TRUSTY did not meet Truelove in the park; it is probable high words might have ensued had he done so. When Truelove learnt that his friend had departed, it made him feel very uncomfortable. Half in jest, half in earnest, he had rivalled his old chum, without thinking that the matter was really serious, little more than a bit of garrison gallantry. Now that Trusty took the matter so much to heart, he was annoyed with himself, and at first determined to leave that very day and go after his friend. But when Truelove met Emily, and she proposed a sketch of Stonehenge, he could not resist, and they spent, with the Squire and two or three other friends, a very pleasant day.

V.

TRUSTY found very little consolation, but some honour, in the Crimea. When he returned, two years later, he went down to the old place, and was very quiet and watchful as to what had been going on. At the inn, not two miles from the Squire's residence, he heard news which filled him with indignation. His friend, Truelove, was "like a son with Squire, and, may be, will be his son before long." It was what Trusty had expected; but it came as a new trouble, and something he had never contemplated. What roused his indignation still more was to notice the very same report among the *on dits* in the local paper. Still more were his feelings outraged when the waiter brought up Truelove's card, with that gentleman's particular wish to see Mr. Trusty for a few seconds.

Seconds! The word was suggestive. Yes, he would see him.

Truelove came into the room with a look of deep anxiety, and held out his hand. Trusty put his hands behind him, stood up, and poured forth such a string of accusations that Truelove could not be heard to speak.

"Trusty, do have patience. Let me explain."

"There needs no explanation, and I will listen to none. You have deceived and betrayed my fondest hopes; you have blighted my whole life; never more will I believe man true, or woman either."

"Trusty, listen ——"

"I will not listen; go, and find your listeners in the little coquette and the besotted Squire."

"You are not yourself. I will tell you everything for your satisfaction."

"Satisfaction! I will have the satisfaction of a gentleman!"

"Trusty, you are wronging yourself—wronging us all—wronging yourself the most of all."

"Do you talk of wrong, you smooth-tongued villain?" And coming hastily forward, Trusty struck his old friend across the face with a riding-whip, leaving a livid wheal.

Truelove only said, "You are a fool, Trusty; but I must settle this in the usual way."

He turned on his heel and left the room.

Within an hour a friend waited on Trusty, a young officer of artillery, and was directed to an officer in Trusty's corps. In the evening five men met in a retired spot, the ground was measured; Trusty and Truelove faced each other; both fired, and both fell.

VI.

THEY contrived to keep the whole affair very quiet. Both men were carried to the same inn, and well cared for. Both wounds were very serious, and it was feared that Truelove's would prove fatal; there had been great difficulty in extracting the ball, and mortification was apprehended. Trusty was delirious, but raved not of Emily, or his slighted love, but of his old friend, the affection he still had for him, and how he had shot him

dead in a duel. The remembrance of the meeting, and the fall of Truelove, were the two ideas that absorbed his mind. Truelove through it all was calm and collected. The Squire came frequently, and once Emily came. Moggridge, of course, was unceasing in his attentions.

At length there was a favourable turn in the case of both patients. Truelove was out of danger, and permitted to sit up; and Trusty came to himself, much shaken and shattered, but in his right mind. By the leave of the doctors, Truelove was allowed to visit his friend, and they shook hands with their old cordiality. Truelove sat down by the couch on which Trusty reclined, and after a brief silence said:

"May I give you satisfaction now, old boy?"

Something like a smile flitted across the face of the patient as he said:

"Yes, boy, I can well bear it."

"That was a lying paragraph you saw."

"What do you mean?"

"That the projected marriage of Miss Thesus and myself was the wicked, impudent invention of some idle rascal."

"It was the talk of the village."

"It was the tattle of the host."

"Then you are not going to marry—Emily?"

"No."

"But you said you loved her."

"I did. I have still a respectful love for her; but she loves somebody else."

"How do you know this?"

"She told me."

"Told you his name?"

"No."

"Who can it be?"

"If I were you I should ask her."

"Ask her! Me ask! What right have I?"

"Well, ask the Squire first."

"Does he know?"

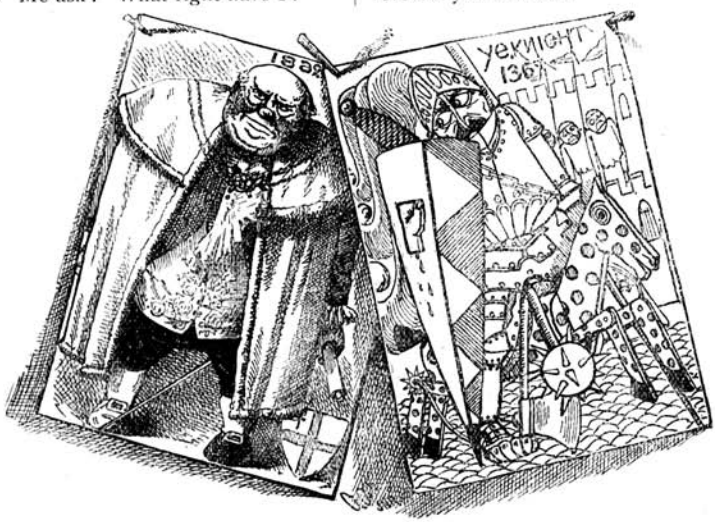
"Yes, I think so; guesses, at all events."

"Ah, boy, the old friendship has come back."

VII.

And this is the end of it. When Trusty was well enough, he told all his story to the Squire, and the Squire shook his head and laughed, and smote his thigh with his strong hands, and saw how the ground lay, as indeed he had seen it before very clearly. Then he told Trusty he was at liberty to speak to Emily and what he said to her is best known to themselves; but there was a wedding not very long afterwards, and Trusty married Emily, with Truelove for his best man, and they were excellent friends, and lived happy and comfortable ever afterwards.

So although it seemed at the first that a woman had separated two very old friends, as she did, it was the self-same woman who brought them together again. You tell me women are mischief makers, and I quite agree with you. If you hear of a quarrel between old chums, or indeed a disturbance of any sort, you may well ask, with the oriental Cadi, "Who is *she?*" taking for granted that a lady's finger has been in the pie. But, beloved, if woman does mischief, consider how much of mischief she sets straight; how with a smile and a word, or a little frown and silence, or just a little suggestion, or a small suppression, the manipulation of which would never have occurred to the male sex, she contrives, when she likes, to put wrong right. Ah me! with the women is power; they can do and undo; they can make sick and heal; they inflict pain, but have the remedy within themselves. Let us speak reverently of women!



The Reve's Tale.

DISCLOSING THE VILLAINY OF A MODERN RASCAL AS BAD AS CHAUCER'S "MILLER."

NOT far from Canterbrigge, at a place called Trompington, there lived a miller, named Dannis Simekin.

He was a man who boasted, year after year, that he was so much heavier and so much stronger.

At first sight and word he was a hail-fellow-well-met man, but after a little time the stranger discovered how small a soul and how mean a mind wandered about in the big body that was so boastful.

He had been churchwarden and overseer of the poor for fifteen years, when Elizabeth, his daughter, was eighteen years of age,—and then *he* was forty.

Could any man bring any charge of dishonesty against the miller? No. Did any man in the parish think him a bad, grasping, an unscrupulous man? All. He belonged to that weary set of men who are neither good, nor kind, nor pleasant, and yet on the surface appear to be frank, straightforward, and hearty. These men are the very shadow and hypocrisy of good citizens.

He had interfered in several village riots, and yet he was a coward; he had once met a savage bull and conquered it; but while in the case of the riots he but interposed between men far less strong than himself, and the more weakened by drink—in the affair of the bull he could not get away. He had a strong stick with him, and the bull was almost exhausted, for it must have been without water for very many hours.

Why, the very fact that he carried a stick proved him a coward. He could lift a heavier weight than any man in the parish, and therefore presumably he could strike a heavier blow; and yet he carried a stick for protection.

So his dog was not an honest shepherd-dog, whose brain is busied with sheep and thinks only of them; whose blood and lips do not quiver with the thoughts of attacking men. No: the miller's four-footed friend was a lurching bull-dog, which the miller had bought because a child having fallen through a flap into a cellar, the dog in question pinned the little one by the throat and nearly killed it.

So much for the miller's bravery. The strongest man in the parish, who never went about without a strong stick and a bull-dog!

As a boy he had fought, but he had never found a boy stronger than himself to tackle, and he never quarrelled out of his own parish.

Like other boys, he rode and swam; but the animal was always a cart-horse, and he swam in the horse-pond. Once he dived in the little river, and, coming up, told how he had touched the bottom. But he did not relate the achievement with the gleeful voice, accompanied by the red face, of a boy, but in quick, startled tones, with his lips apart and his eyes staring.

There are many men and boys like the miller of Trompington, who are cowards, and they keep well the secret, which is rarely found out, except by some small, weakly men, who reserve the discovery to themselves.

He disliked thunder and lightning, and never went on horseback in frosty weather. As a boy, he skated upon ice over shallow water, and he rowed in a broad-bottomed boat.

As a man, he was loud in his dealings with men below him, and meek and civil in his behaviour to his betters. He quite recognized that he had many betters.

As an overseer, he kept the labourers' cottages few and far between, so that not too many should gain settlements, and he subscribed to the fund for giving certain labourers enough bread in the winter months to save them from dying, and enable them to live on to do farm-work through the rest of the year, so that wages might not go up.

In a slow, foolish way, he found that it was cheaper in the end to give as little bread as possible in the winter, than to turn off the labourers who had not gained a parochial settlement.

He had the appearance of being charitable, while in fact he was balancing his many profits and few losses.

The profits, however, were not very great or numerous, because he preferred to be almost sure in a small petty way, rather than be the least venturesome in a greater.

Once he turned a dishonest dairyman to account, so as to economize his winter dole of bread. The man was caught stealing oats. "Of what use will putting him in prison do *me?*" asked the miller. "He has the contract for the twelve cows until next Candlemas, and if he goes to prison mayhap the butter will never be sold, and how then shall I get my rent?"

He thought longer, and slapped his lusty thigh, and he laughed a laugh which nine people in ten would have called hearty, and he said, "I have it!"

So he called the man and said, "Tom Barrudge—I've known thee since thou wert a boy, and I'd not like to send thee to prison. But thou must be punished for stealing my corn. Now, therefore, pay for twenty quartern loaves a week for the winter quarter, which will be not much above ten pounds, and mayhap will just pay for the oats thou hast stolen, and I will forgive thee."

An hour after he laughed very heartily again—heartily as it would have appeared to most men—and he said, "Hey! I knowed he would agree, for he had a stocking of money put away, and was to have paid Jack Reefs fifty pounds with his Mary to marry, which the lass will run short of now for a time, I trow."

As for lasses—Dannis the miller never had been charged with light conduct with the lasses when he was young. He rather misdoubted girls, and never kissed until he married Miss Haughton, from the big house.

When the church was restored the miller put in a cheap window of stained glass, Faith, Hope, and Charity being the subject, and this he bought cheaply, owing to an advertisement he saw in one of the papers.

So much for his heart and mind. This is how the miller looked. A tall man, over six feet high, with broad open chest, and wide swinging arms, a head well set upon his shoulders, and his brown hair hanging well about his head. A healthy, wholesome look he had, but nothing tender about him, except his voice, which was at times artificially low. The eyes shifted and glinted, the mouth was very heavy, and moved in lines which were rounded and pleasant, but these lines changed, made, and unmade themselves so slowly that they became odious. However, the features most to be mistrusted in that face were the nostrils. They were neither still nor dilating—the latter generally proving a candid, honest man. They quivered.

He walked erect, and none went to church or gave out the responses so roundly as he—his wife and daughter following suit.

So am I brought to his wife, who was an offshoot from the great house—Apton Court.

Great families must have poor relations when great estates go wholly to the eldest. This Miss Haughton was the daughter of a second cousin. She was housekeeper at Apton Court when the miller saw her for the first time at the village church. Although he was the tallest man in the parish, and she was the tallest woman, yet much against common custom they selected each other.

He was very civil to her, abject indeed as a lover, because she was the cousin of Sir Allen Haughton, of Apton Court, and she never attempted to induce him to become more familiar.

He obtained not one penny with her, but he thought perhaps he should get the new lease on more advantageous terms if he married a cousin of his landlord's house. It was a vain hope. Sir Allen was glad to be rid of a poor relation who resented any interference with her duties, and the woman herself was only too happy to be free of her dependence, which she could not brook. Thus both married for interest, with no love between them, and no advantage to be gained by their wedding. Nevertheless, they were blessed with a child, at whose coming they wondered.

The miller and his wife faced the world well, and met their neighbours handsomely, but they never had anything to say to each other, rarely spoke to each other before third parties, and when at home they conversed upon business.

If they quarrelled they kept it to themselves, for they were machines in life, and required no sympathy. They found their own lubricating oil, which took the shape of their consciences.

In this home, which prospered yearly, a daughter was brought up. The daughter cared as sincerely for father as for mother, and for neither much.

Mrs. Simekin diligently followed the fashions set by the ladies of the hall, and exacted a word from them on Sundays in the churchyard after the morning service was over.

So this family grew up until the girl was seventeen.

By the time that the daughter was seventeen, the miller had added another trade to that of wheat-grinding. He was partner in a loan-office concern, which thrived upon the wants of others more easily than did the mill upon the honest people who sent their wheat to be turned into flour.

Said the miller to his London partner, "By my faith, Isaiah, if thus we go on, shall I not be a rich man! And I know not why my daughter shall not marry a gentleman, as her mother was born a lady, and so make of me a gentleman. I lays I'll not die without writing 'squire after my name. Nay, my wife knows of a house on the other side of the valley, that is a gentleman's seat, and shall be mine if I can make it so. 'Twould be rare to have Sir Allen on one side of the valley, and his cousin Dannis Simekin, Esquire,

on the other, for I would have you to know that by marriage I'se the cousin of Sir Allen Haughton, of Apton Court."

It was about the time when the daughter Lisbeth was fifteen years of age, that rare news came to the miller, that Sir Allen's son—young Sir Allen, as the common people felicitously called him—had applied to the office to obtain money upon the chances of outliving his father and coming into the estate.

"Never a word let him know, Barker, that I'm in the concern, and let him have as much as he likes upon his good security. It's bank safe, and we shall make a haul; old Sir Allen cannot live many years, as I know from my wife, who had it from the hall herself, and I've my plan, sir, my plan."

Never had the miller seen young Sir Allen since he had become a man. At sixteen the heir had quarrelled with his father, and not once since had he shown himself in the neighbourhood.

He was in the army, it was said, and he was allowed two hundred a year. This was all the miller's neighbourhood knew of the heir of the owner of all the land in the parish.

As the next three years went on, the miller and his wife walked more fiercely upright than ever, and it was noticed that she spoke almost insolently to the Lady Haughton—a weak woman, who was quietly dropping into the grave from sheer grief at the loss of her son, whom her husband had forbidden her to see.

The miller and his wife walked more proudly than ever, because they looked upon the land to be as good as theirs.

They had their plan.

Month after month, year after year, money at ruinous interest was advanced to young Sir Allen, so that all the miller's money was absorbed, and he himself had borrowed upon the securities he held, and upon the lease of his mill, that he might still more deeply involve young Sir Allen.

So far they had never met.

By this time Lisbeth the daughter was of age to marry.

She was a fine, bold-looking girl, not coy, reserved, or graceful; given to riding audaciously, dressing in the extreme of fashion, and knocking off a quick valse or a galop at the piano, with more effect than truth.

Her face was round, her features sensuous and frank, her mouth somewhat large, and her grey eyes gleaming.

One day, at Canterbrigge, she being in the saddle, a cavalry officer said to a comrade, "A fine animal."

"Which," asked the other, "the horse or the woman?"

Her only female companions were those ladies who hunted, and these she knew only in the field. They would cut her in a shop.

She laughed, for the miller and his wife had let the daughter into their plans.

She was frank and out-spoken with the sons of the higher class farmers, and she would ride by their side by the mile—nay, she had even been known to take a cigar with one or two of them; but she never visited their sisters, and they never visited at the miller's.

In fact, the miller and his wife were about the most desolate people in Trompington. Nobody cared to visit them. The squire and the rector called sometimes, but they never stopped, and even Lisbeth's school companions, after one dose of a week at the mill, found they had had quite enough of it, and made promises to come again, which very heartily they never meant to fulfil.

But the miller and his wife, and their daughter, walked proudly to church, and they knew what the future would bring them.

The daughter belonged to no society of young ladies, taught in no schools, looked after no poor, and did no household work.

Sometimes the miller's wife, when in high good-humour with her daughter, would address her as "my lady," a process at which the mother and daughter would laugh, when mayhap the miller coming in he would laugh too, and the family would be quite merry—for a moment.

"Lass," says the miller one day to his wife, "young Sir Allen and his regiment are come to Canterbrigge, and it is now time to try his mettle."

That day the miller wrote a letter to his London partner, and two days after an answer was returned.

"Wife," said the miller, "he will be here to-morrow with a friend. Let there be everything right, and do you, Lisbeth" (this to his daughter), "do thy best to be handsome and agreeable."

The next day, in the afternoon, two gentlemen arrived on horseback. They were received at the mill with all the honours, the miller, his wife, and daughter standing on the door-step to welcome them. The miller was dressed in his Sunday clothes, a white cravat about his neck, while his lady was arrayed in crimson silk, and golden ornaments to match. Lisbeth was resplendent in a low pink moire dress overdone with lace flouncings and rich ruchings, and you could see her fine shape and her fair skin. Of her bright brown hair she had made the most, and had twined in it some large lustrous beads, which were in perfect accordance with her style of beauty.

The two visitors were of similar stature and build, and possibly they might have passed for brothers; but while one was distinguished and refined in look, the other appeared much like the ordinary cavalry officer, ready for enjoyment, and not too particular as to how it was obtained.

They came unaccompanied, and rode equally good horses. They dismounted together, and neither man looked after the other.

The miller, his wife, and daughter, to whom Sir Allen's son was perfectly unknown, looked with equal smiles upon both gentlemen, until the less distinguished of the two men said,

"Simekin, let me introduce you to my friend, Captain Clark—Jack, this is the miller."

The captain bowed, but the family, having now ascertained which was "young Sir Allen," had already almost forgotten the captain's existence.

"We hope you've come to stay, Mr. Allen," said the miller's wife; "for though I know we can't do things as they can do them up at the hall, still I have some silver, and you'll see the family arms on it—for, as you know, I am a second cousin of yours."

"Yes, to be sure," said the young squire. "I had forgotten it. Have you been quite well all these years?"

"Very well, Sir Allen—I mean Mr. Allen, but as you must be Sir Allen some day it does not matter if my tongue made a slip. This is my daughter, Lisbeth, Sir Allen—I mean Mr. Allen, and this is my husband, and right glad heartily am I to welcome you here, though I wish it was at Apton Court itself."

By this time she had led the way into the mill drawing-room, a flashy state-chamber, in which old and honest furniture, old drinking-horns and hunting-horns were mixed up with a blazing carpet, a crashing tri-chord piano, and yellow, blue, red, and green paper dahlias on an amber-coloured mantel-piece.

"Of course," continued the miller's wife, to whom the miller resigned the conversation, "of course you have come to stay, Mr. Allen, for nobody shall know of it up at the hall, though if they do I don't see that it can hurt you, Mr. Allen—which may I ask if ever you hear from Sir Allen?"

"No," replied Mr. Allen, "my father and I are still at variance. Would you have known me again, Mrs. Simekin, had you met me without any knowledge of who I was?"

"In a moment," she replied.

"And yet you have not seen me since I was a boy of sixteen."

"Oh! there is something in the face of our family, Mr. Allen, that can always be recognized. Do you not notice it in my Lisbeth's face?—Lisbeth, come here."

During the last few moments the young heir's friend had been talking with Lisbeth, and this is what passed. The captain spoke first.

"This is a very charming place, Miss Simekin."

"Yes—I am generally called Miss Lisbeth. Mamma and I object much to the name Simekin."

"Indeed—I am sorry to have pained you."

"Not at all. Have you known Allen long?"

"We have been fellow-officers for some years."

"Is he engaged?"

"Engaged?"

"Yes—engaged to be married. How stupid you are!"

"And you are very candid, my dear Miss Lisbeth. No, I don't think my friend is engaged."

"Is he a good sort of fellow? Don't look astounded, man. You know one always wants to know the best and the worst. What is he like?"

"Mr. Allen Haughton is to a certain extent a gentleman."

"But there's no nonsense about him—is there?"

"Not that I know of. But we as seldom know our friends as we know ourselves."

"Oh, but you're very close, you know!"

At this point her mother called to her, and she left the captain without any word of apology on withdrawal.

"There," continued the miller's wife, "can't you see your own face in my Lisbeth's?—I can, Lisbeth, you need not be shy, for this gentleman is your cousin."

"I am not shy, mamma, and I'm sure I shall get on capitally with cousin Allen—shan't I, cousin Allen?"

"It will not be my fault if you don't," said Allen with a laugh, and a freedom of talk and expression which had been totally wanting in his friend.

"You're going to stop, Mr. Allen?" urged the miller's wife—"You don't go away to-day?"

"We must return to Canterbrigge to-night, cousin," said the young squire, "for we have only a twelve-hours' leave—but a visit will be for another time."

Here the miller's wife turned away, leaving Mr. Allen and Lisbeth talking together; and going up to her husband she whispered, "Get the other one out of the room. He's in the way of our young people."

"Captain," said the miller, with an insolent freedom of tone which was very strong in contrast with that he had adopted towards the young squire,—"Captain, have you ever seen a mill?"

"No, miller, I have never seen a mill."

"Come and take stock of mine then—it will only cost a coat-dusting. Mother, when will dinner be ready?"

"In half an hour, miller," she said, imperiously.

"Come along, captain," said Dannis, and he led the way, the officer following gravely.

Scarcely had they left the house when the miller said, "How does he go on?"

"Who?"

"The young squire!"

"He is very well."

"Is he rackety?"

"I scarcely follow your meaning, miller."

"Does he look much at the pink bonnets?"

"I really don't know—I think not."

"Does he bet much now?"

"No—not much, I believe."

"Then where does his money go to?"

"I have no knowledge where his money goes to."

"You know he spends heaps o' money, don't you?"

"No; I never knew that."

"As 'stravagant a young dog as ever trotted. But there, we was all young once."

"No, miller, some of us are never young."

"Faith," laughed the miller, "we all of us grow old."

"True; but many of us have young hearts at eighty."

"I don't know what 'ee mean, captain, by *young* hearts."

"So much the worse for *you*, miller."

The miller looked at the captain as though he could not quite understand him, but he had always felt a contempt for a smaller man than himself who had never proved that he was not afraid of him, and therefore he did not respect the captain; for what was a captain compared with the miller of Trompington, who was so rich that he held *post-obits* upon half the land in the parish, and whose daughter would be Lady Haughton?

"Captain," said he, basing his attempt upon the plea which he had found answer nine times out of ten throughout his insolent ruffling life—"Captain, dost ever want a fifty now and then?"

"A fifty?"

"A fifty-pound note," explained the miller, telling himself comfortably that this captain was the greatest fool he ever had met.

"Yes," replied the officer coolly, "I have sometimes wanted a fifty-pound note, and then generally got it."

"Ha, ha," laughed the miller, in self-triumph; "a joke, dang me, a good joke. Well now—I a'most wish you wanted a fifty now, for I think I could let you have it, and never say a word about it."

"Ha! then you want me to do something!"

The miller smote his own leg, and then his guest's, and said, "Why, lad, I was thinking thee a fool, and thou art not."

"Thank you, miller," said the captain; "but what have I to do for it?"

"Get young Mr. Allen to stop here to-night. We can get him a medical 'stificat to set him straight with the colonel. And tell him to look after his cousin, for she is a fine girl, and his own blood, and a richer than you (for one) would think."

"Allen is clever enough, miller, to see for himself."

"But you can help him to see."

"I hardly can tell how."

"Try. I suppose he doesn't let you into his secrets?"

"Generally I know quite as much of his secrets as Mr. Allen does himself."

"Then he's told you about the *post-obits*, as the lawyers call 'em?"

"Yes."

"I know'd you was chaffing me. Lor, what a couple they'll make, and me living up at the court, and the missus too, so that the county 'ull have to come down to us after all, and them big-wig parsons at Canterbrigge have to be civil—ha! it 'ull be a good time—and the mill leased out to one who shall know his place."

Here the miller spruced himself, and pulled down his waistcoat.

"There be nothing like a English yeoman," he said.

"Except the father-in-law of a baronet," said Captain John, very gravely.

The miller saw a vast joke in this reply, and slapped his guest's leg and his own once more.

"Dinner be ready—there goes the bell!"

"Ha, miller, have you a dinner-bell?"

"Thee see they have it up at the great house, and so my madame said, as she belonged to Apton Court, she would have a dinner-bell, neither do I see why it should not be so!"

"You young people go together," said the miller's wife, addressing her daughter and Allen—"for I see *you* understand one another."

Mr. Allen was laughing with Lisbeth, who was simply flinging herself at his head—to use a common and somewhat effective expression.

Captain Jack ate very little, and once or twice Mr. Allen burst into laughter, apparently with his friend for the butt. The miller and his daughter followed suit, and the miller's wife smiled. As a cousin of the great house she rarely laughed.

"Do 'ee eat," urged the miller to Mr. Allen, who was heartily feeding, "thee don't eat a bit, Allen."

The miller took no notice of the captain, who was making a sufficiently temperate meal.

"Do 'ee drink, cousin Allen," urged the miller, "for thee art drinking nothing. I'll open another bottle o' 'fiz.'"

"Our champagne, cousin," said the miller's wife, "is excellent. We are very careful with our wines."

This was a point at which Mr. Allen looked at Captain Jack, and broke into a huge roar of laughter.

Even the grave captain smiled.

"He *be* a fool, though," thought the miller, looking at the quiet military man.

"Mr. Allen, have some of this ham," urged the miller's wife.

"She cured it herself," said the miller.

"Mr. Simekin," she immediately replied, "there is no need to trouble my cousin with particulars of this character."

Five minutes afterwards the cry was—

"Mr. Allen, do have some of that puddun; our Lisbeth made it."

Upon this occasion the miller was not rebuked by his smiling wife, who said—

"Do try it, cousin Allen; for our Lisbeth, though a lady, is able to be domestic."

[The pastry in question had come out in the confectioner's cart from Canterbrigge.]

At last that twenty-pound lump of cheese which usually finishes an insolent dinner came upon the table.

Pressed to eat of the cheese, Mr. Allen cheerily said, "Oh, yes—lots of cheese, cousin Simekin. In for a penny in for a pound."

Quite conformably with the manners up at Apton Court, the miller's wife rose and led the way out, followed by her daughter, leaving the three men face to face.

The port was on the table—the miller's time had come. His guests were lighting cigars—he had taken to a long pipe.

"Mr. Allen, your friend says as he knows all."

"All, miller—for I suppose we are coming to business."

"With thee leave, Mr. Allen. Did it come on thee with a start when thee heard 'twas I was thee creditor."

"Not much. I knew that the money had been had—and it was owing to some one. You're the man. So much the better for you."

"Can thee pay it back?"

"Not I."

"If Sir Allen died could thee pay it back?"

"That would depend. Sir Allen for twenty years, has not spent one-fourth of his income, therefore if he left me his personal, as he must leave me his real estate, I could readily pay off the *post-obits*."

"Hey—but *will* he leave 'ee the cash?"

"No—I think not!"

At this point Captain John, who was but slightly interested in this conversation, and who was looking about, saw a door move which led into a side room.

The miller's wife and daughter were listening.

"Cousin Allen," continued the miller, "I'll speak to thee plain—art engaged to be married?"

"I believe I am," with a laugh; "but what of that?"

"Can thee get out of it?"

"What, the promise?"

"Yes—can thee send her to the right-about?"

"Any man could do such a thing—few would."

"I'll garrant thee from the lawyers—I will, if thee'lt take thy cousin Lisbeth, and thee shalt have every one o' thy sinnatures back, and not owe me a farden, and I'll 'lowance thee twice what Sir Allen do."

For a moment there was silence, and then Mr. Allen with a great laugh said,

"Captain Jack—what say you?"

"Hey," cried the miller, "Captain Jack will say yes, as sure as there's fifty sovereigns to a fifty-pound note, or a hundred sovereigns to five twenty-pound notes—won't thee, captain?"

"Oh, yes," said the captain. "You must marry some one, Allen, and it mustn't be a poor wife. Why not marry your cousin Lisbeth?"

"Brayvo," said the miller, striking his thigh.

Mr. Allen laughed, took a swig at the wine before him, and said, "But I must get out of my engagement first."

"Never mind her," urged the farmer. "Think of thy cousin, Allen, who is pretty enow, and likerly enow."

When Mrs. Simekin sent to let them know some tea was waiting for them, the miller whispered to the captain as they went out of the room,

"That hundred is thine, captain—but I did na' say when I would pay it. Thou shalt have it when they are man and wife."

"I am much obliged," said the captain.

An hour afterwards the miller had taken the captain to try his billiard-table, and the miller's wife finding something to do, Mr. Allen and Lisbeth were left alone.

"So you are engaged," she said, suddenly.

"Why, how do you know that?"

"You told papa so—and he told me!"

"Told *you*, Lisbeth?"

"Yes—for I knew all about it."

"About what?"

"Why, the plan to marry us two."

"And would you have me?"

"Yes."

"Upon so short an acquaintance?"

"Yes."

"But you know that I am engaged."

"You can't marry us both, cousin Allen, and I dare say I'm richer than she is."

"She has no money whatever."

"Then of course you couldn't *marry* her."

"It could be done."

"And you would be wretched for ever. If now you choose me—you would be rich at once."

"No—for I should still owe your father the money."

She laughed.

"I'd see fair-play—he shouldn't claim a farthing. No—if you marry me for my money I'd see you had it. Fair-play's a jewel."

She laughed again.

In the next hour much was said—things not pleasant to put upon record, because they were heartless. He was unscrupulous enough, and her tone of mind and behaviour made him worse.

"I'll manage it," she said, "and dad will never trouble you for the loans."

At this point the miller appeared, and, simulating annoyance, told Mr. Allen that his horse and his friend's had got loose and were in the wood, out of which to drive them they might want a couple of hours.

"I'll send a boy on a cart-horse if thee like to barracks, explaining how 'tis."

"It matters very little," replied Mr. Allen, "we will excuse ourselves, my friend and I, when we reach garrison."

An hour afterwards, Lisbeth herself was helping to saddle her horse. She was eloping to secure Allen, first, from the danger of being discovered by his father, secondly that she might at a blow overcome her rival.

The miller, his wife, and daughter, were quite in collusion as far as the elopement went.

A quarter of an hour after the miller's two saddle-horses had quitted the mill-stables, carrying off Mr. Allen and Lisbeth, the miller moving nervously up and down the house, leaving his guest to amuse himself as best he could, the miller sees a paper on the ground.

He picks it up, looks at it, starts, and then runs off to his strong-box. For a moment he rages, then his anger changes to laughing admiration.

"Wife!" he cries, "wife!" And as she comes bustling into the room, he says, "Our girl—what a chip of the old block she be! She have stole—that be, *taken*—all the deeds signed by Master Allen. Her's a clever woman. Her was 'fraid that I would na' keep my word, and she's stole a march on me. Faith—she's our daughter."

The miller's wife smiled, but said nothing, for she was thinking of the vengeance she was about to have. For twenty long years, during which her freedom had lasted, freedom from the thrall of her family's head, for twenty years she had nurtured her hatred of the fancied humiliations she had endured. Truth to tell, she had but suffered the grievance of being poor. And her revenge took this form. She sent one of her women servants up to the hall upon some message, with instructions to tell one of the hall-servants as a secret that the young master had been visiting at the mill, and had eloped with the miller's daughter.

She knew the news would soon reach my lady's ears, and that then Sir Allen would know all.

She hugged herself with the thought of the agony the baronet would experience. So this hapless husband and wife made merry with each other, and forgot the existence of quiet Captain John, whom they found one hour afterwards, quietly reading an old chance book he had found in the incongruous mill drawing-room.

"Will 'ee have anything, captain?"

"No, thank you, miller. What time is it?"

"It be near ten."

"What time do you go to bed?"

"Ten."

"Don't let me keep you up. I'm ready for bed when you are. Are the horses caught?"

"Yes, captain. Will 'ee have any supper?"

"No, miller. What time do you get up in the morning?"

"Five."

"I'll be up with you."

"But we doesn't breakfast till seven."

"Never mind breakfast. I shall be in Cantebrigge to breakfast."

"As thee like, captain," said the wretched curmudgeon, who saw no use in being civil and hospitable to the captain now he was useless, now the end held in view was gained. Not a word said he about the hundred pounds.

Here the mill-house bell rang, and the wife's face lighted up with a cruel light.

"It's Sir Allen," she said.

She rose and went to the door, so that she met the baronet as he came into the hall.

He was very pale.

"Good evening, cousin Sir Allen," the woman said,—"though what we owe this late visit to, I am unawares."

"My son is here—was here!"

"Your son, Sir Allen?"

"Yes; he who has completed his crimes by eloping with your miserable daughter."

"Your son," cried the wretched woman. "Is he your son?"

"So I hear, woman,—you must know the truth."

"She does not," here said a quiet voice, which the miller's wife recognised as that of the neglected captain.

"ALLEN!" cried the baronet.

"Good evening, Sir Allen," said the captain, gravely coming forward. "I heard my name mentioned, or I would not have interfered."

"My son, Allen," murmured the baronet.

The miller and his wife were looking murderously at each other.

"Your son, Allen," replied the captain.

After a few moments, Sir Allen said—

"Very recently I have heard that your extravagance had a good intention; is that so?"

"I have never, Sir Allen, exceeded your allowance, and I have been rather looked down on in the regiment consequently. I have raised large sums of money by means of *post-obits*, but not for my own necessities. My sister, your daughter, in consequence of whose marriage to a poor man, with my connivance, you quarrelled, sir, with me,—my sister informed me that her husband had inherited a large extent of mortgaged estates. I obtained the money you have heard about to release that property. I have but one creditor, the miller here."

"What of his daughter?"

"The miller thought he was bribing me to marry his daughter to save me from ruin. My friend, once fellow-student, and now brother officer, Jack Clark, personated me, while I contented myself with assuming his name. He has eloped with the miller's daughter. I shall never marry below my station, Sir Allen, or without your consent!"

The baronet had raised his arms, his lips trembled, and he was about to utter some gentle words, when, recalled to himself by the presence of the miserable miller, and his still more miserable wife, he said,

"Come home, son, we have much to say one to the other."

"Friend miller," said the true Mr. Allen, "you are not so clever as you think."

Thereupon the father and son left the miller and his wife still staring hatefully at each other.

They remained, and remain, a rare proud couple. They boast of their daughter the captain's wife; but she never comes to see them, and they never go to see her.

The inhabitants of Trompington have never understood the elopement, but they have heard that when the miller and his wife are bitter one with the other, that she says,

"It was your blood in her—boor!"

And he replies:

"It was yours, my fine madam."

The miller and his wife hate each other.

He sometimes looks down into the mill-pond, and wonders how long a man will take drowning.

But wilfully he will never drown.

The miller's wife wonders to what age she shall live.

And their daughter never comes to see them.

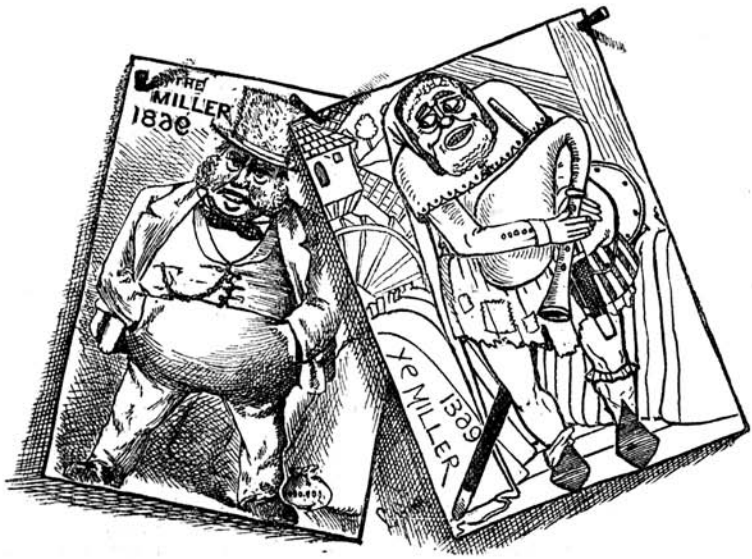
And they never go to see their daughter.

They had not, when young, cast their bread upon the waters, and after many years the ocean of their life is barren.

If to those who have loved much, much shall be forgiven, as writes gentle St. Luke, how unpardoning is the stretch of unforgiveness which surrounds the streaming, waning sight of those who have never loved at all!

Forgive—us—our—tresp—

But here is the end of the page.



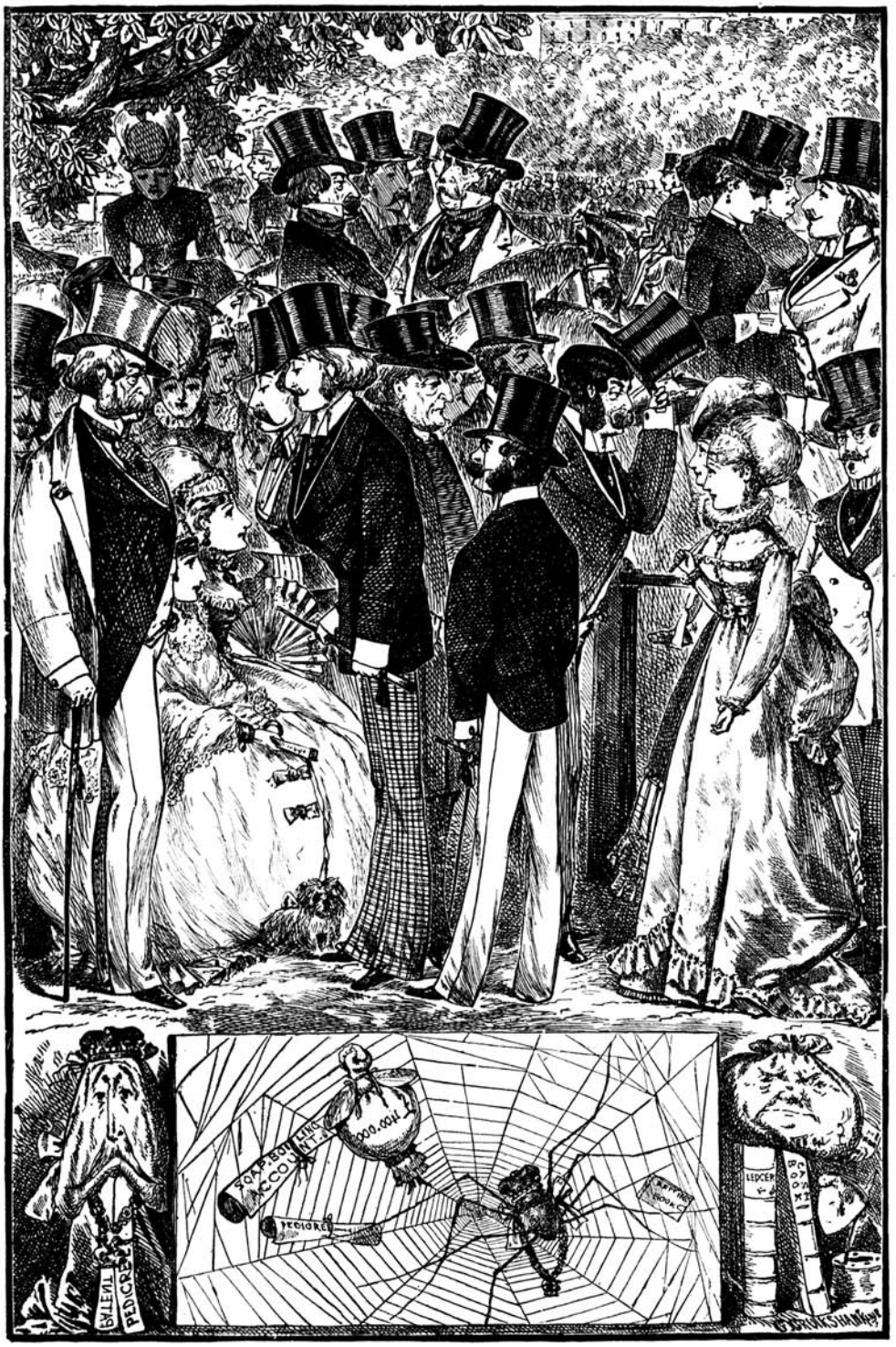
Five Times a Relict; or, Mrs. Tom's Tale.

BEING THE HISTORY OF A MODERN WIFE OF BATH.

I AM a widow, but neither a poor nor lone woman at that. I have been a wife, fresh-wedded five times, and know something, naturally, of the men. The number of my husbands, and their qualities, I will tell you something about. Not precisely everything, because there must always be something in every narrative which we keep from our closest friends. Married women will tell you that there are little secrets which they will carry with them to their graves—married men will confess, honestly and soberly, if you put it to them, that there are some occurrences which they, even in the last stage of blab, do not narrate. Widows—and I know something of *them*, being equal, in my own personal experiences, to five widows—will own that, although they spoke of their first to their second, of their first and second to their third, and so on through the gamut of all their changes, that some things they said not to any of their husbands; not that they had been matters which lacked interest, but that they instinctively and decidedly demanded reticence. My creed—I speak not of my dislike of the Evangelical, and my leaning towards the Ritualists—has always been—to be merry, even if I was not wise; to make the best of the present moment; to live for to-day, and not to bother about to-morrow; and to make myself as comfortable as I can, and extract as much enjoyment as possible from the passing moments. It is a creed which I know will not suit all ladies, because I have been told by many that they do not consider my sentiments likely to lead to ultimate happiness. Of course, with my matter-of-fact policy, I reply that they don't know anything more about that than I do. Indeed, when I have asked one or two of these poll-parrots of meeting-house discourses what they considered real bliss was, all I can say is, that *their* notion wouldn't suit *me*. One point I have managed, all this my life, to carry, and that is to establish in the minds of all my husbands a pleasurable feeling in my company. I believe, and I say it in all humility, of course, that I can make myself agreeable whenever I choose to try. Being of the opinion, besides, that if *you* are agreeable other people are agreeable also, I have not failed, except on rare occasions, to make things pleasant around me. Your Puritan will object strongly to my plan of action, probably, but I have seen enough of Puritans to know that they are no better than other people, and, of the two, I think them rather the worser.

Whether for good or bad, however, five husbands I have had; widow am I now, but when a man I find to my taste again, and I can have him to church with me, so will I, be assured; for I am impatient of living for myself alone, and do desire nothing so much as a kind and generous companion. Now, nearly all women are of my mind, I believe, and I differ from them only that I declare my wishes, whereas the lives of most of them are spent in trying to show that they do *not* care for that which, in reality, they prize and covet most of all things. Prejudice and cant apart, which think you, my lieges, the honester?

Men and women of *experience* rather prefer the opposite sex when they are younger than themselves, I think. Those unversed in life affect the company of them that have seen the world. As a young damsel, May warming the blood of my spring years, I was led captive to the wheels of a man, set and mature: by no means old in years, but yet having much knowledge of the moves and strategies of the pieces on our chess-board of life. He played his game with me effectively enough, became my king, and I occupied my place as queen. Delighted with marriage, I kept at his side constantly, and was perhaps *exigeante* of his attentions. But as I came to know more, I, as the queen, acquired more importance, and increased the range of my aspirations and movements. He, on the contrary, grew more to wish to stay at home, and any little trouble or bother irritated him, and made him wishful, apparently, to hide himself in some safe, quiet place where the world of opposing pawns and pieces could not get at him. But this very cowardice brought its own punishment. I frankly own that, although I made the best of him I could, he was, a few



THE LAND OF THE WEST.

years after our union, not the same man I knew in my honeymoon; his moral nature seemed to deteriorate, whilst his physical powers sank; and, attacked on all sides by foes which surround, indifferently, the best and worst of chess-pieces, he sickened and died, leaving me some property which, had he lived another year, I believe would have been completely dissipated. So there was some room for comfort, and I entered in and took possession of the board and lodgings devised to me by my late husband. Looking back on this period, I cannot say that I was altogether unhappy, for the memory of many blissful occasions, although a little tinged with melancholy, led me to hope there would still be some delight in the coming future, which indeed was to some extent already filled by the approaching shadow of a masculine figure.

A very intimate friend of my late husband had, on the next morning after the funeral, called to sympathize with me. He was a man whom my husband paid the great compliment of never considering a bore, and as for myself, I had always liked him very much indeed, from the first moment I had seen him. That moment happened to be a propitious one for him. I had had a serious disagreement with my husband the night before, on account of his not yielding to my wishes in what I considered an important matter for my happiness. My husband had laughed at me, twitted me with the impropriety and unreasonableness of my demands, and finally sulkily refused to be moved either by my blandishments or complaints. Nothing annoys me so much as to find all my attempts to be agreeable fail, because, as I have said, I am so generally successful when I try to please. I was in an ill-humour, consequently, the next morning when I awoke, just as I had been when I went to sleep. At our lunch-time a gentleman called whom I had heard of, but had not seen. He had just arrived from the United States, and had much to tell us of the shrewd, calculating, egotistical Americans. He interested me greatly, intuitively seemed to know that I was suffering from neglect, and assiduously endeavoured to assuage the pangs of my wounded vanity. I was immediately all smiles, and exerted myself with all my strength for his conquest. That I was successful was soon evident; he did not fail to convince me he was of opinion that no one had a more agreeable person than myself, and that my mind was likewise of that character which suited his ideas of what a woman should be. It was very apparent—his partiality for me—and I did not conceal the pleasure I took in his company. My husband at times feebly reproached me for my attentions, but I was, of course, enabled to reply that it was *his* friend whom I was petting. What the world thought I did not much care, I have always said; in this connection I do not mind what they say of me, so long as they say nothing *to* me—and then I can answer them.

This was the gentleman who called on me the day after the funeral. I was sad, as I ought to have been; was neat, as I ought to have been; but I was, perhaps, more susceptible than I ought to have been. I felt myself looking very nicely. The events of the last few days had toned down my ordinary exuberance, and I felt that my present depression of spirits, countenance, and attitude became me in a marked manner. I never experienced so distinctly my own fascination and power as at that moment when speaking of my loss to my husband's friend. It may have been that Mr. Charles Beattar himself was the cause of all the serene moments I then was passing, and that because *he* was exerting his power over me *I* was as happy as under the circumstances I could be expected to be—in short, that *his* was the mastery, and not mine. He was a strong man, Charles, my second husband. No nonsense about him at all. He was as erudite as a gentleman need be, as full of resources as a successful modern lawyer must be, as replete with health and energy as a summer cruise and hunting two days a week with the West Kent will make a man, as complete a companion, combining a good form and thorough acquaintance with the world, as a woman could wish for. Veraciously, I did wish for him—and I had him. Just a little more than twelve months after my husband's death, I married him. It was rather soon, Charles said; "But," he added, "my dear Mrs. Tom, what do we care about the world? The fellows in the field won't think a bit the worse of me for making you comfortable, and as for the women, they don't like you much now, and between you and me they would rather see you married than at large, because, you see, I might come to grief some day, and then they would be afraid of your fascination being practised on their husbands or sons."

I was between five and six and twenty, and I enjoyed my husband's society for nine years nearly. I loved him as heartily and as wholly as I could. I do not think I ever had a thought for another man; I except, of course, the periods of usual pleasant flirtations with various people whom we met abroad, and in society, and it is very difficult to resist the influence, I find, of good-looking, well-dressed men, who show their appreciation of you by well-timed compliments and seasonable favours. Charles was the least jealous man alive. He knew women would flirt, if they had a chance, and being a frank fellow, he would also admit that all men did, when they had time for it. Still Charles would insist on my being more careful at times, when I had become, probably, a little lost to the sense of propriety, and when he spoke like *that* I knew him well enough to obey. Indeed, he really frightened me once. Captain Jonesby had

come with some men to Tilbury, near which place we lived, and he was a very frequent visitor. To tell the truth, I did not like him, but his impudence took him everywhere, and I did not think it worth while to make a fuss about it, as the man was useful now and then to me. One day we were standing at the open window, looking over the Thames towards Sea Reach, and the Captain had insinuated his arm—for the first time he did this—round my waist. I intended to rebuke him for this, but I do not know whether I did not care sufficiently for him or not, to pique him by forbidding the familiarity; but the objection on my part does not seem to have been uttered, or attended to; for, some minutes afterwards, Charles came in from the conservatory at the other end of the room, and caught my Captain. My husband did not utter a word, but with the back of his hand, swinging it round with all the force of an extremely long arm, he hit Jonesby a horrible blow in the face which forced blood from Jonesby's nose. Jonesby went immediately out of the room into the passage, and thence through the door into the garden, walking quickly but unsteadily into the road. "Don't let me see that sort of thing again," said Charles to me; and I never heard more of the matter: he acted just as if it had never occurred. The only other accident which occurred to baulk my humour happened to a mere youth, a lad scarcely twenty, who had been at the Ecole Polytechnique, and amongst the many things there taught, had learned to make love fluently, and with the utmost disregard to existing property rights. Marital objections were for him nothing—he had bearded the great Madame Schneider, the Grand Duchess herself, and he thought every lady must give way to him. And sooth to say he had seductive ways. He was a great source of amusement to my husband, who was a friend of his father's, a celebrated French physician. The youth had been staying at our house a few days, and had been talking tolerably largely about the sport at Compiègne. "Just the thing for you," said Charles; "the hounds meet on Saturday, at Greenstreet Green, and you shall go over with me. You may take the horse or the mare, which you like." Adolphe's answer almost implied that he would prefer two bare-backed steeds to the conventional saddled unit, but he took the mare, out of compliment, he said, to the sex. After a good breakfast, they left the house, Adolphe delighted. His get-up was a trifle *outré* to ordinary English eyes, unaccustomed to see in the field a cocked hat and a bright green coat with gold embroidery, but in my eyes he did not look uninteresting. There was an amount of *chic* and bravery about him which aided me to repress my own and deprecate my husband's sly laughter. He came back alone, Adolphe, that day—he had ridden into a bog well known to huntsmen, hounds, and horses—he had forced his mare, against her better knowledge, into it, and he, with the assistance of a score of *canaille*, and chains, and plough horses, had been dragged out—he and Charles's favourite mare—covered with the black bog-earth, his gorgeous uniform all grimed and streaked and torn, his hat absent (he had bought one of a needy agriculturist), and himself in a wretched state of injured *morale* and ruined *physique*. Charles came in about five o'clock, with his horse cool and comfortable, although they had had a good run; and he sympathized very much with his young friend's troubles. He read him, however, a lesson which was to this effect:—"You can manage your French married ladies, I have no doubt, very well. They are only too anxious to be conquered. But at present we are not ready here for your experiments. If you attempt the business here, you will arrive at a *malheur*, as sure as you're a Frenchman." Adolphe went to Charing Cross next day by the train, and stayed at the Hotel, and found London streets more to his taste than Country furrows.

I don't remember anything more of importance. I was a buxom, comfortable woman. My husband was a prosperous, satisfied man. Nothing was further from my mind than misfortune, when one day it arrived. He whom the world had thought so well off, was, in fact, thousands of pounds behind the world. Bad times came—his bankers refused to continue some necessary loans, he saw ruin in front of him, and could not bring his courage, great as it was, to wrestle with it. One morning I found him dead by my side. There was no inquiry regarding him. I used my influence with our doctor, and we called it "heart disease." There was some scandal as to the property of some young nephews and nieces, but they were young, and there was no one to say much about it, and the end of it was that they did not have the money they ought to have had, and perhaps they have been better without it.

My grief was real and abundant at my second husband's death. He had taught me what a thorough man was; and, although I fear he had allowed himself to be drawn, for some motive I never knew, into doubtful speculations, and had used monies which should have been sacred, still towards me he had been always indulgent, and never permitted me to want for any comfort, or even luxury. As well as my grief I had to bear the knowledge that my income would now be very small, and that I might even be reduced to uncomfortable straits. House, grounds, garden, horses, carriages, I must think of no more, but must seek for a quiet place, which would cost little for rent or establishment. It was a great struggle, and the woes of widowhood were greatly enhanced by poverty. I had by no means, however, lost my good looks or confidence in myself,

or determination never to remain alone. And, after feeding for a year on my recollections of what had been, and walking down my melancholy with long promenades and rambles around Hastings, St. Leonards, and Fairlight, I found myself coming back to my old frame of mind again.

Who was to be my next companion in this world of sorrows?—although, so far as the sorrows went, I quite determined to have as few of them as possible. Ever since I had been a girl, some one of the opposite sex had engaged my attention. The half-dozen love-affairs I had had before I first became a wife, and married Mr. Thomas Alfer, had formed my sentimental aliment until I was sixteen, and had satisfied me sufficiently. My first bereavement was mitigated and ended by Charles Beattar; and now I had lost him, and with him the consolations of a woman's life. There must be, I knew, many men anxious for a yoke-fellow, but I had not met any person who answered to my requirements. Nevertheless, it cannot be laid to my charge that I had either been negligent or careless. On the contrary, it was my custom to take every opportunity that presented itself to make myself acquainted with those of the necessary sex who were likely to suit my purposes. I found I could not very well get on without the good fare I had been accustomed to for so long, and I had determined, other things being equal, to have a man who had some sort of a decent income. I do not mean to say that I had been utterly destitute of male companionship during the twelve months succeeding the suicide of Charles. My old admirer, the Captain, had been assiduous in his attentions, and Adolphe Beaugout had spent some days with me. But the Captain soon retired: he was poor, and a little shaky from excess; and pauperism, combined with unsteadiness, were not the dual qualifications I sought. Adolphe had grown fat, and he would have wanted me to go to Paris, and I had a shrewd suspicion that French ladies were not to be trusted with one's husband; for, although I knew myself to be fond of admiration, and would get it whenever I could, yet I had strong objections to any spouse of mine becoming any other woman's admirer. Fortune did not forsake me at this juncture. A gentleman, old, but lively in conversation and rich in the world's stores, met me on the beach one morning as Adolphe was indulging in some French declarations, and recognized him as a travelling companion. I was civil to him, and, indeed, rather put Adolphe aside to awaken an interest for myself in the aged beau's breast. I was successful, for I saw him the same week, after Adolphe's departure, and then Mr. Gammaree said:

"You are going to marry a Frenchman, are you? What a pity!"

Quickly I undeceived him. An English gentleman should be my only choice.

"May I have the honour of presenting myself at your house, madam?"

"I shall be pleased beyond measure to increase our acquaintance!"

And I did. A long courtship was out of the question we both agreed,—at least I suggested, and he agreed; and we were married. I would rather not state his age, or his failings. Both were considerable. He worried me a good deal with some harmless monomanias, but I did all I could to make myself comfortable; and, by leading him and assenting to some of his whims and fancies, I passed pretty pleasantly a not long pilgrimage. Many old friends came around me again, to a pretty house we had on the Downs; and the good dinners I gave to some young relatives of Mr. Gammaree prevented me from falling into anything like irritability or vain repinings. Adolphe came over, at my invitation, and although my well-worn husband grumbled at his staying a month, and said I spent too much time with him, yet I managed to keep the peace, by various amiable and kindly offices, seasonably performed when the old gentleman was in his kindlier moments. At the suggestion of the doctor it was that Adolphe ultimately went. I noticed and respected the medical attendant's solicitude, and was much struck by certain reasons he gave as to the advisability of Beaugout's absence. I also had written a line to Captain Jonesby, but he wrote me a cold letter, pretending some excuse. Later, however, he came, and made amends for his want of epistolary warmth. A certain day arrived when Mr. Gammaree became more forgetful of his position and mundane affairs in general, and when an old hallucination revived in a very strong degree. "Mrs. Tom, dear, you must send me to the silversmith's: my lid and spout want setting to rights. Eglinton's will do it—they had me there before." First I must explain that everybody has always called me Mrs. Tom; and secondly, that poor old Gammaree fancied he was a teapot. His state became worse and worse thenceforward, and at the end of a month—during which time I nursed him and prepared his pills and his will, and would let not one of his many relatives see him—the doctor signed a certificate, and for the third time I was a widow.

I do not desire the condolence which the reader may be disposed to offer. Other women may prefer to have marched in file of two, never changing their comrade. I prefer, I avow it, after my experience, to fight the battle of life with my right-hand man knocked over occasionally. I mourn each as he goes, with due marking of time, but am obliged, subsequently, to consider who shall step with me in coming campaigns. The

encounter is more exciting with a fresh companion in arms, and if it be a good thing to have solaced and been solaced by one husband, then how much higher must be her claim to praise and gratitude who has borne herself well in the strife by the side of five good men and true (that is, as true and as good as she could get them)!

The next time, this, my fourth essay, was a very plain sailing affair. I was not an atom less inclined to appreciate the virtues and good points of the manly character now that I was on the wrong side of thirty, than I had been when I was wedded to Alfer. I thought myself more acquainted with men's ways: better fitted to assist and help them in any difficulty or trouble than I had been as a novice in matrimony. Never have I given way, I believe, before any difficulty in my path, but have unswervingly directed all my energies to the end in view. If husband and wife cannot pull together, who can be expected to give them a helping hand? Their happiness is almost entirely within their own control, and my experience teaches me that for a woman's own comfort and pleasurable existence she must pay every attention to the minutest wish of her lord. Otherwise, she will surely not have her way—that which every woman in the land has the desire to possess, and should have the wisdom to secure.

A member of another learned profession was to claim me as his. My fourth entry into the married state was made as a doctor's wife, and it may be guessed who was the fortunate he. My late husband's medical attendant became mine, and a very anxious, watchful, close attendant too, he proved. This time it was not I who was the prime mover. David Dellton, M.D., did all the work. He made the running, set the pace, and won in a canter. His first wife had died a month or so after the death of my husband, and we sorrowed together, taking as much comfort from each other as we could get. All the town appeared to be quite sure that we should be married, and his practice quickly declined; for, as he said, the people supposed he would not need their patronage much longer. Well, it was a pity that all Hastings and St. Leonards should be mistaken and disappointed, so we married; and being tired of the place, and the inhabitants not being friendly, we made use of a special licence at a very handsome church, near Westbourne Grove, where the people seemed delighted with us, and with the dinner that followed later in the day. My doctor was a learned man, obese, not tall or stalwart, little given to exercise, but chiefly to books, and books of a peculiar kind and cast. He knew intimately all the dabblers in Magic, was acquainted with the Cabbala; black-letter he seemed to prefer before modern types; and his taste for old vials was on a par with his liking for wines of ancient birth and in cobwebby bottles. His dryasdust fancies were by no manner of means confined to dusty folios—his cellar was as much the object of his care as his cabinet. This cabinet or closet he affected always gave me the horrors: it is the most uncomfortable thought of my whole life. He would enter it late in the evening, and remain there for hours. In vain I attempted, at first, to wean him from it. After a dinner, which was everything that a man and woman could desire, and loving attentions bestowed on his Sauterne, Oporto, and Burgundy, and a few affectionate phrases afterwards on myself, he would generally retire to this Blue Beard room, and no inducement that I might offer could either gain entrance for me or exit for himself. It was not every night, it is true, he would thus absent himself, but much too frequently I thought. His knowledge of scandalous stories, and unlawful deeds, and episodes improper, and blemished lives, and dangerous practices, daring frauds, and wicked doings, was altogether prodigious. Ever and anon he would work on my nerves and susceptibilities until I was in a state of excitement bordering on frenzy, and he seemed never to be tired of reading to me these doubtful histories. I have since thought he had an intention in all this; but however that may be, I had little reason to complain of his general conduct to me. He was a man whom it was impossible to fathom. It was also impossible for me to respect him, and yet he made me at times feel for him a wild, mad love, which no other husband I have ever had was capable of arousing. On the other hand, he was oftentimes repulsive to me, and I was exceedingly wrath at his repeated interviews with ladies who consulted him upon their ailments. For, notwithstanding that he had no regular practice, some old patients preferred his prescriptions to any other physician's. I now understood why Mrs. Dellton had been jealous of my long consultations with her husband, and I felt for her very much. After seven years had passed, I discovered that his late hours, intense study of absorbing subjects, and his exciting stimulants were having a very bad effect on him, and that his mind was wearing out his body. This exaggerated tone he was also conveying to me, and for some months I felt a tension of nerves and tightening sensations which I was sure, if not altogether unpleasant, must be very exhausting and wearing. My husband's body also seemed to change: his feet, which were always very large, appeared to have spread out to megatherium-like dimensions, and his hands grew of enormous capacity, whilst his trunk shrivelled and decreased. Finally, it came across me with a sudden gleam that he would kill me with all this forcing of nature, or that he would himself succumb to his own morbid imaginings and dearly-bought philosophies. If I could avoid going first, I would. That was my settled determination, and

I forthwith set about making a few friends about me that I might be relieved from the tedium—for it was *that* now—of listening to the wild words and fiery exhortations of my despairing husband. It came at last: in a fit of frenzy he had sat for hours and hours in his closet, day after day, night after night. His food was put outside the door, and we did not see him for an entire week. At the end of seven days he came out, a ghastly ghost; and coming to me, and wishing me good-night, and begging my forgiveness for the temptations he had made me undergo and led me into, he died, shivering and shuddering. This was exactly ten years, to a day, from the date of the death of his wife.

The reaction from this furious time of my life was not what might have been expected in my case. After some months' calm, and administering restoratives and taking much repose, my ordinary comfortable condition was once more renewed, and I was again able to look around the world to see what was in store for me. And my selection, on the fourth occasion of my wearing weeds, of my fifth partner, was a most unhappy one. Attracted by the youth and lightsome form of a clerk in the proctor's office which I had to visit on business connected with my husband's affairs, I invited him to pay me a few days' visit, in order more easily to arrange the carrying out of certain of my late husband's wishes which were very singular and difficult of execution. He gave me great assistance, Mr. Epsillon, and showed an aptitude much beyond his years. He pleased me very much, and I was greatly at a loss when he went back to his office. He showed also great concern at my loneliness, and would occasionally visit me upon various pretexts. I did not conceal from him my partiality, and in the end I went for the last time to the altar, with the youngest man I had yet married: although I was about a quarter of a century older than when I married my first husband. The union was most satisfactory at first, but a few months after marriage he grew less loving, and although I welcomed him with my best attentions, they were frequently lost upon him. We quarrelled seriously, I usually making the first advances, which he was not very anxious apparently to meet half-way. Some of my acquaintances seemed very satisfied at my bad fortune, and I overheard more than one suggest that it served me right that I had caught a Tartar at last. I was blamed, also, as being too old to marry so young a husband; but I shall never, even now that I am some years older, be content, I believe, with an aged man. Different women have different fancies—my taste does not lie in the direction of men born in the last century. But I certainly had a tough job with Master Epsillon. He had the control of all my property, for he had showed himself so careful of my interest when I was a widow, that I thought he might safely be entrusted with what I possessed after marriage. Besides, I am not at all sure *I* could have had *him*, without *he* had had *my money*. My gentleman began to live very fast, and Horse-racing became his fixed idea and sole amusement. Day after day I heard nothing but—"Jaundice" is doing well—he took his usual gallop; "Scarlet Fever" was a trifle queer in temper, but he would be sure to be a hot 'un for the Derby; "Small-Pox" was coming; "Rheumatics" had arrived, and was sure to go for the "Liverpool." The Marquis's lot were out of form altogether; "Sciatica" would walk in for the "Oaks;" and the "Leger" was a certainty for "Hysterics." He invited to dinner a lot of men who were hard featured, weather-beaten, and wore tight trousers and large neckerchiefs; the names of John Scott, Bill Day, Tom Dawson, Fordham, Aldcroft, Wells became as natural to my ears as Derby and Disraeli, Gladstone and Bright, to politicians. The men ate enormously, drank deep, stayed late, and played high. I have lain awake for hours in our bed, waiting for John to come, and thinking I should never hear the last of them depart. When he did come, odoriferous with tobacco smoke and cold brandy, he was anything but a pleasant companion, and he has, indeed, been deposited at the door of my room by one of his friends, with the words "Here you are, missus; you'd better come and pick him up, if you reckon it worth while."

From bad to worse. No books in the house but betting-books; no literature except "Bell's Life," and other "Lives;" and these were read to desperation. "What can you see in those horrid papers?" I would say, when his entire forgetfulness of me roused me into action. "Something more interesting than you, a good deal," he would reply. "You're a brute," I would answer.

"Hold your tongue, woman."

"I shan't hold my tongue."

"Then go out of the room."

"I will not."

And on one occasion he struck me sharply with the corner of his metallic book, to which I replied with a sharp box on the ear. The contest between us did not terminate speedily. My anger was thoroughly roused, and I think he felt he had made a mistake in laying his hand upon me. He, however, wore me out at last, and I lay on the ground, completely exhausted, and well-nigh fainting. When I saw that he was overcome by his victory, and seemed frightened lest he had hurt me, I did not make my hurts smaller, but rather exaggerated them; and he came to me much more gently than he had approached me for many months. Seeing this, I collected my forces, and with the glass he had brought me with water in it I struck him a hard blow on the head, the

water pouring over him at the same time. This cowed him, and he left me. It was a good idea on my part; I found gentle treatment was evidently of no use. His losses on the Derby, which came off soon after our set-to, were very large; we occupied during the Epsom week a small cottage belonging to some of the Crorling family, who charged us a very extortionate price, I remember, and we went to the course every day. A beautiful Wednesday afternoon saw twenty-nine horses run and one win. That one was, of course, the worst horse in the race for my husband. He bore the sight of the bad number pretty well, and on the following Monday paid all his bets like a man,—with my money.

All through that year his luck was bad, an occasional gleam of fortune visiting him, but, altogether, he was very much on the wrong side. The Newmarket Autumn finished him—and if I had not been lucky in putting a "pony" on the Cambridgeshire winner when at a long price, I don't know what we should have done for ready-money. When our means became smaller, Mr. Epsillon was calmer; he had enfeebled himself by his excitement, his late hours, and his journeyings to and fro. It had been a perfectly new life to him, and had been too much for his nerves. He was no longer the fierce tyrant and denying husband he had formerly been: I increased my hold upon him, and as I gradually strengthened the rein, we grew better to understand each other. His vitality and exuberance of spirit became less, but, as he put himself more under my guidance, so he became more regular in his habits, and better to be depended upon. In less than a year from his memorable Derby *coup manqué* he was obliged to own that I was too much for him. Ever afterwards until the day of his death I governed him, and he submitted, I am bound in fairness to say, pretty well, on the whole. A certain amount of contention there was between us, of course, but, altogether, we got on as well as most of our neighbours.

But, like the first four of my husbands, he died before me, and thus it came to pass that I had to pay for the fifth time the undertaker's bill for a husband's funeral, and the stonemason's account for the grave in the cemetery.

* * * * * *

I believe that a good many women would not consider my lot a good one in life, and they would think that I must have suffered very much. That is true, perhaps; but, on the other hand, they must allow I have had some advantages. In any case, it is much better that I should have had five husbands, than that my first husband should have had five wives,—at least, *that* is *my* opinion. My experience is large: my advice may be of some use to my own sex, perhaps, for my estimate of the other ought to be valuable. I will not, however, preach, but if I have an opportunity, practice the doctrine I enunciate. Example is better than precept, and I shall marry again, if I have anything like a decent chance. For to sum up what I know and have felt to be the end and conclusion of my strivings and contrivings, I state—with as much of boldness or modesty as is necessary—that bad as men are, and worthless often, and a trouble invariably to us women, yet, take them for all in all—ANY HUSBAND IS BETTER THAN NO HUSBAND, AND OF THE WORST YOU CAN MAKE SOMETHING, IF YOU TRY THE RIGHT WAY.

Diamond cut Diamond.

THREE KNAVES IN A MODERN PACK AFTER THE PARDONER'S PATTERN, DESIGNED BY GEOFFREY CHAUCER.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Leger had just been run, and the greatest "moral" ever known upset; thousands of hearts which, five minutes before, had been throbbing wildly with hope and excitement, were now pulsating with a feeble, dull, sickly beat, as those who had thought to recoup themselves for the losses sustained at Epsom, Ascot, and Goodwood, realised the fact that their struggles had but sunk them deeper in the mire, and summoned all their fortitude to preserve an external appearance of cheerful indifference.

Three men who had worked their way through the crowd, and were already leaving the Doncaster Town Moor, however, did not seem to think it necessary any longer to put a painful constraint upon their features. Two of them hurried along arm-in-arm, with their hats pulled forward over their scowling foreheads; the third walked by their side, muttering curses as he tore up a whole handful of list-keepers' tickets.

An old gipsy woman accosted them—

"Tell your fortunes, my pretty gentlemen; come, give old Sally sixpence for luck, just a little sixpence; for a good fortune she'll tell you. If you are not lucky at the races you will be with ladies. Come, just a little bit of silver. You have got a wicked eye, sir."

"Get out, you cursed old hag!" cried the man who was nearest her; but she still persisted in her solicitation, till at last one of them pushed her roughly on one side. "Hold your witch's tongue, will you? I should like to have you flogged at the cart's tail through every street in Doncaster."

The woman staggered back, and nearly fell, but recovering her balance, she shook her fist at them, screaming with rage:

"Ah, ah! You strike the old gipsy; you curse the old gipsy! I cannot strike you back, for I am old and feeble, but I can curse you back—curse you, curse you, curse you, you welshers and horse-nobblers! Ah, I know ye, Baldock and Hammel, the biggest thieves on the turf, and your fool and dupe Banham, whom you've made as big a rascal as yourselves. I know him, too. Yah! Who nobbled Falladeen? He's under your thumb, is he, and you are partners now, seeking fortune together? Well, mark me; the day you find fortune you'll find hell."

And with this horrible curse she ceased, being separated from the victims of her tongue by the fast gathering crowd.

A week afterwards the three men were assembled in the parlour of a little village inn which nestled at the foot of the Cotswold Hills. A quiet neighbourhood, perhaps the most primitive in certain respects in England; the Maypole, for instance, still flourishes on every green, and bursts out into garlands and ribbons with each recurring spring, as though Calvinism had not fought and conquered at Worcester within view of the heights above.

This village, however, was too small for green or Maypole either; too small for church, chapel, or school. Indeed, it consisted merely of a dozen cottages on one side of the rough road which led up to the squire's house, a substantial, hospitable mansion once, but now ruinous and dismantled. It was the visitors who gathered to it, particularly in the hunting season, in its palmy days, who supported the inn, which was a comfortable place, absurdly disproportioned now to the requirements of the neighbourhood. But it was also a farm-house, and the tenant did not keep up his licence for the convenience of the shepherds, or to relieve the thirst of chance pedestrians who might stray that way in search of the picturesque, but because it suited his purposes to have a snug out-of-the-way retreat to which certain friends of his might repair when it was prudent for them to withdraw for a while from the notice of a prying world. For though so quiet a spot, it was very accessible: a walk of three miles brought you to the high road, along which a coach passed daily to and from Cheltenham, which was only some twenty miles distant.

The gipsy woman, however she came to know them, had named the men correctly. Baldock, a

short, wiry man about forty, with cunning eyes, low forehead, sensual mouth, was the landlord of the inn and tenant of the small farm attached to it. The inn had not many guests, and the farm grew more weeds than corn, fed more rabbits than sheep; but, on the other hand, he paid no rent. He was an instance of how the natural disposition of a man will force its way in spite of circumstances; for, born and bred in that quiet place, with an honest career before him, he had preferred to be a poacher, a horsewatcher, a frequenter of prize-fights, a betting-list keeper of the sort which starts in business without capital, a low scamp generally. Hammel was not more than five-and-twenty, but upon his bloated face and figure vice had set its seal as effectually as age. He, too, had had a fair chance, being the son of a respectable tradesman, who had given him a decent education, and was broken-hearted when he "fell in with bad company," as they called it. Save the mark! The bad company fell in with worse when he joined it. For the last three years he had been the congenial partner of Baldock.

The third man, Banham, was originally of much higher social position than either of his companions, for he was Baldock's landlord, and had once owned considerable estates in the neighbourhood. Indeed, it was his good old father who had exercised that hospitality at the mansion close at hand which had caused the inn to flourish. The degenerate son still lived at times in an habitable corner of the squire's house, and his dissolute companions called him the squire; but the ground on which the dismantled building stood, together with Baldock's farm, a sheep-run which stretched up a steep hill beyond, and an old tower at the top of it, was all that he could now call his own, and that remnant was on the point of passing away from him for ever. He, too, had shown the cloven foot early: at twelve he was expelled from a public school for brutal cruelty; at eighteen he broke open his father's bureau and stole two hundred pounds; at twenty he was turned out of the army by court-martial for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman; at twenty-two he was posted at Tattersall's, and cut by every man who had the slightest pretensions to be received in decent society; at twenty-five he committed an act which put him in the power of Baldock and Hammel, who could have brought penal servitude upon him if he had thrown them over. He was now twenty-seven.

It was eleven o'clock at night; Baldock and Hammel sat on either side of a table upon which were a couple of candles, two black bottles,—one empty, the other half full,—tumblers, and a soiled pack of cards. Banham was smoking moodily on one side of the fire, which was kept up not for warmth, the night being close and the atmosphere of the room suffocating, but to boil the water for grog. He, like the other two, had been drinking freely, and a steaming jorum stood on the mantelpiece at his hand, but he only showed the effects in his flushed face and bloodshot eyes. Neither the excitement nor the forgetfulness of intoxication came to him.

"Don't sit moping there, Banham," said Baldock thickly, "it's enough to give a fellow the blue devils to look at you. What's lost is lost; it's no good crying over spilt milk. I could win it all back and a lot on the top of it at Newmarket if we only had a trifle of capital."

"Aye, where will you get it?"

"I don't know yet. But hang care, it killed the cat. Come and cut in at loo."

"What's the use of three fellows playing together when not one of them has a shilling to lose?" cried Banham, with an impatient oath.

"That's true enough; it's poor fun playing on tick. But one must do something to kill time, and it's as well to be sociable."

"He is thinking of what the gipsy said," observed Hammel, with a chuckle.

"No, I was not," retorted Banham; "but perhaps I could put you in the way of bringing her words true."

"All right," replied Hammel; "only show me a chance of the fortune, I'll risk the rest."

"You would risk death in any form?"

"Pretty well; I am just about desperate."

"You would not mind infection—from fever say, or small-pox; you would not mind the gallows?"

Hammel swore horribly that the other had just hit on the two things which affected his nervous system the most unpleasantly.

"Then you are no good," replied Banham, turning his shoulder upon him and taking a pull at his tumbler.

Hammel got angry. "What the ——," he began, but Baldock interrupted him.

"Let the squire speak, will you? He has got something in his head, and we can't afford just now to throw a chance away. As for risk, when you calculate that the only consideration is how great the risk is, I had sooner chance death at a thousand to one against it, than a month's imprisonment at only two to one. What is it, squire?"

"How can I speak before Hammel, if he is not game?"

"Oh, I am game enough, if you have any real plant to propose; I thought you were only kidding."

"Well, look here," said Banham, in a low, earnest voice, which caused the others to draw their chairs up to him instinctively. "Just open the door, and see that Polly is not about."

"She has been in bed this hour," replied Bal-

dock ; but he looked nevertheless, and returned to his chair. Then Banham said this—

"*Old Claxton hoards.*"

It has been mentioned that amongst the remnants of property which still adhered to the soiled scutcheon of the Banhams was a tower high on a Cotswold hill. The craze which had now culminated in unbridled profligacy in the last scion of the family, had shown itself in various forms at different stages of its history, and had impelled a Banham of a former generation to imagine that he could not breathe except at a certain height ; and to accommodate his eccentric lungs, he built this octagonal tower, which was known as "Johnny's Retreat," and lived out his hermit-like life there.

Johnny's Retreat had four stories and four rooms, each room taking, as it were, a slice of the building. On opening a low, massive door, you found yourself in a wood and coal cellar, and at the foot of a narrow, stone, corkscrew staircase. Three turns up this, and you came to the door of the kitchen ; three turns again, and the sitting-room was reached ; three turns higher, and there was the bed-room ; and three final turns brought you out upon the lead roof.

The view from the tower was very extensive, and itself was a landmark for many miles round ; but rarely did anyone, save a shepherd, approach it. There was no attempt at garden or enclosure around it, and the sheep browsed up to the very walls.

After remaining uninhabited for many years, this solitary building found a congenial tenant in one Claxton, who was so eccentric that folks declared that he ought to be in a madhouse ; but where was the use of shutting up a man who confined himself, and who paid ten pounds every April and October for the use of his cell ? He had no servant, but procured his week's provisions every Saturday in a village some three miles distant. Four times a year the driver of the Cheltenham coach took him up at a certain point on the high road in the morning, and put him down at the same spot in the evening.

That was pretty nearly all the intercourse he had with his fellow men.

"Old Claxton hoards."

"Why," said Baldock, "I thought he paid everything, even very small sums, by cheque."

"That's a blind. Listen. I was over the hill this morning, after what few birds there are, and as I passed the tower it occurred to me that the old miser would owe me ten pounds for his half year's rent in a few weeks, and that if I let him deduct a few shillings for discount he might be willing to draw me a cheque for it at once. He has done that before, when I have been as hard up as at present. So I went up to the door, and kicked and hammered at it for a quarter of an hour, but could not make him hear. He has never been met out except at his regular times, so I thought it odd, and went home for a duplicate key of the tower which I had there. Then when I had rested a bit I went up the hill again, meeting no one, and unlocked the tower door. It was barricaded inside, but I managed to push it back, and force my way up the staircase, and as I got nearer the sitting-room I heard laughter. It was queer, and I hesitated a bit ; but at last I turned the door handle, and went in. Old Claxton had brought his bed down into that room, and he was sitting up in it in his night-shirt, with a leather bag on his knees full of sovereigns. He would take a handful of them, and then pour them back into the bag : it was late in the afternoon, the sun was setting, and the light fell full upon him, and when it made the gold sparkle he laughed out like a child. It lit up him too, and he looked awful, I can tell you. His eyes sparkled like a devil's, and his face and chest, the latter bare from his night-shirt being unfastened at the throat, were covered with red blotches ; the stench in the room was horrible ; I have the taste of it in my throat yet ; give me the whiskey. He was delirious, no doubt ; but still he had sense enough to clutch his leather bag tight, and try to conceal it directly he saw me, and he shrieked a thousand murders. He looked too infectious to be touched, but his iron safe stood open at his bed's head, and there were other leather bags in it, and I did try for a grab at one of them ; but the old brute sprang right out of bed and came at me, and—— Well, my nerves have been rather shaky lately, and I was startled by the suddenness of his action. Besides, I have always had a particular horror of small-pox, or typhus fever, and so I bolted."

"Did he follow you out of the room ?"

"No ; he fastened his door directly I was on the staircase."

"Did you leave the tower door open ?"

"Of course not ; I brought his key away as well as my own."

"I wonder," said Hammel, "whether anyone else knows that he's ill."

"Not a soul," replied Banham. "I walked straight from the tower to Yardel. He bought his week's provisions there, as usual, last Saturday ; and the same boy who always takes them up the hill for him did so then, and noticed nothing particular."

"What ! do you mean to say you made inquiries ?" said Baldock.

"Yes, but quite naturally, and with reference to my rent. I said nothing that could excite suspicion, whatever may happen : rather the contrary."

"He won't be missed till Saturday ; this is Wednesday night."

"It is a shame to leave a sick man alone there all that time," said Hammel. "He might die,

you know, and die without a heir. Now if he saw us he might make *us* his heirs. It would only be kind to pay him a visit at once. What do you say?"

The two others nodded, and rose. Baldock took a lantern and matches, and also put in the pocket of his pea-jacket an instrument of twisted whalebone, having a heavy lump of lead at one end, called a life-preserver. Then they blew out the lights, and left the house quietly. The fresh night air, striking on their frames heated with alcohol, made their heads reel and their footsteps stagger; but the purpose they had in view kept down the fumes of drink, and as they silently followed the path which led through the farm, and breasted the steep hill, they grew steadier and steadier.

By the end of the hour which it took them to reach the top they were almost sober.

They reached the tower, unlocked the gate, ascended the staircase. Baldock lit his lantern, and tried the sitting-room door; it was fastened on the inside. Hammel set his back against the stone wall, and his foot upon the lock, and prized with his whole force. The door flew back with a crash, and a column of fœtid air rushed out upon them.

Baldock advanced with his lantern. Old Claxton lay face downwards on the floor, his left hand grasping a leather bag by the neck, his right stretched towards an open iron safe. He was quite dead: the effort to defend his chest against Banham, and fasten the door upon him that afternoon, had exhausted his little remaining strength. He tried to reach his bed—fainted—fell—died.

"No need for violence, at all events," said Baldock, smashing open one of the windows. "We may die of the pest, but are safe from Jack."

What need to detail loathsome particulars? Suffice it that they got the body on the bed, and transferred all the treasure they could find to the room below. There were three bags of sovereigns, and a dozen larger ones of silver and copper, crowns, half-crowns, shillings, sixpences, fourpenny bits being all stored up separately.

Hammel proposed to divide the plunder, and leave at once; but Baldock suggested that there might be a great deal more hidden away in old corners, behind wainscotings, &c., as he had heard was the custom with misers, and proposed devoting the whole of the next day to a thorough search.

"I can't stop here without liquor," said Hammel.

"Then let us go odd man who shall walk back for whiskey and provisions; there will be time to return before daylight. Or stop; Hammel can't go, as he is staying at my place, and does not know where the things are; you and I toss, squire."

"I will go," said Banham. "I can get some bread and cheese, and a couple of bottles of brandy from my own house quietly."

When he was gone the other two began to count the money.

"Do you really think there is much more hidden anywhere?" asked Hammel.

"No," replied Baldock. "I wanted to get rid of the squire."

"Aye, I guessed it. He is of no more use—he is squeezed dry. For my part I should not mind getting rid of him altogether."

"You forget his third share of this."

"No, I don't; but he will stick to that, you may take your oath. He is thinking how he may best give us the slip at this moment, I'll lay any odds."

"Why should he have any part of the swag, mate?"

"What's to prevent him?"

"This."

And as he spoke, Baldock drew the life-preserver from his pocket. Hammel turned pale.

"I don't like it," he said. "If it was only for the money I wouldn't do it. But he is tired of being in our power, and I know he is thinking of getting the start and splitting first on us. So that to put him out of the way would be only self-defence. But there is the risk."

"Deuce a bit. There is a dry well, as deep as the PIT, not thirty yards from the tower; and who would take the trouble to wonder where a ruined beggar who is hiding from everybody had gone to? Why, he has not got a friend in the world."

Ignorant of the plot which was being laid against his life, Banham strode rapidly down the hill, with a thought which the devil had just put into his head seething and stinging. What a chance he had now of getting rid of his accomplices and tyrants, and of starting in the world afresh with a good sum in hand. There must be upwards of a thousand pounds, and should that be shared with those fellows when he might so easily secure the whole?

The events of the day had prevented the whiskey swallowed early in the night from producing the effect upon him which a similar quantity usually did, but it had braced his cowardly heart with a fictitious boldness, and so far affected his brain that he felt like one moving and acting in a nightmare, with a sense of uncertainty whether anything was real.

Years ago he had obtained a subtle poison for the purpose of escaping from a general burst of scorn which was well nigh intolerable even to him; but his nerve failed him, and the drug was in his possession still. By its aid he might be even with those two yet. Baldock was the cause of his ruin. When quite a child he had taken him to a dog-fight, and instilled those tastes into him which had caused his expulsion from school—it was Baldock, too, who had taught him to

love drink. The same man, in conjunction with Hammel, had made a cat's-paw of him, inciting him to an act from which they reaped the principal profit, and threatening him with exposure when he would have broken with them. He had a long score to clear with them.

He reached his house, entered it, struck a light, procured bread and cheese, and placed it in a fishing-creel; took a bottle of brandy, went up to his bedroom, and shut the door. Then he opened his desk (a boy's desk, a birthday present from his mother, had he remembered it), and took out something; then he drew the cork of the brandy bottle. He paused, his hand shook; fear, the only substitute for conscience he had left, warned him to stop there.

Why not fly from these men, rather? He had a relative living who would pay for his passage to Australia, and even make him a small quarterly allowance if he would remain there, not out of affection indeed, but to be rid of the disgrace of him. No; the wiser impulse was but momentary: he consulted the demon which lived inside the bottle, and when the lips of flesh parted from the lips of glass his destiny was fixed.

Dawn was breaking in the east, and the tower was turning from black to grey, as Banham once more reached it. The other two were where he had left them, and the regular piles of money on the floor showed that they had been occupying themselves in counting it. Baldock rose and took the creel containing the food and brandy from him; Hammel remained sitting on the ground.

"Look here, squire," said the latter, "what a queer coin this is. Is it what they call a guinea?"

Banham stooped to look at it, and was struck down by a terrible blow on the back of the neck. A million sparks flashed from his eyes; but he struggled to his knees and saw Baldock's face with an expression upon it which he had noticed more than once before at the ring side, and Baldock's hand, armed with the life-preserver, uplifted.

"Mercy! Help! Hammel, you will not see me murdered?" he gasped feebly.

No words. A stunning shock on the temple.

"Oh, my God! I did not think he would bleed like that!" cried Hammel, who was shaking from head to foot, and could not stand without supporting himself by the wall.

"Come, be a man," said Baldock. "I had no idea you were so chicken-hearted. You must rouse yourself and help me carry him to the well, at once; then we will pocket the swag and be off from this cursed place. Here, take a drink of brandy, that will set you all right."

He uncorked the bottle and handed it to Hammel, who took a long draught, and then he did the same.

"Now, then, rouse yourself; it will be daylight presently, and some shepherd may be about. There is no time to lose. Why, what's the matter now?"

"I don't know—a sudden pain. I never felt anything like it before."

"Oh!" cried Baldock, with a blasphemous oath. "I feel it, too. The cursed dog has poisoned the brandy."

A shepherd passing by the tower on the afternoon of the day following, saw something lying outside the open gate, and going up found that it was the body of a man whose cramped-up members and distorted features showed that he had died in great agony. He ran down to the village and gave the alarm; and when a further search was made, another body was discovered on the stone staircase, blocking up the passage. In the room called the kitchen lay a third man, who had evidently been murdered by blows on the head, in the midst of a heap of gold and silver coins; and in the apartment above lay old Claxton, the only one who seemed to have died a natural death. For some weeks the people for miles round supped full of horrors, and wonderful theories were started to account for the tragedy.

"Johnny's Retreat" is now called "The Tower of the Four Corpses," and the shepherds avoid it after nightfall. It is to be let at a very low rent, if anyone would like to take it.

Pardons were sold five hundred years ago—"I have reliks and pardoun in my male"—to those who chose to buy them, and the Œcumenical Council may issue a new tariff of charges on a more economical scale than the Church would ask, A.D. 1369. We do not find fault with the ancient pardons, or the pardoners—in fact, we believe it impossible that any people could be worse than modern pard'ners—say, the pard'ners in a bank. There is a good deal of difficulty about the thing, altogether. Thus, sin will always be committed—at least, something will be done that the world considers sin. Then there must be punishment for sin—at least, what the world thinks punishment. After punishment comes pardon; that is, you don't want to keep people for life, and modern society don't like hanging. If pardon is to come, therefore, the only question between Pio Nono and the Editor is, whether it should be sold or given. Pio says, pay—the Editor, says, No, no. But if the Editor was Pope? Then, the Editor says, he would refer the matter to the Modern Pilgrims, and be "rooled by the companie."

The Poor Parson's Tale.

WHEREBY IT MAY BE SEEN THAT THERE ARE STILL, AS IN CHAUCER'S TIME, SOME MEN OF THE CLOTH WHO KNOW THEIR DUTY AND DO IT.

FRIENDS, I cannot tell you a story to tickle dainty ears. My work lies in a large scattered parish, closely populated with the very poor, whom I am almost powerless to assist, and (knowing how empty and cruel are words of comfort without that help I cannot give to all the hungry) sometimes almost fear to preach to. It is terrible to preach of the Lamb to people with the Wolf at the door. In this parish are many rich men—many thriving and well-to-do shop-keepers and manufacturers—many benevolent men, who *wish* well to the poor and mistake that for beneficence—many beneficent men, who willingly give of their abundance, coals and flannel at Christmas to a fund and a committee, but never know the poor or visit them in their affliction—men who do good to the poor and mistake that for charity. Men who deceive themselves—nay, half fancy in very deed they deceive the Almighty—into the belief that charity means the contributing either with sparing or liberal hand of our own superfluities, and not a continued personal friendship and sympathy with at least some of His poor. Men who, believing the poor are His legacy, are yet satisfied to regard the punctual payment of poor rates and charitable subscriptions to the collectors when they call, as entitling them to a receipt in full for legacy duty which shall pass them scot free through His Court of Probate. Good men, who can love their enemies, but to whom the poor and the hungry and the outcast are the lower classes, never to be visited and known and loved and comforted like friends—men whose mammon of unrighteousness brings them many dependents—many to eat of the crumbs which fall from their table—but never a friend to receive them into everlasting habitations.

I have too much to do with poverty to be surprised at crime, or to care to gloss it over with fine words. I am too frequently with the dying, and my eyes rest too often on the dead, to let me trick out a story in fine dress. I will speak what I know, and testify that which I have seen.

Some years ago—in a time of great destitution, when hundreds of the labouring classes were reduced to the most abject distress through a sudden failure in a staple manufacture — the dwellings of the poor became frightfully crowded. As many as forty and fifty human beings huddled together in a single house—if house it could indeed be called—and ate, drank, slept, washed, and cooked—the sick and the well, young and old, married and single, all crowded together as thick as vermin. It was a bad sign often when a single family did have a single room. There is an instinct in birds and beasts which leads them to go away from their kind to suffer and to die. And too often the single room told of worse straits and deeper destitution than could have been borne in a crowd. There was the workhouse, of course; and many of the sufferers would have been received there—great as was the demand for accommodation and relief. But as a rule a working man *won't* go into the house—that last degradation he cannot bear, and that was the test. Foolish pride it may be—I hope it is, I have argued it so with scores—but they set themselves like flint against it. "Throw myself on the parish?" said a man to me in the three-story attic, "look here, sir—I'd rather throw myself out of winder on them there paving-stones! Go into the house? Never, sir—not while there's the option of a churchyard—so help me, God!" I *know* they mean it, and that these are no idle words; for I've seen them die rather than go there—I've seen them do worse than die, rather than go *there*. It is the professed object of guardians, master, and relieving officers to make the house unpopular, lest it be filled with vagabonds and idlers—yet, when its shelter is only offered to the working man in temporary need, on terms repulsive even to the vagabond, how can he avail himself of it and hold up his head again? He fears, quite as much as the guardians do, lest he should become hopelessly pauperised.

At the time of this distress, one afternoon, I was visiting a little parishioner of mine—a mere child of twelve years old—who, with her younger

sister, makes matchboxes at twopence-halfpenny per gross, and finds glue and thin paper for the insides too; and earns, Lizzie Dottrell and her sister together, nearly or quite as much as her feeble mother can make at sewing. Between them, the three pay the ninepence a week rent of their own little room, and just keep the Wolf from coming in—only just. Whilst there I heard a noise in the street, and going out to see the cause, some one said: "Oh, do go up into that house, sir; there's a man there beating his wife shameful!" I went where I was directed—up a broken flight of greasy stairs, winding round a filthy black passage, up another flight of broken stairs, and past many haggard faces of men and women. Outside a broken door I paused, uncertain if it were the right one. I heard a moan, that sounded like a woman's. Then a man spoke in a weak voice, but passionate, and broken into pauses by sickness or weakness. "I wish, my God, I had killed you, Jane!" "And I, Tom—and I would not have cried nor groaned if you had only kissed me first, and told me you meant it, and would forgive me." "I would—have done it," he gasped out, "but I—I haven't got—the strength."

I opened the door and walked in. "What do you want?" the man asked, in a husky whisper. He was lying on the bare floor, very faint, and had raised himself up on his elbow. He had a face like a skeleton, in which hunger and fever were contending for a prey—for the Wolf had come in, and was looking out of his eyes. There was not a scrap of furniture in the room—neither bed nor bedstead, chair nor table; only a broken teapot with a little water in it beside the man. In another part of the room, against the empty fire-grate, lay his wife, also on the floor, lying on her back, and pale from the loss of the blood that flowed from her head. Near her was a piece of iron rod that seemed once to have served for a poker—and now for a weapon. "I don't know," I said, for I was taken aback; "I wish only to render help, if I can." "Go to her," he said. I went and examined the blows on the poor woman's head. They were not serious, although bleeding profusely—scalp wounds and bruises only. I poured some of the water from the teapot on my handkerchief, bathed them and bandaged them with it. There was the Wolf in her eyes too—till the tears came. Then it left. "He didn't mean to do it, sir," the woman was crying, while I tied up the wounds. "He is the kindest of husbands; but we've been in trouble lately. There was no work. We've parted with the last of the things a fortnight ago. I couldn't bear to see him die for want before my eyes. And so I sent my daughter—No, sir—I can't tell you—but we were all two days without food. It wasn't for myself, sir—I would sooner have died. But I couldn't bear to see him suffer. And as for what he did to me, I deserve it all."

I had a little pocket communion-service with me. There was wine in it. I poured it out—no sacrilege—and gave to her. She would not touch it until her husband had first drank a great part of it. Then, seeing him a trifle revived by the wine, I sat by him on the floor, having given a trifle to his wife to buy bread, and directed her to send for a doctor. When she was gone, I said—

"My poor fellow, open your heart to me—tell me what bitter strait brought you to regret that you hadn't strength left to become a murderer. Was it only famine?"

"No."

He was very weak—past food or medical help—all that was too late for him now. This murderous attack on his wife had been the last mad effort of fever and delirium—the flickering up of the dying flame before it expires.

"What then? Tell me, that I may know how to help you."

I drew his terrible story from him in short questionings and answers as he could bear it. He withheld the portions relative to his own greater privations. These I afterwards gathered from his wife.

He had been out of work ten months, along with many hundred others, and there was no work in his trade obtainable anywhere. He gave up his little house first. That was a great pain. His wife was above his own station, and had taken such a pride in it and made even out of his poor things a house fit for a gentleman, he said. The little savings from his weekly wages soon went—and when he moved into two rooms the furniture began to go. They remained in two rooms till it was all gone for food but the mattress. Then they moved here, and nothing was left but a few garments to pawn. All this time he sought work, tried to get only an hour's employ as porter, messenger, anything as long as it was work; but, the lower down the scale, the fiercer men fight for their own—hunger makes them so keen. Hundreds were struggling for the like employ. The strong and the clamorous succeeded, while the heartbroken were trampled down in the crowd. Now and then he did get a penny or twopence in the day for holding a horse or minding a cab. And in taking this home to his wife and his daughter Nelly, he always made them believe he had spent part of what he earned on food for himself, and would seldom touch their bread. Then he felt the end was coming. He could no more go out. And there was no food, and no more clothes left to pawn to obtain any. His only shirt had long gone, and his wife and child were so destitute as only to have rags enough

between them to cover decently the one who went out to fetch anything.

All that morning he had been lying in a kind of stupor which he had thought was the end. But, awaking, he missed his daughter, and asked for her. His wife prevaricated, then burst out crying, then owned what she had done—how she had sent her out on the streets as a last resource to get money to buy bread to save her father's life, money not to be begged nor stolen.

"Oh! not that!" the man had groaned in bitter agony, "not that, mother! Better we all died than that. Oh, God, how could you, the mother that bare her, and not have killed her rather!" Then in a wild frenzy of horror and anger, thinking his strength had returned to him, he had leaped up and fallen on his wife with the piece of iron, thinking it better they all had died than that; but found himself too weak.

"No, sir," he said to me, "don't tell me about God, or His book; only fetch me my child, my little Nelly—it may not be too late—that I may see her before I die and know that it is not too late."

He was right. I left him, kneeling at his wife's side, although it was a last effort, got medical advice, and a trifle of food, and promising to return, set off on my errand. I got a woman from the house to accompany m to identify the girl, and found a policeman to direct us in our inquiries. We visited every house in the neighbourhood, and every den where there was a chance of a poor ragged girl being found; but without success. We then took each street and alley within a circuit of three miles, and wandered about till evening waned into night, till night waxed to midnight, and the pale moon glared out in a sickly halo through quickly drifting, gusty clouds, and stars gleamed far off in the depth behind the clouds. Farther yet we traversed, and the night grew on, till passing along a deserted street we came to a great and fine building dedicated to Foreign Missions, a glorious monument of the benevolent interest we take in the welfare of the heathen who dwell where Afric's sunny fountains run down her golden sands. There, crouched on the steps, numbed with the cold, and asleep from sheer exhaustion, was the poor English child we sought. Thank God, it was not too late. The Wolf in the girl's face, her wan and frightened looks, and the poor rags that clad her, were her surest protection from evil. We fed her first, there in the street, for I had bought a little bread before the shops closed, and put in my pocket with a small flask of brandy. She ate ravenously, tearing her food like prey, and eyeing it with the eagerness of a wild beast—yet not her, gentle little thing, it was the Wolf. And when she had taken as much as we deemed prudent to allow her, we brought her home in the middle of the night. If ever I saw devout thankfulness and supreme gratitude to the Father in Heaven depicted on any human being's face, I saw it in that poor man's as he lay dying with his head resting on Nelly's lap, the only pillow he had, or wished for.

"I thought," he said, "my last sin—beating her—but I didn't know what I did, and He knows what I've suffered—kiss me again, Jane—would never be forgiven me. Then, after you were gone, it came into my mind if I could only see my little Nelly safe, before I went, I should take it for a sign. God bless you, sir."

"The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy," I said.

"Will He see *they* don't die of want?" he asked, with a great and earnest effort.

"I am sure He will," I replied; "and I will be His servant to do His will." He closed his eyes, and murmured, as it were in a sleep—

"Very pitiful, and of tender mercy!" And when he opened them again in spirit, it was where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, and where God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

The night was past, and it was daybreak, and the sun shone in upon the room, as I left them alone with their dead.

I buried him. And they did not want. My wealthy parishioners are always ready to give money to a thrilling case of aggravated distress, but sadly lax to prevent the occurrence of such cases by lack of personal knowledge of the poor. Monetary help in plenty poured in from all sources in answer to newspaper appeals. "Relief" is the honester word; for it relieves the consciences of the givers by deluding them that thereby they escape their duty to their kind.

The mother never thoroughly recovered that time of suffering; but, in spite of care and sympathy, faded out of life within three months of her husband's death. Then arose the question, what to do with Nelly, a gentle, good-looking girl of sixteen. I tried successively to get her admitted to Orphan Schools, and various Industrial and Benevolent Homes, honestly stating her history as I have told it. But the doors of these excellent Institutions were all shut against her. In two cases only was the objection urged that she was past the age for admission. All the rest stated that after her exposure that night in the streets for the purpose admitted, she could not be received into the Home for fear of corrupting the inmates, and that the only proper Asylum for her was a Magdalen Institute or Penitentiary. As the poor child had done nothing to qualify her to associate with the dwellers in those Asylums, I did not choose she should enter one of them, well knowing how unsuited would be the teaching and discipline experienced there to any but minds

"qualified" to listen to dissertations on female temptation, illustrated by prominent examples.

So, with some trouble, I got Nelly received in a country village school, where she made herself useful, and received an education at the same time.

Many years ago, friends,—many years ago. And Nelly grew up to be a gentle, good, Christian woman; as much a lady in heart and gentleness as any in the land. And when the Poor Parson needed a help-meet for him in word and deed, to help him bind together in one common chord of sympathy the very rich and the very poor, between whom the great gulf fixed is grown so wide as only just to be spanned by kind words now; and when that thread once breaks, fire and sword will leap across it instead,—when, I say, the Poor Parson needed such a gentle help, he asked Nelly to be his wife. And all the parish knows that the Parson's wife is Nelly, that was the outcast, and are glad; for she is the tenderer to the strayed, and the fallen, and them that are out of the way for it. Aye, my darling! and all the world is welcome to know it too.

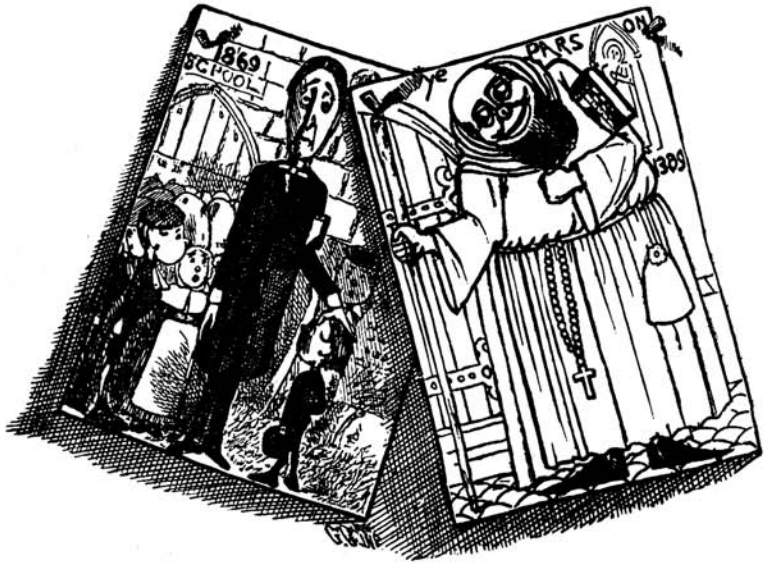
Friends, I have talked of the poor, and of their long-suffering and their patient poverty—"There is none other that fighteth for *them* but only Thou, O God—oh, God make speed to save them—oh, God, make haste to help them!" But think of the poverty of the rich, and of their privations.

Do you know that all the real pleasures which a healthy mind can enjoy come from sources free to all, without money and without price—a freehold for ever, to the poorest of us, which can neither be bought nor sold, nor taken away? Like the air we breathe, and like the wild flowers God sows for us, it is very easy to mistake for valueless things which are only priceless. And this it is that makes rich people so poor, and oftentimes so cross and ill-tempered—they expect too much from money—expect it to buy pleasure; which is just what money can't buy. It will buy excitements, and comforts, and position in society, and a whole host of things to while away the slipping hours before Judgment. Aye—and good, honest money, which represents a man's own labour and toil, with head or hands, for the benefit of his fellows, brings with it a zest and a piquancy which idle accumulators and inheritors of stored-up wealth would give a heavy price to experience. But no miser has wealth enough to buy such cheap things as love and charity, and good-nature, and real, earnest fellowship and friendship with his kind—he cannot purchase an enjoyment, thankful, even to tears, of this beautiful island in the sea, which God clothes with His fairest green trees and flowers, as keepsakes for us to love Him by, and be glad before Him—cannot buy, nor scarcely attain, real delight in God's sky and stars, nor comprehend the pictures he makes in the veil of clouds that sweeps the heavens. For wealth sears the mind and affections, and blunts the senses to the sweetest and most delicate chords of heaven's music which vibrate on earth for him that hath ears to hear. Doth not wealth eat as doth a canker? Does the gold never burn when it comes to a man hot with the tears of the poor and needy, from whom it has been wrested in some of those gigantic swindles our laws don't touch? Do no man's groans nor woman's tears go with the gold to gnaw his heart into a foreboding of the sure judgments of the Almighty? Who says gold is a treasure that doth not rust? Look you, friends, the difference between hoarding iron and hoarding gold is only this—they *both* rust; the rust of the iron abides in the iron, but the rust of the gold—even honest gold—enters the soul of the man, and cakes over *that*. It isn't the gold gets the injury—if it were it wouldn't matter about being a rich man. James would never have cried, "Go to, now, ye rich men, weep and howl for the miseries which shall come upon you;" nor would He, who came as a poor man, have said, "A rich man shall hardly enter the Kingdom." Riches blind the eyes, even to the beauties of God's flowers—think of that!—blind them to things which any poor man can see and appreciate, and love, while the rich don't even know what they are. Go into their hot-houses, and see how the rich torture flowers (even the lily, which the Master said when He left it, was more beautifully arrayed than Solomon in all his glory), and try and make them as much as possible like unnatural cups of wax, which they can buy for money. Look at their gardens—all laid out in patterns like a hearth-rug, or like a piece for waistcoats or trowserings—like anything which money can buy—where each poor flower, instead of being a work and a wonder, as He left it, is only used like a speck of coloured paint, to paint the wretched fellow's lawn. That is all a flower is good for to him—to use instead of paint. No wonder the poor suffer, when flowers do. But, go into the woods and into the fields, and see how God uses flowers, and be glad. We must not blame the rich for this—we must pity them, remembering they have the rust in their souls; and we must send poor men to them, as they send missionaries to the heathen, to teach them better. It may be we shall succeed—but the Lord knows—(for He said so)—"it is very hard."

It is a hard life to be rich. Idleness is always hard, however fashionable. And then the anxiety and care about such a quantity of money—no poor man who digs all day gets so tired and weary—and *he* always sleeps. "Appearances," too, and keeping them up when dividends fall short, and the constant fear of what "the world" will say—

(not the world that travels its grand orbit round the sun, with eight hundred million precious souls upon it, but the opinion of a few dozen brainless idlers—drones on its surface)—and the awkward feeling that will sometimes flit across a rich man's mind, that it is something of an anomaly, and somehow incompatible with a general duty to one's fellow-creatures, that a few men should have so much useless wealth, and so many hundred acres of idle land, whilst so many of their poor brethren have not where to lay their head—worse still, the stain that much of the money reaped in an age when men make haste to be rich leaves on the heart—what are these but tails of the lashes wherewith Mammon scourges, like Zobeide, the dogs he has fed? Great wealth is always idle wealth, inasmuch as it is possible personally to enjoy only so much money as will feed and clothe the body; the rest is only enjoyable by distribution. But are there no luxuries open to the rich? No. Not one. Rich people don't even know what luxuries mean. Poorer are they than the pauper in the workhouse, to whom an ounce of tea once a week and a pipe are luxuries. There can be no luxuries to those accustomed to have every want forestalled; but there is *a* luxury, only one, open even to them, whereby they may become great and grand men, and perchance find the Kingdom, after all—the luxury of sacrifice, even as He, "Who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor."

I'm weary of preaching to men. I would rather preach to stones. Stones know and feel—yea, almost cry aloud. Do you never think, watching the church steeples pointing their slender fingers towards the sky, how from every city, town, and village stones are looking up unto heaven; whilst men, more stony, have set their flinty hearts on the world and selfish ends, forgetting their fellow-men as well as their God? Of the thousands crushing and crowding about their business round the great sombre pile of St. Paul's, does *one* ever heed that stone figure of Paul above the Western pediment, preaching to the multitudes as he preached to the men of Athens from Mars Hill? If that stone figure could speak! If it could tell of all the moiling, unheeding crowds it has looked down on for so many years, of the jostling and the trampling under foot in the great selfish race for wealth!—if it could tell of the sighs of the broken-hearted and the despairing that have come up and turned the din and hubbub of the strife into a great cry of distress! There is a sermon from the stone lips still, about the altar we have built, to no *Un*-known God, ignorantly worshipped, but to "a god of gold and silver, graven by art and man's device"—about our bowing and grovelling before it till we indeed forget God hath made us all of one blood, to dwell together in Him, who is not far from every one of us. For we are all His offspring, and all men are brethren. Hear then, ye rich, the words of the stones, and have pity upon the poor. Stones have pity when men have none, for the very rocks rent when He died.



NORTHERN LATITUDES.

The Clerk of Oxenforde's Tale;

OR, JUST AS IT WAS, IT IS, AND ALWAYS WILL BE.

IN these nineteenth century days, when marriage from a man's point of view has ceased to be considered "the thing," and when the French phrase, *il vaut mieux se marier que de brûler*, is accepted literally as setting forth the holy ceremony in its most favourable light, anything that shall tend to bring wedlock into better repute amongst male humanity should be welcomed with effusion. And this is only to be done by showing the woman and the wife in a more gracious aspect than it is the custom now to exhibit her. Woman (like her original tempter) is not so black as she is painted, nor is every wife the obnoxious combination of selfishness, frivolity, and insipidity so frequently and lovingly portrayed by serial cynics.

The story I am about to tell is the story of a good woman and a true wife—a woman whose troubles (if only, perhaps, those of every-day life) were sustained with patience and resignation, and one who, without rebellion in the time of trial, was without resentment in the hour of triumph.

When Lord Arthur Harrowby succeeded to his father's title and estates he was the richest man in the county, and the excitement amongst the eligible young ladies and their ambitious mammas was proportionately great. That he would marry, and marry at an early date, was held a matter of course, and to this end the ladies, young and old aforementioned, were prepared to lend their readiest and most disinterested assistance. The entire neighbourhood of female youth and beauty (to say nothing of the females without these attributes) enrolled itself unhesitatingly in the good cause; and if ever an event might have been regarded as a "moral" (to use a sporting expression), it was the marriage of Lord Arthur Harrowby. To all appearances he was of gone coons the very gonest, and the hair-suspended sword, which quivered over the head of this devoted Damocles, was expected to fall at each succeeding moment.

Strange to say, the person least affected by the ominous aspect of affairs was he who was principally concerned. Lord Arthur lived and moved, and had his dinners as though women were not, and, courteous to all, he was significantly so to none. How he managed to steer safely between the Scylla of unneighbourly neglect and the Charybdis of "marked attentions," was a matter of marvel to the county generally; but when a year had gone by, and he was still "unattached," it was unanimously agreed that by some one or other his duty must be delicately but decidedly pointed out to him. With this laudable intention, the Honourable Mrs. Margrave (mother of five—all girls) and her husband, the Honourable Francis Margrave (father of five—all girls), resolved to say a word to "dear Arthur" on the subject; and Lady Bellemère, Adolphus De Quiverful, Esq., *cum multis aliis*, determined to go and do likewise. Meanwhile, however, an event had transpired in the existence of Lord Harrowby, which it would be well at once to take note of.

It was a mild September morning, inexpressibly fresh and exhilarating, after the dull, echoless days which had followed each other with brooding monotony for a fortnight previously. In the night a small pepper-castor of a cloud had blown up from the sea (Harrowby Hall stood in a coast county), and sprinkled the thirsty fields with genial raindrops; whilst towards daybreak this had been succeeded by the regular sieve of the storm, which had poured down upon the parched earth and left behind it an almost spring-like atmosphere and brightness of verdure. As early as six o'clock Lord Harrowby had shouldered his gun, and unattended, save by a couple of dogs, had sallied forth in search of sport.

At seven o'clock he found himself on the outskirts of what was known as the home-thicket; and beyond this, after crossing a small strip of meadowland, stood the neat old-fashioned farmhouse of his tenant, Gregory Wilton.

Previous to his father's death, Lord Harrowby had spent many years in travel, and was, therefore, as yet, almost a stranger to the bulk of his tenantry. Amongst the few, however, to whom he was known was Farmer Wilton, who had hastened to pay his respects to his new master so soon as he had arrived at the hall, and it was the remembrance of this which now determined Lord Harrowby to pay him a visit. As a secondary inducement, moreover, there was that

craving for beer which outdoor exercise invariably creates in a healthy man, and which rendered the prospect of the farmer's home-brewed a very Canaan of comfort.

Whistling Offenbach's "Dites-lui" as he went, our thirsty hero set off across the meadow in the direction of the farm-house, but ere he had got half-way to his destination he was arrested by the sight of a young girl—a young girl of such surpassing beauty of form and feature, that for a time even the mighty lust of malt liquor was forgotten in the æsthetic enjoyment of female loveliness.

She was sitting—milking! not, perhaps, the most dignified or advantageous position in which to introduce a heroine, yet the fairest syren at her harp never presented a more seductive picture than did Margaret Wilton on her milking-stool.

Following his first impulse, Lord Arthur took off his deer-stalker and bowed respectfully, and Margaret Wilton rose to her feet and curtseyed blushingly. Whereupon ensued mutual embarrassment, and, after a fearful lapse of time, the following brilliant conversation:

Lord Arthur (*with an effort*). "You—you were milking, I think. I do hope I haven't interrupted you?"

Margaret (*uttering a deliberate falsehood*). "Oh, no! not at all, sir!"

Lord Arthur (*anxiously*). "You are *quite* sure I haven't interrupted you?"

Margaret (*earnestly*). "Yes; *quite* sure, sir!"

Lord Arthur (*relieved of a heavy load*). "I am very glad indeed! I should be *so* sorry to have done so!"

Margaret (*repeating herself*). "Oh, not at all, sir!"

Lord Arthur (*repeating himself*). "I am very glad indeed! (*Pause.*) You are up very early this morning?"

Margaret. "Oh, no! not at—(checking herself)—I am generally up at this time."

Lord Arthur. "I am very gla—(checking *himself*)—are you really, now?"

Margaret. "Yes, sir. (*Pause.*) Do you wish to see my father, sir?"

Lord Arthur. "Your father? Well, really I scarcely know. You see, it depends a good deal on who your father is."

Margaret (*smiling*). "Gregory Wilton is my father, sir."

Lord Arthur. "By Jupiter!—I mean by-and-by. Yes; I should like to see him by-and-by."

Margaret (*preparing to go*). "You'll find him in the house, sir."

Lord Arthur. "Thanks—very many! (*Pause.*) You're not going, are you?"

Margaret. "Yes, sir. I must go now."

Lord Arthur. "Ah, well! then I think I'll go too." [*Exeunt both.*

Lord Harrowby saw Gregory Wilton, drank his beer, conversed affably and absently on the weather and the crops, subsoil and drainage, mangold-wurtzel and top-dressing, and sundry kindred subjects, and then went home to breakfast. At this meal, much piquant sauce was sacrificed on the altar of lost appetite, and an omelette, deserving of the most delicate digestion, ended its days by going to the dogs.

A fortnight after this there was a dinner-party at the Hall, at which were present, amongst others, the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Margrave, Lady Bellemère, and Adolphus De Quiverful.

"My *dear* Arthur," said Mrs. Margrave to her host after the first round of champagne, and speaking with a feminine volubility that defied all rules of punctuation, "you are looking at my little Fanny and thinking poor girl bless her how pale she has grown lately don't deny it I see you are, and so she is! Ever since the 10th of August—I know it was the 10th—because that was the day you paid us your first visit don't you remember and beat Fanny so shamefully at chess after supper—she's not been herself, and, as a rule, so healthy and high-spirited—dear me, what ails the child I can't imagine! can you?"

And then the Honourable Francis broke in with subdued joviality from the opposite side.

"Arthur, my boy, when are you going to show us a mistress at the head of your table? Come, come! A fine handsome young fellow like you, with all the girls pining for him oughtn't to live *en garçon*—'Jove, no, sir! hang me if he ought! Ask the ladies, sir, ask the ladies! What do *you* say, Fanny? Come, now! let's hear what my little Fanny says!"

After this, and when the ladies had withdrawn, came Adolphus De Quiverful, Esq., and spoke long and feelingly on the blessings of married life.

"When I look at my dear girls, sir, and think what their mother has been to me, and see how they take *after* that mother, sir, I lay my hand upon my heart!" (he here laid it on) "and say, 'Happy is the man who shall chose him a wife from amongst them;' and, mark my words, sir! happy that man *will* be!"

And later still when they were once again in the presence of the ladies, the noble young bachelor was cleverly entrapped into a long *tête-à-tête* by Lady Bellemère—subject, matrimony, with passing allusions and occasional references to her daughter Arabella.

And thus it came to pass that when Lord Harrowby got to bed and to sleep, his thoughts were full of matrimony and—Margaret Wilton! Alas, ladies and gentlemen, how little did ye think what deadly fruit your neighbourly suggestions would bring forth! The best you can hope now is that my lord won't remember his dreams when he awakes.

Half the county was asked, and more than half the county came. Excitement was at its highest, and toilettes at their brightest and best. Fluttering flounces, fluttering feathers, and fluttering hearts. Ordinary picnics (sans salt, sans knives, sans forks, sans everything) people had attended in plenty, but never aught like this. For at length (*mirabile dictu!*) Lord Harrowby, of Harrowby Hall, was understood to have given in to the urgent entreaties and advice of his true friends and well-wishers, and to have deliberately announced his intention of selecting a partner for his wealth and title. Actually, of course, he had appointed no particular period for such selection of a spouse, but it was tacitly understood and widely whispered that this special picnic would decide the fate of the many maiden candidates who had entered themselves for the great prize. What wonder then that all was anxiety and eagerness throughout the fashionably-attired crowd assembled at Harrowby Hall on this bright October morning, or that all the arts of feminine strategy should be envoked to obtain a post of 'vantage when the brilliant cavalcade rode forth towards the solemn autumnal woods.

Those who watched closely the hero of the day (and they were many), observed that the universal courtesy which had characterized his conduct from the beginning of his reign at Harrowby was as universal as ever, and that no "bright particular star" of all the beautiful constellation around him could lay claim to any decided mark of preference. We, dear reader, who know women (or who fancy we do!), can imagine the amount of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness that raged in virgin bosoms, and fell from virgin lips as the golden hours went by and events still remained shrouded in uncertainty.

But this was not destined to last long. It was just about four o'clock in the afternoon; every one had picniced and "roughed" it to the heart's content of the wildest Bohemian of the lot, and there was now a general move in the direction of the hall.

Through quiet little country cross-roads; over village greens, where the villagers stood by with widely opened eyes and mouths to see the "quality" pass; under the half-stripped branches of the October woods, all a-litter with rustling leaves and hollow chestnut husks; by field and fence rode Lord Harrowby and his guests, until at length, at a sign from their leader, they pulled up before the picturesque farm-house porch of Gregory Wilton.

Begging to be excused for a few short minutes, Lord Arthur entered the house of his tenant, and immediately the tongues which politeness and his presence had hitherto restrained, became loosened. What in the world did he want at this time with Farmer Wilton? Why had he stopped, and how long did he intend keeping them waiting? Could anybody see what was going on inside the house? They got down to peep. How *very* singular—*most* singular *I* call it! and —hush! my dear, here he comes.

Scarcely ten minutes had elapsed and Lord Harrowby appeared at the porch again. With him was the Farmer, looking very red and confused, but withal bearing so unmistakeable an expression of overflowing gratification on his honest face, that every eye was attracted by it. Lord Harrowby, also somewhat flushed, took off his hat, and, amidst the sudden silence which had come over the entire company, spoke briefly as follows:—

"Ladies and Gentlemen,—When I first came amongst you to take up the inheritance bequeathed me by my late beloved father, I determined that for three years at least I would give up myself and my time wholly to the study of my estate and the duties it involved, and that until the completion of such period all ideas of matrimony should be, if possible, eschewed. But this has not been possible. (Pardonable excitement amongst the ladies.) In the first place, the idea has been powerfully and repeatedly urged upon me by those who were foremost amongst my father's friends, and whom I am now happy to number amongst my own. (Demonstrative signs of assent from the Margraves, De Quiverful, &c.) In the second place, the idea has been no less powerfully urged upon me by the voice of my own heart, and the consequence is, as you already know, that I have withdrawn from my original resolution, yielding much, perhaps, to my friends, but yielding still more to myself.

"It only remains for me, ladies and gentlemen, to introduce to you my chosen wife, and this I now do with the full assurance that you will receive her with all the consideration and affection that you bestowed so freely on myself when I came, a few months since, a stranger amongst you."

Every face was full of eagerness and excitement as the speaker stepped quietly back into the farm-house, and every face was full of blank horror and amazement as he reappeared, leading by the hand the blushing daughter of his tenant, Margaret Wilton. For a second or two there was an awkward silence, then the more diplomatic of the company recovered themselves, and, calculating present and future probabilities with a rapid and farseeing brain, pressed forward to offer their congratulations. Others there were, certainly, whose disappointment and disgust altogether overcame their judgment; and who stared speechlessly at the unconscious couple with some such stony eyes as the dying sailors turned upon the Ancient Mariner. One by one they dropped off and departed to their various homes, and, as

the afternoon deepened into twilight, Lord Harrowby and his betrothed were left alone.

The lapse of a year. The owner of half the county and the daughter of the simple yeoman married and settled, and, what is more, perfectly happy and contented. At first, it is true, the neighbouring gentry had fought somewhat shy of the novice in their aristocratic ring, and had spoken evilly and disparagingly concerning her. But the Lord of Harrowby was too great a man to be long ignored, and his wife Margaret, having plenty of natural wit and good-breeding, improved her opportunities so cleverly and assiduously that it had now come to pass that she was regarded rather as an acquisition than otherwise.

And so things went smoothly on, and by-and-by, time brought with it a little dark-eyed daughter to gladden the hearts of the happy parents, and to bind them yet closer to each other. Margaret's love for her first-born was a religion — an all-absorbing adoration which deepened and strengthened day by day with the budding growth of the babe. For a time her husband joined her in this beautiful and innocent worship, but after awhile (prompted by what evil suggestions I know not) a feeling of jealousy and exaction sprang up in his bosom. He became moody and dissatisfied. He complained to himself that his wife's love was now lavished solely on her child and that he, her husband, whose claim should ever be supreme, was neglected, or at least deemed of secondary consideration.

"'Jove, sir, you're right!" said the honourable and jovial Francis Margrave to him one day in answer to an explicit after-dinner confidence. "Your wife's a charming woman—most charming woman—but hang me, sir, if she don't give herself up, as you say, a deuced sight too much to that child of hers. Now, Penelope (Penelope was Mrs. M.) was speaking to me about it only the other day, and let me tell you, sir, Penelope's a sensible woman—deuced sensible woman!—and what Penelope said was this. 'If I were Arthur,' said Penelope, 'I should just send the child away for a time to some respectable woman or other, and both he and his wife would be the better for it.'"

Lord Arthur pondered deeply over this advice, which so coincided with his own feelings that he speedily determined to act upon it. "I shall see now," mused he gloomily to himself, "whether Margaret really cares for me as she should. Why she hasn't had a single thing to try her affection yet, and, in absence of temptation, any woman from Eve downwards, manages to keep straight!"

And so, with this wretched sophistry in his heart he went to his wife and told her that she must part with her child. For one single moment all the mother's nature rose up in rebellion against this cruel and unnecessary sacrifice, but the next instant the deep-sunk love and reverence of the wife came to the rescue, and she yielded to her husband's whim without a murmur.

This, Lord Harrowby decided was as it should be; and somewhat of his early confidence came back to soothe him. But the man's tendencies were essentially uneasy and suspicious ones, and there were still times when all the old unreasoning jealousy returned with a three-fold force, and then it was that the loving patience of his wife was tested day after day to its uttermost. Her very perfection irritated him. As the old Chaucerian couplet runs:—

> "The husband lives dissatisfied in thought,
> Because the wife lives guiltless of a fault."

Obedient to his slightest wish, and lavishing on him the unfaltering affection of her warm, loving nature, Margaret passed every ordeal triumphantly, and not the least of her trials was the introduction of Lord Harrowby's elder sister, Lady Maria Sark, as a rival power in Harrowby Hall.

Lady Maria was a shrill-voiced, neutral-tinted woman, with an aggressive Roman nose, and possessing as little natural geniality as there is succulency in a cinder. She was (to quote Shakspeare) "like the toad, ugly and venomous," and appeared to derive a peculiar and malicious satisfaction in strewing the path of her sister-in-law with all those little social snares and pitfalls which the sex is so adept at preparing for one another. Scarce an hour passed but she found some means of annoying Margaret's gentle and sensitive mind, and of making the daily burden of her life yet more distressingly apparent. Added to which, she invariably ascribed the very worst motives to the most harmless actions; and was unceasing in her efforts to represent his wife to her brother in some false and unfavourable light.

All this Margaret endured with a patience but little short of sublime; and at last even the leathery heart of Lady Maria was visited by occasional pangs of compunction for her share in her sister's sorrows. And thus the days went by, until once more the wife became a mother, and in the caresses of a baby-boy, revived the old joys that had attended the nurture of his exiled sister.

But these joys were short-lived. As his self-torturing doubts had made him jealous and exacting when his first-born came, so the perverted husband was jealous and exacting now. But for the sadness of its results, there would have been something almost ludicrous in the utter unreason of the man: the cruel weakness which caused him once again to separate his infant child from the yearning embraces of its mother, and resign it to the purchased tenderness of strangers.

As for the mother herself, who shall picture her

grief and anguish at this second parting, or the depth of wifely devotion which could bring her to yield to her husband's insensate orders?

By this time, one would have imagined that Lord Harrowby had experienced quite sufficient of his wife's patient and self-sacrificing affection to convince him of the unquenchable love she bore him; but alas, no! A further and severer trial was yet in store for her.

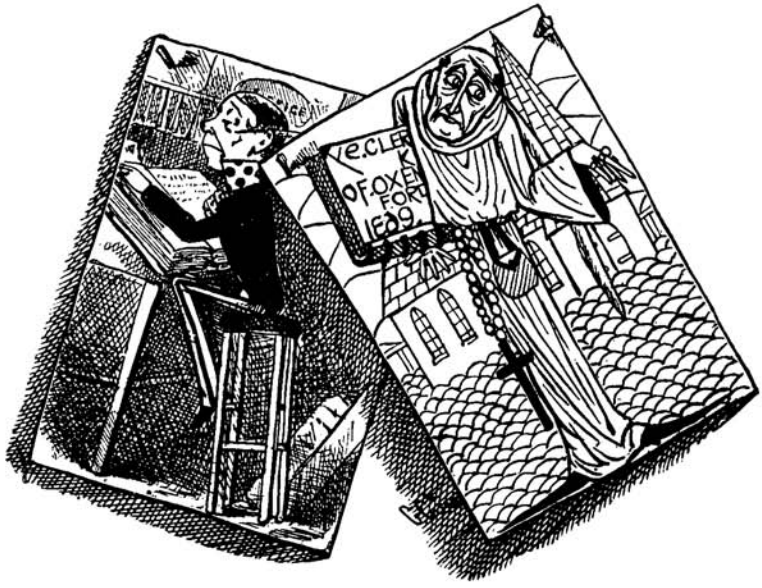
Stung into new suspicions by the busy tongues of scandal-mongers and false friends, he argued that her unreproachful acquiescence with his decrees for the banishment of her children, simply indicated indifference to the children themselves; and that fully to test her virtues as a wife, he, the husband, must himself abandon her.

Jealousy and distorted reasoning had made this man mad; and one miserable morning, Margaret awoke to find herself deserted: bereft of husband, children, all she held nearest and dearest, with scarce a word of explanation.

Well-nigh broken-hearted, but even yet filled with patience and divine forgiveness for him who had so cruelly tried her, she left the great Hall, and everything that was now distasteful to her, and returned to her father's house. Here, for six weary months, she mourned in solitude, until at length it pleased Heaven to requite her noble nature with brighter days.

The absence from his wife, and the reports he secretly received concerning her, served to convince Lord Harrowby of the terrible errors into which he had fallen. With all the old love, and ten times the old trust in his heart, he returned to throw himself a penitent at her feet. Nor did he supplicate in vain.

Once more did Margaret reign the honoured and beloved mistress of Harrowby Hall; and now, with her children and husband restored to her arms, she reaps the reward which even here on earth God sends to those who "suffer and are strong."



THE END

OF

THIS WAY OUT; OR, MODERN PILGRIMS.