Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
THE

NETHER WORLD

A NOVEL

BY

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AUTHOR OF "DEMONS," ETC.

"La peinture d'un fumier peut être justifiée pourvu qu'il y pousse une belle fleur: sans cela, le fumier n'est que repoussant."

M. Renan, at the Académie Française, Feb. 21, 1889.

IN THREE VOLS.

VOL. II.

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1889
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The bells of St. James's, Clerkenwell, ring melodies in intervals of the pealing for service-time. One morning of spring their music, like the rain that fell intermittently, was flung westwards by the boisterous wind, away over Clerkenwell Close, until the notes failed one by one, or were clashed out of existence by the clamour of a less civilised steeple. Had the wind been under mortal control, it would doubtless have blown thus violently and in this quarter in order that the inhabitants of the House of Detention might derive no solace from the melody. Yet I know not; just now the bells were
playing "There is a happy land, far, far away," and that hymn makes too great a demand upon the imagination to soothe amid instant miseries.

In Mrs. Peckover's kitchen the music was audible in bursts. Clem and her mother, however, it neither summoned to prepare for church, nor lulled into a mood of restful reverie. The two were sitting very close together before the fire, and holding intimate converse; their voices kept a low murmur, as if, though the door was shut, they felt it necessary to use every precaution against being overheard. Three years have come and gone since we saw these persons. On the elder, time has made little impression; but Clem has developed noticeably. The girl is now in the very prime of her ferocious beauty. She has grown taller and somewhat stouter; her shoulders spread like those of a caryatid; the arm with which she props her head is as strong as a carter's and magnificently moulded. The head itself looks immense with its pile of glossy hair.
Reddened by the rays of the fire, her features had a splendid savagery which seemed strangely at discord with the paltry surroundings amid which she sat; her eyes just now were gleaming with a crafty and cruel speculation which would have become those of a barbarian in ambush. I wonder how it came about that her strain, after passing through the basest conditions of modern life, had thus reverted to a type of ancestral exuberance.

"If only he doesn't hear about the old man or the girl from somebody!" said Mrs. Peckover. "I've been afraid of it ever since he come into the 'ouse. There's so many people might tell him. You'll have to come round him sharp, Clem."

The mother was dressed as her kind are wont to be on Sunday morning,—that is to say, not dressed at all, but hung about with coarse garments, her hair in unbeautiful disarray. Clem, on the other hand, seemed to have devoted much attention to her morning toilet; she wore a dark dress trimmed with
velveteen, and a metal ornament of primitive taste gleamed amid her hair.

"There ain't no mistake?" she asked, after a pause. "You're jolly sure of that?"

"Mistake? What a blessed fool you must be! Didn't they advertise in the papers for him? Didn't the lawyers themselves say as it was somethink to his advantage? Don't you say yourself as Jane says her grandfather's often spoke about him and wished he could find him? How can it be a mistake? If it was only Bill's letter we had to go on, you might talk; but—there, don't be a idiot!"

"If it turned out as he hadn't nothing," remarked Clem resolutely, "I'd leave him, if I was married fifty times."

Her mother uttered a contemptuous sound. At the same time she moved her head as if listening; some one was, in fact, descending the stairs.

"Here he comes," she whispered. "Get the eggs ready, an' I'll make the corffee."

A tap at the door, then entered a tallish
man of perhaps forty, though he might be a year or two younger. His face was clean-shaven, harsh-featured, unwholesome of complexion; its chief peculiarity was the protuberance of the bone in front of each temple, which gave him a curiously animal aspect. His lower lip hung and jutted forward; when he smiled, as now in advancing to the fire, it slightly overlapped the one above. His hair was very sparse; he looked, indeed, like one who has received the tonsure. The movement of his limbs betokened excessive indolence; he dragged his feet rather than walked. His attire was equally suggestive; not only had it fallen into the last degree of shabbiness, (having originally been such as is worn by a man above the mechanic ranks), but it was patched with dirt of many kinds, and held together by a most inadequate supply of buttons. At present he wore no collar, and his waistcoat, half-open, exposed a red shirt.

"Why, you’re all a-blowin’ and a-growin’ this morning, Miss Peckover," was his first observation, as he dropped heavily into a
wooden arm-chair. "I shall begin to think that colour of yours ain't natural. Dare you let me rub it with a handkerchief?"

"Course I dare," replied Clem, tossing her head. "Don't be so forward, Mr. Snowdon."

"Forward? Not I. I'm behind time if anything. I hope I haven't kept you from church."

He chuckled at his double joke. Mother and daughter laughed appreciatively.

"Will you take your eggs boiled or fried?" inquired Mrs. Peckover.

"Going to give me eggs, are you? Well, I've no objection, I assure you. And I think I'll have them fried, Mrs. Peckover. But, I say, you mustn't be running up too big a bill. The Lord only knows when I shall get anything to do, and it ain't very likely to be a thousand a year when it does come."

"Oh, that's all right," replied the landlady, as if sordid calculation were a thing impossible to her. "I can't say as you behaved quite straightforward years ago, Mr. Snowdon, but I ain't one to make a row about bygones,
A WELCOME GUEST. 7

an’ as you say you’ll put it all straight as soon as you can, well, I won’t refuse to trust you once more.”

Mr. Snowdon lay back in the chair, his hands in his waistcoat pockets, his legs outstretched upon the fender. He was smiling placidly, now at the preparing breakfast, now at Clem. The latter he plainly regarded with much admiration, and cared not to conceal it. When, in a few minutes, it was announced to him that the meal was ready, he dragged his chair up to the table and reseated himself with a sigh of satisfaction. A dish of excellent ham, and eggs as nearly fresh as can be obtained in Clerkenwell, invited him with appetising odour; a large cup of what is known to the generality of English people as coffee steamed at his right hand; slices of new bread lay ready cut upon a plate; a slab of the most expensive substitute for butter caught his eye with yellow promise; vinegar and mustard appealed to the refinements of his taste.

“\textquoterightve got a couple more eggs, if you’d like
them doin',” said Mrs. Peckover, when she had watched the beginning of his attack upon the viands.

“I think I shall manage pretty well with this supply,” returned Mr. Snowdon.

As he ate he kept silence, partly because it was his habit, partly in consequence of the activity of his mind. He was, in fact, musing upon a question which he found it very difficult to answer in any satisfactory way. “What’s the meaning of all this?” he asked himself, and not for the first time. “What makes them treat me in this fashion? A week ago I came here to look up Mrs. Peckover, just because I’d run down to my last penny, and I didn’t know where to find a night’s lodging. I’d got an idea, too, that I should like to find out what had become of my child, whom I left here nine or ten years ago; possibly she was still alive, and might welcome the duty of supporting her parent. The chance was, to be sure, that the girl had long since been in her grave, and that Mrs. Peckover no longer lived in the old quarters; if I discovered the woman,
on the other hand, she was not very likely to give me an affectionate reception, seeing that I found it inconvenient to keep sending her money for Jane's keep in the old days. The queer thing is, that everything turned out exactly the opposite of what I had expected. Mrs. Peckover had rather a sour face at first, but after a little talk she began to seem quite glad to see me. She put me into a room, undertook to board me for a while,—till I find work, and I wonder when that'll be?—and blest if this strapping daughter of hers doesn't seem to have fallen in love with me from the first go off! As for my girl, I'm told she was carried off by her grandfather, my old dad, three years ago, and where they went nobody knows. Very puzzling all this. How on earth came it that Mrs. Peckover kept the child so long, and didn't send her to the workhouse? If I'm to believe her, she took a motherly kindness for the poor brat. But that won't exactly go down with J. J. Snowdon; he's seen a bit too much in his knocking about the world. Still,—what if I'm making a mistake about
the old woman? There are some people do things of that sort; upon my soul, I’ve known people be kind even to me, without a chance of being paid back! You may think you know a man or a woman, and then all at once they’ll go and do something you’d have taken your davy couldn’t possibly happen. I’d have sworn she was nothing but a skinflint and a lying old witch. And so she may be; the chances are there’s some game going on that I can’t see through. Make inquiries? Why, so I have done, as far as I know how. I’ve only been able to hit on one person who knows anything about the matter, and he tells me it’s true enough the girl was taken away about three years ago, but he’s no idea where she went to. Surely the old man must be dead by now, though he was tough. Well, the fact of the matter is, I’ve got a good berth, and I’m a precious sight too lazy to go on the private detective job. Here’s this girl Clem, the finest bit of flesh I’ve seen for a long time; I’ve more than half a mind to see if she won’t be fool enough to marry
me. I’m not a bad-looking fellow, that’s the truth, and she may have taken a real liking to me. Seems to me that I should have come in for a comfortable thing in my old age; if I haven’t a daughter to provide for my needs, at all events I shall have a wife who can be persuaded into doing so. When the old woman gets out of the way I must have a little quiet talk with Clem.”

The opportunity he desired was not long in offering itself. Having made an excellent breakfast, he dragged his chair up to the fender again, and reached a pipe from the mantelpiece, where he had left it last night. Tobacco he carried loose in his waistcoat pocket; it came forth in the form of yellowish dust, intermingled with all sorts of alien scraps. When he had lit his pipe, he poised the chair on its hind-legs, clasped his hands over his bald crown, and continued his musing with an air of amiable calm. Smoke curled up from the corner of his loose lips, and occasionally, removing his pipe for an instant, he spat skilfully between the bars.
of the grate. Assured of his comfort, Mrs. Peckover said she must go and look after certain domestic duties. Her daughter had begun to clean some vegetables that would be cooked for dinner.

"How old may you be, Clem?" Mr. Snowdon inquired genially, when they had been alone together for a few minutes.

"What's that to you? Guess."

"Why, let me see; you was not much more than a baby when I went away. You'll be eighteen or nineteen, I suppose."

"Yes, I'm nineteen—last sixth of February. Pity you come too late to give me a birthday present, ain't it?"

"Ah! And who'd have thought you'd have grown up such a beauty! I say, Clem, how many of the young chaps about here have been wanting to marry you, eh?"

"A dozen or two, I dessay," Clem replied, shrugging her shoulders scornfully.

Mr. Snowdon laughed, and then spat into the fire.

"Tell me about some o' them, will you?"
Who is it you're keeping company with now?"

"Who, indeed? Why, there isn't one I'd look at! Several of 'em's took to drinking 'cause I won't have nothing to do with 'em."

This excited Mr. Snowdon's mirth in a high degree; he rolled on his chair, and almost pitched backwards.

"I suppose you give one or other a bit of encouragement now and then, just to make a fool of him, eh?"

"Course I do. There was Bob Hewett; he used to lodge here, but that was after your time. I kep' him off an' on till he couldn't bear it no longer; then he went an' married a common slut of a thing, just because he thought it 'ud make me mad. Ha, ha! I believe he'd give her poison an' risk it any day, if only I promised to marry him afterwards. Then there was a feller called Jeck Bartley. I set him an' Bob fightin' one Bank-holiday,—you should a' seen 'em go at it! Jack went an' got married a year ago to a girl called Suke Jollop; her mother forced
him. How I did laugh! Last Christmas Day they smashed up their 'ome an' threw the bits out into the street. Jack got one of his eyes knocked out,—I thought I should a' died o' laughin' when I saw him next mornin'.”

The hearer became uproarious in merriment.

“Tell you what it is, Clem,” he cried, “you’re something like a girl! Darn me if I don’t like you! I say, I wonder what my daughter’s grown up? Like her mother, I suppose. You an’ she was sort of sisters, wasn’t you?”

He observed her closely. Clem laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

“Queer sort o’ sisters. She was a bit too quiet-like for me. There never was no fun in her.”

“Aye, like her mother. And where did you say she went to with the old man?”

“Where she went to?” repeated Clem, regarding him steadily with her big eyes, “I never said nothing about it, ’cause I didn’t know.”

“Well, I shan’t cry about her, and I don’t
suppose she misses me much, wherever she is. All the same, Clem, I'm a domesticated sort of man; you can see that, can't you? I shouldn't wonder if I marry again one of these first days. Just tell me where to find a girl of the right sort. I daresay you know heaps."

"Dessay I do. What sort do you want?"

"Oh, a littlish girl,—yellow hair, you know,—one of them that look as if they didn't weigh half-a-stone."

"I'll throw this parsnip at you, Mr. Snowdon!"

"What's up now? You don't call yourself littlish, do you?"

Clem snapped the small end off the vegetable she was paring, and aimed it at his head. He ducked just in time. Then there was an outburst of laughter from both.

"Say, Clem, you haven't got a glass of beer in the house?"

"You'll have to wait till openin' time," replied the girl sourly, going away to the far end of the room.

"Have I offended you, Clem?"
"Offended, indeed! As if I cared what you say!"

"Do you care what I think?"

"Not I!"

"That means you do. Say, Clem, just come here; I've something to tell you."

"You're a nuisance. Let me get on with my work, can't you?"

"No, I can't. You just come here. You'd better not give me the trouble of fetching you!"

The girl obeyed him. Her cheeks were very hot, and the danger-signal was flashing in her eyes. Ten minutes later she went upstairs, and had a vivacious dialogue of whispers with Mrs. Peckover.
CHAPTER II.

SUNLIGHT IN DREARY PLACES.

Among the by-ways of Clerkenwell you might, with some difficulty, have discovered an establishment known in its neighbourhood as "Whitehead's." It was an artificial-flower factory, and the rooms of which it consisted were only to be reached by traversing a timber-yard and then mounting a wooden staircase outside a saw-mill. Here at busy seasons worked some threescore women and girls, who, owing to the nature of their occupation, were spoken of by the jocose youth of the locality as "Whitehead's pastepots."

Naturally they varied much in age and aspect. There was the child who had newly left school and was now invited to consider the question of how to keep herself alive; there was the woman of uncertain age, who
had spent long years of long days in the atmosphere of workrooms, and showed the result in her parchmenty cheek and lack-lustre eye; and between these extremes came all the various types of the London craftsgirl: she who is young enough to hope that disappointments may yet be made up for by the future; she who is already tasting such scanty good as life had in store for her; she who has outlived her illusions and no longer cares to look beyond the close of the week. If regularly engaged as time-workers, they made themselves easy in the prospect of wages that allowed them to sleep under a roof and eat at certain intervals of the day; if employed on piece-work, they might at any moment find themselves wageless, but this, being a familiar state of things, did not trouble them. With few exceptions, they were clad neatly; on the whole, they plied their task in wonderful contentment. The general tone of conversation among them was not high; moralists unfamiliar with the ways of the nether world would probably have applied a term other
than negative to the laughing discussions which now and then enlivened this or that group; but it was very seldom indeed that a child newly arriving heard anything with which she was not already perfectly familiar.

One afternoon at the end of May there penetrated into the largest of the workrooms that rarest of visitants, a stray sunbeam. Only if the sun happened to shine at given moments could any of its light fall directly into the room I speak of; this afternoon, however, all circumstances were favourable, and behold the floor chequered with uncertain gleam. The workers were arranged in groups of three, called "parties," consisting of a learner, an improver, and a hand. All sat with sleeves pushed up to their elbows, and had a habit of rocking to and fro as they plied their mechanical industry. Owing to the movement of a cloud, the sunlight spread gradually towards one of these groups; it touched the skirt, the arms, the head of one of the girls, who, as if gladdened by the
kindly warmth, looked round and smiled. A smile you would have been pleased to observe,—unconscious, gently thoughtful, rich in possibilities of happiness. She was quite a young girl, certainly not seventeen, and wore a smooth grey dress, with a white linen collar; her brown hair was closely plaited, her head well-shaped, the bend of her neck very graceful. From her bare arms it could be seen that she was anything but robustly made, yet her general appearance was not one of ill-health, and she held herself, even thus late in the day, far more uprightly than most of her companions. Had you watched her for a while, you would have noticed that her eyes occasionally strayed beyond the work-table, and, perhaps unconsciously, fixed themselves for some moments on one or other of the girls near her; when she remembered herself and looked down again upon her task, there rose to her face a smile of the subtlest meaning, the outcome of busy reflection.

By her side was a little girl just beginning to learn the work, whose employment it was
to paper wires and make “centres.” This toil always results in blistered fingers, and frequent was the child’s appeal to her neighbour for sympathy.

“It’ll be easier soon,” said the latter, on one of these occasions, bending her head to speak in a low voice. “You should have seen what blisters I had when I began.”

“It’s all very well to say that. I can’t do no more, so there! Oh, when’ll it be five o’clock?”

“It’s a quarter to. Try and go on, Annie.”

Five o’clock did come at length, and with it twenty minutes’ rest for tea. The rule at Whitehead’s was, that you could either bring your own tea, sugar, and eatables, or purchase them here from a forewoman; most of the workers chose to provide themselves. It was customary for each “party” to club together, emptying their several contributions of tea out of little twists of newspaper into one teapot. Wholesome bustle and confusion succeeded to the former silence. One of the
learners, whose turn it was to run on errands, was overwhelmed with commissions to a chandler's shop close by; a wry-faced, stupid little girl she was, and they called her, because of her slowness, the "funeral horse." She had strange habits, which made laughter for those who knew of them; for instance, it was her custom in the dinner-hour to go apart and eat her poor scraps on a doorstep close by a cook-shop; she confided to a companion that the odour of baked joints seemed to give her food a relish. From her present errand she returned with a strange variety of dainties,—for it was early in the week, and the girls still had coppers in their pockets; for two or three she had purchased a farthing's-worth of jam, which she carried in paper. A bite of this and a taste of that rewarded her for her trouble.

The quiet-mannered girl whom we were observing took her cup of tea from the pot in which she had a share, and from her bag produced some folded pieces of bread and butter. She had begun her meal, when there came
and sat down by her a young woman of very different appearance,—our friend, Miss Peckover. They were old acquaintances; but when we first saw them together it would have been difficult to imagine that they would ever sit and converse as at present, apparently in all friendliness. Strange to say, it was Clem who, during the past three years, had been the active one in seeking to obliterate disagreeable memories. The younger girl had never repelled her, but was long in overcoming the dread excited by Clem's proximity. Even now she never looked straight into Miss Peckover's face, as she did when speaking with others; there was reserve in her manner, reserve unmistakable, though clothed with her pleasant smile and amiable voice.

"I've got something to tell you, Jane," Clem began, in a tone inaudible to those who were sitting near. "Something as'll surprise you."

"What is it, I wonder?"

"You must swear you won't tell nobody."
Jane nodded. Then the other brought her head a little nearer, and whispered:

"I'm goin' to be married!"

"Are you really?"

"In a week. Who do you think it is? Somebody as you know of, but if you guessed till next Christmas you'd never come right."

Nor had Clem any intention of revealing the name, but she laughed consumedly, as if her reticence covered the most amusing situation conceivable.

"It'll be the biggest surprise you ever had in your life. You've swore you won't speak about it. I don't think I shall come to work after this week,—but you'll have to come an' see us. You'll promise to, won't you?"

Still convulsed with mirth, Clem went off to another part of the room. From Jane's countenance the look of amusement which she had perforce summoned soon passed; it was succeeded by a shadow almost of pain, and not till she had been at work again for nearly an hour was the former placidity restored to her.
When final release came, Jane was among the first to hasten down the wooden staircase and get clear of the timber-yard. By the direct way, it took her twenty minutes to walk from Whitehead's to her home in Hanover Street, but this evening she had an object in turning aside. The visit she wished to pay took her into a disagreeable quarter, a street of squalid houses, swarming with yet more squalid children. On all the doorsteps sat little girls, themselves only just out of infancy, nursing or neglecting bald, red-eyed, doughy-limbed abortions in every stage of babyhood, hapless spawn of diseased humanity, born to embitter and brutalise yet further the lot of those who unwillingly gave them life. With wide, pitiful eyes Jane looked at each group she passed. Three years ago she would have seen nothing but the ordinary and the inevitable in such spectacles, but since then her moral and intellectual being had grown on rare nourishment; there was indignation as well as heartache in the feeling with which she had learnt to regard the
world of her familiarity. To enter the house at which she paused it was necessary to squeeze through a conglomerate of dirty little bodies. At the head of the first flight of stairs she came upon a girl sitting in a weary attitude on the top step and beating the wood listlessly with the last remnant of a hearth-brush; on her lap was one more specimen of the infinitely-multiplied baby, and a child of two years sprawled behind her on the landing.

"Waiting for him to come home, Pennyloaf?" said Jane.

"Oh, is that you, Miss Snowdon!" exclaimed the other, returning to consciousness and manifesting some shame at being discovered in this position. Hastily she drew together the front of her dress, which for the baby's sake had been wide open, and rose to her feet. Pennyloaf was not a bit more womanly in figure than on the day of her marriage; her voice was still an immature treble; the same rueful irresponsibility marked her features; but all her poor prettiness was
wasted under the disfigurement of pains and cares. Incongruously enough, she wore a gown of bright-patterned calico, and about her neck had a collar of pretentious lace; her hair was dressed as if for a holiday, and a daub recently made on her cheeks by the baby's fingers lent emphasis to the fact that she had but a little while ago washed herself with much care.

"I can't stop," said Jane, "but I thought I'd just look in and speak a word. How have you been getting on?"

"Oh, do come in for just a minute!" pleaded Pennyloaf, moving backwards to an open door, whither Jane followed. They entered a room,—much like other rooms that we have looked into from time to time. Following the nomadic custom of their kind, Bob Hewett and his wife had lived in six or seven different lodgings since their honey-moon in Shooter's Gardens. Mrs. Candy first of all made a change necessary, as might have been anticipated, and the restlessness of domestic ill-being subsequently drove them

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from place to place. "Come in 'ere, Johnny," she called to the child lying on the landing. "What's the good o' washin' you, I'd like to know! Just see, Miss Snowdon, he's made his face all white with the milk as the boy spilt on the stairs! Take this brush an' play with it, do! I can't keep 'em clean, Miss Snowdon, so it's no use talkin'."

"Are you going somewhere to-night?" Jane inquired, with a glance at the strange costume.

Pennyloaf looked up and down in a shame-faced way.

"I only did it just because I thought he might like to see me. He promised me faithful as he'd come 'ome to-night, and I thought—it's only somethink as got into my 'ed to-day, Miss Snowdon."

"But hasn't he been coming home since I saw you last?"

"He did just once, an' then it was all the old ways again. I did what you told me; I did, as sure as I'm a-standin' 'ere! I made the room so clean you wouldn't have be-
lieved; I scrubbed the floor an' the table, an'
I washed the winders,—you can see they ain't
dirty yet. An' he'd never a' paid a bit o'
notice if I hadn't told him. He was jolly
enough for one night, just like he can be
when he likes. But I knew as it wouldn't
last, an' the next night he was off with a lot
o' fellers an' girls, same as ever. I didn't
make no row when he came 'ome; I wish I
may die if I said a word to set his back up!
An' I've gone on just the same all the week;
we haven't had not the least bit of a row;
so you see I kep' my promise. But it's no
good; he won't come 'ome; he's always got
fellers an' girls to go round with. He took
his hoath as he'd come back to-night, an'
then it come into my 'ed as I'd put my best
things on, just to—you know what I mean,
Miss Snowdon. But he won't come before
twelve o'clock; I know he won't. An' I get
that low sittin' 'ere, you can't think! I can't
go nowhere, because o' the children. If it
wasn't for them I could go to work again,
an' I'd be that glad; I feel as if my 'ed would
drop off sometimes! I am so glad you just come in!"

Jane had tried so many forms of encouragement, of consolation, on previous occasions that she knew not how to repeat herself. She was ashamed to speak words which sounded so hollow and profitless. This silence was only too significant to Pennyloaf, and in a moment she exclaimed with querulous energy:

"I know what'll be the end of it! I'll go an' do like mother does,—I will! I will! I'll put my ring away, an' I'll go an' sit all night in the public-'ouse! It's what all the others does, an' I'll do the same. I often feel I'm a fool to go on like this. I don't know what I live for. P'r'aps he'll be sorry when I get run in like mother."

"Don't talk like that, Pennyloaf!" cried Jane, stamping her foot. (It was odd how completely difference of character had reversed their natural relations to each other; Pennyloaf was the child, Jane the mature woman.) "You know better, and you've no
right to give way to such thoughts. I was going to say I'd come and be with you all Saturday afternoon, but I don't know whether I shall now. And I'd been thinking you might like to come and see me on Sunday, but I can't have people that go to the public-house, so we won't say anything more about it. I shall have to be off; good-bye!"

She stepped to the door.

"Miss Snowdon!"

Jane turned, and after an instant of mock severity, broke into a laugh which seemed to fill the wretched den with sunlight. Words, too, she found; words of soothing influence such as leap from the heart to the tongue in spite of the heavy thoughts that try to check them. Pennyloaf was learning to depend upon these words for strength in her desolation. They did not excite her to much hopefulness, but there was a sustaining power in their sweet sincerity which made all the difference between despair tending to evil and the sigh of renewed effort. "I don't care," Pennyloaf had got into the habit of thinking,
after her friend's departure; "I won't give up as long as she looks in now and then."

Out from the swarm of babies Jane hurried homewards. She had a reason for wishing to be back in good time to-night; it was Wednesday, and on Wednesday evening there was wont to come a visitor, who sat for a couple of hours in her grandfather's room and talked, talked,—the most interesting talk Jane had ever heard or could imagine. A latch-key admitted her; she ran up to the second floor. A voice from the front room caught her ear; certainly not his voice,—it was too early,—but that of some unusual visitor. She was on the point of entering her own chamber, when the other door opened, and somebody exclaimed, "Ah, here she is!"

The speaker was an old gentleman, dressed in black, bald, with small and rather rugged features; his voice was pleasant. A gold chain and a bunch of seals shone against his waistcoat, also a pair of eyeglasses. A professional man, obviously. Jane remembered
that she had seen him once before, about a year ago, when he had talked with her for a few minutes, very kindly.

"Will you come in here, Jane?" her grandfather's voice called to her.

Snowdon had changed much. Old age was heavy upon his shoulders, and had even produced a slight tremulousness in his hands; his voice told the same story of enfeeblement. Even more noticeable was the ageing of his countenance. Something more, however, than the progress of time seemed to be here at work. He looked strangely careworn; his forehead was set in lines of anxiety; his mouth expressed a nervousness of which formerly there had been no trace. One would have said that some harassing preoccupation must have seized his mind. His eyes were no longer merely sad and absent, but restless with fatiguing thought. As Jane entered the room he fixed his gaze upon her,—a gaze that appeared to reveal worrying apprehension.

"You remember Mr. Percival, Jane," he said.
The old gentleman thus presented held out his hand with something of fatherly geniality.

"Miss Snowdon, I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again before long, but just now I am carrying off your grandfather for a couple of hours, and indeed we mustn't linger that number of minutes. You look well, I think?"

He stood and examined her intently, then cried:

"Come, my dear sir, come! we shall be late."

Snowdon was already prepared for walking. He spoke a few words to Jane, then followed Mr. Percival downstairs.

Flurried by the encounter, Jane stood looking about her. Then came a rush of disappointment, as she reflected that the visitor of Wednesday evenings would call in vain. Hearing that her grandfather was absent, doubtless he would take his leave at once. Or, would he——?

In a minute or two she ran downstairs to exchange a word with Mrs. Byass. On enter-
ing the kitchen, she was surprised to see Bessie sitting idly by the fire. At this hour it was usual for Mr. Byass to have returned, and there was generally an uproar of laughing talk. This evening, dead silence, and a noticeable something in the air which told of trouble. The baby—of course a new baby—lay in a bassinet near its mother, seemingly asleep; the other child was sitting in a high chair by the table, clattering "bricks."

Bessie did not even look round.

"Is Mr. Byass late?" inquired Jane, in an apprehensive voice.

"He's somewhere in the house, I believe," was the answer, in monotone.

Oh dear! Jane recognised a situation which had already come under her notice once or twice during the last six months. She drew near, and asked in a low voice:

"What's happened, Mrs. Byass?"

"He's a beast! If he doesn't mind I shall go and leave him. I mean it!"

Bessie was in a genuine fit of sullenness. One of her hands was clenched below her
chin; her pretty lips were not pretty at all; her brow was rumpled. Jane began to seek for the cause of dissension, to put affectionate questions, to use her voice soothingly.

"He's a beast!" was Bessie's reiterated observation; but by degrees she added phrases more explanatory. "How can I help it if he cuts himself when he's shaving?—Serve him right!—What for? Why, for saying that babies was nothing but a nuisance, and that my baby was the ugliest and noisiest ever born!"

"Did she cry in the night?" inquired Jane, with sympathy.

"Of course she did! Hasn't she a right to?"

"And then Mr. Byass cut himself with his razor?"

"Yes. And he said it was because he was woke so often, and it made him nervous, and his hand shook. And then I told him he'd better cut himself on the other side, and it wouldn't matter. And then he complained because he had to wait for breakfast. And
he said there'd been no comfort in the house since we'd had children. And I cared nothing about him, he said, and only about the baby and Ernest. And he went on like a beast, as he is! I hate him!"

"Oh no, not a bit of it!" said Jane, seeing the opportunity for a transition to jest.

"I do! And you may go upstairs and tell him so."

"All right; I will."

Jane ran upstairs and knocked at the door of the parlour. A gruff voice bade her enter, but the room was nearly in darkness.

"Will you have a light, Mr. Byass?"

"No—thank you."

"Mr. Byass, Mrs. Byass says I'm to say she hates you."

"All right. Tell her I've known it a long time. She needn't trouble about me; I'm going out to enjoy myself."

Jane ran back to the kitchen.

"Mr. Byass says he's known it a long time," she reported, with much gravity. "And he's going out to enjoy himself."
Bessie remained mute.

"What message shall I take back, Mrs. Byass?"

"Tell him if he dares to leave the house, I'll go to mother's the first thing to-morrow, and let them know how he's treating me."

"Tell her," was Mr. Byass's reply, "that I don't see what it matters to her whether I'm at home or away. And tell her she's a cruel wife to me."

Something like the sound of a snivel came out of the darkness as he concluded. Jane, in reporting his speech, added that she thought he was shedding tears. Thereupon Bessie gave a sob, quite in earnest.

"So am I," she said, chokingly. "Go and tell him, Jane."

"Mr. Byass, Mrs. Byass is crying," whispered Jane at the parlour-door. "Don't you think you'd better go downstairs?"

Hearing a movement, she ran to be out of the way. Samuel left the dark room, and with slow step descended to the kitchen. Then Jane knew that it was all right, and
tripped up to her room humming a song of contentment.

Had she, then, wholly outgrown the bitter experiences of her childhood? Had the cruelty which tortured her during the years when the soul is being fashioned left upon her no brand of slavish vice, nor the baseness of those early associations affected her with any irremovable taint? As far as human observation could probe her, Jane Snowdon had no spot of uncleanness in her being; she had been rescued while it was yet time, and the subsequent period of fostering had enabled features of her character, which no one could have discerned in the helpless child, to expand with singular richness. Two effects of the time of her bondage were, however, clearly to be distinguished. Though nature had endowed her with a good intelligence, she could only with extreme labour acquire that elementary book-knowledge which vulgar children get easily enough; it seemed as if the bodily overstrain at a critical period of life had affected her memory, and her power of mental application
generally. In spite of ceaseless endeavour, she could not yet spell words of the least difficulty; she could not do the easiest sums with accuracy; geographical names were her despair. The second point in which she had suffered harm was of more serious nature. She was subject to fits of hysteria, preceded and followed by the most painful collapse of that buoyant courage which was her supreme charm and the source of her influence. Without warning, an inexplicable terror would fall upon her; like the weakest child, she craved protection from a dread inspired solely by her imagination, and solace for an anguish of wretchedness to which she could give no form in words. Happily this illness afflicted her only at long intervals, and her steadily improving health gave warrant for hoping that in time it would altogether pass away.

Whenever an opportunity had offered for struggling successfully with some form of evil,—were it poor Pennyloaf’s dangerous despair, or the very human difficulties between Bessie and her husband,—Jane lived at her highest
reach of spiritual joy. For all that there was a disappointment on her mind, she felt this joy to-night, and went about her pursuits in happy self-absorption. So it befell that she did not hear a knock at the house-door. Mrs. Byass answered it, and not knowing that Mr. Snowdon was from home, bade his usual visitor go upstairs. The visitor did so, and announced his presence at the door of the room.

“Oh, Mr. Kirkwood,” said Jane, “I’m so sorry, but grandfather had to go out with a gentleman.”

And she waited, looking at him, a gentle warmth on her face.
CHAPTER III.

DIALOGUE AND COMMENT.

"Will it be late before he comes back?" asked Sidney, his smile of greeting shadowed with disappointment.

"Not later than half-past ten, he said."

Sidney turned his face to the stairs. The homeward prospect was dreary after that glimpse of the familiar room through the doorway. The breach of habit discomposed him, and something more positive strengthened his reluctance to be gone. It was not his custom to hang in hesitancy and court chance by indirectness of speech; recognising and admitting his motives, he said simply:

"I should like to stay a little, if you will let me,—if I shan’t be in your way?"
“Oh no! Please come in. I’m only sewing.”

There were two round-backed wooden chairs in the room; one stood on each side of the fireplace, and between them, beside the table, Jane always had her place on a small chair of the ordinary comfortless kind. She seated herself as usual, and Sidney took his familiar position, with the vacant chair opposite. Snowdon and he were accustomed to smoke their pipes whilst conversing, but this evening Sidney dispensed with tobacco.

It was very quiet here. On the floor below dwelt at present two sisters who kept themselves alive (it is quite inaccurate to use any other phrase in such instances) by doing all manner of skilful needlework; they were middle-aged women, gentle-natured and so thoroughly subdued to the hopelessness of their lot that scarcely ever could even their footfall be heard as they went up and down stairs; their voices were always sunk to a soft murmur. Just now no infant wailing came from the Byasses’ regions. Kirkwood
enjoyed a sense of restfulness, intenser, perhaps, for the momentary disappointment he had encountered. He had no desire to talk; enough for a few minutes to sit and watch Jane's hand as it moved backwards and forwards with the needle.

"I went to see Pennyloaf as I came back from work," Jane said at length, just looking up.

"Did you? Do things seem to be any better?"

"Not much, I'm afraid. Mr. Kirkwood, don't you think you might do something? If you tried again with her husband?"

"The fact is," replied Sidney, "I'm so afraid of doing more harm than good."

"You think——? But then perhaps that's just what I'm doing?"

Jane let her hand fall on the sewing and regarded him anxiously.

"No, no! I'm quite sure you can't do harm. Pennyloaf can get nothing but good from having you as a friend. She likes you; she misses you when you happen not to have
seen her for a few days. I'm sorry to say it's quite a different thing with Bob and me. We're friendly enough,—as friendly as ever,—but I haven't a scrap of influence with him like you have with his wife. It was all very well to get hold of him once, and try to make him understand, in a half-joking way, that he wasn't behaving as well as he might. He didn't take it amiss—just that once. But you can't think how difficult it is for one man to begin preaching to another. The natural thought is: Mind your own business. If I was the parson of the parish"——

He paused, and in the same instant their eyes met. The suggestion was irresistible; Jane began to laugh merrily.

What sweet laughter it was! How unlike the shrill discord whereby the ordinary work-girl expresses her foolish mirth! For years Sidney Kirkwood had been unused to utter any sound of merriment; even his smiling was done sadly. But of late he had grown conscious of the element of joy in Jane's character, had accustomed himself to look for
its manifestations,—to observe the brightening of her eyes which foretold a smile, the moving of her lips which suggested inward laughter,—and he knew that herein, as in many another matter, a profound sympathy was transforming him. Sorrow such as he had suffered will leave its mark upon the countenance long after time has done its kindly healing, and in Sidney’s case there was more than the mere personal affliction tending to confirm his life in sadness. With the ripening of his intellect, he saw only more and more reason to condemn and execrate those social disorders of which his own wretched experience was but an illustration. From the first, his friendship with Snowdon had exercised upon him a subduing influence; the old man was stern enough in his criticism of society, but he did not belong to the same school as John Hewett, and the sober authority of his character made appeal to much in Sidney that had found no satisfaction amid the uproar of Clerkenwell Green. For all that, Kirkwood could not become other than himself; his vehemence was
moderated, but he never affected to be at one with Snowdon in that grave enthusiasm of far-off hope which at times made the old man's speech that of an exhorting prophet. Their natural parts were reversed; the young eyes declared that they could see nothing but an horizon of blackest cloud, whilst those enfeebled by years bore ceaseless witness to the raying forth of dawn.

And so it was with a sensation of surprise that Sidney first became aware of light-heartedness in the young girl who was a silent hearer of so many lugubrious discussions. Ridiculous as it may sound,—as Sidney felt it to be,—he almost resented this evidence of happiness; to him, only just recovering from a shock which would leave its mark upon his life to the end, his youth wronged by bitter necessities, forced into brooding over problems of ill when nature would have bidden him enjoy, it seemed for the moment a sign of shallowness that Jane could look and speak cheerfully. This extreme of morbid feeling proved its own cure;
even in reflecting upon it, Sidney was constrained to laugh contemptuously at himself. And therewith opened for him a new world of thought. He began to study the girl. Of course he had already occupied himself much with the peculiarities of her position, but of Jane herself he knew very little; she was still, in his imagination, the fearful and miserable child over whose shoulders he had thrown his coat one bitter night; his impulse towards her was one of compassion merely, justified now by what he heard of her mental slowness, her bodily sufferings. It would take very long to analyse the process whereby this mode of feeling was changed, until it became the sense of ever-deepening sympathy which so possessed him this evening. Little by little Jane's happiness justified itself to him, and in so doing began subtly to modify his own temper. With wonder he recognised that the poor little serf of former days had been meant by nature for one of the most joyous among children. What must that heart have suffered, so scorned and trampled
upon! But now that the days of misery were over, behold nature having its way after all. If the thousands are never rescued from oppression, if they perish abortive in their wretchedness, is that a reason for refusing to rejoice with the one whom fate has blest? Sidney knew too much of Jane by this time to judge her shallow-hearted. This instinct of gladness had a very different significance from the animal vitality which prompted the constant laughter of Bessie Byass; it was but one manifestation of a moral force which made itself nobly felt in many another way. In himself Sidney was experiencing its pure effects, and it was owing to his conviction of Jane's power for good that he had made her acquainted with Bob Hewett's wife. Snowden warmly approved of this; the suggestion led him to speak expressly of Jane, a thing he very seldom did, and to utter a strong wish that she should begin to concern herself with the sorrows she might in some measure relieve.

Sidney joined in the laughter he had ex-
cited by picturing himself the parson of the parish. But the topic under discussion was a serious one, and Jane speedily recovered her gravity.

"Yes, I see how hard it is," she said. "But it's a cruel thing for him to neglect poor Pennyloaf as he does. She never gave him any cause."

"Not knowingly, I quite believe," replied Kirkwood. "But what a miserable home it is!"

"Yes." Jane shook her head. "She doesn't seem to know how to keep things in order. She doesn't seem even to understand me when I try to show her how it might be different."

"There's the root of the trouble, Jane. What chance had Pennyloaf of ever learning how to keep a decent home, and bring up her children properly? How was she brought up? The wonder is that there's so much downright good in her; I feel the same wonder about people every day. Suppose Pennyloaf behaved as badly as her mother
does, who on earth would have the right to blame her? But we can’t expect miracles; so long as she lives decently, it’s the most that can be looked for. And there you are; that isn’t enough to keep a fellow like Bob Hewett in order. I doubt whether any wife would manage it, but as for poor Penny-loaf——!

“I shall speak to him myself,” said Jane quietly.

“Do! There’s much more hope in that than in anything I could say. Bob isn’t a bad fellow; the worst thing I know of him is his conceit. He’s good-looking, and he’s clever in all sorts of ways, and unfortunately he can’t think of anything but his own merits. Of course he’d no business to marry at all whilst he was nothing but a boy.”

Jane plied her needle, musing.

“Do you know whether he ever goes to see his father?” Sidney inquired presently.

“No, I don’t,” Jane answered, looking at him, but immediately dropping her eyes.

“If he doesn’t I should think worse of him.
Nobody ever had a kinder father, and there's many a reason why he should be careful to pay the debt he owes."

Jane waited a moment, then again raised her eyes to him. It seemed as though she would ask a question, and Sidney's grave attentiveness indicated a surmise of what she was about to say. But her thought remained unuttered, and there was a prolongation of silence.

Of course they were both thinking of Clara. That name had never been spoken by either of them in the other's presence, but as often as conversation turned upon the Hewetts, it was impossible for them not to supplement their spoken words by a silent colloquy of which Clara was the subject. From her grandfather Jane knew that, to this day, nothing had been heard of Hewett's daughter; what people said at the time of the girl's disappearance she had learned fully enough from Clem Peckover, who even yet found it pleasant to revive the scandal, and by contemptuous comments revenge herself for Clara's haughty
usage in old days. Time had not impaired Jane's vivid recollection of that Bank-holiday morning when she herself was the first to make it known that Clara had gone away. Many a time since then she had visited the street whither Snowdon led her,—had turned aside from her wonted paths in the thought that it was not impossible she might meet Clara, though whether with more hope or fear of such a meeting she could not have said. When two years had gone by, her grandfather one day led the talk to that subject; he was then beginning to change in certain respects the tone he had hitherto used with her, and to address her as one who had outgrown childhood. He explained to her how it came about that Sidney could no longer be even on terms of acquaintance with John Hewett. The conversation originated in Jane's bringing the news that Hewett and his family had at length left Mrs. Peckover's house. For two years things had gone miserably with them, their only piece of good fortune being the death of the youngest child. John was confirmed in a
habit of drinking. Not that he had become a brutal sot; sometimes for as much as a month he would keep sober, and even when he gave way to temptation he never behaved with violence to his wife and children. Still, the character of his life had once more suffered a degradation, and he possessed no friends who could be of the least use to him. Snowdon, for some reason of his own, maintained a slight intercourse with the Peckovers, and through them he endeavoured to establish an intimacy with Hewett; but the project utterly failed. Probably on Kirkwood's account, John met the old man's advances with something more than coldness. Sternly he had forbidden his wife and the little ones to exchange a word of any kind with Sidney, or with any friend of his. He appeared to nourish incessantly the bitter resentment to which he gave expression when Sidney and he last met.

There was no topic on which Sidney was more desirous of speaking with Jane than this which now occupied both their minds. How far she understood Clara's story, and his
part in it, he had no knowledge; for between Snowdon and himself there had long been absolute silence on that matter. It was not improbable that Jane had been instructed in the truth; he hoped she had not been left to gather what she could from Clem Peckover's gossip. Yet the difficulty with which he found himself beset, now that an obvious opportunity offered for frank speech was so great that, after a few struggles, he fell back on the reflection with which he was wont to soothe himself: Jane was still so young, and the progress of time, by confirming her knowledge of him, would make it all the simpler to explain the miserable past. Had he, in fact, any right to relate this story, to seek her sympathy in that direct way? It was one aspect of a very grave question which occupied more and more of Sidney's thought.

With an effort, he turned the dialogue into quite a new direction, and Jane, though a little absent for some minutes, seemed at length to forget the abruptness of the change. Sidney had of late been resuming his old
interest in pencil-work; two or three of his drawings hung on these walls, and he spoke of making new sketches when he next went into the country. Years ago, one of his favourite excursions,—of the longer ones which he now and then allowed himself,—was to Danbury Hill, some five miles to the east of Chelmsford, one of the few pieces of rising ground in Essex, famous for its view over Maldon and the estuary of the Blackwater. Thither Snowdon and Jane accompanied him during the last summer but one, and the former found so much pleasure in the place that he took lodgings with certain old friends of Sidney's, and gave his granddaughter a week of healthful holiday. In the summer that followed, the lodgings were again taken for a week, and this year the same expedition was in view. Sidney had as good as promised that he would join his friends for the whole time of their absence, and now he talked with Jane of memories and anticipations. Neither was sensible how the quarters and the half-hours went by in such chatting. Sidney
abandoned himself to the enjoyment of peace such as he had never known save in this room, to a delicious restfulness such as was always inspired in him by the girl's gentle voice, by her laughter, by her occasional quiet movements. The same influence was affecting his whole life. To Jane he owed the gradual transition from tumultuous politics and social bitterness to the mood which could find pleasure as of old in nature and art. This was his truer self, emancipated from the distorting effect of the evil amid which he perforce lived. He was recovering somewhat of his spontaneous boyhood; at the same time, reaching after a new ideal of existence which only ripened manhood could appreciate.

Snowdon returned at eleven; it alarmed Sidney to find how late he had allowed himself to remain, and he began shaping apologies. But the old man had nothing but the familiar smile and friendly words.

"Haven't you given Mr. Kirkwood any supper?" he asked of Jane, looking at the table.
"I really forgot all about it, grandfather," was the laughing reply.

Then Snowdon laughed, and Sidney joined in the merriment; but he would not be persuaded to stay longer.
CHAPTER IV.

CLEM MAKES A DISCLOSURE.

When Miss Peckover suggested to her affianced that their wedding might as well take place at the registry-office, seeing that there would then be no need to go to expense in the article of costume, Mr. Snowdon readily assented; at the same time it gave him new matter for speculation. Clem was not exactly the kind of girl to relinquish without good reason that public ceremony which is the dearest of all possible ceremonies to women least capable of reverencing its significance. Every day made it more obvious that the Peckovers desired to keep this marriage a secret until it was accomplished. In one way only could Joseph James account for the mystery running through the whole affair; it must be
that Miss Peckover had indiscretions to conceal, certain points in her history with which she feared lest her bridegroom should be made acquainted by envious neighbours. The thought had no effect upon Mr. Snowdon save to excite his mirth; his attitude with regard to such possibilities was that of a philosopher. The views with which he was entering upon this alliance were so beautifully simple that he really did not find it worth while to puzzle further as soon as the plausible solution of his difficulties had presented itself. Should he hereafter discover that something unforeseen perturbed the smooth flow of life to which he looked forward, nothing could be easier than his remedy; the world is wide, and a cosmopolitan does not attach undue importance to a marriage contracted in one of its somewhat numerous parishes. In any case he would have found the temporary harbour of refuge which stress of weather had made necessary. He surrendered himself to the pleasant tickling of his vanity which was an immediate result of the adventure. For,
whatever Clem might be hiding, it seemed to him beyond doubt that she was genuinely attracted by his personal qualities. Her demonstrations were not extravagant, but in one noteworthy respect she seemed to give evidence of a sensibility so little in keeping with her general character that it was only to be explained as the result of a strong passion. In conversing with him she at times displayed a singular timidity, a nervousness, a self-subdual surprisingly unlike anything that could be expected from her. It was true that at other moments her lover caught a gleam in her eyes, a movement of her lips, expressive of anything rather than diffidence, and tending to confirm his view of her as a cunning as well as fierce animal, but the look and tone of subjugation came often enough to make their impression predominant. One would have said that she suffered from jealous fears which for some reason she did not venture to utter. Now and then he surprised her gazing at him as if in troubled apprehension, the effect of which
upon Mr. Snowdon was perhaps more flattering than any other look.

"What's up, Clem?" he inquired, on one of these occasions. "Are you wondering whether I shall cut and leave you when we've had time to get tired of each other?"

Her face was transformed; she looked at him for an instant with fierce suspicion, then laughed disagreeably.

"We'll see about that," was her answer, with a movement of the head and shoulders strongly reminding one of a lithe beast about to spring.

The necessary delay passed without accident. As the morning of the marriage approached there was, however, a perceptible increase of nervous restlessness in Clem. She had given up her work at Whitehead's, and contrived to keep her future husband within sight nearly all day long. Joseph James found nothing particularly irksome in this, for beer and tobacco were supplied him ad libitum, and a succession of appetising
meals made the underground kitchen a place of the pleasantest associations. A loan from Mrs. Peckover had enabled him to renew his wardrobe. When the last night arrived, Clem and her mother sat conversing to a late hour, their voices again cautiously subdued. A point had been for some days at issue between them, and decision was now imperative.

"It's you as started the job," Clem observed with emphasis, "an' it's you as'll have to finish it."

"And who gets most out of it, I'd like to know?" replied her mother. "Don't be such a fool! Can't you see as it'll come easier from you? A nice thing for his mother-in-law to tell him! If you don't like to do it the first day, then leave it to the second, or third. But if you take my advice, you'll get it over the next morning."

"You'll have to do it yourself," Clem repeated stubbornly, propping her chin upon her fists.

"Well, I never thought as you was such a
frightened babby! Frightened of a feller like him! I'd be ashamed o' myself!"

"Who's frightened? Hold your row!"

"Why, you are; what else?"

"I ain't!"

"You are!"

"I ain't! You'd better not make me mad, or I'll tell him before, just to spite you."

"Spite me, you cat! What difference'll it make to me? I'll tell you what: I've a jolly good mind to tell him myself beforehand, and then we'll see who's spited."

In the end Clem yielded, shrugging her shoulders defiantly.

"I'll have a kitchen-knife near by when I tell him," she remarked with decision. "If he lays a hand on me I'll cut his face open, an' chance it!"

Mrs. Peckover smiled with tender motherly deprecation of such extreme measures. But Clem repeated her threat, and there was something in her eyes which guaranteed the possibility of its fulfilment.

No personal acquaintance of either the
Peckover or the Snowdon family happened to glance over the list of names which hung in the registrar's office during these weeks. The only interested person who had foreknowledge of Clem's wedding was Jane Snowdon, and Jane, though often puzzled in thinking of the matter, kept her promise to speak of it to no one. It was imprudence in Clem to have run this risk, but the joke was so rich that she could not deny herself its enjoyment; she knew, moreover, that Jane was one of those imbecile persons who scruple about breaking a pledge. On the eve of her wedding-day she met Jane as the latter came from Whitehead's, and requested her to call in the Close next Sunday morning at twelve o'clock.

"I want you to see my 'usband," she said, grinning. "I'm sure you'll like him."

Jane promised to come. On the next day, Saturday, Clem entered the registry-office in a plain dress, and after a few simple formalities came forth as Mrs. Snowdon; her usual high colour was a trifle diminished, and she
kept glancing at her husband from under nervously knitted brows. Still the great event was unknown to the inhabitants of the Close. There was no feasting, and no wedding-journey; for the present Mr. and Mrs. Snowdon would take possession of two rooms on the first floor.

Twenty-four hours later, when the bells of St. James's were ringing their melodies before service, Clem requested her husband's attention to something of importance she had to tell him.

Mr. Snowdon had just finished breakfast and was on the point of lighting his pipe; with the match burning down to his fingers, he turned and regarded the speaker shrewdly. Clem's face put it beyond question that at last she was about to make a statement definitely bearing on the history of the past month. At this moment she was almost pale, and her eyes avoided his. She stood close to the table, and her right hand rested near the bread-knife; her left held a piece of paper.
"What is it?" asked Joseph James mildly.

"Go ahead, Clem."

"You ain't bad-tempered, are you? You said you wasn't."

"Not I! Best-tempered feller you could have come across. Look at me smiling."

His grin was in a measure reassuring, but he had caught sight of the piece of paper in her hand, and eyed it steadily.

"You know you played mother a trick a long time ago," Clem pursued, "when you went off an' left that child on her 'ands."

"Hollo! What about that?"

"Well, it wouldn't be nothing but fair if some one was to go an' play tricks with you, —just to pay you off in a friendly sort o' way,—see?"

Mr. Snowden still smiled, but dubiously.

"Out with it!" he muttered. "I'd have bet a trifle there was some game on. You're welcome, old girl. Out with it!"

"Did you know as I'd got a brother in 'Stralia,—him as you used to know when you lived here before?"
“You said you didn’t know where he was.”

“No more we do,—not just now. But he wrote mother a letter about this time last year, an’ there’s something in it as I’d like you to see. You’d better read for yourself.”

Her husband laid down his pipe on the mantelpiece and began to cast his eye over the letter, which was much defaced by frequent foldings, and in any case would have been difficult to decipher, so vilely was it scrawled. But Mr. Snowdon’s interest was strongly excited, and in a few moments he had made out the following communication:

“I don’t begin with no deering, because it’s a plaid out thing, and because I’m riting to too people at onse, both mother and Clem, and it’s so long since I’ve had a pen in my hand I’ve harf forgot how to use it. If you think I’m making my pile, you think rong, so you’ve got no need to ask me when I’m going to send money home, like you did in the last letter. I jest keep myself and that’s about all, because things ain’t what they use to be
in this busted up country. And that reminds me what it was as I ment to tell you when I cold get a bit of time to rite. Not so long ago, I met a chap as use to work for somebody called Snowdon, and from what I can make out it was Snowdon's brother at home, him as we use to ere so much about. He'd made his pile, this Snowdon, you bet, and Ned Williams says he died worth no end of thousands. Not so long before he died, his old farther from England come out to live with him; then Snowdon and a son as he had both got drowneded going over a river at night. And Ned says as all the money went to the old bloak and to a brother in England, and that's what he herd when he was paid off. The old farther made traks very soon, and they sed he'd gone back to England. So it seams to me as you ouht to find Snowdon and make him pay up what he ose you. And I don't know as I've anything more to tell you both, ecsep I'm working at a place as I don't know how to spell, and it wouldn't be no good if I did, because there's no saying were I
shall be before you could rite back. So good
luck to you both, from yours truly, W. P."

In reading, Joseph James scratched his bald
head thoughtfully. Before he had reached
the end there were signs of emotion in his
projecting lower lip. At length he regarded
Clem, no longer smiling, but without any of
the wrath she had anticipated.

"Ha, ha! This was your game, was it?
Well, I don't object, old girl,—so long as you
tell me a bit more about it. Now there's no
need for any more lies, perhaps you'll mention
where the old fellow is."

"He's livin' not so far away, an' Jane with
him."

Put somewhat at her ease, Clem drew her
hand from the neighbourhood of the bread-
knife, and detailed all she knew with regard to
old Mr. Snowdon and his affairs. Her mother
had from the first suspected that he possessed
money, seeing that he paid, with very little
demur, the sum she demanded for Jane's
board and lodging. True, he went to live
in poor lodgings, but that was doubtless a
personal eccentricity. An important piece of evidence subsequently forthcoming was the fact that in sundry newspapers there appeared advertisements addressed to Joseph James Snowdon, requesting him to communicate with Messrs. Percival & Peel of Furnival’s Inn, whereupon Mrs. Peckover made inquiries of the legal firm in question (by means of an anonymous letter), and received a simple assurance that Mr. Snowdon was being sought for his own advantage.

“You’re cool hands, you and your mother,” observed Joseph James, with a certain involuntary admiration. “This was not quite three years ago, you say; just when I was in America. Ha—hum! What I can’t make out is, how the devil that brother of mine came to leave anything to me. We never did anything but curse each other from the time we were children to when we parted for good. And so the old man went out to Australia, did he? That’s a rum affair, too; Mike and he could never get on together. Well, I suppose there’s no mistake about it. I
shouldn't much mind if there was, just to see the face you'd pull, young woman. On the whole, perhaps it's as well for you that I am fairly good-tempered,—eh?"

Clem stood apart, smiling dubiously, now and then eyeing him askance. His last words once more put her on her guard; she moved towards the table again.

"Give me the address," said her husband. "I'll go and have a talk with my relations. What sort of a girl's Janey grown up,—eh?"

"If you'll wait a bit, you can see for yourself. She's goin' to call here at twelve."

"Oh, she is? I suppose you've arranged a pleasant little surprise for her? Well, I must say you're a cool hand, Clem. I shouldn't wonder if she's been in the house several times since I've been here?"

"No, she hasn't. It wouldn't have been safe, you see."

"Give me the corkscrew, and I'll open this bottle of whisky. It takes it out of a fellow, this kind of thing. Here's to you, Mrs. Clem! Have a drink? All right; go down-
stairs and show your mother you’re alive still; and let me know when Jane comes. I want to think a bit.”

When he had sat for a quarter of an hour in solitary reflection the door opened, and Clem led into the room a young girl, whose face expressed timid curiosity. Joseph James stood up, joined his hands under his coat-tail, and examined the stranger.

“Do you know who it is?” asked Clem of her companion.

“Your husband,—but I don’t know his name.”

“You ought to, it seems to me,” said Clem, giggling. “Look at him.”

Jane tried to regard the man for a moment. Her cheeks flushed with confusion. Again she looked at him, and the colour rapidly faded. In her eyes was a strange light of painfully struggling recollection. She turned to Clem, and read her countenance with distress.

“Well, I’m quite sure I should never have known you, Janey,” said Snowdon, advancing. “Don’t you remember your father?”
Yes; as soon as consciousness could reconcile what seemed impossibilities Jane had remembered him. She was not seven years old when he forsook her, and a life of anything but orderly progress had told upon his features. Nevertheless Jane recognised the face she had never had cause to love, recognised yet more certainly the voice which carried her back to childhood. But what did it all mean? The shock was making her heart throb as it was wont to do before her fits of illness. She looked about her with dazed eyes.

"Sit down, sit down," said her father, not without a note of genuine feeling. "It's been a bit too much for you,—like something else was for me just now. Put some water in that glass, Clem; a drop of this will do her good."

The smell of what was offered her proved sufficient to restore Jane; she shook her head and put the glass away. After an uncomfortable silence, during which Joseph dragged his feet about the floor, Clem remarked:
"He wants you to take him home to see your grandfather, Jane. There's been reasons why he couldn't go before. Hadn't you better go at once, Jo?"

Jane rose and waited whilst her father assumed his hat and drew on a new pair of gloves. She could not look at either husband or wife. Presently she found herself in the street, walking without consciousness of things in the homeward direction.

"You've grown up a very nice, modest girl, Jane," was her father's first observation. "I can see your grandfather has taken good care of you."

He tried to speak as if the situation were perfectly simple. Jane could find no reply.

"I thought it was better," he continued, in the same matter-of-fact voice, "not to see either of you till this marriage of mine was over. I've had a great deal of trouble in life, —I'll tell you all about it some day, my dear, —and I wanted just to settle myself before— I daresay you'll understand what I mean."
suppose your grandfather has often spoken to you about me?"

"Not very often, father," was the murmured answer.

"Well, well; things'll soon be set right. I feel quite proud of you, Janey; I do, indeed. And I suppose you just keep house for him, eh?"

"I go to work as well."

"What? You go to work? How's that, I wonder?"

"Didn't Miss Peckover tell you?"

Joseph laughed. The girl could not grasp all these astonishing facts at once, and the presence of her father made her forget who Miss Peckover had become.

"You mean my wife, Janey! No, no; she didn't tell me you went to work;—an accident. But I'm delighted you and Clem are such good friends. Kind-hearted girl, isn't she?"

Jane whispered an assent.

"No doubt your grandfather often tells you about Australia, and your uncle that died there?"
“No, he never speaks of Australia. And I never heard of my uncle.”

“Indeed? Ha—hum!”

Joseph continued his examination all the way to Hanover Street, often expressing surprise, but never varying from the tone of affection and geniality. When they reached the door of the house he said:

“Just let me go into the room by myself. I think it’ll be better. He’s alone, isn’t he?”

“Yes. I’ll come up and show you the door.”

She did so, then turned aside into her own room, where she sat motionless for a long time.
CHAPTER V.

THE JOKE IS COMPLETED.

Michael Snowdon—to distinguish the old man by name from the son who thus unexpectedly returned to him—professed no formal religion. He attended no Sunday service, nor had ever shown a wish that Jane should do so. We have seen that he used the Bible as a source of moral instruction; Jane and he still read passages together on a Sunday morning, but only such were chosen as had a purely human significance, and the comments to which they gave occasion never had any but a human bearing. Doubtless Jane reflected on these things; it was her grandfather's purpose to lead her to such reflection, without himself dogmatising on questions which from his own point of view were unimportant. That Jane should possess the re-
ligious spirit was a desire he never lost sight of; the single purpose of his life was involved therein; but formalism was against the bent of his nature. Born and bred amid the indifference of the London working-classes, he was one of the very numerous thinking men who have never needed to cast aside a faith of childhood; from the dawn of rationality, they simply stand apart from all religious dogmas, unable to understand the desire of such helps to conduct, untouched by spiritual trouble—as that phrase is commonly interpreted. And it seemed that Jane closely resembled him in this matter. Sensitive to every prompting of humanity, instinct with moral earnestness, she betrayed no slightest tendency to the religion of church, chapel, or street-corner. A promenade of the Salvation Army half-puzzled, half-amused her; she spoke of it altogether without intolerance, as did her grandfather, but never dreamt that it was a phenomenon which could gravely concern her. Prayers she had never said; enough that her last thought before sleeping was one of kind-
ness to those beings amid whom she lived her life, that on awaking her mind turned most naturally to projects of duty and helpfulness.

Excepting the Bible, Snowdon seldom made use of books either for inquiry or amusement. Very imperfectly educated in his youth, he had never found leisure for enriching his mind in the ordinary way until it was too late; as an old man he had so much occupation in his thoughts that the printed page made little appeal to him. Till quite recently he had been in the habit of walking for several hours daily, always choosing poor districts; now that his bodily powers were sensibly failing him, he passed more and more of his time in profound brooding, so forgetful of external things that Jane, on her return from work, had more than once been troubled by noticing that he had taken no midday meal. It was in unconsciousness such as this that he sat when his son Joseph, receiving no reply to his knock, opened the door and entered; but that his eyes were open, the
posture of his body and the forward drooping of his head would have made it appear that he slept. Joseph stepped towards him, and at length the old man looked up. He gazed at his visitor, first unintelligently, then with wonder and growing emotion.

"Jo?—Jo, at last? You were in my mind only a few minutes ago, but I saw you as a boy."

He rose from the chair and held out both his hands, trembling more than they were wont to do.

"I almost wonder you knew me," said Joseph. "It's seventeen years since we saw each other. It was all Jane could do to remember me."

"Jane? Where have you seen her? At the house in the Close?"

"Yes. It was me she went to see, but she didn't know it. I've just been married to Miss Peckover. Sit down again, father, and let's talk over things quietly."

"Married to Miss Peckover?" repeated the old man, as if making an effort to understand
the words. "Then why didn't you come here before?"

Joseph gave the explanation which he had already devised for the benefit of his daughter. His manner of speaking was meant to be very respectful, but it suggested that he looked upon the hearer as suffering from feebleness of mind, as well as of body. He supplemented his sentences with gestures and smiles, glancing about the room meantime with looks of much curiosity.

"So you've been living here a long time, father? It was uncommonly good of you to take care of my girl. I daresay you've got so used to having her by you, you wouldn't care for her to go away now?"

"Do you wish to take Jane away?" Michael inquired gravely.

"No, no; not I! Why, it's nothing but her duty to keep you company and be what use she can. She's happy enough, that I can see. Well, well; I've gone through a good deal since the old days, father, and I'm not what you used to know me. I'm gladder
than I can say to find you so easy in your old age. Neither Mike nor me did our duty by you, that's only too sure. I wish I could have the time back again; but what's the good of that? Can you tell me anything about Mike?"

"Yes. He died in Australia, about four years ago."

"Did he now? Well, I've been in America, but I never got so far as Australia. So Mike's dead, is he? I hope he had better luck than me."

The old man did not cease from examining his son's countenance.

"What is your position at present?" he asked, after a pause. "You don't look unprosperous."

"Nothing to boast of, father. I've gone through all kinds of trades. In the States I both made and lost money. I invented a new method of nickel-plating, but it did me no good, and then I gave up that line altogether. Since I've been back in England,—two years about,—I've mostly gone in for canvassing,
advertising agencies, and that kind of thing. I make an honest living, and that’s about all. But I shouldn’t wonder if things go a bit better now; I feel as if I was settled at last. What with having a home of my own, and you and Janey near at hand—— You won’t mind if I come and see you both now and then?"

"I shall hope to see you often," replied the other, still keeping his grave face and tone. "It’s been my strong desire that we might come together again, and I’ve done the best I could to find you. But, as you said, we’ve been parted for a very long time, and it isn’t in a day that we can come to understand each other. These seventeen years have made an old man of me, Jo; I think and speak and act slowly:—better for us all if I had learned to do so long ago! Your coming was unexpected; I shall need a little time to get used to the change it makes."

"To be sure; that’s true enough. Plenty of time to talk over things. As far as I’m concerned, father, the less said about bygones
the better; it's the future that I care about now. I want to put things right between us,—as they ought to be between father and son. You understand me, I hope?"

Michael nodded, keeping his eyes upon the ground. Again there was a silence, then Joseph said that if Jane would come in and speak a few words,—so as to make things home-like,—it would be time for him to take his leave for the present. At her grandfather's summons, Jane entered the room. She was still oppressed by the strangeness of her position, and with difficulty took part in the colloquy. Joseph, still touching the note of humility in his talk, eyed his relatives alternately, and exhibited reluctance to quit them.

When he returned to the Close, it was with a face expressing dissatisfaction. Clem's eager inquiries he met at first with an ill-tempered phrase or two, which informed her of nothing; but when dinner was over he allowed himself to be drawn into a confidential talk, in which Mrs. Peckover took part. The old man, he remarked, was devilish
close; it looked as if "some game was on." Mrs. Peckover ridiculed this remark; of course there was a game on; she spoke of Sidney Kirkwood, the influence he had obtained over Snowdon, the designs he was obviously pursuing. If Joseph thought he would recover his rights, at this time of day, save by direct measures, it only proved how needful it was for him to be instructed by shrewd people. The old man was a hard nut to crack; why he lived in Hanover Street, and sent Jane to work, when it was certain that he had wealth at command, Mrs. Peckover could not pretend to explain, but in all probability he found a pleasure in accumulating money, and was abetted therein by Sidney Kirkwood. Clem could bear witness that Jane always seemed to have secrets to hide; nevertheless a good deal of information had been extracted from the girl during the last year or so, and it all went to confirm the views which Mrs. Peckover now put forth. After long discussion, it was resolved that Joseph should call upon the lawyers whose
names had appeared in the advertisement addressed to himself. If he was met with any shuffling, or if they merely referred him to his father, the next step would be plain enough.

Clem began to exhibit sullenness; her words were few, and it was fortunate for Joseph that he could oppose a philosophical indifference to the trouble with which his honeymoon was threatened. As early as possible on Monday morning he ascended the stairs of a building in Furnival's Inn and discovered the office of Messrs. Percival and Peel. He was hesitating whether to knock or simply turn the handle, when a man came up to the same door, with the quick step of one at home in the place.

"Business with us?" inquired the newcomer, as Joseph drew back.

They looked at each other. He who had spoken was comparatively a young man, dressed with much propriety, gravely polite in manner.

"Ha! How do you do?" exclaimed Snow-
don, with embarrassment, and in an undertone. "I wasn't expecting"—

The recognition was mutual, and whilst Joseph, though disconcerted, expressed his feelings in a familiar smile, the other cast a quick glance of uneasiness towards the stairs, his mouth compressed, his eyebrows twitching a little.

"Business with Mr. Percival?" he inquired confidentially, but without Joseph’s familiar accentuation.

"Yes. That is—— Is he here?"

"Won’t be for another hour. Anything I could see about for you?"

Joseph moved in uncertainty, debating with himself. Their eyes met again.

"Well, we might have a word or two about it," he said. "Better meet somewhere else, perhaps?"

"Could you be at the top of Chancery Lane at six o’clock?"

With a look of mutual understanding, they parted. Joseph went home, and explained that, to his surprise, he had found an
old acquaintance at the lawyer's office, a man named Scawthorne, whom he was going to see in private before having an interview with the lawyer himself. At six o'clock the appointed meeting took place, and from Chancery Lane the pair walked to a quiet house of refreshment in the vicinity of Lincoln's Inn Fields. On the way they exchanged a few insignificant remarks, having reference to a former intimacy and a period during which they had not come across each other. Established in a semi-private room, with a modest stimulant to aid conversation, they became more at ease; Mr. Scawthorne allowed himself a discreet smile, and Joseph, fingerling his glass, broached the matter at issue with a cautious question.

"Do you know anything of a man called Snowdon?"

"What Snowdon?"

"Joseph James Snowdon,—a friend of mine. Your people advertised for him about three years ago. Perhaps you haven't been at the office as long as that?"
“Oh yes. I remember the name. What about him?”

“Your people wanted to find him,—something to his advantage. Do you happen to know whether it’s any use his coming forward now?”

Mr. Scawthorne was not distinguished by directness of gaze. He had handsome features and a not unpleasant cast of countenance, but something, possibly the habit of professional prudence, made his regard coldly, fitfully, absently observant. It was markedly so as he turned his face towards Joseph whilst the latter was speaking. After a moment’s silence he remarked, without emphasis:

“A relative of yours, you said?”

“No, I said a friend—intimate friend. Polkenhorne knows him too.”

“Does he? I haven’t seen Polkenhorne for a long time.”

“You don’t care to talk about the business? Perhaps you’d better introduce me to Mr. Percival.”

“By the name of Camden?”
"Hang it! I may as well tell you at once. Snowdon is my own name."

"Indeed? And how am I to be sure of that?"

"Come and see me where I'm living, in Clerkenwell Close, and then make inquiries of my father, in Hanover Street, Islington. There's no reason now for keeping up the old name,—a little affair,—all put right. But the fact is, I'd as soon find out what this business is with your office without my father knowing. I have reasons; shouldn't mind talking them over with you, if you can give me the information I want."

"I can do that," replied Scawthorne with a smile. "If you are J. J. Snowdon, you are requested to communicate with Michael Snowdon,—that's all."

"Oh! but I have communicated with him, and he's nothing particular to say to me, as far as I can see."

Scawthorne sipped at his glass, gave a stroke to each side of his moustache, and seemed to reflect.
"You were coming to ask Mr. Percival privately for information?"

"That's just it. Of course if you can't give me any, I must see him to-morrow."

"He won't tell you anything more than I have."

"And you don't know anything more?"

"I didn't say that, my dear fellow. Suppose you begin by telling me a little more about yourself?"

It was a matter of time, but at length the dialogue took another character. The glasses of stimulant were renewed, and as Joseph grew expansive Scawthorne laid aside something of his professional reserve, without, however, losing the discretion which led him to subdue his voice and express himself in uncompromising phrases. Their sitting lasted about an hour, and before taking leave of each other they arranged for a meeting at a different place in the course of a few days.

Joseph walked homewards with deliberation, in absent mood, his countenance alternating strangely between a look of mischievous
jocoseness and irritable concern; occasionally he muttered to himself. Just before reaching the Close he turned into a public-house; when he came forth the malicious smile was on his face, and he walked with the air of a man who has business of moment before him. He admitted himself to the house.

"That you, Jo?" cried Clem's voice from upstairs.

"Me, sure enough," was the reply, with a chuckle.

"Come up sharp, then."

Humming a tune, Joseph ascended to the sitting-room on the first floor, and threw himself on a seat. His wife stood just in front of him, her sturdy arms akimbo; her look was fiercely expectant, answering in some degree to the smile with which he looked here and there.

"Well, can't you speak?"

"No hurry, Mrs. Clem; no hurry, my dear. It's all right. The old man's rolling in money."

"And what about your share?"
Joseph laughed obstreperously, his wife's brow lowering the while.

"Just tell me, can't you?" she cried.

"Of course I will. The best joke you ever heard. You had yours yesterday, Mrs. Clem; my turn comes to-day. My share is—just nothing at all. Not a penny! Not a cent! Swallow that, old girl, and tell me how it tastes."

"You're a liar!" shouted the other, her face flushing scarlet, her eyes aflame with rage.

"Never told a lie in my life," replied her husband, still laughing noisily. But for that last glass of cordial on the way home he could scarcely have enjoyed so thoroughly the dramatic flavour of the situation. Joseph was neither a bully nor a man of courage; the joke with which he was delighting himself was certainly a rich one, but it had its element of danger, and only by abandoning himself to riotous mirth could he overcome the nervousness with which Clem's fury threatened to affect him. She, coming forward in the atti-
tude of an enraged fishwife, for a few moments made the room ring with foul abuse, that vituperative vernacular of the nether world, which has never yet been exhibited by typography, and presumably never will be.

"Go it, Clem!" cried her husband, pushing his chair a little back. "Go it, my angel! When you've eased your mind a little, I'll explain how it happens."

She became silent, glaring at him with murderous eyes. But just at that moment Mrs. Peckover put her head in at the door, inquiring "What's up?"

"Come in, if you want to know," cried her daughter. "See what you've let me in for! Didn't I tell you as it might be all a mistake? Oh yes, you may look!"

Mrs. Peckover was startled; her small cunning eyes went rapidly from Clem to Joseph, and she fixed the latter with a gaze of angry suspicion.

"Got a bit of news for you, mother," resumed Joseph, nodding. "You and Clem were precious artful, weren't you now? It's
my turn now. Thought I'd got money—ha, ha!"

"And so you have," replied Mrs. Peckover. "We know all about it, so you needn't try your little game."

"Know all about it, do you? Well, see here. My brother Mike died out in Australia, and his son died at the same time,—they was drowned. Mike left no will, and his wife was dead before him. What's the law, eh? Pity you didn't make sure of that. Why, all his money went to the old man, every cent of it. I've no claim on a penny. That's the law, my pretty dears!"

"He's a — liar!" roared Clem, who at the best of times would have brought small understanding to a legal question. "What did my brother say in his letter?"

"He was told wrong, that's all, or else he got the idea out of his own head."

"Then why did they advertise for you?" inquired Mrs. Peckover, keeping perfect command of her temper.

"The old man thought he'd like to find
his son again, that's all. Ha, ha! Why can't you take it good-humoured, Clem? You had your joke yesterday, and you can't say I cut up rough about it. I'm a good-natured fellow, I am. There's many a man would have broke every bone in your body, my angel, you just remember that!"

It rather seemed as if the merry proceeding would in this case be reversed; Joseph had risen, and was prepared to defend himself from an onslaught. But Mrs. Peckover came between the newly-wedded pair, and by degrees induced Clem to take a calmer view of the situation, or at all events to postpone her vengeance. It was absurd, she argued, to act as if the matter were hopeless. Michael Snowdon would certainly leave Joseph money in his will, if only the right steps were taken to secure his favour. Instead of quarrelling, they must put their heads together and scheme. She had her ideas; let them listen to her.

"Clem, you go and get a pot of old six for supper, and don't be such a —— fool," was her final remark.
CHAPTER VI.

A RETREAT.

Visiting his friends as usual on Sunday evening, Sidney Kirkwood felt, before he had been many minutes in the room, that something unwonted was troubling the quiet he always found here. Michael Snowdon was unlike himself, nervously inattentive, moving frequently, indisposed to converse on any subject. Neither had Jane her accustomed brightness, and the frequent glances she cast at her grandfather seemed to show that the latter's condition was causing her anxiety. She withdrew very early, and, as at once appeared, in order that Sidney might hear in private what had that day happened. The story of Clem Peckover's marriage naturally occasioned no little astonishment in Sidney.
"And how will all this affect Jane?" he asked involuntarily.

"That is what I cannot tell," replied Michael. "It troubles me. My son is a stranger; all these years have made him quite a different man from what I remember; and the worst is, I can no longer trust myself to judge him. Yet I must know the truth;—Sidney, I must know the truth. It's hard to speak ill of the only son left to me out of the four I once had, but if I think of him as he was seventeen years ago—no, no, he must have changed as he has grown older. But you must help me to know him, Sidney."

And in a very few days Sidney had his first opportunity of observing Jane's father. At this meeting Joseph seemed to desire nothing so much as to recommend himself by an amiable bearing. Impossible to speak with more engaging frankness than he did whilst strolling away from Hanover Street in Sidney's company. Thereafter the two saw a great deal of each other. Joseph was soon a familiar visitor in Tysoe Street; he would come about
nine o'clock of an evening and sit till after midnight. The staple of his talk was at first
the painfully unnatural relations existing between his father, his daughter, and himself.
He had led a most unsatisfactory life; he owned it, deplored it. That the old man
should distrust him was but natural; but would not Sidney, as a common friend, do his best
to dispel this prejudice? On the subject of his brother Mike he kept absolute silence.
The accident of meeting an intimate acquaintance at the office of Messrs. Percival & Peel
had rendered it possible for him to pursue his inquiries in that direction without it becom-
ing known to Michael Snowdon that he had done anything of the kind; and the policy he
elaborated for himself demanded the appearance of absolute disinterestedness in all his
dealings with his father. Aided by the shrewd Mrs. Peckover, he succeeded in reconciling
Clem to a present disappointment, bitter as it was, by pointing out that there was every
chance of his profiting largely upon the old man's death, which could not be a very
remote contingency. At present there was little that could be done save to curry favour in Hanover Street, and keep an eye on what went forward between Kirkwood and Jane. This latter was, of course, an issue of supreme importance. A very little observation convinced Joseph that his daughter had learned to regard Sidney as more than a friend; whether there existed any mutual understanding between them he could only discover by direct inquiry, and for the present it seemed wiser to make no reference to the subject. He preserved the attitude of one who has forfeited his natural rights, and only seeks with humility the chance of proving that he is a reformed character. Was, or was not, Kirkwood aware of the old man's wealth? That too must be left uncertain, though it was more than probable he had seen the advertisement in the newspapers, and, like Mrs. Peckover, had based conclusions thereupon. Another possibility was, that Kirkwood had wormed himself into Michael's complete confidence. From Joseph's point of view, subtle machinations were natu-
rally attributed to the young man,—whose appearance proved him anything but a commonplace person. The situation was full of obscurities and dangers. From Scawthorne Joseph received an assurance that the whole of the Australian property had been capitalised and placed in English investments; also, that the income was regularly drawn and in some way disposed off; the manner of such disposal being kept private between old Mr. Percival and his client.

In the meantime family discussions in the Close had brought to Joseph’s knowledge a circumstance regarding Kirkwood which interested him in a high degree. When talking of Sidney’s character, it was natural that the Peckovers should relate the story of his relations with Clara Hewett.

"Clara?" exclaimed Mr. Snowdon, as if struck by the name. "Disappeared, has she? What sort of a girl to look at?"

Clem was ready with a malicious description, whereto her husband attended very carefully. He mused over it, and proceeded to.
make inquiries about Clara’s family. The Hewetts were now living in another part of Clerkenwell, but there was no hostility between them and the Peckovers. Was anything to be gained by keeping up intimacy with them? Joseph, after further musing, decided that it would be just as well to do so; suppose Clem called upon them and presented the husband of whom she was so proud? He would like, if possible, to hear a little more about their daughter; an idea he had—never mind exactly what. So this call was paid, and in a few weeks Joseph had established an acquaintance with John Hewett.

Sidney, on his part, had a difficulty in coming to definite conclusions respecting Jane’s father. Of course he was prejudiced against the man, and though himself too little acquainted with the facts of the case to distinguish Joseph’s motives, he felt that the middle-aged prodigal’s return was anything but a fortunate event for Michael and his granddaughter. The secret marriage with Clem was not likely, in any case, to have a
responsible significance. True, there were not lacking grounds for hesitation in refusing to accept Joseph's account of himself. He had a fund of natural amiability; he had a good provision of intellect; his talk was at times very persuasive and much like that of one who has been brought to a passable degree of honesty by the slow development of his better instincts. But his face was against him; the worn, sallow features, the eyes which so obviously made a struggle to look with frankness, the vicious lower lip, awoke suspicion and told tales of base experience such as leaves its stamp upon a man for ever. All the more repugnant was this face to Sidney because it presented, in certain aspects, an undeniable resemblance to Jane's; impossible to say which feature put forth this claim of kindred, but the impression was there, and it made Sidney turn away his eyes in disgust as often as he perceived it. He strove, however, to behave with friendliness, for it was Michael's desire that he should do so. That Joseph was using every opportunity
of prying into his thoughts, of learning the details of his history, he soon became perfectly conscious; but he knew of nothing that he need conceal.

It was impossible that Sidney should not have reflected many a time on Michael Snowdon's position, and have been moved to curiosity by hints of the mysterious when he thought of his friends in Hanover Street. As it happened, he never saw those newspaper advertisements addressed to Joseph, and his speculation had nothing whatever to support it save the very few allusions to the past which Michael had permitted himself in the course of talk. Plainly the old man had means sufficient for his support, and in all likelihood this independence was connected with his visit to Australia; but no act or word of Michael's had ever suggested that he possessed more than a very modest competency. It was not, indeed, the circumstances, so much as the character and views, of his friend that set Kirkwood pondering. He did not yet know Michael Snowdon; of that he was
convinced. He had not fathomed his mind, got at the prime motive of his being. Moreover, he felt that the old man was waiting for some moment, or some event, to make revelation of himself. Since Joseph's appearance, it had become more noticeable than ever that Snowdon suffered from some agitation of the mind; Sidney had met his eyes fixed upon him in a painful interrogation, and seemed to discern the importunity of a desire that was refused utterance. His own condition was affected by sympathy with this restlessness, and he could not overcome the feeling that some decisive change was at hand for him. Though nothing positive justified the idea, he began to connect this anticipation of change with the holiday that was approaching, the week to be spent in Essex at the end of July. It had been his fear that Joseph's presence might affect these arrangements, but Michael was evidently resolved to allow nothing of the kind. One evening, a fortnight before the day agreed upon for leaving town, and when Joseph had made a call in
Hanover Street, the old man took occasion to speak of the matter. Joseph accepted the information with his usual pliancy.

"I only wish my wife and me could join you," he remarked. "But it wouldn't do to take a holiday so soon after settling to business. Better luck for me next year, father, let's hope."

That he had settled to business was a fact of which Joseph made so much just now that one would have been tempted to suppose it almost a new experience for him. His engagement, he declared, was with a firm of advertising agents in the City; nothing to boast of, unfortunately, and remunerative only in the way of commission; but he saw his way to better things.

"Jane, my girl," he continued, averting his eyes as if in emotion, "I don't know how you and me are going to show our gratitude for all this kindness, I'm sure. I hope you haven't got so used to it that you think there's no need to thank your grandfather?"

The girl and the old man exchanged a
look. Joseph sighed, and began to speak of another subject in a tone of cheery martyrdom.

Jane herself had not been quite so joyous as was her wont since the occurrence that caused her to take a new view of her position in the world. She understood that her grandfather regarded the change very gravely, and in her own heart awoke all manner of tremulous apprehensions when she tried to look onward a little to the uncertainties of the future. Forecasts had not hitherto troubled her; the present was so rich in satisfactions that she could follow the bent of her nature and live with no anxiety concerning the unknown. It was a great relief to her to be assured that the long-standing plans for the holiday would suffer no change. The last week was a time of impatience, resolutely suppressed. On the Saturday afternoon Sidney was to meet them at Liverpool Street. Would anything happen these last few days, —this last day,—this last hour? No; all three stood together on the platform, and their holiday had already begun.
Over the pest-stricken regions of East London, sweltering in sunshine which served only to reveal the intimacies of abomination; across miles of a city of the damned, such as thought never conceived before this age of ours; above streets swarming with a nameless populace, cruelly exposed by the unwonted light of heaven; stopping at stations which it crushes the heart to think should be the destination of any mortal; the train made its way at length beyond the outmost limits of dread, and entered upon a land of level meadows, of hedges and trees, of crops and cattle. Michael Snowdon was anxious that Jane should not regard with the carelessness of familiarity those desolate tracts from which they were escaping. In Bethnal Green he directed her attention with a whispered word to the view from each window, and Jane had learnt well to understand him. But, the lesson over, it was none of his purpose to spoil her natural mood of holiday. Sidney sat opposite her, and as often as their eyes met a smile of contentment answered on either's face.
They alighted at Chelmsford, and were met by the farmer in whose house they were going to lodge, a stolid, good-natured fellow named Pammenter, with red, leathery cheeks, and a corkscrew curl of black hair coming forward on each temple. His trap was waiting, and in a few minutes they started on the drive to Danbury. The distance is about five miles, and, until Danbury Hill is reached, the countryside has no point of interest to distinguish it from any other representative bit of rural Essex. It is merely one of those quiet corners of flat, homely England, where man and beast seem on good terms with each other, where all green things grow in abundance, where from old tilth and pasture-land are humbly observant of seasons and alternations, where the brown roads are familiar only with the tread of the labourer, with the light wheel of the farmer’s gig, or the rumbling of the solid wain. By the roadside you pass occasionally a mantled pool, where perchance ducks or geese are enjoying themselves; and at times
there is a pleasant glimpse of farm-yard, with stacks and barns and stables. All things as simple as could be, but beautiful on this summer afternoon, and priceless when one has come forth from the streets of Clerkenwell.

Farmer Pammenter was talkative, and his honest chest-voice sounded pleasantly; but the matter of his discourse might have been more cheerful. Here, as elsewhere, the evil of the times was pressing upon men and disheartening them from labour. Farms lying barren, ill-will between proprietor and tenant, between tenant and hind, departure of the tillers of the soil to rot in towns that have no need of them,—of such things did honest Pammenter speak, with many a sturdy mal- diction of landlords and land-laws, whereat Sidney smiled, not unsympathetic.

Danbury Hill, rising thick-wooded to the village church, which is visible for miles around, with stretches of heath about its lower slopes, with its far prospects over the sunny country, was the pleasant end of a pleasant drive. Mrs. Pammenter and her
children (seven of them, unhappily) gave the party a rough, warm-hearted welcome. Ha! how good it was to smell the rooms through which the pure air breathed freely! All the front of the house was draped with purple clematis; in the garden were sunflowers and hollyhocks and lowly plants innumerable; on the red and lichenized tiles pigeons were cooing themselves into a doze; the horse's hoofs rang with a pleasant clearness on the stones as he was led to his cool stable. Her heart throbbing with excess of delight, Jane pushed back the diamond-paned casement of her bedroom, the same room she had occupied last year and the year before, and buried her face in clematis. Then the tea that Mrs. Pammenter had made ready;—how delicious everything tasted! how white the cloth was! how fragrant the cut flowers in the brown jug!

But Michael had found the journey a greater tax upon his strength than he anticipated. Whilst Sidney and Jane talked merrily over the tea-table the old man was thinking,
"Another year they will come without me," and he smiled just to hide his thoughts. In the evening he smoked his pipe on a garden-seat, for the most part silent, and at sunset he was glad to go up to his chamber.

Jane was renewing her friendship with the Pammenters' eldest girl, an apple-cheeked, red-haired, ungraceful, but good-natured lass of sixteen. Their voices sounded from all parts of the garden and the farm-yard, Jane's clear-throated laugh contrasting with the rougher utterance of her companion. After supper, in the falling of the dusk, Sidney strolled away from the gossiping circle within-doors, and found a corner of the garden whence there was a view of wooded hillside against the late glow of the heavens. Presently he heard footsteps, and through the leafage of a tree that shadowed him he saw Jane looking this way and that, as if she sought some one. Her dress was a light calico, and she held in her hand a rough garden-hat, the property of Miss Pammenter. Sidney regarded her for some moments, then called her by name.
She could not see him at first, and looked about anxiously. He moved a branch of the tree and again called her; whereupon she ran forward.

"I thought perhaps you'd gone up the hill," she said, resting her arms on the wall by which he was standing.

Then they kept silence, enjoying the sweetness of the hour. Differently, it is true; for Kirkwood's natural sensitiveness had been developed and refined by studies of which Jane had no conception. Imperfect as his instruction remained, the sources of spiritual enjoyment were open to him, and with all his feeling there blended that reflective bitterness which is the sad privilege of such as he. Jane's delight was as simple as the language in which she was wont to express herself. She felt infinitely more than Pennyloaf, for instance, would have done under the circumstances; but her joy consisted, in the main, of a satisfaction of pure instincts and a deep sense of gratitude to those who made her life what it was. She could as little have under-
stood Sidney's mind at this moment as she could have given an analytic account of her own sensations. For all that, the two were in profound sympathy; how different soever the ways in which they were affected, the result, as they stood side by side, was identical in the hearts of both.

Sidney began to speak of Michael Snowden, keeping his voice low, as if in fear of breaking those subtle harmonies wherewith the night descended.

"We must be careful not to over-tire him. He looked very pale when he went upstairs. I've thought lately that he must suffer more than he tells us."

"Yes, I'm afraid he often does," Jane assented, as if relieved to speak of it. "Yet he always says it's nothing to trouble about, nothing but what is natural at his age. He's altered a great deal since father came," she added, regarding him diffidently.

"I hope it isn't because he thinks your father may be wanting to take you away?"

"Oh, it can't be that! Oh, he knows I
wouldn’t leave him! Mr. Kirkwood, you don’t think my father will give us any trouble?"

She revealed an anxiety which delicacy of feeling had hitherto prevented her expressing. Sidney at once spoke reassuringly, though he had in fact no little suspicion of Joseph Snowdon’s tactics.

“‘It’s my grandfather that I ought to think most of,’” pursued Jane earnestly. “‘I can’t feel to my father as I do to him. What should I have been now if’”—

Something caused her to leave the speech unfinished, and for a few moments there was silence. From the ground exhaled a sweet fresh odour, soothing to the senses, and at times a breath of air brought subtler perfume from the alleys of the garden. In the branches above them rustled a bird’s wing. At a distance on the country road sounded the trotting of a horse.

“‘I feel ashamed and angry with myself,’” said Sidney, in a tone of emotion, “‘when I think now of those times. I might have
done something, Jane. I had no right to know what you were suffering and just go by as if it didn't matter!"

"Oh, but you didn't!" came eagerly from the girl's lips. "You've forgotten, but I can't. You were very kind to me,—you helped me more than you can think,—you never saw me without speaking kindly. Don't you remember that night when I came to fetch you from the workshop, and you took off your coat and put it over me, because it was cold and raining?"

"Jane, what a long, long time ago that seems!"

"As long as I live I shall never forget it—never! You were the only friend I had then."

"No; there was some one else who took thought for you," said Sidney, regarding her gravely.

Jane met his look for an instant,—they could just read each other's features in the pale light,—then dropped her eyes.

"I don't think you've forgotten that either," he added, in the same unusual voice.
"No," said Jane, below her breath.
"Say who it is I mean."
"You mean Miss Hewett," was the reply, after a troubled moment.
"I wanted you to say her name. You remember one evening not long ago, when your grandfather was away? I had the same wish then. Why shouldn't we speak of her? She was a friend to you when you needed one badly, and it's right that you should remember her with gratitude. I think of her just like we do of people that are dead."

Jane stood with one hand on the low wall, half-turned to him, but her face bent downwards. Regarding her for what seemed a long time, Sidney felt as though the fragrance of the earth and the flowers were mingling with his blood and confusing him with emotions. At the same time his tongue was paralysed. Frequently of late he had known a timidity in Jane's presence, which prevented him from meeting her eyes, and now this tremor came upon him with painful intensity. He knew to what his last
words had tended; it was with consciousness of a distinct purpose that he had led the conversation to Clara; but now he was powerless to speak the words his heart prompted. Of a sudden he experienced a kind of shame, the result of comparison between himself and the simple girl who stood before him; she was so young, and the memory of passions from which he had suffered years ago affected him with a sense of worthlessness, almost of impurity. Jane had come to be his ideal of maidenhood, but till this moment he had not understood the full significance of the feeling with which he regarded her. He could not transform with a word their relations to each other. The temptation of the hour had hurried him towards an end which he must approach with more thought, more preparation of himself.

It was scarcely for ten heart-beats. Then Jane raised her eyes and said in a voice that trembled:

"I've often wished I could see her again, and thank her for her kindness that night."

"That will help me to think with less
pain of things that are long since over and
done with,” Sidney replied, forcing himself
to speak firmly. “We can’t alter the past,
Jane, but we can try to remember only the
best part of it. You, I hope, very seldom
look back at all.”
“Grandfather wishes me never to forget
it. He often says that.”
“Does he? I think I understand.”
Jane drew down a branch and laid the
broad cool leaves against her cheek; releasing
it, she moved in the direction of the house.
Her companion followed with slow step, his
head bent. Before they came to the door
Jane drew his attention to a bat that was
sweeping duskily above their heads; she
began to speak with her wonted cheerfulness.
“How I should like Pennyloaf to be here!
I wonder what she’d think of it?”
At the door they bade each other good-
night. Sidney took yet a few turns in the
garden before entering. But that it would
have seemed to the Pammenters a crazy pro-
ceeding, he would have gladly struck away
over the fields and walked for hours.
CHAPTER VII.

A VISION OF NOBLE THINGS.

He slept but for an hour or two, and even then with such disturbance of fitful dreams that he could not be said to rest. At the earliest sound of movements in the house he rose and went out into the morning air. There had fallen a heavy shower just after sunrise, and the glory of the east was still partly veiled with uncertain clouds. Heedless of weather-signs, Sidney strode away at a great pace, urged by his ungovernable thoughts. His state was that miserable one in which a man repeats for the thousandth time something he has said, and torments himself with devising possible and impossible interpretations thereof. Through the night he had done nothing but imagine what significance Jane might have attached to his words
about Clara Hewett. Why had he spoken of Clara at all? One moment he understood his reasons, and approved them; the next he was at a loss to account for such needless revival of a miserable story. How had Jane interpreted him? And was it right or wrong to have paused when on the point of confessing that he loved her?

Rain caught him at a distance from home, and he returned to breakfast in rather a cheerless plight. He found that Michael was not feeling quite himself, and would not rise till midday. Jane had a look of anxiety, and he fancied she behaved to him with a constraint hitherto unknown. The fancy was dispelled, however, when, later in the morning, she persuaded him to bring out his sketch-book, and suggested points of view for a drawing of the farm that had been promised to Mr. Pamentier. Himself unable to recover the tone of calm intimacy which till yesterday had been natural between them, Sidney found himself studying the girl, seeking to surprise some proof that she too was no longer the
same, and only affected this unconsciousness of change. There was, perhaps, a little less readiness in her eyes to meet his, but she talked as naturally as ever, and the spontaneousness of her good-humour was assuredly not feigned.

On Monday the farmer had business in Maldon. Occasionally when he drove over to that town he took one or other of his children with him to visit a relative, and today he proposed that Jane should be of the party. They started after an early dinner. Michael and Sidney stood together in the road, watching the vehicle as it rolled away; then they walked in silence to a familiar spot where they could sit in shadow. Sidney was glad of Jane's departure for the afternoon. He found it impossible to escape the restlessness into which he had fallen, and was resolved to seek relief by opening his mind to the old man. There could be little doubt that Michael already understood his thoughts, and no better opportunity for such a conversation was likely to present itself. When they
had been seated for a minute or two, neither speaking, Sidney turned to his companion with a grave look. At the same instant Michael also had raised his eyes and seemed on the point of saying something of importance. They regarded each other. The old man's face was set in an expression of profound feeling, and his lips moved tremulously before words rose to them.

"What were you going to say, Sidney?" he asked, reading the other's features.

"Something which I hope won't be displeasing to you. I was going to speak of Jane. Since she has been living with you she has grown from a child to a woman. When I was talking with her in the garden on Saturday night I felt this change more distinctly than I had ever done before. I understood that it had made a change in myself. I love her, Mr. Snowdon, and it's my dearest hope that she may come to feel the same for me."

Michael was more agitated than the speaker; he raised a hand to his forehead and closed his eyes as if the light pained them. But the
smile with which he speedily answered Sidney's look of trouble was full of reassurance.

"You couldn't have said anything that would give me more pleasure," he replied, just above his breath. "Does she know it? Did you speak to her?"

"We were talking of years ago, and I mentioned Clara Hewett. I said that I had forgotten all about her except that she'd befriended Jane. But nothing more than that. I couldn't say what I was feeling just then. Partly I thought that it was right to speak to you first; and then—it seemed to me almost as if I should be treating her unfairly. I'm so much older,—she knows that it isn't the first time I,—and she's always thought of me just as a friend."

"So much older?" repeated Michael, with a grave smile. "Why, you're both children to my sight. Wait and let me think a bit, Sidney. I too have something I want to say. I'm glad you've spoken this afternoon, when there's time for us to talk. Just wait a few minutes, and let me think."
Sidney had as good as forgotten that there was anything unusual in his friend's circumstances; this last day or two he had thought of nothing but Jane and his love for her. Now he recalled the anticipation—originating he scarcely knew how—that some kind of disclosure would before long be made to him. The trouble of his mind was heightened; he waited with all but dread for the next words.

"I think I've told you," Michael resumed at length, steadying his voice, "that Joseph is my youngest son, and that I had three others. Three others: Michael, Edward, and Robert,—all dead. Edward died when he was a boy of fifteen; Robert was killed on the railway—he was a porter—at three-and-twenty. The eldest went out to Australia; he took a wife there, and had one child; the wife died when they'd been married a year or two, and Michael and his boy were drowned, both together. I was living with them at the time, as you know. But what I've never spoken of, Sidney, is that my son had made his fortune. He left a deal of land, and many thousands of
pounds, behind him. There was no finding any will; a lawyer in the nearest town, a man that had known him a long time, said he felt sure there'd been no will made. So, as things were, the law gave everything to his father."

He related it with subdued voice, in a solemn and agitated tone. The effect of the news upon Sidney was a painful constriction of the heart, a rush of confused thought, an involvement of all his perceptions in a sense of fear. The pallor of his cheeks and the pained parting of his lips bore witness to how little he was prepared for such a story.

"I've begun with what ought by rights to have come last," pursued Michael, after drawing a deep sigh, "But it does me good to get it told; it's been burdening me this long while. Now you must listen, Sidney, whilst I show you why I've kept this a secret. I've no fear but you'll understand me, though most people wouldn't. It's a secret from everybody except a lawyer in London, who does business for me; a right-hearted man
he is, in most things, and I'm glad I met with him, but he doesn't understand me as you will; he thinks I'm making a mistake. My son knows nothing about it: at least, it's my hope and belief he doesn't. He told me he hadn't heard of his brother's death. I say I hope he doesn't know; it isn't selfishness, that; I needn't tell you. I've never for a minute thought of myself as a rich man, Sidney; I've never thought of the money as my own, never; and if Joseph proves himself honest, I'm ready to give up to him the share of his brother's property that it seems to me ought to be rightly his, though the law for some reason looks at it in a different way. I'm ready, but I must know that he's an honest man; I must prove him first."

The eagerness of his thought impelled him to repetitions and emphasis. His voice fell upon a note of feebleness, and with an effort he recovered the tone in which he had begun.

"As soon as I knew that all this wealth had fallen to me, I decided at once to come back to England. What could I do out
there? I decided to come to England, but I couldn’t see further ahead than that. I sold all the land; I had the business done for me by that lawyer I spoke of, that had known my son, and he recommended me to a Mr. Percival in London. I came back, and I found little Jane, and then bit by bit I began to understand what my duty was. It got clear in my mind; I formed a purpose, a plan, and it’s as strong in me now as ever. Let me think again for a little, Sidney. I want to make it as plain to you as it is to me. You’ll understand me best if I go back and tell you more than I have done yet about my life before I left England. Let me think a while.”

He was overcome with a fear that he might not be able to convey with sufficient force the design which had wholly possessed him. So painful was the struggle in him between enthusiasm and a consciousness of failing faculties, that Sidney grasped his hand and begged him to speak simply, without effort.
"Have no fear about my understanding you. We've talked a great deal together, and I know very well what your strongest motives are. Trust me to sympathise with you."

"I do! If I hadn't that trust, Sidney, I couldn't have felt the joy I did when you spoke to me of my Jane. You'll help me to carry out my plan; you and Jane will; you and Jane! I've got to be such an old man all at once, as it seems, and I dursn't have waited much longer without telling you what I had in my mind. See now, I'll go back to when I was a boy, as far back as I can remember. You know I was born in Clerk-enwell, and I've told you a little now and then of the hard times I went through. My poor father and mother came out of the country, thinking to better themselves; instead of that, they found nothing but cold and hunger, and toil and moil. They were both dead by when I was between thirteen and fourteen. They died in the same winter,—a cruel winter. I used to go about begging bits of firewood from the neighbours.
There was a man in our house who kept dogs, and I remember once catching hold of a bit of dirty meat—I can't call it meat—that one of them had gnawed and left on the stairs; and I ate it, as if I'd been a dog myself, I was that driven with hunger. Why, I feel the cold and the hunger at this minute! It was a cruel winter, that, and it left me alone. I had to get my own living as best I could.

"No teaching. I was nineteen before I could read the signs over shops, or write my own name. Between nineteen and twenty I got all the education I ever was to have, paying a man with what I could save out of my earnings. The blessing was I had health and strength, and with hard struggling I got into a regular employment. At five-and-twenty I could earn my pound a week, pretty certain. When it got to five shillings more, I must needs have a wife to share it with me. My poor girl came to live with me in a room in Hill Street.

"I've never spoken to you of her, but you
shall hear it all now, cost me what it may in the telling. Of course she was out of a poor home, and she'd known as well as me what it was to go cold and hungry. I sometimes think, Sidney, I can see a look of her in Jane's face,—but she was prettier than Jane; yes, yes, prettier than Jane. And to think a man could treat a poor little thing like her in the way I did!—you don't know what sort of a man Michael Snowdon was then; no, you don't know what I was then. You're not to think I ill-used her in the common way; I never raised my hand, thank God! and I never spoke a word a man should be ashamed of. But I was a hard, self-willed, stubborn fool! How she came to like me and to marry me I don't know; we were so different in every way. Well, it was partly my nature and partly what I'd gone through; we hadn't been married more than a month or two when I began to find fault with her, and from that day on she could never please me. I earned five-and-twenty shillings a week, and I'd made up my mind that we must save out of it.
I wouldn't let her work; no, what she had to do was to keep the home on as little as possible, and always have everything clean and straight when I got back at night. But Jenny hadn't the same ideas about things as I had. She couldn't pinch and pare, and our plans of saving came to nothing. It grew worse as the children were born. The more need there was for carefulness, the more heedless Jenny seemed to get. And it was my fault, mine from beginning to end. Another man would have been gentle with her and showed her kindly when she was wrong, and have been thankful for the love she gave him, whatever her faults. That wasn't my way. I got angry, and made her life a burden to her. I must have things done exactly as I wished; if not, there was no end to my fault-finding. And yet, if you'll believe it, I loved my wife as truly as man ever did. Jenny couldn't understand that,—and how should she? At last she began to deceive me in all sorts of little things; she got into debt with shop-people, she showed
me false accounts, she pawned things without my knowing. Last of all, she began to drink. Our fourth child was born just at that time; Jenny had a bad illness, and I believe it set her mind wrong. I lost all control of her, and she used to say if it wasn't for the children she'd go and leave me. One morning we quarrelled very badly, and I did as I'd threatened to,—I walked about the streets all the night that followed, never coming home. I went to work next day, but at dinner-time I got frightened and ran home just to speak a word. Little Mike, the eldest, was playing on the stairs, and he said his mother was asleep. I went into the room, and saw Jenny lying on the bed dressed. There was something queer in the way her arms were stretched out. When I got near I saw she was dead. She'd taken poison.

"And it was I had killed her, just as much as if I'd put the poison to her lips. All because I thought myself such a wise fellow, because I'd resolved to live more prudently
than other men of my kind did. I wanted to save money for the future—out of five-and-twenty shillings a week. Many and many a day I starved myself to try and make up for expenses of the home. Sidney, you remember that man we once went to hear lecture, the man that talked of nothing but the thriftlessness of the poor, and how it was their own fault they suffered? I was very near telling you my story when we came away that night. Why, look; I myself was just the kind of poor man that would have suited that lecturer. And what came of it? If I'd let my poor Jenny go her own way from the first, we should have had hard times now and then, but there'd have been our love to help us, and we should have been happy enough. They talk about thriftiness, and it just means that poor people are expected to practise a self-denial that the rich can't even imagine, much less carry out! You know now why this kind of talk always angers me."

Michael brooded for a few moments, his eyes straying sadly over the landscape before him.
"I was punished," he continued, "and in the fittest way. The two of my boys who showed most love for me, Edward and Robert, died young. The eldest and youngest were a constant trouble to me. Michael was quick-tempered and self-willed, like myself; I took the wrong way with him, just like I had with his mother, and there was no peace till he left home. Joseph was still harder to deal with; but he's the only one left alive, and there is no need to bring up things against him. With him I wasn't to blame, unless I treated him too kindly and spoilt him. He was my favourite, was Jo, and he repaid me cruelly. When he married, I only heard of it from other people; we'd been parted for a long time already. And just about then I had a letter from Michael, asking me if I was willing to go out and live with him in Australia. I hadn't heard from him more than two or three times in twelve years, and when this letter came to me I was living in Sheffield; I'd been there about five years. He wrote to say he was
doing well, and that he didn't like to think of me being left to spend my old age alone. It was a kind letter, and it warmed my heart. Lonely I was; as lonely and sorrowful a man as any in England. I wrote back to say that I'd come to him gladly if he could promise to put me in the way of earning my own living. He agreed to that, and I left the old country, little thinking I should ever see it again. I didn't see Joseph before I went. All I knew of him was, that he lived in Clerkenwell Close, married; and that was all I had to guide me when I tried to find him a few years after. I was bitter against him, and went without trying to say good-bye.

"My son's fortune seems to have been made chiefly out of horse-dealing and what they call 'land-grabbing,'—buying sheep-runs over the heads of squatters, to be bought out again at a high profit. Well, you know what my opinion is of trading at the best, and as far as I could understand it, it was trading at about its worst that had filled Michael's pockets. He'd had a partner for
a time, and very ugly stories were told me about the man. However, Michael gave me as kind a welcome as his letter promised; prosperity had done him good, and he seemed only anxious to make up for the years of unkindness that had gone by. Had I been willing, I might have lived under his roof at my ease; but I held him to his bargain, and worked like any other man who goes there without money. It's a comfort to me to think of those few years spent in quiet and goodwill with my eldest boy. His own lad would have given trouble, I'm afraid, if he'd lived; Michael used to talk to me uneasily about him, poor fellow! But they both came to their end before the world had parted them.

"If I'd been a young man, I dare say I should have felt different when they told me how rich I was; it gave me no pleasure at first, and when I'd had time to think about it I only grew worried. I even thought once or twice of getting rid of the burden by giving all the money to a hospital in Sydney or
Melbourne. But then I remembered that the poor in the old country had more claim on me, and when I'd got used to the idea of being a wealthy man, I found myself recalling all sorts of fancies and wishes that used to come into my head when I was working hard for a poor living. It took some time to get all the lawyer's business finished, and by when it was done I began to see a way before me. First of all I must find my son in England, and see if he needed help. I hadn't made any change in my way of living, and I came back from Australia as a steerage passenger, wearing the same clothes that I'd worked in. The lawyer laughed at me, but I'm sure I should have laughed at myself if I'd dressed up as a gentleman and begun to play the fool in my old age. The money wasn't to be used in that way. I'd got my ideas, and they grew clearer during the voyage home.

"You know how I found Jane. Not long after, I put an advertisement in the papers, asking my son, if he saw it, to communicate with Mr. Percival,—that's the lawyer I was
recommended to in London. There was no answer; Joseph was in America at that time. I hadn't much reason to like Mrs. Peckover and her daughter, but I kept up acquaintance with them because I thought they might hear of Jo some day. And after a while I sent Jane to learn a business. Do you know why I did that? Can you think why I brought up the child as if I'd only had just enough to keep us both, and never gave a sign that I could have made a rich lady of her?"

In asking the question, he bent forward and laid his hand on Sidney's shoulder. His eyes gleamed with that light which betrays the enthusiast, the idealist. As he approached the explanation to which his story had tended, the signs of age and weakness disappeared before the intensity of his feeling. Sidney understood now why he had always been conscious of something in the man's mind that was not revealed to him, of a life-controlling purpose but vaguely indicated by the general tenor of Michael's opinions. The latter's fervour affected him, and he replied with emotion:
“You wish Jane to think of this money as you do yourself,—not to regard it as wealth, but as the means of bringing help to the miserable.”

“That is my thought, Sidney. It came to me in that form whilst I was sitting by her bed, when she was ill at Mrs. Peckover’s. I knew nothing of her character then, and the idea I had might have come to nothing through her turning out untrustworthy. But I thought to myself: Suppose she grows up to be a good woman,—suppose I can teach her to look at things in the same way as I do myself, train her to feel that no happiness could be greater than the power to put an end to ever so little of the want and wretchedness about her,—suppose when I die I could have the certainty that all this money was going to be used for the good of the poor by a woman who herself belonged to the poor? You understand me? It would have been easy enough to leave it among charities in the ordinary way; but my idea went beyond that. I might have had Jane schooled and fashioned into a lady, and still have hoped that she
would use the money well; but my idea went beyond that. There's plenty of ladies now-a-days taking an interest in the miserable, and spending their means unselfishly. What I hoped was to raise up for the poor and the untaught a friend out of their own midst, some one who had gone through all that they suffer, who was accustomed to earn her own living by the work of her hands as they do, who had never thought herself their better, who saw the world as they see it and knew all their wants. A lady may do good, we know that; but she can't be the friend of the poor as I understand it; there's too great a distance between her world and theirs. Can you picture to yourself how anxiously I've watched this child from the first day she came to live with me? I've scarcely had a thought but about her. I saw very soon that she had good feelings, and I set myself to encourage them. I wanted her to be able to read and write, but there was no need of any more education than that; it was the heart I cared about, not the mind. Besides, I had
always to keep saying to myself that perhaps, after all, she wouldn’t turn out the kind of woman I wished, and in that case she mustn’t be spoiled for an ordinary life. Sidney, it’s this money that has made me a weak old man when I might still have been as strong as many at fifty; the care of it has worn me out; I haven’t slept quietly since it came into my hands. But the worst is over. I shan’t be disappointed. Jane will be the woman I’ve hoped for, and however soon my own life comes to an end, I shall die knowing that there’s a true man by her side to help her to make my idea a reality.

“I’ve mentioned Mr. Percival, the lawyer. He’s an old man like myself, and we’ve had many a long talk together. About a year and a half ago I told him what I’ve told you now. Since I came back to England, he’s been managing the money for me; he’s paid me the little we needed, and the rest of the income has been used in charity by some people we could trust. Well, Mr. Percival doesn’t go with me in my plans for
Jane. He thinks I'm making a mistake, that I ought to have had the child educated to fit her to live with rich people. It's no use; I can't get him to feel what a grand thing it'll be for Jane to go about among her own people and help them as nobody ever could. He said to me not long ago, 'And isn't the girl ever to have a husband?' It's my hope that she will, I told him. 'And do you suppose,' he went on, 'that whoever marries her will let her live in the way you talk of? Where are you going to find a working man that'll be content never to touch this money, —to work on for his weekly wages, when he might be living at his ease?' And I told him that it wasn't as impossible as he thought. What do you think, Sidney?"

The communication of a noble idea has the same effect upon the brains of certain men—of one, let us say, in every hundred thousand—as a wine that exalts and enraptures. As Sidney listened to the old man telling of his wondrous vision, he became possessed with ardour such as he had known
but once or twice in his life. Idealism such as Michael Snowdon had developed in these latter years is a form of genius; given the susceptible hearer, it dazzles, inspires, raises to heroic contempt of the facts of life. Had this story been related to him of some unknown person, Sidney would have admired, but as one admires the nobly impracticable; subject to the electric influence of a man who was great enough to conceive and direct his life by such a project, who could repose so supreme a faith in those he loved, all the primitive nobleness of his character asserted itself, and he could accept with a throbbing heart the superb challenge addressed to him.

"If Jane can think me worthy to be her husband," he replied, "your friend shall see that he has feared without cause."

"I knew it, Sidney; I knew it!" exclaimed the old man. "How much younger I feel, now that I have shared this burden with you!"

"And shall you now tell Jane?" the other inquired.
"Not yet; not just yet. She is very young; we must wait a little. But there can be no reason why you shouldn't speak to her—of yourself."

Sidney was descending from the clouds. As the flush of his humanitarian enthusiasm passed away, and he thought of his personal relations to Jane, a misgiving, a scruple began to make itself heard within him. Worldly and commonplace the thought, but—had he a right to ask the girl to pledge herself to him under circumstances such as these? To be sure, it was not as if Jane were an heiress in the ordinary way; for all that, would it not be a proceeding of doubtful justice to woo her when as yet she was wholly ignorant of the most important item in her situation? His sincerity was unassailable, but—suppose, in fact, he had to judge the conduct of another man thus placed? Upon the heated pulsing of his blood succeeded a coolness, almost a chill; he felt as though he had been on the verge of a precipice, and had been warned to draw back
only just in time. Every second showed him more distinctly what his duty was. He experienced a sensation of thankfulness that he had not spoken definitely on Saturday evening. His instinct had guided him aright; Jane was still too young to be called upon solemnly to decide her whole future.

"That, too, had better wait, Mr. Snowdon," he said, after a pause of a minute. "I should like her to know everything before I speak to her in that way. In a year it will be time enough."

Michael regarded him thoughtfully.

"Perhaps you are right. I wish you knew Mr. Percival; but there is time, there is time. He still thinks I shall be persuaded to alter my plans. That night you came to Hanover Street and found me away, he took me to see a lady who works among the poor in Clerkenwell; she knew me by name, because Mr. Percival had given her money from me to use, but we'd never seen each other till then. He wants me to ask her opinion about Jane."
"Has he spoken of her to the lady, do you think?"

"Oh no!" replied the other, with perfect confidence. "He has promised me to keep all that a secret as long as I wish. The lady—her name is Miss Lant—seemed all that my friend said she was, and perhaps Jane might do well to make her acquaintance some day; but that mustn't be till Jane knows and approves the purpose of my life and hers. The one thing that troubles me still, Sidney, is—her father. It's hard that I can't be sure whether my son will be a help or a hindrance. I must wait, and try to know him better."

The conversation had so wearied Michael, that in returning to the house he had to lean on his companion's arm. Sidney was silent, and yielded, he scarce knew why, to a mood of depression. When Jane returned from Maldon in the evening, and he heard her happy voice as the children ran out to welcome her, there was a heaviness at his heart. Perhaps it came only of hope deferred.
There is no accounting for tastes. Sidney Kirkwood, spending his Sunday evening in a garden away there in the chawbacon regions of Essex, where it was so deadly quiet that you could hear the flutter of a bird’s wing or the rustle of a leaf, not once only congratulated himself on his good fortune; yet at that hour he might have stood, as so often, listening to the eloquence, the wit, the wisdom, that give proud distinction to the name of Clerkenwell Green. Towards sundown, that modern Agora rang with the voices of orators, swarmed with listeners, with disputants, with mockers, with indifferent loungers. The circle closing about an agnostic lecturer intersected with one gathered for a prayer-meeting; the roar of an enthusiastic
total-abstainer blended with the shriek of a Radical politician. Innumerable were the little groups which had broken away from the larger ones to hold semi-private debate on matters which demanded calm consideration and the finer intellect. From the doctrine of the Trinity to the question of cabbage *versus* beef; from Neo-Malthusianism to the grievance of compulsory vaccination; not a subject which modernism has thrown out to the multitude but here received its sufficient mauling. Above the crowd floated wreaths of rank tobacco smoke.

Straying from circle to circle might have been seen Mr. Joseph Snowdon, the baldness of his crown hidden by a most respectable silk hat, on one hand a glove, in the other his walking-stick, a yellow waistcoat enhancing his appearance of dignity, a white necktie spotted with blue and a geranium in his buttonhole correcting the suspicion of age suggested by his countenance. As a listener to harangues of the most various tendency, Mr. Snowdon exhibited an impartial spirit;
he smiled occasionally, but was never moved to any expression of stronger feeling. His placid front revealed the philosopher.

Yet at length something stirred him to a more pronounced interest. He was on the edge of a dense throng which had just been delighted by the rhetoric of a well-known Clerkenwell Radical; the topic under discussion was Rent, and the last speaker had, in truth, put before them certain noteworthy views of the subject as it affected the poor of London. What attracted Mr. Snowdon's attention was the voice of the speaker who next rose. Pressing a little nearer, he got a glimpse of a lean, haggard, grey-headed man, shabbily dressed, no bad example of a sufferer from the hardships he was beginning to denounce. "That's old Hewett," remarked somebody close by. "He's the feller to let 'em 'ave it!" Yes, it was John Hewett, much older, much more broken, yet much fiercer than when we last saw him. Though it was evident that he spoke often at these meetings, he had no command of his voice
and no coherence of style; after the first few words he seemed to be overcome by rage that was little short of frenzy. Inarticulate screams and yells interrupted the torrent of his invective; he raised both hands above his head and clenched them in a gesture of frantic passion; his visage was frightfully distorted, and in a few minutes there actually fell drops of blood from his bitten lip. Rent!—it was a subject on which the poor fellow could speak to some purpose. What was the root of the difficulty a London workman found in making both ends meet? Wasn't it that accursed law by which the owner of property can make him pay a half, and often more, of his earnings for permission to put his wife and children under a roof? And what sort of dwellings were they, these in which the men who made the wealth of the country were born and lived and died? What would happen to the landlords of Clerkenwell if they got their due? Ay, what shall happen, my boys, and that before so very long? For fifteen or twenty minutes John expended his
fury, until, in fact, he was speechless. It was terrible to look at him when at length he made his way out of the crowd; his face was livid, his eyes bloodshot, a red slaver covered his lips and beard; you might have taken him for a drunken man, so feebly did his limbs support him, so shattered was he by the fit through which he had passed.

Joseph followed him, and presently walked along at his side.

"That was about as good a speech as I've heard for a long time, Mr. Hewett," he began by observing. "I like to hear a man speak as if he meant it."

John looked up with a leaden, rheumy eye, but the compliment pleased him, and in a moment he smiled vacantly.

"I haven't said my last word yet," he replied, with difficulty making himself audible through his hoarseness.

"It takes it out of you, I'm afraid. Suppose we have a drop of something at the corner here?"

"I don't mind, Mr. Snowdon. I thought
of looking in at my club for a quarter of an hour; perhaps you'd come round with me afterwards?"

They drank at the public-house, then Hewett led the way by back streets to the quarters of the club of which he had been for many years a member. The locality was not cheerful, and the house itself stood in much need of repair. As they entered, John requested his companion to sign his name in the visitors' book; Mr. Snowdon did so with a flourish. They ascended to the first floor and passed into a room where little could be seen but the gas-jets, and those dimly, owing to the fume of pipes. The rattle of bones, the strumming of a banjo, and a voice raised at intervals in a kind of whoop announced that a nigger entertainment was in progress. Recreation of this kind is not uncommon on Sunday evening at the workmen's clubs; you will find it announced in the remarkable list of lectures, &c., printed in certain Sunday newspapers. The company which was exerting itself in the present instance had at all
events an appreciative audience; laughter and applause broke forth very frequently.

"I'd forgot it was this kind o' thing tonight," said Hewett, when he could discover no vacant seat. "Do you care about it? No more don't I; let's go down into the readin'-room."

Downstairs they established themselves at their ease. John ordered two half-pints of ale,—the club supplied refreshment for the body as well as for the mind,—and presently he was more himself.

"How's your wife?" inquired Joseph. "Better, I hope?"

"I wish I could say so," answered the other, shaking his head. "She hasn't been up since Thursday. She's bad, poor woman! she's bad."

Joseph murmured his sympathy, between two draughts of ale.

"Seen young Kirkwood lately?" Hewett asked, averting his eyes and assuming a tone of half-absent indifference.

"He's gone away for his holiday; gone into VOL. II."
Essex somewhere. When was it he was speaking of you? Why, one day last week, to be sure."

"Speakin' about me, eh?" said John, turning his glass round and round on the table. And as the other remained silent, he added, "You can tell him, if you like, that my wife's been very bad for a long time. Him an' me don't have nothing to say to each other,—but you can tell him that, if you like."

"So I will," replied Mr. Snowdon, nodding with a confidential air.

He had noticed from the beginning of his acquaintance with Hewett that the latter showed no disinclination to receive news of Kirkwood. As Clem's husband, Joseph was understood to be perfectly aware of the state of things between the Hewetts and their former friend, and in a recent conversation with Mrs. Hewett he had assured himself that she, at all events, would be glad if the estrangement could come to an end. For reasons of his own, Joseph gave narrow attention to these signs.
The talk was turning to other matters, when a man who had just entered the room and stood looking about him with an uneasy expression caught sight of Hewett and approached him. He was middle-aged, coarse of feature, clad in the creased black which a certain type of artisan wears on Sunday.

"I'd like a word with you, John," he said, "if your friend'll excuse."

Hewett rose from the table, and they walked together to an unoccupied spot.

"Have you heard any talk about the Burial Club?" inquired the man, in a low voice of suspicion, knitting his eyebrows.

"Heard anything? No. What?"

"Why, Dick Smales says he can't get the money for his boy, as died last week."

"Can't get it? Why not?"

"That's just what I want to know. Some o' the chaps is talkin' about it upstairs. M'Cosh ain't been seen for four or five days. Somebody had news as he was ill in bed, and now there's no findin' him. I've got a notion there's something wrong, my boy."
Hewett's eyes grew large and the muscles of his mouth contracted.

"Where's Jenkins?" he asked abruptly.
"I suppose he can explain it?"

"No, by God, he can't! He won't say nothing, but he's been runnin' about all yesterday and to-day, lookin' precious queer."

Without paying any further attention to Snowdon, John left the room with his companion, and they went upstairs. Most of the men present were members of the Burial Club in question, an institution of some fifteen years' standing and in connection with the club which met here for social and political purposes; they were in the habit, like John Hewett, of depositing their coppers weekly, thus insuring themselves or their relatives for a sum payable at death. The rumour that something was wrong, that the secretary M'Cosh could not be found, began to create a disturbance; presently the nigger entertainment came to an end, and the Burial Club was the sole topic of conversation.

On the morrow it was an ascertained fact
that one of the catastrophes which occasionally befall the provident among wage-earners had come to pass. Investigation showed that for a long time there had been carelessness and mismanagement of funds, and that fraud had completed the disaster. M'Cosh was wanted by the police.

To John Hewett the blow was a terrible one. In spite of his poverty, he had never fallen behind with those weekly payments. The thing he dreaded supremely was, that his wife or one of the children should die and he be unable to provide a decent burial. At the death of the last child born to him the club had of course paid, and the confidence he felt in it for the future was a sensible support under the many miseries of his life, a support of which no idea can be formed by one who has never foreseen the possibility of those dear to him being carried to a pauper's grave. It was a touching fact that he still kept up the payment for Clara; who could say but his daughter might yet come back to him to die? To know that he had lost that one stronghold
against fate was a stroke that left him scarcely strength to go about his daily work.

And he could not breathe a word of it to his wife. Oh that bitter curse of poverty, which puts corrupting poison into the wounds inflicted by nature, which outrages the spirit's tenderness, which profanes with unutterable defilement the secret places of the mourning heart! He could not, durst not, speak a word of this misery to her whose gratitude and love had resisted every trial, who had shared uncomplainingly all the evil of his lot, and had borne with supreme patience those added sufferings of which he had no conception. For she lay on her deathbed. The doctor told him so on the very day when he learnt that it would be out of his power to discharge the fitting pieties at her grave. So far from looking to her for sympathy, it behoved him to keep from her as much as a suspicion of what had happened.

Their home at this time was a kitchen in King's Cross Road. The eldest child, Amy, was now between ten and eleven; Annie was
nine; Tom seven. These, of course, went to school every day, and were being taught to appreciate the woefulness of their inheritance. Amy was, on the whole, a good girl; she could make purchases as well as her mother, and when in the mood, look carefully after her little brother and sister; but already she had begun to display restiveness under the hard discipline to which the domestic poverty subjected her. Once she had played truant from school, and told falsehoods to the teachers to explain her absence. It was discovered that she had been tempted by other girls to go and see the Lord Mayor's show. Annie and Tom threatened to be troublesome when they got a little older; the boy could not be taught to speak the truth, and his sister was constantly committing petty thefts of jam, sugar, even coppers; and during the past year their mother was seldom able to exert herself in correcting these faults. Only by dint of struggle which cost her agonies could she discharge the simplest duties of home. She made a brave fight against disease and penury
and incessant dread of the coming day, but month after month her strength failed. Now at length she tried vainly to leave her bed. The last reserve of energy was exhausted, and the end near.

After her death, what then? Through the nights of this week after her doom had been spoken she lay questioning the future. She knew that but for her unremitting efforts Hewett would have yielded to the despair of a drunkard; the crucial moment was when he found himself forsaken by his daughter, and no one but this poor woman could know what force of loving will, what entreaties, what tears, had drawn him back a little way from the edge of the gulf. Throughout his life until that day of Clara's disappearance he had seemed in no danger from the deadliest enemy of the poor; one taste of the oblivion that could be bought at any street-corner, and it was as though drinking had been a recognised habit with him. A year, two years, and he still drank himself into forgetfulness as often as his mental suffering waxed un-
endurable. On the morrow of every such crime—interpret the word rightly—he hated himself for his cruelty to that pale sufferer whose reproaches were only the utterances of love. The third year saw an improvement, whether owing to conscious self-control or to the fact that time was blunting his affliction. Instead of the public-house, he frequented all places where the woes of the nether world found fierce expression. He became a constant speaker at the meetings on Clerkenwell Green and at the Radical clubs. The effect upon him of this excitement was evil enough, yet not so evil as the malady of drink. Mrs. Hewett was thankful for the alternative. But when she was no longer at his side—what then?

His employment was irregular, but for the most part at cabinet-making. The workshop where he was generally to be found was owned by two brothers, who invariably spent the first half of each week in steady drinking. Their money gone, they set to work and made articles of furniture, which on Saturday they took round to the shops of small dealers
and sold for what they could get. When once they took up their tools, these men worked with incredible persistency, and they expected the same exertion from those they employed. "I wouldn't give a — for the chap as can't do his six-and-thirty hours at the bench!" remarked one of them on the occasion of a workman falling into a fainting-fit, caused by utter exhaustion. Hewett was anything but strong, and he earned little.

Late on Saturday afternoon, Sidney Kirkwood and his friends were back in London. As he drew near to Tysoe Street, carrying the bag which was all the luggage he had needed, Sidney by chance encountered Joseph Snowdon, who, after inquiring about his relatives, said that he had just come from visiting the Hewetts. Mrs. Hewett was very ill indeed; and it was scarcely to be expected she would live more than a few days.

"You mean that?" exclaimed Kirkwood, upon whom, after his week of holiday and of mental experiences which seemed to have
changed the face of the world for him, this sudden announcement came with a painful shock, reviving all the miserable past. "She is dying?"

"There's no doubt of it."

And Joseph added his belief that John Hewett would certainly not take it ill if the other went there before it was too late.

Sidney had no appetite now for the meal he would have purchased on reaching home. A profound pity for the poor woman who had given him so many proofs of her affection made his heart heavy almost to tears. The perplexities of the present vanished in a revival of old tenderness, of bygone sympathies and sorrows. He could not doubt but that it was his duty to go to his former friends at a time such as this. Perhaps, if he had overcome his pride, he might have sooner brought the estrangement to an end.

He did not know, and had forgotten to ask of Snowdon, the number of the house in King's Cross Road where the Hewetts lived. He could find it, however, by visiting Penny-
loaf. Conquering his hesitation, he was on the point of going forth, when his landlady came up and told him that a young girl wished to see him. It was Amy Hewett, and her face told him on what errand she had come.

"Mr. Kirkwood," she began, looking up with embarrassment, for he was all but a stranger to her now, "mother wants to know if you'd come and see her. She's very bad; they're afraid she's"

The word was choked. Amy had been crying, and the tears again rose to her eyes.

"I was just coming," Sidney answered, as he took her hand and pressed it kindly.

They crossed Wilmington Square and descended by the streets that slope to Pentonville Prison. The cellar in which John Hewett and his family were housed was underneath a milk-shop; Amy led the way down stone steps from the pavement of the street into an area, where more than two people would have had difficulty in standing together. Sidney saw that the window which looked upon this space was draped with a
sheet. By an open door they entered a passage, then came to the door of the room. Amy pushed it open, and showed that a lamp gave light within.

To poor homes Sidney Kirkwood was no stranger, but a poorer than this now disclosed to him he had never seen. The first view of it made him draw in his breath, as though a pang went through him. Hewett was not here. The two younger children were sitting upon a mattress, eating bread. Amy stepped up to the bedside and bent to examine her mother's face.

"I think she's asleep," she whispered, turning round to Sidney.

Sleep, or death? It might well be the latter, for anything Sidney could determine to the contrary. The face he could not recognise, or only when he had gazed at it for several minutes. Oh, pitiless world, that pursues its business and its pleasure, that takes its fill of life from the rising to the going down of the sun, and within sound of its clamour is this hiding-place of anguish and desolation!
"Mother, here's Mr. Kirkwood."

Repeated several times, the words at length awoke consciousness. The dying woman could not move her head from the pillow; her eyes wandered, but in the end rested upon Sidney. He saw an expression of surprise, of anxiety, then a smile of deep contentment.

"I knew you'd come. I did so want to see you. Don't go just yet, will you?"

The lump in his throat hindered Sidney from replying. Hot tears, an agony in the shedding, began to stream down his cheeks.

"Where's John?" she continued, trying to look about the room. "Amy, where's your father? He'll come soon, Sidney. I want you and him to be friends again. He knows he'd never ought to a' said what he did. Don't take on so, Sidney! There'll be Amy to look after the others. She'll be a good girl. She's promised me. It's John I'm afraid for. If only he can keep from drink. Will you try and help him, Sidney?"

There was a terrible earnestness of appeal
in the look she fixed upon him. Sidney replied that he would hold nothing more sacred than the charge she gave him.

"It'll be easier for them to live," continued the feeble voice. "I've been ill so long, and there's been so much expense. Amy'll be earning something before long."

"Don't trouble," Sidney answered. "They shall never want as long as I live—never!"

"Sidney, come a bit nearer. Do you know anything about her?"

He shook his head.

"If ever—if ever she comes back, don't turn away from her—will you?"

"I would welcome her as I would a sister of my own."

"There's such hard things in a woman's life. What would a' become of me, if John hadn't took pity on me! The world's a hard place; I should be glad to leave it, if it wasn't for them as has to go on in their trouble. I knew you'd come when I sent Amy. Oh, I feel that easier in my mind!"

"Why didn't you send long before? No,
it's my fault. Why didn't I come? Why didn't I come?"

There was a footstep in the passage, a slow, uncertain step; then the door moved a little. With blurred vision Sidney saw Hewett enter and come forward. They grasped each other’s hands, without speaking, and John, as though his strength were at an end, dropped upon the chair by the bedside. For the last four or five nights he had sat there; if he got half-an-hour’s painful slumber now and then it was the utmost. His face was like that of some prisoner, whom the long torture of a foul dungeon has brought to the point of madness. He uttered only a few words during the half-hour that Sidney still remained in the room. The latter, when Mrs. Hewett’s relapse into unconsciousness made it useless for him to stay, beckoned Amy to follow him out into the area and put money in her hand, begging her to get whatever was needed without troubling her father. He would come again in the morning.

Mrs. Hewett died just before daybreak
without a pang, as though death had compassion on her. When Sidney came, about nine o'clock, he found Amy standing at the door of the milk-shop; the people who kept it had brought the children up into their room. Hewett still sat by the bed; seeing Kirkwood, he pointed to the hidden face.

"How am I to bury her?" he whispered hoarsely. "Haven't you heard about it? They've stole the club-money; they've robbed me of it; I haven't as much as'll pay for her coffin."

Sidney fancied at first that the man's mind was wandering, but Hewett took out of his pocket a scrap of newspaper in which the matter was briefly reported.

"See, it's there. I've known since last Sunday, and I had to keep it from her. No need to be afraid of speakin' now. They've robbed me, and I haven't as much as'll pay for her coffin. It's a nice blasted world, this is, where they won't let you live, and then make you pay if you don't want to be buried like a dog! She's had nothing but pain and
poverty all her life, and now they'll pitch her out of the way in a parish box. Do you remember what hopes I used to have when we was first married? See the end of 'em,—look at this underground hole,—look at this bed as she lays on! Is it my fault? By God, I wonder I haven't killed myself before this! I've been drove mad, I tell you,—mad! It's well if I don't do murder yet; every man as I see go by with a good coat on his back and a face fat with good feeding, it's all I can do to keep from catchin' his throat an' tearin' the life out of him!"

"Let's talk about the burial," interposed Sidney. "Make your mind at ease. I've got enough to pay for all that, and you must let me lend you what you want."

"Lend me money? You as I haven't spoke to for years?"

"The more fault mine. I ought to have come back again long since; you wouldn't have refused an old friend that never meant an unkindness to you."

"No, it was me as was to blame," said the
other, with choking voice. "She always told me so, and she always said what was right. But I can't take it of you, Sidney; I can't! Lend it? An' where am I goin' to get it from to pay you back? It won't be so long before I lie like she does there. It's getting too much for me."

The first tears he had shed rose at this generosity of the man he had so little claim upon. His passionate grief and the spirit of rebellion, which grew more frenzied as he grew older, were subdued to a sobbing gratitude for the kindness which visited him in his need. Nerveless, voiceless, he fell back again upon the chair and let his head lie by that of the dead woman.
MR. JOSEPH SNOWDON, though presenting a calm countenance to the world and seeming to enjoy comparative prosperity, was in truth much harassed by the difficulties of his position. Domestic troubles he had anticipated, but the unforeseen sequel of his marriage resulted in a martyrdom at the hands of Clem and her mother such as he had never dreamed of. His faults and weaknesses distinctly those of the civilised man, he found himself in disastrous alliance with two savages, whose characters so supplemented each other as to constitute in unison a formidable engine of tyranny. Clem,—suspicious, revengeful, fierce, watching with cruel eyes every opportunity of taking payment on account for the ridicule to which she had exposed herself;
Mrs. Peckover,—ceaselessly occupied with the basest scheming, keen as an Indian on any trail she happened to strike, excited by the scent of money as a jackal by that of carrion; for this pair Joseph was no match. Not only did they compel him to earn his daily bread by dint of methodical effort such as was torture to his indolent disposition, but, moreover, in pursuance of Mrs. Peckover’s crafty projects, he was constrained to an assiduous hypocrisy in his relations with Michael and Jane which wearied him beyond measure. Joseph did not belong to the most desperate class of hungry mortals; he had neither the large ambitions and the passionate sensual desires which make life an unending fever, nor was he possessed with that foul itch of covetousness which is the explanation of the greater part of the world’s activity. He understood quite sufficiently the advantages of wealth, and was prepared to go considerable lengths for the sake of enjoying them, but his character lacked persistence. This defect explained the rogueries and calamities of his
life. He had brains in abundance, and a somewhat better education would have made of him either a successful honest man or a rascal of superior scope,—it is always a toss-up between these two results where a character such as his is in question. Ever since he abandoned the craft to which his father had had him trained, he had lived on his wits; there would be matter for a volume in the history of his experiences at home and abroad, a volume infinitely more valuable considered as a treatise on modern civilisation than any professed work on that subject in existence. With one episode only in his past can we here concern ourselves; the retrospect is needful to make clear his relations with Mr. Scawthorne.

On his return from America, Joseph possessed a matter of a hundred pounds; the money was not quite legally earned (pray let us reserve the word honesty for a truer use than the common one), and on the whole he preferred to recommence life in the old country under a pseudonym,—that little affair
of the desertion of his child would perhaps, in any case, have made this advisable. A hundred pounds will not go very far, but Joseph took care to be well dressed, and allowed it to be surmised by those with whom he came in contact that the resources at his command were considerable. In early days, as we know, he had worked at electroplating, and the natural bent of his intellect was towards mechanical and physical science; by dint of experimenting at his old pursuit, he persuaded himself, or at all events attained plausibility for the persuading of others, that he had discovered a new and valuable method of plating with nickel. He gave it out that he was in search of a partner to join him in putting this method into practice. Gentlemen thus situated naturally avail themselves of the advertisement columns of the newspaper, and Joseph by this means had the happiness to form an acquaintance with one Mr. Polkenhorne, who, like himself, had sundry schemes for obtaining money without toiling for it in the usual vulgar way.
Polkenhorne was a man of thirty-five, much of a blackguard, but keen-witted, handsome, and tolerably educated; the son of a Clerkenwell clockmaker, he had run through an inheritance of a few thousand pounds, and made no secret of his history,—spoke of his experiences, indeed, with a certain pride. Between these two a close intimacy sprang up, one of those partnerships, beginning with mutual deception, which are so common in the border-land of enterprise just skirting the criminal courts. Polkenhorne resided at this time in Kennington; he was married—or said that he was—to a young lady in the theatrical profession, known to the public as Miss Grace Danver. To Mrs. Polkenhorne, or Miss Danver, Joseph soon had the honour of being presented, for she was just then playing at a London theatre; he found her a pretty but consumptive-looking girl, not at all likely to achieve great successes, earning enough, however, to support Mr. Polkenhorne during this time of his misfortunes,—a most pleasant and natural arrangement.
Polkenhorne's acquaintances were numerous, but, as he informed Joseph, most of them were "played out," that is to say, no further use could be made of them from Polkenhorne's point of view. One, however, as yet imperfectly known, promised to be useful, perchance as a victim, more probably as an ally; his name was Scawthorne, and Polkenhorne had come across him in consequence of a friendship existing between Grace Danver and Mrs. Scawthorne,—at all events, a young lady thus known,—who was preparing herself for the stage. This gentleman was "something in the City;" he had rather a close look, but proved genial enough, and was very ready to discuss things in general with Mr. Polkenhorne and his capitalist friend Mr. Camden, just from the United States.

A word or two about Charles Henry Scawthorne, of the circumstances which made him what you know, or what you conjecture. His father had a small business as a dyer in Islington, and the boy, leaving school at fourteen, was sent to become a copying-clerk in a
solicitor's office; his tastes were so strongly intellectual that it seemed a pity to put him to work he hated, and the clerkship was the best opening that could be procured for him. Two years after, Mr. Scawthorne died; his wife tried to keep on the business, but soon failed, and thenceforth her son had to support her as well as himself. From sixteen to three-and-twenty was the period of young Scawthorne's life which assured his future advancement—and his moral ruin. A grave, gentle, somewhat effeminate boy, with a great love of books and a wonderful power of application to study, he suffered so much during those years of early maturity, that, as in almost all such cases, his nature was corrupted. Pity that some self-made intellectual man of our time has not flung in the world's teeth a truthful autobiography. Scawthorne worked himself up to a position which had at first seemed unattainable; what he paid for the success was loss of all his pure ideals, of his sincerity, of his disinterestedness, of the fine perceptions to which he was born.
Probably no one who is half-starved and overworked during those critical years comes out of the trial with his moral nature uninjured; to certain characters it is a wrong irreparable. To stab the root of a young tree, to hang crushing burdens upon it, to rend off its early branches,—that is not the treatment likely to result in growth such as nature purposed. There will come of it a vicious formation, and the principle applies also to the youth of men.

Scawthorne was fond of the theatre; as soon as his time of incessant toil was over, he not only attended performances frequently, but managed to make personal acquaintance with sundry theatrical people. Opportunity for this was afforded by his becoming member of a club, consisting chiefly of solicitors’ clerks, which was frequently honoured by visits from former associates who had taken to the stage; these happy beings would condescend to recite at times, to give help in getting up a dramatic entertainment, and soon, in this way, Scawthorne came to know an old actor named
Drake, who supported himself by instructing novices, male and female, in his own profession; one of Mr. Drake's old pupils was Miss Grace Danver, in whom, as soon as he met her, Scawthorne recognised the Grace Rudd of earlier days. And it was not long after this that he brought to Mr. Drake a young girl of interesting appearance, but very imperfect education, who fancied she had a turn for acting; he succeeded in arranging for her instruction, and a year and a half later she obtained her first engagement at a theatre in Scotland. The name she adopted was Clara Vale. Joseph Snowdon saw her once or twice before she left London, and from Grace Danver he heard that Grace and she had been schoolfellows in Clerkenwell. These facts revived in his memory when he afterwards heard Clem speak of Clara Hewett.

Nothing came of the alliance between Polkenhorne and Joseph; when the latter's money was exhausted, they naturally fell apart. Joseph made a living in sundry precarious ways, but at length sank into such
straits that he risked the step of going to Clerkenwell Close. Personal interest in his child he had then none whatever; his short married life seemed an episode in the remote past, recalled with indifference. But in spite of his profound selfishness, it was not solely from the speculative point of view that he regarded Jane, when he had had time to realise that she was his daughter, and in a measure to appreciate her character. With the merely base motives which led him to seek her affection and put him at secret hostility with Sidney Kirkwood, there mingled before long a strain of feeling which was natural and pure; he became a little jealous of his father and of Sidney on other grounds than those of self-interest. Intolerable as his home was, no wonder that he found it a pleasant relief to spend an evening in Hanover Street; he never came away without railing at himself for his imbecility in having married Clem. For the present he had to plot with his wife and Mrs. Peckover, but only let the chance for plotting against them offer itself!
The opportunity might come. In the meantime, the great thing was to postpone the marriage—he had no doubt it was contemplated—between Jane and Sidney. That would be little less than a fatality.

The week that Jane spent in Essex was of course a time of desperate anxiety with Joseph; immediately on her return he hastened to assure himself that things remained as before. It seemed to him that Jane’s greeting had more warmth than she was wont to display when they met; sundry other little changes in her demeanour struck him at the same interview, and he was rather surprised that she had not so much blitheness as before she went away. But his speculation on minutiae such as these was suddenly interrupted a day or two later by news which threw him into a state of excitement; Jane sent word that her grandfather was very unwell, that he appeared to have caught a chill in the journey home, and could not at present leave his bed. For a week the old man suffered from feverish symptoms, and, though he threw off the ail-
ment, it was in a state of much feebleness that he at length resumed the ordinary tenor of his way. Jane had of course stayed at home to nurse him; a fortnight, a month passed, and Michael still kept her from work. Then it happened that, on Joseph's looking in one evening, the old man said quietly, "I think I'd rather Jane stayed at home in future. We've had a long talk about it this afternoon."

Joseph glanced at his daughter, who met the look very gravely. He had a feeling that the girl was of a sudden grown older; when she spoke it was in brief phrases, and with but little of her natural spontaneity; noiseless as always in her movements, she walked with a staider gait, held herself less girlishly, and on saying goodnight she let her cheek rest for a moment against her father's, a thing she had never yet done.

The explanation of it all came a few minutes after Jane's retirement. Michael, warned by his illness how unstable was the tenure on which he henceforth held his life, had resolved to have an end of mystery and explain to his son all that he had already
made known to Sidney Kirkwood. With Jane he had spoken a few hours ago, revealing to her the power that was in his hands, the solemn significance he attached to it, the responsibility with which her future was to be invested. To make the same things known to Joseph was a task of more difficulty. He could not here count on sympathetic intelligence; it was but too certain that his son would listen with disappointment, if not with bitterness. In order to mitigate the worst results, he began by making known the fact of his wealth and asking if Joseph had any practical views which could be furthered by a moderate sum put at his disposal.

"At my death," he added, "you'll find that I haven't dealt unkindly by you. But you're a man of middle age, and I should like to see you in some fixed way of life before I go."

Having heard all, Joseph promised to think over the proposal which concerned himself. It was in a strange state of mind that he returned to the Close; one thing only he was clear upon, that to Clem and her mother he
would breathe no word of what had been told him. After a night passed without a wink of sleep, struggling with the amazement, the incredulity, the confusion of understanding caused by his father's words, he betook himself to a familiar public-house, and there penned a note to Scawthorne, requesting an interview as soon as possible. The meeting took place that evening at the retreat behind Lincoln's Inn Fields where the two had held colloquies on several occasions during the last half-year. Scawthorne received with gravity what his acquaintance had to communicate. Then he observed:

"The will was executed ten days ago."
"It was? And what's he left me?"
"Seven thousand pounds—less legacy duty."
"And thirty thousand to Jane?"
"Just so."

Joseph drew in his breath; his teeth ground together for a moment; his eyes grew very wide. With a smile Scawthorne proceeded to explain that Jane's trustees were Mr. Percival, senior, and his son.
die unmarried before attaining her twenty-first birthday, the money bequeathed to her was to be distributed among certain charities.

"It's my belief there's a crank in the old fellow," exclaimed Joseph. "Is he really such a fool as to think Jane won't use the money for herself? And what about Kirkwood? I tell you what it is; he's a deep fellow, is Kirkwood. I wish you knew him."

Scawthorne confessed that he had the same wish, but added that there was no chance of its being realised; prudence forbade any move in that direction.

"If he marries her," questioned Joseph, "will the money be his?"

"No; it will be settled on her. But it comes to very much the same thing; there's to be no restraint on her discretion in using it."

"She might give her affectionate parent a hundred or so now and then, if she chose?"

"If she chose."

Scawthorne began a detailed inquiry into the humanitarian projects of which Joseph had given but a rude and contemptuous
explanation. The finer qualities of his mind enabled him to see the matter in quite a different light from that in which it presented itself to Jane's father; he had once or twice had an opportunity of observing Michael Snowdon at the office, and could realise in a measure the character which directed its energies to such an ideal aim. Concerning Jane he asked many questions; then the conversation turned once more to Sidney Kirkwood.

"I wish he'd married his old sweetheart," observed Joseph, watching the other's face.

"Who was that?"

"A girl called Clara Hewett."

Their looks met. Scawthorne, in spite of habitual self-command, betrayed an extreme surprise.

"I wonder what's become of her?" continued Joseph, still observing his companion, and speaking with unmistakable significance.

"Just tell me something about this," said Scawthorne peremptorily.

Joseph complied, and ended his story with a few more hints.
"I never saw her myself,—at least I can't be sure that I did. There was somebody of the same name—Clara—a friend of Polkenhorne's wife."

Scawthorne appeared to pay no attention; he mused with a wrinkled brow.

"If only I could put something between Kirkwood and the girl," remarked Joseph, as if absently. "I shouldn't wonder if it could be made worth some one's while to give a bit of help that way. Don't you think so?"

In the tone of one turning to a different subject, Scawthorne asked suddenly:

"What use are you going to make of your father's offer?"

"Well, I'm not quite sure. Shouldn't wonder if I go in for filters."

"Filters?"

Joseph explained. In the capacity of "commission agent"—denomination which includes and apologises for such a vast variety of casual pursuits—he had of late been helping to make known to the public a new filter, which promised to be a commercial success.
The owner of the patent lacked capital, and a judicious investment might secure a share in the business; Joseph thought of broaching the subject with him next day.

"You won't make a fool of yourself?" remarked Scawthorne.

"Trust me; I think I know my way about."

For the present these gentlemen had nothing more to say to each other; they emptied their glasses with deliberation, exchanged a look which might mean either much or nothing, and so went their several ways.

The filter project was put into execution. When Joseph had communicated it in detail to his father, the latter took the professional advice of his friend Mr. Percival, and in the course of a few weeks Joseph found himself regularly established in a business which had the—for him—novel characteristic of serving the purposes of purity. The manufactory was situated in a by-street on the north of Euston Road: a small concern, but at all events a genuine one. On the window of the office you read, "Lake, Snowdon, & Co." As it was necessary to account for this
achievement to Clem and Mrs. Peckover, Joseph made known to them a part of the truth; of the will he said nothing, and, for reasons of his own, he allowed these tender relatives to believe that he was in a fair way to inherit the greater part of Michael’s possessions. There was jubilation in Clerkenwell Close, but mother and daughter kept stern watch upon Joseph’s proceedings.

Another acquaintance of ours benefited by this event. Michael made it a stipulation that some kind of work should be found at the factory for John Hewett, who, since his wife’s death, had been making a wretched struggle to establish a more decent home for the children. The firm of Lake, Snowdon, and Co. took Hewett into their employment as a porter, and paid him twenty-five shillings a week,—of which sum, however, the odd five shillings were privately made up by Michael.

On receiving this appointment, John drew the sigh of a man who finds himself in haven after perilous beating about a lee shore. The kitchen in King’s Cross Road was abandoned, and with Sidney Kirkwood’s aid the family
found much more satisfactory quarters. Friends of Sidney’s, a man and wife of middle age without children, happened to be looking for lodgings; it was decided that they and John Hewett should join in the tenancy of a flat, up on the fifth storey of the huge block of tenements called Farringdon Road Buildings. By this arrangement the children would be looked after, and the weekly twenty-five shillings could be made to go much further than on the ordinary system. As soon as everything had been settled, and when Mr. and Mrs. Eagles had already housed themselves in the one room which was all they needed for their private accommodation, Hewett and the children began to pack together their miserable sticks and rags for removal. Just then Sidney Kirkwood looked in.

"Eagles wants to see you for a minute about something," he said. "Just walk round with me, will you?"

John obeyed, in the silent, spiritless way now usual with him. It was but a short distance to the buildings; they went up the
winding stone staircase, and Sidney gave a hollow-sounding knock at one of the two doors that faced each other on the fifth storey. Mrs. Eagles opened, a decent motherly woman, with a pleasant and rather curious smile on her face. She led the way into one of the rooms which John had seen empty only a few hours ago. How was this? Oil-cloth on the floor, a blind at the window, a bedstead, a table, a chest of drawers—.

Mrs. Eagles withdrew, discreetly. Hewett stood with a look of uneasy wonderment, and at length turned to his companion.

"Now, look here," he growled, in an unsteady voice, "what's all this about?"

"Somebody seems to have got here before you," replied Sidney, smiling.

"How the devil am I to keep any self-respect if you go on treatin' me in this fashion?" blustered John, hanging his head.

"It isn't my doing, Mr. Hewett."

"Whose, then?"

"A friend's. Don't make a fuss. You shall know the person some day."
CHAPTER X.

ON THE EVE OF TRIUMPH.

"I have got your letter, but it tells me no more than the last did. Why don't you say plainly what you mean? I suppose it's something you are ashamed of. You say that there's a chance for me of earning a large sum of money, and if you are in earnest, I shall be only too glad to hear how it's to be done. This life is no better than what I used to lead years ago; I'm no nearer to getting a good part than I was when I first began acting, and unless I can get money to buy dresses and all the rest of it, I may go on for ever at this hateful drudgery. I shall take nothing more from you; I say it, and I mean it; but as you tell me that this chance has nothing to do with yourself, let me know what it really is. For a large sum of money
there are few things I wouldn’t do. Of course it’s something disgraceful, but you needn’t be afraid on that account; I haven’t lost all my pride yet, but I know what I’m fighting for, and I won’t be beaten. Cost what it may, I’ll make people hear of me and talk of me, and I’ll pay myself back for all I’ve gone through. So write in plain words, or come and see me.

C. V.”

She wrote at a round table, shaky on its central support, in the parlour of an indifferent lodging-house; the October afternoon drew towards dusk; the sky hung low and murky, or, rather, was itself invisible, veiled by the fume of factory chimneys; a wailing wind rattled the sash and the door. A newly lighted fire refused to flame cheerfully, half-smothered in its own smoke, which every now and then was blown downwards and out into the room. The letter finished,—scribbled angrily with a bad pen and in pale ink,—she put it into its envelope,—“C. H. Scawthorne, Esq.”
Then a long reverie, such as she always fell into when alone and unoccupied. The face was older, but not greatly changed from that of the girl who fought her dread fight with temptation, and lost it, in the lodging at Islington, who, then as now, brooded over the wild passions in her heart and defied the world that was her enemy. Still a beautiful face, its haughty characteristics strengthened, the lips a little more sensual, a little coarser; still the same stamp of intellect upon the forehead, the same impatient scorn and misery in her eyes. She asked no one's pity, but not many women breathed at that moment who knew more of suffering.

For three weeks she had belonged to a company on tour in the northern counties. In accordance with the modern custom—so beneficial to actors and the public—their repertory consisted of one play, the famous melodrama, "A Secret of the Thames," recommended to provincial audiences by its run of four hundred and thirty-seven nights at a London theatre. These, to be sure, were
not the London actors, but advertisements in local newspapers gave it to be understood that they "made an ensemble in no respect inferior to that which was so long the delight of the metropolis." Starred on the placards was the name of Mr. Samuel Peel, renowned in the north of England; his was the company, and his the main glory in the piece. As leading lady he had the distinguished Miss Erminia Walcott; her part was a trying one, for she had to be half-strangled by ruffians and flung—most decorously—over the parapet of London Bridge. In the long list of subordinate performers occurred two names with which we are familiar, Miss Grace Danver and Miss Clara Vale. The present evening would be the third and last in a certain town of Lancashire, one of those remarkable centres of industry which pollute heaven and earth, and on that account are spoken of with somewhat more of pride than stirred the Athenian when he named his Acropolis.

Clara had just risen to stir the fire, compelled to move by the smoke that was annoy-
ing her, when, after a tap at the door, there came in a young woman of about five-and-twenty, in a plain walking costume, tall, very slender, pretty, but looking ill. At this moment there was a slight flush on her cheeks and a brightness in her eyes which obviously came of some excitement. She paused just after entering and said in an eager voice, which had a touch of huskiness:

"What do you think? Miss Walcott's taken her hook!"

Clara did not allow herself to be moved at this announcement. For several days what is called unpleasantness had existed between the leading lady and the manager; in other words, they had been quarrelling violently on certain professional matters, and Miss Walcott had threatened to ruin the tour by withdrawing her invaluable services. The menace was at last executed, in good earnest, and the cause of Grace Danver's excitement was that she, as Miss Walcott's understudy, would to-night, in all probability, be called upon to take the leading part.
"I'm glad to hear it," Clara replied, very soberly.

"You don't look as if you cared much," rejoined the other, with a little irritation.

"What do you want me to do? Am I to scream with joy because the greatest actress in the world has got her chance at last?"

There was bitterness in the irony. Whatever their friendship in days gone by, these two were clearly not on the most amiable terms at present. This was their first engagement in the same company, and it had needed but a week of association to put a jealousy and ill-feeling between them which proved fatal to such mutual kindness as they had previously cherished. Grace, now no less than in her schooldays, was fond of patronising; as the elder in years and in experience, she adopted a tone which Clara speedily resented. To heighten the danger of a conflict between natures essentially incompatible, both were in a morbid and nervous state, consumed with discontent, sensitive to the most trifling injury, abandoned to a fierce egoism, which
the course of their lives and the circumstances of their profession kept constantly inflamed. Grace was of acrid and violent temper; when stung with words such as Clara was only too apt at using, she speedily lost command of herself and spoke, or even acted, frantically. Except that she had not Clara's sensibilities, her lot was the harder of the two; for she knew herself stricken with a malady which would hunt her unsparingly to the grave. On her story I have no time to dwell; it was full of wretchedness, which had caused her, about a year ago, to make an attempt at suicide. A little generosity, and Clara might have helped to soothe the pains of one so much weaker than herself; but noble feeling was extinct in the girl, or so nearly extinct that a breath of petty rivalry could make her base, cruel, remorseless.

"At all events, I have got my chance!" exclaimed Grace, with a harsh laugh. "When you get yours, ask me to congratulate you."

And she swept her skirts out of the room. In a few minutes Clara put a stamp on her
letter and went out to the post. Her presence at the theatre would not be necessary for another two hours, but as the distance was slight, and nervousness would not let her remain at home, she walked on to make inquiry concerning Grace's news. Rain had just begun to fall, and with it descended the smut and grime that darkened above the houses; the pavement was speedily oversmeared with sticky mud, and passing vehicles flung splashes in every direction. Odours of oil and shoddy, and all such things as characterised the town, grew more pungent under the heavy shower. On reaching the stage-door, Clara found two or three of her companions just within; the sudden departure of Miss Walcott had become known to every one, and at this moment Mr. Peel was holding a council, to which, as the doorkeeper testified, Miss Danver had been summoned.

The manager decided to make no public announcement of what had happened before the hour came for drawing up the curtain.
A scrappy rehearsal for the benefit of Grace Danver and the two or three other ladies who were affected by the necessary rearrangement, went on until the last possible moment, then Mr. Peel presented himself before the drop and made a little speech. The gallery was full of mill-hands; in the pit was a sprinkling of people; the circles and boxes presented half-a-dozen occupants. "Sudden domestic calamity . . . enforced absence of the lady who played . . . efficient substitution . . . deep regret, but confidence in the friendly feeling of audience on this last evening."

They growled, but in the end applauded the actor-manager, who had succeeded in delicately hinting that, after all, the great attraction was still present in his own person. The play went very much as usual, but those behind the scenes were not allowed to forget that Mr. Peel was in a furious temper; the ladies noticed with satisfaction that more than once he glared ominously at Miss Danver, who naturally could not aid him to make his "points" as Miss Walcott had accustomed
herself to do. At his final exit, it was observed that he shrugged his shoulders and muttered a few oaths.

Clara had her familiar part; it was a poor one from every point of view, and the imbecility of the words she had to speak affected her to-night with exceptional irritation. Clara always acted in ill-humour. She despised her audience for their acceptance of the playwright's claptrap; she felt that she could do better than any of the actresses entrusted with the more important characters; her imagination was for ever turning to powerful scenes in plays she had studied privately, and despair possessed her at the thought that she would perhaps never have a chance of putting forth her strength. To-night her mood was one of sullen carelessness; she did little more than "walk through" her part, feeling a pleasure in thus insulting the house. One scrap of dialogue she had with Grace, and her eyes answered with a flash of hatred to the arrogance of the other's regard. At another point she all but missed her cue, for her thoughts
were busy with that letter to which she had replied this afternoon. Mr. Peel looked at her savagely, and she met his silent rebuke with an air of indifference. After that the manager appeared to pay peculiar attention to her as often as they were together before the footlights. It was not the first time that Mr. Peel had allowed her to see that she was an object of interest to him.

There was an after-piece, but Clara was not engaged in it. When, at the fall of the curtain on the melodrama, she went to the shabby dressing-room which she shared with two companions, a message delivered by the call-boy bade her repair as soon as possible to the manager's office. What might this mean? She was startled on the instant, but speedily recovered her self-control; most likely she was to receive a rating,—let it come! Without unusual hurry, she washed, changed her dress, and obeyed the summons.

Mr. Peel was still a young man, of tall and robust stature, sanguine, with much sham refinement in his manner; he prided himself on
the civility with which he behaved to all who had business relations with him, but every now and then the veneer gave an awkward crack, and, as in his debate with Miss Walcott, the man himself was discovered to be of coarse grain. His aspect was singular when, on Clara's entrance into the private room, he laid down his cigarette and scrutinised her. There was a fiery hue on his visage, and the scowl of his black eyebrows had a peculiar ugliness.

"Miss Vale," he began, after hesitation, "do you consider that you played your part this evening with the conscientiousness that may fairly be expected of you?"

"Perhaps not," replied the girl, averting her eyes, and resting her hand on the table.

"And may I ask why not?"

"I didn't feel in the humour. The house saw no difference."

"Indeed? The house saw no difference? Do you mean to imply that you always play badly?"

"I mean that the part isn't worth any attention,—even if they were able to judge."
There was a perfection of insolence in her tone that in itself spoke strongly for the abilities she could display if occasion offered.

"This is rather an offhand way of treating the subject, madam," cried Mr. Peel. "If you disparage our audiences, I beg you to observe that it is much the same thing as telling me that my own successes are worthless!"

"I intended nothing of the kind."

"Perhaps not." He thrust his hands into his pockets, and looked down at his boots for an instant. "So you are discontented with your part?"

"It's only natural that I should be."

"I presume you think yourself equal to Juliet, or perhaps Lady Macbeth?"

"I could play either a good deal better than most women do."

The manager laughed, by no means ill-humouredly.

"I'm sorry I can't bring you out in Shakespeare just at present, Miss Vale; but—should you think it a condescension to play Laura Denton?"
This was Miss Walcott's part, now Grace Danver's. Clara looked at him with mistrust; her breath did not come quite naturally.

"How long would it take you, do you think," pursued the other, "to get the words?"

"An hour or two; I all but know them."

The manager took a few paces this way and that.

"We go on to Bolton to-morrow morning. Could you undertake to be perfect for the afternoon rehearsal?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll try you. Here's a copy you can take. I make no terms, you understand; it's an experiment. We'll have another talk to-morrow. Good-night."

She left the room. Near the door stood Grace Danver and another actress, both of whom were bidden to wait upon the manager before leaving. Clara passed under the fire of their eyes, but scarcely observed them.

Rain drenched her between the theatre and her lodgings, for she did not think of putting up an umbrella; she thought indeed of
nothing; there was fire and tumult in her brain. On the round table in her sitting-room supper was made ready, but she did not heed it. Excitement compelled her to walk incessantly round and round the scanty space of floor. Already she had begun to rehearse the chief scenes of Laura Denton; she spoke the words with all appropriate loudness and emphasis; her gestures were those of the stage, as though an audience sat before her; she seemed to have grown taller. There came a double knock at the house-door, but it did not attract her attention; a knock at her own room, and only when some one entered was she recalled to the present. It was Grace again; her lodging was elsewhere, and this late visit could have but one motive.

They stood face to face. The elder woman was so incensed that her lips moved fruitlessly, like those of a paralytic.

"I suppose you're going to make a scene," Clara addressed her. "Please remember how late it is, and don't let all the house hear you."

"You mean to tell me you accepted that
offer of Peel's—without saying a word—
without as much as telling him that he ought
to speak to me first?"

"Certainly I did. I've waited long enough;
I'm not going to beat about the bush when
my chance comes."

"And you called yourself my friend?"

"I'm nobody's friend but my own in an
affair of this kind. If you'd been in my
place you'd have done just the same."

"I wouldn't! I couldn't have been such
a mean creature! Every man and woman in
the company'll cry shame on you."

"Don't deafen me with your nonsense!
If you played the part badly, I suppose some
one else must take it. You were only on
trial, like I shall be."

Grace was livid with fury.

"Played badly! As if we didn't all know
how you've managed it! Much it has to do
with good or bad acting! We know how
creatures of your kind get what they want."

Before the last word was uttered she was
seized with a violent fit of coughing; her
cheeks flamed, and spots of blood reddened on the handkerchief she put to her mouth. Half-stifled, she lay back in the angle of the wall by the door. Clara regarded her with a contemptuous pity, and when the cough had nearly ceased, said coldly:

"I'm not going to try and match you in insulting language; I dare say you'd beat me at that. If you take my advice, you'll go home and take care of yourself; you look ill enough to be in bed. I don't care what you or any one else thinks of me; what you said just now was a lie, but it doesn't matter. I've got the part, and I'll take good care that I keep it. You talk about us being friends; I should have thought you knew by this time that there's no such thing as friendship or generosity or feeling for women who have to make their way in the world. You've had your hard times as well as I, and what's the use of pretending what you don't believe? You wouldn't give up a chance for me; I'm sure I should never expect you to. We have to fight, to fight for everything, and the weak
get beaten. That's what life has taught me."

"You're right," was the other's reply, given with a strangely sudden calmness. "And we'll see who wins."

Clara gave no thought to the words, nor to the look of deadly enmity that accompanied them. Alone again, she speedily became absorbed in a vision of the triumph which she never doubted was near at hand. A long, long time it seemed since she had sold herself to degradation with this one hope. You see that she had formulated her philosophy of life since then; a child of the nether world whom fate had endowed with intellect, she gave articulate utterance to what is seething in the brains of thousands who fight and perish in the obscure depths. The bitter bargain was issuing to her profit at last; she would yet attain that end which had shone through all her misery—to be known as a successful actress by those she had abandoned, whose faces were growing dim to her memory, but of whom, in truth, she still
thought more than of all the multitudinous unknown public. A great success during the remainder of this tour, and she might hope for an engagement in London. Her portraits would at length be in the windows; some would recognise her.

Yet she was not so pitiless as she boasted. The next morning, when she met Grace, there came a pain at her heart in seeing the ghastly, bloodless countenance which refused to turn towards her. Would Grace be able to act at all at the next town? Yes, one more scene.

They reached Bolton. In the afternoon the rehearsal took place, but the first representation was not until to-morrow. Clara saw her name attached to the leading female character on bills rapidly printed and distributed through the town. She went about in a dream, rather a delirium. Mr. Peel used his most affable manner to her; his compliments after the rehearsal were an augury of great things. And the eventful evening approached.
To give herself plenty of time to dress (the costumes needed for the part were fortunately simple, and Mr. Peel had advanced her money to make needful purchases) she left her lodgings at half-past six. It was a fine evening, but very dark in the two or three by-streets along which she had to pass to reach the theatre. She waited a minute on the door-step to let a troop of female mill-hands go by; their shoes clanked on the pavement, and they were singing in chorus, a common habit of their kind in leaving work. Then she started and walked quickly.

Close by the stage-door, which was in a dark, narrow passage, stood a woman with veiled face, a shawl muffling the upper part of her body. Since six o'clock she had been waiting about the spot, occasionally walking to a short distance, but always keeping her face turned towards the door. One or two persons came up and entered; she observed them, but held aloof. Another drew near. The woman advanced, and, as she did so, freed one of her arms from the shawl.
"That you, Grace?" said Clara, almost kindly, for in her victorious joy she was ready to be at peace with all the world.

The answer was something dashed violently in her face,—something fluid and fiery,—something that ate into her flesh, that frenzied her with pain, that drove her shrieking she knew not whither.

Late in the same night, a pointsman, walking along the railway a little distance out of the town, came upon the body of a woman, train-crushed, horrible to view. She wore the dress of a lady; a shawl was still partly wrapped about her, and her hands were gloved. Nothing discoverable upon her would have helped strangers in the task of identification, and as for her face— But a missing woman was already sought by the police, and when certain persons were taken to view this body, they had no difficulty in pronouncing it that of Grace Danver.
CHAPTER XI.

THE FAMILY HISTORY PROGRESSES.

What could possess John Hewett that, after resting from the day's work, he often left his comfortable room late in the evening and rambled about the streets of that part of London which had surely least interest for him, the streets which are thronged with idlers, with carriages going homeward from the theatres, with those who can only come forth to ply their business when darkness has fallen? Did he seek food for his antagonism in observing the characteristics of the world in which he was a stranger, the world which has its garners full and takes its ease amid superfluity? It could scarcely be that, for since his wife's death an indifference seemed to be settling upon him; he no longer cared to visit the Green or his club on Sunday, and seldom spoke on the subjects which formerly goaded
him to madness. He appeared to be drawn forth against his will, in spite of weariness, and his look as he walked on was that of a man who is in search of some one. Yet whom could he expect to meet in these highways of the West End?

Oxford Street, Regent Street, Piccadilly, the Strand, the ways about St. James's Park; John Hewett was not the only father who has come forth after nightfall from an obscure home to look darkly at the faces passing on these broad pavements. At times he would shrink into a shadowed corner, and peer thence at those who went by under the gaslight. When he moved forward, it was with the uneasy gait of one who shuns observation; you would have thought, perchance, that he watched an opportunity of begging and was shamefaced; it happened now and then that he was regarded suspiciously. A rough-looking man, with grizzled beard, with eyes generally bloodshot, his shoulders stooping,—naturally the miserable are always suspected where law is conscious of its injustice.
Two years ago he was beset for a time with the same restlessness, and took night-walks in the same directions; the habit wore away, however. Now it possessed him even more strongly. Between ten and eleven o'clock, when the children were in bed, he fell into abstraction, and presently, with an unexpected movement, looked up as if some one had spoken to him,—just the look of one who hears a familiar voice; then he sighed, and took his hat and went forth. It happened sometimes when he was sitting with his friends Mr. and Mrs. Eagles; in that case he would make some kind of excuse. The couple suspected that his business would take him to the public-house, but John never came back with a sign about him of having drunk; of that failing he had broken himself. He went cautiously down the stone stairs, averting his face if any one met him; then by cross-ways he reached Gray's Inn Road, and so westwards.

He had a well-ordered home, and his children were about him, but these things did not compensate him for the greatest loss his life
had suffered. The children, in truth, had no very strong hold upon his affections. Sometimes, when Amy sat and talked to him, he showed a growing nervousness, an impatience, and at length turned away from her as if to occupy himself in some manner. The voice was not that which had ever power to soothe him when it spoke playfully. Memory brought back the tones which had been so dear to him, and at times something more than memory; he seemed really to hear them, as if from a distance. And then it was that he went out to wander in the streets.

Of Bob in the meantime he saw scarcely anything. That young man presented himself one Sunday shortly after his father had become settled in the new home, but practically he was a stranger. John and he had no interests in common; there even existed a slight antipathy on the father's part of late years. Strangely enough this feeling expressed itself one day in the form of a rebuke to Bob for neglecting Pennyloaf,—Pennyloaf, whom John had always declined to recognise.

VOL. II.
"I hear no good of your goin's on," remarked Hewett, on a casual encounter in the street. "A married man ought to give up the kind of company as you keep."

"I do no harm," replied Bob, bluntly. "Has my wife been complaining to you?"

"I've nothing to do with her; it's what I'm told."

"By Kirkwood, I suppose? You'd better not have made up with him again, if he's only making mischief."

"No, I didn't mean Kirkwood."

And John went his way. Odd thing, was it not, that this embittered leveller should himself practise the very intolerance which he reviled in people of the upper world. For his refusal to recognise Pennyloaf he had absolutely no grounds, save—I use the words advisedly—an aristocratic prejudice. Bob had married deplorably beneath him; it was unpardonable, let the character of the girl be what it might. Of course you recognise the item in John Hewett's personality which serves to explain this singular attitude. But, viewed
generally, it was one of those bits of human in-
consistency over which the observer smiles, and
which should be recommended to good people
in search of arguments for the equality of men.

After that little dialogue, Bob went home
in a disagreeable temper. To begin with, his
mood had been ruffled, for the landlady at his
lodgings—the fourth to which he had removed
this year—was "nasty" about a week or two
of unpaid rent, and a man on whom he had
counted this evening for the payment of a
debt was keeping out of his way. He found
Pennyloaf sitting on the stairs with her two
children, as usual; poor Pennyloaf had not
originality enough to discover new expressions
of misery, and that one bright idea of donning
her best dress was a single instance of in-
genuity. In obedience to Jane Snowdon, she
kept herself and the babies and the room
tolerably clean, but everything was done in
the most dispirited way.

"What are you kicking about here for?" asked Bob impatiently. "That's how that kid
gets its cold—of course it is!—Ger out!"
The last remark was addressed to the elder child, who caught at his legs as he strode past. Bob was not actively unkind to the little wretches for whose being he was responsible; he simply occupied the natural position of unsophisticated man to children of that age, one of indifference, or impatience. The infants were a nuisance; no one desired their coming, and the older they grew the more expensive they were.

It was a cold evening of October; Penny-loaf had allowed the fire to get very low (she knew not exactly where the next supply of coals was to come from), and her husband growled as he made a vain endeavour to warm his hands.

"Why haven't you got tea ready?" he asked.

"I couldn't be sure as you was comin', Bob; how could I? But I'll soon get the kettle boilin'."

"Couldn't be sure as I was coming? Why, I've been back every night this week—except two or three."
It was Thursday, but Bob meant nothing jocose.

"Look here!" he continued, fixing a surly eye upon her. "What do you mean by complaining about me to people? Just mind your own business. When was that girl Jane Snowdon here last?"

"Yesterday, Bob."

"I thought as much. Did she give you anything?" He made this inquiry in rather a shamefaced way.

"No, she didn't."

"Well, I tell you what it is. I'm not going to have her coming about the place, so understand that. When she comes next, you'll just tell her she needn't come again."

Pennyloaf looked at him with dismay. For the delivery of this command Bob had seated himself on the corner of the table and crossed his arms. But for the touch of blackguardism in his appearance, Bob would have been a very good-looking fellow; his face was healthy, by no means commonplace in its mould, and had the peculiar vividness which
indicates ability,—so impressive, because so rarely seen, in men of his level. Unfortunately his hair was cropped all but to the scalp, in the fashionable manner; it was greased, too, and curled up on one side of his forehead with a peculiarly offensive perkishness. Poor Pennyloaf was in a great degree responsible for the ills of her married life; not only did she believe Bob to be the handsomest man who walked the earth, but in her weakness she could not refrain from telling him as much. At the present moment he was intensely self-conscious; with Pennyloaf's eye upon him, he posed for effect. The idea of forbidding future intercourse with Jane had come to him quite suddenly; it was by no means his intention to make his order permanent, for Jane had now and then brought little presents which were useful, but just now he felt a satisfaction in asserting authority. Jane should understand that he regarded her censure of him with high displeasure.

"You don't mean that, Bob?" murmured Pennyloaf.
"Of course I do. And let me catch you disobeying me! I should think you might find better friends than a girl as used to be the Peckovers' dirty little servant."

Bob turned up his nose and sniffed the air. And Pennyloaf, in spite of the keenest distress, actually felt that there was something in the objection, thus framed! She herself had never been a servant,—never; she had never sunk below working with the needle for sixteen hours a day for a payment of ninepence. The work-girl regards a domestic slave as very distinctly her inferior.

"But that's a long while ago," she ventured to urge, after reflection.

"That makes no difference. Do as I tell you, and don't argue."

It was not often that visitors sought Bob at his home of an evening, but whilst this dialogue was still going on an acquaintance made his arrival known by a knock at the door. It was a lank and hungry individual, grimy of face and hands, his clothing such as in the country would serve well for a scare-
crow. Who could have recognised in him the once spruce and spirited Mr. Jack Bartley, distinguished by his chimney-pot hat at the Crystal Palace on Bob's wedding-day? At the close of that same day, as you remember, he and Bob engaged in terrific combat, the outcome of earlier rivalry for the favour of Clem Peckover. Notwithstanding that memory, the two were now on very friendly terms. You have heard from Clem's lips that Jack Bartley, failing to win herself, ended by espousing Miss Susan Jollop; also what was the result of that alliance. Mr. Bartley was an unhappy man. His wife had a ferocious temper, was reckless with money, and now drank steadily; the consequence was, that Jack had lost all regular employment, and only earned occasional pence in the most various ways. Broken in spirit, he himself first made advances to his companion of former days, and Bob, flattered by the other's humility, encouraged him as a hanger-on.—Really, we shall soon be coming to a conclusion that the differences between the
nether and the upper world are purely superficial.

Whenever Jack came to spend an hour with Mr. and Mrs. Hewett, he was sure sooner or later to indulge the misery that preyed upon him and give way to sheer weeping. He did so this evening, almost as soon as he entered.

"I ain't had a mouthful past my lips since last night, I ain't!" he sobbed. "It's 'ard on a feller as used to have his meals regular. I'll murder Suke yet, see if I don't! I'll have her life! She met me last night and gave me this black eye as you see,—she did! It's 'ard on a feller."

"You mean to say as she 'it you?" cried Pennyloaf.

Bob chuckled, thrust his hands into his pockets, spread himself out. His own superiority was so gloriously manifest.

"Suppose you try it on with me, Penny!" he cried.

"You'd give me something as I should remember," she answered, smirking, the good little slavey.
"Shouldn't wonder if I did," assented Bob.

Mr. Bartley's pressing hunger was satisfied with some bread and butter and a cup of tea. Whilst taking a share of the meal, Bob brought a small box on to the table; it had a sliding lid, and inside were certain specimens of artistic work with which he was wont to amuse himself when tired of roaming the streets in jovial company. Do you recollect that, when we first made Bob's acquaintance, he showed Sidney Kirkwood a medal of his own design and casting? His daily work at die-sinking had of course supplied him with this suggestion, and he still found pleasure in work of the same kind. In days before commercialism had divorced art and the handicrafts, a man with Bob's distinct faculty would have found encouragement to exercise it for serious ends; as it was, he remained at the semi-conscious stage with regard to his own aptitudes, and cast leaden medals just as a way of occupying his hands when a couple of hours hung heavy on them. Partly with the thought of amusing the dolorous Jack, yet more to win
laudation, he brought forth now a variety of casts and moulds and spread them on the table. His latest piece of work was a medal in high relief bearing the heads of the Prince and Princess of Wales surrounded with a wreath. Bob had no political convictions; with complacency he drew these royal features, the sight of which would have made his father foam at the mouth. True, he might have found subjects artistically more satisfying, but he belonged to the people, and the English people.

Jack Bartley, having dried his eyes and swallowed his bread and butter, considered the medal with much attention.

"I say," he remarked at length, "will you give me this, Bob?"

"I don't mind. You can take it if you like."

"Thanks!"

Jack wrapped it up and put it in his waistcoat pocket, and before long rose to take leave of his friends.

"I only wish I'd got a wife like you," he observed at the door, as he saw Pennyloaf bending over the two children, recently put to bed.
Pennyloaf's eyes gleamed at the compliment, and she turned them to her husband.

"She's nothing to boast of," said Bob, judicially and masculinely. "All women are pretty much alike."

And Pennyloaf tried to smile at the snub.

Having devoted one evening to domestic quietude, Bob naturally felt himself free to dispose of the next in a manner more to his taste. The pleasures which sufficed to keep him from home had the same sordid monotony which characterises life in general for the lower strata of society. If he had money, there was the music-hall; if he had none, there were the streets. Being in the latter condition to-night, he joined a company of male and female intimates, and with them strolled aimlessly from one familiar rendezvous to another. Would that it were possible to set down a literal report of the conversation which passed during hours thus spent. Much of it, of course, would be merely revolting, but for the most part it would consist of such wearying, such incredible imbecilites as no human
patience could endure through five minutes' perusal. Realise it, however, and you grasp the conditions of what is called the social problem. As regards Robert Hewett in particular, it would help you to understand the momentous change in his life which was just coming to pass.

On his reaching home at eleven o'clock, Pennyloaf met him with the news that Jack Bartley had looked in twice and seemed very anxious to see him. To-morrow being Saturday, Jack would call again early in the afternoon. When the time came, he presented himself, hungry and dirty as ever, but with an unwonted liveliness in his eye.

"I've got something to say to you," he began, in a low voice, nodding significantly towards Pennyloaf.

"Go and buy what you want for to-morrow," said Bob to his wife, giving her some money out of his wages. "Take the kids."

Disappointed in being thus excluded from confidence, but obedient as ever, Pennyloaf speedily prepared herself and the children, the
younger of whom she still had to carry. When she was gone Mr. Bartley assumed a peculiar attitude and began to speak in an undertone.

"You know that medal as you gave me the other night?"

"What about it?"

"I sold it for fourpence to a chap I know. It got me a bed at the lodgings in Pentonville Road."

"Oh, you did! Well, what else?"

Jack was writhing in the most unaccountable way, peering hither and thither out of the corners of his eyes, seeming to have an obstruction in his throat.

"It was in a public-house as I sold it,—a chap I know. There was another chap as I didn't know standing just by,—see? He kep' looking at the medal, and he kep' looking at me. When I went out, the chap as I didn't know followed behind me. I didn't see him at first, but he come up with me just at the top of Rosoman Street,—a red-haired chap, looked like a corster. 'Hollo!' says he. 'Hollo!' says I. 'Got any more o' them
medals?' he says, in a quiet way like. ‘What do you want to know for?’ I says,—’cos you see he was a bloke as I didn’t know nothing about, and there’s no good being over-free with your talk. He got me to walk on a bit with him, and kept talking. ‘You didn’t buy that nowhere,’ he says, with a sort of wink. ‘What if I didn’t?’ I says. ‘There’s no harm, as I know.’ Well, he kept on with his sort o’ winks, and then he says, ‘Got any queer to put round?’”

At this point, Jack lowered his voice to a whisper and looked timorously towards the door.

“You know what he meant, Bob?”

Bob nodded and became reflective.

“Well, I didn’t say nothing,” pursued Bartley, “but the chap stuck to me. ‘A fair price for a fair article,’ he says. ‘You’ll always find me there of a Thursday night, if you’ve got any business going. Give me a look round,’ he says. ‘It ain’t in my line,’ I says. So he gave a grin like, and kep’ on talking. ‘If you want a four-half shiner,’ he says, ‘you
know where to come. Reasonable with them as is reasonable. Thursday night,' he says, and then he slung his hook round the corner.”

“What's a four-half shiner?” inquired Bob, looking from under his eyebrows.

“Well, I didn't know myself, just then; but I've found out. It's a public-house pewter,—see?”

A flash of intelligence shot across Bob's face. . . .

When Pennyloaf returned she found her husband with his box of moulds and medals on the table. He was turning over its contents, meditatively. On the table there also lay a half-crown and a florin, as though Bob had been examining these products of the Royal Mint with a view to improving the artistic quality of his amateur workmanship. He took up the coins quietly as his wife entered and put them in his pocket.

“Mrs. Rendal's been at me again, Bob,” Pennyloaf said, as she set down her market-basket. “You'll have to give her something to-day.”
He paid no attention, and Pennyloaf had a difficulty in bringing him to discuss the subject of the landlady's demands. Ultimately, however, he admitted with discontent the advisability of letting Mrs. Rendal have something on account. Though it was Saturday night, he let hour after hour go by and showed no disposition to leave home; to Pennyloaf's surprise, he sat almost without moving by the fire, absorbed in thought.

Genuine respect for law is the result of possessing something which the law exerts itself to guard. Should it happen that you possess nothing, and that your education in metaphysics has been grievously neglected, the strong probability is, that your mind will reduce the principle of society to its naked formula: Get, by whatever means, so long as with impunity. On that formula Bob Hewett was brooding; in the hours of this Saturday evening he exerted his mind more strenuously than ever before in the course of his life. And to a foregone result. Here is a man with no moral convictions, with no conscious
relations to society save those which are hostile, with no personal affections; at the same time, vaguely aware of certain faculties in himself for which life affords no scope and encouraged in various kinds of conceit by the crass stupidity of all with whom he associates. It is suggested to him all at once that there is a very easy way of improving his circumstances, and that by exercise of a certain craft with which he is perfectly familiar;—only, the method happens to be criminal. "Men who do this kind of thing are constantly being caught and severely punished. Yes; men of a certain kind; not Robert Hewett. Robert Hewett is altogether an exceptional being; he is head and shoulders above the men with whom he mixes; he is clever, he is remarkably good-looking. If any one in this world, of a truth Robert Hewett may reckon on impunity when he sets his wits against the law. Why, his arrest and punishment is an altogether inconceivable thing; he never in his life had a charge brought against him."
Again and again it came back to that. Every novice in unimpassioned crime has that thought, and the more self-conscious the man, the more impressed with a sense of his own importance, so much the weightier is its effect with him.

We know in what spirit John Hewett regarded rebels against the law. Do not imagine that any impulse of that nature actuated his son. Clara alone had inherited her father's instinct of revolt. Bob's temperament was, in a certain measure, that of the artist; he felt without reasoning; he let himself go whither his moods propelled him. Not a man of evil propensities; entertain no such thought for a moment. Society produces many a monster, but the mass of those whom, after creating them, it pronounces bad are merely bad from the conventional point of view; they are guilty of weaknesses, not of crimes. Bob was not incapable of generosity; his marriage had, in fact, implied more of that quality than you in the upper world can at all appreciate. He neglected his wife, of
course, for he had never loved her, and the burden of her support was too great a trial for his selfishness. Weakness, vanity, a sense that he has not satisfactions proportionate to his desert, a strong temptation,—here are the data which, in ordinary cases, explain a man's deliberate attempt to profit by criminality.

In a short time Pennyloaf began to be aware of peculiarities of behaviour in her husband for which she could not account. Though there appeared no necessity for the step, he insisted on their once more seeking new lodgings, and, before the removal, he destroyed all his medals and moulds.

"What's that for, Bob?" Pennyloaf inquired.

"I'll tell you, and mind you hold your tongue about it. Somebody's been saying as these things might get me into trouble. Just you be careful not to mention to people that I used to make these kind of things."

"But why should it get you into trouble?"

"Mind what I tell you, and don't ask questions. You're always too ready at talking."
His absences of an evening were nothing new, but his manner on returning was such as Pennyloaf had never seen in him. He appeared to be suffering from some intense excitement; his hands were unsteady; he showed the strangest nervousness if there were any unusual sounds in the house. Then he certainly obtained money of which his wife did not know the source; he bought new articles of clothing, and in explanation said that he had won bets. Pennyloaf remarked these things with uneasiness; she had a fear during her lonely evenings for which she could give no reason. Poor slow-witted mortal though she was, a devoted fidelity attached her to her husband, and quickened wonderfully her apprehension in everything that concerned him.

"Miss Snowdon came to-day, Bob," she had said, about a week after his order with regard to Jane.

"Oh, she did? And did you tell her she'd better keep away?"

"Yes," was the dispirited answer.
“Glad to hear it.”

As for Jack Bartley, he never showed himself at the new lodgings.

Bob shortly became less regular in his attendance at the workshop. An occasional Monday he had, to be sure, been in the habit of allowing himself, but as the winter wore on he was more than once found straying about the streets in mid-week. One morning towards the end of November, as he strolled along High Holborn, a hand checked his progress; he gave almost a leap, and turned a face of terror upon the person who stopped him. It was Clem,—Mrs. Snowdon. They had, of course, met casually since Bob’s marriage, and in progress of time the ferocious glances they were wont to exchange had softened into a grin of half-friendly recognition; Clem’s behaviour at present was an unexpected revival of familiarity. When he had got over his shock Bob felt surprised, and expressed the feeling in a—“Well, what have you got to say for yourself?”

“You jumped as if I’d stuck a pin in you,”
replied Clem. "Did you think it was a copper?"

Bob looked at her with a surly smile. Though no one could have mistaken the class she belonged to, Clem was dressed in a way which made her companionship with Bob in his workman's clothing somewhat incongruous; she wore a heavily trimmed brown hat, a long velveteen jacket, and carried a little bag of imitation fur.

"Why ain't you at work?" she added. "Does Mrs. Pennyloaf Hewett know how you spend your time?"

"Hasn't your husband taught you to mind your own business?"

Clem took the retort good-humouredly, and they walked on conversing. Not altogether at his ease thus companioned, Bob turned out of the main street, and presently they came within sight of the British Museum.

"Ever been in that place?" Clem asked.

"Of course I have," he replied, with his air of superiority.
"I haven't. Is there anything to pay?—Let's go in for half-an-hour."

It was an odd freak, but Bob began to have a pleasure in this renewal of intimacy; he wished he had been wearing his best suit. Years ago his father had brought him on a public holiday to the Museum, and his interest was chiefly excited by the collection of the Royal Seals. To that quarter he first led his companion, and thence directed her towards objects more likely to supply her with amusement; he talked freely, and was himself surprised at the show of information his memory allowed him to make,—desperately vague and often ludicrously wide of the mark, but still a something of knowledge, retained from all sorts of chance encounters by his capable mind. Had the British Museum been open to visitors in the hours of the evening, or on Sundays, Bob Hewett would possibly have been employing his leisure now-a-days in more profitable pursuits. Possibly; one cannot say more than that; for the world to which he belonged is above all
a world of frustration, and only the one man in half a million has fate for his friend.

Much Clem cared for antiquities; when she had wearied herself in pretending interest, a seat in an unvisited corner gave her an opportunity for more congenial dialogue.

"How's Mrs. Pennyloaf?" she asked, with a smile of malice.

"How's Mr. What's-his-name Snowdon?" was the reply.

"My husband's a gentleman. Good thing for me I had the sense to wait."

"And for me too, I daresay."

"Why ain't you at work? Got the sack?"

"I can take a day off if I like, can't I?"

"And you'll go 'ome and tell your wife as you've been working. I know what you men are. What 'ud Mrs. Pennyloaf say if she knew you was here with me? You daren't tell her; you daren't!"

"I'm not doing any harm as I know of. I shall tell her if I choose, and if I choose I shan't. I don't ask her what I'm to do."

"I daresay. And how does that mother of
hers get on? And her brother at the public? Nice relations for Mr. Bob Hewett. Do they come to tea on a Sunday?"

Bob glared at her, and Clem laughed, showing all her teeth. From this exchange of pleasantries the talk passed to various subjects,—the affairs of Jack Bartley and his precious wife, changes in Clerkenwell Close, then to Clem's own circumstances; she threw out hints of brilliant things in store for her.

"Do you come here often?" she asked at length.

"Can't say I do."

"Thought p'r'aps you brought Mrs. Penny-loaf. When'll you be here again?"

"Don't know," Bob replied, fidgeting and looking to a distance.

"I shouldn't wonder if I'm here this day next week," said Clem, after a pause. "You can bring Pennyloaf if you like."

It was dinner-time, and they left the building together. At the end of Museum Street they exchanged a careless nod and went their several ways.
CHAPTER XII.

A DOUBLE CONSECRATION.

Bessie Byass and her husband had, as you may suppose, devoted many an hour to intimate gossip on the affairs of their top-floor lodgers. Having no relations with Clerkenwell Close, they did not even hear the rumours which spread from Mrs. Peckover's house at the time of Jane's departure thence; their curiosity, which only grew keener as time went on, found no appeasement save in conjecture. That Sidney Kirkwood was in the secret from the first they had no doubt; Bessie made a sly attempt now and then to get a hint from him, but without the least result. The appearance on the scene of Jane's father revived their speculation, and just after the old man's illness in the month of August occurred something which gave them still fresh matter for
The rooms on the first floor having become vacant, Michael proposed certain new arrangements. His own chamber was too much that of an invalid to serve any longer as sitting-room for Jane; he desired to take the front room below for that purpose, to make the other on the same floor Jane's bedroom, and then to share with the Byasses the expense of keeping a servant, whose lodging would be in the chamber thus set free. Hitherto Bessie and Jane and an occasional charwoman had done all the work of the house; it was a day of jubilation for Mrs. Byass when she found herself ruling over a capped and aproned maid. All these things set it beyond doubt that Michael Snowdon had means greater than one would have supposed from his way of living hitherto. Jane's removal from work could, of course, be explained by her grandfather's growing infirmities, but Bessie saw more than this in the new order of things; she began to look upon the girl with a certain awe, as one whose future might reveal marvels.

For Jane, as we know, the marvels had
already begun. She came back from Danbury not altogether like herself; unsettled a little, as it appeared; and Michael's illness, befalling so soon, brought her into a nervous state such as she had not known for a long time. The immediate effect of the disclosure made to her by Michael whilst he was recovering was to overwhelm her with a sense of responsibilities, to throw her mind into painful tumult. Slow of thought, habituated to the simplest views of her own existence, very ignorant of the world beyond the little circle in which her life had been passed, she could not at once bring into the control of her reflection this wondrous future to which her eyes had been opened. The way in which she had been made acquainted with the facts was unfortunate. Michael Snowdon, in spite of his deep affection for her, and of the trust he had come to repose in her character, did not understand Jane well enough to bring about this revelation with the needful prudence. Between him, a man burdened with the sorrowful memories of a long life, originally of stern
temperament, and now, in the feebleness of his age, possessed by an enthusiasm which in several respects disturbed his judgment, which made him desperately eager to secure his end now that he felt life slipping away from him,—between him and such a girl as Jane there was a wider gulf than either of them could be aware of. Little as he desired it, he could not help using a tone which seemed severe rather than tenderly trustful. Absorbed in his great idea, conscious that it had regulated every detail in his treatment of Jane since she came to live with him, he forgot that the girl herself was by no means adequately prepared to receive the solemn injunctions which he now delivered to her. His language was as general as were the ideas of beneficent activity which he desired to embody in Jane's future; but instead of inspiring her with his own zeal, he afflicted her with grievous spiritual trouble. For a time she could only feel that something great and hard and high was suddenly required of her; the old man's look seemed to keep repeating, "Are you worthy?"
The tremor of bygone days came back upon her as she listened, the anguish of timidity, the heart-sinking, with which she had been wont to strain her attention when Mrs. Peck-over or Clem imposed a harsh task.

One thing alone had she grasped as soon as it was uttered; one word of reassurance she could recall when she sat down in solitude to collect her thoughts. Her grandfather had mentioned that Sidney Kirkwood already knew this secret. To Sidney her whole being turned in this hour of distress; he was the friend who would help her with counsel and teach her to be strong. But hereupon there revived in her a trouble which for the moment she had forgotten, and it became so acute that she was driven to speak to Michael in a way which had till now seemed impossible. When she entered his room,—it was the morning after their grave conversation,—Michael welcomed her with a face of joy, which, however, she still felt to be somewhat stern and searching in its look. When they had talked for a few moments, Jane said:
"I may speak about this to Mr. Kirkwood, grandfather?"

"I hope you will, Jane. Strangers needn't know of it yet, but we can speak freely to him."

After many endeavours to find words that would veil her thought, she constrained herself to ask:

"Does he think I can be all you wish?"

Michael looked at her, with a smile.

"Sidney has no less faith in you than I have, be sure of that."

"I've been thinking—that perhaps he distrusted me a little."

"Why, my child?"

"I don't quite know. But there's been a little difference in him, I think, since we came back."

Michael's countenance fell.

"Difference? How?"

But Jane could not go further. She wished she had not spoken. Her face began to grow hot, and she moved away.

"It's only your fancy," continued Michael.
‘But may be that—. You think he isn’t quite so easy in his talking to you as he was?’

‘I’ve fancied it. But it was only’—

‘Well, you may be partly right,’ said her grandfather, softening his voice. ‘See, Jane, I’ll tell you something. I think there’s no harm; perhaps I ought to. You must know that I hadn’t meant to speak to Sidney of these things just when I did. It came about, because he had something to tell me, and something I was well pleased to hear. It was about you, Jane, and in that way I got talking,—something about you, my child. Afterwards, I asked him whether he wouldn’t speak to you yourself, but he said no,—not till you’d heard all that was before you. I think I understood him, and I daresay you will, if you think it over.’

Matter enough for thinking over, in these words. Did she understand them aright? Before leaving the room she had not dared to look her grandfather in the face, but she knew well that he was regarding her still with the same smile. Did she understand him aright?
Try to read her mind. The world had all at once grown very large, a distress to her imagination; worse still, she had herself become a person of magnified importance, irrecognisable in her own sight, moving, thinking so unnaturally. Jane, I assure you, had thought very little of herself hitherto,—in both senses of the phrase. Joyous because she could not help it, full of gratitude, admiration, generosity, she occupied her thoughts very much with other people, but knew not self-seeking, knew not self-esteem. The one thing affecting herself over which she mused frequently was her suffering as a little thrall in Clerkenwell Close, and the result was to make her very humble. She had been an ill-used, ragged, work-worn child, and something of that degradation seemed, in her feeling, still to cling to her. Could she have known Bob Hewett's view of her position, she would have felt its injustice, but at the same time would have bowed her head. And in this spirit had she looked up to Sidney Kirkwood, regarding him as when she was a child, save for that subtle
modification which began on the day when she brought news of Clara Hewett's disappearance. Perfect in kindness, Sidney had never addressed a word to her which implied more than friendship,—never until that evening at the farm; then for the first time had he struck a new note. His words seemed spoken with the express purpose of altering his and her relations to each other. So much Jane had felt, and his change since then was all the more painful to her, all the more confusing. Now that of a sudden she had to regard herself in an entirely new way, the dearest interest of her life necessarily entered upon another phase. Struggling to understand how her grandfather could think her worthy of such high trust, she inevitably searched her mind for testimony as to the account in which Sidney held her. A fearful hope had already flushed her cheeks before Michael spoke the words which surely could have but one meaning.

On one point Sidney had left her no doubts; that his love for Clara Hewett was a thing of the past he had told her distinctly. And why
did he wish her to be assured of that? Oh, had her grandfather been mistaken in those words he reported? Durst she put faith in them, coming thus to her by another's voice?

Doubts and dreads and self-reproofs might still visit her from hour to hour, but the instinct of joy would not allow her to refuse admission to this supreme hope. As if in spite of herself, the former gladness—nay, a gladness multiplied beyond conception—reigned once more in her heart. Her grandfather would not speak lightly in such a matter as this; the meaning of his words was confessed, to all eternity immutable. Had it, then, come to this? The friend to whom she looked up with such reverence, with voiceless gratitude, when he condescended to speak kindly to her, the Peckovers' miserable little servant,—he, after all these changes and chances of life, sought her now that she was a woman, and had it on his lips to say that he loved her. Hitherto the impossible, the silly thought to be laughed out of her head, the desire for which she would have chid herself durst she
have faced it seriously,—was it become a very truth? "Keep a good heart, Jane; things'll be better some day." How many years since the rainy and windy night when he threw his coat over her and spoke those words? Yet she could hear them now, and the tears that rushed to her eyes as she blessed him for his manly goodness were as much those of the desolate child as of the full-hearted woman.

And the change that she had observed in him since that evening at Danbury? A real change, but only of manner. He would not say to her what he had meant to say until she knew the truth about her own circumstances. In simple words, she being rich and he having only what he earned by his daily work, Sidney did not think it right to speak whilst she was still in ignorance. The delicacy of her instincts, and the sympathies awakened by her affection, made this perfectly clear to her, strange and difficult to grasp as the situation was at first. When she understood, how her soul laughed with exulting merriment! Consecration to a great
idea, endowment with the means of wide beneficence,—this not only left her cold, but weighed upon her; afflicted her beyond her strength. What was it, in truth, that restored her to herself and made her heart beat joyously? Knit your brows against her; shake your head and raze her name from that catalogue of saints whereon you have inscribed it in anticipation. Jane rejoiced simply because she loved a poor man, and had riches that she could lay at his feet.

Great sums of money, vague and disturbing to her imagination when she was bidden hold them in trust for unknown people, gleamed and made music now that she could think of them as a gift of love. By this way of thought she could escape from the confusion in which Michael's solemn appeal had left her. Exalted by her great hope, calmed by the assurance of aid that would never fail her, she began to feel the beauty of the task to which she was summoned; the appalling responsibility became a high privilege now that it was to be shared with one in whose
wisdom and strength she had measureless confidence. She knew now what wealth meant; it was a great and glorious power, a source of blessings incalculable. This power it would be hers to bestow, and no man more worthy than he who should receive it at her hands.

It was not without result that Jane had been so long a listener to the conversations between Michael and Kirkwood. Defective as was her instruction in the ordinary sense, those evenings spent in the company of the two men had done much to refine her modes of thought. In spite of the humble powers of her mind and her narrow experience, she had learned to think on matters which are wholly strange to girls of her station, to regard the life of the world and the individual in a light of idealism and with a freedom from ignoble association rare enough in any class. Her forecast of the future to be spent with Sidney was pathetic in its simplicity, but had the stamp of nobleness. Thinking of the past years, she made clear to herself
all the significance of her training. In her general view of things, wealth was naturally allied with education, but she understood why Michael had had her taught so little. A wealthy woman is called a lady; yes, but that was exactly what she was not to become. On that account she had gone to work, when in reality there was no need for her to do so. Never must she remove herself from the poor and the laborious, her kin, her care; never must she forget those bitter sufferings of her childhood, precious as enabling her to comprehend the misery of others for whom had come no rescue. She saw, moreover, what was meant by Michael's religious teaching, why he chose for her study such parts of the Bible as taught the beauty of compassion, of service rendered to those whom the world casts forth and leaves to perish. All this grew upon her, when once the gladness of her heart was revived. It was of the essence of her being to exercise all human and self-forgetful virtues, and the consecration to a life of beneficence moved her profoundly now
that it followed upon consecration to the warmer love.

When Sidney paid his next visit Jane was alone in the new sitting-room; her grandfather said he did not feel well enough to come down this evening. It was the first time that Kirkwood had seen the new room. After making his inquiries about Michael he surveyed the arrangements, which were as simple as they could be, and spoke a few words regarding the comfort Jane would find in them. He had his hand on a chair, but did not sit down, nor lay aside his hat. Jane suffered from a constraint which she had never before felt in his presence.

"You know what grandfather has been telling me?" she said at length, regarding him with grave eyes.

"Yes. He told me of his intention."

"I asked him if I might speak to you about it. It was hard to understand at first."

"It would be, I've no doubt."

Jane moved a little, took up some sewing,
and seated herself. Sidney let his hat drop on to the chair, but remained standing, his arms resting on the back.

"It's a very short time since I myself knew of it," he continued. "Till then, I as little imagined as you did that"——. He paused, then resumed more quickly, "But it explains many things which I had always understood in a simpler way."

"I feel, too, that I know grandfather much better than I did," Jane said. "He's always been thinking about the time when I should be old enough to hear what plans he'd made for me. I do so hope he really trusts me, Mr. Kirkwood! I don't know whether I speak about it as he wishes. It isn't easy to say all I think, but I mean to do my best to be what he"——

"He knows that very well. Don't be anxious; he feels that all his hopes have been realised in you."

There was silence. Jane made a pretence of using her needle, and Sidney watched her hands.
“He spoke to you of a lady called Miss Lant?” were his next words.
“Yes. He just mentioned her.”
“Are you going to see her soon?”
“I don’t know. Have you seen her?”
“No. But I believe she’s a woman you could soon be friendly with. I hope your grandfather will ask her to come here before long.”
“I’m rather afraid of strangers.”
“No doubt,” said the other, smiling. “But you’ll get over that. I shall do my best to persuade Mr. Snowdon to make you acquainted with her.”
Jane drew in her breath uneasily.
“She won’t want me to know other people, I hope?”
“Oh, if she does, they’ll be kind and nice and easy to talk to.”
Jane raised her eyes and said half-laughingly:
“I feel as if I was very childish, and that makes me feel it still more. Of course, if it’s necessary, I’ll do my best to talk to strangers.
But they won’t expect too much of me, at first? I mean, if they find me a little slow, they won’t be impatient?"

"You mustn’t think that hard things are going to be asked of you. You’ll never be required to say or do anything that you haven’t already said and done many a time, quite naturally. Why, it’s some time since you began the kind of work of which your grandfather has been speaking."

"I have begun it? How?"

"Who has been such a good friend to Pennyloaf, and helped her as nobody else could have done?"

"Oh, but that’s nothing!"

Sidney was on the point of replying, but suddenly altered his intention. He raised himself from the leaning attitude, and took his hat.

"Well, we’ll talk about it another time," he said carelessly. "I can’t stop long to-night, so I’ll go up and see your grandfather."

Jane rose silently.

"I’ll just look in and say good-night before I go," Sidney added, as he left the room.
He did so, twenty minutes after. When he opened the door Jane was sewing busily, but it was only on hearing his footsteps that she had so applied herself. He gave a friendly nod, and departed.

Still the same change in his manner. A little while ago he would have chatted freely and forgotten the time.

Another week, and Jane made the acquaintance of the lady whose name we have once or twice heard, Miss Lant, the friend of old Mr. Percival. Of middle age and with very plain features, Miss Lant had devoted herself to philanthropic work; she had an income of a few hundred pounds, and lived almost as simply as the Snowdons in order to save money for charitable expenditure. Unfortunately the earlier years of her life had been joyless, and in the energy which she brought to this self-denying enterprise there was just a touch of excess, common enough in those who have been defrauded of their natural satisfactions and find a resource in altruism. She was no pietist, but there is now-a-days
coming into existence a class of persons who substitute for the old religious acerbity a narrow and oppressive zeal for good works of purely human sanction, and to this order Miss Lant might be said to belong. However, nothing but what was agreeable manifested itself in her intercourse with Michael and Jane; the former found her ardent spirit very congenial, and the latter was soon at ease in her company.

It was a keen distress to Jane when she heard from Pennyloaf that Bob would allow no future meetings between them. In vain she sought an explanation; Pennyloaf professed to know nothing of her husband's motives, but implored her friend to keep away for a time, as any disregard of Bob's injunction would only result in worse troubles than she yet had to endure. Jane sought the aid of Kirkwood, begging him to interfere with young Hewett; the attempt was made, but proved fruitless. "Sic volo, sic jubeo," was Bob's standpoint, and he as good as bade Sidney mind his own affairs.
Jane suffered, and more than she herself would have anticipated. She had conceived a liking, almost an affection, for poor, shiftless Pennyloaf, strengthened, of course, by the devotion with which the latter repaid her. But something more than this injury to her feelings was involved in her distress on being excluded from those sorry lodgings. Pennyloaf was comparatively an old friend; she represented the past, its contented work, its familiar associations, its abundant happiness. And now, though Jane did not acknowledge to herself that she regretted the old state of things, still less that she feared the future, it was undeniable that the past seemed very bright in her memory, and that something weighed upon her heart, forbidding such gladsomeness as she had known.
CHAPTER XIII.

S I D N E Y ' S S T R U G G L E.

In the dreary days when autumn is being choked by the first fogs, Sidney Kirkwood had to bestir himself and to find new lodgings. The cheerless task came upon him just when he had already more than sufficient trouble, and to tear himself out of the abode in which he had spent eight years caused him more than regret; he felt superstitiously about it, and questioned fate as to what sorrows might be lurking for him behind this corner in life's journey. Move he must; his landlady was dead, and the house would perhaps be vacant for a long time. After making search about Islington one rainy evening, he found himself at the end of Hanover Street, and was drawn to the familiar house; not, however, to visit the Snow-
dons, but to redeem a promise recently made to Bessie Byass, who declared herself vastly indignant at the neglect with which he treated her. So, instead of going up the steps to the front door, he descended into the area. Bessie herself opened to him, and after a shrewd glance, made as though she would close the door again. "Nothing for you! The idea of beggars coming down the area-steps! Be off!"

"I'm worse than a beggar," replied Sidney. "Housebreaking's more in my line."

And he attempted to force an entrance. Bessie struggled, but had to give in, overcome with laughter. Samuel was enjoying a pipe in the front kitchen; in spite of the dignity of keeping a servant (to whom the back-kitchen was sacred), Mr. and Mrs. Byass frequently spent their evenings below stairs in the same manner as of old.

The talk began with Sidney's immediate difficulties.

"Now if it had only happened half a year ago," said Bessie, "I should have got you into our first-floor rooms."

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"Shouldn't wonder if we have him there yet, some day," remarked Sam, winking at his wife.

"Not him," was Bessie's rejoinder, with a meaning smile. "He's a cool hand, is Mr. Kirkwood. He knows how to wait. When something happens, we shall have him taking a house out at Highbury, you see if he don't."

Sidney turned upon her with anything but a jesting look.

"What do you mean by that, Mrs. Byass?" he asked, sharply. "When what happens? What are you hinting at?"

"Bless us and save us!" cried Bessie. "Here, Sam, he's going to swallow me. What harm have I done?"

"Please tell me what you meant?" Sidney urged, his face expressing strong annoyance. "Why do you call me a 'cool hand,' and say that 'I know how to wait'? What did you mean? I'm serious; I want you to explain."

Whilst he was speaking there came a knock at the kitchen-door. Bessie cried, "Come in," and Jane showed herself; she
glanced in a startled way at Sidney, murmured a "good-evening" to him, and made a request of Bessie for some trifle she needed. Sidney, after just looking round, kept his seat and paid no further attention to Jane, who speedily retired.

Silence followed, and in the midst of it Kirkwood pushed his chair impatiently.

"Bess," cried Samuel, with an affected jocoseness, "you're called upon to apologise. Don't make a fool of yourself again."

"I don't see why he need be so snappish with me," replied his wife. "I beg his pardon, if he wants me."

But Sidney was laughing now, though not in a very natural way. He put an end to the incident, and led off into talk of quite a different kind. When supper-time was at hand he declared that it was impossible for him to stay. The hour had been anything but a lively one, and when he was gone his friends discussed at length this novel display of ill-humour on Sidney's part.

He went home muttering to himself, and
passed as bad a night as he had ever known. Two days later his removal to new lodgings was effected; notwithstanding his desire to get into a cleaner region, he had taken a room at the top of a house in Red Lion Street, in the densest part of Clerkenwell, where his neighbours under the same roof were craftsmen, carrying on their business at home.

"It'll do well enough just for a time," he said to himself. "Who can say when I shall be really settled again, or whether I ever shall?"

Midway in an attempt to put his things in order, to nail his pictures on the walls and bring forth his books again, he was seized with such utter discouragement that he let a volume drop from his hand and threw himself into a seat. A moan escaped his lips,—"That cursed money!"

Ever since the disclosure made to him by Michael Snowdon at Danbury he had been sensible of a grave uneasiness respecting his relations with Jane. At the moment he might imagine himself to share the old man's enthu-
siasm, or dream, or craze,—whichever name were the most appropriate,—but not an hour had passed before he began to lament that such a romance as this should envelop the life which had so linked itself with his own. Immediately there arose in him a struggle between the idealist tendency, of which he had his share, and stubborn everyday sense, supported by his knowledge of the world and of his own being,—a struggle to continue for months, thwarting the natural current of his life, racking his intellect, embittering his heart's truest emotions. Conscious of mystery in Snowdon's affairs, he had never dreamed of such a solution as this; the probability was—so he had thought—that Michael received an annuity under the will of his son who died in Australia. No word of the old man's had ever hinted at wealth in his possession; the complaints he frequently made of the ill use to which wealthy people put their means seemed to imply a regret that he, with his purer purposes, had no power of doing anything. There was no explaining the manner of Jane's
bringing-up, if it were not necessary that she should be able to support herself; the idea on which Michael acted was not such as would suggest itself, even to Sidney's mind. Deliberately to withhold education from a girl who was to inherit any property worth speaking of would be acting with such boldness of originality that Sidney could not seriously have attributed it to his friend. In fact, he did not know Michael until the revelation was made; the depths of the man's character escaped him.

The struggle went all against idealism. It was a noble vision, that of Michael's, but too certainly Jane Snowdon was not the person to make it a reality; the fearful danger was, that all the possibilities of her life might be sacrificed to a vain conscientiousness. Her character was full of purity and sweetness and self-forgetful warmth, but it had not the strength necessary for the carrying out of a purpose beset with difficulties and perils. Michael, it was true, appeared to be aware of this; it did not, however, gravely disturb
him, and for the simple reason that not to Jane alone did he look for the completion of his design; destiny had brought him aid such as he could never have anticipated; Jane’s helpmate was at hand, in whom his trust was unbounded.

What was in his way, that Sidney should not accept the responsibility? Conscience from the first whispered against his doing so, and the whisper was grown to so loud a voice that not an adverse argument could get effective hearing. Temptations lurked for him and sprang out in moments of his weakness, but as temptations they were at once recognised. "He had gone too far to retire; he would be guilty of sheer treachery to Jane; he would break the old man's heart." All which meant merely that he loved the girl, and that it would be like death to part from her. But why part? What had conscience got hold of, that it made all this clamour? Oh, it was simple enough; Sidney not only had no faith in the practicability of such a life's work as Michael visioned, but he had the profoundest distrust
of his own moral strength if he should allow himself to be committed to lifelong renunciation. "I am no hero," he said, "no enthusiast. The time when my whole being could be stirred by social questions has gone by. I am a man in love, and in proportion as my love has strengthened, so has my old artist-self revived in me, until now I can imagine no bliss so perfect as to marry Jane Snowdon and go off to live with her amid fields and trees, where no echo of the suffering world should ever reach us." To confess this was to make it terribly certain that sooner or later the burden of conscientiousness would become intolerable. Not from Jane would support come in that event; she, poor child! would fall into miserable perplexity, in conflict between love and duty, and her life would be ruined.

Of course a man might have said, "What matter how things arrange themselves when Michael is past knowledge of them? I will marry the woman I honestly desire, and together we will carry out this humanitarian
project so long as it be possible. When it ceases to be so, well”—But Sidney could not take that view. It shamed him beyond endurance to think that he must ever avoid Jane's look, because he had proved himself dishonest, and, what were worse, had tempted her to become so.

The conflict between desire and scruple made every day a weariness. Instead of looking forward eagerly to the evening in the week which he spent with Michael and Jane, he dreaded its approach. Scarcely had he met Jane's look since this trouble began; he knew that her voice when she spoke to him expressed consciousness of something new in their relations, and even whilst continuing to act his part he suffered ceaselessly. Had Michael ever repeated to his granddaughter the confession which Sidney would now have given anything to recall? It was more than possible. Of Jane's feeling Sidney could not entertain a serious doubt, and he knew that for a long time he had done his best to encourage it. It was unpardonable to draw aloof
from her just because these circumstances had declared themselves, circumstances which brought perplexity into her life and doubtless made her long for another kind of support than Michael could afford her. The old man himself appeared to be waiting anxiously; he had fallen back into his habit of long silences, and often regarded Sidney in a way which the latter only too well understood.

He tried to help himself through the time of indecision by saying that there was no hurry. Jane was very young, and with the new order of things her life had in truth only just begun. She must have a space to look about her; all the better if she could form various acquaintances. On that account he urged so strongly that she should be brought into relation with Miss Lant, and, if possible, with certain of Miss Lant’s friends. All very well, had not the reasoning been utterly insincere. It might have applied to another person; in Jane’s case it was mere sophistry. Her nature was home-keeping; to force her into alliance with conscious
philanthropists was to set her in the falsest position conceivable; striving to mould herself to the desires of those she loved, she would suffer patiently and in secret mourn for the time when she had been obscure and happy. These things Sidney knew with a certainty only less than that wherewith he judged his own sensations; between Jane and himself the sympathy was perfect. And in despite of scruple he would before long have obeyed the natural impulse of his heart, had it not been that still graver complications declared themselves, and by exasperating his over-sensitive pride made him reckless of the pain he gave to others so long as his own self-torture was made sufficiently acute.

With Joseph Snowdon he was doing his best to be on genial terms, but the task was a hard one. The more he saw of Joseph, the less he liked him. Of late the filter manufacturer had begun to strike notes in his conversation which jarred on Sidney's sensibilities and made him disagreeably suspicious that something more was meant than Joseph
cared to put into plain speech. Since his establishment in business Joseph had become remarkably attentive to his father; he appeared to enter with much zeal into all that concerned Jane; he conversed privately with the old man for a couple of hours at a time, and these dialogues, for some reason or other, he made a point of reporting to Sidney. According to these reports—and Sidney did not wholly discredit them—Michael was coming to have a far better opinion of his son than formerly, was even disposed to speak with him gravely of his dearest interests.

"We talked no end about you, Sidney, last night," said Joseph on one occasion, with the smile whereby he meant to express the last degree of friendly intelligence.

And Sidney, though anxiously desiring to know the gist of the conversation, in this instance was not gratified. He could not bring himself to put questions, and went away in a mood of vague annoyance which Joseph had the especial power of exciting.

With the Byasses, Joseph was forming an
intimacy; of this too Sidney became aware, and it irritated him. The exact source of this irritation he did not at first recognise, but it was disclosed at length unmistakably enough, and that on the occasion of the visit recently described. Bessie's pleasantry, which roused him in so unwonted a manner, could bear, of course, but one meaning; as soon as he heard it, Sidney saw as in a flash that one remaining aspect of his position which had not as yet attracted his concern. The Byasses had learnt, or had been put in the way of surmising, that Michael Snowdon was wealthy; instantly they passed to the reflection that in marrying Jane their old acquaintance would be doing an excellent stroke of business. They were coarse-minded, and Bessie could even venture to jest with him on this detestable view of his projects. But was it not very likely that they derived their information from Joseph Snowdon? And if so, was it not all but certain that Joseph had suggested to them this way of regarding Sidney himself?
So when Jane's face appeared at the door he held himself in stubborn disregard of her. A thing impossible to him, he would have said a few minutes ago. He revenged himself upon Jane. Good; in this way he was likely to make noble advances.

The next evening he was due at the Snowdons', and for the very first time he voluntarily kept away. He posted a note to say that the business of his removal had made him irregular; he would come next week, when things were settled once more.

Thus it came to pass that he sat wretchedly in his unfamiliar room and groaned about "that accursed money." His only relief was in bursts of anger. Why had he not the courage to go to Michael and say plainly what he thought? "You have formed a wild scheme, the project of a fanatic. Its realisation would be a miracle, and in your heart you must know that Jane's character contains no miraculous possibilities. You are playing with people's lives, as fanatics always do. For Heaven's sake, bestow your money on the
practical folks who make a solid business of relieving distress! Jane, I know, will bless you for making her as poor as ever. Things are going on about you which you do not suspect. Your son is plotting, plotting; I can see it. This money will be the cause of endless suffering to those you really love, and will never be of as much benefit to the unknown as if practical people dealt with it. Jane is a simple girl, of infinite goodness; what possesses you that you want to make her an impossible sort of social saint?" Too hard to speak thus frankly. Michael had no longer the mental pliancy of even six months ago; his idea was everything to him; as he became weaker, it would gain the dire force of an hallucination. And in the meantime he, Sidney, must submit to be slandered by that fellow who had his own ends to gain.

To marry Jane, and, at the old man's death, resign every farthing of the money to her trustees, for charitable uses?—But the old pang of conscience; the life-long wound to Jane's tender heart.
A day of headache and incapacity, during which it was all he could do to attend to his mechanical work, and again the miserable loneliness of his attic. It rained, it rained. He had half a mind to seek refuge at some theatre, but the energy to walk so far was lacking. And whilst he stood stupidly abstracted there came a knock at his door.

"I thought I'd just see if you'd got straight," said Joseph Snowdon, entering with his genial smile.

Sidney made no reply, but turned as if to stir the fire. Hands in pockets, Joseph sauntered to a seat.

"Think you'll be comfortable here?" he went on. "Well, well; of course it's only temporary."

"I don't know about that," returned Sidney. "I may stay here as long as I was at the last place,—eight years."

Joseph laughed, with exceeding good-nature.

"Oh yes; I shouldn't wonder," he said, entering into the joke. "Still"—becoming
serious—"I wish you'd found a pleasanter place. With the winter coming on, you see"——

Sidney broke in with splenetic perversity.

"I don't know that I shall pass the winter here. My arrangements are all temporary—all of them."

After glancing at him the other crossed his legs and seemed to dispose himself for a stay of some duration.

"You didn't turn up the other night—in Hanover Street."

"No."

"I was there. We talked about you. My father has a notion you haven't been quite well lately. I dare say you're worrying a little, eh?"

Sidney remained standing by the fireplace, turned so that his face was in shadow.

"Worry? Oh, I don't know," he replied, idly.

"Well, I'm worried a good deal, Sidney, and that's the fact."

"What about?"
“All sorts of things. I’ve meant to have a long talk with you; but then I don’t quite know how to begin. Well, see, it’s chiefly about Jane.”

Sidney neither moved nor spoke.

“After all, Sidney,” resumed the other, softening his voice, “I am her father, you see. A precious bad one I’ve been, that there’s no denying, and dash it if I don’t sometimes feel ashamed of myself. I do when she speaks to me in that pleasant way she has,—you know what I mean. For all that, I am her father, and I think it’s only right I should do my best to make her happy. You agree with that, I know.”

“Certainly I do.”

“You won’t take it ill if I ask whether—in fact, whether you’ve ever asked her—you know what I mean.”

“I have not,” Sidney replied, in a clear, unmoved tone, changing his position at the same time so as to look his interlocutor in the face.

Joseph seemed relieved.
"Still," he continued, "you've given her to understand—eh? I suppose there's no secret about that?"

"I've often spoken to her very intimately, but I have used no words such as you are thinking of. It's quite true that my way of behaving has meant more than ordinary friendship."

"Yes, yes; you're not offended at me bringing this subject up, old man? You see, I'm her father, after all, and I think we ought to understand each other."

"You are quite right."

"Well, now, see." He fidgeted a little.

"Has my father ever told you that his friend the lawyer, Percival, altogether went against that way of bringing up Jane?"

"Yes, I know that."

"You do?" Joseph paused before proceeding. "To tell you the truth, I don't much care about Percival. I had a talk with him, you know, when my business was being settled. No, I don't quite take to him, so to say. Now, you won't be offended? The fact
of the matter is, he asked some rather queer questions about you,—or, at all events, if they weren't exactly questions, they—they came to the same thing."

Sidney was beginning to glare under his brows. Common-sense told him how very unlikely it was that a respectable solicitor should compromise himself in talk with a stranger, and that such a man as J. J. Snowdon; yet, whether the story were true or not, it meant that Joseph was plotting in some vile way, and thus confirmed his suspicions. He inquired, briefly and indifferently, what Mr. Percival's insinuations had been.

"Well, I told you I don't much care for the fellow. He didn't say as much, mind, but he seemed to be hinting-like that, as Jane's father, I should do well to—to keep an eye on you—ha, ha! It came to that, I thought,—though, of course, I may have been mistaken. It shows how little he knows about you and father. I fancy he'd got it into his head that it was you set father on those plans about Jane,—though why I'd like to know."
He paused. Sidney kept his eyes down, and said nothing.

"Well, there's quite enough of that; too much. Still, I thought I'd tell you, you see. It's well to know when we've got enemies behind our backs. But see, Sidney; to speak seriously, between ourselves." He leaned forward in the confidential attitude. "You say you've gone just a bit further than friendship with our Janey. Well, I don't know a better man, and that's the truth,—but don't you think we might put this off for a year or two? Look now, here's this lady, Miss Lant, taking up the girl, and it's an advantage to her; you won't deny that. I sympathise with my good old dad; I do, honestly; but I can't help thinking that Janey, in her position, ought to see a little of the world. There's no secrets between us; you know what she'll have as well as I do. I should be a brute if I grudged it her, after all she's suffered from my neglect. But don't you think we might leave her free for a year or two?"

"Yes, I agree with you."
"You do? I thought you and I could understand each other, if we only got really talking. Look here, Sidney; I don't mind just whispering to you. For anything I know, Percival is saying disagreeable things to the old man; but don't you worry about that. It don't matter a scrap, you see, so long as you and I keep friendly, eh? I'm talking very open to you, but it's all for Janey's sake. If you went and told father I'd been saying anything against Percival—well, it would make things nasty for me. I've put myself in your hands, but I know the kind of man you are. It's only right you should hear of what's said. Don't worry; we'll just wait a little, that's all. I mean it all for the little girl's sake. It wouldn't be nice if you married her and then she was told—eh?"

Sidney looked at the speaker steadily, then stirred the fire and moved about for a few moments. As he kept absolute silence, Joseph, after throwing out a few vague assurances of good-will and trust, rose to take his leave. Kirkwood shook hands with him, but spoke
not a word. Late the same night Sidney penned a letter to Michael Snowdon. In the morning he read it over, and instead of putting it into an envelope, locked it away in one of his drawers.

When the evening for his visit to Hanover Street again came round he again absented himself, this time just calling to leave word with the servant that business kept him away. The business was that of walking aimlessly about Clerkenwell, in mud and fog. About ten o’clock he came to Farringdon Road Buildings, and with a glance up towards the Hewetts’ window he was passing by when a hand clutched at him. Turning, he saw the face of John Hewett, painfully disturbed, strained in some wild emotion.

“Sidney! Come this way; I want to speak to you.”

“Why, what’s wrong?”

“Come over here. Sidney,—I’ve found my girl,—I’ve found Clara!”
CHAPTER XIV.

CLARA'S RETURN.

Mrs. Eagles, a middle-aged woman of something more than average girth, always took her time in ascending to that fifth storey where she and her husband shared a tenement with the Hewett family. This afternoon her pause on each landing was longer than usual, for a yellow fog, which mocked the pale glimmer of gas-jets on the staircase, made her gasp asthmatically. She carried, too, a heavy market-bag, having done her Saturday purchasing earlier than of wont on account of the intolerable weather. She reached the door at length, and being too much exhausted to search her pocket for the latch-key, knocked for admission. Amy Hewett opened to her, and she sank on a chair in the first room, where the other two Hewett children were bending over "home-lessons" with a studious-
ness not altogether natural. Mrs. Eagles had a shrewd eye; having glanced at Annie and Tom with a discreet smile, she turned her look towards the elder girl, who was standing full in the lamplight.

"Come here, Amy," she said, after a moment's scrutiny. "So you will keep doin' that foolish thing! Very well, then, I shall have to speak to your father about it; I'm not goin' to see you make yourself ill and do nothing to prevent you."

Amy, now a girl of eleven, affected much indignation.

"Why, I haven't touched a drop, Mrs. Eagles!"

"Now, now, now, now, now! Why, your lips are shrivelled up like a bit o' dried orange-peel! You're a silly girl, that's what you are!"

Of late Amy Hewett had become the victim of a singular propensity; whenever she could obtain vinegar, she drank it as a toper does spirits. Inadequate nourishment, and especially an unsatisfied palate, frequently have this result in female children among the poor;
it is an anticipation of what will befall them as soon as they find their way to the public-house.

Having administered a scolding, Mrs. Eagles went into the room which she and her husband occupied. It was so encumbered with furniture that not more than eight or ten square feet of floor can have been available for movement. On the bed sat Mr. Eagles, a spare, large-headed, ugly, but very thoughtful-looking man; he and Sidney Kirkwood had been acquaintances and fellow-workmen for some years, but no close intimacy had arisen between them, owing to the difference of their tastes and views. Eagles was absorbed in the study of a certain branch of political statistics; the enthusiasm of his life was Financial Reform. Every budget presented to Parliament he criticised with extraordinary thoroughness, and, in fact, with an acumen which would have made him no inefficient auxiliary of the Chancellor himself. Of course he took the view that the nation's resources were iniquitously wasted, and of course had little difficulty in illustrating a truth so
obvious; what distinguished him from the ordinary malcontent of Clerkenwell Green was his logical faculty and the surprising extent of the information with which he had furnished himself. Long before there existed a "Financial Reform Almanack," Eagles practically represented that work in his own person. Disinterested, ardent, with thoughts for but one subject in the scope of human inquiry, he lived contentedly on his two pounds a week, and was for ever engaged in the theoretic manipulation of millions. Utopian budgets multiplied themselves in his brain and his note-books. He devised imposts such as Minister never dreamt of, yet which, he declared, could not fail of vast success. "You just look at these figures!" he would exclaim to Sidney, in his low, intense voice. "There it is in black and white!" But Sidney's faculties were quite unequal to calculations of this kind, and Eagles could never summon resolve to explain his schemes before an audience. Indefatigably he worked on, and the work had to be its own reward.
He was busy in the usual way this afternoon, as he sat on the bed, coatless, a trade journal open on his knees. His wife never disturbed him; she was a placid, ruminative woman, generally finding the details of her own weekly budget quite a sufficient occupation. When she had taken off her bonnet and was turning out the contents of her bag, Eagles remarked quietly:

"They'll have a bad journey."

"What a day for her to be travelling all that distance, poor thing! But perhaps it ain't so bad out o' London."

Lowering their voices, they began to talk of John Hewett and the daughter he was bringing from Lancashire, where she had lain in hospital for some weeks. Of the girl and her past they knew next to nothing, but Hewett's restricted confidences suggested disagreeable things. The truth of the situation was, that John had received by post, from he knew not whom, a newspaper report of the inquest held on the body of Grace Danver, wherein, of course, was an account of what
had happened to Clara Vale; in the margin was pencilled, "Clara Vale's real name is Clara Hewett." An hour after receiving this John encountered Sidney Kirkwood. They read the report together. Before the coroner it had been made public that the dead woman was in truth named Rudd; she who was injured refused to give any details concerning herself, and her history escaped the reporters. Harbouring no doubt of the information thus mysteriously sent him,—the handwriting seemed to be that of a man, but gave no further hint as to its origin,—Hewett the next day journeyed down into Lancashire, Sidney supplying him with money. He found Clara in a perilous condition; her face was horribly burnt with vitriol, and the doctors could not as yet answer for the results of the shock she had suffered. One consolation alone offered itself in the course of Hewett's inquiries; Clara, if she recovered, would not have lost her eyesight. The fluid had been thrown too low to effect the worst injury; the accident of a trembling hand, of a movement on her part, had kept her eyes untouched.
Necessity brought the father back to London almost at once, but the news sent him at brief intervals continued to be favourable. Now that the girl could be removed from the infirmary, there was no retreat for her but her father's home. Mr. Peel, the manager, had made her a present of £20—it was all he could do; the members of the company had subscribed another £5, generously enough, seeing that their tour was come perforce to an abrupt close. Clara's career as an actress had ended.

When the fog's artificial night deepened at the close of the winter evening, Mrs. Eagles made the Hewetts' two rooms as cheerful as might be, expecting every moment the arrival of John and his companion. The children were aware that an all but forgotten sister was returning to them, and that she had been very ill; they promised quietude. Amy set the tea-table in order, and kept the kettle ready. . . . The knock for which they were waiting! Mrs. Eagles withdrew into her own room; Amy went to the door.
A tall figure, so wrapped and veiled that nothing but the womanly outline could be discerned, entered, supported by John Hewett.

"Is there a light in the other room, Amy?" John inquired in a thick voice.

"Yes, father."

He led the muffled form into the chamber where Amy and Annie slept. The door closed, and for several minutes the three children stood regarding each other, alarmed, mute. Then their father joined them. He looked about in an absent way, slowly drew off his overcoat, and when Amy offered to take it, bent and kissed her cheek. The girl was startled to hear him sob and to see tears starting from his eyes. Turning suddenly away, he stood before the fire and made a pretence of warming himself; but his sobs overmastered him. He leaned his arms on the mantelpiece.

"Shall I pour out the tea, father?" Amy ventured to ask, when there was again perfect silence.
"Haven't you had yours?" he replied, half-facing her.

"Not yet."

"Get it, then,—all of you. Yes, you can pour me out a cup,—and put another on the little tray. Is this stuff in the saucepan ready?"

"Mrs. Eagles said it would be in five minutes."

"All right. Get on with your eatin', all of you."

He went to Mrs. Eagles' room and talked there for a short time. Presently Mrs. Eagles herself came out and silently removed from the saucepan a mixture of broth and meat. Having already taken the cup of tea to Clara, Hewett now returned to her with this food. She was sitting by the fire, her face resting upon her hands. The lamp was extinguished; she had said that the firelight was enough. John deposited his burden on the table, then touched her shoulder gently and spoke in so soft a voice that one would not have recognised it as his.
"You'll try an' eat a little, my dear? Here's somethin' as has been made particular. After travellin',—just a spoonful or two."

Clara expressed reluctance.

"I don't feel hungry, father. Presently, perhaps."

"Well, well; it do want to cool a bit. Do you feel able to sit up?"

"Yes. Don't take so much trouble, father. I'd rather you left me alone."

The tone was not exactly impatient; it spoke a weary indifference to everything and every person.

"Yes, I'll go away, dear. But you'll eat just a bit? If you don't like this, you must tell me, and I'll get something you could fancy."

"It'll do well enough. I'll eat it presently; I promise you."

John hesitated before going.

"Clara,—shall you mind Amy and Annie comin' to sleep here? If you'd rather, we'll manage it somehow else."

"No. What does it matter? They can..."
come when they like, only they mustn’t want me to talk to them.”

He went softly from the room, and joined the children at their tea. His mood had grown brighter. Though in talking he kept his tone much softened, there was a smile upon his face, and he answered freely the questions put to him about his journey. Overcome at first by the dark aspect of this home-coming, he now began to taste the joy of having Clara under his roof, rescued alike from those vague dangers of the past and from the recent peril. Impossible to separate the sorrow he felt for her blighted life, her broken spirit, and the solace lurking in the thought that henceforth she could not abandon him. Never a word to reproach her for the unalterable; it should be as though there were no gap between the old love and its renewal in the present. For Clara used to love him, and already she had shown that his tenderness did not appeal to her in vain; during the journey she had once or twice pressed his hand in gratitude. How well it
was that he had this home in which to receive her! Half a year ago, and what should he have done? He would not admit to himself that there were any difficulties ahead; if it came to that, he would manage to get some extra work in the evening and on Saturday afternoons. He would take Sidney into council. But thereupon his face darkened again, and he lost himself in troubled musing.

Midway in the Sunday morning Amy told him that Clara had risen and would like him to go and sit with her. She would not leave her room; Amy had put it in order, and the blind was drawn low. Clara sat by the fireside, in her attitude of last night, hiding her face as far as she was able. The beauty of her form would have impressed any one who approached her, the grace of her bent head; but the countenance was no longer that of Clara Hewett; none must now look at her, unless to pity. Feeling herself thus utterly changed, she could not speak in her former natural voice; her utterance was oppressed, unmusical, monotonous.

When her father had taken a place near her
she asked him, "Have you got that piece of newspaper still?"

He had, and at her wish produced it. Clara held it in the light of the fire, and regarded the pencilled words closely. Then she inquired if he wished to keep it, and on his answering in the negative threw it to be burnt. Hewett took her hand, and for a while they kept silence.

"Do you live comfortably here, father?" she said presently.

"We do, Clara. It's a bit high up, but that don't matter much."

"You've got new furniture."

"Yes, some new things. The old was all done for, you know."

"And where did you live before you came here?"

"Oh, we had a place in King's Cross Road,—it wasn't much of a place, but I suppose it might a' been worse."

"And that was where?"

"Yes—yes—it was there."

"And how did you manage to buy this furniture?" Clara asked, after a pause.
"Well, my dear, to tell you the truth—it was a friend as—an old friend helped us a bit."
"You wouldn't care to say who it was?"
John was gravely embarrassed. Clara moved her head a little, so as to regard him, but at once turned away, shrinkingly, when she met his eyes.

"Why don't you like to tell me, father? Was it Mr. Kirkwood?"
"Yes, my dear, it was."

Neither spoke for a long time. Clara's head sank lower; she drew her hand away from her father's, and used it to shield her face. When she spoke, it was as if to herself.

"I suppose he's altered in some ways?"
"Not much; I don't see much change, myself, but then of course—- No, he's pretty much the same."
"He's married, isn't he?"
"Married? Why, what made you think that, Clara? No, not he. He had to move not long ago; his lodgin's is in Red Lion Street now."
"And does he ever come here?"
"He has been,—just now an' then."
"Have you told him?"
"Why—yes, dear,—I felt I had to."
"There's no harm. You couldn't keep it a secret. But he mustn't come whilst I'm here; you understand that, father?"
"No, no, he shan't. He shall never come, if you don't wish it."
"Only whilst I'm here."
"But—Clara—you'll always be here."
"Oh no! Do you think I'm going to burden you all the rest of my life? I shall find some way of earning a living, and then I shall go and get a room for myself."
"Now don't—now don't talk like that!" exclaimed her father, putting his hand on her.
"You shall do what else you like, my girl, but don't talk about goin' away from me. That's the one thing as I couldn't bear. I ain't so young as I was, and I've had things as was hard to go through,—I mean when the mother died and—and other things at that time. Let you an' me stay by each other whilst we may, my girl. You know it was
always you as I thought most of, and I want to keep you by me—I do, Clara. You won't speak about goin' away?"

She remained mute. Shadows from the firelight rose and fell upon the walls of the half-darkened room. It was a cloudy morning; every now and then a gust flung rain against the window.

"If you went," he continued, huskily, "I should be afraid o' myself. I haven't told you. I didn't behave as I'd ought to have done to the poor mother, Clara; I got into drinkin' too much; yes, I did. I've broke myself off that; but if you was to leave me—I've had hard things to go through. Do you know the Burial Club broke up just before she died? I couldn't get not a ha'penny! A lot o' the money was stolen. You may think how I felt, Clara, with her lyin' there, and I hadn't got as much as would pay for a coffin. It was Sidney Kirkwood found the money,—he did! There was never man had as good a friend as he's been to me; I shall never have a chance of payin' what I owe
him. Things is better with me now, but I'd rather beg my bread in the streets than you should go away. Don't be afraid, my dearest. I promise you nobody shan't come near. You won't mind Mrs. Eagles; she's very good to the children. But I must keep you near to me, my poor girl!"

Perhaps it was that word of pity,—though the man's shaken voice was throughout deeply moving. For the first time since the exultant hope of her life was blasted, Clara shed tears.

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