FARNORTH.

BY THEO. KENNEDY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

Vol. II.

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CHAPTER I.

CLARA did not remain much longer with the Doctor and his whimpering patient. She went to her own room and carefully locked the door; she threw herself down on the bed, and strove to still the tumultuous throbbing of her heart, and to collect her thoughts.

She is on the trail of the rich man’s secret, she is quite convinced of that; but the foot-print is indistinct, and her every sense is strained to keep her still on the right path through the maze.

She has a clue now to those sleepless nights and restless days which always follow the passage of the Straits of Dover, as Zoé has deplored; she knows at last what that black shadow is which the presence of the bearded Frenchman ever flings.

The mystery which is eating away the life of
her uncle lies hidden in that Paris madhouse. She has advanced so far on her way.

Not for one moment will Algy's daughter accept that explanation which the master of Becklands had imposed upon the two doctors. She laughs the mythical Monsieur Ferné to scorn. It was no accidental resemblance that had startled Dr. Halley. It was really his old acquaintance, the French mad-doctor, who had passed him so rapidly in his carriage years ago, now. What was this man's business with Zoe's father? What was it that Dives hid with so much care from the eyes of all the world in this Maison de Santé? Was it some wretched crétin, the offspring of his miserable marriage with the drunken barmaid, some drivelling idiot of whom the unhappy father was ashamed, that he guarded with so much secrecy?

Clara is not disposed to admit this solution of the mystery. If that be all, it is not actual crime which haunts the pillow, and scares away sleep from the Midas of Farnorth; and it is crime, and skulking, pallid guilt that the huntress is longing so earnestly to drag into the light of day. For more than an hour Algy's daughter struggles with her fevered thoughts; for more than an hour
does she wrestle with the brambles and the sturdy copsewood in her path, and yet she is no further on her way. Can her mother aid her?

Very closely is Mrs. Silvester questioned by the beautiful inquisitor. So closely, indeed, that the good lady is peevish enough before the ordeal is over. Clara wishes to glean some particulars relative to her uncle's life in South America, but her mother can furnish her with none.

"I have told you over and over again, Clara, both you and your father too, that I never heard anything about my brother," she says impatiently, "since he sent me that nasty black-edged letter, until his name was in the papers."

Clara is not daunted. She condescends even to conciliate her mother in order still further to prosecute her enquiries. At length a few words drop from the lips of Algy's wife, which elicit a sharp, sudden exclamation from her lovely questioner.

"What is the matter with you, Clara?" said her mother crossly. "I wish you would not startle me so. I'm sure my poor nerves——"

"It was a violent twinge of toothache," replies her daughter. "I must go at once and apply some——"
“Dear me! your cheeks are quite flushed. I hope you’re not going to lose any of your teeth, Clara; it is not at all in our family. I’m sure mine are as sound, as sound,” she adds, as she complacently grinds her molars.

“It is probably only neuralgia,” answers her daughter, as she rapidly leaves the room.

Clara does not throw herself down on her bed this time, when she is once more alone. She walks backwards and forwards, and is quite tremulous with excitement. “I must go to London at once,” she says. “Our way is clear before us now. I think we may make our own terms.”

Algy’s daughter is very caressing in her manner to her young cousin that evening, and she confides to her the intention she has formed of leaving Becklands for a few days. “I am so uneasy about papa,” she says. “I must go to him or we shall be beggars again, Zoé. His letter this morning was full of nothing but the Derby; he will be staking the whole of the money which has been left him by his aunt on the first race. Papa is a perfect idiot when he once commences betting. You look shocked my little cousin, and are thinking my days will not be long in the land. You must have some
Clara resolves to visit London.

consideration for me, Zoé; if I had a father such as you have, I could very religiously observe the fifth commandment,” she adds, with a slight tremor in her voice.

Zoé feels quite sorry for poor Clara, and sympathises with her in her uneasiness about her father. “I agree with you, dear, I think you had better go to him at once,” the little maid says.

“I shall have to draw very largely on my imagination to find an excuse that will satisfy mamma. Nature intended me to walk on the straight gravelled path, but fate forces me on to the grass. I cannot give up my dream of rusticating in the calm delights of Ivy Cottage. I cannot make up my mind to wander into dreadful Bohemia again, Zoé, and so I shall have to lie,” Clara says in her most candid tones.

I think she must have drawn rather largely on her imagination, for Mrs. Silvester very soon admitted the necessity for her daughter’s immediate departure. “And I wish you would buy me a cap in Regent Street, or, indeed, two or three,” says the mother. “Those Miss Benton makes for me don’t suit me a bit; I look as old as I don’t know what in them, and as your father has at
last got some money of his own, I think it is time he should spend a little of it over me. I'm sure, I never thought when my wedding clothes cost a thousand pounds, or even more, that——”

But Clara did not stay to listen to the old familiar grind.

She was quite as candid in the explanation she gave her uncle, when she told him of her proposed journey, as she had been to her cousin. “You do not know, my dear uncle,” she said, “the good reason I have to dread a return to the old life we led before we came here. I have great influence with papa, and I think if I arrive in time, I shall be able to prevent his risking this money which has so fortunately reverted to him.” And Mr. Harding spoke very kindly to his beautiful niece, and he put two or three crisp bank notes in her hand as he bade her good night.

“You may always look to me for your pin-money, Clara. I cannot allow my handsome niece to indulge her whim of wearing cotton dresses,” he said.

Clara was to leave Farnorth by the mid-day train, and she astonished her cousin not a little at breakfast time, by suggesting a morning call at Rose Cottage before she took her departure.

“I think we ought to make personal enquiries
after the health of the valiant knight who was wounded in our service; will you go with us, dear uncle, and so shield us from Mrs. Grundy?” she asked. Mr. Harding smiled. You know he had fancied from the first that the soldier was greatly attracted by the many charms of this beautiful girl, and the master of Becklands has a high opinion of Horace Snowe, and is really glad to see his lovely niece so far interested in her admirer as to propose this visit, and so he willingly consents to set Mrs. Grundy at defiance.

“I made this suggestion entirely on your account, little one,” Clara whispered to her cousin. “Do not look angry, Zoé; I wish to undo the mischief I have done. Why will you let your pride interfere with your happiness? What on earth does it signify, you foolish child, whether the motive be good or bad, so that the desired result is attained? I am so sorry now I ever pointed out the wires; I would never have done so, had I thought you really cared for this red-whiskered hero. There was another reason, too, why——”

Clara suddenly hesitated and slightly blushed, and her hesitation, her blushes, and her sophistry produced exactly the effect that she desired, and Zoé stifled some wailing, envious thoughts, and
would very willingly have isolated herself from this call at Rose Cottage. The morning visit was, however, made.

The soldier was lying back in an easy chair, supported on the dexter and sinister side by the anxious spinsters. His arm was in a sling and his face very pale. He had evidently suffered considerably. He welcomed his visitors with great pleasure, and would not admit that the injuries he had sustained were of any consequence whatever. "The old doctor keeps me on very low diet, and that is the reason I look so gaunt and cadaverous," he said.

Mr. Harding good naturedly contrived that his niece should occupy a chair near the invalid. Zoe, as she listens to some learned instructions which Miss Alathea mingles with her lamentations over her nephew's accident, has the satisfaction of seeing that Horace is greatly absorbed in some communication her cousin is making to him. There is a half saucy expression on Clara's face as she answers some eager question of the soldier's, and at length the words, "You will write to me," reach the ears of the unhappy child, and tolls the knell of her last hope.

And yet, to show what self-tormentors we are,
I may as well mention that this animated conversation between the soldier and Clara Silvester had really very little that was interesting in it. Algy's daughter is, if possible, more beautiful than ever this morning, and as the artist's son is an enthusiastic admirer of beauty, it is natural enough he should express that feeling in his eyes. Those three or four words which have paled the cheek of the little heiress have only a reference to a painting by one of the old masters, which you may see any day at the Dulwich Gallery. Horace has advanced one opinion and Clara another; they have both eagerly sustained their different positions, and the soldier has at length, half in joke, requested his lovely opponent to write a line to relieve his mind on this important subject. All those coquettish looks of Miss Silvester's have been assumed for the express purpose of misleading and tormenting her young cousin. But there is no beneficent fairy to whisper this consolatory assurance to poor Zoé, or, we will hope that some of those seeds of knowledge which La Sagesse is scattering so freely might have found root.

The bas bleu must have been studying very hard, for she is really quite dazzling on the subject of the four groups of the third formation.
"You have no idea, my dear child," she says, "how excessively interesting is the study of the strata of the tertiary series—the crustacea, invertebrata, and deposits of mammalia, this formation yields, is perfectly astonishing. But you are looking at Horace I see. He looks very pale, poor boy. I am afraid the whole of the cuticle, in spite of the almost immediate application of cotton wool, will—but for my part I prefer a liniment." And opodeldoc and oil and flour mingle now with miocene and pliocene in the rest of the learned lady's discourse.

Mrs. Silvester, who is likewise one of the morning callers, is very much attracted by that mysterious picture which hangs on the wall of the drawing-room at Rose Cottage. If Madame, who sits next to her, had not contrived to compel her to silence, she would immediately have drawn the attention of every one present to the extraordinary resemblance which exists between Horace and this portrait.

Algy's wife submits very unwillingly to this enforced reticence. "If people will do such out-of-the-way things," she mutters, "they must expect other people to make remarks. It would have been much better to have sent this young man to
the Foundling Hospital. Such a very odd thing to adopt their sister’s child—under such circumstances I mean you know. I should have been quite ashamed, but really there are some persons who seem to have no—"

But Mrs. Silvester was not permitted to advance any further opinions on this subject—she was interrupted by an impatient flow of words from Madame.

"I trembled of indignation, but yet I have dissimulated," that lady said when she mentioned this conversation to her pupil; but I don’t think the Parisian ever did practise much dissimulation, and I am pretty sure her manner to this "babil-leuse impitoyable," as she calls her, would be quite sufficiently emphatic.

Mr. Harding sat by Mary Snowe, and the anxious lady asked him some questions about Dr. Halley’s professional reputation. "We are perhaps foolishly nervous about Horace," she said, "and we doubt whether Dr. Banques is quite equal to a case of this kind." To Mary’s surprise, the master of Becklands did not recommend Dr. Halley very highly. "If you are not satisfied with country skill," he said, "I should advise you to call in some one, who has made injuries such
as your nephew has sustained, his particular study. I know that this is not Dr. Halley’s spécialité.”

Clara is apparently entirely interested in her conversation with the soldier, but not one word that her uncle has uttered has escaped her attentive ears; and an odd smile agitates her lips, and she draws her own conclusions from the hesitating and confused manner in which the rich man has passed his unfavourable verdict on the London doctor’s ability.

“He is fast in my web now,” she thinks; “he may struggle, but he cannot disentangle himself.” And she watches her unhappy prey with the same merciless feelings that a spider probably regards the poor fly it has entrapped. And yet Clara admires her uncle. There is a real delicacy of feeling, a refinement and courtesy about him, which suits her keen appreciation of whatever is good and beautiful. Yes, Algy’s daughter most assuredly admires the grave master of Becklands. Perhaps the spider may also admire the delicate wings and bright colouring of its victim. Who knows?

The soldier must in his inmost heart have pronounced the young Peruvian the most capricious of her capricious sex. On the night of the fire,
her manner to him had been such as to entirely reconcile him to the smart of his wounds. He had, I am afraid, been dreaming dreams, and thinking very foolish thoughts, in that invalid chair of his. Reason and Common-sense have been turned out of doors by bright-winged Hope; but alas! they will very soon return and take deadly revenge on their lovely opponent; indeed, they are forcing an entrance at this very moment. The Becklands party are leaving Rose Cottage, and Zoé has averted her eyes from the soldier, and scarcely touched with her delicate fingers the strong hand which is so eagerly outstretched to her at parting.

I fancy Dr. Banques will not find any great improvement in his patient when he makes his professional call this day.

"How pale you look, my poor child," Clara says to her young cousin. "What a silly little girl it is not to be advised. We do not live in Utopia, Zoé, and must content ourselves with the sophisticated heroes of railway days. You cannot have everything, petite exigeante," and she kisses the pale cheeks with great tenderness. Zoé almost shudders at Clara's caresses, but she reproaches herself bitterly for the feeling. "It is envy that
is crawling about me," she thinks, "and I have despised it so much in others;" and she compels herself to return her cousin's treacherous embrace as she parts from her at the railway station.

"I shall be back again in a few days, at least I hope so," Clara says; "I trust mamma will not have worried you into your grave before my return; and remember, little shepherdess, I expect to find you completely cured of your Utopian notions when I see you again. I will write to you the day before I leave town, but I shall reserve all my metropolitan news for oral communication. Keep the prospect of the Regent-street caps constantly before mamma, if she is too tiresome for mortal nerves to bear. Don't shake your head, Zoé, you know I never set up for filial piety, or indeed piety of any kind; I leave all that sort of thing to my little Phyllis. Adieu, petite."

"She will be building a castle of cards during my absence," Clara murmurs to herself, "but I need not make myself uneasy; a breath of mine will destroy the fabric."

And the train rushes on, bearing its living freight of fine ladies and gentlemen, honest peasants and runaway thieves, munificent Pea-
bodys and convicted felons, only separated from each other by a painted cushioned piece of wood! Surely no situation that a romancist is able to devise can be more extraordinary than the situation you may any day find yourself in, when seated in the quasi easy chair of a railway carriage. Talk about steam having destroyed romance and killed adventure! It is fecund of both. Had you ever a chance of being murdered and made the world's wonder in the old coaching days? I think not.

Clara had no companions during the whole of that long journey. She had no companions but her own busy thoughts, which were certainly vigorous and active enough to keep her very wide awake. There was no chance, no dread now, of any return into horrible Bohemia. There was no longer a necessity to stoop humbly and pick up the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. The past vagabond life would melt into a dream, and comparative luxury environ the future. The huntress has made her way through the tangled maze; one more step in the right direction, and she will secure her prey. Her mother's words have chased the mist which obscured her path. She feels certain that she knows now what that grim phantom is which has scared away all peace
and happiness from the most fortunate speculator in Farnorth. She has started pallid guilt from its lair, and she will drag it so far into the light of day as to make it work for her advantage. "I shall look to you for something more than pin-money, cher mon oncle," she mutters.

And yet the doomed man will never know whose hand it is has bent the fatal bow. "Papa must bear the whole onus of this affair," Clara decides. "I will make the path perfectly easy for him, but I will not appear; our secret might be valueless if Dives suspected it was known to so many; he might turn at bay, and we should be lost. Papa shall have the full credit of this discovery," she adds with a smile, and she is easier in her mind after she has made this decision, for when one has been guilty of a very loathsome action, it is pleasant to secure a whipping boy, and be lashed with scorn vicariously.

Mrs. Silvester does certainly try poor Zoë's patience very much indeed, and the remedy which her daughter proposed is not altogether efficacious. Indeed, the prospect of the new caps suggests a fresh grievance. A possibility presents itself that perhaps Clara may select too deep a coloured pink as a trimming for them. "And I know if
the shade of pink is too dark, I shall look as pale as pale. I wish I had said blue, and now there won't be time to write, for she may have ordered the caps, and those Regent-street people are so very disagreeable," she whimpers. [If the Regent-street people have been disagreeable to Algy's wife I am not very much surprised, knowing how very peculiar the cadet of a noble family is in his monetary transactions.]

"I wish I had said blue," Mrs. Silvester repeats. "Sky blue was always my colour. I remember when I was staying with my grandfather, Sir Theodore Baynes," she continues, rallying a little as she plunges feebly into the Woolwich triumphs, "some of the officers used to wear little bits of my ribbons in the button-holes of their coats; it was such a nice contrast. I could have married any of the artillery, I was so run after. Oh! I was very happy in those days, so different to what I am now. Never you marry, my dear, you are far better off as you are," adds Algy's wife, inculcating that doctrine too often, I am sorry to say, pronounced by married ladies.

Zoé does not make any reply to her aunt, but I do not think she is likely to become a convert to this creed.

VOL. II.
"I don't know why I chose Mr. Silvester, I'm sure," continues that gentleman's better half peevishly, "with so many admirers as I had, and Captain Cowley so fond of me. I remember when I was at that fancy ball, poor Cowley was quite wretched because I danced with Major Bold after supper, and now nobody cares whether I—" and tears dim the pale blue eyes, and stop all further utterance.

It was positively a relief to Zoé, when the entrance of Lady Plantagenet and her son put an end to the lamentations of her father's sister. Sir Mortimer was looking his very best, and there was quite a tremor in the rich full tones of his voice as he expressed his regret that he had not been present on the night of the fire. Between you and me I do not think Monseigneur would have rendered much assistance where any danger was concerned. The present representative of the noble house of Plantagenet does not resemble that brave ancestor of his who was a knight of renown, and indeed won his spurs in the reign of the lion-hearted Richard. The tailor's grandson is not remarkable for physical courage, but he has never had his bravery called into question, and so Lady Mortimer has no suspicion of this craven spirit
possessed by her handsome son. She quite accepts all those fine manly speeches of his, and so indeed does little Zoé, who blushes and feels more favourably disposed towards the Baronet than she has hitherto done.

I am afraid some of my readers will accuse my pretty favourite of a want of decision and strength of character; but I think if they had been placed in similar circumstances, they might not possibly have behaved with more consistency. The poor little maid is smarting from the conviction that she has given her heart where the boon is only valued from its association with more solid attractions, and it was soothing to her vanity—and the best among us are vain enough, Heaven knows—to listen to words expressing such tender genuine interest as those uttered by Sir Mortimer. The cut-glass beads really shone with wonderful brilliance, and it was not, as I have said before, at all astonishing if they dazzled the eyes of the innocent provincial.

"Does your cousin make any very long stay in town, my dear?" Lady Mortimer enquired, as soon as her son permitted her to have any innings.

"She will remain only for a few days," answered Zoé.
"Then the wounded inmate of Rose Cottage will not be utterly désolé. It is wonderful how very soon one acquires a taste for gossip in the country, particularly if the weather be wet. During the last few rainy days I have been told a great amount of local news, and amongst other things that Farnorth has associated your cousin's name with that of Mr. Horace Snowe. Is there any truth in the rumour, my love?"

York drove poor Lancaster back to its citadel. Zoé was deadly white when she answered Lady Mortimer's question.

"I do not believe any actual engagement exists as yet between him and my cousin," the pale lips calmly uttered.

"I should hope not," said the Baronet hastily. "It would indeed be a little too ambitious. I—" and then he stopped suddenly, arrested by a warning look from his mother.

The suggestion of this possibility of an engagement existing between the soldier and Zoé's beautiful cousin was exceedingly distasteful to Sir Mortimer Plantagenet. You know he cannot eat the sweet hay himself, but that does not in the least prevent his grudging the perfumed food to others.
“It certainly would not be a suitable connection,” said her ladyship. “Miss Silvester is well born and singularly beautiful. She might aspire to a much higher match, but if her affections are engaged, it alters the question. I never advocate any marriages but those of the heart,” added the woman who had jilted Edward Sparkles.

“I am determined I will make no other,” said the Baronet with a meaning glance at Zoé; but the shot missed fire. I have admitted that my little friend thinks and acts in a very inconsistent manner, and I am surprised so good a diplomat as my Lady Mortimer should have introduced the name of the soldier into her conversation.

“Even my romantic prejudices can scarcely get over this sad stain on his birth,” continued her ladyship.

“There are graver reasons than the mere accident of birth which render Mr. Horace Snowe by no means a desirable companion,” said the Baronet, with a very mysterious air; “but why need we discuss unpleasant subjects? I think the soldier has engrossed enough of public attention for the present. Suppose we talk about something more pleasant.” And Sir Mortimer exerted himself to give a lively tone to the conversation.
"You must come and see me to-morrow, my dear child," Lady Plantagenet said, as she kissed Zoé at parting, and Monseigneur looked unutterable things with his handsome eyes, and ventured slightly to press the little hand he held in his.

Foolish Zoé rushed away to solitude with her bitter thoughts when the Plantagenet carriage had borne away her visitors. Pride and Love were holding a grand tournament in the child's heart, and I am afraid poor Pride's lance was shivered more than once by his vigorous opponent.

I think it would have greatly rejoiced Clara Silvester if she could have seen the utter prostration of her rich young cousin.

There were very few rose-leaves to uncurl under the little Sybarite's pillow now.
CHAPTER II.

Sophy Bland's wedding-day is rapidly approaching, and Mrs. Jellybags is very busy. The Miss Middletons have arrived. They are genteel-looking young ladies, Farnorth says, and Mrs. Bland calls them "distanguay." The relict is fond of this word, and applies it always to those of Eve's daughters who are blessed with long necks, sloping shoulders, and a general patrician leanness of outline. The Miss Middletons are rather distant in their manner to their future sister-in-law. I believe the Reverend Archibald has had some difficulty in reconciling his family to his approaching marriage. Poor Sophy has only her pretty face, and her kind heart, and her one thousand pounds to recommend her, and Archibald may at any moment become Rector of Slippersly; he might really have looked much higher, his sisters think. If the Curate had been successful in his pursuit of the little heiress of Becklands it would
have been altogether different. Zoé would have had no reason to complain of a want of cordiality in the manner of the Middleton family, but his Reverence had not been successful as we know, and he had been glad enough at the time to console his wounded vanity with the assurance of pretty Sophy’s devotion.

Mrs. Jellybags has really performed wonders; the dinner she has prepared is most creditable to her, and the Miss Middletons unbend a little as they aristocratically dispose of the savoury soup and delicately cooked fish. The cheeks of the bride elect cool down to a more becoming hue, and the curate’s sisters decide that “Sophy is really rather pretty when she hasn’t that dairy-maid colour.” John rises to the occasion, and although he certainly looks all glove, and is a little redolent of the stable, does not wait badly. Mrs. Bland has allowed the soup and fish to pass over without informing her guests that she cannot afford these luxuries on ordinary occasions, but this happy state of things is not to continue. The Reverend Archibald is infatuated enough to speak in praise of some delicacy he is discussing, and by so doing he sets his future mother-in-law’s tongue in motion.
"I am so glad you like the curry, it is quite Mrs. Jellybag's forte; she lived for years with old General Sutler, an Indian officer, it was only after he died that she took to going out to cook. It is such a great convenience to me, Miss Middleton," the good lady continues, with a burst of confidence. "My cook is quite a raw country girl, I can only afford to give ten pounds a year, with tea and sugar, and really now-a-days you can only secure very young incompetent hands for such a sum. When we are alone I do a great deal of the cooking myself."

The Miss Middletons raised their eye-brows with horrified amazement; the patricians could scarcely believe it possible that any one, who called herself a lady, could condescend to culinary degradation.

"On an occasion of this kind," the relict adds, "I thought it better to engage Mrs. Jellybags for two or three days—she charges five shillings a day, and drinks a good deal of beer, but really I think she is worth it, for she is an excellent cook—I have always been taught to attach great importance to all culinary details, for my father was a great epicure, and indeed the whole of his family was the same. I am sorry to say my
uncle James”—the dairy-maid colour returned with renewed force to poor Sophy’s cheek, she knew what was coming, and tried to stop the stumping of the wooden-leg, but was powerless to do so.

“Every family is liable to a mésalliance,” Mrs. Bland says, and I am afraid the Miss Middletons are mentally endorsing the truth of her remark—“I always think it is much better to make the best of a bad business, but my father did not think so, and so when my uncle James married his cook, he used to pass him afterwards as though he were a complete stranger. I was very sorry for my uncle, for after all, you know, my grandfather was only—”

But this was too much for the Reverend Archibald, and he rushed to the rescue. I believe if he had not done so poor Sophy would have burst into a passion of tears.

“I think you told me you had met Sophy’s uncle, the Dean of Blankstir, Annabella?” the Curate said to his eldest sister; “he is to make me a present of my little wife. I am very anxious to become acquainted with him. I believe he is a very superior man.”

Miss Annabella’s stiffness relaxed a little at the mention of the Dean of Blankstir. Sophy’s con-
nexion with this dignitary had been a powerful engine in removing the obstacles which the curate's family advanced against his marriage.

"The Dean is indeed a most superior man," Miss Middleton said, "I shall be delighted to renew my intimacy with him, he——"

"I always quote the example of my late husband's uncle, to all the young men I know," interposed la mère terrible; "his rise in life has been so very extraordinary. He was only a——"

Just at this moment John providentially dropped the tray he was carrying, and the relict was so much horrified at the shivering into fragments of the tumblers she had only lately purchased, that the accident completely absorbed her attention throughout the rest of the dinner, and the patrician guests remained in ignorance of the Dean of Blankstir's somewhat humble antecedents.

"The Dean would never forgive you mamma, if he thought you ever referred to the education he first received at the charity-school," Sophy said to her mother afterwards, "and you mortified me to the quick by mentioning uncle James's marriage. And why need you have told the Miss Middletons that we only have Mrs. Jellybags for two or three days? Archibald was so annoyed.
You know that his sisters are very fine in their notions, and it was so unpleasant for me. I had hard work to keep back my tears,” the curate’s fiancée said.

But Mrs. Bland could not be persuaded into thinking that her cackling might have a mischievous tendency. She loved to épancher herself, as the French say, and she could not understand why any one should put themselves out of the way to hide the holes in their stocking. However, she did not again refer to the Dean’s antecedents, and when that important personage arrived things went on more favourably. Farnorth was liberal in the wedding presents it gave to the bride elect of the curate. The cadeaux quite covered all the tables in the drawing-room. The handsome service of plate which Mr. Harding had presented to the young couple occupied a very prominent position, and the bracelet which Zoé had given Sophy was pointed out with great triumph by Mrs. Bland. The Reverend Archibald scarcely condescends to glance at the presents which have come from the master of Becklands and his daughter, but he had better take care, or the relict will be accounting for the curate’s ungraciousness, by detailing to his sisters every
particular connected with Archibald's unsuccessful pursuit of the little heiress of Becklands.

The wedding-day has arrived, and the bells of the parish church are ringing merrily. Sophy Bland is Sophy Middleton now, and she is pale enough in her veil and orange blossom to satisfy the requirements of her patrician sisters-in-law. The bridesmaids look very "genteel" in their blue silk dresses, and white tulle bonnets, Farnorth says. The wedding guests are all assembled to partake of the breakfast, to which Mrs. Jellybags has devoted her energies for the last three days. The hired waiters, in immaculate white ties and embroidered waistcoats, are hurrying to and fro, and shouldering poor scared John about in a very unceremonious manner. Mrs. Bland, gorgeously arrayed in a mauve moiré—"only dyed, but I'm sure you could not tell it from new," as she informs every one with her usual épanchement—is seated, a happy mixture of smiles and tears, at the foot of the table; the Dean of Blankstir graces its head. The Dean has given his blessing to the bride, and the bride to the Curate, but I don't think he has given anything else. Zoé Harding's pretty face and elegant dress shed a lustre around, and rivet the admiring
attention of the Miss Middletons. Madame and Mrs. Silvester are also present. The buxom Parisian looks remarkably well, but Algy’s wife is not in an amiable mood, for the cap which Clara has sent her from London is trimmed with too deep a shade of pink, and makes her look as pale as pale, she complains.

The Dean rises to propose the health of the young couple, and is quite affected as he feelingly dilates on the important part he has taken in the ceremony, and after having thus melted the hearts of his listeners, the reverend gentleman adroitly turns the current of his speech and raises a general smile by quoting that proverb which is always willingly received, to wit: that one marriage makes many, and the Dean looks rather meaningly at the best man, who has commenced a tepid flirtation with Lucy Bland, and every one follows the direction of the facetious dignitary’s eyes. The Reverend Archibald assumes the perpendicular position, and returns thanks in a speech which he had carefully got by heart the night before, but which his nervousness mutilates very much indeed on this the happiest day of his life. His audience good-naturedly tap the table, and cover his shortcomings as a _claquement_ drowns the red-hot notes
of a passée prima donna; and the bridegroom sits down with the conviction that he has acquitted himself very creditably.

The bride appears in her travelling costume, and all the ladies are melted to tears as the victim is borne away in a carriage and pair. "Try to prevent mamma from telling anything more about Uncle James to Annabella, dear Lucy, and mind there is soup and fish every day for dinner whilst the girls stay, darling," are the last words the little bride says to her weeping sister as she kisses her tenderly at parting. The universal feminine shower, which seems to be a necessary baptism for the happiest day of one's life, was very soon over, and when the ladies were all assembled together in the drawing-room, Mrs. Bland was herself again.

"There will soon be another wedding at Far-north," she said, looking with a roguish smile at Zoé Harding; "it will be a much more brilliant affair than my poor girl's. A little bird has whispered to me"—Mrs. Bland was in the habit of receiving these ornithological confidences—"a little bird has whispered to me that a certain gentleman is very much smitten with a certain pretty young lady."
The relict was a very painful person. Zoé did not know what might come next. The ambiguous gentleman in whom the little bird was interested might perhaps—and Zoé’s colour mounted very rapidly—but the widow’s next words relieved her. “I am so glad to think there is a chance of keeping you always at Farnorth, and it will be so delightful to have you settled at Plantagenet Park. I hope you won’t cut your old acquaintances when you become my Lady Mortimer; but I don’t think there is a chance of that, Miss Harding, for you never do give yourself any airs and graces,”—and it seemed to me that the relict rather pointed her last words at the Miss Middletons. Zoé disclaimed all intention of becoming mistress of Plantagenet Park, but Mrs. Bland continued her banter, and the aristocratic sisters of the curate condescended to smile, and I really think the presence of the heiress of Becklands tended almost as much as the presence of the august Dean to reconcile the patricians to their brother’s unhappy marriage. And then Mrs. Silvester’s feeble treble made itself heard, and as she bleated about my maternal grandfather, Sir Theodore Baynes, and my husband’s first cousin, Lord Shorthorn, the Miss Middletons decided that
the Blands were evidently in a good set, and so I hope dear Sophy will not have to give up her mother and sister for the sake of the man she has taken for better for worse.

Giles Houndly, Esq., was not one of the guests invited to the wedding of the widow’s daughter. I think Mrs. Bland was very courageous to exclude him, but after all, any one who rattles the bones of their family skeletons as she does can set such ghouls as Giles at defiance. “I understand the old Dean of Blankstir gave the bride away; he would not give away anything else I’ll be bound,” the ex-lawyer says; “Ahem! the Dean’s life is quite a romance, sir—only a charity-school boy when old Professor Clapper took a fancy to him. Tom Bland was born under a lucky star, sir. The professor educated him, pushed him on in the Church, and left him all his money. They do say, ahem! that there was something exceedingly mysterious attending old Clapper’s death, but of course, you know, there may be nothing in it.” It is always a matter of wonder to me how the master of Gothic Hall has hitherto escaped being prosecuted for libel.
CHAPTER III.

Algernon Charles Silvester is busily studying the mystical pages of Bradshaw. He has just received a telegram from his daughter. The message is short, but it has quite startled the father. "I wonder what is up now?" he says. "Has she come to a split with Stiffback or his little filly? But no, Clarry is a vast deal too wide awake to fall out in that quarter." And so saying, Algy rings the bell and secures a bedroom for his daughter.

Algy is staying at a very comfortable hotel situated in a central position. His visit to London has been very satisfactory. Aunt Aggie's legacy has proved to be larger than he had at first anticipated, and Algy has doubled his stakes on the favourite in consequence. "If the pot don't capsize, I shall land altogether—including the old girl's legacy—three thousand pounds," he calculates, and he feels very much elated.
He has seen his eldest brother, who has positively shaken hands with him, and enquired after the health of his family, and all on account of Aunt Aggie’s recollection of her scampish nephew at her last moments. “Gus has grown fat, vulgar, and stupid,” Algy says, as he complacently strokes his dyed moustache; “he don’t wear half so well as I do, in spite of his living in the clover of primogeniture.” “Algernon’s manners are those of a groom now,” the elder brother tells his fine lady wife; “he positively smells of the stable, and cannot speak a sentence without an oath. He is much better at a distance, my love.” And Madam quite coincides with this opinion of her husband.

Algernon is at the Euston Station punctually at half-past nine to meet the train from the North. He has brought a private carriage to convey Miss Silvester and her luggage to the hotel. “Clarry hates the crueltv vans I know,” Algy says to himself, and so he orders the brougham. I must admit that this swindling, unscrupulous vagabond has really the very strongest affection for his handsome daughter. She has, as she says, immense influence over him. I think there are very few sacrifices Algy
would not make for her sake. When the expected train entered the station, he looked eagerly into all the carriages, and his eyes quite brightened as they fell on Clara's beautiful face. He took her in his arms, and kissed her with more affection than elegance. "You are as strongly scented with tobacco as ever, papa," the young lady said, as she extricated herself from his embrace. "I have very little luggage, and it is all in the carriage. I only intend to stay three or four days in London. I see you are dying with curiosity, but I shall not answer a single question until I have removed the dust I have collected during this long journey; indeed, I shall remain silent until I have had some dinner, so you must practice patience, mon père," she added as she stepped into the brougham, and was whirled rapidly along through the brilliantly-lighted streets.

The travel-stains have been removed—the fish, soup, game, and entremets which formed the dainty dinner Algy had ordered for his daughter have all been done full justice to. The obsequious waiter, who has brushed away the last crumb from the snowy damask, evinces an inclination to remain and gaze with admiring eyes for a short
time longer at the beautiful woman seated at the table. Algy dismisses him haughtily—the cadet of a noble family is arrogant in his manner to all the domestic kine—and the father and daughter are left alone together.

Clara looks at her father with a very amused smile on her face, for impatient, eager curiosity is stamped on every one of Algy's features.

"We have had a visitor at Becklands since you left," she said; "a Monsieur Ferné, a French merchant. Do you know anything about him?"

"I have heard What's-his-name—the Cornish captain—mention him as being the stiffest customer they have to deal with. Well, what about the Frenchman, Clarry?"

"Her babyship cannot endure him. She says he worries her father to death. We came upon Dives and this impracticable gentleman—Mademoiselle and I—suddenly in the library the other day; and the rich man snubbed his daughter for the intrusion. You don't see anything extraordinary in that, I suppose?"

"Not a bit, Clarry. Business must be attended to; and if you've come all this way to tell—"

"Wait an instant. You are not in the least surprised that this millionaire should be so anxious
Farnorth.

about this French contract as to lose his sleep for nights together in consequence?"

"I can't say I am. I know when I was director of that confounded 'Amalgamated Anglican and American' it was precious little sleep I got for ——"

"You would not make a good Red-skin, papa. I think I mentioned to you that the nameless knight of Rose Cottage received some injuries in his fight with the flames at Becklands. His spinster aunts are not satisfied with Dr. Banques, who is attending the wounded hero."

"You haven't come nearly three hundred miles to tell me such bosh as that, Clarry?" said Algy, almost savagely.

Clara laughed merrily. "Yes, I have," she said, "you shall know everything in due course, papa, but you must have patience, and allow me to tell my story in my own way. And so, as I was saying, the scholar and the saint are not satisfied with the country doctor's skill. Galen took mamma and me into his confidence on this subject, and told us he had recommended Dr. Halley who lives in one of the fashionable squares here."

"Perhaps you want me to call on him and
make some enquiries as to his capabilities?" said Algy ironically.

"Something of the kind, but not just at this moment. Dives called in this London oracle some years ago, when his daughter had the scarlet fever. Dr. Banques mentioned an extraordinary case of an accidental resemblance."

"Upon my word, Clarry, I do think you are trying to provoke me. What has all this to do with your coming to town so suddenly?" said her father, quite angrily.

"Everything, papa, as you will see, if you will season your admiration for a while. So let me return to this accidental resemblance. At the moment the country doctor and the London Esculapius were walking up the avenue towards Becklands together, this very Monsieur Ferné to whom I have referred was leaving it in a travelling carriage. The Frenchman put his head out of the window to give some directions to the driver. Dr. Banques says his companion was quite startled by the extraordinary resemblance the iron merchant bore to an acquaintance of his in Paris, who conducts a Maison de Santé there; indeed Dr. Halley was so struck with this likeness, that he did his best to overtake the carriage, and
was quite convinced that it was the Mad Doctor, until your brother-in-law explained to him that the gentleman was this identical Monsieur Ferné. Does my story interest you yet, papa?"

"I cannot say it does at present, Clarry, but go on."

"You would indeed make a wretched hunter, papa. I have already shown you my best footprint; but I will diverge into another track. I have been questioning mamma about her brother's first wife: she does not know much about her."

"Very little. I have tried more than once to extract particulars, as you may have heard, but from what she has told me, the barmaid must have been a very pleasant mate, I should say."

"The only time Mr. Harding ever communicated with his sister was when he wrote to announce the death of his wife."

"That's true enough; you must have heard your mother say so pretty frequently. Maria is slightly given to repetitions," remarked that lady's husband.

"Some one told mamma that her brother's wife was raving mad at the time she died," said Clara, fixing her eyes steadily on her father's face.
"Brain fever carried her off, I know; she was subject to epileptic fits, and——"

"The barmaid is not dead!" said Clara, slowly and distinctly.

"CLARRY!" almost screamed her father.

"Her husband hides her in that Maison de Santé over which Dr. Halley's friend presides," continued the beautiful girl, her eyes blazing with excitement. "Do you think I believe in that mythical Monsieur Ferné? No, the trail is perfect; I have tracked the rich man's secret at last; I know now what that leprous memory is he strives so hard to drown."

Algy had to swallow several glasses of wine before he could rally from the shock produced by his daughter's extraordinary communication. He was disposed at first to be slightly incredulous, but as the huntress showed him every footprint and every broken twig, Algy agreed with his daughter that the trail was indeed perfect.

"I have guided you through the maze so far, papa; I have cleared your path, and now your work commences."

Algy was silent—a deep gloom had fallen over his face.

"'Gad, Clarry," he said presently, "I wish you
had unearthed anything but this. By Jove, I am sorry for Harding. Poor devil!"

The words were coarse enough, but there was real sympathy in the tones.

"He has been so confoundedly badly treated, you know, ma fille," he continued, almost deprecatingly. "And he has really behaved so very handsomely. I tell you what, Clarry, it will be a rascally shame to twist this rope round his neck in return for all."

Clara is not altogether unprepared for this move on the part of her father. She is aware of that feeble glimmer of light in his nature to which I have some time ago alluded.

"And so you will have nothing whatever to do with the matter, I suppose, and I have expended two pounds ten for nothing," she said. "What are your future plans, mon père? How are you going to invest your shower of gold?—in the sweet simplicity of the three per cents? Shall we retire into private life with ninety pounds a year, and eat the bread of honesty and independence? I have no great fancy for the fare."

"But it is such a dirty thing to do, Clarry," Algy still remonstrates. (Alas! I fear that feeble light will soon be very dim). "He has suffered
so much already on account of that woman, and now——”

“He ought to be thankful his secret has only fallen into the hands of a loving relative. Pshaw! papa, you cannot afford to play the angel. The tar which fastens on your wings must melt when near the sun of common sense. What is this man’s income?” she asked suddenly.

“Thirty thousand per annum—it is, by Jove!” replied her father, rallying a little. (The light is pretty nearly dead out now.) “’Gad, he might spare us a slice, and never miss it.”

“Ten per cent commission would be no very usurious demand, if you undertook to manage the whole of that French business for him. You would take a heavy labour off his hands, papa,” the daughter smilingly suggested.

“I can’t joke about it yet, Clarry; I can’t help feeling sorry for the poor chap. But, by Jove—still, as you say, I might be of some use to Harding. I always had a capital head for figures,” said the late Director of the ‘Amalgamated Anglican.’

Clara pursues her advantage, and the feeble glimmer dies away as the wily diplomat points out the golden future to be gained, and arrangements are made, and Algy consents to obey his daughter in all things.
"You must first find out the name of the Mad Doctor; our rustic medico is rather vague on the subject. He told me it was something like Nasty, but it is probable the good man was thinking of his drugs at the time, and associated the Frenchman's name with them. However, it may be something similar. You will have to call on Dr. Halley at once."

"I must be prepared with some story," interposed Algy, eagerly.

"You are not satisfied with the treatment your idiot ward receives in her English retreat, and so you have determined to remove her to some asylum across the channel. These establishments are admirably conducted, you know."

"By George! Clarry," cried her father, "the more I listen to you, the more you amaze me; all the diplomatists that have lived since the days of Jacob have been fools to you."

"You have heard by accident that Dr. Halley is acquainted with some gentleman who conducts a Maison de Santé at Paris," continued his daughter, acknowledging her father's compliment with a smile, "and you have to request he will favour you with the name and address of this French gentleman. When you have secured that, your next move must be to Paris."
"I won't leave England until the Derby's over," said Algy with some excitement. "You don't expect me to do that, Clarry?"

"I suppose nothing could tear you away from the races, and——"

"I have a heavy pot on the favourite; I must stay over the first day, Clarry, and then I will carry out all your instructions to the letter."

"I shall have to trust very much to your own discretion when once you reach Paris. You must make the Mad Doctor understand at once that you are acquainted with Mr. Harding's secret, and you must not leave the Maison de Santé until you have seen the Doctor's patient."

Algy shrugged his shoulders with anything but an air of satisfaction.

"It is not a pleasant business, and there will be worse to follow. 'Gad, I shall have to screw myself up with brandy before I shall be able to muster the courage to tell Harding I have run his ghoul to earth. I suppose you have reserved that duty for me, Clarry?" said Algy, with a very long face.

"My uncle must never know that I am acquainted with his secret. You shall have the full credit of the discovery," said Clara, archly.

"I have no doubt of it," answered her father,
very crossly. "By Jove, my paw will be considerably burnt in securing these chestnuts for you, mademoiselle."

"Not alone for me, mon père. Besides, how often have you told me that you would make any sacrifices for my sake?"

"And so I would, and so I will, my beauty," cried Algy, utterly unable to resist this appeal to his paternal feelings. "And now, Clarry, we will drop this horrid business for the present. Go and dress for the Opera, I have taken two stalls. I know you like these foreign howlers, though they are the dooce of a bore to me," he muttered as his daughter left the room.

There were a great many lorgnettes raised in that direction where the cadet of a noble family sat with his beautiful companion. Algy proudly noticed the sensation she created, and patiently endured the, to him, long, dreary performance. Clara enjoyed the music of the 'Trovatore,' but even the dulcet notes of the great tenor had not power to absorb her attention that evening. The admiring exquisites who raised their glasses so frequently to feast their eyes with her wonderful beauty, little suspected the wild ambitious schemes which were busy in that lovely head.
CHAPTER IV.

My Lady Plantagenet has to listen to many peevish complaints from her handsome son, and I think he has reason to complain. The Baronet has been playing at bob-cherry for some time now, and the game is calculated to try the patience of this spoilt child of society. At one moment, the tempting fruit has seemed within reach of his eager lips, at the next, it has glided away, and he is no nearer than when he first commenced the sport. I have not attempted to exonerate the little heiress from the charge of inconsistency, and, I repeat, the Baronet has reason to complain. When the train carried away beautiful Clara, it carried away Sir Mortimer's best ally. There is no one at Becklands to sound the trumpet in his praise now; Madame is not favourably disposed towards his Majesty of Foxcroft. Perhaps her jealousy detects some latent design in his frequent visits? I do not
know—but I know she is not flattering in her estimate of Sir Mortimer. She does not absolutely refer to Monseigneur in those disparaging remarks of hers; but it is not difficult to see at whom the shafts are aimed. And Zoé attempts no defence for her noble admirer. She does not raise her buckler to shield him for a moment. I am really sorry for the Baronet. And it is not only the troubles of wooing which afflict Monseigneur—the correspondence between him and Sir Thomas Marsden is very brisk. The present owner of the Marsden Estate has been a sharp thorn in Sir Mortimer’s side for some years, and now he threatens to foreclose. One or two white hairs have latterly appeared in the Baronet’s dark locke, and, as he savagely removes the pale unbidden guests, he mutters strong words against his grasping mortgagee.

Poor Miss Winifred’s life is not rendered any more cheerful by these flies in Sir Mortimer’s ointment. The unhappy lady has reason indeed bitterly to bewail her dependent position. That gorgeous chandelier, lustrous with its brilliant facets, which the Baronet exhibits in society, and more especially to Zoé Harding, is mostly shrouded in a big holland bag at home. And
now if the cut glass appears at all in Monseigneur's domestic circle, it is mainly employed to wound with its sharp edges the lean frame of his elderly half-sister. We have seen how ingeniously he has always contrived to torment the poor lady, and he is worse than ever since these clouds have obscured his horizon. I think Miss Winifred would have been fairly driven away from Plantagenet Park at this time had it not been for the baronet's mother. My Lady Plantagenet and the great granddaughter of the Duke of Overall have been on very good terms for years, as we know. That sad accident which crippled the old baronet's second wife in the pride of her youth and beauty, acted the part of a fairy godmother to her stepdaughter. The step-dame's heavy staff was suddenly transformed into the gentle tickling of feathers on the shoulders of Gracieuse. Lady Mortimer is kinder than ever to poor Miss Winifred now, and it is very well she is.

Lady Plantagenet and her son have stayed at home two whole mornings, but the heiress has not complied with that request which Sir Mortimer supplemented with a tender squeeze of the little Peruvian's fingers. Zoé has not called again at Foxcroft, but I am sorry to say, both she and
Madame have called twice at Rose Cottage, to enquire after the health of the wounded soldier. The Parisian greatly admires Horace Snowe. She always makes an exception in his favour whenever she holds forth, as she too frequently does, on the *gaucherries* and other shortcomings of "*les ours Britanniques*," and so, it was at Madame's earnest request that the little girl had consented to accompany her governess in those visits of enquiry. I mention this partly in justification of the iron man's heiress, whom we last saw—at one moment blushing beneath the loving glances of the Baronet, and at the next paling to the hue of a corpse as my Lady Mortimer associated Clara Silvester's name with that of Horace Snowe. I quite agree with those of my strong-minded readers, who, no doubt, think that Zoé would have shown a much higher spirit had she isolated herself from all chance of meeting the soldier; but, alas! it is too true that we do not, when the proper occasion offers, show that grand high spirit about which we so much love to *prôner*. Our crutch fails us at our greatest need, and we bend our weak knees to our idol, instead of standing as we ought to do haughtily aloof. Zoé's crutch has broken in twain, and left her a worshipper at the old shrine.
And Horace is not a whit more wise. I am quite angry with these foolish young people—indeed I have no patience with the soldier. Has not he already had most bitter reason to bewail the caprice of his little mistress? Does he not know that there is a sad existing cause which renders any chance of a union with the rich man's daughter simply impossible? And yet he is deaf to the warnings of common sense, and is lulling himself to sleep once more in the Paradise of Fools.

This very afternoon Zoé is building her castle of cards. The soldier has passed the whole of one afternoon at Becklands. The old pleasant intimacy, which had grown up during that month before the Silvesters appeared in Farnorth, has been resumed. Madame is so engrossed with one of George Sands' romances that the silly pair have had the conversation all to themselves, and Horace has improved the occasion. If the Parisian could have abstracted herself from the fictitious woes which engross her, she would have been slightly scared had she heard some of the words which are at this moment falling from the lips of the soldier. He is alluding to that cloud which shadows his life, and he mingle
great sorrow other regrets which cause his little confidante's heart to beat and flutter. Fortunately Dr. Banques opportunely appears, or Horace, I am certain, would have spoken that, which would have terminated this history at once and for ever.

The good Doctor is very angry indeed when he sees his patient in the drawing-room at Becklands, and prophesies all manner of evils as likely to result from this imprudence, but unless appearances are very deceitful indeed, I don't think the soldier is any the worse for this change of air and scene. However, Galen bears him away, and condemns him to two days' more imprisonment in his invalid chair at Rose Cottage for having disobeyed orders.

Mrs. Silvester mentions this circumstance when she writes to her daughter to request her to be very particular in the choice of the pink ribbon she selects for the other caps. "The one you sent me I wore at Miss Bland's wedding. Mrs. Bland's moiré was only dyed; just fancy, the idea of wearing a dyed gown on such an occasion! I wore my green velvet, but the pink ribbons made me look as sallow as I don't know what, and talking of sallow," continues the writer, who has the
tendency to glide from one subject to another in rather an irrelevant manner, "that man the Miss Snowes have adopted, has been here all the afternoon, and though he does not look so gaunt and pale as he did, Dr. Banques—I don't think he understands my case; I had palpitation last evening, and he would say it was the lobster sauce at dinner—but he was quite angry with the soldier, and talked about gangrene, whatever that may be, and says he is not to stir from his room for two or three days; and mind you are particular about the right shade of pink," &c. &c.

Clara was considerably discomfited when she read this communication from her mother. "I must lose no time in returning to Farnorth," she said, "or her babyship's castle of cards may defy the power of my breath to overthrow it. I will leave London this evening. I will send a herald to precede me by two hours," she added, as she seated herself at her writing-desk.

The letter she wrote to her young cousin to announce her return, took some time in its composition. She destroyed several sheets of note paper before she was satisfied, and when at length she folded the written matter and enclosed it in an envelope addressed to Zoé, there was a very
odd expression in her lovely face. "It is a great risk," she muttered, "but I must venture it."

The betting had been five to two against the favourite up to the last moment before starting, but West Australian has won the Derby, and his lucky backers are delirious with delight. Algy is in wonderful spirits.

"I am at your disposition now, mademoiselle," he says to his daughter, "I shall stay over the Chantilly races; it will amuse me to see old Crapaud bestriding a horse, and 'gad I shall want something to exhilarate me after I have paid my respects to Madame. It will be rather a sell if we are searching for a mare's nest after all, ma belle."

"I have not one doubt on the subject. I shall watch my uncle very closely when I mention to him that your object in visiting Paris is to find a pleasant asylum for your late aunt's imbecile stepdaughter; if my communication does not produce a considerable effect on the rich man I will never pretend to hunt down a secret again. I leave London this evening, and shall travel all night."

"Travel all night, Clarry! That is quite a new arrangement. By Jove, you're too handsome to
travel by yourself, I've half a mind to run down with you."

"You have no time to spare for the part of the anxious paterfamilias. Do you think some adventurous knight will run away with me? Dismiss your fears, mon père. Paris now-a-days would not bear away Helen of Troy until he had been to Doctors' Commons to study her father's will. Sleep in peace, papa, I shall reach Farnorth in safety, and I must be there to-morrow morning."

"'Gad, I shall be in no such particular hurry to get back again, I can tell you," says Algy, ruefully. "When I think of the encounter that must take place between me and Harding, by Jove, I would rather go in for a round with the champion of England, and take the punishment the boxer would most assuredly give me."

"I believe you would, papa, for you are not remarkable for moral courage; however, it must be done, and the sooner it is over the better for everybody. You will cross the channel to-morrow. You have obtained the address of the Mad Doctor?"

"Yes, here it is. I managed that cleverly enough. Old Halley was quite anxious to give
his French acquaintance the chance of a job. Banques was not so far out, you see; the man's name is something like Nasty," Algy said, as he handed a card to his daughter.

"M. Denassie, 54, Rue Pompadour, Passy. Dives has written that address very frequently you may be certain. I shall be so anxious to hear from you, papa. You must write me every particular directly you have a moment to spare. How long will you remain in Paris?"

"Possibly a week. I tell you I want to see Crapaud bestride a horse, and I shall stay over the Chantilly races. I shall not go in for any betting, for it would be a sort of tempting of Providence after my lucky haul on the Derby. I mean to bring you no end of a parure from the Queen of Cities, my beauty. What shall it be?"

"I leave that to your good taste, Monsieur le Millionnaire," Clara answered, gaily. "And now I must hasten my preparations, for the train starts in an hour."

"I will leave this for Dover the very first thing to-morrow morning," Algy says to his daughter as he places her in a first-class carriage. "I shall have crossed the channel and reached Paris by the time you are eating your turbot and lobster
sauce. I will write to you directly I have been to the Rue Pompadour on my agreeable errand. Don't you think I am a most conscientious guardian to take all this trouble about my imbecile ward, Clarry?" he adds with a grin.

"It is very kind and disinterested," Clara answers with a merry laugh, "and I shall take care to impress this fact on my uncle. Good bye. Do you expect me to read all this before I reach Farnorth?" she says, as Algy stuffs at least half-a-dozen periodicals into her hand.

"It is a confoundedly long journey, Clarry. I'm afraid you will be dreadfully tired. I've put you under the care of the guard, he will look after you."

Clara could not possibly have been placed in better hands, for there are not more chivalrous paladins living in these days than the blue-coated officials of the line.

Algy returned to his hotel and paid his bill like a man. He added a douceur to the solemn-faced waiter, and requested to be called very early next morning. "I'm in for it now, and must go on with it. Clarry is right, we cannot afford to be squeamish. This may be the making of us, and
the three thousand pounds won't last for ever," Algy said to himself as he retired that night.

The master of Becklands little dreams of the danger menacing that single hair which has supported the sword over his head for so many years. Mr. Harding has been almost cheerful for the last few days. I think Zoé's spirits have infected her father. The little maid is quite another creature to what she has been for nearly four months. Her merry laugh rings through the house, and Madame smilingly shakes her head at her pupil's "enfantillage."

Poor silly little Zoé. It was only a week ago she had admitted to herself that the three or four words which she had heard Horace Snowe whisper to her cousin, had tolled the knell of her last hope. I wonder how many such funerals we are daily attending in our passage through life! We are weeping mourners at the bed-side of a fading hope at one moment, and at the next we are gaily tossing the new-born offspring of the moribund. Only a week ago, and every rose-leaf was uncurling beneath the pillow of Zoé Harding, now there is nothing but unruffled fragrance under the head of the little sybarite. Shall we grudge the pretty butterfly it's short life of sunshine? Love has not
only triumphed over pride in the mêlée, but doubt and fear, reason and common sense have been unhorsed and lie sprawling in the dust. Poor silly little Zoé. Every nook and corner of her heart is occupied by that intruder who forced an entrance there five months ago. The heiress yields to this mighty influence as we all of us in our time have yielded, and, God help her, she will suffer as most of us have suffered; but there are no clouds to blot out the fair sunshine now. The trumpets bray forth glad music—the triumphant champion lays his spoil at the feet of the little queen of beauty. She will not listen to the gasping warnings of the unhorsed cavaliers. Doubt and fear, reason and common sense may bite the dust for some little time longer. And whilst foolish Zoé is dreaming dreams, and imbecile Horace sleeping in the Paradise of Fools, the down train is rapidly conveying beautiful Clara Silvester back again to Farnorth.
CHAPTER V.

The weather is most beautiful at Farnorth, and the large windows of the morning-room at Becklands are open to the ground. The soft south wind gently toys with the delicate muslin curtains, and scatters the perfumed breath of flowers throughout the room. Zoë and Madame are seated at the breakfast table: the most pleasant meal of the day is over, and the two ladies are enjoying what Miss Alathea Snowe would term "the twilight of the matutinal refection."

A letter for Zoë lies on the table, with the seal yet unbroken. The little lady is evidently too much interested in the columns of the Thunderer to be able to tear herself away from its eloquent leaders. Madame is greedily devouring the last pages of another of George Sands' wonderful romances. The heiress at length lays down the 'Times' and takes up the neglected missive. "A letter from Clara," she remarks to her companion.

"Is it that mademoiselle your cousin goes to
come à l'instant?” demands Madame with anything but a satisfied expression on her face.

Zoé bows her head in reply, and the Parisian, with an impatient frown resumes her lecture.

Clara has written quite a long letter to her young cousin—it occupies two whole sheets of note paper. A smile dimples on Zoé’s pretty face as her eyes wander over the first page. Algy’s daughter has at all times a clever facile pen, but she must have been more than usually brilliant in this epistle, for the little reader laughs aloud at some of her cousin’s quaintly-expressed fancies, and she eagerly takes up the second sheet of closely-written note paper.

Madame has finished her novel. She closes the book with an air of satisfaction—the sequel has satisfied her. She commences some superlative praise. Suddenly a change comes over her expressive features.

“Grand Dieu! what is it that has arrived?” she almost shrieks, as she rushes towards her pupil. “You are all pale, chérie; vous avez l’air tout misérable. Cette figure-là me fait mal. Ciel! Qu’est ce que c’est?”

“It is only the heat,” gasps the miserable child, whose very lips are white.
Madame will not accept this explanation. She declares that the heat could not have produced such a sudden change as that which has startled her in the face of her darling, but Zoé obstinately persists that the weather is alone to blame, and she tries to steady her trembling limbs as she walks towards the bell, which she rings hastily.

"Tell the coachman that the carriage must be at the railway station in an hour to meet Miss Silvester," the little heiress says to the man who answers her summons; and then she smiles, oh, such a wan smile, at her anxious governess, and tells her she will go and lie down, and promises to be all right again by the time her cousin arrives.

Madame is a ladylike person, and has a strict regard for *les convenances*; but if any one had heard the strong expression she muttered at the mention of the name of Clara Silvester they would have formed an unfavourable opinion of the Frenchwoman's manners and tone of conversation.

Zoé is alone at last. The imprisoned sighs and tears are free. Ah me! What a jail delivery it is. How bitterly the wretched, motherless girl weeps! What cruel agony writhes her beautiful figure as she flings herself on her knees on the ground!
Where are the spoils that the triumphant champion laid at the feet of the little queen of beauty? They are all crushed and trampled down. The knights in sombre armour who were vanquished in the last mêlée no longer bite the dust. They are mounted again, and are riding rapidly forward, lance in hand. Will the gay champion of love triumph again? I think not.

The violence of her grief exhausts itself, and the heiress is once more calm—calm enough to think over that letter which has caused this sudden hurricane. She draws it again from the folds of her dress where she has hidden it. She can realise it all now. Clara has by mistake enclosed in the envelope to her cousin a portion of a letter intended for Horace Snowe.

Pride unhorses love as Zoé reads again those fatal words which almost stayed the current of her young life when first she saw them.

"I congratulate you, my dear friend," Clara wrote, "on the accident which has delayed your departure from Farnorth. Bright days are in store for you. Courage, mon ami; you have won the pure, unselfish heart of my pretty cousin. Believe me, dear Horace, you will learn in time to love that charming child. You are under a glamour
now. You fancy that—Pshaw! Neither you nor I can afford to sacrifice our prospects in life for the sake of a grande passion. We must leave that luxury to others. You will soon forget me. In all essential particulars Zoé is infinitely my superior. I am not good at all: there is nothing more génant to me than to do what I ought to do. Zoé is altogether different. She leads a model life, and yet because I—-but I will not pursue that subject. I think you are now disposed to act more wisely. I am delighted to hear you spent the whole afternoon at Becklands. The Baronet will be au désespoir. I am really rather sorry for his majesty of Foxcroft, as I believe he is sincerely attached to my dear little cousin. However, he is not the only victim. I never dreamt that I should ever earn the crown of martyrdom. I have hitherto been quite satisfied to admire self-sacrifice without practising it, and even now I confess I would rather bear my honours vicariously. Zoé would never forgive me if she suspected I had written to you as I have done. Gardez le silence, and walk in the path I have assigned you.

"Yours sincerely,

"Clara Silvester."
The angry blood had quite chased away the pallor from Zoë's cheeks when she had finished reading this precious epistle for the second time. The little girl's passionate nature was aroused. Pride and wounded vanity entered her heart and thrust forth both gentle pity and gratitude. How bitterly she feels towards the soldier! Clara she can forgive, but Horace never. Poor love lies on the ground now, with a very ugly wound in his fair side.

There were no traces of tears on the face of the little heiress when she rejoined her governess in the drawing-room. She had quite recovered from the effects of the heat, she said, in answer to the Parisian's tender enquiries, and her manner was perfectly composed when she welcomed her cousin.

Clara was in very high spirits. "I am so glad to see you all again," she said; "the country looks so fresh and pure after smoky Babylon. You see I really am growing quite innocent in my tastes, Zoë. How very pretty you are, carissima. Where have you gathered those crimson roses, little girl?" and she touched the poor flushed cheeks playfully. "I have any amount of news to tell you. Where
is mamma? I am glad she has not worn you to death. I must go to her and carry my welcome with me," she added as she hurried away, bearing a small box in her hand.

Clara has been very judicious in her selection of the pink ribbon this time. Mrs. Silvester is quite amiable as the mirror reflects her face ornamented with the becoming head-gear, and her daughter escapes with about a third of the usual dirge.

"Who would imagine I am only three years and four months younger than my brother," Algy's wife says with a satisfied smile. "Theodore looks as old as I don't know what: his face is as lined, as lined."

The master of Becklands joins the ladies at luncheon, and is very kind and courteous in his words of welcome to his beautiful niece.

"I hope the prime minister arrived in time to avert the mischief she dreaded," he says gaily.

"Yes; but I am sorry to say I fear my influence is on the wane. Papa is becoming refractory; he will not answer to the word of command very long. I think this legacy has almost turned his brain. He would not at first confide to me the motive that has taken him to Paris."

"And I am sure I am surprised," interposed
Mrs. Silvester. "Your father is not in the habit of putting himself out of the way to oblige any one. And just fancy—the idea of his taking charge of this dreadful idiot. She is no relation of his, and I dare say she was quite well done to where she was. Why need he take her away to France?"

Clara just glanced at her uncle, but that one look was quite sufficient.

"He has not taken her with him; he simply wishes to make some enquiries—at least so he says; but I am an undutiful daughter, and don't believe him. I am convinced the Chantilly races are the attraction which draws him to Paris. I doubt very much whether he will even go near that Maison de Santé at Passy."

A low groan escaped from the lips of the unhappy master of Becklands. Zoé rose in terror, but her father motioned her to be seated.

"It is nothing, my darling," he said. "A slight spasm; it has already passed away."

"Just like what I have, I dare say," broke in Mrs. Silvester. "I am sure the pain I had the other day after that curry; and it lasted such a time. Is yours quite gone already, Theodore?"

"Quite, I thank you. I beg your pardon,
Clara, you were talking about the Chantilly races."

"Oh, my dear uncle; I really cannot discuss either Chantilly races or Chantilly laces. I am so very hungry: all my thoughts are concentrated on cold chicken at present. Shall I give you some, Zoé?" And Clara devoted herself to her knife and fork, and did not raise her head for some moments.

"Mr. Silvester is certain to bet and lose money at these nasty French races," moaned his wife. "I should like to know how much of my poor money went on the turf. I am sure when I think, Theodore"—but Theodore had already left the room—"I was just going to say to your father, my dear," she continued, addressing herself to Zoé, "that he must be very careful about your settlements. If I had only listened to my poor——"

"Here is Dr. Banques, mamma; had you not better go to him?" said Clara.

"He don't understand my complaint a bit," was her mother's peevish rejoinder. "I had palpitation, and was as ill as I don't know what, last night, and he will say it is only indigestion, and that I must not eat the very things I like best.
It is very hard for me to see other people eating whatever they like best, whilst I”—and she walked away with herself and her troubles. There was no one now in the room with Clara and her young cousin. The crimson flush had not yet left Zoé's cheeks, and she had some difficulty to steady the fingers which guided her crochet needle.

“You are prettier than ever, my little Spanish maiden,” Clara said as she placed herself near the poor child. “Who is the magician that has called into life this new beauty? Tell me his name, Zoé,” she continued playfully. “What has happened since I left you, little shepherdess? Have you taken my advice, and is Corydon——”

“You enclosed this letter in mistake with the one I received from you this morning, Clara,” said Zoé calmly, as she handed the cause of so much misery to her cousin.

A more discerning person than the little heiress would have been completely imposed upon by the accomplished acting of Algy's daughter. Tears rose in her fine eyes, and a rich colour suffused her beautiful face as she glanced for a few moments at the letter. She tore it into the minutest fragments.
"How shall I ever forgive myself, my poor dear child!" she cried in her most caressing tones as she threw her arms around the little girl.

Zoé trembled, and slightly drew herself away.

"You shrink from me," said Clara sadly. "You hate me now, Zoé; and yet it was your happiness alone that I considered when I wrote those foolish lines. I have done my best to hide this secret from you. It is only very lately I knew how much you cared for——"

"Oh, how could you so compromise me, Clara?" cried Zoé reproachfully, and the bitter tears of shame dimmed again her dark eyes.

"Pshaw! my rustic darling," answered her cousin, resuming the old sarcastic manner. "I must exorcise all these old-fashioned demons who hold you in their grasp. We do not live in the days of Mrs. Chapone, my pretty propriety. If Pyramus is shy, Thisbe must take the initiative—it is all the same. The squire of low degree hesitated in his wooing of the king's daughter, and the princess would not descend from her pedestal to encourage the lagging lover. She is angry because her friend was not so scrupulous. I could not bear to see you so unhappy, child. You must forgive me, Zoé, and believe——"
"I do believe you meant well, Clara," said the poor little heiress; "but how could you think so meanly of me as to imagine I——"

"I will never imagine anything again. I hate myself for my stupidity, and I wish the soldier was at the bottom of the Red Sea," said Clara passionately. "We will never speak of him any more, Zoé." And so the matter ended.

Mrs. Silvester certainly did look several years younger than her brother when she wore her becoming cap at dinner that day. The sad lines in the face of the master of Becklands were deeper than ever, and there was a scared look in his eye which did not escape the notice of his watchful niece. "Fear has him in his clutches already," she thought, and she marked the frequent filling of his glass, and the eagerness with which he swallowed the stimulant which yet seemed powerless to chase away that anxious look.

Zoé noticed her father's haggard appearance, and she remarked upon it to her cousin.

"Papa has been so cheerful for the last week," she said, "I cannot understand why he should look so pale and worn to-day."

"Your papa must pay the penalty of riches,"
answered her cousin. "Money brings its cares. Every sunbeam has its shadow. The Midas of the North may have an occasional cloud to darken the brightness of his prospects—it will pass away, and you will see Le Grand Monarque will be himself again to-morrow. He is never very gay, you know. I admire his grave stately manners. I should be almost sorry to hear him laugh, and behave like ordinary mortals. I am very fond of your father, Zoé; there is something singularly attractive to me in his character. Mamma does not resemble him in the least, neither physically, mentally, nor morally. I only wish she did. Don't look grave my excellent little mentor, and I will say nothing more to imperil the length of my days. Papa says he will return from Paris the end of this week."

"Does he?" said Zoé, listlessly.

"Do you know he will not listen to my suggestions about Ivy Cottage; indeed, he is rather unwilling to remain at Farnorth at all, but upon that point I am quite determined, and, rather than be dragged away, I shall assure to myself a chronic residence in the district by making love to Mr. Giles Houndly, or some other eligible; will you be my bridesmaid, Zoé?"
Clara rattled away and exerted herself to amuse her young cousin, but she was not very successful. "Mademoiselle's purple and fine linen give her no consolation; she suffer as much as the ragged child of Lazarus," Clara thinks, and the thought gives her considerable satisfaction.

Horace Snowe called at Becklands on the day following Clara's return. He was pale, and still carried his injured arm in a sling. It so chanced that Sir Mortimer was announced almost at the same time as the soldier. The two rivals did not gaze very amiably at each other, but the Baronet acknowledged Horace's presence by a slight bow. You know the tailor's grandson prides himself on his good breeding. Zoé welcomed Monseigneur with some empressement, but she scarcely bent her head to the unhappy man of war. Horace did not behave like an officer and a gentleman on this occasion. An acute listener might have heard a very strong exclamation hiss through the soldier's half-closed lips. When we are craving for bread it is not pleasant to have a cold hard stone thrust into our fingers. I think under similar circumstances I should have behaved no better than Horace Snowe. Only three days ago, and this
capricious child had admitted him to terms of friendly intimacy. He was foolish to build a house upon this shifting sand, but still I can pity the poor fellow as he stands wan and miserable amidst the ruins.

"You are yet in the alphabet of your knowledge of our delightful sex," Clara said in low tones to the pale bewildered man. "I warned you, and you were not grateful, I know; no one ever is. There is not a more finished coquette in any of the Belgravian drawing-rooms than my provincial cousin. On that night when you distinguished yourself by extinguishing the fire, I really thought you had put out two flames, but the baronet's flickering light has awakened again into glow, and the sparks you kindled by your heroism ——"

"I never presumed to imagine for one moment," faltered poor Horace, "that ——"

"You had every reason to presume," interposed Clara with her most candid manner. "My cousin misled me, I really thought the baronet's day was over; however, it seems I was wrong, little Zoé has not abandoned her designs on the red hand. How much longer do you remain in Farnorth, Mr. Snowe?" and so the conversation drifted into commonplace.
The Baronet sparkled and shone in a most marvellous fashion. The presence of his rival imparted fresh vigour, he was really quite fascinating, and looked handsome enough to have captivated any woman in the land.

Horace did not remain very long in this chamber of torture, and when he took his leave, he did not offer his hand to the little mistress of Becklands, his bow was as haughty and as distant as her own. Pride and wounded vanity do not confine themselves to shivering lances in the feminine breast alone, and there was a grand mélée going on in the heart of the handsome soldier. If his farewell salute to his capricious mistress was stiff and grand, the bend of the head with which he acknowledged the gracious inclination of Monseigneur was scarcely visible to the naked eye—not so the scowl which accompanied it. Romeo suffers quite as much in this age of steam and progress as ever he did in the days of the Capulets, and the modern lover is even more murderously disposed towards the County Paris than the unfortunate Montagu was.

The mortified soldier forms magnificent resolves as he walks slowly in the direction of Rose Cottage. He will not break his teeth on that hard
stone which has been thrust into his supplicating hand in lieu of bread. He will fling it away, and forget the cruel donor. Horace is only an erring mortal—he is very far from faultless. I have said that he did not behave like an officer and a gentleman when he received that sudden douche from the little girl who had bewitched him. He had muttered some very broad Saxon, and he is not behaving any better now. Juliet may relieve her full heart by weeping in the privacy of her chamber, her swollen and disfigured eyelids bring no disgrace with them to her. Poor Romeo cannot thus besmame his manhood, and so he seeks consolation for his wounded feelings by cruelly striking his idol as the savage belabours the wooden fetish which has not listened to his prayers. Pretty little Zoé was all bruised and beaten by the time her lover had reached the house of the maiden ladies. She was a heartless flirt, unworthy the affection of an honest man. She was an ambitious coquette, who would barter herself for rank and position. She was frivolous and deceitful, a trader in false smiles and meretricious charms, in short she was everything that is unloveable and dreadful. Assuredly the race of philosophical Reynards is not by any means extinct.
And whilst Horace is battling with the fierce winds of passion, and Zoé perishing in the noonday glare of luxury, is Clara basking in the calm sunshine of content?

No. At the moment when her foot is planted on the first step of that ladder with which she is to scale the ambitious heights she has so often pictured—at the moment when her past life, with all its hideous shifts and contrivances so abhorrent to her haughty nature, is about to fade away like a grim phantom—at the moment when success promises to crown the anxious stealthy search of the huntress:—at this moment of triumph she is attacked and beaten down by that despised and insidious foe, against whom she has for months now been waging war. Clara Silvester, who has passed her early girlhood with a heart as hard and cold as marble, who is devoid of genuine feeling as a senseless caryatide, is crushed and broken as any love-sick sentimental school-girl by the passion she has conceived for the man whose heart is given to her young cousin. How fiercely she abhors that unhappy child! How pitiless she is of the misery she has induced! The more she is confirmed in her impression that Zoé has won the prize, the more she is madly anxious to wrest
away the treasure. She would almost sacrifice her ambitious schemes to win the soldier's love. But this folly will not last long; Algy's daughter will be herself again. Ambition is too much engrained in her nature to be removed by any momentary delirium; her strong will must ultimately triumph, and I repeat that Algy's daughter will be herself again.
CHAPTER VI.

It is little more than a month since Horace Snowe uttered that wish which scared the gentle hearts of the maiden ladies of Rose Cottage; it is little more than a month, and the soldier’s eager desire for a war with civilized white men seems likely enough to be gratified now. Whispers, born on the wings of the East wind, have already slightly rustled the folds of some of the European pennons. A mighty potentate has cast an envious eye on the possessions of his sick neighbour. The wolf has bandied cruel words with the poor lamb he is seeking to devour. Diplomacy, with its stereotyped smile, and its soft winning accents has pleaded in vain, and the sick lamb will assuredly perish, or at best be shorn of its wool, unless its feeble bleat reaches the ears of friendly allies. All the vehicles of news are filled with this question. The welfare of many is involved in the fate of the menaced invalid, and wise men foretell
the coming of a storm. Old animosities will be buried, it is prophesied, the lion will fraternise with the eagle, the cross and the crescent combine, and the united body make one common cause against the imperial tyrant.

Peace and her helpmate Plenty have reigned for nearly forty years, they have held their royal sceptre undisturbed, and the children they have reared in their lap have grown up into glorious manhood. Steam, a puling infant when Waterloo was won, has now a giant's strength. Science has expanded its wings and gained a wizard power that would have earned for it the glories of martyrdom in mediæval ages. Time and space are well nigh annihilated. Ariel's girdle is around the world, and the nations of the earth are armed with a ubiquity of knowledge. All these wonders have come to pass during the long reign of peace, and now she is tottering on her throne. Men, who made a fortune during the wars of the first empire, shake their white heads dubiously, and prate about the good old times when the lagging post brought valuable information from private sources, and gamblers on the Stock Exchange won their thousands from these hints. Nothing of the kind can happen now-a-days, they
say. Reuter has utterly destroyed all hopes that lie in that direction. Private information will be of none effect to either bulls or bears, and so the speculators deprecate the necessity for unfolding the British banner, and the shopkeepers' peace congress is very busy indeed.

Horace Snowe inclines an eager ear to the faint sighing of the coming storm. He longs more eagerly than ever to mingle in fierce strife and carnage. Our warlike Romeo does not betake himself to an apothecary and purchase the fatal drug which is to end his sorrows and his life, but I do not think he values the boon of existence one whit more than the love-sick Montagu did. He is very foolish. He has health and strength, manly beauty, a fine intellect, and a moderate competence. He has all these grand belongings, and yet because Fate denies him one desire of his heart, he must needs fret and chafe, and behave in a very absurd manner.

[We, you know, have crossed that dangerous channel whose waves the soldier is breasting. We are landed high and dry, and in the security of our gray hairs, wrinkles, and amplitude of waistcoat, we forget our sufferings during that stormy passage, and we are disposed to smile at the con-
vulsive efforts of the struggler who is well nigh perishing amidst the breakers.]

I am glad, however, to say, that Pride and wounded Vanity do this time so far sustain the soldier, that he does not again flutter in the vicinage of his bright tormentor during the remainder of his stay at Farnorth.

Clara Silvester has received a letter from her father. Algy has not written more than half-a-dozen words, but they are very welcome to his daughter, and she is eagerly expecting his arrival. Mrs. Silvester does not evince a similar feeling; indeed she bewails the coming of her lord very bitterly, and is altogether peevish and unpleasant.

"I am sure I dare scarcely say my soul is my own, or speak a word, when your father is here; he takes me up as sharp as I don't know what," she says to Clara. "I wish these French races had lasted for some time longer, though I dare say he has lost plenty of money. He thinks himself so clever about horses, and he knows no more than anything. When we were first married, he was always losing money at the races, and then he was as cross, as cross. It wasn't my fault if his horse didn't win, and it was so very hard for
poor me, when it was my money he was risking all the time,” &c., &c., &c.

Dinner was being served at Becklands when the cadet of a noble family was announced. He had already removed the stains of travel, and was daintily clad in prandial costume. He greeted his daughter with great affection, and extended some show of that material to his helpmate. [Mokanna still keeps down the conjugal silver veil in the presence of his brother-in-law.] The unhappy master of Becklands, ever courteous, shook hands with the new arrival, and pale little Zoé spoke some words of welcome.

Algy exerted himself to talk, but he was evidently abnormally excited, and Clara knew that her father had borrowed his high spirits from the Frenchman’s water of life. She glanced uneasily at him once or twice, but a telegram from the half drunken man partially reassured her. Mrs. Silvester of course started the very subject that ought to have been avoided. She commenced making enquiries about that unfortunate imbecile, Algy’s ward, but her husband gave very short unsatisfactory answers to her many questions, and he diverged into a description of the Chantilly races.
"Some of the Crapauds did not sit their horses badly," he said, "but I did not risk any money on the race where Mossoo was the jockey. I backed Jouvence for the Prix de Diane. Bob Sherwood rode her, so I knew I was safe enough. She won in capital style. You know she ran third for the City and Suburban Handicap at Epsom. I didn't make a bad haul altogether."

The dinner is over, and the ladies have retired to the drawing-room. Mr. Harding and his brother-in-law are alone. Algy tosses off very nearly a tumbler of claret, but in spite of the quantity of Dutch courage with which he has saturated himself, his voice trembles not a little as he addresses his grave companion.

"I have something to say to you, Harding, and something not too pleasant either; I have by accident found out——"

"I have some letters to write," interposed the master of Becklands, calmly. "I am going to the library; if you will join me there in a quarter of an hour, I shall be at leisure to hear whatever you have to say."

There was no tremor in the tones of the rich man's voice, as he spoke these words. There was
no faltering in his firm footsteps as he left the room, and yet he knew the hair which held the fatal sword was about to break at last.

All his calmness forsook him when he had closed the door of the library. The strong man shook in every limb. There was a wild scared look in his face which was very sad to see. He unlocked his desk and took from a secret drawer a small phial filled with a dark liquid. A wine glass and a carafe of water were on the table; he dropped some of the black sluggish fluid into the glass, and mingling it with water, drank the mixture. Very soon the powerful drug asserted itself. The shaking limbs were stilled, the racked nerves composed, and that wild scared look had left the eyes of the master of Becklands, as he sank back in a chair, and calmly awaited the coming of his brother-in-law.

Alas, unhappy man—how darkly has that shadow from the past shrouded the whole of his life! The ardent student who deified common clay, and worshipped the idol he had himself created, how bitterly has he expiated this folly of his boyhood. Cursed and disinherited by his father, all his prospects in life blighted and laid low—what consolation had he found in the beautiful woman for
whom he had sacrificed so much? For how long had Love blinded him to the terrible fact of that mean common soul hidden beneath the lovely covering which had bewitched and carried away captive the heart of the passionate boy? For how long?—God help him—for how long? A rapture of a week, followed by months of torture. No one but his Maker knows the hideous misery that blackened those early married years of Zoe's father.

The quarter of an hour has elapsed, and Algy enters the library. The last twilight of a long June evening lingers in the room. Mr. Harding is seated at his desk, but he lays aside his pen when he sees his brother-in-law. "Shall I ring for candles?" he says quietly.

"By Jove! what I have to say had best be told in the dark," answers Algy, whose voice is very thick and unsteady; "I'll tell you what it is, Harding, I'm —— sorry for you, and that's all about it."

All Clara's diplomacy could not have produced a better effect than Algy's clumsy manner did upon his listener. Mr. Harding's power of discerning character is very little more acute than that of his daughter. The refined man has often
shuddered at the coarseness of his brother-in-law, but he has always given him credit for a certain amount of good nature, and he is disposed now to believe in Algy's roughly expressed sympathy.

"Maria let out at dinner what was my principal object in visiting Paris. 'Gad, if she only knew the mystery I stumbled upon when I got there, she would make all Farnorth ring again. It was so odd I should be recommended to take my ward to this very identical Maison de Santé conducted by Denassie."

The master of Becklands could not repress a slight shudder.

"When he asked for a reference and I mentioned your name, he thought I was accredited from you, and it all slipped out before I could stop him. I say again, Harding, I'm —— sorry for you. I have seen her!" he added, in a low whisper.

"Seen—her?" repeated his unhappy companion, in a dull dreamy tone.

The black drops had enough to do to retain their influence now.

"Yes, Denassie wanted my opinion. He told me he had been down here on purpose to consult
you about these long lucid intervals she has; he
tells me that——"

"She is mad—mad—raving mad!" interrupted
Mr. Harding, in a wild excited manner.

"Well, the doctor don't exactly seem to think
so; he says she's sane enough for months together
if the drink can be kept away from her, and he
don't seem altogether easy in his mind that she
should be mewed up there. It's altogether a con-
foundedly awkward business, there's no denying
that. She was rational enough when I saw her,
although she did abuse you in fine style. Denassie
quite believes that clever story you imposed upon
him, Harding, and he don't listen to any of
madam's ravings about her right to bear your
name. I didn't enlighten him, you may depend.
I was mute as a fish about your second mar-
riage."

"God help me! God help me! my poor child
—my poor child!" moaned the miserable rich man,
whose presence of mind had altogether deserted
him.

Algy was a good deal overcome by the utter
prostration of his companion, and there was some
genuine clumsy sympathy in his tones when next
he spoke.
"Now look you here, Harding, there's no harm done by my knowing this affair. I'll not blow upon you, I'll swear. I am confoundedly sorry for you. You were shamefully ill-used, and I've told Maria over and over again that the loss of her money was a judgment upon her, but luck has turned with you. You are a rich man, Harding, and the truth is," said Algy, who was preparing for the mendicant's whine now, "I am doocedly hard up in spite of Aunt Aggie's——"

"Am I to understand that I can purchase your silence?" asked the master of Becklands with a shade of bitterness in his tones which was not altogether lost upon Algy, half intoxicated though he was.

"Come now, that's all humbug, you know," he replied, rather indignantly. "One don't talk about purchasing and all that between friends and relatives, but Clarry has been so elated about this windfall that I have had, and I've not told her how small it——"

"Does your daughter know anything of—of—this?" demanded Mr. Harding in a hollow broken voice.

"Catch me telling a secret to any woman—no, no, make your mind easy about that. I'll not split
upon you. This awkward affair is safe enough in my hands."

"Will you take an oath never to reveal this—this—miserable secret to any one?" asked the rich man, eagerly.

"I'll kiss the book on it if that will make you any more comfortable," answered Algy promptly.

("It would not have done to have boggled at this fence, after I had taken so many raspers," Clara's father said to his daughter, when he told her of this deliberate perjury.)

The conversation between the unhappy rich man and his vagabond brother-in-law lasted for some considerable time. The result of it we shall presently learn.

The master of Becklands appeared in the drawing-room that evening. He was haggard and pale, but he was very calm, and Clara, as she watched him furtively, was amazed at his self-possession.

"I will come to your dressing-room when the house is quiet," Algy whispered to his daughter when he bade her good-night.

It was long past midnight before a slight tap at the door of Clara's room announced the promised visit.
“I am awfully glad it’s over,” Algy said, with a sigh of relief, as he threw himself into a chair. “Poor Harding! ’Gad, I was never so sorry for a fellow in my life.”

His daughter did not venture a single mocking word in reply. She saw he was in earnest, and she waited for the feeble light to burn out.

“He was terribly cut up, and I could not help feeling confoundedly ashamed of myself. It was a rascally thing to do, there’s no denying that, Clarry.”

Still Clara did not say a word.

“But after all,” said Algy, “he’s no worse off because the secret has tumbled into my hands. And I can be of use to him in a thousand ways, too,” he continued, blinding the weak eyes of his conscience with this species of blinkers. “I can be useful to him in a thousand ways, ma fille. I can take this French business off his hands—any one can see he is wearing himself to death with it; and I can help him too with the mine, I have a capital head for figures; he’ll find me pretty nearly worth my wages.”

A peculiar smile passed over the beautiful face of his listener. She will not have to remain silent long.
"He has come down handsomely, Clarry. He always does things handsomely, poor chap. We shall be able to keep up a very decent establishment," said Algy, brightening up considerably, as this prospect beamed upon him.

"I am very glad to hear it," said his daughter. "It is time we should have something better than our mountebank tent. Your letter from Paris was very short, but I gathered enough to know that—"

"You were correct in every particular, my handsome Red-skin. I see you are impatient to know everything, Clarry, so I will begin from the very beginning. When once I reached Paris, I did not let the grass grow under my feet, you may depend. I showed up at the house in the Rue Pompadour. I was very well pleased with the doctor, Clarry, and my French acquired on the Continent during our many genteel retirements served me in good stead. I opened the business with that little affair we had concocted about Aunt Aggie's stepdaughter. By the bye—I have really made arrangements with the doctor about placing the idiot under his care. It is just as well to do all things on the square in a case of this kind."

Clara bowed her head approvingly. "You are improving, papa," she said.
“By Jove, I think I am,” said Algy; “I shall be almost a match for you in time, ma fille, and that is saying something. I am sure you would have admired the clever way in which I extracted everything from old Denassie, Clarry. He has had the barmaid in his establishment for more than twenty years, and I——”

“Did you see her?” asked Clara, eagerly.

“Of course I did,” replied her father, “and she was by no means a pleasant arrangement to look at. ’Gad, Clarry, your mother’s no beauty, but she’s a perfect houri compared to the hideous vulture that Harding keeps caged up across the channel.”

“I thought she was so very handsome.”

“So she may have been years ago. I suppose she was, or poor Harding would not have made such a fool of himself; but she has not a trace of beauty now. She has lost all her teeth, and her hair, and her flesh. She is more like a living skeleton than anything else. Harding pays the doctor very handsomely, and the vulture is luxuriously lodged; but hang me, if I ever saw anything more hideous. I tell you what, Clarry, Madam is booked for the long journey; we are only just in time.”

“Has she any suspicions about this second marriage?”
“Not a bit, but she abuses her husband in fine style. Denassie alluded to this ‘delusion’ as he calls it, for he evidently quite believes the account Harding gave of her when he placed her there. The most awkward part of the business for your uncle is this, Clarry,” said Algy, mysteriously, “between you and me, Madam is no more insane than I am.”

Clara started.

“She was mad enough when Harding first popped her into this calm retreat, and she has the temper of a demon, and is subject to epileptic fits as well; but she is quite sane for weeks together, if they can keep the gin away from her, and is fit to go at large. Harding knows this, and the conviction don’t add to his happiness. You may depend he has had some difficulty in prevailing on Denassie to keep her there for so many years. The Frenchman’s visits here were all about this matter, I expect. Harding might well look worn and haggard. From something either you or your mother had said, I saw he had prepared himself for a thunderstorm this evening, but he was terribly upset for all that.”

“I was surprised to see how calm and self-possessed he was in the drawing-room this evening.”
"Opium, *ma fille*, opium. Harding has been at that trade for some time now. He must pull up, or, by Jove, he will do himself a mischief."

"That would not suit us at all."

"'Gad, no, nor himself either, poor fellow; but if I take this French business entirely into my hands, it will be an immense relief to him; so after all, it is just as well for your uncle that we have unearthed his secret, Clarry." And having applied this ointment to the small scar within him, Algy retired to sleep off the effects of the Dutch courage.

There was one inmate at Becklands who never slept at all that night.
CHAPTER VII.

Although the Grandlys of Grandly Manor have evinced a stately desire to cultivate the acquaintance of the Hardings of Becklands—although Miss Grandly has positively called on the little heiress—although old Grandly has suddenly become pompously polite to his brother magistrate:—although all this has been done, nothing but a bowing acquaintance has resulted from this condescension. The Brahmin of the Manor has not been invited to partake of any of those dinners for which the master of Becklands is famous, and the patrician gourmand is not a little disappointed. He has heard Sir Mortimer allude more than once to the rare delicacies which blossom regardless of expense at Mr. Harding’s table, and his lips have watered as he listened. It is very pleasant to eat your lamb and green peas at the expense of other people, and very unpleasant when those other people will not give you the chance of so doing.
The Grandlys are the most exclusive aristocrats in Farnorth, as we know. Old Grandly has stalked through life perpetually attired, so to speak, in the flowing wig and robes of state. He has striven very hard to be a hero to his valet de chambre, and has to a certain extent succeeded. The late Mrs. Grandly believed in her husband to the day of her death, and the Miss Grandlys regard their father with admiring awe. The whole bench of magistrates are dumb in his presence, the master of Becklands alone excepted. Until that dinner at the Plantagenet Park, the old autocrat of Farnorth was disposed to resent the presumption of this "tradesman," as he haughtily termed him. Perhaps the "tradesman" has not forgotten all that insolent arrogance, and that is the reason he does not eagerly grasp the hand which is now held out to him. At any rate the Grandlys and Hardings are as yet only on bowing terms, but this state of things is not to last much longer; the wearer of the flowing wig determines to make one more vigorous effort to secure to himself the chance of eating salmon, and lamb and green peas at abnormal seasons.

"I will invite Mr. Harding and his family to my table," he decides, and he announces this
decision to his daughters. "This iron master is a very intelligent man, and his charities are princely, quite princely; and so I have determined to mark my approval of this liberal conduct by admitting him as a guest at my board."

A sovereign presenting some order as a badge of merit to his subject could not have spoken more magnificently than patrician Grandly did, as he conveyed this decision to his daughters.

I do not fancy the Becklands people were in the least bit overcome when they received the notes of invitation from Grandly Manor, but they did accept the courtesy.

And now the sisters Grandly hold anxious counsel together, for a feast at the temple of the high caste old Brahmin is not altogether an easy matter to arrange.

We have seen how my Lady Mortimer prepares to give her grand entertainments. She summons her housekeeper, issues her commands, and although; as I have said, economy is practised at Plantagenet Park, it is elegantly hidden amongst silver and hot-house flowers. We have seen how Mrs. Bland contrives to give her hospitable entertainments; she hires a cook at so much a day, and tells all her guests she has done so. She has
very little silver and no hot-house flowers to hide her economy in, and she would make no attempt to do so if she had. But no one will ever see or know how the Grandlys arrange their rare entertainments. They do not, in the first instance, summon their housekeeper, for the simple reason that they have not one to summon; and as their family plate is not extensive, they cannot entomb meagre fare in magnificent mausoleums, as my Lady Mortimer does. They have to practise the same rigid economy which Mrs. Bland has to practise; but rather than allude to clever make-shifts as the good relict does they would perish at the stake. The Grandlys are poor, they would not be rich even if they were not Grandlys, but being Grandlys they are well nigh paupers. How they have to pinch and screw to maintain all those lazy retainers who minister to their state, they themselves only know. Adolphus, that victim of an unfortunate attachment, is abroad; he has returned to his official duties; but a gentleman is staying at Grandly Manor. The gentleman is Miss Adeline Grandly's betrothed. For how many years has Miss Adeline been a waiting maid? I should scarcely like to say. The course of her true love runs smoothly enough, but it does
not drift into matrimony. "They will marry when anything happens to Mr. Montagu's uncle," Mrs. Bland will tell you. Montagu is the surname of Miss Adeline's fiancé, and the "anything" which is to happen, is, of course, nothing less than the last debt which the elder Montagu must sooner or later discharge to an inexorable creditor. Hope deferred has not improved Miss Adeline's appearance. She has an anxious careworn look. Time may have mellowed that long engagement but it has assuredly robbed it of its flavour. When that event which Mrs. Bland has alluded to in paraphrase comes to pass, I am afraid a good deal of the sparkle will have left the champagne.

* * * * *

It is the day of the dinner party, and Grandly of Grandly, his daughters, and the shackled Montagu await the coming guests. That much enduring young person, the mistress of the robes to the Miss Grandlys, has exerted herself to do full justice to the waning charms of her young ladies. Poor Miss Adeline always reserves her best dresses for those periods when her affianced visits Grandly Manor. She is still rather pretty, but I fear her coquettish arts are wasted on her lover; he has had so much time to study the per-
sonal beauties of his betrothed that he has them off by heart.

Of course the old autocrat has invited no one but the Plantagenets to meet Mr. Harding's family. Miss Grandly had made some suggestions in favour of the new curate—clergymen are always safe people for even Grandlys to invite—but the motion had been negatived.

Sir Mortimer was conversing with Miss Grandly in a languid, graceful manner when Zoë and her cousin were announced. I have said that the Baronet had at one time flirted with this young lady; he had indeed; she is one of his sulphured pheasants, and although he ridicules her in private he pays her some feeble attention in public, it is a way his majesty has with most of his slaughtered victims. I am afraid this victim is still fond of him, for a sad shade passes over her face as he leaves her and rushes forward with his most fascinating smile to greet the pale little heiress.

The master of Becklands is not improved in appearance since last we saw him; but Algy, his daughter, and even his amiable wife, are looking remarkably well.

Old Grandly exerts himself to play the hospitable entertainer, but the perennial wig and
pompous robes of state are scarcely suited to the part of a pleasant host. He tried to draw his brother magistrate into some local discussion during that dreary half-hour which preceded the dinner, but the autocrat's views on every subject are directly opposed to those of the "tradesman." Grandly of Grandly Manor belongs to the good old school; he is a fine old English gentleman, one of the olden time, an enemy to progress, and a firm supporter of red tape and routine. It was just as well, perhaps, that the conversation did flag, and that the dinner-bell sounded when it did, or Grandly of Grandly Manor might have been shocked by some of the low, radical notions entertained by the fortunate owner of the Weasle.

Sir Mortimer does not wait for any directions from his hostess, but at once appropriates the little heiress to himself. If poor Miss Grandly had any latent intention or hope of hanging on his arm, she is disappointed; the honour of conducting into dinner the lady of the house devolves upon Algy, who mentally passes some unflattering comments on the want of condition of his companion as he leads her forward. Clara is assigned to Mr. Montagu, who appears more attracted by
the charms of Mr. Harding's lovely niece, than as a shackled man he has any right to be. The master of Becklands and Miss Winifred are coupled together. That courtesy of manner and delicate tact, for which the unhappy rich man is remarkable, are very charming to the poor neglected lady. I am afraid she will have to suffer again from the insolent raillery of the young Baronet; he has already given her a very sufficient dose; for, alas! Miss Winifred's costume has not been judiciously chosen, it is quite as girlish as that worn by pretty Zoé. Poor Miss Winifred! she will not accept her position, she will not take her place in the background with the rest of the chorus singers. And do we not most of us resemble her? Do we not strive and struggle to be first tenor and prima donna assoluta to the very day of our death? And are we not hissed and hooted at over and over again, and is it not all in vain? Poor Miss Winifred! you will never have a bouquet thrown to you now; but you are not much more foolish than your neighbours.

The dinner which Mrs. Bland, in conjunction with Mrs. Jellybags, placed before the Miss Middletons, was infinitely better than the repast
which the fine old English gentleman is heading in his most pompous manner now; but then, Mrs. Bland's guests were only waited upon by honest John, with his helpless hands and ill-fitting livery, whilst a proper staff of underlings lends a superior flavour to all the dishes at the Grandly board. The quantity of table-cloth ought, of course, to reconcile you to everything, but it does not exactly. Algy makes a face as he takes his first sip of the wine with which the stout and haughty butler has filled his glass, and his wife sighs in an impatient manner as she places on one side some miserable failure of gastronomic art. But Algy and his wife are gourmands, and have been spoilt by Mr. Harding's cellars and admirable cuisine.

The principal subject discussed at dinner, besides the mean fare, is naturally the threatened war with Russia. Divers opinions are advanced. Zoé's attention is aroused, and her thoughts directed into a channel which they had much better never have diverged into again. Clara has kept her word, she has never alluded to the soldier since the day she had so passionately declared that she wished him at the bottom of the Red Sea. Horace is, as Madame would say,
“grippée de philosophie,” and is condemning himself to live “au pain sec.” He has not called again at Becklands, and the little heiress is very foolish to waste any regrets on the man whose heart she firmly believes to be given to her cousin.

When the ladies leave the dinner table, Algy becomes excessively loquacious, he applies to his host to furnish him with some information with regard to Belle Grange, a handsome residence very close to Becklands. Grandly of Grandly is fortunately in a position to answer Algy’s questions, for Belle Grange belongs to an old friend of his. “I am very glad to hear you propose remaining in our neighbourhood,” he says, with condescending courtesy. “Belle Grange is, I know, replete with every comfort, and I think you will be able to secure it on advantageous terms.”

“I only mean to take it from year to year. My movements are always uncertain. This place agrees with my wife,” says affectionate Mokanna, “and it is principally on that account I am thinking of remaining at Farnorth.”

Algy spoke with the air of a man whose easy income rendered it a matter of no moment where he pitched his tent, and Sir Mortimer, who had
heard all that gossip about the loss of her fortune which Mrs. Silvester communicated to Mrs. Bland, raises his eyebrows a little. The Baronet is, however, glad to hear that Zoë's beautiful cousin is likely to remain in the neighbourhood.

"It is principally on account of my wife's health that I am thinking of remaining here," Algy repeated, "but I have another motive as well. I want to be of some assistance to Harding there. He is working himself to death with that confounded mine of his. It is very pleasant you know to turn over your thousand or so every month, but it don't do to play the very dooce with your constitution. I don't pretend to be the clever man of business that Harding is, but I am not altogether a dormouse, and I think I may be of some use to him, and he thinks so to. Don't you, Harding?"

The master of Becklands bowed his head in a dreamy, listless sort of way. He had for some time subsided into silence, and was communing with his weary thoughts. The attention of every one present was directed to him by these remarks of his brother-in-law, they noticed how pale and haggard he was, and they agreed with Algy that the Midas of Farnorth was really working himself
to death with that California he had developed.

"You must take care of yourself, my dear sir," the stately host said. "You must really take care of yourself. The acquisition of wealth is no compensation for the deterioration of health."

The language of Grandly of Grandly was always in keeping with the flowing robes of state.

The rich man roused himself from the stupor which had fallen on him, and protested that there was really nothing in the world the matter with him.

"He always declares that he is quite well, but at any rate a little rest will do him no harm," said Algy, "and I shall insist upon his taking it, and that's all about it. Good people are scarce, and 'gad, if there is a good fellow breathing, that fellow is Harding," he added with a supplementary oath.

Mr. Harding could not repress a movement of impatience, but he compelled himself to speak calmly.

"I am much obliged to you for your good opinion, Silvester," he said, "but suppose we made the conversation a little less personal."

Algy gave a grunt of acquiescence, but there
was an ugly scowl on his face for the rest of the evening.

When the gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, you can easily guess in what manner Sir Mortimer improved the shining hours. I do not know whether he extracted any honey from the pretty flower to which he was devoted, but he buzzed about it until it was transplanted. The affianced Montague did not buzz about his poor faded flower, but devoted himself to that pride of beauty's garden, Algy's daughter.

Adeline reproached her lover when the guests had departed, and shed some tears which, alas! had not much effect on her fickle fiancé.

"Adeline is very exigeante," the shackled man muttered to himself peevishly, when he sought his pillow; "she looks quite plain when she is angry, as she was to-night." And then he composed himself to sleep, and dreamt that something had at last happened to his uncle, and in connexion with this event appeared a gorgeous vision, bearing no trace of resemblance to the patient girl who had waited for him for so many years.

Algy joked his daughter about her conquest when they were alone together that evening.

"By Jove! the aged had no chance against my
handsome three year old. You could win the race by just walking over the course, Clarry, but we shall enter for better stakes than that; n'est-ce pas, ma belle? 'Gad you were right too about the Baronet, he means business, and no mistake. Will he win, do you think?"

"His prospects are brightening if my uncle — "

"Confound your uncle," broke in Algy,"savagely. "I tell you what Clarry, I'm not going to stand any of his Chesterfield insolence; he snubbed me tonight, before all the other fellows, and its not the first time he has done it since we had that little conversation together. I believe he hates the very sight of me."

"He has no reason to be very fond of you, and — — "

"Well, I do like that," cried Algy, with pardonable irritation. "And who was it pray that — — "

"Earned you Belle Grange, and an income of fifteen hundred a year? I did, mon père, mea culpa," said Clara, with a smile.

Her father's ill-temper very quickly vanished, as he thought of the mansion, "replete with every comfort."

"Still I shan't allow Harding to think that
because he has come down handsome I am to knuckle under. No one could be sorrier for your uncle than I was Clarry, as you know, but I'm not exactly the ground under his feet, and that he will precious soon learn."

The cadet of a noble family was not wanting in that fine manly spirit which will accept any amount of monetary obligation, but rebels at once from exhibiting any gratitude for it.

"He don't want me to undertake the French business, ma fille, and I suspect he is meditating some counter-check, but ——"

"What a noise you two are making," bleated Mrs. Silvester, who entered at this moment; "I am as sleepy as I don't know what, but I'm sure I shall never close my eyes whilst you are talking so. And what is this I hear about your taking a house, Mr. Silvester. I do think you might have told me something of it before this, but its always the same, and I must say ——"

"Pretty dear! you are always a martyr, aren't you, Maria. The peas in your shoes cripple you, don't they, my dear. 'Gad, you don't boil them down to a paste before you put them in, do you?" said Algy, ironically. "But it is quite true, madam, that I am about to take a house in this neighbour-
hood, and you may distribute the information in whatever direction you please,” he added in a mock grandiose manner. Mrs. Silvester carried out her husband’s suggestions to the letter; our town very soon learnt that Mr. Harding’s relatives were to be permanent residents in Farnorth.
CHAPTER VIII.

Horace Snowe has left Farnorth; he has joined his regiment which is stationed somewhere in Ireland. A great number of England's brave defenders are parading before Her Majesty at Chobham, but the regiment to which our soldier belongs is not one of the number there.

The maiden ladies are very unhappy. That whisper from the east which has fluttered the folds of the British banner, is a deadly sirocco to their dearest hopes. How eagerly they pore over those newspapers whose leaders still talk of a peaceful adjustment of the great Eastern Question, and how they shrink from the columns that proudly prate of England's honour, and prophesy a war à l'outrance, embittered by that worst of all bitterness, religious animosity. Very savagely the gentle ladies denounce the ambition of the cruel Czar, which has occasioned all this misery and confusion. Unhappiness and danger environ
on every side the son of their dead Emmeline, and
the hearts of the Admiral's daughters are very
heavy.

There has been no leave-taking this time be-
tween the soldier and Zoé Harding. The little
maid has had no occasion to starch herself into
rigidity. Horace has left Farnorth, and only his
card, with the three conventional letters in the
corner, has announced his departure to the in-
mates of Becklands.

Clara rejoices that the soldier is at last gone—
she rejoices even whilst she suffers from that
gnawing pain which we know has held her in its
iron grasp for some time now. Zoé does not
possess her cousin's strength of mind; sustained
though the little heiress is by those doughty
knights, Pride and wounded Vanity, the foolish
child still bewails, and very sadly too, the de-
parture of the man who has so shadowed her
young life. She has, however, the grace to
be ashamed of her tears and weak regrets,
and nothing but her white face betrays to
Clara the hidden anguish of this daughter of
Luxury.

Algy's handsome girl is not the only person in
Farnorth who rejoices in the absence of the
soldier. Sir Mortimer Plantagenet is very glad indeed that his rival has literally and figuratively left the field to him.

"It is very unfortunate," the Baronet says to his mother, "that I should be obliged, just at this time, to go to London, and yet there is no help for it. We cannot allow Sir Thomas to foreclose, as he again in his letter this morning threatens to do. I must be off at once, and raise the money somehow. I shall accept the exorbitant demands of the chosen people with some philosophy now. I think even you must admit my victory is well nigh gained. Still, it is very provoking I am obliged to run away. I confess I am glad the red-whiskered hero is gone, and still more glad that he has——" and the Baronet hesitated.

"Still more glad that he has—what?" enquired her ladyship.

"Well, I suppose I may as well tell you, as you are likely enough to hear it, sooner or later. It is said that this blackguard rival of mine has carried away a companion with him to solace his leisure hours."

"What do you mean, Mortimer?" said his mother.

"Houndly tells me the Snowdrop of Farnorth
is missing, and he swears that Rufus has taken her with him as his *compagnon de voyage*.”

“And who is the Snowdrop of Farnorth?” my Lady asks.

“Oh, you must have noticed her, mother, I am sure. She is a pretty pale-faced little girl; a milliner or sempstress, or something or other. She is quite a rustic belle, and I must say the knight of the bar sinister has shown excellent taste. I have suspected the *preux chevalier* for some time, for I have seen him more than once with this country beauty; however I said nothing about it, I——”

“It is a most disgraceful affair,” her ladyship says, “but I am afraid there must be some truth in it. I remember there were some reports circulated at the time of the fire that did not speak well for Mr. Snowe.”

“There were some things said, and they reached the ears of Rufus, who was furiously savage, and threatened all manner of horrible things to the promulgators of the scandal; but he did not offer any explanation to account for his presence in the grounds at Becklands on that night, when he strove to extract heroism out of such a mighty deed as the extinguishing of a farthing rushlight; he did not account for his presence then, so people kept their
own opinions, and now they are quite confirmed in them. Rufus set up for a Bayard, *sans peur et sans reproche*, but you see he is not any better than his neighbours. He is a low-bred fellow. I think this will give him his *coup de grâce* in the eyes of the little heiress of the iron man."

"Did this girl, this daisy, or snowdrop, or whatever you call her, actually go away in company with the soldier?" Lady Mortimer enquires.

"I believe so," her son answers, "but I have not heard all the rights of the story. Houndly mentioned it to me at the Bench this morning, and he says Farnorth is very full of it."

It was quite true. Farnorth was full of this story. The Snowdrop was missing, and rumour had associated her disappearance with the departure of Horace Snowe. Giles Houndly is in very high feather; the story loses nothing by passing through his wicked old bill. It is indeed an ugly morsel the scandalmonger conveys to every house.

Such a cry of agony has arisen in John Dalton's cottage, as I hope may not often fall upon your ears. The miserable father and mother are well-nigh distraught. Ann Dalton is flying from cottage to cottage, searching for her lost child. No
one as yet has dared to breathe a word to the shrieking agonised woman of that suspicion which Giles is circulating. Indeed she will not listen to any one; she will neither eat nor drink; her misery is terrible to witness.

Mrs. Bland carries the intelligence of the Snowdrop’s disappearance to Becklands.

"I was the first to make the discovery," she tells Algy’s wife, "for I had engaged Mary Dalton to turn my last summer silk. Latterly she has always slept in the house whenever I have employed her; she can work so much longer, you know. Yesterday she was to have come in the morning, and she never came, and there was I waiting with the trimming all ready, (made out of an old velvet cloak, dyed, Mrs. Silvester, and looks every bit as good as new); but as I was saying, Mary Dalton never came, and I was so provoked, and I called this morning at Ann Dalton’s cottage. The poor woman stared with surprise when I asked her why her daughter had not been to my house. I was really frightened, and I did not know what to say when she told me Mary had left the cottage at half-past seven yesterday morning, saying she was going to my house. I was obliged to say I had never seen the Snowdrop, and Ann Dalton
became quite frantic. I was glad to get away as fast as I could."

"And what do you think has happened to the girl? Has she drowned herself, or anything of that kind?" enquires Mrs. Silvester, with some interest, for she has a morbid taste for the horrible.

"Her mother fancies she has. It seems that John Dalton had spoken very severely to his daughter the night before last, and his wife has got all kinds of ideas into her head but the right one. And the canal is being dragged at this moment, but the body of the Snowdrop will not be found," says the relict, mysteriously. "More shame to her," she continues, severely. "I am afraid it is something very bad, Mrs. Silvester. Farnorth is talking about nothing else. You see Mary Dalton was such a beauty, that everyone knew her, and her extraordinary disappearance is creating quite a sensation. And now that Mr. Giles Houndly says—but it really is a shame almost to repeat what he does say, for he has such a disagreeable tongue—however, I am afraid there is too much truth in the scandal this time, for so many people have seen them together."

"Seen who together?" enquires Algy's wife,
eagerly, and as defiant as ever of the rules of Lindley Murray.

"Why, I am sorry to say, Mr. Horace Snowe and the Snowdrop. Mr. Giles Houndly is ready to swear he has seen the soldier standing talking to Mary Dalton in the dusk of the evening, a dozen times at least, and many other people say the same. I am so sorry for the poor Miss Snowes, every one is so hard upon their nephew; but for my part I am the most indignant with this impudent girl, a bold-faced thing! I declare I have no patience with her."

"And I have no patience with this man," says Mrs. Silvester, who has never forgiven Horace the snubs she has received on his account from her brother; "but I am not in the least surprised. I hope Theodore will be satisfied now; it may perhaps teach him a lesson; but I really don't know, he has such low radical notions. It always makes me as indignant as I don't know what when I think how I have been obliged to tolerate the presence of this Mr. Horace Snowe."

[Taking into consideration that Algy's wife has not altogether mingled with la crème de la crème of society for the last twenty years, it seems to me her compelled intercourse with the soldier need
not have made her as "indignant as I don't know what."

"Well, I must say, Mr. Horace Snowe was always a great favourite of mine," says the widow, bravely raising the pennon of the absent man, "and I am only sorry he should have behaved so very foolishly. But as I have always said, young men will be young men, and I am certain that bold forward girl is the most to blame."

The relict, like the rest of her sex, was infinitely more merciful to the erring man than to the erring woman.

"You are always so tolerant, Mrs. Bland," replies her companion, crossly, "but I think it is altogether a most scandalous thing; it has quite excited me, and excitement is very bad for me, as you know," she adds, with a disconsolate shake of her head.

Ever since the Doctor has relieved the mind of Mrs. Silvester by assuring her that her heart is perfectly sound, she has taken great pleasure in assuming her health to be in a most critical state. She is no longer under any serious alarm about herself, and so it pleases her to play the moribund.

"Still you have been much better since you
came to Farnorth,” says her visitor, with a sympa-
thising air, “and now since you are going to
remain here permanently—I suppose it is quite
true that your husband has applied for Belle
Grange?”

“I suppose so,” says Algy’s wife, peevishly, “but
Mr. Silvester don’t choose to take me into his con-
fidence. I know no more than anything how much
his aunt has left him, but I’m quite certain of one
thing, it won’t be one-tenth part as much as I had
to my fortune when I married, Mrs. Bland. Oh! I
often think——” and the usual refrain followed,
and drove away even the patient and much en-
during relict of the late James Bland.

Mrs. Silvester did not lose much time in making
every inmate of Becklands acquainted with the
particulars of the scandal which the widow had
conveyed to her. She had the satisfaction of pro-
ducing a very considerable effect on her hearers.

Madame was greatly excited. She first relieved
her mind by pouring a torrent of Gallic abuse on
the devoted head of Giles Houndly, Esq., then she
dashed a shower of the same fluid into the face
of the missing Snowdrop, next she deplored the in-
fatuation of the soldier, for the Parisian did not
attempt to invalidate the truth of the report.
“I have seen them; I have seen them. Je voudrais que je pourrais démentir les yeux et les oreilles, but I have seen them, the one with the other,” she moaned in a dismal manner.

Clara dismissed the subject with a few haughty words, but it was clear the gossip was excessively displeasing to her.

She viewed the matter with the eyes of a woman of the world. Visions of a deserted home, of the wild agony of wretched parents, of a blighted young life, having but one miserable ending, did not rise to scare her, as they rose to scare and well-nigh paralyse her little cousin. Clara reasoned very much as Mrs. Bland reasoned. Still, as I have said, the gossip was exceedingly displeasing to her. There was no romance, no sentiment to gloze over the sin. It was a common low intrigue, totally unworthy of the man she had, although unwillingly, honoured with her regard; and Algy’s daughter was very much disgusted with Mr. Horace Snowe.

Zoé was quite prostrated by this last blow which had flung her idol into the slough. She could far better have endured Clara’s marriage with the soldier than this new misery.

* * * * *
The canal was dragged nearly the whole of the day, but the body of the Snowdrop was not found. More shame to her, as Mrs. Bland said. Giles Houndly, Esq. stopped everyone he met and discussed this unpleasant story with them.

"It only proves to me, sir," Giles said, "the mighty good effected by educating the lower orders. There is Harding, sir, cram full of all kinds of new-fangled theories about raising the tone of morals by educating the masses. He has spent no end of money over that school he has built for the miners' children. Education is to work miracles, sir. Now here is a case in point. This girl—this impudent young hussy—instead of being taught to darn stockings and say her catechism, was sent to a fine school by her silly parents, and got her head filled with a lot of rubbish, which made her quite discontented with her social status, sir. She would not look aside at any of the young fellows in her own class. They were not sufficiently refined for her dainty ladyship; and so she prefers disgracing herself in this shameful manner. Oh, education is a grand thing, sir, a very grand thing," Giles added ironically as he struck his stick on the ground. [The logic of the owner of Gothic Hall is never par-
ticularly good, but he has the happy knack of always being able to attack the weak side of every liberal enterprise.] “With regard to Mr. Horace Snowe,” he continued, “I can only say I am not in the least surprised. The morals of the army are at a very low ebb, sir, a very low ebb indeed.”

There were some ugly reports extant about Mr. Giles Houndly during his wife’s lifetime, which have never been exactly cleared away. I have not forgotten them; but people who themselves live in glass houses will nevertheless persist in smashing the windows of their neighbours’ crystal establishments, and the barber’s grandson was never very sparing of the stones he threw.

Mr. Harding was much grieved when he heard this sad scandal about Horace Snowe. Indeed, he was more than grieved; he was very angry with the soldier. Poor John Dalton had carried his misery to the master of the Weasle, and the tender heart of the rich man had been sadly wrung by the despair of the wretched father of the lost Snowdrop.

Sir Mortimer Plantagenet called at Becklands, and eloquently regretted the very imperative necessity which drew him away to London.
"I trust I shall not be compelled to remain there longer than a week," he said. "I have made my mother promise to write to me every day. I never thought I should become so much attached to Farnorth," he added, with a meaning smile at Zoé.

The Baronet did not allude to that circumstance which was convulsing the town and neighbourhood, and when Lady Plantagenet made some reference to the mysterious disappearance of Mary Dalton, her son stopped her with a severe look, and said it was not a subject to discuss in such a presence.

But if the Baronet observed a silence with the ladies of Becklands, he spoke freely enough about the matter with other people. He had seen the soldier with the Snowdrop several times, he was ready to make oath. Who indeed had not seen this couple together? I should be very glad to say I had not, but alas! I had, on more than one occasion. It is true, each time it was in the dusk, and at a distance; but in spite of the dusk and the distance, I could not be mistaken.

The tall, red-whiskered man I saw with the miner's daughter carried his left arm in a sling.
CHAPTER IX.

The day has been very sultry. The maiden ladies of Rose Cottage have been unable to leave the shade of their pleasant sitting-room. They are now inhaling a little fresh air in the cool of the evening, and are walking backwards and forwards among the roses and evergreens of their pretty garden. None of those reports, which are causing so much excitement in Farnorth, have reached their ears. If any one member of their household has heard of the mysterious disappearance of the Snowdrop, and the connection of her name with that of Horace Snowe, nothing of the subject has been breathed to either of the sisters. The poor ladies were quite prostrated with grief when their nephew bade them farewell. You may trace some lines of care and anxiety now in Mary Snowe's lovely face, and some silver threads are visible among the golden sheen of her abundant hair. Miss Alathea is beginning to rally from the
shock of that sirocco from the East which at one time affected her quite as much as her sister. She is something of a philosopher you know, and has, as she says, grappled with the difficulties of the Oriental Question. She has crammed herself from the columns of her favourite newspaper, and is at this moment giving poor Mary the benefit of some of the mutilated leaders.

"There is no hope now, my dear Mary, that a war can be averted," Miss Alathea says, with all the dignity of the tripod and toga about her. "Indeed hostilities may be said to have commenced, since the Russian army occupied the Danubian Provinces of the Turkish empire. The Emperor Nicholas——"

"Oh, don't speak of him, dear Alathea," Mary says entreatingly. "When I think of the misery this man's wicked ambition threatens to bring upon the whole of Europe; when I think of dear Horace——"

"England must not run the risk of becoming a second-rate power," continues Miss Alathea, totally oblivious of Mary's interruption. "You may depend upon it that now is the time for resistance; now is the time for the powers of Western and Central Europe to form an alliance with Turkey,
and so combine to punish the daring bigot who imperils the best interests of civilization to feed his miserable vanity and insatiable ambition.” Miss Alathea stopped a few moments for breath, and then went on with renewed vigour. “The tyrant pretends that a zeal for the religion, of which he is the temporal head, alone impels him in his dangerous career. He pretends that it is not the lust of conquest which urges him to attempt the supremacy of his church and the expulsion of the Mussulmans from Europe. He seeks to hide the bloody sword of ambition beneath the robe of the fanatic. It is false,” Miss Alathea cries, her cheeks flushed with excitement. “The alleged cause of dispute is nothing but a mere pretence. The Emperor Nicholas is determined on the dismemberment of the Turkish empire; nothing less will satisfy him. England must assume an attitude that will strike terror into the heart of the insatiable tyrant. France must unfurl her banner and sound the war-note of defiance. We have enjoyed peace for eight-and-thirty years, but we are not enervated. The provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia—good gracious! My dear Mary, who is that?”

The exclamation was wrung from Miss Alathea
by the sudden appearance of a figure in the path—a figure with hair unkempt and dress all torn and in disorder; a figure with haggard cheeks and blood-shot, staring eyes; a figure with misery inprinted on every feature. "Anne Dalton!" Mary cried, at sight of the apparition.

It was indeed the wretched, bereaved mother of the lost Snowdrop.

"War has yer nevvy takken my barn till?" she said, without any other preface, and speaking with a forced composure, which was so awfully out of keeping with her wild, excited aspect, that it was terrible to hear. "War has yer nevvy takken my barn till, Miss Mary?"

The sisters stood as though perfectly petrified for some moments. At length Miss Alathea spoke.

"My good woman," she commenced.

"Good woman, good woman," Ann Dalton repeated, mimicking the tones of the bas bleu, but still forcing herself to speak calmly, "I want nin o' yer good womans. Ho'd yer noise ye poor äde flighty body, I spak till Miss Mary. War has yer nevvy takken my barn till?" she asked again. "Does he mean ut wed her? and why sudn't he? why sudn't he, I say?" she cried, her
excitement gradually overcoming her forced control. "What's he as he sud ho'd his head aboon my barn? What's he?" she shrieked, "what's he as he sud think hissel' better nor our Polly? What's he? he's nowt but a—-" some feeling for which she would have found it difficult to account stayed the coarse words on the excited woman's lips. "Why sudn't he wed her?" she repeated. "An' he mun mak' an honest woman on her, or may the Lord—-

"Oh hush, Ann, pray be calm," cried poor Mary. "What is it? There is some dreadful mistake."

"I wish I was mistakken; but its ower true. Oh, Miss Mary, Miss Mary," wailed the miserable creature, "it was nobbut last Sunday afterneean as I went to t' church, an' said me prayers, an' tried at du what was reet, and now my barn has rin away. My barn, my barn—my bonny barn!" she cried in tones of agony that thrilled the hearts of both the sisters.

Mary took the toil-worn hands of the miserable woman in her soft palms, and tried to compose her.

"What is it that has happened to you, my poor Ann?" she said. "We have heard nothing. Where is Mary?"
"That's what I've coom to ye at larn," she said savagely, drawing away her hands. "Aw t' nebburs can tell me now what they've seen, an' what they've seen. They say as yer nevvy has rin away wi' my barn; and do ye mean at tell me as ye've hard nowt. Don't ye knä that aw this morning they were dragging t' kanel for my Polly. I've nivver takken bite or sup into my mouth sin Mrs. Bland cawed at tell me naibody had seen t' barn sin yesterday morning. I thowt at first my barn had drowned hersel'—for her fath-er had flyted her the neet afore, an' Polly had a high sperrit for aw she was so fair an' bonny looking—an sä they dragged t' kanel, an' I waited, an' waited, God help me! an' thowt at see them drag—" and a passion of tears choked her utterance as the whole dreadful scene recurred to her.

"You said something about Horace," said Mary, speaking with some hesitation.

"Ay, an' I've mair to say about him yet afore I've done," she cried fiercely. "I'll have his heart's blood if he—oh, Miss Mary," she continued, changing her savage tone to one of entreaty, "mak' him wed my barn, mak' him wed her, she's bonnier nor any leddy in t' country-side,
an' she's fit to gang amang t' quality. John an' me wad nivver sham them, we'd keep wersels to werséis, we'd nivver push wersels forrad; If I could nobbut see her bonny face now and then I'd be content. Mak' him wed her, Miss Mary; why sudn't he, indeed? He's nin sā mich as he sud ho'd his head aboon my barn, whä was born i' loful wedlock. I can shā ye my marriage lines."

What could poor Mary say? She was dreadfully shocked as she heard Horace's name connected with the disappearance of Mary Dalton. She was disposed to be angry with Ann for the persistent manner in which she associated the two names. She was disposed to be very angry, and yet her heart bled for the miserable woman who stood half-crazed before her. Miss Alathea was fuming with indignation, she would have spoken, but was dumb from contending emotions, of which fear was predominant. Mary again took the toil-worn hands of the Snowdrop's mother into hers; she felt very differently towards her now, to what she had done when we first introduced her to the reader. She had seen how that strong affection for her only child had gradually softened, and changed this woman's tigerish nature. She knew that Ann Dalton only spoke the truth when she
Miss Alathea's Indignation.

said she had tried to "du what was reet." Ann had been a regular church-goer for years now; Mary had frequently seen her bowing her head in prayer, and if the poor woman's attention to the words from the pulpit had been sometimes too much divided by her interest in "our Polly" in the choir, La Bonté could very well excuse her, knowing as she did, the mother's passionate affection for her "bonny barn." Yes, poor Ann had striven to do well, and Mary could have wept at the pathos of those words, "After aw, my barn has rin away."

Ann gradually became more composed, and Mary ventured again to say something about Horace.

"I am sure there is some dreadful mistake, Ann."

"Of course, it is altogether a mistake," broke in indignant Miss Alathea. "Horace is utterly incapable of anything of the kind, utterly incapable, and even if it were so—and believe me, my good woman, I do not entertain this idea myself for one moment, but granting for the sake of argument that it were so—any question of a marriage between your daughter and my nephew is simply preposterous, simply preposterous, my good woman; the difference in social position, the difference——"
Miss Alathea had very much better have kept silence. The woman turned towards her like a fury, and flung her such bouquets as only a Blankshire woman can fling. The bas bleu was quite stunned with the shower, and would have fled in dismay, but just at this moment Edward Sparkles appeared en scène. The lawyer very quickly made himself master of the situation. He advanced towards the shrieking woman and laid his hand on her arm: “I have just met your husband, Ann,” he said quietly; “he is seeking you everywhere.”

“Has he hard tell owt o’ my barn?” she cried, fixing her fierce black eyes eagerly on the lawyer’s face.

“I believe so,” he answered; and the words had scarcely left his lips when the woman had sped away like the wind.

“God forgive me if I have told the poor creature an untruth,” said the lawyer sadly; “but I did hear that something had been found out which may lead to the discovery of this missing girl.”

“Oh, Mr. Sparkles,” cried Mary, “you do not believe this report about Horace?”

“Of course he does not,” interrupted Miss Alathea; “no one in their senses would, Mary,
Resumption of the Oriental Question. 135

I am really surprised at you. If we are to discuss this matter, we will go into the house, if you please," the bas bleu continued, in her very grandest manner. "I must request you will entirely eliminate my nephew's name from the subject."

But as it was as impossible to discuss the subject with the soldier's name "eliminated" as it would be to act the play of Hamlet with the part of the Prince of Denmark omitted, the matter very soon dropped, and the conversation flagged, and would have quite died out if Miss Alathea had not thrown the Oriental Question on to the dying embers.

"I was just giving my views on this great question to Mary when this wretched woman appeared," Miss Alathea said. The bas bleu was in the habit of appropriating as her own that honey which, busy bee that she was, she gathered from the flowers of rhetoric blooming in the columns of the journals she affected. You know that Mr. Pecksniff claimed all the credit of those designs of his pupils, to which he had added a supplementary back window, or other last touch of artistic finish. The bas bleu's system of appropriation was conducted after the same fashion, and
she is not the only person I know, who, in this respect at least, resembles the worthy architect.

Miss Alathea favoured the lawyer with a resumé of all she had already discussed with her sister, and then she knotted her eloquence together at that part of the thread which had been abruptly broken by the apparition of Ann Dalton.

"Yes, Mr. Sparkles, England must assume an attitude that will strike terror into the heart of this insatiable tyrant. Supposing that Moldavia and Wallachia be ceded to him; do you for one moment imagine that peace would be secured by such a pusillanimous sacrifice? A thousand times no, my dear sir, a thousand times no," cried Miss Alathea. "The autocrat, encouraged by impunity and the weakness of the great Powers of Europe, would employ himself in making preparations for another and still more formidable aggression upon his neighbours. I repeat that it is impossible now that the war can be averted consistently with England's honour."

Mary would very gladly have put an end to this discussion. She wondered how her sister could so speak on a subject which involved so much personal interest. What was England's honour in the eyes of Mary compared to the
Horace asserts his Innocence.

safety of her nephew? *L'amour de la patrie* in her breast was such a feeble flame that it was quite extinguished by the love she bore the son of her dead sister. I doubt very much whether the *bas bleu* will view the matter so philosophically when war is absolutely declared; but at present it is a new hobby for her, and she is delighted to trot out her steed.

Mary could not "eliminate" Horace's name from her thoughts in connection with the report about the Snowdrop, and so she determined to write to her nephew, and mention the whole of the circumstances. She received an answer from the soldier by return of post. He most indignantly protested that he knew nothing whatever of the mysterious disappearance of Mary Dalton; he declared most emphatically that he had only spoken to her twice during the whole time he had been at Farnorth, and that even on those two occasions the conversation had been on the most trivial subjects, and had only lasted for a few minutes; he said he would have come at once and personally refuted the scandal, but he could not possibly obtain leave of absence.

The maiden ladies implicitly believed in his innocence, but they were the only people in
Farnorth who did. Farnorth could not disbelieve its own eyes and its own ears as Madame said, and though the soldier had vehemently pleaded not guilty, not one who had already pronounced sentence upon him revoked his verdict. "I will take this letter with me to Ann Dalton's cottage," said Mary to her sister. "I did not venture to call and see the poor woman yesterday, but I am not afraid to go to-day." And in spite of the many objections raised by Miss Alathea, Mary persisted in her determination to go to that abode of misery. John Dalton was leaning against the door of his cottage. The miner wore his working clothes, but he had not been to the Weasle Mine since he heard of his daughter's disappearance. There were no red-ochre stains on his face to hide its ghastly pallor. A beard of three days' growth was on his lips and chin, his eyes had a heavy sodden look, it was evident the wretched man had striven to drown his misery in drink.

"It's a bonny spot for sic as ye to coom till," he said, in thick husky tones. "Happen ye'll step in, and see how gradely we're ganging on. Harken till her?" he added with horrible irony; "there's music for ye, that's our Ann. She's clean off it."

The cottage indeed resounded with the frantic
shrieks of the bereaved mother, who was in an inner room, strapped down on her bed, raging with the fever of delirium.

"Oh, John, John," Mary cried, as her sobs almost choked her utterance, "what can I say to you, my poor man?"

"Are ye coom to tell me war she is," said the man, making a powerful effort to sober himself. "Are ye coom to tell me war he's takken her till? I'll finnd them, Miss Mary, I'll finnd them baith, if I have to late owr aw t' warld. I'll late them, an' when I've fund him, I'll ——"

But the sight of the pale scared face before him stopped the utterance of the threat. Mary was dreadfully alarmed; John had hitherto been so quiet and well behaved, that she was quite unprepared to treat with him, excited and half intoxicated as he was now.

"Will ye tell me war he's takken her till?" John repeated, speaking more calmly.

"Oh, John, it is altogether a mistake," said Mary; "Horace knows nothing at all about your daughter's flight. I have brought this letter with me which I have just received; will you listen to what he says?"

"War is he?" said the miner, eagerly.
Mary told him.

"Write it down, I'se not mich on a scholar, but I can read as mich as that, and I'll gang whar he is, when Ann comes round."

And in spite of all that Mary urged to exculpate her nephew, the miner only repeated the same words, "I'll gang an' see for mysel' when our Ann comes round."

But Ann never did come round, in the sense that her husband meant. One week after the mysterious disappearance of the Snowdrop, grim revels were held in the miner's cottage. The hot spiced ale, and the wheaten bread, and cheese were liberally handed about amongst the neighbours, but the mistress of that desecrated hearth was lying stone dead in the narrow limits of her painted coffin.
Sir Mortimer Plantagenet did not rush back again to the home he so much loved at the end of a week. The children of the Caucasus must have been difficult to deal with, for more than a fortnight elapsed before the Baronet returned to Foxcroft. Monseigneur was in very excellent spirits. He had enjoyed himself very much, he informed his mother. He had concluded all that unpleasant business about the mortgage in a most satisfactory manner. He need no longer stand in any dread of Sir Thomas Marsden's letters. That gentleman had no further lien on Plantagenet Park.

"And I expect to be able to dispense with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, very shortly," he said. "I intend to be a Benedict before the winter is over, mother mine. Your ladyship was right when you told me I should become reconciled to the dose, it is wonderful how the gilding enables
one to swallow the pill. You will see no more wry faces, madre. I intend to take a house in town next season. I found the metropolis exceedingly pleasant. I hope you have been properly attending to my interests, madam. No chance of a rival I suppose, since the total overthrow of Rufus?"

"I told you that the mother of the girl he carried away with him died raving mad, did I not?" said her ladyship.

"Yes, you said something about it," replied the Baronet, yawning lazily. "I was not particularly interested, as I had not the pleasure of knowing the estimable party. It is nearly a week, is it not, since the Snowdrop's mother has been gone dead. Peace be to her memorandums," he added as he turned his attention to a number of letters that were awaiting his perusal.

It certainly was not at all likely his majesty of Farnorth would be interested in the shattering of such a common piece of clay as Ann Dalton.

A silence of some minutes was at length energetically broken by the Baronet.

"By Jove!" he cried, and he laughed quite merrily. "What do you think, madam? I have received a letter containing a proposal for the hand of the ancient Winifred."
"You don't say so, Mortimer?" said her ladyship, slightly smiling. "Who is the enterprising gentleman?"

"Giles Houndly, Esq., J.P. How will you like your step-son-in-law, my lady?" said the Baronet, still laughing immoderately.

"What insolent presumption!" cried her ladyship, indignantly. "Of course he will receive but one answer."

"But one answer!" repeated Monseigneur. "I should think not. Corpo di Bacco, he will have my best wishes to speed him on his wooing. He says he will settle ten thousand pounds on the lovely Saxon. I never hoped for such good luck as this. I never hoped that any one would have desired the paw of the lovely Tabitha."

"Winifred will never listen to this proposal for one moment," said Lady Mortimer, "and really ——"

"Nonsense, my dear mother. Winsome Winny has reached that age when, as some one says, maidens mingle the cry of 'Any, any,' in their prayers to heaven for a husband. Your step-daughter, my lady, has not only passed through the wood, but has advanced several steps on the other side. This crooked stick must be more than
she could possibly have hoped for. You will see, she will accept it at once.”

“I do not think so,” replied his mother, “and I cannot imagine how you can ever reconcile yourself to such a connection.”

“Confound it, madam!” cried the Baronet, losing his temper and his good manners together. “What absurd humbug you do talk. I am not the first Plantagenet who ——”

He had the grace to stop here. Sir Mortimer is really fond of his mother, I have not attempted to deny that, and he looked and felt ashamed of his petulance.

“You really provoked me just now, madre mia,” he said, in tones of half apology, “by the objections you raise to what I consider a most unlooked-for piece of good fortune. I can assure you, that in my plans for my future ménage, the vision of the lovely Winifred, a chronic guest at my table, has been a very Banquo to me; she must, and shall become the mistress of Gothic Hall.”

But his majesty of Foxcroft very soon found that his monarchy was, after all, only a limited one. My Lady Plantagenet was quite right, her step-daughter would not for one moment listen to the proposals of Giles Houndly, Esq. The Baronet
was furious at this opposition; he plied his bitterest satire. It was of no avail; he succeeded in very much exciting his step-sister, and that was all.

"I cannot give a greater proof of the utter detestation in which I hold this man," cried Miss Winifred, stung almost to madness by her young brother's cruel taunts, "than when I say I would rather remain here—here, where my life is one slowly trailing misery—here, where I am daily exposed to insult and coarse contempt! I would yet rather remain here than——"

"Brava! Brava!" cried the Baronet, with affected rapture; "a Rachel, a Ristori, hides her light down in the provinces; you are grand, positively sublime, my handsome Winny. The flush of excitement lends a new beauty to your magnificent Overall nose. And so you would rather remain under my poor roof? You do me too much honour, fair sister—an honour that, pardon me, I would willingly dispense with—an honour that——"

"My dear Mortimer, let us drop this subject," interposed Lady Plantagenet, "you would not surely wish to coerce your sister."

"I wish her to understand that her room would be infinitely more agreeable than her company,"
said the Baronet, speaking much more like the tailor’s grandson than the descendant of the noble house of Plantagenet. “I only recommend a dish to you, most lovely Saxon,” he continued, once more adopting the old mocking tone. “I only recommend a dish for those most rosy lips, similar to one I am myself about to taste. I have some intention of changing my own state, fair sister, and——”

“I know it,” interrupted Miss Winifred, speaking in the same passionate manner. “I know you have been employing all your arts lately to compass the misery of an innocent child; I know that——”

“Hear her! hear her!” said the Baronet, calmly, though his lips shook with suppressed rage; “you are too flattering, my elderly beauty, much too flattering.”

“I have thought more than once,” continued Miss Winifred, her voice still tremulous with excitement, “that it would only be an act of common charity to warn your victim of the wretched fate in store for her—only an act of duty to tell the simple girl of the mean spirit, the cold and cruel heart, that lies hidden beneath that handsome mask.”
"Winifred! Winifred!" cried Lady Plantagenet, entreatingly, "you surely forget you are speaking to your brother."

"I do not forget that I am speaking to my father's son," replied the excited woman; "I lost my only brother many years ago. What has my life been since then? Oh! if Frederick were alive, as sometimes I dream he may yet be—yes, as sometimes I dream——"

"My dear Winifred, how wildly you do talk!" said her ladyship, in quite a broken voice. It was wonderful how the passion of this woman, generally so calm and stony, began to affect the mother and her son. The Baronet was pale as death. I believe he was half-frightened at his step-sister's vehemence. Monseigneur is not remarkable for courage, as I have said, and I think if Miss Winifred had only turned at bay before this, she would have secured to herself a much more peaceful life. I am sure his majesty was quite rejoiced when the appearance of morning visitors put an end to this stormy discussion; and it is very certain that the great-granddaughter of the Duke of Overall was not again annoyed by any recurrence to the ambitious proposal of Mr. Giles Houndly. The Baronet wrote a very civil
refusal to the master of Gothic Hall, but that gentleman was not the less indignant at "the pride and presumption of these beggarly Plantagenets, sir, up to their ears in debt." And it was not only the pride and presumption, the debts and the beggary, of the royal family of Farnorth, that this disappointed rebellious subject attacked. Giles has on one occasion remotely alluded to some scandalous reports that were years ago current about the queen regnant, and now he more than remotely alludes to them. "This tailor's daughter had better be careful," he repeats. "We Farnorthites have very tenacious memories. I have not forgotten the ugly things that were said at the time of her step-son's death, sir. Persons have been arrested on less grounds than the suspicions which attached to my lady at that time, arrested, sir, for murder, aye, and hanged, too, before this. It was a very mysterious business, sir, and that Boyne, the valet, half-Italian blackguard that he was, the principal witness to swear to the manner of the young man's death. Why, sir, Boyne was the husband of Rose Dacre, the favourite maid and putative foster sister of my Lady Mortimer Plantagenet—putative foster sister, I say, for I had always my doubts on the subject.
Where is Boyne? and where is his wife? Now, sir, we know that Boyne was obliged to fly the country, a year after the old baronet's eldest son disappeared, sir, and we know that his wife came down at the dead of night, and brought an infant with her, and we know she had a long and stormy interview with her noble foster sister, but we do not know why my Lady Mortimer pawned all her diamonds, though we know very well that she did so do. Where are Boyne and his wife now, sir? that is what I want to know."

But the persons he addressed could not relieve his mind on this subject; they did not know what had become of the half-Italian, Boyne, and his very handsome wife, neither do I.

In those early days of her married splendour, when Edward Sparkles' beautiful false love reigned a haughty young sovereign at Foxcroft, she had a royal favourite, by name Rose Dacre. Rose Dacre was a very Eleanora Dori to the lovely Marie of Plantagenet Park; she was her foster sister, she held no nearer relation to her, I know, in spite of Giles's hints, and had almost unbounded influence over her. Her position at the palace was no higher than that of her counterpart, the ill-fated Florentine. She was simply at first the tire-
woman to her lady, and subsequently the nurse to her infant son, but she was not the less the bosom friend and *confidante* of her young mistress. This friendly intercourse between the pair lasted for some years, and then there was a sudden rupture. On one of those rare visits which the eldest son of the house paid to his paternal roof, he brought with him a valet. This man was fated to play the part of a Concini Concini to the young queen's favourite; he won the heart of Eleanora. So far our Signora Dori exactly resembles her Italian prototype, but the similarity in their fate ends here. All the blandishments of the favourite were powerless to wrest from her mistress a sanction to a union between her confidential maid and the half-Italian valet of her hated step-son. A rupture, as I have said, ensued, and Eleanora left the palace with her Concini. Nothing more of their career was heard of in Farnorth, until the death of Frederick Plantagenet once more brought his valet into public notice. It was quite true that the confused statement this man gave at the inquest led to many scandalous rumours at the time, but none of these rumours were so bad as Giles would wish you to believe; it was quite true, also, that a year after this accident to the young Prince Royal, Boyne,
his valet, was obliged to run the country to escape punishment for a disgraceful felony, in which he was gravely implicated. True, as well, that his wife had suddenly appeared with an infant, at Plantagenet Park, and held that stormy interview with the Lady Mortimer, but with regard to that story about the pawned diamonds, I really will not undertake to advance any testimony whatever. It may, for aught I know, be purely an invention of the master of Gothic Hall.

The fact that the ex-lawyer had proposed for, and been rejected by, Miss Winifred, was very soon whispered about Farnorth. It is difficult to say how such things do creep out, but they do somehow. Perhaps Giles, who after all only possesses that ostrich wisdom which hides the head and leaves the body all exposed, may himself, by his extra spitefulness, have given rise to the rumours.

"I never heard of such audacity," Mrs. Bland says; "we thought it a dreadful thing when the late Baronet married his governess; but you know, Mrs. Silvester, the man always raises the woman, and so although it was bad enough when we were obliged to call Nelly Brown, my Lady, still it was nothing to this. Giles Houndly indeed! aspire to Miss Winifred, great-granddaughter to the Duke
of Overall, and his grandfather, between you and me, a barber! Why, he would have been nothing at all in the county if poor Jane Hopkins had not married him, and she had money, you know."

"Mr. Silvester had scarcely anything of his own," broke in Algy's helpmate. "It was all my poor money that went in the way it did."

The relict made some sympathising movement with her lips, and then went on—

"I always feel so very sorry for poor Miss Winifred. Ah! if her father had not interfered—the late Baronet was no favourite of mine, Mrs. Silvester—if he had not interfered, she would have been mistress at the Deanery of Northminster by this time. And it was such a very sad thing for the poor young lady, too, her brother dying as he did, and she not friendly with him; they had not spoken for months before the accident."

"She don't look like a quarrelsome person," remarked Mrs. Silvester; "I'm sure she looks as quiet, as quiet."

"Miss Winifred never was a quarrelsome person, and she was very fond of her brother, but you know she was a great friend, and first cousin once removed, to Miss Marsden, the young lady poor Mr. Frederick was engaged to for nearly two
years before he was drowned. Miss Marsden was very distangway and beetle-browed, but I don’t think Mr. Frederick ever much fancied her, and Miss Winifred came to words with her brother because he was always finding some excuse or other to delay the marriage. The engagement was quite a family arrangement, and those things never turn out well, as you know, Mrs. Silvester.”

“Indeed I know nothing of the kind,” said the lady addressed, with a very doleful shake of the head. “Poor grandpapa wished me to marry Cowley of the Artillery. I’m sure I wish now I had attended to him, and Cowley was so fond of me. I shall never forget his face when I danced with Major Bold after supper at that fancy ball; and if I had married Cowley, there would have been settlements, and my poor——”

The widow rapidly interposed.

“It may answer in some cases, but it certainly did not with Mr. Frederick; and so, as I was saying, Miss Winifred quarrelled with her brother, and she never saw him again, never again, Mrs. Silvester, either alive or dead, for his body was never recovered. We were all dreadfully shocked, and poor old Lady Overall—she was great-aunt to both Mr. Frederick and Miss Marsden, and she
was so very liberal to her great-nephew—indeed, if it had not been for her——"

But here I must take the narrative out of the hands of the prolix relict.

In the earlier pages of this history I have alluded in somewhat strong language to the deceased Sir Mortimer Plantagenet Plantagenet. I do not intend to elaborate very much on that rough sketch; I do not intend to blacken the old man's memory any further than it is absolutely necessary to do, in order to remove the stain of filial impiety from the hatchment of his dead son. All Farnorth can certify to the quarrels between his majesty of Foxcroft and the heir to his name. All Farnorth knows that the root of all evil grew to be an upas tree within the royal mansion, and fatherly love and filial faith perished beneath its shade. All Farnorth knows this, but Farnorth does not know how severely the son was tried before he rose in rebellion against his father. It was not only his daughters' fortunes that the unprincipled paternal trustee had dissipated, very nearly the whole of that handsome sum bequeathed to the younger Plantagenet by his mother's sister was dispersed as well. Complaints issued from the lips of the
disappointed legatee when he made this discovery, complaints which were met by raillery and coarse insult. High words followed, and the war commenced from that moment. The old Baronet's infatuation for his beautiful young wife was just then at its height, he was lavishing hundreds upon her, he was mortgaging his property to surround her with luxury. Was it strange if the defrauded son rebelled? His father's purse strings were tightly drawn against him. He would have had barely the means of subsistence had it not been for his great-aunt, the Lady Overall. She was liberal in her supplies to him, as Mrs. Bland said, but, alas! even in her gold there was much alloy for the ill-fated prince of the blood royal. She was an anxious promoter of that engagement which existed between him and his cousin Alice Marsden. She combined with his father and sister in urging its speedy fulfilment, and the young man had no fancy to part with his liberty so early, and no great fancy, if truth must be told, for his beetle-browed fiancée either. He was fond of leading a roving life, and absented himself from Foxcroft for months together. There was a war à l'outrance between him and his beautiful stepmother, a war unnatural between him and his
ruffian father. No wonder he found the air of Plantagenet Park murky and unwholesome, no wonder he wandered away in search of a purer atmosphere. The last visit he had paid to his home before his miserable death was terminated by a fiercer storm than any that had preceded it. His father had cursed him, his step-mother bitterly taunted him, even his sister and his aunt had risen against him, and all on account of the daughter of Sir Thomas Marsden. Terribly did the aunt and sister expiate those angry words. The Lady Overall never recovered from the shock produced by her unhappy nephew's fate. She died; her will was unsigned, and her property reverted to her own noble house. Miss Winifred—but Mrs. Bland is at this moment recounting her sufferings.

"Miss Winifred was ill for months after her brother's death. She had brain fever, and I don't know what; and talking of fever," the relict continued, shunting on to an entirely new line, "the old Rector of Slippersly is very ill indeed."

"That must be very good news for you," said Algy's wife, who imagined every one was as selfish as she herself was.

"Oh, I don't say that," said Mrs. Bland, a little shocked at the heartlessness of her gossip. "The
poor old man is welcome to live as long as he can, as far as I am concerned; but if anything does happen,” the widow added, employing her favourite paraphrase, “I do hope that Archibald will not begin with any of his high-church notions—his matins and his vespers, and his fastings, for Sophy instead of being made to fast and all that, requires every kind of indulgence now,” she said, with an emphasis on the adverb, no doubt intelligible to her hearer.

“No one should ever make me fast through Lent or on Saints’ days either,” said Mrs. Silvester. “Papa always disliked such papisitical notions, and——”

“There is the Plantagenet carriage dashing up the Avenue,” cried Mrs. Bland, rising suddenly. “And although your niece has just come in I must go, for I really cannot put up with Lady Mortimer’s grand ways—a poor governess as she was, and intimate enough with me at one time. She has often met Edward Sparkles at my house. Ah! I can never forgive her for treating the lawyer so shamefully, and you see what has come of it. She is quite a cripple,—I declare they are lifting her out of the carriage. I will say good bye before she comes.” And the widow bustled away.
The baronet's mother was borne into the room by obsequious attendants. It was indeed rarely that the poor lady was able to walk at all, and she had suffered very much during the last few days.

[Nelly Brown had treated her lover shamefully as Mrs. Bland justly said. She had blighted his youth, and embittered the whole of his days; but I do not coincide with the relict in that illogical remark she made just before she took her departure. The fact of her ladyship's being a cripple has nothing whatever to do with her dishonourable conduct to her lover. That sad accident, which had left the pretty governess a helpless invalid for the rest of her life, was not the natural sequence of her heartless and cruel treatment of Edward Sparkles; but it has given her time and opportunity to reflect on that heartless, cruel treatment. Her butterfly day was over from the moment she was dragged, a poor crushed worm, from beneath the wheels of the grand triumphal car for which she had sacrificed all honest and womanly feeling. The lawyer was avenged. The woman who had jilted him suffered quite as bitterly as she had made him suffer. How willingly she would have surrendered all that shimmering splendour which surrounded her,
no one but herself could tell. How regretfully she thought of that true love she had bartered away for all this meretricious show, no one but herself knew. Ah me! it is not the Princess Badroulboudour alone who has lived to deplore the folly which changed away the old lamp for the new."

Obsequious attendants have placed her ladyship upon the sofa in the Becklands drawing-room, and have taken their leave. The baronet's mother lies there very quietly, she does not exert herself to talk as she has hitherto exerted herself during the many visits she has made to the little heiress; her thoughts seem quite abstracted. She is indeed so very distraught that her son rallies her, and so she compels herself to shake off the gloom which has laid its dark hand upon her.

Sir Mortimer is not at all quiet; I don't think he was ever more talkative, and the moral sentiments he perpetually utters are beautiful to hear. His manner to Zoé is so prononcé that the little girl is made quite uncomfortable by his excessive devotion.

"I wish I had some one to make love to me," Clara said to her cousin, when they were once more alone; "some one, I mean, with a fine estate and a grand old name; any other kind of love-
making is worth nothing, as I have reason to know,” she added with a half sigh, which was not lost upon her poor little listener.

“I must praise you for your wisdom and discretion, *carissima,*” she continued, “and I do not now repent that blunder of mine which made you acquainted with a secret I meant to hide from you for ever. Do you know, little one, I really did behave on that occasion in a very creditable manner for me; I say *for me,* because I never pretend to that magnificent abnegation of self which the saints of this world love to practise; but I did sacrifice something when I strove to bring about a marriage between you and Horace Snowe. I have scarcely patience to mention his name, Zoé; you were wiser than I, my pretty shepherdess. No happiness can result from a marriage where interested motives are the mainspring. That speech is worthy of Mrs. Chapone. I am really growing fresh and verdant. My notions will soon be as Utopian as yours, *belle provençale.*"

Not one word did Zoé say in answer to this long tirade.

“That terrible old person, Miss Alathea Snowe, declares you have the bump of adhesiveness very
large, and she is right, Zoé," Clara went on. "It is very difficult for you, I see, to part with old thoughts and antiquated feelings. I do not believe in that careful storing away of worn-out raiment, more especially when Fate stands ready like an honest old-clothes man to trade with you, and give you fresh flowers in exchange for your shabby habits. Negotiate with the worthy Jew, my pretty Phyllis. See what a handsome flower the trader offers in exchange for musty garments. I only wish that I had such a chance, I would not leave a single article in my wardrobe, if I could secure this choice exotic. Seriously, petite, how long do you intend this poor Baronet to sigh at your feet? He is very fond of you, señorita, you must not be cruel. Alas! my pretty cousin, you are like the rest of your sex, you do not care for the sweet fruit within your reach, but strive and struggle for that you never can obtain."

The Baronet has indeed an admirable ally in Algy's daughter.
CHAPTER XI.

John Dalton has returned once more to his miserable home. He has made that journey he said he would make. The miner crossed the Irish Sea, two days after the body of his broken-hearted wife was laid in our peaceful churchyard. Mary, fully persuaded of her nephew's innocence, offered the miner money to meet the expenses of his journey, but John would not accept one farthing from her. "I'se nit gä'en ut tak your brass, Miss Mary," he said, "at hunt down t' sodger wi'; happen what ye say may be reet, happen I'se wrang, an' he knä's nowt about my barn, but I mun see for mysel', I mun gang an' see for mysel'. I swar till her, as is dead an' gone, as I wa'd du sä, an' I mun. Oh! Miss Mary, if t' barn wa'd nobbut coom yam again, if she wa'd nobbut coom yam! I wa'dn't kar how t' nebburs skitted; we'd gang away, Polly an' me, we'd gang away, reet away beyont Lunnun. I wa'd nivver say a wrang
word till her mair, nivver mair, if she wa'd nobbut coom yam," the poor gaunt miserable man said.

Horace Snowe was dining with his brother officers when an orderly whispered to him that a person wished to speak to him. "I can scarcely understand what he says, sir," the man said, "but I can gather enough to know that he will not take any denial, and that he has already been to your rooms, sir."

I think even the soldier's stout heart must have quailed a little when he found himself in the presence of the gigantic miner. The interview lasted for some time. I do not know what passed between the two men, but the result was satisfactory to Horace Snowe, for John Dalton gave him his brawny hand at parting, and left the barracks fully persuaded of the soldier's innocence.

And so the miner returned to Farnorth again, and it was very soon bruited about in the town and neighbourhood that Horace had contrived to throw dust in the poor man's eyes. "Not very likely Rufus would confess his peccadillo to the 'stern parient,'" the Baronet said.

It was only before Zoé Harding, and such as she, that Monseigneur pranced and ambled, in the
haute école style, on that moral stalking horse of his. On ordinary occasions, the Baronet rode his steed in a very low art fasion, in fleshings, and paint, and tinsel, and with the full flavour of tan and saw-dust, about his evolutions. Vice is never so dangerous as when dressed in motley. The enemy of mankind has of late years, more than ever, hidden his sable hue and his cloven foot beneath that garb. And so the Baronet joked about "the stern parient," and many persons who had been quite shocked at the tragical sequence to the mysterious disappearance of the Snowdrop, forgot all about that miserable woman now lying under the green sod, forgot all about the broken-hearted miner, forgot, in short, every feeling of humanity, and joined in Sir Mortimer's joke about "the stern parient," and made fun of the whole affair, and were altogether so hilarious in their motley, and tan, and sawdust, that I think somebody must have joyfully hugged himself beneath his parti-coloured raiment.

If John Dalton believed that Horace Snowe was not the betrayer of his daughter, it was only he, and the maiden ladies, who did so acquit the soldier. No one else in Farnorth revoked their original verdict; no one, not even Mr. Harding, who was
attached to the culprit as well as grateful to the man who had assuredly saved his life; not even Madame, desirous as the good lady was to "démentir les yeux et les oreilles;" not even Zoé, weeping in the dead of night over her broken and earth-stained idol; not even I, who had known and liked the fellow for years; not one of us, in our inmost souls, could for one moment doubt his guilt—circumstantial evidence was too strong even for friendly eyes and ears. We could not acquit the soldier, save by that verdict of the Irish jury, "Not guilty, but he had better not do it again."

That journey across the Irish Sea was not the only one that John Dalton made in search of his lost child. Day after day, night after night, the miner started buoyed up by some false hope that he was at length upon the right track. Day after day, night after night, he wandered far away, only to return more weary, more gaunt, more dispirited, more miserable than ever. The nest-egg which the honest fellow had collected during many years of toil, the nest-egg which was to protect himself, his wife, and "our Polly" from any haunting dread of parish aid, would have been sadly reduced had it not been for Mary Snowe and the master of Becklands. If
money could have consoled the poor fellow, it was given freely enough, but money was of no avail. The miner's gigantic frame grew daily more lean and worn, there was a blank wan misery in his face, which would have made your heart ache to see; and still the Baronet and his motley friends laughed and made merry about the "stern parient," and amused themselves by grinning and mouthing in their paint and tinsel, in the sawdust and tan of the ring.

The trouble and anxiety of the last few weeks had soon a very disastrous effect on the health of Mary Snowe. The soft colour in her sweet face faded away, her graceful figure lost its rounded outline, and she became so weak, that her sister was in despair. It was in vain the gentle sufferer protested she ailed nothing, it was in vain she tried to smile and be as calmly cheerful as she once had been. Miss Alathea's anxiety could not be dispelled. She summoned Dr. Banques, and the good Doctor prated about a susceptible organisation, and nervous prostration, and prophesied a rapid return to health, if the invalid would swallow, three times a day, two table-spoonfuls of a hideous mixture he himself compounded; but al-
though Mary did dutifully and conscientiously swallow the hideous potion according to directions, the nervous prostration was not exorcised.

"I never had any faith in Dr. Banques," Miss Alathea said, with the tears rolling down her poor cheeks; "I shall telegraph at once for Dr. ——." And so the London physician with a big name received a telegram as he was dining with one of his rich patients, demanding his immediate appearance at "quite an obscure place in the North, my dear sir," and the great man promptly obeyed the summons, and very shortly appeared at the obscure place in the North.

Dr. —— looked very grave as he listened to Miss Alathea's account of her sister's symptoms, and he took that short wooden instrument from his pocket which most of us dread almost as much as a loaded pistol when it is presented against our breasts. The Doctor inclined his ear for some time to this warning monitor, but the story it had to tell was not, after all, an evil one to hear. The clouds cleared away from the physician's face after he had listened to his guide for a few minutes.

"There is no occasion for alarm, my dear madam," he said to the anxious bas bleu, who, rigidly proper though she was, could have em-
braced him on the spot as he delivered this verdict. "I will write a prescription at once, but the best remedy I can suggest is, immediate change of air. I should recommend you to pass the winter in the South of Devonshire." And the oracle took his leave with his fee of fifty guineas, which he had earned by his short visit to the obscure place in the North.

When it was known in Farnorth that Rose Cottage was likely soon to be vacated, the lamentation was pretty nearly universal. Zoé was in despair. This parting, even for a few months, with her dear La Bonté, was quite an unlooked-for misfortune. Mrs. Bland, too, was greatly grieved. Although that "anything" had happened to the Rector of Slippersly—although the Reverend Archibald had at length stepped into those comfortable shoes for which he had rather impatiently waited—although Sophy had written a most rapturous account of her new home at the Rectory, and had relieved her anxious mother's mind by the assurance that her high-church husband made no effort to mulct her in any of her ordinary reflections—although all these pleasing events had come to pass, the relict forgot every cause for satisfaction in her distress at the approaching departure of the sisters.
"It must be five-and-twenty years now since they first came here," the widow said, her voice quite broken with emotion, "and it seems only the other day. Miss Mary Snowe was then the loveliest young creature I ever saw, and that fine soldierly-looking man, her nephew, who looks his profession every inch, was then a pretty little fellow with long fair curls down to his waist. I often feel quite ashamed when I think how shamefully we treated the poor dear things, but it was all Mr. Giles Houndly's fault. Ces pauvres dames arrivaient ici toute seule avec un petit garçon, et Mossoo Giles Houndly disait horribles choses, Madame," she added, airing her Anglo-Gallic.

"Ame vile et impitoyable!" cried the Parisian, who never lost an opportunity of giving the master of Gothic Hall her blessing. "Ame vile et impitoyable! Ne devrait-il pas en rougir pour lui-même. But the day shall arrive when he shall carry all the pain of his inhumanity. I would that he shall feel all the price of his cruelty. I would that he shall consume himself of misery and of despair, I would——" but the Frenchwoman's English utterly failed her as she strove to express her kind wishes for the future welfare of the husband of the late Jane Hopkins, and she
concluded with an anathema in her native tongue, which was however lost upon her hearers.

"French is really quite different to what it was in my young days," the relict said to Algy's wife, "indeed, everything is so altered; but, as I was saying, the Miss Snowes ——"

"Everything is indeed altered," interposed Mrs. Silvester, who considered the maiden ladies had engrossed enough of the conversation, and determined to turn it again into the old and favourite channel. "Everything is indeed altered, Mrs. Bland, and certainly not for the better, since I was at school. There's music for instance, Clara is said to play and sing like I don't know what. I'm sure it always makes my head ache to hear her. My playing and singing was so different. I remember how poor Cowley used to sigh whenever I sang 'The last links are broken,' and then I played 'The Battle of Prague' so well. Everybody said my 'Groans of the wounded' were as like, as like; but no one cares to listen to me now. No one cares. Oh dear me! when I think ——"

The doleful monologue might have lasted for some time longer, but Algy appeared, and his wife subsided into silence.
The Silvesters are to leave Becklands very shortly now. Algy has taken Belle Grange, but he has not secured it on those reasonable terms prophesied by Grandly of Grândly Manor. The cadet of a noble family will have to pay a very good sum yearly for this home which he has provided for his family. Belle Grange is a handsome house, and well furnished. It will require a tolerable staff of servants to support its dignity properly.

"Mr. Silvester's aunt must have left him a great deal of money," his helpmate says, "or he would not surely think of taking such a place. I wish I knew how much she died worth. Mr. Silvester never does tell me anything, but I should like to know how much this legacy was."

I don't think Algy's wife ever will be enlightened on this subject.

Clara is in high spirits. She is constantly reverting to her father's good fortune whenever she is with her cousin.

"Papa is by no means the most exemplary person in the world," this candid daughter says, "but really his relatives have treated him shamefully. Aunt Aggie will always have a sacred niche in my memory. Belle Grange is infinitely superior
to Ivy Cottage, and it is sufficiently near Plantagenet Park. I shall be able to drive my ponyphaeton over every day to see your little ladyship. I hope you have thought over my advice, carissima. I hope you intend to transact business with the honest old-clothes man,” Clara adds, with a smile.

But Zoé does not yet evince any eagerness to negotiate with the trader. She is blind to the beauty of the fine exotic the Jew is offering in exchange for her old properties. Perhaps she suspects that the proffered flower which looks so gay, and smells so sweet, may be a rootless thing, a gaudy deception stuck into the soil to blossom for a day; perhaps the little maid is learning caution. I do not know, but I know she still guards those worn vestments of hers with a miser’s care.

Many tears were shed on both sides, when the farewell words were spoken between the sisters and their little friend. Miss Alathea mingled much good advice with her sobs; tertiary formation, and Spurzheim and Combe perfumed her parting words; but Mary could only press her dear child’s hand, and murmur promises to write to her very, very often.
Clamorous grief prevailed in nearly every cottage in Farnorth when the carriage left the gates of the maiden ladies' pretty home, and bore away the wasted form of gentle Mary Snowe.

"They say," quoth Giles Houndly, "that she's pining herself to death for Harding. Ahem! I knew he was too old a bird to be caught. I knew Miss Mary's methodistical humbug would not lime him, and her nephew has about done for himself too, I should say—he has no chance of the heiress now, at any rate, I should think he will not have the impudence to show his red whiskers here again. They say, ahem! they say sir, that these two women have paid a good round sum to John Dalton to keep the miner's tongue still."

I firmly believe that kinder hearts have throbbed in the breasts of men legally strangled in the presence of a hooting, howling multitude, than that heart which sluggishly beats in the well-fed body of the master of Gothic Hall.
CHAPTER XII.

Three months have passed since the last chapter. A sickly autumn has been followed by a rigid winter. Not only is the sword unsheathed in the East, but pestilence has burst its prison doors, and a blight from its fatal breath has fallen on some of the homes of our father land. Gaunt famine has shown her ghastly face and skeleton frame to our friends and allies across the channel. The harvest has been very bad in England, but this failure in our crops has not lessened the size of the poor man’s loaf, for the demon protection does not clutch it with niggard fingers. Famine, and sword, and pestilence are abroad, but Farnorth knows very little of these evils. The fatal red cross, telling of pestilence, has not been written on our portals. The war has not affected the trade of the district. Prices are still high, and at the last quarterly meeting had even an upward tendency. The Farnorth miner can earn as much
in two days as an agricultural labourer in the Midland Counties can earn in a week. And so the inhabitants of Farnorth care very little about that war now raging in the Danubian territories. Objects of local interest engross their attention. The settling of the Silvesters at Belle Grange is of more importance to Farnorth than the settling of the Eastern Question. The approaching Conference is nothing to them, but poor Miss Alathea Snowe, anxiously watching for the hue of health on her sister's cheek takes the most absorbing interest in this last effort of the four Great Western Powers. The bas bleu no longer waves the British banner defiantly aloft, her martial ardour has all vanished, she shudders as she reads of that cruel massacre at Sinope, which the British and French fleets were powerless to prevent, and would willingly accept peace, even on the most pusillanimous terms.

The Silvesters are settled at Belle Grange. A very sufficient staff of retainers minister to the wants of Algy, and his wife and daughter.

"We scarcely foresaw all this sheeny silk in that dull mulberry leaf in the left hand side of the 'Times' supplement," Clara said to her father when
they first took possession of their new tenement. But Algy was not in such high spirits as his daughter.

"It is all very well for the present, Clarry," he said, "but the tenure is uncertain. By Jove! every time I cross the channel (Algy had secured the French business it seemed), and put in an appearance at the Rue Pompadour, the vulture looks worse. When she drops off her perch, some of our good luck will drop off as well. Dead men tell no tales, nor dead women neither, ma fille. Our secret will not be worth nearly so much when when madam hooks it. 'Gad, the sheeny silk may fall away from us, and the mulberry leaf too, if we don't look sharp."

"I intend to walk in silk attire for the rest of my natural career," replied his daughter, airily. "Soyez tranquillement mon père. Dives will never lock his money-chest, he would rather give you half its contents than allow Mademoiselle Tartine to be scared by a peep into his blue chamber."

"I know one thing he will give me very liberally," said Algy rather fiercely, "and never ask for a receipt to it either, and that's his confounded Grandisonian insolence. Stiffback and I will come to a split if he don't mind I can't stand
it much longer. Does he think his beggarly money is to buy me body and soul? By Jove! what he does pay me is no such great things after all," continued the manly independent Britton. "A fair day's wages for a fair day's work. I lighten his labours no little, ma fille."

But if the cadet of a noble family did lighten his brother-in-law's business toil, this division of labour had not as yet effected any change for the better in the rich man's looks—he was still wretchedly pale and worn. "Is it true that the water has driven them out of their best drifts at the Weasle?" a rival iron-master enquires, with more smiling eagerness than is altogether Christian-like; but the answer he received from his catechumen was not of a kind to convey that pleasant sensation we are said by the Frenchman to feel at the misfortunes of our friends and neighbours. Water has not got into the best drifts at the Weasle. The mine was never in a more flourishing condition. It certainly is not business worry which is deepening the sad lines in the face of the Midas of Farnorth. "He ought to have advice. There is something very wrong the matter with him," the town and neighbourhood say as they shake their heads sorrowfully.
The gentleman whose fair day's work is worth a fair day's wages is not altogether popular amongst the workpeople at the Weasle. They do not brook his interference. "He's an offcome, an' he knäs nowt," the miners say. The Cornish captain of the mine is sulkily civil to the cadet of a noble family, but he does not like him. Algy makes a great fuss about that French business, which he tells the captain he has entirely taken into his own hands. The Cornish man cannot understand why the "guv'nor," as he calls Mr. Harding, perseveres about that French contract. "We don't ship as much ore to France in a twelvemonth as we send off to Staffordshire in a week," he says. "I kaint make out why the guv'nor bothers himself with the frog-eating mossoos."

The county cedars have most of them waved their haughty branches in the drawing-room of Belle Grange. The Grandlys have called, and poor Miss Adeline has passed some spiteful comments on beautiful Clara. "I wonder any one can admire her. She is so tall, and her eyes are so big, and she is very much made up; her hair is false I am quite certain. You can buy those plaits at so much an ounce," the affianced of Montagu,
who resents Clara's involuntary captivation of the shackled man, says. The Plantagenets have also called more than once at Belle Grange; but whatever may be the Baronet's real feelings, he still only ventures to offer to Algy's daughter the gray ashes of his admiration. His majesty has paid one or two visits to London, and garnishes his conversation with metropolitan on dits. I think his persistent devotion at the shrine of the little heiress is likely to be rewarded. Zoé is not quite so indifferent as she was to the devotion of her prostrate worshipper. Sir Mortimer has many friendly allies. Clara is always advocating his cause, and even the grave master of Becklands tacitly gives him his countenance. Lady Plantagenet works very hard for her son, and the Baronet himself is, so to speak, scarcely ever off his knees. Still the affair has not culminated, and some of those old properties we know of are yet carefully stored by in the wardrobes of the pretty Peruvian.

Edward Sparkles has made many professional visits to Becklands. He has been closeted with the rich man for hours together. Algy has met him coming away several times, and has drawn his own conclusions about these private interviews. "The lawyer and Harding will checkmate us. By
Jove they will,” Algy tells his daughter dolefully; but Clara does not pay much attention to her father.

Christmas has come and gone after sealing with its icy breath every tarn and beck and pond in Farnorth; Mrs. Bland is busy with preparations for her annual party; Mrs. Jellybags is deep in the mysteries of her art; John has been released from all garden and stable duties, and is chronic for the nonce as butler or footman, or indeed any other recognised indoor official; Lucy Bland is busily decorating some chef-d'œuvres of the late cook of the deceased Indian warrior. She is disturbed by the sudden appearance of her mother.

“It is the most provoking thing, Lucy, and so unexpected,” the relict cries, in a great state of flurry and excitement. “The Hardings cannot come. Dear Zoë’s great uncle is dead. I can’t read his name, can you, dear?” Mrs. Bland says, showing the note she had just received to her daughter. “I thought she had no relatives—and Mr. Harding has sent such a beautiful pine—he is always so liberal. I would rather any one else had stayed away.” And Lucy holds the same opinion as her mother.
“Harding is, without exception, the most mysterious fellow I ever came across, sir,” Giles Houndly said, when he heard Mrs. Bland bemoaning the absence of the master of Becklands and his daughter. “He’s an OEdipus, sir, a perfect OEdipus; the sphynx could have made nothing of him.” (Giles’s classical knowledge is not very extensive.) “The man is a riddle that no one can solve. He dropped down here from the clouds, sir. Not a soul knew anything about him, and all at once relations and connections crop up, sir, on every side. People do not believe in this uncle, sir. They say, ahem! that Harding has manufactured him to escape drinking the widow’s bad wine.” But no one that evening paid any attention to the venomous backbiter. And the death of Don Miguel Quilea, of Lima, was duly gazetted in one of the columns of the ‘Farnorth Advertiser,’ and when next pretty Zoé appeared in public she was dressed in mourning.

“I have some news for you, little girl. Come to the library, where we may be undisturbed,” Mr. Harding said to his daughter, about a fortnight after Mrs. Bland’s evening party.

A summons to this private sanctum was always
suggestive of some unusual communication, and Zoé's heart fluttered a little as she obeyed her father's wishes. The library was a very fine room. It had a large bay-window with sashes opening to the ground. The walls were entirely lined with books, and heavy curtains of crimson cloth swept the ground at each side of the embrasure of the window. A long secrétaire with innumerable drawers almost filled up the interstice between the sweeping curtains. Clara often saw her uncle seated at this secrétaire when she passed the window, in the frequent morning visits which she made to her young cousin. A shaded laurel walk led from the Porter's lodge at Becklands to a conservatory through the door of which Algy's daughter could at any time effect a private entrance into the house. The conservatory had been lately built—it was close to the library, and many a pleasant smile was exchanged between the uncle and his niece, as her handsome figure glided past the large bay-window. The rich man was quite attached to his peevish sister's beautiful daughter.

Mr. Sparkles was in the library. The good lawyer was a great favourite of little Zoé's, and she greeted him kindly. Mr. Harding did not
speak for some minutes. He held an official-looking parchment in his hand, which he appeared to be attentively perusing.

"How old are you, Zoé?" he said shortly.

"I was eighteen last month, papa. Don't you remember my birthday when you gave—"

"I thought you were eighteen," interrupted her father. "In that case you are entitled to receive immediately the sum of five thousand pounds, bequeathed to you by your late great uncle, Don Miguel Quilea of Lima."

Zoé opened her beautiful eyes very wide indeed.

"I never saw him in my life, papa," she cried.

"He was very much attached to your dear mother. The conditions under which you are to inherit this money are very extraordinary," continued the rich man, who spoke in a slow monotonous tone, as though he were repeating something learnt by rote. "This money is to be paid over to you solely on condition that you at once adopt your uncle’s name."

Mr. Sparkles started, but recovered himself immediately.

"Adopt my uncle’s name, and give up yours, papa!" cried the little maid. "I don't care for
this money; I would rather not have it," she added impetuously.

"Nonsense, child! What's in a name?" said her father gaily. "Why you will have an income of two hundred and fifty pounds a year—and all your own. What an independent little lady you will be! I shall expect such handsome presents from you, Zoé. The will is written in Spanish," he continued, as he handed the parchment to the lawyer; but Edward Sparkles did not understand the language, and so the master of Becklands read several extracts from the will aloud.

Of course Farnorth had enough to say, when it was made aware that Zoé Harding was in future to be addressed as Zoé Quilea. "I had no idea you could inherit anything until you were twenty-one," Mrs. Bland said. "And so very odd that a man should care so much about his name. If dear Miss Zoé had been a boy now, I could have understood it; but, being a young lady, it is really quite droll—and then you know so likely as she is to change this name again. It seems almost an empty compliment—not but what I would consent to be called the Witch of Endor, or anything you like, for five thousand pounds," the widow added with a sigh.
“More mystery!” cried Giles Houndly. “That chit of a girl has no legal right to inherit. They say, sir, ahem! Harding has manufactured this will, as well as the great uncle. What is he up to, eh, sir?”

But Mr. Harding had neither manufactured the will nor the great uncle. The bequest to his daughter was a genuine one, although the conditions under which she inherited it might be open to suspicion.

“He is as deep as Garrick, I tell you, Clarry,” Algy said to his daughter, his face quite flushed with excitement. “Don’t you see what he has done? he has given his little filly her real name. I tell you, ma belle, the lawyer and he will checkmate us, unless we keep our eyes open. You see when the Baronet marries Missy, as he means to do, there won’t be a screw loose. Harding is very wide awake, I’ll not deny that. I don’t believe one bit in those conditions attached to his legacy by the late Don Miguel, Clarry. Midas has invented them in order that he may bequeath all his property to his beloved daughter, Zoé Quilea. Do you see the depth of it, ma fille?”

Clara bowed her head, but she did not speak.
"Harding won't take the lawyer more into his confidence than is absolutely necessary; he will impose the same story upon him, about Madam across the sea, that he has upon Denassie. 'Gad! I've half a mind to enlighten the Mad Doctor next time I show up at his establishment. I repeat, if the vulture drops off her perch, we shall be in a queer way, Clarry. By George! I will get papers properly signed and attested, so as to be prepared for the worst. There's no saying what may happen. Many persons say Harding's own life is not worth a day's purchase."

"I should be sorry to think so," remarked Clara gravely. "I am very fond of my uncle."

Algy stared at his daughter, but the expression of her face did not change. The young lady was such a thorough actress, that she would not always obey the call to appear before the curtain even when her father was the only audient.

"'Gad! I must say you have shown your affection in a devilish strange manner, Clarry," Algy said at last. "Well, I can't say I am so fond of him. I have felt confoundedly sorry for him at times; but he is such a proud, pragmatical prig. You'll see he'll be closeted with the lawyer again more than ever now. By George! it would be
an awkward thing for Missy if her father were to pop off suddenly before his will was signed; she would not inherit one stiver, Clarry."

A sudden light blazed in the eyes of Algy's handsome girl, but it quickly died out, and she frowned slightly as though dismissing some impossible hope.

"Not one blessed stiver, ma belle! By George!" the father continued, "the property is all either personality or leasehold. The vulture would come in for her thirds, and I through your mother would inherit everything else. Missy is nothing in the eye of the law, you know; it would be deuced hard lines for the little girl, but I would do the handsome thing by her, hang me if I would not!" said Algy quite grandly.

"Your magnanimity will never be called into action," his daughter said coldly. "My uncle will make a dozen wills, and sign them every one, rather than run such a risk."

"I agree with you, ma belle, and so the wisest thing to be done is to ensure to ourselves a handsome remembrance in all those legal documents."

Having thus decided, Algy left his beautiful companion to her own meditations.

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"Your new name does not accord very well with the English generic, Miss," Clara said to her little cousin; "but it is likely soon to be transfused again, carissima."

Zoé blushed; she was in the habit of changing colour now at any of the hints and inuendoes of Algy's daughter.

"When am I to order my bridesmaid's dress?" Clara continued playfully. "I am so anxious to pass my first season in town, Zoé—really my first season—although my teens are in the far distance. In the old Bohemian days, my papers were not in order—I was contraband, and could not pass the fashionable douane—but it will be altogether different when my passport is viséd by the wealthy young bride of Sir Mortimer Plantagenet. Have compassion on me, señorita. I do so eagerly long to be introduced to the London world under such auspices."

Algy's daughter had never spoken truer words; she was eagerly longing to be introduced to the London world. The ambitious girl was dreaming of coronets and strawberry leaves. There were moments still when that old feeling, which had carried her away captive, made her wear its chain; but the gnawing pain was not so sharp as
The Snowdrop forgotten. 189

it had been, and visions of magnificent conquests that would obliterate all recollection of this one miserable weakness daily rendered the bonds more easy to bear.

The Baronet made many pretty speeches when he heard of Zoé’s change of name. Very pretty speeches Monseigneur made, but, as they had not the advantage of novelty, I shall not repeat them. Every day his majesty might be met with at Becklands, and he was so tender and gentle, I do not think Miss Winifred would have recognised her brother. He cantered about too on his moral stalking horse in such a graceful manner—there was not a soupçon of sawdust or tinsel about his high art evolutions. No one would for one moment have imagined that the Baronet could have jested, as we know he has done, about that dark mystery which has shadowed for ever the miner’s humble cottage.

Farnorth has almost entirely forgotten the mysterious disappearance of its Snowdrop; but whenever it does revert to it, Horace Snowe’s name is brought forward in bold and unflattering relief. The soldier has sunk down to zero in the opinion of all the good people of the neighbourhood. John Dalton has made no more journeys
in search of his lost child. All hope has left him. The miner is, alas! a frequent visitor at the public-houses now; he scarcely works three days in the week, but the master of the Weasle makes no reduction in his wages, and he sighs as he sees the man, once so sober and industrious, staggering home to his miserable and deserted hearth.
CHAPTER XIII.

Sir Mortimer Plantagenet has won his battle of Worcester, the crowning mercy has come at last, the Baronet's engagement with the little heiress of Becklands has been officially confirmed. Lady Mortimer Plantagenet, soon to subside into the dowager, has herself disseminated the intelligence amongst the four groups of the grand tertiary formation. Pliocene and Miocene have conveyed it again to the strata of the transition series, and so the important fact now permeates the whole of Farnorth. The town and neighbourhood have been expecting this match to come off for some time. It is a very suitable connection, they say, infinitely better than the late baronet's unfortunate second marriage, for neither the upper strata of the society at Farnorth, nor the strata of the transition series, have yet forgotten the horror they first felt at that terrible mésalliance. Some of Monseigneur's sulphured pheasants are in a very
sad way. Miss Grandly, being a Grandly of Grandly, bears the torture of the rack without the outward quivering of a muscle, but the unhappy woman suffers not a whit less than those plebeians who are demonstrative in their woe. She finds some consolation, however, in a conviction which she confides to her sister Adeline—

"Poor Mortimer’s property is dreadfully mortgaged, you know, dear," Miss Grandly says, choking down some unpatrician sobs; "he is obliged to marry for money. I know that he really cares for me far more than he does for any one else in the world. I know his heart is mine, Adeline, and I can feel almost sorry for this iron man’s daughter."

There were a good many more self-constituted Rachels amongst the baronet’s victims, who thus consoled themselves with the shadow, when they heard that Leah was about to carry away the substance, and I am very glad they could so do.

I doubt very much whether this victory, over which his majesty of Foxcroft and his mother are rejoicing, would ever have been won, had it not been for the countenance lent to Monseigneur’s siege by the master of Becklands. Mr. Harding is not, as you know, remarkable for his powers of
discrimination, and he has believed in all that damp gunpowder of which the attacking soldier has been prodigal; he has admired the *haute école* performance on the moral stalking horse, and been dazzled by the glittering facets of the gorgeous chandelier; he has taken some pains to point out the fine prismatic colours of this last to his little girl, and so the crowning mercy has come, and the Plantagenet banner is waving proudly on the highest pinnacle at Becklands.

Zoé can scarcely realise her position, and her father watches her very anxiously. Clara rejoices at the prospect of standing room whereon to plant her fulcrum. Madame maintains a gloomy silence. It is all in vain that his majesty glitters and shines; it is all in vain that he ambles and canters gracefully before her: Madame will not accept him. Even the delightful toilette adjuncts of a *marriage à la mode* are powerless to reconcile her to the coming event. But all the gloomy looks of Madame, and all her impatient exclamations cannot undo the fact of her pupil's engagement. The wedding is to take place in six weeks, and preparations have already commenced. An artiste, looking so elegantly fashionable that she appears to have fluttered out of the leaves of
‘Le Follet,’ has arrived at Becklands. She is the prime minister of Madame Tournure, the world-known modiste. Lady Plantagenet holds grave consultations with this splendid person, but the principal party concerned takes very little interest in any of the proceedings.

Edward Sparkles and Sir Mortimer’s confidential solicitor are very busy indeed. Mr. Harding looks rather grave when that ugly fact about the Caucasian creditors creeps out, but as the Baronet justly says, it was not he who first incurred the debt, and he is not answerable for the wicked extravagance of the late Sir Mortimer Plantagenet Plantagenet, whose memory is not held sacred by his handsome son, although he does not allow any unfilial irreverence to protrude in the presence of his intended father-in-law. And so the master of Becklands undertakes to rescue the estate out of the clutches of the descendants of Abraham. A rough draft of the marriage settlements is shown to Sir Mortimer, and the sight of it has greatly rejoiced the heart of his majesty, for the liberal portion the Midas of Farnorth proposes to assign to his daughter is beyond her conqueror’s wildest hopes.

The news of the change in their young friend’s
The Miss Snowes disapprove of the Match. 195

destiny has reached the maiden ladies in their Devonshire retreat. Their nephew is far away from them now. The soldier's regiment has been ordered off to the seat of war in the East. No tongue can tell how much the tender hearts of these two women have suffered, and if prayers humbly and fervently breathed to the Most High have power to shield their dead sister's son, assuredly that buckler will not be wanting to Horace Snowe.

Miss Alathea does not approve of this engagement between the Baronet and her favourite. "He has not a good head," she says to her sister, "very little veneration, and no benevolence whatever." But I doubt very much whether her distaste to the intelligence is based on purely phrenological objections. I believe the bas bleu has been building châteaux en Espagne, which are now razed to the ground. I fancy she has some suspicion of that sad turmoil and confusion which has reigned and still holds tyrannical dominion in the heart of her nephew. At any rate, she will not give the royal betrothal her sanction, and the idea of the approaching marriage annoys her considerably.

But Alathea's annoyance is as nothing compared to Mary's distress. La Bonté has long known the poor soldier's secret, has long known
the hopelessness which environs his unhappy love, and yet this confirmation is a cruel blow to her.

There is, however, no evidence of either annoyance or distress in those two letters which Zoé receives from her tried friends. Mary's abounds with tender loving congratulations. The soldier's name does not linger for one moment on its pages, but I am afraid his image rises before the reader more frequently than the Baronet would altogether approve. Miss Alathea's epistle is worthy of that accomplished lady. Excellent advice is administered in her best manner, and the punctuation is splendid, colons and semicolons take their proper positions, but not one word does the phrenologist breathe of the lack of benevolence and veneration she has deplored in the handsome head of the pretty Peruvian's betrothed.

The wedding-day is rapidly approaching. Fabrications, bearing the true stamp of artistic merit, daily arrive from the emporium of Madame Tournure. Mrs. Bland is admitted to a private view, and goes into raptures. Mrs. Silvester draws querulous comparison between this modern trousseau and her own which cost "a thousand pound," and the conclusion she arrives at is not in favour of Zoé's. There is not the same elegant style
about the dresses, Algy's wife declares, but she does not make many converts. Even sulky Madame gazes surreptitiously with admiring eyes on the works of the great modiste.

Lucy Bland is to be one of the bridesmaids. Miss Winifred has declined the office, very wisely, as I think, and Lucy will have to play a weak third to magnificent Clara Silvester and haughty Adeline Grandly. The heiress had great difficulties to contend against when she first proposed the relict's daughter. Every one was disposed to black-ball the modest little girl. Lady Plantagenet was dead against her, and so was Clara. Adeline Grandly would have tendered her resignation on the spot, had it not been that the bridesmaids' dresses were so very pretty, and the shackled Montagu was expected to be at Grandly Manor about the time of the wedding, and Adeline pictured herself in that becoming dress of pale blue silk, receiving admiring looks from her lover, and breathing again that delightful atmosphere which surrounded his early courtship. Alas! poor patient waiting maid; neither blue nor red, nor yellow-tinted dresses will ever infuse a Turner brightness into the dull, gray, leaden horizon which has grown out of those many years of bondage.
There surely never was a more listless bride elect than the young heiress of Becklands. Those triumphs of art transmitted by the great modiste have no power to interest her, and I think the Baronet’s vanity must have suffered not a little, if the indifference of his betrothed was as palpable to him as it was to others. The royal fowler has netted his bird, and he must be contented with that fact, for it is the only consolation he is likely to have. His majesty is still figuratively never off his knees in the presence of his fluttering victim, although he indulges in an altogether different and infinitely more congenial attitude when alone with his mother. Zoé frequently reproaches herself for her ingratitude to “poor Mortimer, who is so good and kind,” as she says; but in spite of her conviction of the goodness and kindness of her promised husband, in spite of Lady Plantagenet’s motherly caresses, in spite of her father’s approving sanction, in spite of the wonderful creations of the great Madame Tournure, smiles are rare visitors to the lips of the envied child of the richest man in Farnorth.

Clara feels very great contempt for her young cousin’s listless abstraction. She has no patience with all these puling sentimental regrets, as she
inwardly pronounces them to be, in the midst of such splendid prospects. Algy's daughter would have sacrificed her love for Horace Snowe, over and over again, to have secured such a position, and yet no one estimates Monseigneur of Foxcroft at a lower ratio than she does. “He is a poor flimsy creature,” she has said more than once. But what of that? His majesty is a necessary evil that must be accepted by reason of the many advantages he brings with him. There is another necessary evil far more objectionable in the eyes of Zoé's cousin than the Baronet, and that is, the baronet's mother. By the terms of her marriage settlements Lady Plantagenet has a right to remain at the palace so long as she lives, and she clearly intends to avail herself of this right. Clara discusses the matter with Zoé in that light airy manner of hers which so cleverly disguises the black wickedness beneath.

“Your future is almost an Italian sky, ma belle,” she says. “There is only one cloud—it appears in the dark form of a permanent mother-in-law—how shall we disperse it, señorita?”

“I have not the slightest wish to blow this cloud away, Clara,” Zoé answers. “I like Lady Plantagenet very much, and Mortimer is so
very fond of his mother," she adds rather earnestly.

[Has her instinct recognised the true ring of this one piece of gold amidst the chink of the false coin?]

"Filial piety is very charming. I admire the virtue excessively, although I never practise it; but we are not enjoined to honour our mothers-in-law, chère cousine, and if all reports be true, you are a courageous little girl to venture your life under the same roof with her ladyship. What does Mr. Giles Houndly say about her?"

"Don't quote that man, if you please," Zoé interposes indignantly.

"You dislike him, I know, carissima, but I do not; he only says what other people think, and I approve of candour; but I will not repeat many of his 'they says.' I don't believe that Lady Mortimer murdered her step-son, and poisoned her husband, and daily horsewhips Miss Winifred," Clara says, smiling. "It is not against her in particular I am waging war, but against mothers-in-law in general; they have no right to any proper place in creation. I repeat it is not against Lady Mortimer Plantagenet that I am waging war. I should inveigh more bitterly still
if your husband's mother were Mrs. Bland. The widow's gossip and twaddle are far more unendurable to me than the murders and horsewhippings to which I have referred."

Zoé laughed. She could not help being amused at her cousin's odd speeches, in spite of her better judgment.

"You must not be too severe upon poor Mrs. Bland's harmless little foibles," she said, deprecatingly.

"People should not thrust their harmless little foibles forward. They may be only the hands and feet of the great body of evil, but they are nearest the social lens, and so become unnaturally exaggerated and distorted, and offensive to the eye. I always keep my own hands and feet in the background, and to give her her due, so does your future mother-in-law. You have decided that her ladyship is to remain en permanence at Foxcroft?"

"Most assuredly, and Miss Winifred as well."

"Oh! I do not long for the banishment of the baronet's sister. She is taciturn, and does not bore one; moreover she is first cousin once removed to the Duke of Overall," said the red republican candidly.

Algy's daughter never attempted to disguise
her estimation of the guinea's stamp from her young cousin.

"Is our Italian sky to be overclouded in London?" she asked, after a momentary pause.

"Lady Plantagenet proposes to remain at Foxcroft, whilst we are in town, so you will have undimmed metropolitan sunshine, Clara."

"I am glad of that, at any rate," the young lady said, as she closed the conversation.

Sir Mortimer has taken a very fine house in Park Lane; he wrote to secure it directly he had seen that rough draft of the marriage settlements. The young couple are to take up their abode in London immediately on their return from their wedding tour, and Clara and Zoë's father are to join them there. Coronets and strawberry leaves perpetually haunt the sleeping and waking moments of Algy's handsome daughter.

"I shall have the honour of presenting the two belles of the season to the London world," his majesty says gallantly. "What a delightful contrast my mountain heath will be to the forced exotics of the great metropolis!" he adds, with an enthusiasm which, I fear, is lost on that simple flower. "I shall tremble for your freshness in that meretricious atmosphere," the Baronet con-
tinues with rather sickly sentiment; "the innocent purity of your nature is so very charming to me."

Sir Mortimer was exactly the kind of man to estimate the innocent purity of any nature.

"I do hope the Peruvian will not exhibit any provincial gaucheries when I present her in society as my wife," the Baronet says to his mother, posing himself in his most natural attitude. "She has a dairy-maid habit of blushing, with which I could willingly dispense. I wish my bride elect was more like her cousin. Clara Silvester is the handsomest woman I have ever seen in my life. I could have made love to her in earnest," the admirer of innocent purity adds with a sigh.

Giles Houndly, Esq., has received no invitation to the wedding, and he is very furious; his tongue was busy enough when he first heard of the engagement, and now it is more active than ever. "Harding is much too fine a man to know his old friends now, sir; ahem! he could be intimate enough with me when he wanted a seat on the bench; but nothing but Plantagenets and Grandlys go down now, sir. I wonder what sum he has had to pay by way of purchase-money for his baronet son-in-law? He will gain little more than the title sir; there is scarcely an inch of the
Plantagenet property that is not mortgaged; a
good deal more belongs to the Jews than to Sir Mortimer, *that* I happen to know. The tailor's
daughter has been working as hard lately as ever honest Caleb did, and he was the most industrious
tradesman I ever knew.” [Giles is always stabbing
the Plantagenets in the back with the dreaded bodkin now.] “I do hope that scraggy old scare-crow, Miss Winifred, who is sixty if she's a day,
sir”—[The master of Gothic Hall has a habit of
adding sometimes even as much as a decade to
the ages of his feminine acquaintances.]—“I do
hope she will not make a guy of herself. The
last time I saw her—I give you my oath, sir—she
had on a white muslin gown, and her sash was
tied behind. They say, ahem! that she is just a
little bit touched *here,*” Giles adds, as he taps his
forehead mysteriously.

Most rejected suitors are vicious enough, Heaven knows, but I think the great incubator
of scandal is even beyond the average in that
respect.

Nearer and nearer the wedding-day approaches,
and the master of Becklands grows more cheerful
every hour. If his daughter is listless and ab-
stracted, he certainly is not, but takes such
interest in all the preparations, that Zoé, half in earnest, reproaches him for his eagerness to part with her. "It is not a parting, child," the father says tenderly. "I shall see you every day; you will grow weary of my long shadow on the walls of Foxcroft. I know you will be happy, little girl." So you see that the Baronet has not ambled and cantered altogether in vain.

Algy is in Paris, but proposes to return in time for the ceremony. He writes constantly to his daughter, and his letters are not cheering. "Denassie says the vulture cannot last out two months longer. She is dying by inches: there is no hope for her, and he has told Harding so. I mean to ask for a good round sum down on the nail when I come home again, or, 'gad, I'll blow on him. Now is the time to make our game."

"Papa has just that kind of wisdom which will lead him to kill the bird that provides us with our golden eggs," Clara says impatiently, as she tears up her father's letter.
Some event of importance is convulsing the good people of Farnorth. There is almost as much stir and hilarity in the town on this cold March day, as there was on that memorable one when the Plantagenets returned from their many years’ exile, and the young monarch of Foxcroft ascended the throne of his ancestors. Banners are waving everywhere. A procession, headed by a brass band, and supplemented by every little vagabond belonging to the district, is parading the streets. The disciples of George Fox, with their wives and daughters, may be seen very plentifully scattered about the motley crowd. What is producing all this unwonted excitement amongst the “placid believers and followers of sumptuary laws and regulations?

Farnorth is this day the chosen field for a grand temperance demonstration. The enemies of alcohol have invited their great leader down to
this benighted region, which they have represented
as being the most dearly beloved child of the
demon of drunkenness. As the March wind
flutters the different flags borne in the hands of
staunch supporters of Father Matthew, you may
easily read their mottoes. They are all in execra-
tion of John Barleycorn & Co., and in praise of
the virtues of the Pump. The motley crowd is
moving in the direction of Plantagenet Park. The
young Baronet has earned golden opinions from
the broad-brims and their straight-skirted wives
and daughters by the countenance he has lent to
the great temperance movement. The eloquent
apostle of water is to deliver his oration at three
o’clock precisely; it is now considerably past two,
and eager recruits are perpetually rallying round
that standard which is fluttering in the praise of
Adam’s wine. A plentiful refection of tea, coffee,
currant buns, and muffins, is to be served after the
oration, to those who are willing to pay for the
refreshment, in a large tent, which has been
erected by a speculative teetotaller for that pur-
pose.

Clara Silvester has left Belle Grange with the
intention of making her usual call on her young
cousin. She has some difficulty in forcing a
passage through all this crowd and turmoil. An attendant on the house of Silvester, clad in a gorgeous livery—Algy's tastes incline to the bright and gay in colour—is pushing the Farnorthites about in a very unceremonious fashion. He receives some compliments, delivered with strong emphasis, as he endeavours to clear the road for his beautiful young mistress. At length Becklands appears in sight, and Clara dismisses her servant, who rushes rapidly away to join his plushed brethren already gathered together in Plantagenet Park.

The porter's lodge at Becklands is quite deserted; even the round-eyed little children have been taken by their parents to be edified by the eloquence of the great teetotal orator. There is not a soul to be seen anywhere, as Clara disappears up that shady laurel walk which leads to the conservatory, where she is accustomed to make a private entrance to the boudoir of her cousin.

Mutilated strains from the brass band float on the chill March breeze, and you can distinctly hear the shouts of the hilarious multitude, who have assembled to hear the temperance missionary.

Nearly half-an-hour must have elapsed since Algy's daughter disappeared up the shady laurel
walk, and she is again at the porter's deserted lodge. The gardener has evidently locked the door of the conservatory, and Clara must have wasted all this time in struggling with the closed door. She has slightly wounded her right hand with her efforts. It is ungloved, and there is blood upon the fingers, which she wipes off hastily with her handkerchief as she walks hurriedly up the wide avenue.

The bitter east wind has strangely affected Zoé's cousin. She is as pale as death, and she shudders and trembles in every limb, in spite of her rapid movements.

More mutilated brazen strains are borne along on the wings of the March breeze, and the hilarious shouts of the enemies of alcohol increase each moment in power.

Zoé was opening the front door just at the time her cousin entered the large portico. The little girl's appearance was a great contrast to that of Algy's daughter. Her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes shone like diamonds through the becoming mist of her flimsy veil; she was going to visit some of her old pensioners, and carried a basket on her arm.

"You look like Red Riding Hood," Clara said,
gaily, although her teeth chattered with the cold.

"I hope I shall not meet with a wolf on the road," Zoë answered. "Good gracious, Clara," she added suddenly, "how cold you must be! you look quite blue. Do come in, and warm yourself."

"The east wind always affects me in this way," Clara said, striving to steady her trembling lips. "I cannot stay for more than a minute or two. I called for a piece of music I left here last night. I suppose we shall have the usual concert this evening, and my harp accompaniment to those airs from 'Lucrezia' is far from perfect."

Zoë led the way into the drawing-room and commenced a search for the piece of music. Clara knelt down by the fire and chafed her trembling hands together.

"I see your house is as deserted as ours is," she said, speaking a little more steadily now. "I left mamma grumbling dreadfully. I think she had ground every stop of her extensive barrel organ of grievances before I left. There was an additional one to-day in the shape of this temperance demonstration."

"My establishment is represented by the kitchen-maid and a char-woman; Sam left about half-an-hour ago—he has not gone to hear the
great orator; papa, who has been in the library all the morning, sent him with a note for Mr. Sparkles. You are not going, Clara, surely? You are still pale, and you tremble. I had no idea cold affected you so much."

"It is the east wind, I tell you," Clara said, impatiently, and she stamped her foot on the ground. "I hate it; I must go, Zoé, in spite of the cold. I have to call at the library to get a book for mamma, and it will be closed if I don't make haste. Walk down the avenue with me. I saw a crocus there which won my affections as I came along, and you must give me a root in order that I may not break the eighth commandment."

"I did not think you knew a crocus when you saw one," said Zoé, laughing. "I am glad to see you are improving in floral knowledge, and you shall have your crocus, Clara. I was about to suggest we would go by the conservatory, and so escape some of the east wind which has made such ravages on you, but ——"

"I really cannot stay another moment," said Clara, hurriedly. "Do come; where is Madame?"

"She cannot tear herself away from the last importation from Madame Tournure's, I fancy; but I will call her."
The French woman's voice was soon heard in reply, and presently her buxom figure appeared in sight. If anything could have chilled Algy's daughter more than the east wind had already done, it might have been the frigid greeting she received from the Parisian, but Clara was accustomed to her frozen manners, and she made no attempt to thaw them.

"Now Red Riding Hood, if you please we will lose no more time. I shudder to think what an half-hour I shall have to endure if the library be closed. If you have any compassion for me you will walk very fast, carissima. What time is the concert to commence—soon after dinner?" Clara asked.

"Yes, papa always enjoys the music, you know, and so does Mortimer, at least he says he does," Zoé added with a smile, "but I think he scarcely knows one air from another. And now, Clara, this is the coveted crocus, is it not?"

Clara's interest in the crocus was all gone. She waited very impatiently whilst her cousin dug up two or three roots.

"It is a quarter-past three," she said, as she looked at her watch. "I must really leave you to walk your own pace."
Pretended Visit to the Library.

There seemed to be a fate against Clara's visit to the library, for at the moment she was speaking Mr. Sparkles and the negro approached. Nelly Brown's cruel treatment of her old lover had not extinguished the lawyer's natural gallantry, and Clara chafed inwardly as she was compelled to stay and listen to his old-fashioned compliments. The negro wished to relieve his young mistress of the basket she was carrying, but Zoé would not permit him to do so. "Papa may want you," she said. "You will find him in the library, Mr. Sparkles; I had strict orders not to disturb him this morning, and he has been shut up there since luncheon. We must say good-bye now, for Clara is in a fever to get a book from the library before it closes."

"Miss Silvester has plenty of time yet to select her book," the lawyer said, "but I will not detain you any longer. It is not a day for one to stand still." And he raised his hat and followed his black guide.

"Adieu for the present," said Zoé to her cousin, as they parted at the lodge gate; "I hope the library will not be closed. What are you doing, Clara? See, you have torn your poor crocus to pieces."

"I could tear anything to pieces this miserable cold day," answered her cousin. "East winds
should be put down by Act of Parliament. "Au
revoir!" she added, as she walked rapidly away.

Algy's daughter did not go to the library after
all. Perhaps it was the east wind, or the cold, or
the conviction that it would be too late to select a
book, in spite of the lawyer's assurance to the
 contrary, which determined her not to waste any
time on this errand. At any rate she did not go
to the library, but hastened home as quickly as
she could.

The streets were all deserted. There was no
crowd now to impede Clara's progress. The trades-
people might just as well have closed their shops
in High Street, for there was little chance of any
customers on that bitter afternoon in March. It
was scarcely a good day for the great orator to
expatiate on the beauties of his mission. I mean,
as far as the weather was concerned, it was not
a good day. Pure and wholesome as water un-
doubtedly is, it was scarcely a beverage calculated
to make glad the heart of man when that pitiless
east wind was blowing. I am afraid malt-liquor
and even alcohol will be sold this evening in most
of the public-houses of Farnorth, in spite of the
eoquent vituperations against them uttered by
the great regenerator. I am afraid that malt-
liquor and even alcohol will be drunken this evening by some of the assembled multitude in Plantagenet Park, in spite of the earnest attention they have inclined to the fine teetotal oration.

It was clear that Clara Silvester was no rigid disciple of Father Matthew, for her first act on entering the dining-room at Belle Grange was to take a decanter from the sideboard and more than half fill a tumbler with sherry. She was about to raise the glass to her lips, when her mother came into the room.

"You are surely not going to drink all that, Clara?" said Mrs. Silvester, her voice more peevish than ever. "It would make me as tipsy as I don't know what; and you, who insisted the servants should go to this temperance meeting. A nice example you set them."

Clara drank the sherry, and paid not the slightest attention to her mother's remonstrances. She never did.

"Did you git me that book from the library? No, of course not. It is always the way," Algy's wife wailed. "Nobody cares for me, and not a servant in the house to send anywhere, as you know. I'm sure such a luncheon as I have had. The mutton-chop burnt to a cinder, and the pota-
toes as watery, as watery. Are you going, Clara? I suppose I'm to be left by myself again. The man was quite right when he said that about the serpent's tooth. It is very hard, and such a mother as I——”

“Is there a fire in my bedroom?” Clara demanded of Mrs. Silvester's maid, who had been kept at home to wait upon her mistress.

“Yes, miss; it is burning very brightly,” the woman answered.

An hour had passed before Clara again joined her mother. The sherry and the bright fire had chased away the pallor caused by the bitter east wind.

“Are you going to twang away at the harp?” Mrs. Silvester said, as her daughter carried out that instrument and arranged some music on the stand.

“I have to perfect myself in a piece I have to play this evening. There is a fire in the next room. You need not remain here to be annoyed by my practising,” said Clara, coldly.

“Who is to dine at Becklands to-day as well as the Plantagenets?” enquired her mother, who had no fancy for the exile proposed. “The Grandlys?”
“I believe so,” said Clara.

“Then of course the Blands won’t be there. Miss Grandly is so angry that Lucy Bland is to be one of the bridesmaids, and I am not surprised. The Blands are respectable enough I dare say; but you know Mrs. Bland’s uncle married his cook, and she herself has only five hundred a-year, and has to pinch and scrape like I don’t know what. She has told me so over and over again. And there is no air about her daughter Lucy, no air at all,” Mrs. Silvester repeated, as she shook her head over pretty Lucy’s lack of high-bred atmosphere. “So different to the Grandlys. You can tell at once what they are. I think it is a great pity Lucy is to be one of the bridesmaids; but Zoé is just like her father. Theodore always was—— Oh!” she cried, starting suddenly, as one of the strings Clara was tuning snapped; “how I do hate that nasty thing, making one jump as it does. You should really take more care, Clara; you have set my poor heart beating; it——”

“You had much better go into the next room,” interrupted Clara, impatiently. She was never too tolerant of her mother’s constant murmuring; but this day it appeared to irritate her more than
ever. "Is it not time for you to dress for dinner?" she added suddenly, as the happy thought suggested itself.

"The dinner hour at Becklands is always at seven. It is too early to begin dressing. I don't know, though; Watkins is so stupid about getting out my things. Perhaps it would be as well to go. What dress shall I wear, my moiré?" enquired the mother, whose good temper returned a little as she thought of this last addition to her wardrobe. "I think I shall wear my moiré, it fits me so well," continued Algy's wife, not waiting for her daughter's answer. "I wonder whether we shall have salmon and green peas, not that that will matter to me. I am not like anybody else. If there is a dish I at all care for that is the one I am not to have. It is hard, I must say," she added. And the recollection of the embargo her doctor had laid upon her favourite dish chased away the momentary sunshine.

Clara was not very successful in tuning her instrument, even when her mother had left her. The strings broke in a most unaccountable manner, and at last Algy's daughter threw down the key, and abandoned all intention of perfecting herself in those airs from 'Lucrezia.'
She drew a chair close to the fire and sat down. When her mother appeared, *en grande tenue*, Clara was still gazing abstractedly at the dying embers in the grate.

“Good gracious!” cried the full-dressed lady, rustling about in her rich moiré, “not gone to dress *yet*, Clara? You will be as late, as late, and the carriage will be at the door directly; and Mr. Silvester so particular as he is about the horses taking cold. Your father makes such a fuss always; and I declare you have let the fire nearly out. You might have taken the trouble to ring. What dress are you going to wear? Pray do make haste.”

“I have put out your black tulle, miss,” said a maid, who was waiting with a candle, “and your turquoise ornaments.”

“A black dress!” cried Mrs. Silvester. “Surely you won’t think of wearing it, and a wedding coming off so soon. It is quite out of place; so unlucky, you know.”

Clara rose to leave the room, but again she was arrested by her mother.

Mrs. Silvester was looking out of the window. There was still light enough to enable her to distinguish objects out of doors.
"Just look, Clara. I declare there is Dr. Banques' carriage. Fancy his coming at this time, and he called to see me this morning, too. He is getting out. It isn't him," cried the contemner of Lindley Murray, excitedly, "it's only his assistant, the young man he talks of taking into partnership, and who they say is sweet on Lucy Bland. I call it very disrespectful of Dr. Banques to send this young man to see me, very disrespectful indeed, and that I shall let him know. Me, paying him as much as——"

"Hush!" cried Clara, in a low, tremulous voice. "Hush, pray, he will hear you."

"Mr. Newcome, Dr. Banques' assistant," was pompously announced by one of the returned and enlightened men servants.
CHAPTER XV.

"Has Dr. Banques already arrived?" Edward Sparkles demanded of the frowsy-headed charwoman, who admitted him and his negro companion.

"No, sir; leastways not as I knows on," answered frowsy-head.

"It must be close upon half-past three now. I hope he won't be late," the lawyer murmured. "I can find my way to the library, Sam," he added aloud. "Mind you show the Doctor in the moment he arrives."

There was no one in the library when the lawyer entered the room; one of the large windows was slightly open.

"Chimney been smoking," Mr. Sparkles said to himself; "it always does, I know, when the wind is in this confounded quarter. The current of air won't improve my rheumatism," he added, as he took a chair and placed it close to the fire.
The master of Becklands had evidently destroyed a great number of papers that morning; their calcined remains quite littered the grate.

There was a loud peal at the front door bell.

"That's the Doctor," thought Mr. Sparkles; "he is punctual after all."

Sam ushered in Dr. Banques.

"Good morning, Doctor," said the lawyer, "you are in excellent time. Tell your master we are here, Sam. Dreadfully cold weather, Doctor; a good season for you I should say—east winds must add to your exchequer. I've got a touch of rheumatism, and that draught there does not improve it. The fire burns brightly enough now; I wonder whether one might venture to close the window?"

"You will have the room filled with smoke again directly if you do. I know this library of old. Squire Rowley, who had the place before Mr. Harding bought it, tried his best to cure this chimney, spent ever so much over it, but it was of no use. It always will smoke when the wind is in this quarter. By the way, why have I been summoned here to-day? Not on professional business, I know."

"Simply to append your signature to some
legal documents. We sharks are very busy just now," the lawyer said with a smile.

"I suppose so," said the Doctor. "Marriage shortly to come off, is it not?"

"In about a month, I believe. Sir Mortimer is a very lucky man."

"Very much so indeed. Miss Zoé is a most charming young lady. Dear me! how time flies—it only seems the other day since I was called in to attend her. A very severe case of rosalia, Mr. Sparkles. I don't remember a more severe case in the whole of my professional experience. I must say," continued the Doctor with a self-satisfied air, "that I had reason to congratulate myself on my treatment of that case—it was most successful. So indeed I was assured by the celebrated Dr. Halley, who—"

"Master is not in his room, sir, and I can't find him nowhere about the house," said the black servant, who made his appearance at this moment.

"He is no doubt in the conservatory," said Mr. Sparkles; "he smokes a cigar there very often I know. Make haste, Sam; go and look for him there. Stop a minute though; I declare I can't stand this draught any longer; I shall be laid up if I don't take care. We must bear a little smoke,
Doctor. Just close that window before you go, Sam."

The African advanced towards the _secrétaire_.

Two or three minutes passed, and the chill current still ventilated the room.

"Why don't you make haste, Sam? What are you stopping for?" said the lawyer sharply, rubbing his suffering limbs.

The negro still stood at that side of the heavy _secrétaire_ close to the embrasure of the window.

"Good God! what is the matter?" cried Dr. Banques suddenly.

The negro turned his face slowly towards the two men; every feature was paralysed with horror. He flung his arms wildly aloft, and, bursting into a passion of sobs, rushed out of the room.

A terrible suspicion of what might be, kept the lawyer rooted to where he stood; but the Doctor went rapidly forward. He tore away the heavy _secrétaire_. His worst fears were realised.

There, on the ground, his fingers still clutching in their last mortal agony, his features fixed in the rigidity of death, and a purple ooze flowing sluggishly from his livid lips, lay the body of the unhappy master of Becklands.

Alone and unaided had he wrestled with that
dread visitor, who had summoned him so hastily away; alone and unsustained had he breathed his parting sigh of anguish.

"Is he dead?" said the lawyer in a hollow voice.

The Doctor bowed his head solemnly. "He must have died an hour ago," he said. "The whole College of Physicians could not have saved him. Rupture of a blood-vessel; he has bled inwardly—there is not enough here to account for death," he added, as he wiped away the purple ooze from the lips of the dead man. "Come, and help me to carry him to the sofa, Sparkles."

The lawyer was frightfully agitated; he trembled in every limb. The shock had quite overpowered him; but he answered the Doctor's appeal at once.

They laid the body gently and tenderly upon the sofa.

"I have apprehended this for some time," said Dr. Banques. "I have been very uneasy about him lately. I feared he was suffering from angina pectoris." The Doctor could not forget his professional jargon even at that moment of horror. "He would not call in any medical aid—he was quite obstinate on that subject. Such a splendid
"This ought never to have happened."

"God help his unhappy child! How will she bear this cruel blow?" cried the lawyer. "I saw her only half-an-hour ago; she looked so—" and, as he thought of that bright young face, so soon to be shadowed by this black woe, soams choked his utterance.

"It is a very sad thing," said the Doctor; he was a good deal distressed, but did not feel the blow nearly so keenly as the lawyer. "At such a time too! It is a thousand pities that the marriage had not already taken place."

The lawyer started, and looked hastily around.

The servants had returned home, and their ghastly faces might be seen peering in at the open door. They were all unnerved with terror; they were huddled together in a helpless mass.

"My assistant is in the carriage at the door. I wish—Ah! here he is," the Doctor said, as the young man, pale and horror-stricken, came hastily forward. "We shall want you, Newcome. I know these fools will be of no use at such a time," he added, pointing to the scared servant-men, whose
faces were as white as their powdered heads. "We must carry our poor dead friend to his room. If his daughter were to arrive before—"

"Stay a moment," said Mr. Sparkles in a low, gasping voice, "I have a duty to perform. It may seem heartless at such a time, and in such a presence, but it must be done."

The lawyer had lit a taper whilst he was speaking. He took up some sealing-wax which was lying on the secrétaire. A drawer of the secrétaire was open, he closed and locked it, and then affixed his seal over the lock. He did the same to all the other drawers, and indeed to every door and cupboard in the room.

It did seem a heartless thing to do at such a time, and in such a presence. The Doctor remarked upon it afterwards to his young colleague—"I always considered Sparkles a tender-hearted man; I was surprised to see him do a thing of that kind; but you know his profession makes him cold-blooded." [Neither of the medical men shuddered to think of the ghastly duty they would soon be called upon to perform.]

More scared faces appear at the open door. Some of the women have ventured into the room, and are sobbing convulsively; the negro has
returned, and is crouched on the ground close to his dead master.

"We must lose no more time, Sparkles," said Dr. Banques. "If that poor child returns home before we have removed the body of her father to his room, I will not answer for the consequences. She has a peculiarly excitable organisation. I don't know how we shall break the sad news to her. Perhaps we had better tell the French-woman first, and leave her to do the best she can. At any rate I shall remain here until the poor little girl does know all, but we must lose no more time."

The three men raised the sad burden in their arms. The horrified servants made a lane for them to pass through. The Doctor was quite right; they were all of them utterly helpless.

The body of the unhappy rich man was laid upon his bed. The Doctor straightened the clenched fingers, and composed the stiffening limbs. All the horrors of that last struggle were removed; there was nothing but the majesty of death surrounding the still form now.

The two medical men remained beside the bed; they were talking together in a low subdued manner.
"He has taken it for years," Dr. Banques said. He held a small phial in his hand. "I found it on the floor close to where he was lying. We need not say anything about it at the inquest. He has died from the rupture of a blood-vessel; very likely the smoke brought on a violent fit of coughing, and so he was stricken down just after he had opened the window—at least I should judge so from the manner he has fallen. This affair," he added, pointing to the phial, "has had nothing whatever to do with it, and so we need say nothing about it. He was so accustomed to opium he could not very well have over-dosed himself, however much he had taken; not but what it has played the deuce with his constitution. I am certain I am quite correct in the conclusion I have drawn with regard to the proximate cause of death; but we shall see, you know, when—" and the Doctor lowered his voice, so as to be inaudible to every one but his medical colleague.

The lawyer paced restlessly backwards and forwards. He was still violently agitated. The dead man had endeared himself to him, as indeed he had to every one in Farnorth; but it was not only the sudden loss of his friend which thus
disquieted Mr. Sparkles. The servants, who were still clustered together in this room as they had been in the one downstairs, will never forget the extraordinary behaviour of the lawyer.

"Bring me that taper I lighted, and the sealing-wax, out of the library," he said to one of the least helpless of the officials.

When the taper and sealing-wax were brought to him, he went round the room and examined every drawer and cupboard, as he had done in the library; he locked them all, and carefully affixed his seal to every one.

Some of the servants were disposed to resent this conduct of Mr. Sparkles, even in the midst of their scared helplessness.

"It would have been time enough to have done all that in the morning," they said to each other. "Does he think we are thieves, that he goes and locks up everything. I shall hand him up the key of the plate-closet; perhaps he would like to put his seal there," the pale-faced butler murmured. But Mr. Sparkles did not care for the key of the plate-closet, and he did not affix his seal there.

He had just finished locking the last drawer near the door, when he was startled by the touch
of a hand laid on his arm. He turned round, and found himself face to face with the dead man's child.

She was lividly white; her eyes were fixed in a dull vacant stare. She did not utter a sound; but the dumb appealing agony of her look was far more eloquent with misery than any words could have been, and the sight of it thrilled the lawyer's every nerve. She staggered a few steps forward. Her eyes fell upon that still figure lying on the bed, and with a wild piercing cry that rang through the room, the unhappy girl threw herself upon the dead body of her father. Those who heard that keen of anguish will remember it to the last day of their lives.
CHAPTER XVI.

"Mr. Newcome," repeated the gaily-clad flunkey of Belle Grange.

It was dusk, as I have said: there was only one candle in the room, the candle which Clara's maid had just placed upon the table.

Mr. Newcome, Dr. Banques' future partner, was a complete stranger to Mrs. Silvester and her daughter. He felt greatly embarrassed as he stood for a minute or two in the doorway.

Algy's wife, silently fuming, made no effort to approach the young man. Clara went slowly towards him.

"You—have—brought some message from Dr. Banques," she said in a hesitating voice, "you——"

"The Doctor might have taken the trouble to come himself, I think," interrupted her mother, "I'm sure you've——"

"Dr. Banques was unable to come himself; I
regret to say I am the bearer of very sad tidings,” the young man said tremulously; “I have this moment come from Becklands, and——”

“There has been some accident at the mine, and the dinner party is put off, I suppose?” said Mrs. Silvester, peevishly. “It is always the way. Theodore is so morbid. A month ago he did exactly the same thing, all because a boy was crushed or something of the kind. These people should take more care. I dare say it is very unpleasant for them, but I really don’t see what good it will do them for us to go without our dinners. Don’t tell me anything about it,” she added, deprecating all the young Doctor’s attempts to speak. “Don’t give me any details, if you please. Excitement is very bad for me, as you ought to know. I am surprised Dr. Banques——”

“There has been no accident at the mine,” Mr. Newcome said, making himself heard at last; “your brother, Mr. Harding——”

“Has had one of his old attacks, I dare say,” said the affectionate sister. “Well, I am sorry to say it, but it is no secret, you know, if he will take——”

“Your brother is dead, madam!” said the
young man, disgusted with the woman's apathy and heartlessness.

"Dead!" shrieked Mrs. Silvester. "I wonder you dare startle me so; I am not to be excited, you know that very well."

"Dead! dead!" repeated Clara, mechanically.

"I don't believe it," cried her mother, "I saw him this morning, and he looked as well as ever. He can't be dead, he is only three years older than me; but perhaps he has met with some accident, and—"

"Mr. Harding has died from the rupture of a blood-vessel. It appears that he has long been suffering from disease of the heart—"

The young man was interrupted by a piercing shriek from Mrs. Silvester.

"And so have I—and so have I!" she screamed; "the complaint must be in our family; it has killed him, and it will kill me. There is no hope for me—none, none, none!" she cried, as she abandoned herself to the most violent hysterical emotion.

"I am afraid I have been very injudicious!" said Mr. Newcome, in some alarm, as he bent over the prostrate woman. "Dr. Banques did not give me to understand that—"
Clara's lip was curled disdainfully. It was wonderful how intolerant she was of heartlessness and selfishness in others. Even at that moment she could not disguise her contempt for her mother.

"You need be under no apprehension: mamma’s ailments are all imaginary. She fancies her own heart is affected, and it is only your allusion to the cause of my poor uncle’s death which has agitated her now. Of course," she continued, recollecting it was scarcely wise to indulge her satire at the expense of her mother in the presence of a perfect stranger—"Of course this sad news is a terrible shock for her. It is a cruel blow to me, I was greatly attached to my uncle," she added in a low, broken voice. As the light from the solitary candle fell upon her face, the young Doctor saw that it was as pale as death.

He was very sorry for her. "She suffers far more than this shrieking old brimstone does," he thought. Algy’s wife had not impressed him at all favourably. Nevertheless, he offered what restoratives he could, and did his best to calm her. Her cry was, however, still the same. "I shall die as Theodore has died. There is no hope for me—none, none, none." She was prevailed upon,
at length, to go to bed, and Clara was left alone with Mr. Newcome.

"Does—my cousin know the worst?" she asked, in husky hesitating tones.

"Yes," replied the young man gravely, "and the effect of the shock has been most disastrous. We had not time to break it to her properly. She is now lying perfectly insensible. Dr. Banques is seriously alarmed, and he is anxious you should go at once to Becklands. The poor young lady has only her governess and the servants with her. Madame is greatly excited and much distressed. She is almost helpless, and the servants are worse than useless. I have a carriage waiting, if you—"

"I cannot go to Becklands—I will not go," cried Clara, wildly. "No one can expect me to do so," she added more quietly. "No one can expect me to leave my mother whilst she is in this state."

"Of course not, of course not," the young Doctor said soothingly. He quite sympathised with the beautiful girl, so dignified in her grief, as he said afterwards.

"If papa were only at home!" Clara said. "He must have a telegram sent to him at once. I am so bewildered and confused. Would you be kind
enough to write a message to this address, and I will send it to the Telegraph Office at once?"

She handed him an envelope whereon Algy’s Paris address was written.

"He cannot be here before two days, I am afraid. It is most unfortunate that he should be from home at such a time. I cannot leave mamma until he arrives, and it distresses me so much that I can be of no assistance to my dear cousin," Clara said, with a heavy sigh.

"Let us hope that your mother will be more calm to-morrow morning," Mr. Newcome said, inwardly anathematising the "shrieking old brimstone."

"I scarcely know how to act," he added, after a short pause. "Dr. Banques was so very anxious some one should be with this poor young lady."

"Lady Plantagenet is very much attached to my cousin, and——"

"Lady Plantagenet is a confirmed invalid; she is quite out of the question."

"Surely there is some person in Farnorth who will undertake this common act of charity. I would go at once, but I cannot leave my mother," said Clara, her lips quivering.

"Mrs. Bland is a kind motherly woman," said
the young Doctor suddenly; "I will call and see if she will volunteer her services. Good evening, Miss Silvester. I shall hope to hear a better account of your mother to-morrow." And so saying he took his departure for the relict's abode, not altogether sorry of an excuse for securing the chance of speaking to pretty Lucy Bland. Young men are very selfish, to be sure.

The good widow was so dreadfully agitated when she was told of that sad tragedy at Becklands, so utterly afflicted and prostrated by the suddenness of the blow, that her would-be son-in-law quickly decided his errand, as far as she was concerned, was a bootless one, and so he returned to the house of mourning alone.

He found on his arrival there that the French-woman was behaving infinitely better than either he or Dr. Banques had expected. She had chained down her hysterical emotion, and was sitting, calmly watching, at the bedside of her beloved pupil. Zoé had been with great difficulty recovered from that fit of insensibility. She was sleeping now, under the influence of a strong soporific, administered by the Doctor.

"She is very young, and her constitution is as sound as a roach; I hope she will weather it, nay
I'm sure she will," he said; "grief seldom kills. Madame is behaving better than I thought she would. It is perhaps as well that Miss Silvester cannot come. The fewer people the poor child has about her the better. I've seen the coroner, Newcome, there will have to be a——" and the Doctor once more lowered his voice.

The helpless pallid servants did not go to bed that night, but they kept far away from the room where their dead master was lying. Hired watchers gaze on the marble repose of that handsome face. There are no sorrowful lines on those placid features now. The unhappy man, with his one crime linked to a hundred good deeds, is at peace at last. The weary spirit has been called home. The hired watchers speak softly in the presence of the majesty of death, and they are disposed to chide the loud bitter wailing of that other watcher who is not paid so much an hour for his faithful guardianship of the dead. The negro is lying on the ground, close to the bed which holds his beloved master, indulging the full agony of his grief. Threats and entreaties are alike useless in checking his convulsive sobs, and the hired watchers shrugged their shoulders impatiently. "It is so very disrespectful," they say.
There was great excitement in Farnorth when the sad news from Becklands was wafted through the town. Many persons had seen and spoken to Mr. Harding on that very morning, and he was to all appearance in his usual health. Farnorth could scarcely realise the awful fact of his death: it was quite startled, and a universal gloom prevailed. The master of Becklands had been most deservedly popular amongst all ranks of people. His great charities, his kindly courtesy of manner, his benevolent generous heart had endeared him to every one. There was only one person in the neighbourhood who spoke of him otherwise than tenderly; I need not mention that person's name, you know him very well.

"Ahem! sad thing, sir, very sad thing; but we must all come to it sooner or later," that person said, with the philosophy of robust health. "Money cannot do everything, sir. Harding's balance at the banker's could not save his life, you see. Comparatively a young man though—very odd his dying in that way, very odd indeed. They say, ahem! they say that he has killed himself with drinking. What do you think, sir?" But the person he addressed turned away in disgust, although he was a rival ironmaster.
Sympathy of the Ironmasters.

Yes, the ironmasters, one and all, regretted that sudden summoning away of the enterprising, liberal owner of the Weasle Mine; they regretted it sincerely. "He was a clever, intelligent man," they said. "There has been no one like him in this country for years; he taught us a good many useful lessons, and he was as honourable as the day. No underselling, no dirty tricks about the late owner of the Weasle, sir. I am truly sorry for that pretty little girl of his." The rival ironmasters might have rejoiced if water had drowned the workmen out of the drifts at the Weasle, they would not have been sorry had they heard of the appearance of a large body of rock in one of the best veins of ore there; but they were truly sorry to hear that the large-hearted master of that California was dead.

My Lady Plantagenet was much shocked when the intelligence of Mr. Harding's sudden death first reached her, and poor Miss Winifred shed many tears in private over his loss. The dead man had always treated this poor lady with courtesy and kindness, courtesy and kindness that were very rarely extended to her now, and so she mourned him with exceeding sorrow. His majesty of Foxcroft was at first a good deal startled and
subdued, but he very quickly rallied, and his cold, avaricious heart throbbed with almost wild delight, as his crafty brain grasped the advantages likely to accrue to him from the orphan position of his promised bride. The marriage settlements were not signed, there would no longer be any need for them. The little provençale was likely to be a better match than ever, and he inwardly blessed the maternal wisdom which had first suggested this marital speculation to him. Zoé would, of course, inherit all her father's wealth; but trustees would be appointed he rather feared. And who would these trustees be? Not difficult fellows to manage, he hoped. The marriage must be delayed for some time; but that was no great hardship; he should be able to enjoy his liberty a little longer. These were the thoughts which chased through Monseigneur's mind, as he sat down and wrote a letter of condolence to his betrothed. It was a perfect dirge of sentimental sympathy, and a fine piece of composition in its way; but I am afraid it was never seen by any other eyes than those of the writer. It was the foundation, or rather corner-stone, of that fabric of black-edged letters, with unbroken seals, which stood on a table in the bedroom of the unhappy orphan.
Three days have passed since Mr. Newcome called at Belle Grange. Three days have passed, and Clara Silvester has not yet been to Becklands. "Miss Silvester is quite ill, she feels her poor uncle's death dreadfully," Farnorth says, "and her mother is in a terrible way." Algy's daughter has written once to her father, and more than once to her young cousin. I cannot say what has been the fate of her Paris communication; but I know her tender epistles to the little heiress are gathered to that pile which the Baronet is daily, nay, almost hourly increasing.

The beams of the bright March sun cannot force an entrance into any of the rooms at Becklands. Ophthalmia and sudden cataract have fallen on the handsome stone building. A hushed quiet prevails within the house; but the servants are no longer pallid and helpless; they glide about in the semi-obscurity, and do not altogether dislike their enforced laziness. The housekeeper and her underlings survey and essay their mourning robes with dismal complacency. The duty of providing the outward semblances of woe had devolved upon the mistress of the salle, and she has performed it for herself and inferior sisters with a noble lavishness. Dainty reflections are served in the hall,
and though its inmates still avoid the closed room, it does not possess the horrors for them that it did. They discuss in whispers the "Crowner's quest," and talk of the grand funeral which is to take place on the morrow with unwholesome pride.

Zoé is lying helpless and almost insensible on her bed. How much the poor child has suffered God only knows. I have shown her heart to you in those days of her weakness, when it was torn with sentimental sorrow, but her grief is too sacred for my pen to treat of now. She is lying, as I have said, helpless and almost insensible. Madame, haggard and worn, gazes with tear-dimmed eyes on the wasted form of her little pupil. Dr. Banques has scarcely left his patient either night or day; he is very anxious about her. Lady Plantagenet has called at Becklands many times, but has not been permitted to enter the sick room. The slightest excitement must be avoided, the doctor says, or he will not answer for the consequences. Edward Sparkles has not quitted the house since that sad discovery in the library. The lawyer has made all the arrangements for the grim pageant, which the servants are discussing in the hall.

Stealthy figures have glided in and out of that
shunned room where the solemn presence is. Stealthy figures have carried there a hideous burden—black, and studded with a ghastly splendour. All the preparations for the next day's solemn ceremony are concluded.

Mr. Silvester is expected to arrive at Belle Grange this evening, our town says. His arrival is looked for with some anxiety. He has written to the landlord of the Crescent Hotel in High Street to engage rooms there for some friends who are to accompany him from France. Farnorth cannot understand why these friends are to be billeted at an Hotel. Giles is perambulating the streets and suggesting all manner of mysterious reasons, and Algy's appearance is looked forward to with some interest, even by those inhabitants of Farnorth whose grief for the loss of the master of Becklands is beyond suspicion.
CHAPTER XVII.

The domestics of the Crescent Hotel, in High Street, peered very eagerly forward when their master and mistress advanced to meet that party for whom Mr. Silvester had secured their best apartments. The party was a plural party, and consisted of a tall foreign-looking gentleman, a tall lady clad in deep mourning, and a short, stout, middle-aged female attendant. The lady's face was entirely concealed by a thick crape veil, which depended from her bonnet; the inquisitive servants could not distinguish one feature of her face. Mr. Silvester, who had accompanied his friends, went with them into the sitting-room he had engaged for them. He remained talking with the French gentleman for some little time, and then hurried off to the carriage which was waiting to convey him to Belle Grange.

It was late, very nearly midnight, indeed, when Algy reached his own home, but, late though it
was, his daughter was there to receive him. Her colour was heightened with excitement, and she looked brilliantly beautiful.

"Those fools at the station told me you had been ill, ma belle," Algy said, as he held her in his arms, and examined her face anxiously. "Confound the croaking ravens, they made me quite uncomfortable. 'Gad, I never saw you look better or handsomer in my life. I dare say you were a good deal startled when you heard of your uncle's death; I was myself, I must confess. One always is you know when a fellow goes off like a flash of lightening; it makes one think it may be one's own turn next. Poor Harding! I knew he was in a critical state, but I never thought I had seen the last of him. I was really quite cut up at first."

"I have felt my uncle's death very much indeed," said Clara, with a sigh, as she drew herself away from her father's encircling arm. "He had a very fine character, and I was extremely fond of him."

Algy stared at his daughter as he had done once before when she made a similar remark.

"By Jove, Clarry, you are beyond me," he cried, "I cannot make you out. Well, if you were so
extremely fond of him, I can only repeat you had a dooced queer way of showing your affection. I never pretended to be particularly attached to my late brother-in-law; he treated me with confounded insolence sometimes, but I was always sorry for him, and I should have been better contented if he had put on for a little while longer. But, after all, we must all die some time, Clarry,” he added, philosophically, “and it is as well perhaps that poor Harding has got his troubles over quietly. How did your mother take the news?”

“Mamma was violently agitated when she was told her brother had died from disease of the heart.”

“She thought she might one day pop off in the same sudden manner. Maria ails nothing,” said the candid husband, “but what she suffers from ill-temper, and 'gad, that’s a chronic complaint which nothing will cure. She went into hysterics, I’ll be bound. She used to give me the benefit of them once; how is she now?”

“She has been much better to-day. Dr. Banques has succeeded in allaying her alarm on her own account, and she bears the death of her brother with great resignation.”

“I don’t doubt that, Clarry,” said Algy; “I am
sorry to say, *ma fille*, your mother has very little more feeling than a rhinoceros. You have not told her anything, I suppose?"

"I scarcely thought it advisable to do so until after the funeral," replied his daughter.

"I wish it was over, Clarry, I wish it was well over," said Algy, as he gnawed at his moustache, restlessly. "I have carried out your directions, but I had some difficulty in persuading Denassie to come over with *her*. By Jove, you will be shocked when you see her. I have not made a suttee of her yet, but you won't see in a long day's march a more unsightly object."

"I am glad you did not bring her here," said Clara, with a slight shudder.

"That would never have done, *ma belle*. I have told Denassie nothing, and I don't want a rumour to creep out until after the funeral. You were quite right to keep your mother in the dark. If Harding has remembered us handsomely in his will, 'gad, the vulture shall go back to her cage, and Farnorth be not one bit the wiser. I swore I would keep poor Harding's secret, and I will. I hate anything mean or dishonourable, and I won't do it," said Algy, with the air of a Bayard.
"And if he has not remembered us handsomely in his will?" said Clara, eagerly.

"But he is certain to have done it," said the father a little impatiently; "you don't think so, or else you would never have advised me to bring Madam over with me; but I have not a doubt on this subject. The question is, to what extent will he have remembered us. I say again, if he has done the thing really handsomely, the vulture shall cross the channel again the day after to-morrow, and no one be a bit the wiser."

"You are prepared to act, if my doubts are verified?"

"Certainly. In that case all obligation between me and the dead man would be at an end. I should do my duty, ma fille," said Algy, with a very peculiar smile. "I should at once constitute myself the representative of justice, and advance the claims of that unfortunate, ill-used woman, the first and only legal wife of the late Theodore Baynes Harding, Esq.

"And if he should have died without making any will at all?" persisted his daughter, speaking still more eagerly.

"We need not waste time in providing for impossible contingencies, Clarry. A will was
made, witnessed, and signed, only a fortnight ago. I know that for a fact," replied the father.

"Dr. Banques has been anxious about Mademoiselle; he has attended her night and day. I——"

"Poor little girl!" broke in Algy, with some feeling. "By George, Clarry, I am sorry for her and no mistake. I do pity her from my heart."

"The heiress to many thousands a year, and the affianced bride of a handsome young baronet, is well deserving of your pity," said Clara, with some bitterness. The very mention of the poor bereaved child's name appeared to develop the latent evil in her cousin's nature.

"Well, there are extenuating circumstances, there's no denying that," assented Algy; "but it is a sad thing for her. She's only a slip of a girl, you know, very different to you, Clarry. 'Gad, I wonder how you would behave if I were placed under the sod; not that I have any intention of putting you to the proof, ma belle. Algernon Charles Silvester is good for the next twenty years, and perhaps a lustre or two beyond that. Good night, my beauty! By Jove, I shall be glad when the twenty-four hours have come around again," he added, as he took his leave.
The waiter who attended on Number 4, the sitting-room occupied by the foreign party, was quite incapable of attending to his duties, so much was he engrossed by gazing at the lady companion of the foreign gentleman, the friend of Mr. Silvester.

"I believe she's the frog-eater's mother," he said, in answer to the eager enquiries of his feminine assistants, "but she's not French. I heard her speaking English, and loud too. Mossoo is very attentive to her, but I never see sich a gashly looking woman, and can't she just —— " and the speaker went through a short pantomime. "I see her son stop her when she was filling her glass too often, and she give him such a look. The French gent is an old friend of the late Mr. Harding's, and he has come all this way to the funeral."

Farnorth very soon learnt that fact. Dr. Banques, who had met Mr. Silvester and his friends at the station, had cleared away the mystery in which the town had enveloped the coming strangers.

"I knew him directly, Newcome," the doctor said to his young colleague, as they were sipping their port wine on the morning of the funeral,
"I knew him directly, although I have only seen him twice, but he has a marked face, and I met him first on a special occasion. It was when I was attending poor little Miss Zoé, in conjunction with the celebrated Dr. Halley, a case of rosalia, you know, where, as I told you, the cuticular exfoliations were so extraordinary. I remember, Halley was quite struck by the resemblance that Frenchman bore to an old friend of his, and he mentioned the circumstance to poor Harding, who told us the gentleman was an ironmaster. I have forgotten his name. Did Mr. Silvester mention it? No. Just fancy, Newcome, his taking the trouble to come from France to be present on this occasion. There was no one more universally respected than the late master of Becklands. It is a very long time since we have had such a funeral in Farnorth as we shall see to-day. Sparkles has made all the arrangements, and I think they will do him credit. After you, Sir Mortimer," the doctor added, courteously, as he wrestled helplessly with his stiff black gloves.

"This is your carriage, if you please, gentlemen."

The speaker was a gaunt-looking man, whose physique and general bearing asserted his pro-
fession. The persons addressed were Sir Mortimer Plantagenet, and Algernon Charles Silvester, Esq. They were the chief mourners, and so occupied a prominent position in that day's pageant.

The faces of the chief mourners were carefully prepared for their rôle, and the broad-hemmed handkerchiefs they held in their hands gracefully suggested their sorrow.

All the shops were closed as the mournful procession passed through High Street. All the shops were closed, but every casement in the upper windows framed an eager, expectant face. The grim master of the ceremonies felt some inward satisfaction as he observed the sensation his nodding plumes, his flowing hat-bands, and his prancing black steeds created. Dr. Banques had spoken the truth: it was indeed a very long time since Farnorth had seen such a funeral as it saw that day. Dust had not been gathered to dust with so much solemn pomp and magnificence since the late Lady Mortimer Plantagenet, niece of the Duke of Overall, was carried to her last home.

All the county families had sent their carriages to swell the funeral train.

"It must be most gratifying to the relations of our late lamented friend to see how much he was
respected by all ranks of people. Most gratifying indeed,” Dr. Banques said to Edward Sparkles, who occupied a seat in the same carriage with him. “I never remember to have seen anything of the kind so well attended in the course of my professional experience.”

The lawyer paid very little attention to his chatty companion. Edward Sparkles was a real mourner at the funeral of his friend and patron; but it was not sorrow alone which kept him so grave and silent. Anxiety for the living mingled with his regret for the dead, and his thoughts wandered very frequently to the carefully-locked and sealed drawers in those two rooms at Becklands.

Mr. Silvester's foreign friend sat in the same carriage with Mr. Newcome, but as the Frenchman could speak very little English, and the Englishman less French, very few words passed between them.

More than an hour elapsed before the nodding plumes, the flowing scarves, and the black, prancing steeds reached the old parish church.

There was a supplementary train to his magnificent procession, of which the master of the ceremonies did not approve. There was nothing of
pomp or splendour about this appendage. It was clad in decent black raiment, but it had no flowing scarves, no broad-hemmed white handkerchiefs, no well-regulated professional grief pervading it. It sobbed aloud in a very unbecoming manner, and made an unsophisticated use of its knuckles. It did not keep step, but walked in a broken, disorderly fashion. It was composed of the principal workmen of the Weasle Mine, and was a grievous cross the person in the shiny sables was compelled to bear.

The last grand, solemn words are spoken; the narrow black tenement, with all its hideous splendour, is lowered into the deep trench; dust is consigned to dust, earth covers earth, and all is at length over.

The master of the ceremonies takes little or no interest in the return of his procession, and even the cross is no longer a burden to him. Some of the shops are open again in High Street as the carriages pass through from the churchyard. The broad-hemmed cambric handkerchiefs of the chief mourners are no longer on duty. Algy's heart is beating loud and fast, and Sir Mortimer Plantagenet's brain is very busy. The two men have
scarcely exchanged one word during the whole time they have been together, and now they have subsided into complete silence. Their thoughts are concentrated on the ceremony which will shortly take place—the ceremony of reading the will.

The French gentleman returned to his hotel immediately after the funeral. All the mourning guests dispersed to their different homes, with the exception of the white-haired pastor, the lawyer, the doctor, Sir Mortimer Plantagenet, and Algernon Charles Silvester. These gentlemen are assembled together in the library, and the lawyer has commenced his search for the will.

It was impossible for a search to be conducted with more care. One by one the drawers of the large secrétaire are opened; one by one the papers they contain are carefully examined by Edward Sparkles. The lawyer's face grows each moment paler as drawer after drawer is opened and searched—and yet the last will and testament is nowhere to be seen. Algy's heart is fluttering wildly, and he can scarcely control his emotion. Sir Mortimer is not nearly so much interested in the proceedings as either the lawyer or Clara's father. In any case, whether there is a will or not, he is perfectly secure. His betrothed will of
course inherit everything, and he is irritated with Edward Sparkles for the eagerness he evinces about the matter. "Interested motives, no doubt; his own name is down for a cool thousand or so," Monseigneur decides privately.

The last drawer in the secrétaire has been searched, the last paper opened, and no will has yet been found.

"I cannot understand it," the lawyer said, in an unsteady voice. "A will was executed a week before the death of Mr. Harding, as you know, gentlemen," he added, addressing himself to the white-haired pastor and the doctor. "You witnessed it. The will was in my possession until the very day before he died. He sent for it to append some codicil I believe. He had made a previous one, which he destroyed when——" The speaker hesitated a moment, and then continued hurriedly.

"Mr. Harding made a new will when some of the property of the late Don Miguel Quilea reverted to his grand-niece conditionally on her adopting the name of the testator. I expected to find the will in this secrétaire, because I know Mr. Harding kept most of his papers in it; however, he must have placed it elsewhere. I will continue my search if you please."
“I must just step up and see how my poor little patient is going on,” said Dr. Banques, who was, truth to say, very weary of being a witness, and somewhat hungry into the bargain. “She knows nothing of this day’s sad ceremony. I judged it better to keep her in ignorance, Sir Mortimer. A very susceptible organisation, and this has been a great trial to her; but she has a fine constitution, and she is young, very young, Sir Mortimer. There is no occasion for alarm.”

The Doctor’s words suggested an unpleasant train of thought to the Baronet. What was he to say and do when he first saw the dead man’s child? His majesty of Foxcroft did not like the exhibition of grief; he had a dread of what he called scenes. “It will be an awful bore,” he thought. “My mother must do the heavy work; she must take the provincial abroad. I cannot stand tears and gloomy faces, and I shall keep at a respectful distance until all that is over. I suppose I shall not be shackled for six months at least.” Sir Mortimer might have wandered in dreams for some time longer had he not been disturbed by the lawyer.

Edward Sparkles was greatly agitated, though he strove to speak calmly.
"My careful search has not yet been attended with success," he said. "We are now going into Mr. Harding's bedroom. I locked and sealed the wardrobes and drawers on the day of his death. I thought it a necessary precaution," the lawyer added, and he glanced keenly at Algy, whose face was purple and swollen with excitement. "Will you come with us, Sir Mortimer?"

No; Sir Mortimer would rather remain in the library until their return. He had no fancy to enter that room, where the solemn presence had so lately been.

"Are you alone, Sir Mortimer?" said the bustling doctor, who had evidently refreshed the inner man as well as performed his professional duty. "Where are the others? Febrile symptoms about my pretty patient; great prostration, Sir Mortimer, but no cause for alarm—none whatever, I assure you. No will yet? Very odd. I am afraid he must have destroyed it just before his death. The grate was quite littered with burnt papers I remember. I am afraid the deceased gentleman must have destroyed the will. But after all, I don't know why Sparkles worries himself so much about it. An only child: the succession is a very simple affair. She will have to
be a ward in Chancery until—until she passes into your guardianship, Sir Mortimer,” the doctor added, with a meaning smile.

The haughty Baronet did not deign to vouchsafe an answer to his companion, but wrapped himself very closely in his arrogant reserve.

“He’s a proud, conceited puppy,” thought the huffed doctor, “and not fit to be mentioned in the same day with his poor brother Frederick; but stuck up as he is, he need not think that any of us have forgotten who his maternal grandfather was.”

Our acquaintances will bring out the bodkin whenever we give ourselves airs, and I think they are quite right to do so.

“It’s the tailor’s blood about him which makes him so confoundedly touchy,” was the soothing mixture which our medical friend administered to himself for the snub he had received. “I will go and see what they are doing in the other room,” he said, after an interval of silence, and he rose to carry out his purpose.

He was met at the door of the library by the three men he was about to join. Edward Sparkles was very pale; Algy’s face more purple and swollen than ever; the white-haired pastor was calm.
and composed: he appeared to attach little importance to the fact that the rich man had died intestate.

"There is no will," the lawyer said, still striving to speak calmly. "He must have destroyed it just before his death."

"So I a few minutes ago remarked to Sir Mortimer," said Dr. Banques. "I suppose there is no further necessity for our presence, Sparkles. I have some patients to attend, and——"

Algy came forward—he staggered like a drunken man.

"You must remain for some time longer, if you please, gentlemen," he said, in a thick, hoarse voice. "I have a duty to perform."
CHAPTER XVIII.

The town clock is striking six, and Algernon Charles Silvester has not yet returned to his home. Four or five hours must have elapsed since that solemn procession, with all its grim magnificence, passed through High Street. It is growing dusk, and Clara is standing at the large window which faces the entrance gate to Belle Grange. She is anxiously waiting for her father; you can only distinguish the outline of her fine figure, draped in its heavy mourning; but you may detect nervous impatience in her every movement. She is alone, her mother has retired to her room. Mrs. Silvester no longer yields to hysteria; she can talk very calmly now of her brother's death. "After all, it was only what one could expect," she says. "Theodore would take that nasty laudanum; and then I must say, although he's dead and gone, and all that, I've seen him drink wine like I don't know what; so
very different to poor me—it would indeed be hard if I was to have anything serious the matter with me.” And this conviction gives her considerable satisfaction. She is a lay-figure in the hands of her maid at this moment. Miss Benton has made a sad misfit of that black dress which Algy’s wife has adopted for the first time this day.

“It has no more shape in it than a sack,” Mrs. Silvester moans. “And I do so hate this nasty crape, it looks as dismal as dismal—she might have put some jet trimming, and brightened it up a bit. I never could abide mourning, and I shall have to wear it for six months at least; and this dull white ribbon in my cap is so trying—it makes me look as yellow as anything. Take in another inch at the waist, Watkins. Miss Benton must have been wrong in her head when she took my measure; but it’s always the way with country dressmakers. When I think of the dresses I had from Paris when poor papa was alive. Oh! dear me, if he was only alive, and could see me now,” &c., &c., &c.

The town clock has chimed another half-hour. Clara has left her post at the large window—the shutters are close—the room brilliantly lighted.
You can see more than the outline of that fine figure now—you can see the face in all its glorious beauty. Algy's daughter is lying back in her chair; she holds a book in her hand, but she has not read one line of its open page. Her movements are as restless as ever; a bright crimson spot burns on each cheek, and her eyes shine like stars.

The door-bell is rung violently; the beautiful girl knows very well who has given that impatient summons; she rises hastily, but the next moment she sinks back again in her chair. The door is flung violently open, and Algy enters; he is delirious with excitement, he reels as he walks. You would pronounce him to be mad with drink, and yet not one drop of wine has passed his lips. He approaches his daughter, and strives to speak; but the words will not come from his parched and fevered lips.

"How late you are," said Clara quietly, scarcely glancing at her father, and utterly ignoring his wild excited manner. "What has detained you so long?"

"No Will!" cried Algy, forcing his tongue to obedience at last. "No Will!" he repeated, almost in a shout. "Can you realise it Clarry? No
will, I tell you. Everything is ours. Do you hear me, Clarry?"

Not a sound, not a movement from the beautiful woman.

"Are you paralysed, Clarry? Why don't you speak? There is no will, I tell you—not a screech of paper worth a rush amongst the whole litter; and the lawyer searched diligently for more than two hours. There is no will, and everything is ours. Do you hear me, ma fille? Why don't you speak?" Algy cried impatiently.

"You haven't given me time. You do not make any allowance for the surprise. You told me you were certain there had been a will made, and signed, only a fortnight ago."

"And so there was, my beauty! Banques and the parson both witnessed it. Harding must have destroyed it just before he died."

"And there was no duplicate to that will, which—my uncle—must have destroyed just before he died?" enquired Clara, in a low hesitating voice.

"Not a bit of one. You never saw a man so like a ghost as Sparkles was when the last drawer was opened, and nothing turned up. The dead man had only taken the lawyer into his confidence to a certain extent; he had been told
there was a screw loose about Missy's birth, and that was why he locked and sealed up everything before Harding's body was cold, as Banques tells me he did; but he knew no more about our interesting friend at the Crescent than Denassie does until I enlightened him. It was as good as a play, *ma fille*, to see all the faces in the library when I commenced my little story. The Baronet was so taken aback, I thought he would have fainted. He means to slip his collar, Clarry, and that in double-quick time."

"Very probably," said his daughter calmly.

"I'm confoundedly sorry for Missy, I must say," said Algy; and the faint light from within spread its feeble rays over his face. "I am very sorry for the little girl—it is not her own fault, you know, and its devilish hard lines for her."

"Your sorrow will prevent your prosecuting your claims of course," said Clara, sarcastically. All the natural horror and regret she had appeared to feel when first told of her uncle's death, was gone. Algy's daughter was herself again.

"No, no, I don't mean that," said Algy. "I don't mean to forego my claims—that would be mad indeed—but I am sorry for the little filly; and I tell you what, Clarry, she'll find me a
liberal uncle. I'll double the five thousand she has inherited from the Spaniard; and more than that too, if things go on nice and quietly."

"You speak as if you were already the man in possession," said Clara with a smile. "You will not be able to carry out your generous intentions for some time yet, I am afraid."

"I don't know that, Clarry. I shall put the affairs into the hands of the lawyers at once. Our case is a very strong one, ma fille; but Sparkles will make a stand for Missy—he means mischief, ma fille. We shall have a sharp war, but a short one it must be."

"Mademoiselle would resign her claims at once if she knew anything about this," said Clara thoughtfully. "She would never permit her father's name to be dragged into a Court of Justice in connection with——"

"Do you really think so, Clarry?" cried Algy earnestly. "Do you really think Missy would do anything so confoundedly Quixotic? It's more than likely—she's a simple piece of goods—and 'gad! after all, it would be her best policy; for I would do very handsomely by her, and it would save a lot of expense. I tell you what, ma fille; she must be told this story somehow or other.
Sparkles won't do it, he said as much, and Banques says it would be the death of her if she heard it now; but that's all humbug, you know. I don't believe a word of it. She ought to know it, Clarry; it's all stuff and nonsense; she will have to be told some time, and the sooner it's over the better; it is a duty that must be done."

"Will you undertake this duty?" demanded Clara.

"No, I will not," replied Algy shortly.

Even the cruel uncle of the pretty babes who perished in the wood, employed others to do his assassin work, you know.

"I will not do anything of the kind," repeated Algy stoutly. "Will you?"

"I have a decided objection to the office; but I can name a delegate," replied Clara.

"Name, name," cried the father.

"Mamma would perform this duty very efficiently, and not altogether dislike it either," replied Clara.

"By Jove! I believe you are right, Clarry. Your mother, as I've said before, has very little more feeling than a rhinoceros. She's the one for the office, and she may set about it as soon as she likes. She must be told everything this very
night, *ma fille*. 'Gad! what a row she will make? Your mother is not like you, Clarry—you've taken this business mighty quietly I must say."

Quietly! he would not have said so had he placed his hand on her throbbing side.

"How Maria will prose away about this second fortune she has brought me!" continued Algy. "A precious lot *she* has done in the matter. Why, she would never have known her brother was alive if I had not seen that paragraph in the paper. We've done everything, Clarry, and 'gad, we're entitled to the plunder. What a stud of horses I will have!" he cried excitedly, "and I'll take a house in town, and you shall have your box at the Opera, *ma belle*, and——"

"Gently, gently, Alnaschar," interrupted Clara, gaily, "your wares are brittle, you must remember."

"Not a bit of it," said Algy; "I'll give you very long odds that we are settled at Becklands three months from this very day, aye, and before that, if Missy yields without a struggle. By Jove, if she does, I won't be particular as far as a few thousands go, I'll——"

"Your liberality will never be taxed," interposed his daughter. "If her babyship admits
your claims, she will not accept one farthing from you, and so you may make your mind easy on that subject."

"Do you think so?" said Algy, very lugubriously. "I hope she won't take stupid, Clarry. I should be so much easier in my mind now, if things could be settled nicely and comfortably. I am so sorry for the little girl; there's not much in her, but she's harmless, and she was always very civil to me. It is dooced hard lines for her."

"You had much better allow her to remain in undisturbed possession of her wealth and position," said Clara, mockingly. "Refrain from prosecuting your claims; be generous and noble; Made-moiselle will no doubt pay you as handsomely for your disinterestedness as you just now proposed to reward her. Pshaw! papa, do not talk fâde sentiment—it does not suit you. Dinner has been waiting for the last half-hour—will you give me your arm?"

"I can't stay for any dinner, Clarry; I must be off to Denassie now. He will have to make a deposition before witnesses, and he is in a hurry to be home again. The vulture remains, of course. You must make up your mind to receive her tonight, ma fille."
"Must she really come here?" said Clara, with a very perceptible shudder.

"There is no help for it, Clarry. She must come. She can have her own rooms and her own attendant, but here she must be, until she departs for the long road. She will astonish you a little, I expect. By George, whenever I look at her, I'm not a bit surprised that Harding kept her fast up in her cage. I would have done the same myself," said Algy, candidly.

"The self-constituted champion of that unfortunate lady, the first and only legal wife of the late Theodore Baynes Harding, Esq., must not utter such shocking sentiments," said Clara, smiling.

"And now I suppose our conference is at an end; we should have been liable to interruption had not mamma's attention been fortunately engrossed with her mourning, which she does not consider so becoming as it might be."

"Now only just fancy, Clarry; what must your mother's heart be made of?" said Algy, with considerable disgust. "Here, on the very day, that her only brother has been carried to his grave, she can actually occupy herself with her trumpery gowns. I hate such heartlessness, and I cannot understand it."
I dare say he could not: Algy had such very fine feelings.

"I must lose no more time, though," he added, after indulging in this diatribe against his wife. "I wonder what Farnorth is saying about this affair. You may depend upon it, Banques has circulated this story pretty freely. Prepare your mother's mind to receive her sister-in-law. Au revoir, ma belle."

Farnorth is turning up the whites of its eyes, and clasping its hands in horror. The principal portion of the town believes this sad story. We have a facile faculty of acceptance when evil reports against our neighbours are the gifts offered, and even if we would blind ourselves to the mote which is in our brother's eye, friends and acquaintances hand us their spectacles of double magnifying power, and compel us to see. Alas, for the uncertainty of public opinion and popular favour! Only yesterday the tide knew no ebb, but flowed perpetually in praise of the late master of Becklands. Now it is dashing its fierce waves against his grave. Giles Houndly, Esq., has not enjoyed himself so thoroughly for many years. "I always said there was something uncommonly mysterious.
about Harding,” he says, “but hang me, sir, if ever I expected anything like this. Farnorth has had a valuable acquisition to its society. We have been entertaining a felon, sir, at our houses.” [The master of Becklands had never seen the interior of Gothic Hall, though the owner of that mansion had greedily devoured many of the poor deceased gentleman’s good dinners.]

“A felon, sir, a man who had not only committed that capital offence, bigamy, but had also incarcerated an unfortunate lady—incarcerated, sir, a perfectly sane woman in a lunatic asylum for more than twenty-five years! I am told her appearance is something quite heartrending; they say, ahem! that she must have been systematically starved and beaten. It is monstrous, sir, and the excuse offered for this outrageous conduct—the only excuse offered for him by his best friends is, that the poor lady was addicted to drinking! Was the late Mr. Harding such a very temperate man, sir? Ahem! I have seen him take more wine than would have intoxicated two men, and if the stimulant had no outward effect on him, does that alter the fact of his intemperance, sir? And this is the man that Farnorth delighted to honour. This man, this felon, sir, was one of our magis-
trates; his name ostentatiously headed our public charities, and yesterday all our shops were closed, forsooth, out of respect for his memory. He was deserving of this mark of respect, sir—he was indeed,” Giles says sarcastically, as he stamps his stick on the ground.

“The tailor’s daughter has made a nice mess of it,” he continues, with renewed vigour. “She has slaved and worked for some purpose. No chance of Miss Zoé being mistress of Plantagenet Park now; the Baronet will have to look somewhere else if he wishes to get out of the clutches of the Jews, sir, and Miss Zoé will have to fall back upon the red-whiskered soldier. No wonder to me now, Harding encouraged his visits, sir. A very equal match for his daughter; no need to quarrel about pedigree there, sir.” And the most odious of our natives walked away, to shed his venom elsewhere.

There was no one in Farnorth so bitterly vindictive against the dead man as the master of Gothic Hall. Still, as I have said, the greater part of the town was clasping its hands in horror, and the greatest sympathy was extended to that unfortunate lady, the first and only legal wife of the late Mr. Harding, deprived of her liberty for five-and-twenty years! It was certainly very dreadful:
nothing could justify such conduct—nothing; and then Farnorth discussed the appearance of the ill-used lady. Mrs. Bland had seen her, and could not find words to describe her. "Her skin is just like parchment," the relict said, "and it is drawn so tightly over her face, you can see every bone; her eyes are quite starting out of her head. I don't want to say anything against poor Mr. Harding, so kind as he always was to me, so liberal too; but this poor lady does look as if she had not had enough to eat. Perhaps you know she might not like the French dishes. Good English cooking may bring her round, and cod liver oil and Iceland moss. I got some quite cheap the other day, and I make Lucy take some every morning. They tell me at the Crescent that they were very glad when Mrs. Harding, as I suppose we must call her, went away, she was so noisy. She drinks awfully yet, I believe, unless she is strictly watched; and, although I don't mean to say that justified her husband's conduct, still it must have been very disagreeable for him, and I cannot help pitying him, whatever people may say; and my heart aches for poor Miss Zoë," the widow added, drifting helplessly into tears, as she thought of the bereaved orphan.
Indeed, all Farnorth pities that unhappy child. If the waves of their indignation dash fiercely against the dead man's grave, the tide of their sorrow flows with perpetual sympathy for his innocent little girl.

She is so utterly desolate, so unconscious in her desolation of the new misery already sown for her, that chivalrous sparks are kindled in the breasts of some of our young paladins, who constitute themselves her champions, and do battle manfully for her with the old dragon of Gothic Hall.

Sir Mortimer Plantagenet is not one of these valiant knights. Algy had spoken the truth when he said the Baronet was dreadfully agitated when he was first told that miserable history which is convulsing the whole of Farnorth. It was assuredly a blow to Monseigneur for some little time, but he is quite reconciled to it now. If this story be true, if Algernon Charles Silvester substantiates his claims, who will then be the heiress of Becklands? Who, indeed? His majesty's heart flutters with something more than vanity as a glorious vision rises before him. Alas for the mountain heath, whose pure and simple charms have been so lauded by the worshipping Baronet! The pretty flower is withering, and
well-nigh dying now, and not one solitary ray from that gorgeous sun which has shone so laboriously for so many months will ever reach the fading plant again.

There is still some womanly feeling beating beneath that worldly encrustation which surrounds the heart of Lady Mortimer Plantagenet. She weeps bitterly when she is told of that terrible storm which threatens to shipwreck for ever the fortune and prospects of the little girl she has so eagerly desired to claim as her daughter. The glorious vision which more than consoles the son, brings with it nothing of consolation for the mother. Sir Mortimer may possibly still call the heiress of Becklands his wife, but it will not be the pretty child whose naïve grace has so attracted the woman of the world; and so her ladyship bewails the failure of her hopes, and refuses to be comforted.

No more letters from Plantagenet Park arrive to swell that unopened pile on the table in the sick girl's chamber, and it is circulated throughout Farnorth that Sir Mortimer has accompanied his mother to Harrogate.
DR. BANQUES is gazing with great interest at his little patient. Zoé has left her bed, and is lying very weak and helpless in an easy chair. Grief has made a sad change in her pretty face, and there is a wan, hopeless look in her eyes which is very piteous to see. She holds an open letter in her slender fingers, and this letter attracts the Doctor's attention.

"Ah! what is this?" he says, "a letter? that is against rules, Miss Zoé. I said, no letters, Madame," he adds, in the loud voice which Britons usually adopt to foreigners.

"It is from Mees Marie Snowe," the Frenchwoman answers eagerly. "My petite has always so much of pleasure to receive——"

"Tout droit, tout droit, Madame," interrupts the good Doctor, Frenchifying the English colloquialism, to his entire satisfaction. "I wish to the Lord, Mary Snowe was here," he adds, in a low tone.
A light flickers for a moment over Zoé's face—a light which is not lost upon the observant Galen.

"You would like to see your old friend, my dear?" he says—he is very kind and fatherly in his manner to his little patient, indeed his heart bleeds for the desolate child—"you would like to see Miss Mary Snowe, my dear?"

An eager "Yes" comes from the pale lips.

"You shall see her, my dear; I will write to her this very day. She will do you far more good than all my physic," the doctor says candidly.

"I am sure you are fatigued, Madame," he continues, once more raising his voice for the benefit of the Parisian; "you are an excellent nurse, but you must be nearly worn out. I shall have you on my hands as a patient, if I don't provide some assistant for you, and I was saying to Miss Zoé that it would be as well perhaps to send for Miss Mary Snowe."

"Send for Mees Marie Snowe!" Madame cries, as the indignant tears rise in her eyes.

"Only to help you, you understand," says the Doctor, deprecatingly; "only to prevent your being quite worn out; but if you have any objection, you know—shall I send for her, or not, Madame?"
“If you will,” the Parisian answers, with a heavy sigh.

Perhaps she never gave so strong a proof of her affection for her pupil, as when she uttered those three words. Zoé raised the poor woman’s hand to her lips, and Madame smothered the jealous pang that clutched her heart, and was consoled.

“We shall soon have the roses blooming here again,” the Doctor says cheerily, as he touches Zoé’s pale cheek; “Miss Mary Snowe will do you a world of good; she is the very companion to have at such a time. If ever there was an angel on this earth, that angel is Mary Snowe. I hear she has recovered her health: she would have got well just as soon if she had remained here; it was nothing in the world but worry about that sad affair. I never would have suspected Horace Snowe—Pain in the left side, my dear? a little nervous fluttering—take a teaspoonful of sal volatile mixed with water whenever you feel it—it is nothing, my dear, just nothing at all. But as I was saying, Mary Snowe has recovered her health. She was perfectly satisfied with my treatment, but Miss Alathea, who is altogether a different person, was not, and so they were fifty pound out of pocket, for that was the sum paid to the London
doctor they called in—a solemn humbug, made up of white choker and gold repeater, my dear. Mary Snowe was on the road to recovery when he was summoned, but, of course, he will get the credit of her cure; it is always the way with us poor country practitioners. But Miss Alathea was the one to blame—Miss Mary had nothing whatever to do with it. The blue-stockling is a very odd person—rather flighty, you know."

Doubt of his professional skill was the one infidelity the good Doctor could never forgive.

"I will call again this evening. Good day, my dear. "Bong jour, Madame; mind, no company, not a single visitor, you understand," he adds, with a warning look as he bustles out of the room.

It is more than a week since the funeral now, but not one breath of the tempest agitating Farnorth has reached the room which Zoé and her governess have tenanted for so many weary days and restless nights. The slightest excitement of any kind must be avoided, the Doctor has reiterated. His patient must read no letters, see no visitors, and his orders have been rigorously obeyed. Indeed the poor child has evinced not the slightest interest about that pile of unopened epistles which is now lying on the table
by her side. She has just glanced at their superscription, and that is all. She knows the different handwritings very well. But when that letter which she holds so tenderly arrived this morning, Madame did not place it on the neglected heap; she gave it to her beloved pupil, and if the Frenchwoman suffered a little as she did so, she was rewarded by the sight of the first faint smile which had flitted over her darling's face since that terrible day which had made her fatherless.

"Madame, Madame, it is forbidden to enter. I assure you it is forbidden. I conjure you to retire. The doctor has said that——"

These words were spoken loud enough to reach the ears of the sick girl, and her patient nurse Annette, Zoe's maid, was evidently endeavouring to prevent the entrance of some person.

"I conjure you to retire, Madame," the soubrette repeated, in the most entreating tones.

"Don't be insolent. Not allowed to see my own niece, indeed!" said a peevish and indignant voice, which Zoe and her governess knew only too well.

"But, Madame, the doctor has said——" remonstrated poor Annette.
The Parisian muttered something very uncomplimentary, and rose hastily. She rushed towards the door. She was too late; Mrs. Silvester, rustling in the thickest of silks, was already in the room.

"How are you to-day, my dear?" Algy's wife said, as she advanced forward with a noise and bustle that was torture to the poor invalid's racked nerves. "You look much better than I expected to see, from what your fussy maid said. I was not going to be denied any longer. I wanted very much to see with my own eyes how you were going on; and I have a dooty to perform which must be done. Of course, it is a dreadful thing to be left an orphan, as I have reason to know," she whimpered, as her own woes presented themselves to her ever ready sympathy; "but it is no worse for you than it is for any one else; and really, you know, it is wicked to give way, as you have done, particularly now when you are called upon to make an effort."

Poor Zoé looked imploringly at her father's sister; yes, she was her dear, dear father's only sister, and the child rose feebly and placed her thin, worn hand in the selfish woman's palm.

"You must not agitate me," Algy's wife cried.
"You must not agitate me, I can't bear it, you know, it is most dangerous for me. Sit down, pray, I have a great deal to say to you, and it is my dooty to say it. We are all very sorry for you, and Mr. Silvester intends to provide very handsomely for you, and he says you can stay here if you like, and Clara hopes you will, but I don't see myself that it would do. Society will make these distinctions, and society is quite right; it does not do. I said the same thing myself about Mr. Snowe, and he was no more to blame than you are."

Zoe's eyes were fixed with a dull, blank stare on her aunt.

"The innocent must suffer for the guilty," the pitiless woman continued; "the Bible tells us so. Of course, I can't speak about your father as Farnorth does; he was my own flesh and blood, I shall never forget that; but you know it was a very wicked thing to do—taking your mother in too, who, I dare say, was a very respectable person, and marrying her when his first wife was living, and kept in a madhouse although she was perfectly sane. I don't mean to say I care much for my sister-in-law, it's not likely; but——"

How much longer Mrs. Silvester would have
pursued her merciless "dooty" will never now be known. She was brought to a dead halt.

"Murderess! behold what you have done. She is dead!" said Madame, in a hoarse whisper terrible to hear.

Algy’s wife shuddered as the sibilant words fell upon her ear.

Zoé was lying back without sense or motion; her eyes were open, there was a dull haze over them.

"She has only fainted," whined Mrs. Silvester; "if you throw some water over her she will soon come round again. You have frightened me so, my heart is beating like I don’t know what."

"Sortez!" thundered the Frenchwoman, whose eyes had a dangerous light in them. "Sortez à l’instant!"

Mrs. Silvester hesitated. She had much better have left the room at once. Madame swooped upon her as a hawk does on its prey. She poured over her a deluge of sibilant words; powerful Gallic phrases, which it was as well the recipient did not understand. She clutched the massive shoulder of Algy’s wife and dragged her from her chair; out of the room, down the stairs, through the hall, out of the front door, the
pulpy, selfish mass was hurried along, and finally dismissed, with more strong words hissed through the firmly set teeth of her implacable conductor.

Annette was weeping bitterly over the inanimate form of her young mistress, when Madame, panting with her exertions, returned to the room. The passion which had sustained the Frenchwoman gave way at the sight of the corpse-like figure, and the hysterical emotion which she had chained down for so many days and nights broke its bonds at last. Her shrieks rang through the house.

The startled servants rushed to the room, but fled away in helpless despair, as their eyes fell on the rigid limbs and livid face of the unhappy orphan. The negro alone retained some presence of mind, and he flew rather than ran to summon Dr. Banques. The good doctor had just seated himself down to his luncheon; he had worked hard, and he was very hungry. The mutton chop was hot, and yielded a pleasant aroma; the potatoes were in perfection. The doctor had helped himself and his guest Mr. Newcome to a fair proportion, and was about to commence the agreeable manipulation of his knife and fork.

"A servant from Becklands, sir; Miss Harding—"
(Farnorth has not yet reconciled itself to Zoë's new name, alas, too truly her own now.)—"Miss Harding is not so well, sir."

"Pshaw!" cried the hungry doctor, impatiently. "Some freak of the Frenchwoman's; it is only two hours since I saw her, and she was going on as well as one could possibly expect under the circumstances. I must have my luncheon, and that's all about it. Tell the man I'll be over in half an hour."

"I will go, doctor," said Mr. Newcome, rising suddenly; "the poor girl has no one with her but the Frenchwoman. I will go at once—I may comfort Madame, if I can do no other good," he added modestly.

"Say I'll be there directly, Newcome," said the doctor, whose conscience was waging war with his appetite. "If I thought there was anything serious the matter, I would go at once."

There was something very serious the matter, as the young doctor found when he entered the sick room. Madame was quite calm; she was seated in stony despair by the side of her pupil.

Zoë's eyes were still fixed in that awful glassy stare; her hands clenched; her face lividly pale.
"Good God!" cried the young man. "What is the cause of this? how long has she——"

"She is dead," said the Frenchwoman drearily; "her aunt has killed her."

"Has Mrs. Silvester been here? How could you think of admitting her?" cried Mr. Newcome. Madame scarcely seemed to comprehend the young man's words. She looked gloomily at him and repeated hoarsely:

"She is dead; her aunt has killed her."

"I dare say the old brimstone forced herself into the room," the young doctor muttered, as he inwardly consigned Algy's wife to a very warm destination. "She has told the poor child everything, no doubt, and the shock has produced this."

He tried every means to restore the stricken girl, but it was all in vain. She was lying in the same state when Dr. Banques arrived.

The worthy man's face lengthened considerably at the sight of the motionless figure, and his conscience reproached him not a little when he remembered how he had lingered over the succulent chops and the mealy potatoes.

"She has had some frightful shock," he said, "She has been——"
“Mrs. Silvester forced an entrance into the room as far as I can make out from what Madame says, and she must——”

“————————” broke in Dr. Banques, emphatically.

Farnorth is disposed to be very emphatic in its language when excited, and the Doctor's language was a great deal too emphatic for my pen to chronicle.

The two men had not been idle whilst this conversation was going on between them. They had busied themselves with applying all kinds of restoratives to poor Zoé.

“This state of coma is a precursor to brain fever,” said Dr. Banques. “I tell you what, Newcome, I don’t like the responsibility of this case. I will telegraph for Halley; I have his address.”

Mr. Newcome nodded approvingly.

“And, at the same time, I will send a telegram to Miss Mary Snowe,” he continued. “Madame is worn out with watching and anxiety. She will be of no more use than the fifth wheel of a coach.”

And so telegrams were sent to London and Devonshire.

When Farnorth heard that the orphan girl
was lying at the very brink of death, when it heard also who it was had dragged her thus to the edge of the grave, Farnorth was very much excited. Algy's wife was incontinently pilloried and savagely pelted. The tide of public opinion changed; it no longer dashed its fierce waves against the dead man's narrow home, but raised its angry crest and threatened destruction to the inmates of Belle Grange.

Doubts were now thrown on that tale which the town and neighbourhood have been feeding on for so many days; indeed, there was one party in Farnorth, composed of those paladins who had enlisted from the first under the young orphan's standard, who not only threw doubts on the story, but who openly protested that they disbelieved it altogether. This infidel party was headed by young Newcome and pretty Lucy Bland. Poor Lucy had almost wept her beauty away during the last fortnight, and she was one of the most devoted partisans of the desolate child at Becklands. Even those persons who still believed in Algy's assertions did not now condemn the unhappy owner of the Weasle as they had done at first. He was no longer judged with Draco-like severity. Extenuating circumstances were found
for him. He had been guilty of bigamy certainly, but all that nonsense about incarcerating a sane woman was worth just nothing, you know. That unfortunate woman, the widow of the late Theodore Baynes Harding, Esq., had utterly destroyed her prestige. She had conducted herself in a most disreputable manner since she had been domesticated at Belle Grange. Servants will talk, and servants had talked. Mrs. Harding was not only mad, but dangerous, Farnorth said, and the sooner she returned to her old home the better. Dr. Denassie had spoken in the highest terms of the late gentleman's liberality; his mad wife had been surrounded with every luxury, and so there was only the stain of bigamy to be wiped away. It was an ugly stain, certainly, but, ugly as it was, it did not now so completely blacken the memory of Zoë's father as it had done ten days ago. The great charities, the tender kindness, the courtesy of bearing, the simple unpretentious manner of the dead man, were remembered again. If he had sinned, he had also suffered, Farnorth said, and it was unanimously decided that the Silvester dynasty would be a sorry substitute for the old régime at Becklands.

That train to which I have referred as supple-
menting the funeral which passed through High Street ten days ago, is in a great state of agitation and excitement. If the orphan girl dies, as it is feared she will, I cannot answer for the safety of the cadet of a noble family. The miners are furiously incensed against him. They bewail the loss of their late master in the most unsophisticated manner. The evil reports which are circulated against him, have no effect on these red-ochred aborigines. If the master of the Weasle had chosen to have as many wives as the prophet of the Salt Lake, the polygamous fact would not have prejudiced him one iota in the eyes of these undisciplined savages; and with regard to that scandal about the madhouse, I think there were several Benedict amongst the moles who would not have been at all sorry to have secured a similar calm retreat for their noisy helpmates.

"Your mother has made a nice mess of it," Algy said to his daughter. (Mrs. Silvester's husband is a worthy descendant of our common father.) "She has made a nice mess of it. 'Gad, if this poor little girl dies, we shall be mobbed for a certainty. I have as much pluck as most men"—(to give him his due, he had)—"but I
ran for my life to-day; and, by Jove, if Missy dies——"

"She will not die," answered Clara impatiently. "Don't you know they have sent for her saintly friend?"

"What, the methodistical party? Banques says that nephew of hers—the red-coat, you know—has written to entreat him to send him accounts about Missy."

A dark shade fell over the face of Algy's daughter, but she did not speak a word.

"I am glad she is going to have some one with her besides old Parlez-vous," continued Algy. "Poor little Missy. I tell you what, Clarry, I could never hold up my head again if she were to die."

"She will not die," repeated Clara, almost fiercely. "The name of Snowe would rescue her babyship from the very jaws of death," she added bitterly.

"I hope it may. But the town speaks very badly of her case; and if anything does happen, 'gad, Madam, you will have killed her," Algy said savagely, addressing himself to his wife, who had just entered the room.

"It was you who told me to do it," remon-
strated Mrs. Silvester, "and I only did my dooty after all. And I'm sure the shameful way I was treated by that horrid Frenchwoman I shall never forget or forgive. My poor arm is as black, as black," she moaned. "I don't believe there is so much the matter with Zoé. I broke it all to her as kindly and as carefully as I could. She had no need to make such a fuss about it. I told her she should never want for anything; and as to her being an orphan, she is no worse off than I am. When poor papa died I——"

"What is that?" cried Algy suddenly, as some shrill screams resounded through the house. "'Gad, she's in one of her tantrums again."

The discordant music proceeded from the room occupied by the unfortunate and ill-used lady.

"By Jove! the vulture shall go back again to her cage the very moment this affair is settled," said the protector of that ill-omened bird, with some energy. "'Gad, there she goes again."

The vulture has not a pleasant note, and the ménage at Belle Grange is not improved by her presence.
CHAPTER XX.

Travel-stained, weary, and very, very anxious, Mary Snowe has at length reached the end of her journey. She knows everything now. She has been told of the sudden hurricane which has swept over the grave of the dead man, and utterly prostrated his child. Mrs. Bland has been Mary's travelling companion for the last two hours, and as you know the garrulous widow, you will easily believe she has not left much to be revealed.

"Every person in Farnorth is utterly disgusted with Mrs. Silvester," the relict said as she concluded her long story. "Only think of her forcing her way into the poor child's room, and telling her everything. It was little short of murder, and Madame told her so; indeed the Frenchwoman was very violent with her, and I really don't wonder. Mrs. Silvester showed me her arm: it was certainly black, but I did not pity her a bit; and, my dear, the servants do tell such tales about
this Mrs. Harding, as some people still persist in calling her—she is as mad as a March hare, and will have to go back to the asylum, for not a servant will stay at Belle Grange if she remains. And then Sir Mortimer,” continued Mrs. Bland, wandering away in her usual fashion; “he means to jilt poor Miss Zoé—I am quite sure of it; but, indeed, what could one expect from Nelly Brown’s son? Good gracious!” she cried suddenly, “what a very rude woman; she stopped and stared at me just now when I mentioned the name of Nelly Brown, and look, she has fixed her eyes on you at this moment. There she is, dressed in black.”

The person who had attracted Mrs. Bland had nothing very remarkable about her. She was tall and slight, and dressed in decent mourning. She seemed as if she might have only lately landed from a long sea voyage, for her face was much sun-burnt and weather-stained. Heavy braids of black hair, which had never grown on the head they adorned, harshly outlined her forehead. She was hurrying forward to enter the train which Mary and her talkative companion had just quitted. As she passed these ladies she again fixed her large dark eyes on the widow and Mary Snowe, and although she was evidently pressed
for time, she stopped a moment or two to ask some questions of the porter who was following with her luggage.

"I wonder who she is?" said Mrs. Bland. "Somehow her face seems familiar to me, and—ah! here is Dr. Banques. How is our dear little friend?"

The good Doctor welcomed Mary Snowe with great eagerness, but he shook his head very gravely in answer to the widow's question.

"The carriage is here, my dear Miss Snowe," he said. "We must lose no time. Brain fever has supervened, as I apprehended it would do. The poor little girl is quite delirious. Halley has been with her for the last three or four hours. A very clever man Dr. Halley is, Miss Snowe: his view of the case exactly coincides with my own. I am so very glad you are come. The Frenchwoman has broken down, poor soul. She has really done wonders, has Madame; but this last blow has been too much for her, and she is downright ill. Give the horses the whip, Jarvis," he added, as he seated himself in the carriage opposite his fair-faced companion.

Mary's powers of self-control were severely taxed as she passed through the desolate house and
entered the room where the sick child was lying.

Dr. Halley was standing at the bedside of his patient and holding her wasted little hand in his. His face was very grave as he courteously received the new nurse.

Zoé was tossing restlessly to and fro, an unnatural light blazed in her beautiful eyes, and strange words poured continuously from her fevered lips. Reason no longer guards the hidden thoughts. Mary will learn some innocent secrets during her weary vigils near her little friend. The child's mind was wandering now into the bright past, far, far away from the gloomy horrors of the last few days.

"I have not yet given orders for the cruel shears, Miss Snowe," the doctor said, as he lifted a heavy lock of Zoé's silken hair, "but I am afraid the sacrifice must be made. A very severe case of brain fever, my dear madam, very severe indeed. We can only hope for the best. Be kind enough to apply the ice to the head. A wonderful resource to us, Miss Snowe. A great change even in my day—a vast improvement on the old shaving and blistering process. And now, if you will excuse me, I will go down stairs for a little
refreshment. Travelled all night, my dear madam, and have had nothing but a cup of scalding coffee since I started," he added apologetically, as he left Mary a solitary watcher.

The excitement in Farnorth knew no ebb during the whole of the time that the young orphan's life was pronounced to be in danger, and its indignation against the family of Silvesters knew no ebb either. Recruits daily joined that standard which young Newcome and Lucy Bland had planted. Half the town now totally disbelieved the scandal which Algy had disseminated; half the town was disgusted with itself for its credulity in the first instance. The disgraceful story was an infamous fabrication, this faction said, a heartless conspiracy to defraud the orphan girl of her dead father's well-earned wealth. Zoé' champions performed their devoir so well, that the dragon of Gothic Hall was stricken mute. Nearly every window at Belle Grange was shivered into fragments, and the cadet of a noble family absolutely burnt in effigy more than once by some of the most infuriated of the Weasle miners during this period. There was quite a crowd mustered every morning to read the bulletins which were,
Indignation of the Grandlys.

by Dr. Banques’ orders, daily posted over the lodge gates at Becklands, and when the first change for the better in the health of the little sufferer was officially announced, the cheers from her assembled partisans were positively deafening.

Even the Grandlys of Grandly were interested in Zoe’s recovery now, and occasionally one of their helots might be seen among the readers of the bulletins. I have forborne to refer to this high and mighty family whilst the storm first raged. I felt myself powerless to describe the indignation which well nigh froze the blood and paralysed the aristocratic limbs of the haughty wearer of the perennial wig and robes of state, when he first learnt that he had received at his table, and accepted, nay, positively almost solicited, the hospitality of a felon! Old Grandly adopted that word as Giles Houndly had done, and he shuddered to think of the gusto with which he had disposed of abnormal lamb and peas at the felon’s board! Miss Grandly had discussed “dear Mortimer’s fortunate escape” with tears of horror in her eyes. Now all was changed again. If this story was not true, if it proved after all to be a conspiracy—as Farnorth said it was—well, then, whilst there is a doubt on the subject, the fine old
English gentleman will not desert the cause of the young person he has condescended to patronise, particularly when that young person may possibly inherit something like thirty thousand a-year.

Rumours of this mutation in public opinion reach the ears of his majesty of Foxcroft, and cause them to tingle unpleasantly. If he has been too precipitate, Sir Mortimer thinks; if he has been gulled by a wicked lie, and thus destroyed his chance of grasping the golden prize! The glorious vision which had more than consoled him on the day of the funeral fades away, and is replaced by a phantom neither glorious nor beautiful. This new spectre haunted the Baronet for many days after he had heard those last reports from Farnorth. It was a Banquo—far worse than poor Miss Winifred—at those recherché dinners which his Harrogate host purveyed for him; a Banquo which shook its sable locks and prated nasally of usurious percentage. Sir Mortimer commenced one or two letters to the little invalid during the time he was thus disagreeably haunted—he commenced, but did not finish any of these fine compositions. There would be time enough to retrace his steps; he would wait the turn of
Uneasiness at Belle Grange. 303
events, he decided. The Baronet did not make
his mother acquainted with any of the whispers
he had heard. Her ladyship is still deploring
the failure of her schemes, but she knows nothing
whatever of the imminent danger which threatens
the life of her little favourite.

Great uneasiness prevails amongst the different
members of the Belle Grange household. Mrs.
Bland only spoke the truth when she told Mary
Snowe that Algy's servants had refused to remain
under the same roof with the so-called widow of
the late Mr. Harding. The Silvesters have a very
limited number of attendants to minister to them
now. Mrs. Silvester bewails her unhappy fate by
day and night—her life is one long moan. Clara
is restless and excited, and keeps very far away
from that room where the "unfortunate, ill-used
lady" reigns supreme.

Algy has held many consultations with his law-
yer, and his sanguine hopes have met with an
aphis vastator during those séances with his legal
adviser. It will not be the easy thing he had
imagined to substantiate his assertions. The cold
reasoning of the law flings distrust upon his most
important facts. How will he be able to prove that
this woman he has eliminated from Dr. Denassie's
asylum is really identical with the person consigned to the Mad Doctor's care five-and-twenty years ago? And if even he proves this identity, what evidence is there that she is the first wife of the master of Becklands? The doctor himself had implicitly believed Mr. Harding's representations when that gentleman first placed this patient under his care. There is positively nothing but the woman's own assertions to make good the statement Zoé's uncle has made; and what weight are the oaths and protestations of a mad woman likely to have in a court of justice? The barmaid may have long lucid intervals, but that she is mad enough at times Algy knows to his sorrow; and so the cadet of a noble family is not nearly so exultant as he was three weeks ago. Instead of those few thousand pounds he had in imagination so liberally apportioned to little Zoé provided she resigned all claim to her father's property, Algy would, under such circumstances, be very glad now to halve the estate with her; indeed, in some of his most despairing moments, a third of it would satisfy him.

"They say Missy has taken a turn for the better, Clarry," he said. "She is no longer in any danger, and——"
"Of course this assurance has relieved your mind?" said his daughter sneeringly. "You were so very anxious about the young lady a few days ago. I told you her saintly friend would rescue her from the very jaws of death."

"I heard to-day that Sparkles is going to make her a ward in chancery. I tell you what, Clarry, that fool Wary has made me quite low: he has started all kinds of doubts and difficulties. I have half a mind to consult some other solicitor."

"You need not give yourself the trouble. We shall have a magnificent tableau presently: Mademoiselle, as the devoted daughter sacrificing everything to save her father's memory. She will glory in placing the martyr's crown on her imbecile head. Pshaw! I know her better than you do."

"'Gad, I hope you do, Clarry; but I must say you are very bitter against the little girl, and, by Jove, if she does make this sacrifice, I will do the liberal thing by her," said Algy, with a magnificent air.

"She will not accept one farthing from you," replied his daughter.

Zoé is, as her uncle has said, pronounced out of
danger; indeed, a fortnight has elapsed since that first favourable bulletin cheered the hearts of the young orphan's partisans. Mary Snowe is holding a private consultation with Edward Sparkles in the morning room at Becklands, and she has evidently made some proposition of which the lawyer does not approve.

"I cannot entertain this idea for one moment, Miss Snowe," he says, with great determination. "I have already taken steps for making her a ward in chancery. I was her late father's confidential adviser, and I constitute myself hers, in default of a better."

"You are a very kind friend, I know," Mary says, gently; "but if there is any truth in this strange story, I am convinced it will kill Zoé to have it brought before the public. She was devotedly attached to her father, and to have his memory so blackened—she would never live through the trial. If you can assure her there is no truth in the scandal, it would be altogether different. Do you believe this tale, Mr. Sparkles?"

"The promulgators of it will not find it easy to substantiate their statements," replies the lawyer, evading a direct answer to the question. "It was
most disastrous that Mr. Harding should have destroyed his last will before he had executed another," he continued. "I cannot account for it. The will was absolutely in my hands the very day before he died. I was about to make a duplicate of it."

"Was the property bequeathed to Zoé Quilea, or to Zoé Harding, in that last will?" Mary enquires, as she raises her soft eyes to the lawyer's face.

"To Zoé Quilea, of course," replies Mr. Sparkles, a little impatiently, and he rather avoids his companion's steadfast look; "but that has nothing whatever to do with this question. The will is unfortunately destroyed, and so there is an end of that. Miss Zoé Quilea," he added, firmly, "is a minor; she has no power to move in this matter at all; I have constituted myself her——"

"I warn you that you will kill her if you persevere in this case now," interposes Mary solemnly. "I see there is too much truth in this miserable story. You will not betray the confidence which has been reposed in you, but you are no friend to Zoé if you persist in dragging her father's name before the public. She wishes to resign
all claim to his property, and to leave Farnorth for ever.”

“It is Quixotic madness!” cries the lawyer excitedly. “Resign all claim to her father’s property! Do you know how much that property is worth? Do you know that the Weasle Mine cleared thirty thousand pounds last year, and is likely to clear a similar sum for many years to come? And do you mean to tell me such property as that is to be yielded without a struggle? Why the opposing party have already lost heart. Mr. Silvester, only this very morning, proposed to compromise the matter by consenting to accept one-third.”

It was quite true that Algy had been foolish enough to show the weakness of his hand to his adversary. It was very well his daughter suspected nothing of this folly.

“Zoé will never accept one farthing from Mr. Silvester,” says Mary, her fair face flushing with indignation as she spoke. “She proposes to retain only the five thousand pounds bequeathed to her by her great-uncle. I suppose that, at any rate, is legally hers?”

“The Spanish will is in my possession,” says
Mr. Sparkles, once more evading a direct reply; "the legacy was left by the late Don Miguel to the eldest child of his niece. No one will be audacious enough to contest her claims there, I should think. You must not for one moment imagine you have turned me from my fixed determination, Miss Snowe, I——"

"Zoé wishes very much to speak to you herself on this subject. She is well enough to see you now. You will not refuse her request."

The lawyer wavered a little.

"I will see the poor child," he says, at last, "but remember, Miss Snowe, I do not promise anything."

An hour passed before the lawyer and La Bonté came from the sick room. Both their faces bore traces of agitation.

"She has prevailed. I have been very foolish, but I could not resist her. Good God! what a wreck she is! Poor desolate child, her only relatives her most bitter enemies," the lawyer said, his voice tremulous with emotion. "I have not common patience with the Silvesters," he continued, indignantly, "and I am afraid the Baronet will not come out well in this."
The lawyer had indeed no very great reason to look for truth and honour in the son of Nelly Brown.

"I do not like his having left Farnorth at such a time, Miss Snowe. I do not like——"

"Zoé has already written to release the Baronet from his engagement, and in so doing she has made no sacrifice whatever. Her father's wishes and Sir Mortimer's persistent pursuit alone influenced Zoé. She was never attached to Sir Mortimer, I am convinced of that."

"Thank God!" said the lawyer fervently; "she is at any rate spared that misery. And now, when do you leave us, my dear Miss Snowe?"

"Directly Zoé is well enough to undertake the journey; the sooner she is taken away from the scenes where she has suffered so keenly, the better. You are not satisfied with yourself, I see, Mr. Sparkles, but believe me, it is all for the best."

"I wish I could think so; however, it cannot be helped now. I have given my word, and so there is an end of the matter. A millennium will reign at Belle Grange when this news reaches them. I shall never be able to forgive these people as long as I live. Good morning, Miss Snowe." And the
lawyer departed, by no means pleased with his morning's work.

A millennium did indeed reign at Belle Grange when intelligence of Zoé's proposed sacrifice was conveyed to its inmates.

"Did I not prophesy this magnificent tableau, mon père?" Clara said, triumphantly. "Mademoiselle will leave Farnorth amidst a blaze of fireworks and red and blue lights. We shall have to endure the dead smoke and the sulphur for some little time, but I think we shall have strength of mind to bear them patiently under the circumstances; n'est-ce pas, Monsieur le Millionnaire?"

Farnorth shook its head very dolefully when it was told of this triumph of the Silvesters. It considered the orphan girl's act sublime, it applauded with all its might and main, but it did not approve. "C'était magnifique, mais ce n'était pas la guerre," and it was war implacable that Farnorth desired. Our town could not understand such a sacrifice. Zoé's partisans waved her banner proudly aloft, but they were terribly dispirited; they were even angry with Mr. Sparkles for having yielded to his little client's wishes. She was only a child, they said.
How much the Baronet congratulated himself that he had never posted those fine compositions, I need not say. That Banquo with the thick lips and the hooked nose no longer haunts his waking moments; it is chased by a phantom lovely as a poet's dream.

"I have escaped in a creditable manner, you see, my lady," he said to his mother, as he handed poor Zoé's letter to her. "I have not taken the initiative this time, at any rate."

Lady Plantagenet sighed as she laid the note down.

"She is a fine generous-hearted creature," she said.

"A vast deal too fine and generous for me," said his majesty. "I prefer something more of the earth, earthy. There was always too much of the saint in the little Peruvian to suit me. I hear she is to be carried away from Farnorth by the aunt of her beloved soldier; perhaps she will marry that gigantic hero now. Rufus is welcome to my affianced—I wish him joy of his bargain."

Several of the best workmen at the Weasle Mine sent in their resignations when they were told Mr.
Silvester was likely to become their master. He had never been popular amongst them, and I don’t think he ever will be. Mr. Harding was deservedly revered by the miners. “This offcome whâ nacks, an’ nacks, an’ knâs nowt wi’ aw his nacking, will nivver be owt like t’ äde maister. An’ it’s a fair sham as he sud kom an’ tak her fath-er brass frai t’ bonny lile lass; he’s nowt but a rogue, a d——d rogue, an’ I’se nit gäen ut drive naither a spade nor a pick for him,” the different malcontents say to the Cornish captain. The rebels were headed by John Dalton; he was one of the first to throw down his pick-axe and spade, when he heard of the approaching Silvester rule. Poor John, even amidst his own wretchedness has felt his kind master’s death very bitterly, and he is one of the staunchest partisans the little orphan has.

You must not imagine that the cadet of a noble family did not carry out those magnificent intentions which he has more than once propounded. Algy never wrote a finer epistle in his life than that communication he forwarded to his defrauded niece, directly the reign of the millennium commenced at Belle Grange. The answer he received displeased him very much.
and well-nigh extinguished for ever and a day the feeble glimmer within him. "'Gad, she is a little stoopid, and no mistake, Clarry," he said; "by Jove, no one can say the proposal I made was not a handsome one—ten thousand pound down on the nail, ma fille, and permission to remain here as long as she pleased. She is wrong in her head to refuse such an offer, and so provoking too when everything might have been settled so nicely and comfortably."

"You must contrive to exist without the niceness and comfort," replied his daughter. "Lay aside the silver veil, mon père. I shall never smother myself with mine again, in the presence of Mademoiselle." And I don't think it at all likely that she ever will.

When the establishment at Becklands was broken up, two of its members pleaded so earnestly for permission to follow the fortunes of their young mistress, that neither she nor Mary Snowe could refuse to listen to their prayer, and so the faithful negro and Annette are to accompany Zoé and her governess to the Devonshire retreat of the Admiral's daughters.

And amidst figurative fireworks and red and blue lights, amidst genuine tears and sighs of sym-
pathy from young and old, rich and poor, the Exodus was at length made, and the only child of the richest man in Farnorth took her leave of that luxurious home which her father's industry had provided for her.

END OF VOL. II.