Joseph's Coat

David Christie Murray

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Prologue.

Chapter 1.

Old Joe and young Joe, sturdy sire and lissom son, trudged through the dust together old Joe bent down a little earthwards, and going rather like a carthorse; young Joe with his head well up, and stepping like a hunter that can carry weight. I see them in my mind's eye, as in a picture. Old Joe, dressed in white moleskin of such weight and thickness that he looked like a polar bear, with his gnarled hands hanging lazily and solidly as if each carried a hundredweight which his gigantic strength made light of blue−eyed, grey−whiskered, with deep blue scars like tattoo marks all over his face, tramped on serenely, pipe in mouth. Young Joe, with a sprouting bit of whisker, downy as yet, and yellow like a callow fledgling's feathers; blue−eyed, broad−shouldered, lithe and limber, went springily at the old man's side. Young Joe was dressed like a gentleman of that period (it is nearly thirty years since the father and son walked side by side for the last time), and he and the old man made altogether a fine contrast. Old Joe was stolidly genial, as befitted a man who had beaten the world hollow, and now took his ease with dignity. Young Joe had something of an aggressive air, or carried at least a sort of warning in his face *nemo me impune lacessit*. This warning was perhaps a trifle sulky, as was natural, all things considered. How rich old Joe might be no man knew, but he clung to the dress and habits of his youth dressed like a working miner on holiday, lived like a miner, looked like a miner, and was proud to talk like one. Joe, bred at a distant 'college school,' and returning home at holiday times, resented these things. His speech was of the finest, his clothes were of the best the son of a baronet was his chosen chum, he had yearnings towards the world of fashion, and believed that he could shine in that bright sphere, if he had but a chance. Old Joe cared for none of those things, and, except for a certain sturdy self−possession, had no pride. He would have met the hereditary Autocrat of All the Russias with a sentiment of equality so natural that he would not have dreamed of formulating it even to himself. Young Joe formulated his beliefs in the equality of mankind daily, and, with a natural want of logic, resented with great *hauteur* the approach of any of his father's old and less prosperous companions. He himself was 'a man for a' that' *cela va sans dire* but 'for a' that and a' that,' the claims of one's social inferiors must be repelled and beaten down. He was the equal of any man above him, but no one below him had a right to a similar claim. This mental attitude is not uncommon.

Young Joe resented his name, and would have preferred Reginald, or Herbert, or Walter, or anything rather than Joseph, so easily susceptible of a vulgar abbreviation. He was not without pride in his father, but he resented the old man's clothes, and his house, and his speech. And, most bitterly and shamefacedly of all, he resented the spectacle he was now on his way to witness.

It was summer weather, in days when summer weather meant warmth and sunshine. There was sunshine even here, though the scene lay in the centre of the Black Country. It is pleasant to notice how nature has reasserted herself in that grimy province after all the scars which labour has left upon her. Labour has dug deep into her heart, and has rifled her very entrails, and has set upon her breast such burdens as Enceladus lay under. Yet, wheresoever you see her face, she smiles; wheresoever her busy hands can move, she weaves her spells. Tall purple foxgloves lined the road, and the hawthorns were white with blossom, and the lark shook with the delight of his own song a mile above the smoke wreaths. It was Sunday also, and the smoke wreaths were something thinner and even fewer than they would have been on any other day in the seven. Old Joe had a little of the quiet Sabbath feeling on him. Young Joe, pridefully resenting all things, resented Sunday terribly because of the shame it brought him.

Father and son were on their way to listen to the most popular preacher of the time and neighbourhood. That preacher was a woman. Nay, the murder must out: that woman was Rebecca Bushell, old Joe's wife and young Joe's mother. On the subject of female preachers in general young Joe had incisive opinions, sharpened probably by some personal feeling. That his mother should preach, and be publicly advertised to preach, and that she should speak in public with no disguise of that picturesque and drawling accent which was her birthright, was an

affliction which the lad's pride had borne with groaning this many a day. And now, worse than all, here was his mother in combination with greasy−complexioned professionals, whom he knew, in seedy black and ties of dubious white, and roomy shoes topped by too visible stockings of white cotton, also dubious in tone conducting a camp−meeting, advertised far and wide in flaring posters, and sure to bring with crowds of the pious, countless railers, to many of whom he himself was known. The reader will understand the term 'camp−meeting' in a limited sense. It was a camp−meeting with no encampment, and lasted one day only.

As father and son walked together, there was heard suddenly the bray of a band, drowning the lark's music, and far and wide the sound of the Hallelujah Chorus filled the fields. It was not ignobly played or sung, though band and choir alike needed a little fining here and there. The folk of the Black Country are essentially musical, and here they played and sang with all their heart and soul and lungs. There was a little admixture of strings with the wind instruments, and a tailor led the violins. 'Now David,' cried the drummer, as he grasped his sticks, 'let thy elbow fly like a lamb's tail!' and David nodded to this encouragement, and led the way at a rattling pace. Whilst the band and choir were in the midst of their fervour, the two late comers took their place at the edge of the vast crowd. There were some five−and−twenty thousand people present, and the gathering could scarcely fail to be impressive. The place of meeting had some advantages and some disadvantages. For one thing, the crowd was sundered by the waters of a canal; but as a set−off against this, the lock, over which the platform was built, stood some ten or twelve feet above the hollow land in which the multitude had gathered, so that all could at least see the orators of the day. The platform was primitive but secure, and consisted of great beams of timber laid from wall to wall of the lock; and in the centre was another smaller platform on which the more prominent of the promoters of the meeting were gathered. They were a rugged set for the most part, and the presence of one or two massive women added little refinement to this central knot. Mrs. Bushell sat in black silk square, hard, uncompromising in face and figure at the little unclothed deal table with red legs, on which were set a water−bottle, a glass, a Bible, and a few scattered hymn−books. Young Joe, discerning here and there an acquaintance in the crowd, blushed at the figure on the platform, and revolted at its presence there. One gentleman, the son of a neighbouring coal−owner, beholding young Joe, waited until he caught his eye, and then, from his coign of vantage near the lock gates, elaborately winked at him. At this and a slight backward motion of the head, indicating the chief personage on the platform, the youngster turned scarlet, but he held his head erect and felt savagely defiant not least defiant, perhaps, of his Mother and the prominence of her place. Old Joe, with his massive hands depending downwards, smoked his clay calmly at the edge of the crowd by his son's side. These *al−fresco* religious observances had one especial charm for the elder Bushell; they found room for a pipe; and, without the soothing influence of his tube of clay, the old man found the best of sermons dull.

Young Joe's resentfulness of humour increased as he stood by his father's side. But he was there to brave the whole thing out, and to show to his friends that be was not ashamed of his father and mother and their ways. But why, in the name of all things abominable, would his father insist on wearing moleskin clothing and on smoking a clay pipe at such a place and time? and why should his mother sit there, the centre of these vulgar orators, gazed at by all these vulgar eyes? He was not ashamed of them, he told himself. Was he not here by his own free will? He grew more and more wrathful and rebellious as he nursed these thoughts.

By−and−by, after the due introductory readings and prayers had been gone through, and when a hymn had been sung with rough and striking grandeur of tone, Mrs. Rebecca Bushell rose squarely up, and gave out her text and preached. I suppose that everybody who reads this will have some notion of what a revival sermon is like, and that there is therefore no need for me to set down Mrs. Bushell's utterances. The creed she unfolded was stern and ugly, though modified by some private tenderness of her own, and young Joe knew well enough that much of the discourse was levelled at himself. The presence of her son gave her speech a passionate earnestness which it would otherwise have missed, and she preached at the crowd through him, and at him through the crowd. This also young Joe resented, and savagely endured. It came to an end at last, and twenty−five thousand pairs of lungs aided the band in giving breath to the Old Hundredth, which rolled its slow, grand stream of sound across the sunny fields, and was heard, soft and sweet with distance, in the Sabbath streets of the town a mile away.

The crowd broke into scattered sections, and took its devious way towards a mid−day dinner. The old man and his son passed to the platform.

'Joseph,' said Rebecca, descending, 'put that pipe away. For shame on a Sunday, an' at meeting too.'

'All right, missis,' said Bushell senior. 'There's no harm in a pipe.' And he smoked on placidly.

His wife, knowing by old experience the uselessness of opposition, resigned the point with a sigh, and walked gravely away with the Reverend Paul Screed.

In these days in which I write the Reverend Paul is dead, and no truth can hurt his feelings any more. But it is true of him that he preached a vulgar gospel, worshipped a vulgar god, and had vulgar notions upon all things which came within the sphere of an intellect not too well instructed. He was always in remarkable earnest, and was very certain that all his beliefs were accurate and that all beliefs running counter to his own were sinful. He was incapable of doing a wilful wrong to anybody. In person he was gaunt and bony, and his general aspect was repellent. Young Joe, resenting most things, resented the Reverend Paul with a vehemence inspired by direct hate. The Reverend Paul, for his part, looked on the young man with a stony severity of holiness which foresaw for him eternal pains and penalties.

Mrs. Bushell, arm−in−arm with the minister, walked homewards, and her husband and her son followed at a little distance. By−and−by came round a corner of the lane, facing this broken quartette, a youngster resplendent in the devices of the latest fashion, switching at the hedges as be walked. The lane was fairly filled with scattered groups of homeward−going worshippers, and all but the new−comer were walking in one direction. He strolled along, a good deal stared at, and pausing suddenly before young Joe, thrust out a gloved hand, and said 'Good morning' in a loud and cheery voice. The youngster, a little embarrassed, returned his greeting. The old man, without pausing, turned his head, and in his broadest drawl bade his son be home in time for dinner.

'Who's that?' said the new−comer. He was one of those people who, without knowing it, are audible under ordinary conditions over a circuit of fifty yards.

'My father,' young Joe answered, speaking in tones as loud as the other's, and with an air of injured pride.

'Who's that?' asked old Joe, returning, and joining the young men as they stood before each other.

'Mr. Sydney Cheston,' said young Joe; 'Sir Sydney Cheston's son. My father, Mr. Cheston.'

'How be *you?*' said old Joe, pipe in mouth. He kept his hands in the pockets of his moleskin jacket, and nodded at the baronet's son with perfect naturalness.

'I am very well,' returned Mr. Cheston. 'How be you?'

'I'm as right as a trivet,' old Joe answered, unsuspicious of Satire. For a moment he had thought the loud 'Who's that?' a little impudent, but seeing the young man cheerful and self−possessed, forgot to notice it. Young Joe burned to knock Mr. Sydney Cheston down 'I've heerd Joe talk about you,' said the old man comfortably. 'Come and have a bit o' dinner along of us. Eh?'

'Very sorry,' the young buck returned, 'I have an engagement.'

'All right,' said the old man, nodding. 'Be in time, Joe. Good mornin', young mister.'

'Good morning, governor,' said Mr. Cheston with loud cheer. Young Joe raged inwardly. 'Queer old bird, the pater,' the baronet made comment, in a moderated voice.

'It occurs to me,' young Joe replied, in rapid undertone, 'that I am scarcely a fit repository for your opinions.'

'My dear fellow,' said Mr. Cheston lightly, 'everything must have a beginning. You begin now, and we began a hundred years ago. That's all the difference.'

'Possibly,' said young Joe with great stiffness. His reply was somewhat vague, even to himself; but he felt that he discharged a duty, whilst he relieved the gathered spleen of the whole morning.

'Don't be rusty,' Mr. Cheston answered. 'anybody's welcome to tell me that *my* governor's a queer old bird. Gad, he is! A very queer old bird. Most men's governors *are* queer old birds. We shall be queer old birds ourselves some day:

Young Joe, a little mollified and a little in haste to be rid of that sore subject, asked what had brought his friend into the neighbourhood. The out−of−door worshippers were still straggling by, and Cheston, taking Joe's arm, turned with him and struck across a by−path which led through cornfields where the bright scarlet of thick−growing poppies lent more beauty than value to the crop.

'I'm staying with old Moulding, at the Hollies,' Cheston said; 'and as they all went to church this morning, I ventured on a lonely stroll through the region. I'm glad I did it, for I've seen two things which impressed me vastly.'

'Imprimis?' asked young Joe, trying to catch some little seeming of gaiety, if only for wounded pride's sake.

'Imprimis,' answered Cheston, 'the prettiest face I ever set eyes on. A Black Country beauty. A rose springing from an artificial Alp of slag and cinder.'

'Oh!' said the other in a meditative way.

'Pleasing spectacle number one,' said Cheston gaily, as though addressing an audience, 'led to pleasing spectacle number two. Number one, dressed in the most becoming and least conventional fashion, was apparently bound for church or chapel, inasmuch as she bore a hymn−book and looked devotional and demure. Having no fear of the proprieties before my eyes, and having a natural delight in the contemplation of beauty, I lit up a cigar and strolled after her. By−and−by we came upon an enormous outdoor meeting, where my little beauty met her mother or some other elderly female dragon, and I lost sight of her. But I know where she lives, and I am going to have another look at her.'

Young Joe, without seeing any clear grounds for apprehension, spoke with some anxiety, though with outer lightness.

'Who is this charming young person?'

'She dwells,' said Cheston, simulating a melodramatic tone, 'though in what capacity I know not, at the sign of the Saracen's Head, and her divine name is Diana or Dinah. Yes, it's Dinah. I heard the guardian dragon scold her for being late.'

A blush, partly of anger and partly of embarrassment, was on young Joe's face. He forced a laugh.

'Yes, she's a pretty girl;' then hurriedly, to escape further discussion of the topic, 'And what was pleasing spectacle number two?'

'Pleasing spectacle number two,' said Cheston with noisy cheerfulness, 'was a sort of she−Boanerges in black silk who harangued the multitude. I protest,' he went on, laughing heartily, 'that she was worth a journey to the North Pole to look at and to listen to. But I dare say you were there and heard her. You were coming back that way. For myself, I walked off to the Saracen's Head and watched my little divinity in again before I turned to walk to the Hollies.'

What with wounded pride, and jealous fear, and his resentful rage at things in general, young Joe was very near to boiling−point.

'You know everybody hereabouts,' said Cheston, with obtuse goodhumour and unflagging enjoyment in the sound of his own voice sweeter music than the spheres could make 'who was the Boanerges?'

Young Joe reached boiling−point and bubbled over.

'She was my mother, sir! And in ten minutes you have insulted my father and my mother and have told me how you dogged my my sweetheart home, and and I tell you what it is, Cheston. You cash that I O U I have of yours at your earliest convenience, and don't trouble yourself to know me any more. Good morning.'

And off went the hapless young fellow in a great heat, with a face like a peony, and with smarting tears in his eyes. Cheston stood a moment, stunned, as though an invisible avalanche had fallen upon him. Then he raced after his late companion and caught him by the shoulder in the act of mounting the first stile.

'My dear fellow,' be said pantingly, 'pray forgive me. I was quite ignorant. I wouldn't have done it for the world. Pray do forgive me. I beg your pardon a hundred thousand times.'

Young Joe swung himself out of the other's grasp and mounted the stile. He melted a little notwithstanding. He wanted somebody's sympathy and companionship, and Cheston was evidently very sorry. But how could he turn and show the hot tears which were even then finding their channels on his face? The penitent vaulted the stile after him and pursued him with breathless apology, and at last took him by the shoulders and swung him fairly round. At that, in a sudden gust of added shame for the tears with which his eyes were filled, he gave his rage full swing, and launched a blow at the apologist, and stood waving his arms about him, demanding wildly to know if the prostrate Cheston wanted any more.

'By Jove I do,' roared the late penitent, and springing to his feet he threw his hat and coat upon the grass and awaited young Joe's onslaught. For a minute the two stood face to face, in a posture of defence. Then Cheston dropped his hands. 'It was quite my fault, Bushell,' he said, 'and I won't fight about it. I don't wonder at your striking me. Let us say no more about it. Shake hands, old man, shake hands.'

Thereupon young Joe shamefacedly shook hands, stammered some broken excuses 'temper greatly tried,' and so forth and went his way.

'He's got hatsful of money;' meditated the future baronet, as young Joe walked miserably away. 'But ain't he paying for having it, poor beggar? ain't he just, that's all?'

Chapter 2.

Mr. and Mrs. Bushell and the Reverend Paul Screed sat at meat together. A pair of fowls and a leg of mutton, cooked on the previous day to avoid the desecration of the Sabbath by needless labour, decorated the board, whilst hot vegetables made a sort of concession from religious principle to hospitality.

'Shall us wait for Joseph?' the old man asked. Joseph was Joe in non−company hours. The conventional form was a concession to the presence of the Reverend Paul.

'If Joseph can't get home in time for dinner,' said Mrs. Bushell, 'Joseph must go without.'

'Nonsense, missis,' said the old man genially. 'Nobody go's wi'out grub i' this house as long as there is any. But we'll go on wi'out him if you like.'

Grace had already been pronounced by the Reverend Paul, who crumbled his bread in silence during this brief debate, with a demure eye on the leg of mutton. Mrs. Bushell had the head of the table, and set to work business−like on the cold fowls. At that moment young Joe entered, still resentful, and somewhat heated by a hurried walk home. Mrs. Bushell silently carved for him also and set his plate before him. Rather to be doing something to hide the agitation which yet remained with him, than because the food invited him, he took up his knife and fork. The Reverend Paul laid a detaining hand upon his arm, and arose slowly. The three bowed their heads whilst the minister pronounced a second and supplementary 'blessing.' 'For what Mr. Joseph is about to receive may the Lord make him truly thankful.' Young Joe accepted this as a new affront, and his food choked him. He pushed his plate a little away, after making an ineffectual attempt at the cold fowl.

'Joseph,' said his mother with placid severity, 'it is better to serve God than Mammon. I can't break the Sabbath by cooking to satisfy your carnal appetites.'

'I don't want you to cook for me, mother,' said the young fellow, sorely baited by his own feelings. 'The fowl is well enough, but I am not hungry. That is all.'

The mother sighed and the sigh said plainly, 'I hold my own opinion.' The father set his hand on the young man's shoulder.

'You've been a bit downhearted−like all mornin', What's the matter, lad? Bain't you well?'

'I am not altogether well, father,' young Joe answered.

Mrs. Bushell's severity vanished, and she looked at her son's flushed face with motherly eyes and instant anxiety and pity.

'You're a bit feverish, Joseph,' she said; 'I can see that. Have a glass o' wine an' lie down,'

'I think I will lie down,' said young Joe, glad to escape, though conscious of hypocrisy. 'I will lie down a little while if you'll excuse me. No, never mind the wine, mother.'

'Perhaps,' said the Reverend Paul, 'it is the working of the powerful word we heard this morning.'

Mrs. Bushell shook her head, and sighed again. This second sigh said plainly, 'I am a humble vessel.'

'Let us hope so, ma'am,' said the Reverend Paul, at once recognising and waiving Mrs. Bushell's depreciation of herself.

'The lad's well enough,' said old Joe, reaching out his fork and appropriating a slice of cold mutton.

'You're over−careless, Joseph,' said Mrs. Bushell, helping the Reverend Paul. 'You're over−careless yourself, Joseph. I wish Mr. Screed 'ud say a solemn word to him.'

'I will, ma'am,' said the Reverend Paul, with his hand upon the beer−jug.

Nothing of this was spoken in young Joe's hearing. He, cooling himself meanwhile with a cigar in his own room, thought over the events of the morning with self−tormenting accusation. He despised himself for having made allusion to the I O U, and he hated himself for having struck his old school companion and constantly good−humoured friend. And he laid all these things, with what ever other of his own faults and misdoings he could think of, at the parental doors; though, even as he did so, some self−accusing thoughts assailed him.

The Reverend Paul in the meantime meditated on the solemn word he had promised to say to young Joe, and as he thought about it, he grew more and more severe in his judgments upon young Joe's private character and spiritual prospects. It was quite in a mood of prophetic indignation, therefore, that he encountered the object of his reflections. The old man had gone upstairs for his afternoon nap his custom always and Mrs. Bushell was asleep in the back parlour, when young Joe came a little stealthily downstairs, and, taking his hat from its peg, went towards the door. The Reverend Paul, also moving stealthily, emerged from the front parlour and approached the young man on tiptoe.

'May I ask a word with you?' he said with ghostly solemnity.

'You may,' young Joe answered. He had smoked himself into a better humour, but he hated the reverend gentleman as I have said already, and his gorge arose at him.

The minister went on tiptoe back into the parlour, and young Joe, like a conspirator, followed stealthily. It was the habit of the household to go about in this wise whilst the elder Bushel took his nap.

'Mister Joseph,' said the Reverend Paul, 'your mother has requested me to speak a solemn word to you.'

'About what?' asked young Joe, with his eyes glittering a little wickedly.

'Your soul,' said the Reverend Paul.

'Ah!' said Joe, with a sigh of desperation; 'what about it?'

'It is greatly to be feared,' said the Reverend Paul, 'that you are in a state of impenitence.'

'About what?' asked young Joe again. 'I'm very penitent for some things, and not at all penitent for others,'

'You resist the Spirit,' said the minister in a solemn murmur; 'you neglect the means of grace; you scoff at the way of safety; you live in open profligacy.'

'What?' asked the other. The question was put with startling distinctness, and sounded like a pistol−shot snapping across the subdued grumble of a violoncello.

'I have watched you closely,' said the minister; 'you spent an hour yesterday in a tap−room.'

'I did nothing of the sort,' young Joe declared hotly. 'I passed through a tap−room on my way to play a game at billiards.'

'A profitless and sinful waste of time,' said the Reverend Paul.

'There are some things,' said young Joe, with a fine−gentleman manner, 'which you and I cannot agree upon. I challenge your right to watch me, but every beast acts after his own instinct, and I can't help that. You are my father's guest, Mr. Screed, and I am bound not to quarrel with you. If you take any interest in my spiritual welfare, you will refrain from provoking me to wrath. That is, I believe, the proper phrase. Good afternoon, sir.'

The Reverend Paul Screed's wrath was seasoned by a certain self−repression and a certain sense of authority. He told himself, and he believed it, that he did well to be angry. But, in spite of the fact that he was, according to his lights, a good man, he had a strain of meanness in him. Anger, says the old poet, is a brief madness. It is also a self−revelation, searching as lightning.

Young Joe was on his way to the door, hat in hand. The minister, with one hand on the wall and the other grasping the edge of the door, barred his progress.

'I am not to be debarred, Mister Joseph,' he said, very picked and precise in every syllable, as men only educated late in life are apt to be, 'I am not to be debarred, Mr. Joseph, from doing my duty by any pretended contempt you may assume. It is my business to warn you, and I do it without fear. If my warnings are disregarded by you, I shall carry them elsewhere. I have already told you that I have watched you closely. I witnessed your parting last night from that unhappy girl whom you are endeavouring to entrap.'

'Eh?' said young Joe, an octave higher than his common speech, and very softly.

'I spoke to her,' said the Reverend Paul, 'and admonished her. And I shall make it my business now, for her soul's safety and yours, to tell your parents and hers what I know about this matter.'

'You will, will you?' said the other in the same soft key.

'I can tell already,' said the Reverend Paul, 'that it will be useless to appeal to any honourable instinct in you. And I have seen enough of the girl whom you have endeavoured to make the victim of your arts and wiles, to know that only constant watching could ensure her safety.'

At that instant three people were tremendously surprised. And I cannot tell who was the most profoundly amazed amongst them. I record the fact. Young Joe struck the Reverend Paul and knocked him headlong into the arms of Bushell senior, at that moment in the act of entering the room. Father and son regarded each other across the semi−prostrate figure of the minister with blank amazement, for young Joe was as wildly astonished at his own deed as even the Reverend Paul himself could he. Yet, having done the deed, he must abide by it.

'Why, what's all this?' demanded the old man sternly.

'This fellow,' said young Joe, scornfully indicating the minister, who held a white handkerchief to his mouth, 'has the insolence to tell me that he has been watching me this long time past. He says he saw me kiss a pretty girl last night, and that he's going to tell her mother and my mother, and have us looked after and taken care of. And he has the audacity to tell me that nothing but close watching can save my my sweetheart's virtue.'

O disingenuous and cowardly young Joe! It was not too late even then, and one honest word might have saved you, but you would not speak it.

'An' becos a minister o' God's word, as is a old man likewise, speaks a honest word o' warnin to you, you go an' knock him down! An' you do it in your father's house, of a Sunday!'

'He insulted a lady,' said young Joe, 'for whom I have a great respect and regard. I never meant to strike him. I tried to leave the room, and he stood in the doorway, and wouldn't let me pass. Suppose a man had attacked my

mother's reputation before you married her, wouldn't you have knocked him down?'

Old Joe had been a little too handy at knocking people down in his own youth, on slighter provocation, to feel that he had any great right to be severe about this matter. Yet he felt keenly that an outrage had been committed, and that it must in some way he atoned for. He was angry, but he was puzzled, and, as his readiest refuge from bewilderment, he looked angrier than he was. As for young Joe, he began to feel that he was dangerous and incendiary. He had knocked down two men in one day, and he was now bitterly ashamed of the achievement. One of the men was his closest friend, and the other was elderly and was laid under professional obligations not to fight. But the more ashamed he grew, the more shameful his last misdeed seemed likely to appear in the eyes of others, and the more necessary it became to shroud himself in a sort of cloak of tacit scorn of everybody, and be sulky in as dignified a way as came easily.

The rustle of a silk dress was heard, and Mrs. Bushell stood in the doorway, by her husband's side. At the bare sight of his mother young Joe recognised the hopelessness of any defence, and threw himself upon the sofa.

'What's the matter?' asked Mrs. Bushell.

'Your son,' said the Reverend Paul Screed, removing the handkerchief, 'has answered the solemn word of warning you desired me to address to him by blows.'

'Not blows,' said the culprit from the sofa, hardening himself, 'a blow.'

'I do not know,' said the minister, 'whether I received one blow or more. I am still a little shaken by his violence.'

'Joseph,' said Mrs. Bushel advancing, 'leave this house, and never come back to it again.'

'Very well,' said the young man, rising. Even at that moment the mother's heart yearned over him, but she must acquit herself of duty first and be tender afterwards. She knew her husband would interfere, and she never dreamed that her only child would leave her, even though she ordered him away.

'Rot an' nonsense!' said the old man angrily. 'If it's anybody's business to order my son out o' my house, it's mine. Fair play's a jewel. Joe's done wrong, but we do' know' (meaning 'don't know') the rights o' this business yet. Now, parson, it's your turn. Say thy say.'

Mr. Screed answered nothing, and Mrs. Bushel, still confident in her husband's interference, turned again upon her son.

'Leave the house, Joseph.'

'Very well,' said young Joe again, and passing from the room went upstairs, and began to pack his belongings together. Meanwhile the minister told his story, and from his own point of view told it fairly.

'Mr. Banks,' said Mrs. Bushell, 'ain't a godly person; but I've known Dinah ever since her was a baby, an' her's as good a gell as ever lived, I believe. I've seen as Joe an' her was fond of each other, an' I always thought somethin' 'ud come of it.'

'Cuss it all, passon,' said old Joe in great heat, 'why shouldn't the lad kiss his sweetheart, an' why should yo' goo and black her character to him?'

'I did my duty,' said Mr. Screed with dignity.

'Forgiveness is a Christian duty,' said Mrs. Bushell, alarmed by the sounds which came from above, where young Joe was vigorously cording a box. 'I needn't tell you that, sir. But Joseph shall beg your pardon on his bended knees, or out of this house he goes.'

'I am willing to accept his apology,' said the Reverend Paul, with a real effort towards charity which cost him dear.

Mrs. Bushell mounted the stairs and entered her son's bedroom. He was hastily searching the pockets of an old light overcoat, and when his mother entered he threw the garment upon the bed, where it lay with all its pockets turned inside out. Whatever he searched for was not found, for he turned, and, disregarding his mother's presence, took a hasty look through a number of documents old letters, scraps of newspapers and what not in an open drawer, and then, as if putting off the search to a more convenient moment, tumbled the papers loosely together into a portmanteau which he strapped and locked. His mother watched him with a cold demeanour which belied the longing of her heart.

'Joseph!' she said harshly, yearning over him.

'Yes, mother,' said he, looking up for a minute.

'Come down stairs an' beg Mr. Screed's pardon, or out o' this house you go.'

'Beg his pardon for insulting me!' said young Joe bitterly. 'No, thank you, mother. As for leaving the house, I've been ready and willing to do that this many a day. It's been none too happy a home for me, with its parsons and prayer−meetings.'

'Where do you think you're going?' asked Mrs. Bushell severely, wounded by this last allusion. 'A wise son maketh a glad father, but he that is foolish despiseth his mother. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul, but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding. You come down and beg Mr. Screed's pardon, or out of this house you go.'

'Very well, mother,' said young Joe; and Mrs. Bushell, her mission having failed, went downstairs again.

'Joseph,' she said, addressing her husband, 'I can do nothin' with him. Will you speak to him?'

The old man called his son from the foot of the stairs, and Joe came down with a box on his shoulder and a portmanteau in his hand. He set them down outside the parlour door, and stood there sulkily.

'I've heard this thing through o' one side,' said old Joe, striving to deal honestly with the case. 'What ha' you got to say?'

'I have said all that I have to say,' young Joe answered. 'He was insolent, and I lost my temper. I told him once that he was my father's guest, and that I had no right to quarrel with him. I bade him good afternoon, but he stopped me, and was more insolent than ever.'

'Now, look here, Joseph,' said the old man: 'you ask Mr. Screed's pardon, and tak' them things upstairs again, and be a good lad, and let's hear no more about it.'

'I wouldn't forgive Mr. Screed,' said young Joe, feeling himself to be a very plucky martyr now, 'if he asked my pardon fifty times, and that I should apologise to him is out of the question.'

'Then leave the house,' said Mrs. Bushell, still belying herself and thinking it righteous to do so.

'I can send for these, I suppose?' said young Joe, indicating the chest and the portmanteau. 'Good−bye, father. Good−bye, mother. When next you feel inclined to be insolent, sir, remember the deserved chastisement you once met with at my hands.'

With that final defiance young Joe was gone. He was very miserable, and very much ashamed; but there was not one of the three who remained behind who did not confess that he had at least a shadow of right on his side. Indeed the whole of this poor quarrel was conducted by people who were ashamed of their part in it. The Reverend Paul felt that he had gone further with the lad than duty impelled him. The mother repented of her cruel ultimatum, and cried to think she had not used softer means. The father was angry with himself for having allowed young Joe to go. The lad himself, as we have seen already, was heartily ashamed. Of course each member of the quartette would have fought the quarrel through again, rather than admit just then a shade of wrong on his or her own side.

Young Joe could scarcely analyse his sensations at that time. He was very fond of his father and very proud of him, in spite of an education which had done much to weaken all family ties. For his mother he had an affection much less keen. There had never been any sympathy between them, so far as young Joe knew; and although his negative knowledge was necessarily incomplete, it was a barrier more than sufficient against love's progress. I regret that we shall see but little of that hard old Calvinist, for to one who knew her well she was a woman well worth knowing. She had more affection in her than anybody gave her credit for, and she loved her only child with so passionate a tenderness that she prayed every night and morning that she might not make an 'idol' of him. In this wise she succeeded in disguising her love so perfectly that young Joe had grown up in the belief that his very presence was distasteful to her.

So, with a sore heart and with some burdens of conscience, the young fellow dawdled away from the house in which he was born, resolved never to return to it. The future looked blank enough, for he had no business or profession, and had discovered in himself no special aptitudes which were likely to be profitable to him. He had ten pounds in his pocket, and might be able, perhaps, on his personal possessions of jewelry and what not, to realise fifty. The prospect was altogether dreary, and in spite of his resolve not to return, he was conscious of a very definite longing that his father would run after him and take forcible possession of him by ear or shoulder. He would willingly have gone back even ignominiously so that the ignominy had not seemed voluntary. But nobody ran after him; no restraining voice called him; and young Joe went his way to shame and sorrow, as many a thousand worse and better men have gone before him; for the want of one wise courage in himself, or, failing that, one word of friendly resolution from outside him.

There was nothing to invite or encourage him in the blank Sabbath street, where one cur lay in the sunshine snapping at the flies. Young Joe had upon him an impulse to kick the cur, but restrained himself, and went miserably and moodily along. It was counted highly improper and even immoral to smoke in the streets on Sunday in that quarter of the world; but Joe, feeling that he was leaving the town, and could afford to despise its edict, lit a cigar and hardened himself. He chose a way which led him across certain mournful meadows, where the grass was poisoned by the exhalations of a chemical factory near at hand, and rambled on through frowsy verdure until he reached a canal. The artificial hills rose high on each side of the cutting, and on one side ran clean into the water, wooded to the very edge. On the other, the towing−path was green except for one little streak. The water was without motion, or the place might have passed for an unusually favourable scrap of English river scenery. The artificial bluffs were bold and precipitous, and they had the merit of hiding the defaced country which lay beyond them. Up and down the towing−path young Joe wandered with the air of a man who has appointed a rendezvous. He waited for perhaps an hour, when round the corner of the farthest bluff came a figure in fluttering white muslin and a straw hat. His back was turned, and the new−comer, with innocent mirthful mischief in her face, ran tiptoe along the sward, and clapped both hands across his eyes.

'Guess who it is,' said the new−comer blithely. Young Joe returned no answer. The expression in the girl's face changed. She moved her hands, and saw what she had only felt before that they were wet with tears. She threw

one arm around his neck, and, seeking his left hand with hers, asked with tender solicitude,

'What is it, Joe, dear? What's the matter?'

Young Joe, facing about, kissed her, and took both her hands in his. The tears still glistened on the lashes over his gloomy eyes, and the girl regarded him with a look of fear and anxiety.

'I have bad news for you, Dinah;' said young Joe at last. 'I am turned out of house and home, and I shall have to go away somewhere and face the world.'

'Turned out of house and home?' questioned Dinah, with brown frightened eyes wide open.

'Turned out of house and home,' young Joe repeated somberly. 'But don't be afraid, Dinah. I shall be able to take care of myself and you. I shall cast about for something to do, and I'll work my fingers to the bone rather than see you want anything.'

'Turned away from home?' Dinah again asked. 'Who turned you away?'

Joe related the incidents of the afternoon, with some little natural bias.

'And you see, dear, there's nothing for it but to go away and' with a bitter little laugh 'and seek my fortune.'

'But, Joe,' said Dinah, 'you hadn't ought to have hit him, and him a middle−aged man. Wouldn't it be better, darling, to go back and say as you was sorry?'

'Good heaven, Dinah!' said young Joe, 'don't say hadn't ought. How can I go back and say I'm sorry? I'm not sorry; and even if I were, I couldn't go back and say so, to have them think I was afraid to face the world.'

Dinah stood grave and thoughtful for a minute, and then said, 'I suppose I mustn't tell father as we're a−going?'

'My darling,' said young Joe, 'you mustn't think of coming with me. Not at first, you know. I must go away and get something to do, and make a home for you. We can't run away like two babes in the wood, in that fashion. It won't be long, Dinah. Don't cry, my darling, don't cry. We shan't be long apart. I'll take care of that.'

'I don't see any use,' said Dinah, sitting disconsolately on the side of the spoil−bank and wiping her eyes with her little muslin apron 'I don't see any use in being married if a wife can't go along with her husband when he's turned out of house an' home, and hasn't got anywhere to go to. O Joe, you can't leave me behind you can't be so cruel. No, Joe, no, you couldn't have the heart to leave me.'

Joe sat down beside her on the grass−grown bank and soothed her, feeling himself very guilty all the while. Dinah refused to be comforted, and yet found his proffered comfort pleasant. But by−and−by a certain coquettish little petulance took the place of grief, and young Joe knew that he had half won his cause, which he admitted was a poor one to win.

'Don't tell me, Joe,' said pretty Dinah, 'as your folks are going to drive you away for always I know better. If you take 'em at their word, and stay away a week, they'll be glad to have you back again.'

Young Joe recognised the truth of this observation, but it played such havoc with the heroics of the case that he resented it and pooh−poohed it with a sombre gloom.

'It isn't very kind of you, Dinah,' said Joe, glad to appear as the injured person of the two, 'to make light of such a serious matter. And I would not lower myself in my own esteem by begging myself back again for anything the world could give me. I couldn't do it, darling, even for your sake, No, I'll work for you and struggle for you, but I won't do a mean thing, even for *you*.'

He said 'even for you' so tenderly, and there was such an obvious self−accusation in him when he said it, that the girl threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

'I know you're noble an' 'igh spirited, my dear,' she said, 'and I shall never say a word to ask you to be nothing else for me. No, not a word, Joe. And I've been a very thankless girl, Joe, to make believe as it was my trouble, when it was yours all the time. Why, dear me! it's no great matter for me to go on livin' at home with my father an' mother, till you can afford to send for me, is it, Joe? No, darlin', I shan't fret no more about myself.'

He read the devotion and the affection in her heart, and had a dim notion that he could not be altogether a bad fellow, since she gave him such unstinted love. It stirred a vague comfort in him, and strengthened him to approve of himself. He bullied his conscience into quiet, therefore, and began to take quite a high tune with it.

'It's perhaps a good thing, after all,' he said. 'A man ought not to be dependent upon anybody. He ought to be able to take care of himself. And I shall go into the world and fight for you, Dinah, and that will help ma. And when I have made a place for you ' He smiled in appreciation of the work already done in fancy.

'Don't mind about its being a very fine place at first, dear,' said Dinah, nestling to him and admiring him with all her heart his courage, his misfortune, his love.

'Not too fine a place at first,' said Joe, 'but later on a palace of a place.'

He said it lightly, and she laughed at the badinage, but in a moment they were grave again. It was a bitter business, after all. When the time for parting came, Joe strained her to his breast, and she hung about him sobbing.

'Go,' she said, struggling to be brave. 'Go, an' God bless you, my own dear, dear, ever dearest Joe.'

At this courageous sorrow young Joe melted.

'Yes,' he said, 'I will go. I'll go home and beg Screed's pardon, and I'll I'll tell my father that we're married, Dinah, and if he likes to cut up rough about it he can, but I can at least feel then that I've acted like a man, and not like a coward. And if he likes to send me away then, I can work with a clear conscience, and I shall know that I've done my duty.'

Now, women have always been puzzles to me, and I understand very little of them, but I have noticed in them one consistent peculiarity. If you once succeed in awaking in a woman that sense of protecting strength and tenderness which the most helpless of women are capable of feeling over even the most helpful of men, she will protect you, at the cost of serious wounds, from the merest scratch of any little thorn. Dinah would have none of this wholesome and honest sacrifice for her sake.

'No,' she said, fairly yearning over him and worshipping him for this bare promise of bare justice. 'Don't vex him with any talk about me yet, my dear. Why, you know, darling,' she went on, strangling her own hopes with the bowstring her sultan had sent her a month before, 'that if you hadn't known as it 'ud vex him, you'd ha' told him of it long ago. And now you want to tell him when he's vexed a'ready.'

'I don't care,' said Joe, feeling heroic. 'He can't do anything worse than he has done. I'll do the right thing.'

But Dinah clung to him.

'No,' she said. 'You shan't ruin yourself for me, Joe.' And she clung to her point with such vehemence that Joe yielded, and had till the satisfaction of seeming heroic without incurring any danger a joy which I have myself experienced.

They kissed and embraced again, and Joe wiped her eyes, and promised brokenly to write often.

'You're not a−going far away, my darlin', are you?' said Dinah, trying to be brave again.

'No, dear, no,' said he in answer; 'not far.'

'And, Joe, darlin',' she said, after a tearful pause, relieved by many sad kisses, 'will you let me keep my marriage lines?'

She whispered the question at his ear, and he bent over tenderly the while.

'Yes, yes, my dear,' he answered; 'I meant to bring them to you this afternoon, but I was in such a hurry. They are packed up in my portmanteau, but I will send them to you.'

'You don't mind my askin' for 'em, do you, Joe?'

'I was wrong all through,' he said; 'we ought to have been married openly. But I shall do you justice, Dinah. You know that, don't you?'

And so, with protestations, and caresses, and hopes, and with some repentances on his side, they parted. Joe climbed the bank again, and waved adieu from the top. She answered with a motion of the hand, and he was gone.

Chapter 3.

Mrs. Bushell did what she could to atone to the minister for the terrible insult which had been put upon him by her son. Old Joe sat awhile and smoked in silence, and, being greatly exercised by the whole business, drank rather more whisky and water than was good for him. Finally a streak of light appeared, and he went, a little flushed, towards it. It led him for a while by the road young Joe had taken an hour or two before, but he stopped short of the mangy meadow and sounded a heavy rat−tat at the door of a smart−looking house, which stood a little back from the lane. A neat servant−maid responded to this summons.

'Is Brother George in?' asked the old man.

'Yes, sir,' said the damsel, and led the way into a gaudily furnished parlour, where in black broadcloth sat an intensely respectable man in an armchair by the fireplace.

'Joe−ziph,' said the intensely respectable man, dividing the name into two balanced syllables, 'how are you?'

'George,' said old Joe, seating himself, 'I'm in a bit o' trouble.'

'You don't say so, Joe−ziph,' said the respectable man, with a wooden want of interest.

'Yis,' said old Joe, rubbing his grey hair with an enormous palm. 'I'm in a peck o' trouble. My Rebecca has been an' ordered my Joe out o' my house, an' he's took her at a word, an' he's gone.'

'Dear me,' said Brother George, as woodenly as before.

'Yes;' said old Joe again,'he's took her at a word, an' he's gone.'

'What did her order him off for?' asked Brother George.

Old Joe told the story, with rough−hewn brevity, and his brother nodded now and then to signify attention. In point of fact, it interested him more than it seemed to do. He was pretty nearly as wooden as he looked, but he had a very remarkable eye for the main chance. He saw money with an eye at once telescopic and microscopic, and he scented it, or seemed to scent it, as a sleuth−hound scents his game. Joe Bushell had made his money by a remarkably profitable patent, was worth a quarter of a million if a penny, and lived on less than a twentieth part of his income. George had borrowed from his brother to start life as a charter−master, had worked hard and lived hard, and screwed down all under him to the uttermost farthing, and, having made his money chiefly by hard−fistedness, was hated by his workpeople, and knew it, and rather rejoiced in it than otherwise, as being in some sense a tribute to his business capacity. He was a mean and grudging creature, with no instinct of active dishonesty. He had a dull, slow, wooden dislike of young Joe, because young Joe would one day inherit old Joe's fortune. Not that George had ever had a hope of it himself, but he grudged wealth to anybody, and could have nursed a spite against the very walls of a bank's strong−room for holding so much money. And now for the first time in his life dawned upon him some dim fancy, scarcely a hope, that he might handle Brother Joseph's money as his own some day. It was that dim fancy which made old Joe's story interesting to him.

'Now,' said the father, when his narrative was finished, 'what I want thee to do, George, is just this. Thee go an' find Joe, an' fetch him hum. Tek no sort o' denial. He can stop wi' thee a day or two, an' then, when it's blowed over wi' Rebecca, he can come back to me. Dost see?'

'Ah,' said Brother George, 'I see.' And he saw more than he confessed to seeing. He intended no wrong to anybody, but was it likely that young Joe would listen to his solicitations? He thought not. And if that misguided young man declined to listen, might not his absence become a source of profit to his uncle? 'Where is he?' the uncle asked, after giving these reflections time to form.

'Well, thee seest,' said old Joe, rubbing his head perplexedly, 'we do' rightly know wheer he is. But he's bound to send for his luggage.'

'Ah,' said Brother George again, 'I see.'

I think,' old Joe resumed, 'as he's likely to send for it tonight. Our Joe's allays in a bit of a hurry, an' does everythin' hot−foot.'

'Then,' said George, 'I'd better come up to your place, eh?'

'Just what I wanted,' answered old Joe; and the two set out together. 'Not a word to the missis, mind.' George nodded in reply, turning over in that stiff−jointed mind of his the question Shall I break or keep *that* promise? Which is likelier to pay? He would not have robbed young Joe he would not have robbed anybody. Theft was 'agen the law.' But although any plain and straightforward method of transferring a neighbour's coin to his pouch was a thing to be reprehended, the construction of any crooked scheme for that purpose was praiseworthy, and the carriage of the same to triumphant effect was a thing to be proud of. In short, Brother George was a diplomatist, and had some personal advantages in the diplomatic way singular as that statement may appear. He could lie, for instance, with a stolidity which defied scrutiny. Practice had done much for him, but the first great gift was Nature's. He was 'inscrutable' enough to have realised a Tory journalist's idea of a prime minister. His respectable countenance, clean−shaven but for its respectable tufts of grey whisker, was scarcely more mobile than a mask. Since he never lied apart from strict necessity, he was commonly regarded as a veracious man. He is not the

scoundrel of this story which, indeed, scarcely aspires to the portraiture of a real rascal and nobody who knew him thought of him as being anything but a very respectable self−made man, who did unusual credit to his original station in life. The remarkable woodenness of his manner, and a certain solemn drawl he had, were mainly responsible for the family belief in his wisdom. He was the final authority on family affairs.

The Reverend Paul had left the house when the brothers reached it. Mrs. Bushell was sitting in the kitchen with a big Bible before her, earnestly and believingly struggling after comfort in the utterances of Habakkuk. There are people who find Christian philosophies in Solomon's Song and suck satisfaction out of Ecclesiastes; and Mrs. Bushell was of them. But at this sorrowful hour, a philippic against the Chaldeans, 'that bitter and hasty nation;' had little power to soothe.

'Brother George,' she said, as that respectable person entered, 'has Joseph been a−asking your advice?'

'Rebecker,' Brother George replied with weighty solemnity, 'far be it from me to deny anythin' as is true, That's what Joe−ziph come to see me for, as far as I can see.'

'Why,' read Mrs. Bushell with her finger tracking the denouncing lines in the great Bible, 'why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me; and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked and judgment doth never forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; there wrong judgment proceedeth.'

'Well, well, Rebecker,' said Brother George with a propitiatory accent, 'boys will be boys, you know, an' allays was.'

'They wouldn't *be* boys if they wasn't,' said old Joe, with a touch of the local humour.

'Joseph!' said Mrs. Bushell warningly.

'Becky, my gull!' said old Joe, leaning above her chair and laying a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

She felt the appeal thus conveyed, for she was by nature a woman of much tenderness. But she only straightened herself, and laid her finger once more upon the warning text.

'There's my guide, Joseph,' she made answer, when she could find her voice, for she was sore disturbed, and her 'worldly longings,' as she called them, moved strongly in her heart.

Old Joe moved away from the back of her chair, and Brother George sat down with an air of wisdom on him, and looked as one who is prepared to proffer counsel. There was silence for a time; then Mrs. Bushell turned her head away and asked,

'What do you advise, Brother George?'

'Well,' said Brother George, venting an elaborate and prolonged wink upon old Joe, 'I should advise as nothing should be done, not to say precipitate.'

'Yes,' said old Joe, nodding at his brother, 'give him a day or two, an' he'll come round.'

'Joseph,' said Mrs. Bushell, with unfortunate solemnity, 'if you look for any healin' of this breach apart from his repentance, you will wait in vain. If you mean as I shall come round, you are mistaken. In this case, Joseph, there is duty to be done, an' I've spoke my last word a'ready.'

Joe shook his head at Brother George mournfully, and George shook his head in answer. Matters were growing rather bright for Brother George, and if the brightness were only nebulous as yet, it might reveal things pleasant to look at by−and−by. Notwithstanding this cheerful inward knowledge, however, George looked upon his brother with a solemn countenance, He would fain have appealed seriously to his sister−in−law's forbearance, and so have drawn from her a more emphatic and forcible denial of her own desires, but he was afraid of that experiment.

'Becky,' said old Joe, being perhaps a little more accessible to emotion at that moment that he commonly was, 'the lad was hard put on. The parson go's an' says things to him about his sweetheart, an' it stands to r'ason as Joe got humped at it. He axed me, Becky, afore you come into the room, what I'd ha' done if any mon had said things to me about yo' afore we got married: It wouldn't ha' made much differ to me, I think,' said old Joe, driving one great hand into the palm of the other, 'who it was as said at. I'd ha' floored him, if he'd ha' killed me the next minute.'

Brother George nodded gloomily in assent to this, for it seemed to him an unanswerable argument in young Joe's favour. But Mrs. Bushell held firm.

'I've spoke my last word, Joseph. He struck a minister o' God's word, in his own father's house, of a Sunday; an' if that ain't worth saying I'm sorry for, I've got no more to say.'

Brother George nodded again in acquiescence, for this view of the case also seemed unanswerable.

'Gi'e the lad time,' urged old Joe.

'Let him tak' his own time, Joseph,' said the mother staunchly. 'When he's tired o' the husks o' the Prodigal, he'll come back again. But I fear he'll sup sorrow by spoonfuls i' the way.'

She left the room, and old Joe, with a troubled face, set tobacco and a glass of whisky before his brother. The pair sat in gloomy silence for a while, when a knock came to the door. Old Joe answered this summons.

'Who's theer?' he asked.

'Well,' said a voice from the dark outside, 'as for as my apinium go's, it's a young feller o' the name o' Bowker.'

'Come in, William,' said old Joe in a shaky voice. 'What be you come for?'

'Why, your son's at the Dudley Arms,' said Mr. Bowker, entering the kitchen, 'an' he's sent me up here t'ax for his box. He's a−gooin' in to Brummagen to−night, he says, an' on to London i' the mornin'.'

'Goo an' say a word to him, George,' said the father. 'Don't let the lad go further 'n Brummagen. Mak' him send word to you wheer he is, when he gets theer, an' we'll tek care on him. But, George, don't go to let him know as I ain't angry wi' him. Mind that. Do it all as if it was comin' from yourself like. D'ye see?'

'I see;' said Brother George. Could anything have been designed to play better into the hands of a respectable man who desired to secure an advantage and was afraid of a crime? He would not in this case have even the shadow of a lie upon his conscience. All that was to be done was to tell the truth, and obey instructions in breaking them. Mrs. Bushell, without an apology, was implacable, and her husband wished to have it supposed that he also was very angry. George knew very well that his nephew would tender no apology just then, and began to look complacently on the promise of the future.

Young Joe sat moody and alone in the smoke−room of the Dudley Arms, awaiting the return of his emissary, when Uncle George entered, and with a solemn aspect took a seat before him.

'This is a bad job, Joe−ziph,' said he, shaking his head. 'I've heerd all about it from your mother and father. I don't say as you was in the wrong, not to say altogether, but you know as it was a dreadful thing to do a dreadful thing. But look thee here, my lad,' he continued, with a wooden assumption of geniality which went, howsoever unreal it might be, clean to the lad's sore heart, 'blood's thicker than water, an' when all's said an' done you're my nevew and I'm your uncle. Now, what d'ye mean to do? They'm hard on you at home, fearful hard.'

'I shall go out and face the world,' said young Joe. 'I'm not afraid!'

'Of course you ain't, a fine−built young fellow like you! It ain't likely as you would be. But look here, my lad you can't face the world on nothing. Can you, now?'

'I have something to begin with,' said Joe in answer. 'I am not altogether without money. And then, I have a little owing to me.'

'Ah, dear me. Well. I can see as you're just as hot−foot as your father and mother! But, come now, wheer do you think o' going to?'

'I'd go to America,' said young Joe, 'if I only had the chance.'

'Merriky?' echoed Uncle George. 'It's a long way there.'

'The longer the better,' said Joe bitterly.

'No, no, Joseph,' said Uncle George. 'Don't say that. But if you're bent on it, why, I . No, no, Joseph, don't think on it.'

'Yes,' said Joe, 'I'll do it. I'll do it if I work my passage out. There's room for a man to move in, in America.'

'Don't you talk nonsense,' said Uncle George.

'By Jove!' quoth young Joe, rising, and feeling already the glow of a successful explorer, 'I'll show you whether or not I'm talking nonsense. I tell you, sir, I'll do it, and I will.'

'Pooh!' said Uncle George; 'you ain't going to work your passage out. Not while you've got a uncle as can put his hand in his pocket to help you. No, no, Joseph.'

'You are very kind, uncle,' said Joe, 'but I can't accept any help from you.' And he wondered 'why did I never see what a good fellow Uncle George is until now?'

'Wait here a bit,' said the benevolent uncle, and with that arose, and left the room with stagey stealth. When he returned, he bore with him a sheet of letter−paper and an inkstand. He sat down in silence, and wrote in a slow and laboured manner. Then he produced a pocket−book, from which, after an intricate search, he drew a crumpled receipt stamp. Gazing hard at Joe, he moistened this with his tongue, affixed it to the paper, and then, squaring his elbows, he set his head down sideways to the table, and laboriously signed the document. Joe watched him, not knowing what all this might mean, until the sheet, carefully dried before the fire, was placed in his own hands. He read it with a swift moistening of the eyes, less at the gift than at the kindness which dictated it.

'Thank you, uncle,' said young Joe. 'God bless you for your goodness. You are the only friend I have.'

'If they knowed,' said his only friend truthfully, 'as I'd helped you i' this way, they'd never forgive me. But wherever you goo, Joseph, remember as you've got a friend in me. Allays write to me, my lad; allays write to me.'

Therewith the benevolent uncle squeezed his nephew's hand and left him. Young Joe sat with his elbows on the table, and looked with new−born affection and gratitude after him. Why had he never understood Uncle George until now?

'A dear good fellow!' he said aloud in his enthusiasm; 'a most kindly, generous fellow!'

And with tears of gratitude hot in his eyes, he folded up his uncle's cheque for a hundred pounds.

Chapter 4.

Young Joe, his heart still warmed by his uncle's generosity, sat at the side of the bed in his room at the Dudley Arms that Sunday night, and surveyed the situation. Starting in this well−provided way, it did not seem easy to fail in the world. Practically, as everybody knows, there is an end to the productive powers of a hundred pounds, but, for all that, a hundred pounds is a good round sum for a start in the world, and young Joe saw already in fancy his fortune made.

'And I'll make poor little Dinah happy, anyhow,' he thought. She haunted him, and her memory filled him with a keen and poignant remorse. 'The poor child,' he said to himself, 'must have her marriage lines.' With that he unstrapped his portmanteau, tumbled out its disorderly papers on the carpet, and set to work to search for the certificate of the marriage between Joseph Bushell, bachelor, and Dinah Banks, spinster. First, he made a hasty and confident grope amongst the papers; next, with a little shade of perplexity on his face, he took a more careful search; and finally, having separately examined every scrap, turned out his pockets, unlocked his chest and searched through its contents, and still met with no success, he sat down on the lid of the box in the midst of his tumbled belongings and clawed his hair with vexation.

'Confound it all!' said Joe. 'The thing's somewhere here, I'm sure. I must look for it by daylight.' With this promise by way of consolation for almost certain loss, he undressed and got into bed. He had but a poor night of it, for Dinah's appealing face was always before him, and he felt alternately base and heroic as he thought of his encounter with the minister. The candle burned down and went out, with the result particularised in the Honourable Mr. Sucklethumbkin's account of a public execution. Then the moonlight sent into the room a beam which travelled very, very slowly across the carpet, and rose very slowly up the fireplace, and when Joe had tossed about for long ages, reached the mirror, and crept along the wall, and slid slowly towards the window, as its brightness faded and died. Then the swallows who built beneath the roof−pipes began to chirrup, and the window glimmered grey. Joe pulled up the blind and lighted a cigar, and looked a last look on the familiar High Street: a last conscious look, at least, for always when Memory brought her budget of pictures to him thereafter, she brought that view, with the grey desolate dawnlight broadening on the closed shutters of the shops, and he heard distinctly, many a time, by Memory's magic, the stately step of the peeler 'the blue−robed guardian of the city streets,' as a minor poet called him once upon a time patrolling the silent highway.

I the present writer have found it necessary, for one reason or another, to face the world anew so often, and under such varying circumstances, that I have almost worn out the sensations attendant on the process. But striving, as a faithful chronicler should strive, to project myself into young Joe's personality, I succeed chiefly in calling to mind my first impressions of that melancholy yet inspiriting business. I recall the heartache and the sense of freedom the regrets for past folly and the promises of amendment so devoutly sworn the dear regard for parted friends, the hope to meet again, the determination to return triumphant.

All these held sway in the young fellow's heart. But for Uncle George's news of the attitude of father and mother, he could willingly have gone home again to say good−bye, not without hope of no good−bye being said. Shame pulled him both ways, now homewards, now abroad. After all, going back was out of the question. He packed carefully, purposing to go once more through the papers, but when he came to them he said, without being quite

sure of the motive which moved him, 'I'll look into them on the way,' and so thrust them anew into his portmanteau, and waited drearily for some sign of life in the hotel.

At the first sound of opening doors he rang his bell, and demanded of Boots, who came unkempt and sleepy, the time−table for London. The railway had not reached the outlying Black Country towns at this time, but coaches ran through most of them to the great New Street station in Birmingham, a marvel of art, whose vast glass roof was in those days, as I can just remember, an object of unfading wonder to the populace. The coach would start in time to catch the mid−day train, and there were four hours to wait. He went downstairs and sat alone in the dismal coffee−room, and being presently broken in upon by a damsel in curl−papers, asked for breakfast, and in an hour's time attacked with languid appetite a cindery dish of eggs and bacon, and investigated a funereal−looking Britannia metal urn containing a dark−coloured semi−liquid tepid concoction announced by the curl−papered damsel as coffee. After this he called dejectedly for his bill, ordered Boots to send on his luggage by the coach in time for the up−train, and set out to walk. His spirits rose as he went along the road. Town seems in danger of meeting town to−day, and some now alive may live to see a vaster London join its scattered parts in the middle of England, forming one solid and prodigious city. But there were fair spaces of field and park about the central town when Joe walked towards it, and here and there a rabbit frolicked across his path, and once he stood still to watch a weasel shoot across the road from hedge to hedge, where a grey rabbit had run a second before. 'The mellow ousel fluted in the elm', colts pushed their inquiring heads over the gates which held them from the road, the sun shone clear, the wind blew warm. Joe meant no wrong to any human creature. Why should trouble weigh upon him? He pegged on, with snatches of song on his mind, and high resolve in his heart. There was gold in California. Jim Brooks, the High Street tailor's son, had found a nugget weighing two hundred ounces. Gold−digging was the readiest way to wealth the world had seen, and many a man had prospered at it Why not he? The great Henry Russell's songs were in vogue, and young Joe sang jollily back to the lark and throstle:

Pull away, cheerily,
Not slow or wearily
Shifting the cradle, boys, fast to and fro;
Working your hand about,
Shifting the sand about,
Seeking for treasures that lie hid below.

And so on. The verse was not written in the highest possible style of art, but it might be interesting to know how many young fellows went out of England with that doggerel in their ears and on their tongues. Joe was only one out of many who made it a part of the Litany sung at Gold's great shrine.

He cashed Uncle George's cheque at Lloyd's bank, and drew the hundred pounds in sovereigns, influenced, I fancy, by those gold−digging visions. Paper is but a poor medium between riches and poverty, after all. You may be able to translate it into gold, but it has not gold's magic, and can exert but little of gold's charm. I am nothing of a money−lover, but I do yet care somewhat for the round ring of minted gold, and find a something sibilant in the rustle of bank paper, as though that rustle whispered, 'Soon shall I fly.' With the hard gold in a lump in his inner breast−pocket, tied in a chamois leather bag, Joe wandered down to the station and awaited the arrival of the coach. By some accident, for the days were leisurely, and people gave themselves plenty of time for most things, the sound of old Tom's horn came tootling into New Street a quarter of an hour beyond its usual time, and the train was already puffing to be gone. Joe had secured his ticket, and now fell upon his luggage, called a porter, impetuously bade him get these things into the London train, saw them hurriedly labelled, took his seat just in time, and was swallowed up by the darkness of the tunnel before he had looked round him to observe his fellow−passengers. Light breaking in anew, revealed the florid countenance of Mr. Sydney Cheston, who held out his hand with a loud greeting. Joe took it, a little shamefacedly, but his friend was determined to make light of the affair of the previous day, and was even ostentatiously hearty. At Coventry they were left alone, and, having bribed the guard with half a−crown (after the manner of young British gentlemen before Brinsley Sheridan's grandson gave us the good gift of smoking−carriages), they began to smoke at a great rate; and it befell that in the

course of the journey Joe opened his heart, and having first apologised once more, went on:

'I'm in a deuce of a mess, old fellow. To tell the truth, I was in a wretched bad temper all day yesterday, or I should never have behaved as I did to you '

'Don't say a word about it,' Cheston said; 'I didn't mean to hurt you, but it was my fault.'

Then the young men shook hands, and Joe went on again:

'When I got home there was a parson there. He's not a bad fellow for a parson, and I'm very sorry for what happened, but I was in an infernal temper, and he insulted me and was horribly trying and annoying, and all that sort of thing; and, gad, sir, I knocked him down!'

Cheston stared hard at Joe and burst out laughing. 'What a fire−eater you are, Bushell,' said he. 'Excommunication, you know. That sort of thing.'

'He was a Nonconformist parson,' said Joe guiltily, 'and really, in cold blood, I've a great deal of respect for him.'

The irreverent Cheston screamed with laughter, and by−and−by asked breathlessly:

'You must have had a row about it?'

'A row!' said Joe ruefully. 'My mother told me either to apologise or leave the house and never go back again. I couldn't apologise. It was impossible.'

'Especially under compulsion,' said Cheston, still laughing. 'If apologies were as plenty as blackberries, I wouldn't give an apology under compulsion. Well?'

'Well,' Joe returned, 'the long and the short of it is, I'm on the way to America.'

'No!' cried Cheston.

'Yes,' said Joe stolidly, 'I'm on the way to America' Then cheering a little, 'I shall try my luck on the Pacific side, amongst the nuggets.'

'By George, you know,' said Cheston, surveying him with an eye of admiration and envy, 'I should like that. What a lark it would be. No,' he added sorrowfully, 'the governor wouldn't listen to it. In the words of Shenstone, or something like 'em

I should like for to follow you there,
And to toil where the gold−nuggets breed;
Bat papa would be ready to swear,
And

Hang it all! I'm full of these momentary flashes of genius. A−ha! Got him!

And I know that I shouldn't succeed!

Besides, my son, I haven't got the rhino. But are you really going? When?'

'I'm really going, and I'm going now,' said Joe. 'Now, at once.'

'I suppose,' said Cheston, striving purposely to bury Joe's angry meanness of the day before, 'I suppose you remember that I owe you something? Thirty odd pounds, I think it is. If you'll come round with me, I'll let you have it.'

'Well,' said Joe, striving also to wipe out that ugly remembrance, 'if you don't mind, Cheston, I'd rather you kept it until I ask you for it. I have enough to begin with, but I might get hard up, and in that case it would come in usefully. You be my banker, and when I find myself in danger of wanting the coin I'll send for it.'

'Good,' said Cheston; and the two began to talk about California, and told each other what they knew of it which was mostly more marvellous than true.

'But what,' asked Cheston, 'induced you to come to London? Isn't Liverpool the nearest way?'

'Why, yes,' said Joe, 'I suppose it is. But ' there he blushed a little, 'you see it's altogether a little sudden for a fellow, and and, in point of fact, I never made up my mind until I started to walk into town to catch this train. London is the first place a man tends to, you know, and it's a sort of axle whose spokes radiate to everywhere.'

'Well,' said Cheston, with that happy−go−lucky spirit which distinguishes the average young Englishman, and perhaps helps to make him what he is the wonder of the world for pluck, and dash, and enterprise 'it doesn't matter a great deal where a man goes, so long as he has the right stuff in him, and sticks to what he takes to.'

'I'm not going to be beaten,' said young Joe valiantly. 'Money isn't everything in the world; and if I can't get much of it, I must do with little.'

'Oh yes,' Cheston answered, 'and besides that, your governor will turn up trumps at the finish. You're the only son, I think?'

'The only child,' said Joe, with a tremor on his lip. 'I mustn't stay away too long, after all, for they're both getting old, and a little bit frail, and it wouldn't be nice to come back and find them gone.'

'You must write to 'em,' Cheston answered cheerfully.

The conversation languished. Young Joe's heart once more began to fail him. He had fairly started now, and going back was more than ever impossible until he had at least done something. With little further speech they came to London, and went down to the luggage−van together to secure their belongings. Cheston's came out first. Then, after a long delay, came one of Joe's properties his chest. Then, after another pause, the van was cleared, and there was no sign of his portmanteau.

'Must have been put out at Rugby, sir,' said the porter in answer to the young man's claim. 'We can send back for it. Where shall we send it sir?'

Joe gave his address at an hotel in Covent Garden, and was driven thither in a hackney coach. Cheston accompanied him, and that night they dined together. In the morning Joe made inquiries as to the easiest and quickest way to California, and learned little that was likely to be of practical use to him, for he had no idea as to the right way of going about the business, and wandered rather listlessly about the docks, standing promiscuous treat to nautical−looking men who appeared to have nothing special on their hands. The best way, he concluded, would be to get to New York, and make a start for the gold fields thence. The route to New York at least was clear. Meantime, back to the hotel to see if the lost portmanteau had arrived, and, in case it had, to send the certificate of marriage to Dinah. For it was characteristic of young Joe that, at the moment at which the portmanteau was known to have disappeared, he was resolved that it held the certificate, though whilst it remained in his possession he was most mournfully sure it did not.

No portmanteau for him at the hotel. No news of it at the railway station. No news of it next day, and next day still no news. And on the Thursday night the fast−sailing clipper ship 'Orinoco' dropped down the Thames, and the portmanteau was finally left behind and with it the last hope of Dinah's peace? Not so, young Joe inwardly declared. Cheston was with him on the deck, and was prepared to go as far as Greenwich, to keep heart and hope in him at the start.

'We'll have a bottle of champagne, Bushell, for doch an dhorras,' says that young gentleman cheerfully.

Joe accedes, and they go below, and with laughter and clinking of glasses and good wishes and high hope they drink to each other.

'And here;' cried Cheston, 'here is the Rose of the Midlands, coupled with the name of the gentleman who will shortly return from Tom Tiddler's ground with his pockets full of nuggets.'

Joe laughed, a little constrainedly, and drank, murmuring into the glass a word of tenderness for Dinah. He would fain have given his confidence to Cheston, but something withheld him, some fear perhaps of breaking down, or some childish dread of seeming sentimental, or reluctant about going at this final moment.

'You'll let me know how you get along,' says Cheston; 'and,' drawing him aside, 'you'll claim the coin whenever you want it, you know.'

'All right,' Joe nodded in return. New clinking of glasses, new good wishes. Wine makes the heart glad and the face to shine, and sets the little cords within tingling and ringing to tunes tender and hopeful, mournful and triumphant. On deck again, the inward orchestra playing 'Good−bye, Sweetheart' 'The Emigrant's Farewell,' and 'Cheer, Boys, Cheer,' in a strange laughing tearful medley. Stedfast lights ashore and shifting lights afloat, shining reflected on the transparent gloom of the river, many a time to be recalled by fancy, and looking already memorable and unlike anything seen before. Greenwich and 'good−bye' the little boat dancing shoreward into darkness, the great black hulk sliding sullenly down the river and towards the open sea.

And now for the first time in his life young Joe felt alone. A man may be alone a thousand times without feeling it or may feel it in spite of society. There are certain normal conditions of nature which we do our best to leave unrecognised. Silence is one, darkness another, solitude a third. We make raids into silence with a tremulous defiance, as a boy whistles to keep his heart up when walking in the dusk through a churchyard. We defy darkness in the feeblest ways, and she has her own in spite of us. One of these days she will creep at an extinguished sun and stifle the fading stars. And as for solitude, every human soul is so alone that no other can get into reach of it, but we make pretence of being gregarious and we forget our fears. These three great negatives, silence and darkness and solitude, are the eternal background against which we fantoccini disport ourselves, for Heaven knows whose amusement. We huddle together to forget these gruesome everlasting negatives; but when we are for a moment severed from the crowd, how the knowledge of them swoops down and shrivels us! Solitude, silence, darkness on the sea, and the hapless young Joe in the middle of them.

He had never been at sea before, and he suffered physically. The Reverend Paul Screed was avenged already, and could he have appreciated his enemy's miseries, he would have been more than ready to forgive. Surely, thought Joe, there was nothing in the world nothing, nothing, nothing which could make it worth while to endure this helpless horrible nausea, this fruitless revolt of soul and body against a universe suddenly grown hideous and unbearable. 'Ah, death I'd gladly welcome,' sings the melodious Italian tenor in florid declamation to Leonora. Young Joe had no heart to sing it, but he groaned it, as with heavy eyes and pea−green countenance he lay in his berth surrendered to misery. Only one man in a hundred tastes the awful possibilities of sea−sickness, but Joe was the one in the hundred who sailed aboard the 'Orinoco,' and the ship's look−out had sighted Kinsale Head before he was better. Then he began to recover pluck and appetite together, and the remainder part of the voyage went pleasantly enough. When a man has been as penitent for three or four days as he had been, penitence is apt to be

worn a little threadbare. There is no emotion which cannot be outworn, and Joe had got through his stock of repentances too speedily perhaps. I knew a schoolboy whose one gustatory passion was cheese. Once being possessed of a spare half−crown, he bought an egregious lump of Gruyère, and attacked it in the solitude of his chamber, and ate until he could eat no more. He has arrived now at man's estate, that schoolboy; and his youthful feast was enjoyed years and years ago, but if you show him Gruyère at this day you almost drive him from the table. He ate enough to last him for his lifetime. In like manner, young Joe was so greedy of remorse that his four days' feast of woe lasted him the voyage and for some time beyond it.

He landed in due time in New York, and before he had set foot upon American ground the crushing sense of solitude had retired in favour of an exhilarating feeling of independence. He had already been so long absent from Dinah without sending her a message that he felt it unworthy to write now until he had begun to do something to atone for absence and silence. He was a little dismayed to discover that he was as far off from California, practically, as ever, and that he had not money enough to go there, except in the roughest and meanest way. Then, people with whom he talked set the chances before him in a discouraging manner, and, in brief, his money melted with surprising swiftness, and, though employment was plentiful enough for those who knew how to work, he knew how to do nothing, and therefore got nothing to do. He wrote to Cheston and to Uncle George. Cheston kept his promise and sent the money he owed, and that also melted. Uncle George wrote a letter, which he took the precaution to post in Birmingham, lest the local postmaster should know the lad's address. In this epistle he set forth his deep sorrow at the fact that his brother and his sister−in−law were still implacable. Young Joe's resolve to emigrate according to Uncle George had been the last straw which broke the camel's back, and they were now irreconcilable. The writer expressed his deepest regret for young Joe's prospects, but he sent no money.

Then came two or three days' semi−starvation in New York, then an engagement as fire−mender at a brick−kiln some miles outside the city. This business in a rough and squalid way held body and soul together, but there was no chance of making a home for Dinah out of it. And so Dinah was still unwritten to, and the days and weeks and months went by. He had new remorses, but he had his work to do and his bodily discomforts to endure, and by−and−by memory grew less poignant. After some months he fell in with a lumber ganger, and went with him to the Dominion and lived a rough backwood life, hardening his hands and toughening his muscles, and growing a great beard. Anybody seeing him would never have recognised the spruce young Midland dandy, and he had almost forgotten himself.

By this time he was ashamed and afraid to write to Dinah. He was very unhappy about her often. He was very tender and sore in his thoughts about her always. But he never wrote, and he began to hope that she would forget him, and give him up for dead, and carry on her life without him. In one of his rare letters to Uncle George, a couple of years after leaving England, he mentioned Dinah so particularly that the old fox suspected him of an inclination to come back again. So he wrote in answer that Dinah Banks had married, and from that time forth he received no letters from his nephew. This rejoiced him, for with every day that passed he felt his hold upon his brother's fortune surer and more sure.

Chapter 5.

The Saracen's Head was a cheerful and comfortable hostel, proffering on its signboard good accommodation for man and beast, and fulfilling its promise liberally within. Sanded floor, huge open fireplace blazing with an enormous fire, after the generous−looking fashion of the mining districts, where coal is cheap and a good fire is counted first of household comforts. Big bare oak beams in the ceiling, with flitches of mellow bacon stuck flat across them, ripening to the rasher stage; shining onions in nets and reeves, and hams in canvas jackets bearing them company. Prodigiously solid tables of dark oak, much battered by years of rough usage and irregularly gauffred at the edges by idle pocket−knives. Heavy wooden settles, polished by the lounging shoulders of many generations of guests, and staunch to carry generations more. The present assembly clad in thick flannel jackets, thrown open to show the gaudy lining of cheap felt carpeting, heavy ankle−jack boots, mostly worn unlaced, with

a big crumpled tongue hanging out, as though the boots were thirstier than their wearers, nondescript hats of felt, shaped like basins and without a pretence of brim the present assembly sat smoking and drinking in a quiet contentment almost bovine. It was noticeable that most of the men were blazoned in a singular manner on the face, as if they had been tattooed and the design had been half obliterated. Each man so marked had felt Death's hand upon his cheek once at least. But that was commonplace, everyday, and in the way of business, and as the general thing was not much thought of.

This was the Saracen's common room, and was rather out of the Saracen's own direct line of observation. He swung, with inflamed countenance, portentous turban, unnumbered jewels, and bilious eyes, above a brighter window round the corner, and behind the brighter window lay a snugger room a sort of library of liquor, where bottles held the shelves instead of books. It was a mere bandbox of a room, and what with its jolly fire and crimson window blind, and its glitter of glass and gilt lettering, it glowed and sparkled on this wintry night with amazing warmth and brightness. For the wind was howling and the Saracen was pitching gustily to and fro outside, and shrieking rustily at the weather, and the rain beat at the windows frantically at times. All this redoubled the inner warmth and brightness, of course, and sent the inmates of the cosy room closer with comfortable shiverings round the fire. The inmates of the room were three in number. On one side of the fire sat an old woman, and on the other a young one. Between them an old man in a sleeved waistcoat sat back in an armchair and scorched his legs with an aspect of much contentment. He was a fat man with a pale countenance, white hair, and a well−filled rotund waistcoat. Every now and then with his fat hands he caressed the rotund waistcoat as if encouraging his digestive faculties, as you pat a horse when he has pleased you. The old woman was ruddy and neat and clean, in an old−fashioned mutch cap with spotless crisp lace edges and having a white silk kerchief drawn squarely over her round shoulders. The young woman was pretty but wistful−looking, her face paler than it should have been; her eyes giving a kindly observer warrant to believe that they were more used to tears than eyes which had a right to be gay by virtue of their brightness and their beauty should be.

'Daniel,' said the old lady, 'what's the time?'

The old man stole a caressing hand across the rotundity of his figure and pulled out a fat, pale watch. 'It's nearhand on ten.'

'Time them chaps was goin', then;' said the old lady.

'Ah!' said the old man assentingly, 'I suppose it is, missis. I suppose it is.' He drew his legs from the fire, and stroked them persuasively, as who should say 'Will you carry me?' The legs apparently declined, for the feet went back to the fender, and their owner's hands once more offered a slight recognition of the efforts made by his digestive organs. A long−drawn sigh seemed to admit that they were overworked, and that he had no wish to hurry them.

'I do declare, our Daniel,' said his wife placidly, 'you're gettin' lazier every day.'

'Very like, missis,' assented Daniel, 'very like. A mon do't get no suppler at my time o' life.'

'I'm ashamed on you, Daniel' said the wife, half vexed, half laughing. 'Dinah, light your father's candle, an' send him to bed.' The girl rose to obey. The old woman, laying down the knitting which had hitherto occupied her plump white fingers, set her hands upon the elbows of her armchair and made a motion to rise. By that time the struggle between the smile and the frown was over and the smile had won. Her placid and good−humoured gaze followed her daughter's languid motion across the room, when suddenly her hands relaxed their hold upon the elbows of the chair and she sank back with a look in which terror and suspicion were singularly blended. The girl reached a candlestick from the mantelpiece, crossed the room for a spill of paper, returned, lighted the candle and set it in the old man's hand. Then stooping over ham she kissed his cheek, and sat down in her corner. The mother arose and left the room. A moment later her voice was heard.

'Now, Willy−um, your mother'll be a sittin' up for you. George Bethell, you ought to ha' been abed an hour ago. Tummas, you're on the night shift, *I* know, an' it's time as you was gone.'

'Let's have another half−gallint, mother,' pleaded one solemn roysterer gruffly. 'It'll on'y be half−a−pint all round.'

'Not another drop o' drink'll be drawed i' this house *this* night,' returned the old lady with unusual acidity of tone.

'Missis,' responded the young man first addressed, 'yo' mote [must not] send Tum whum sober. His ode woman ain't used to it. Her'll have a fit, or summat.'

'Haw, haw, haw!' from the assemblage. The old lady turned upon the wag with solemn anger.

'Willy−um Bowker,' she said, 'you'm worse than any on 'em, an' to be so young too. It's known far an' wide as nobody ever got drink to mek him unsteady at the Saracen's Head, neither Tummas Howl nor no man.'

'Missis,' said the wag with instant propitiation in his tone, 'it een't like yo to turn rusty at a joke. But we gone away dry tonight i'stead o' drunk, an' for my part I likin' to be about half−way.' A murmur of general approval greeted this statement, and every man seemed to be in favour of the golden mean. But the old lady was inexorable.

'Drank or dry,' she said with much acerbity and decision, 'you'll go as you are.'

'Come on, chaps,' said Mr. Bowker, who as yet was beardless. 'Her's as good as a mother to all on us, an' what her says her sticks to. Good−night, missis, and no offence, as Tum said to the windmill last time he fell agen it.'

'Good−night, missis,' said each grave roysterer as he passed her.

She answered each by name. 'Good−night, 'Minadab. Good−night, Ebenezer. Good−night, Meshach.' And soon through a list of the quaintest names, until the last had tramped up the sanded passage and had turned out into the rain. She blew out the candles, bolted the door behind the retiring guests, and returned to the smaller room. The old man had gone upstairs, and the girl was preparing to follow. The staircase, with steps of well−scoured white−sanded wood, opened into this snug little room, and the mother, closing the door, stood with her shoulders against it regarding Dinah. The girl looked at her meekly, but with an air a little startled.

'Our Dinah,' said the mother, 'I want to speak to you. You'd better sit down.' The girl obeyed. 'There's somethin' the matter wi'you. What is it?'

'There's nothing the matter with *me*, mother,' answered Dinah wearily.

'My gell,' said Mrs. Banks advancing, and bending towards her with an anxious, tremulous severity, 'you can't deceive me. There's somethin' the matter.'

'No,' said Dinah, looking puzzled; 'I'm a bit dull. That's all.'

'Dinah, you can't deceive an old experienced woman. There's somethin' the matter with you, and somethin' very dreadful. Tell me this minute what it is.'

'Oh, mother,' said Dinah, in an agitated whisper, 'am I going to die?'

'It'd a'most be better if you was,' said the mother. Dinah's face was white, and her eyes were wide open with fear, but at this she flushed suddenly, and shrank and cowered, with her arms drawn across her face. Her very ears and neck were red and white by turns, as she bent down.

'Is it that?' she sobbed; 'oh, is it that?'

'Dinah! Dinah! you wicked gell,' said her mother. 'Tell me who it is!' Dinah bent lower and lower, and drew herself away as any defenceless thing draws back into itself at the touch of an intruding finger. Her mother seized one of her hands, and strove to draw it from her face, but Dinah held her head down so resolutely, and drew her arms so tightly towards herself, that the old woman was powerless to effect her purpose. 'Tell me who it is!' she repeated severely, relinquishing her hand. 'Is it young Joe Bushell as has broke his father's and mother's heart, and made a huzzy o' you as well?'

'Oh, mother,' cried Dinah, dropping suddenly upon her knees, and seizing the old woman by both hands, 'we were married at Waston Church last Whitsuntide.' Dinah's mother dropped down upon her knees and faced the girl.

'You was married? At Whitsuntide? You an' young Joe Bushell?'

'Yes,' cried the girl, and suddenly releasing her mother's hands, she fell forward upon the floor, and hiding her face again, cried passionately. The elder woman fell forward also, and clipping her by the waist, strove to lift her, but again Dinah would not move. So they knelt there and mingled their tears.

'Dinah,' said the mother, whispering, 'it never crossed my mind till to−night when you got up to get your father's candle, an' then it come to me at a run. But, Dinah, I'm sorry for you, an' you'll have a bad time wi' your father an' the neighbours. Oh, you poor silly gall not to tell me as you was married! An' now he's gone, the Lord alone knows wheer.'

'He'll come hack again,' sobbed Dinah. 'If he's alive, he'll come back again.'

'Haven't *you* heerd on him, neither?' asked her mother in surprise and fear.

'No,' wept Dinah, 'never since the day he went away. Oh, mother, do you think he's dead? They say he's gone to America, an' he might ha' been drowned at sea, or anything. Oh, I can't think as if he'd been alive he'd ha' left like this. And he promised to send my lines an' all, an' I've never heard a word.'

'Dinah,' said the mother in a horror−stricken whisper, 'haven't you got your lines?'

'No,' answered Dinah, still weeping. 'He promised to send 'em the day he went away.'

Then the mother lifted up her voice and wept aloud.

'Dinah, you're a ruined gell, and I'm a miserable, disgraced old woman!'

The immortal Doctor Marigold remarks that in his father's days 'registration hadn't come up much.' So far as the knowledge of poor Dinah and her mother went, registration had not come up at all. To this very day, in that part of England in which they lived, there are women who believe that the possession of their 'marriage lines' is the only surety of their own honour. To lose their 'lines,' in the belief of those simple souls, would be to invalidate the marriage ceremony, and to make their children illegitimate. Nor is this curious superstition confined to the downright ignorant classes, as you might fancy. Fairly well−to−do people, who can read the newspaper without spelling the hard words at all, and who would with righteous anger resent the imputation of ignorance, still stick to the belief. Thirty years ago it was probably general.

Mrs. Banks, landlady of the Saracen's Head, was not by nature an imaginative or an inventive woman. Unless you choose to call the immortal allegories of Bunyan by that name, she had never read a romance in her life. Nowadays Mr. Wilkie Collins is to the fore to help anybody to an elaborate plot upon emergency, and there is,

indeed, scarcely a condition of life imaginable upon which modern fiction could not throw a light more or less direct and helpful. But feminine human nature existed on much the same lines as now before the popular novelist came into being. Necessity is the mother of invention, and here if anywhere in the world was a necessity of the sternest sort. At any risk the family reputation must be saved: at any risk short of crime. It would be surely the very whitest of white lies if the mother could acknowledge her daughter's child as her own, and could thereby save her daughter's reputation. In any case, the material cost of the child's maintenance would fall upon the Saracen, and his shoulders were broad enough to bear without tremor a score of such burdens.

Dinah was the only child of her parents, and if she shared in the deceit she could rob nobody. So the old woman mellowed her plan, and slowly turned it over, and then laid it before Dinah.

'Dinah, my dear, we're in a peck o' trouble, and we shall ha' to get weselves out on it as best we can, It 'ud break thy father's heart to know it, and it mustn't be let get to his hearin' at all.'

'How can we help it?' asked Dinah, forlorn and pale. The old lady revealed her plan in a sentence.

'He must be made to think as the child's mine.' Dinah quivered at this. One of those amazing and mysterious instincts which make mothers what they are, awoke in her, and she felt as if her unborn baby were being stolen from her. The mother saw this and understood it, being a mother. 'By yourself it'll be all your own. I must tell Daniel as I expect it. He'll be sore amazed, I doubt, but you must get away into the country when the time's comin', an' I must come to see you. Then you'll ha' to write to your father an' say as I'm took ill, an' can't come back again. Then, when it's all oe'r, we can come back together, an' nobody'll think anythin' about it.'

From the first moment of Dinah's proclamation of the truth, there had been no shadow of doubt in the mother's mind. She believed the story unreservedly, and when Dinah told it in full, setting forth the errant young Joe's reasons for concealment, she, though her anger burned against the runaway, forgave her daughter the folly of which she had been guilty.

The winter wore away; and through it all Dinah was kept almost a prisoner. Daniel was not often curious about her, but when he was his wife was equal to the occasion, and satisfied him easily. What should make him believe that a plot like the beginning of a melodrama was going on at the Saracen's Head? The spring began to hint that it was coming, and the time drew near.

'Our Daniel,' said Mrs. Banks to her husband, 'our Dinah is looking a bit delicate, don't you fancy?'

Daniel was a good husband, and agreed with his wife in all things. He had had five−and−twenty years of married life, and found that a policy of general acquiescence kept things smooth.

'Is her?' said Daniel. 'Well, I thought I'd noticed it myself.'

'I think o' sendin' her to Wardenb'ry,' said Mrs. Banks, 'for change of air, like. What do *you* say, Daniel?'

'Very well, missis,' said that easy man. 'It'll do her a bit of good, mayhap, poor wench!'

'Mayhap it will, Daniel,' said Mrs. Banks. 'We'll go tomorrow.'

Daniel was somewhat taken aback by this precipitancy. Commonly at the Saracen's Head a thing was mentioned, discussed, put by, mentioned and discussed again, and put into action long after in less sleepy places it would have been forgotten. He offered no opposition. He was accustomed to philosophise about women in his own way. 'A woman,' he had been known to say, 'is like a pig. Her'll nayther be led nor drove, an' it's as tryin' to a mon to do one as it is to do the t'other.' So, as a rule, Daniel said nothing, but encouraged his digestive apparatus by patting

his waistcoat, and let things take their course.

Wardenbury was thirty−miles off and Daniel knew it vaguely as being Coventry way. Mrs. Banks had relatives there, and in the long course of her married life had paid it two or three visits. Daniel used to speak of himself as being 'no great hands of a traveller.' He had been born at the Saracen's Head, and had never been farther away than Birmingham. But though he was no traveller, and might, had he been a demonstrative man, have run a risk of seeming hen−pecked, he had his feelings as a husband.

'Mother,' he advised, 'I shouldn't go to Wardenb'ry yet, if I was you. Think o' your condition.'

'Think o' your own condition, y'ode timber−head!' returned his wife, 'an' leave me to think o' mine.'

'Well, think on it,' said Daniel. Mrs. Banks bustled away to tell Dinah that matters were arranged, and to help her to prepare for the journey. The landlord of the Saracen was not in the least degree offended by his wife's outspokenness. Had she even called upon him to confirm her criticism he would probably have done it.

The morrow came, and Dinah was smuggled into the trap in the back yard. The mother followed. A shock−headed stable−boy called Jabez drove the pair to the railway station, and returned alone. Next morning came a letter to Daniel stating that Mrs. Banks would spend a day or two at Wardenbury.

'I knowed how it 'ud be,' said Daniel. 'Once let 'em goo a−gaddin' about, in' thee may'st whistle for 'em afore they comin' back again.' He had not the remotest suspicion. He had never read anything more romantic than an invoice for wines and spirits, and he had never seen a play. Even if he had, why should he suspect his wife end daughter? The day or two lengthened into a week, and then came the news that he was again a father. His old age was blessed with a son. He took an extra glass or two on the strength of it, and went about with an air of proprietorial gravity, crossed at times by an involuntary smile. Towards evening the neighbours dropped in as usual. Daniel imparted the news and was congratulated. He sat in his big armchair with his hands resting on the crook of a thick walking−stick and his elbows squared, and looked as if he thought that he deserved the congratulations and had earned the applause of the world. There was an air upon him as of one who might boast if he would, but would not. The little snuggery was rather better filled than common that evening, and the health of the son and heir was drunk pretty frequently. Daniel could do nothing less than join. Liquor took little effect upon him: he was accustomed to it, and his inner man was toughened to its assaults. It floated his smile to the surface a little oftener, that was all. But when closing−time came, and he was left alone, he gave vent to his joy and triumph. He struck his stick upon the floor with both hands and arose; and laughed long and loud.

'Ha, ha, ha!' cried Daniel, shaking and beaming; 'theer's life in th'ode dog yit.'

That night shock−headed Jabez had to guide the landlord upstairs, but on the morrow the old man had accepted the position of affairs, and awaited the arrival of the infant and his mother with an approach to phlegm. He had never received many letters, and had never had occasion to write many. The lack of correspondence did not affect him. Dinah wrote once or twice, but that was all, and mother and daughter came back with the infant, after little more than a month from the date of their departure. Dinah's restoration to health seemed little less than miraculous. Her languid heavy step was changed for one light and full of energy. Her face beamed and bloomed once more, and there was no trace of grief in her eyes. And surely never was sister so passionately devoted to a late−born brother who came to step in between herself and wealth. For old Daniel who, in a quiet way, was very well−to−do made no secret of his intent to leave everything or nearly everything to the young stranger. He was ludicrously proud of the baby, and used to rock him in his cradle or watch him as he yelled and fought against milk−warm water and soap, or crowed, in better moods, for kisses in his elder sister's lap. Dinah never allowed him to crow in vain. The old man was amazed sometimes by the almost savage fervour of the kisses with which she mumblingly devoured the little pink body and the podgy little face and hands. Mrs. Banks and her daughter between them attended to the infant's wants with amazing ardour, and sometimes almost quarrelled for the

possession of him. Once Daniel overheard a colloquy between them.

'Dinah,' said her mother, in a half−cross, half−appealing tone, 'you might let me nurse the babby now an' then.'

'He's mine,' said Dinah defiantly.

'Why, Dinah,' cried Mrs. Banks, seeing the old man looking in at the door, 'a body might think as you was the mother as bore him. Give me the child, I tell thee.' A meaning look passed between them. Dinah understood, and surrendered little George.

But scarcely a day passed in which she was not in danger of betraying herself. She would sit for hours and hours poring over the little red snub−nosed baby face, reading a likeness to the absent Joe in features where your eye or mine could have discovered no atom of resemblance, and where she found one clearer than the truest photograph the sun ever made. It was curious and yet natural how the presence of the child atoned for the absence of the father. And yet there was a terrible cruelty in it. The child would never learn to call her 'Mother,'

Chapter 6.

When Rebecca Bushell took her ultimatum to young Joe, then packing up for departure in his bedroom, she saw, lying upon the bed, an old light overcoat, with its pockets turned inside out. In those pockets Joe had made a hasty search for the certificate, and, not finding it, had cast the coat aside. The mother walked into the son's empty room next morning. It was just as he had left it the night before. All the drawers had been taken bodily from the chest, and were stacked disorderly on each other beside it. The mother, by matronly instinct, began to abolish disorder, crying silently the while. Then wiping her eyes with her apron and looking round to see if all were straight, she noticed the light overcoat thrown across the bed. With native tidiness she took up the coat and straightened it, and observing a rent in one of the pockets, drew out a housewife and sat upon the bed to repair that slight mischief; folding the coat carefully, she placed it in one of the drawers, smoothed the pillows, adjusted the hangings of the bed, and left the room.

This empty chamber became sacred to motherly prayers and tears thereafter, when many heavy months had gone by, and young Joe's silence had not been broken. Many a time she knelt there and followed him into she knew not what of danger and temptation, and many a time she opened the drawer to look at the coat, which was the only relic her only child had left her. By mutual consent of sorrow, husband and wife spoke little of the absent son; but old Joe would yet break out at times, with a shake of his head:

'Becky, you was too hard on the lad.'

'Joseph,' Rebecca would answer, 'he that spareth the rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chastiseth him betimes.'

'Yes,' old Joe would say in return, 'that's well enough, but you was too hard on the lad.'

So Rebecca bore alike her own burden and a load which was not hers. She had but one way with all her troubles to cast them on the hands of that vast, vague, cruel, unfatherly Fatherhood who was the refuge of His chosen, and the scourge and overwhelming terror of all others. She went into her son's room, and there knelt down, and poured out her soul in silent tears; and after a while, seeing how she grieved, old Joe troubled her no more.

The Reverend Paul Screed was less reticent.

'It is ordained,' he would say, 'that the saints shall be troubled, lest they become too much absorbed by the world;' and by a thousand platitudes of the sort he strove to console the inconsolable, probing a wound which could only heal by rest. The Reverend Paul was a good man, and tried hourly to be better than he was, but he had no touch of tact in all his clumsy nature. I looked up to him in my youth, and I respect his memory now, but I could find it in my heart to wish him and his kind an island to themselves, where they should vex none out of their own communion. Yet, within six months of the day on which young Joe departed from his native town, the minister did as noble a thing as lay within him to do. He sat once more at meat with old Joe and his wife, and dinner being over, the minister cleared his voice with a sorrowful 'Ahem,' and addressed his host and hostess.

'Mr. Bushell and Madam,' he said, with a certain stiff formality which perhaps was the only manner which left speech possible to him, 'it is part of our mortal burden to reflect that we have laid it chiefly upon ourselves. One part of my burden is that I helped to bring a heavy and an undeserved trouble upon people whom I value, and people who have borne my injury without an angry word. Even whilst I thought I was doing my duty as a minister of the Word, I was but revenging myself for certain slights and thoughtless witticisms which your now errant son had vented upon me. I spoke in anger and in bitterness, and I spoke, as I have since had reason to believe, on no sufficient grounds. And it has been borne in upon me, my friends, that although it is unhappily beyond my power to undo the wrong I did, it is still my duty to confess it humbly before you, and to beg your Christian forgiveness. I have long since forgiven the blow with which your son retaliated upon my sour impertinences. I trust that he has forgiven me my part. I confess my wrong−doing, and I ask humbly and with deep sorrow, for your pardon.'

Mrs. Bushell had never been so near disliking the Reverend Paul as she was at that minute, for she had long since formed her judgment and forgiven, and this appeal set the old wound aching.

'Parson,' said old Joe, 'say no more about it. There was faults all round.'

'Ah, Joseph,' said Mrs. Bushell with tears in her eyes, 'it's too late now, but I should have been a glad woman at this minute if you'd said me nay when I was that cruel to poor Joe.'

'I'm master i' this house,' said old Joe, 'and what I ought to ha' done would ha' been to ha' gi'en him a lickin' theer an' then, an' said no more about it.'

When they had time to think about it, husband and wife respected the minister the more for his candid and manly confession, but neither that nor any other reparation could bring back young Joe, who now began to live in the regard of those three with something of the martyr's halo about him. The neighbourhood knew the story, of course, and the neighbours put their own constructions upon it. Those who went to Ebenezer Chapel, in which edifice the Reverend Paul habitually discoursed, held with their pastor. Those who went to Church, and those who went nowhere the vast majority held for the most part with young Joe, and made a hero of him as well as a martyr. Had the young fellow returned within any reasonable time after his escapade, he would have been encountered by precisely that kind of qualified laudation with which it is now the practice of this enlightened and steadfast country to greet its home−returning warriors or colonial governors.

In those days of decent poverty when she first gave her hand to old Joe, and set up housekeeping with him, Rebecca had mastered the practice of all virtues of industry, and even in later years, when her husband became wealthy beyond the wildest and most extravagant hopes of his class, and when she might have surrounded herself with an army of servants had she chosen it, she still performed all but the roughest work of the household with her own hands. I like to think of the erect, personable woman in her afternoon black silk, looking, as she sat in state in the little parlour, almost too lofty for approach. At such times, when the scrubbing, scouring, and dusting, the washing, baking, mending, cooking whatever may have been the business of the day was done with, she would sit there above her big Bible or the 'holy War,' in which volume, as I remember, she took an especial and unique delight, and would resign herself to a stern and stately meditation on holy things. Whilst young Joe was with her he vexed her often, and her heart ached with fear for his future many a time. But now that he was gone and gave

no sign, these daylight vigils became a prolonged and prayerful pain to the mother's heart. Old Joe, who had no taste for parlours, would sit and smoke gloomily and alone beside the kitchen fire. He too had his dreary vigils, troubled, certainly, by no such spiritual agonies as his wife endured, but unlighted by those flashes of pious hope which sometimes illumined her spirit. Now and then Brother George would look in, and, wooden as he was, some qualms of conscience touched him, beholding the desolation he had helped to bring about. I do not wish, as I have intimated, to paint George in the darkest sort of colours. He had not enough of virtuous instinct to be a villain. There was nothing in him for himself to sin against.

'It's the best thing in the world as could happen to him.' Thus George meditated respecting young Joe. It is the mean man's tribute to honour, the rogue's admission of the beauty of justice, that he cares to justify himself in his own mind. 'It'll make a man of him, an he'll have me to thank for it. It's a precious poor chance I've got o' seein' that hunderd pound again. Eh dear, but I allays *was* a fool wi' my money.' Thus he held his head in the sand, and persuaded himself that his conscience did not see him an attitude more common than the superficial student might suppose.

It became more and more evident, as time went on, that old Joe and Rebecca his wife were breaking. Trouble told upon the woman earlier than upon the man, for though she bore it better, she suffered more intensely. She fell into languor. The household work, once gone through with such swift bustle, had to be committed to a stranger's charge; she spent more of her time in her bedroom, and old Joe sat, feeling lonelier that ever, by the kitchen fire.

Rebecca, though few people guessed it, had always been strongly attracted to young people. That young people were not attracted to her was natural enough, perhaps, though she felt it to be hard. But now, in this time of her distress, Dinah Banks became her chief comfort. The clumsy servant wench, though animated by the best intentions, was a poor attendant in a sick room. A hippopotamus in clogs might have gone about as lightly, and she had one or two special faculties in the way of tumbling over fire−irons, dropping dishes and the like, which were aggravated into supernatural exercise by her own desire to go about the sick−chamber silently. Dinah, light−footed and soft−handed, was a welcome relief to the sufferer's nerves. The more Dinah came, the more Mrs. Bushell cared to have her there, and the better Dinah loved to wait upon her.

The thing which drew Dinah there was the hope that she might hear something of her husband. No news came, but at last, on the anniversary of the day of his departure, Mrs. Bushell for the first time spoke of him.

'It's a year to−day,' she said, 'since my poor lad went away.'

Dinah, whose mind was full of the remembrance of the day (for women are your true keepers of anniversaries, and have other saints' days than are set down in the calendar), trembled and turned pale at these simple words. Rebecca, lying with her eyes closed, and her thin hands folded below her chin, went on:

'We're short−sighted creatures, and there's only one thing as we can be sure of, Dinah. It's all in the Lord's hands.'

Then she lay quiet for a while, and Dinah quivered beside her. For not Joe's desertion of her, nor the failure of his promise, nor the danger of disgrace, nor the fact that fate had stolen her child from her, had weaned her heart from young Joe. She would believe no ill of him, but dreaded to hear of terrible mischiefs which had happened to him.

'And now,' said the old woman again, 'I shan't be here long, and perhaps I shall know more about it where I'm goin' to.'

'No,' said Dinah, laying a timid hand upon Rebecca's brow, 'you must wait long enough to see him come back again. He can't have the heart to stay away for good, if he's alive,' and at that Dinah broke out crying.

Rebecca opened her eyes, and her hands parted.

'Dinah, my poor gell!' was all she said.

And Dinah, pierced by a sudden revelation of instinct, read the stately heart of the rigid old Calvinist aright, and knew its tenderness. She leaned over the bed, and laid her face softly in Rebecca's bosom, and, the old woman and the young one cried together.

'I always knowed,' said Rebecca, gliding back into the broadest accent of her childhood, 'as you loved him, an' I know as he loved you. An' he wasn't a bad lad at bottom, Dinah, he never meant no harm; an' it was my cruel ways as made him angry wi' religion.' The old woman's tears flowed freely, but she went on with no break in her voice. 'Yo' seek help where help is to be got. Yo'll see him come back again some day, Dinah, an' yo' must tell him as whatever he did as was wrong his mother forgive him afore her died, an' whatever her did as was wrong to him, her asked yo' t'ask him to forget.'

There she ceased again, and lay, stroking Dinah's wet cheek, and feebly drying the girl's eyes. Dinah had an impulse upon her to tell the story of her marriage to young Joe, and the birth of her son, but was restrained by the sense of Rebecca's weakness, and by some misgiving that without her 'lines' a strict woman like Mrs. Bushell might regard her as an altogether improper sort of person. In a little time she controlled herself, and sat down, once more, beside the bed. For a time both were silent. Rebecca lay with closed eyes like one asleep, and Dinah had risen to steal from the room, when the sick woman turned her head, saying:

'Dinah, my dear, theer's only one thing as Joe left behind him. Yo'll find it i' the top long drawer i' the next room. It's a grey−coloured coat. Bring it in to me, there's a good gell: I want to see it again before I die. It's the only thing he left behind him.'

Dinah passed into the next room, found the coat and returned. Rebecca took it from her, unfolded it feebly, and caressed it with her hands.

'It was Joseph's Coat,' she said. 'When the wicked sons pretended as young Joseph was dead, they brought his coat to Jacob: Joseph's Coat. But he was alive all the time in Egypt, and his father lived to see him rich and well−to−do.'

Her mind began to wander, and she fancied that her son stood beside her.

'Yo'll be kind to your father, Joseph,' she said, 'when you come back from Egypt, and yo'll remember as it's my wish as you should marry Dinah.'

Then she slumbered for a while, and Dinah, full of fear and awe, stole downstairs to the kitchen, where old Joe sat in gloomy silence, with an unlighted pipe between his teeth and stared into the ashy bars of the grate.

'There's a great change in her, Mr. Bushell,' she said. Old Joe shook his head sadly.

'I've knowed as it was a−comin',' he said, in a deep inward murmur; 'I've seen it a−comin' this many a day.'

They passed upstairs together. Rebecca still slumbered. They stood for a time on either side of the bed in silence. By−and−by the dying woman opened her eyes languidly, looked round with no recognition, plucked feebly at the coat which lay beneath her hands, and then, with the last ray of intelligence which visited her soul in this world, recognised the garment.

'It was Joseph's Coat,' she said, and with these words she died.

Old Joe bore his wife's death stonily, and no man could tell whether he grieved or not. The funeral took place on Sunday, and the bereaved husband and his Brother George were the only mourners. They walked behind the hearse in long hat−bands and black clothes, saw the dead interred in the squalid graveyard of Ebenezer, and went back together.

'Theer was a will I made,' said Old Joe, sitting beside the kitchen fire, 'i' my son's favour.' He rose and took the document of which he spoke from a sham two volumes in folio of the 'History of England,' marked on the inside for a chess−board. 'Me an' Joe,' he said, 'used to play draughts on that. They used to reckon me a pretty good player, but he could beat my yed off. He was a very good draught−player, was Joe.'

He set down the chess−board lingeringly, and tapped it once or twice with his knuckles. Then, seating himself again, he opened the document.

'It was drawed up,' he said, 'by a lawyer an' all made out proper, this here will was. Everythin' on my Rebecca's death was to goo without reserve to my son Joseph, except a thousand pound to my Brother George. And now there don't seem no son Joseph for it to goo to, and wheer it does goo I don't care.'

At this intimation Brother George's heart experienced a soft and gentle glow. Things were looking well for Brother George. It was a maxim of his that 'fine words butter no parsnips,' but he knew also that they cost nothing, and he expended a few upon his brother's grief.

'Your piternal feelin's, Joe−ziph, as a man might say, is a playin' on your heart−strings. But theer's many a young man as has stopped away for a year as has come back at the end of it, or, leastways, in the course of time. Preaps he mightn't ha' gone to Merriky after all. He might ha' 'listed.'

'He's never wrote to nobody,' said Joe, 'not all the time he's been away.'

'No,' said Brother George, with no token of shame; 'never a word as I've heerd on.'

The elder brother sat silent, looking at the fire, with his massive hands depending loosely between his knees, and the will held between the finger and thumb of each hand. Without any sign of haste or anger, or any new resolve, he tore the document across leisurely, and with no look of emotion laid the two pieces together and tore them through. Then, in the same listless way, he took the poker, hollowed out the fire a little, pushed the paper fragments into the hollow, and beat down the fire upon them.

Brother George sipped whisky and water to conceal his smile. Any sort of facial demonstration was rare with him, but this action of old Joe's was in its way a foretaste of triumph for the clumsy schemer, and that soft glow of satisfaction warmed his heart so well that he could not keep its reflection from his face. He might have grinned his broadest, for old Joe never looked at him.

'Twelve months to a day,' said Joe, with his hands still hanging lax before him, and his eyes upon the fire, 'twelve months to a day.'

'What was twelve months to a day?' asked the other.

'From the time he went,' said old Joe listlessly, 'to the time her died.' Then he said 'Twelve months to a day' again, and sat silent for a long time.

A man with an atom of perception in him would have been keenly touched must have been touched by the complete forlornness of the old man's face, and voice, and attitude; but George, being by nature wooden, and by cultivation hardened, laid an unsympathetic hand upon his brother's shoulder, and congratulated him.

'I am glad to see you bear it so easy, Joe−ziph.'

Old Joe looked at him slowly, dropped his head again, and murmured, 'Twelve months to a day.'

'Have a glass o' grog,' said George. It was not his own liquor, and he could afford to he generous with it. 'It'll warm the cockles of your heart, and do you good.'

He took the kettle from the hearth and mixed a stiff glass, and set it on the hob beside his brother.

'Jones her maiden name was,' said old Joe. 'We was married at the parish church. A good wife for five−and−thirty years was my Rebecca. A good wife.'

'Yes,' said Brother George, 'her was a fine personable figure of a woman, and a savin' manager. Yes, Joe, her was all that, an' her's no doubt better off.'

To this genially spoken commendation the widower made no answer. Brother George fell to thinking as to what the mourner's fortune might amount to.

In the silence of the room a murmur broke upon his thoughts

'Eh?' said George.

'It was a twel'month to a day,' said old Joe vacantly. 'I bain't well, George,' he added. 'I think I'll goo upstairs an' lay down a bit.'

'Ah, do,' said Brother George. 'And I'll wait here till you've had a rest.'

Old Joe, bent strangely, with his massive arms dependent like weights from his broad shoulders, bored his way slowly out of the room, and went heavily upstairs. George sat absorbed in halcyon visions. Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. Call it two hundred thousand. A wooden man; a dull, slow, unperceptive, unimaginative man. And yet, what visions haunted that dim brain of his and warmed his chilly heart! The summer afternoon wore down to summer evening, and George took a comfortable tea in his brother's parlour, and returning to the kitchen sat and smoked and sipped his grog, until it grew too dark for him to see the wreaths of smoke which curled about his head. He called to the ruddy servant, who sat alone in the back kitchen.

'Sarah, go upstairs and call the master, there's a good wench.'

The girl clumped upstairs and tapped at the sleeper's door. There came no answer, and she rapped again. She called down stairs, saying that she could not make him hear.

'He's pretty sound asleep, then,' said Brother George. 'Leave him to it. I'll go away home.'

He put on the crape−bound hat, and walked gravely to his own house, and slept the sleep of the just. His dreams were bright with the gleam of two hundred thousand pounds. He sat at breakfast in the morning, and the sunbeams flowing through the window were mellow with the same auriferous shine. There came a hurried knock at the door, and George's servant, being engaged at the back of the house, left her master to answer it. He found his brother's clumsy Black Country serving−wench standing on the doorstep with blanched cheeks, and eyes full of terror.

'I've fetched the doctor,' she gasped breathlessly, 'an' he says he must ha' been dead afore you left the house last night.'

George fell back against the wall of the passage.

'Dead!' he gasped; 'who's dead?'

'Your brother Joseph,' said the girl.

HERE THE PROLOGUE CLOSES.

Chapter 7.

Four−and−twenty years have gone by since the prologue opened; old Joe and his wife have lain side by side in Ebenezer Graveyard for years three−and−twenty. The baby is a young man with moustaches and a sweetheart, and his mother is getting on towards middle age, if an earthly pilgrimage of forty−two years may be supposed to have borne a pretty woman so far. Daniel's thin legs nowadays will scarcely carry him, and he is more than eighty years of age. His wife died half a score of years ago, and took her pious fraud to the grave with her. Errant Joe's uncle George is over sixty, and is mightily prosperous and somewhat swollen out with worldly grandeur. For over a score of years nobody has heard of errant Joe, and to the minds of his contemporaries he is as dead as Nebuchadnezzar. To Dinah he remains an unchangeable, fixed figure. Whilst other young men have grown into middle age, whilst they wear garments of the fashion of 1874 and have grown wizened or burly according to their nature, young Joe in her remembrance remains in the garb in which she last beheld him: no older, no stouter or thinner; a blue−eyed young fellow still, with blooming cheeks and a downy bit of whisker. If anywhere alive, young Joe is five−and−forty by this time, and young Joe no longer, but in Dinah's remembrance of him, Time stands still. In short, madam, you were just married when the tale opened, and yesterday you cried and smiled at the wedding breakfast of your second daughter. And you, sir, were in a round jacket and a broad collar at Eton, with no notion that the wave of a Conservative reaction would drift you into Parliament to denounce the Opposition in well−prepared impromptu epigram, or to demand from your place to be instructed by the right honourable gentleman at the head of Her Majesty's Government. A great space of time. Let it pass in this story as it passes in much more tremendous chronicles like a breath.

Dinah Banks, or Bushell, was a simple−minded woman, and all these years she had passively defrauded herself and her child of a great fortune which was legitimately theirs. George, her son, was not the sort of person to be defrauded of any rights he knew of, but he was as ignorant of these as poor Sir Roger before this time proved himself to be of his dear mother's Christian name. Since Daniel's early days, times had changed a good deal. He had little sympathy with the new crochet of education; but it is hard for simple folks like Daniel to swim against the tide, and the lad went to the great Grammar School in Birmingham and swallowed his modicum of Latin and Euclid and Algebra and grew up quite a superior young person, with a natural disdain for home associations and a genuine contempt for his putative father which would have done credit to a princely fairy changeling. Daniel humoured the lad in everything, as old fathers sometimes will humour sons; and the boy himself bullied where he could, and had his own way royally when he was sure of it. As he grew up, the fraud his mother had practised bore very bitter fruit. Her child scorned her in spite of her tenderness, and spoke scoffingly of her as an old maid with old−maidish fancies when she would stay him from participation in this or that boyish freak or folly. I have not the heart to tell how she suffered and in what mean ways. Things that to a sister would have been little troubles magnified themselves to the mother's heart, and every day in all these dreary years her soul cried out for the child's love, and yearned unsatisfied. It was a proof, perhaps, of great sweetness of nature that she remained comely still, and that even in some eyes she grew more beautiful as Time touched her. It was commonly said of her that she wore a motherly rather than an old−maidish air, and, indeed, she had grown buxom and a little portly. Her eyes were sad, but wonderfully sweet and affectionate. She had offers of marriage in profusion; but declined them all, for no reason that the neighbours could divine, and lived solely for her child and her memories of his father. There are among women many thousands of such faithful hearts, who suffer much, but have their reward now and then even in this hard world.

Visible from the upper bed−room windows of the Saracen is a range of hills, of perhaps twelve or thirteen hundred feet elevation, the only notable thing in the landscape. They are not more than four miles away, and they naturally draw the eye of a stranger from the surrounding dead level. Under the shadow of that low range of hills, on the farther side, lies as charming a bit of country as you may look for in a quiet way in England a rich undulating landscape, with meadow and cornfield, and noble timber here and there, all gathering an added charm from the fact that by a walk of half a mile you may command a view of another valley, lurid with vast columns of fiery smoke and the red tongues of furnace flame that leap at the low skies. Lying in any field about that pleasant stretch of country on a quiet day in summer, beneath skies whose blue is somewhat toned by the thin gauze of outlying smoke−clouds, you may hear afar off the great heart of giant Labour beating; and standing still at night, when sound travels farther, you can catch the clank of iron and the shuddering roar or shrill shriek of distant engines, or even the dull thud of the forge hammer. And even in the pleasant valley itself, when you might fancy that you had strayed unaware into the very heart of Agricola's realm, when the ferns are unrolling their crown−like scrolls, and the dog−rose is opening from the bud, and the air is sickly sweet with the heavy scent of the may, you come saunteringly to a little rise and look about you, and you see pit−stacks in the distance sending up their blue curls of smoke, and pit frames with gliding chains above them, filmy−fine.

On the lower slope of one of these hills I know a farmhouse, so old that its outside walls have grown grey and rimy like the rind of a Stilton cheese. Great beams of timber cross its front, and here and there its lines have swayed picturesquely out of their first prim drawing. Dormer windows peep from the roof: the chimney−stacks are Elizabethan, but the rest of the house is a sort of architectural dream made concrete. The building is all gables and corners outside, and within there are little flights of unexpected stairs in unexpected places, and a stranger finds himself intruding on rooms in which he has no business, and wondering how they got there. All the windows are diamonded, and the panes held together by little strips of lead. The floors are sunken in a curious way, and the inner walls warp to this side or that in such a fashion as to give you an impression of being somehow in a house at sea. But the old place is solid and sturdy, pinned together as it is by its huge oak beams, and it may stand for hundreds of years yet in defiance of wind and weather.

Behind this fine old house there is a fine old garden, where in their season ten−week−stocks and gilly−flowers and bachelor's buttons and other such homely blossoms grow with roses red and white, and lilies pale and golden. Here are hoary apple−trees hearing wonderful fruit, plum−trees, damson−trees, pear−trees, and a little forest of gooseberry bushes. And in great strips between the flower−beds, or edged round with flowers and tangled aromatic bushes, there are spaces set apart for the culture of the homely cabbage and cauliflower, the pungent eschalot and others of its tribe. Everything seems more or less entangled with everything else in this delightful, disorderly old garden. The sides of its walks are edged with box and moss−grown, and its high brick walls, mellow with age, are thick with lichens. Walking here on any summer day you are at liberty to forget that there is any such thing as a forge, a foundry, a coal−mine, a smoke−cloud in the world. Yet even here, if you listen closely, you may hear great Labour's muffled heart beat two or three miles away, and beyond the hills at night−time the sky is livid red. There are gardens as old−fashioned and profuse in growth in many places, I dare say gardens where the same homely blossoms blow, and the same scents perfume the air, and the same spirit of retired Quiet dwells; hut they lack the charm of this retreat for the most part, because they have not its singular contrast of neighbourhood. When by good chance you meet amongst those 'fair Circassians,' of whom so many fables have been told, a woman with any decent pretensions to good looks when you see a star glinting through the late−divided storm−wrack when you see the pearl upon the Ethiop's arm when you see (if ever you do) Mr. Leigh Hunt's beautiful symbol of the lily in the mouth of Tartarus you know what advantages you expect to get out pf contrast. Those advantages are here, in this old garden's neighbourhood, with smoke and fire, and the amazing travail of the earth about it.

The Donne family had lived in the old house for many generations and farmed the land which surrounded it. The fact that in the parish churchyard there was a tombstone bearing their name, and dated as far back as the year 1613, proved that the family was substantial and respectable more than two centuries ago. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it was not everybody who was honoured with a tombstone. The stones came down from that

date almost without a break: Iohn Aldley Dunne succeeded by Iohn Aldley Dunne for nigh a hundred years, and being followed by other Johns whose J's had long and curly tails. It was at the beginning of the curly−J period that the spelling of the names was changed, Audley being substituted for Aldley, and Donne for Dunne. There were many Dunne Aldleys, too, buried in the churchyard, and the two families had been evidently somehow tied together.

In the year 1870 the male branch of the Donnes became extinct, and there were now left but two women to bear the old name Mrs. Donne, a notable woman, widow of the late farmer, and her daughter Ethel. Now, in that part of the country people go, as a rule for Scriptural appellations, and the old English feminine names are neglected. It may perhaps be accepted as corroborative of other evidence in favour of some old standing in the family that it held a distinctive feminine name again and again repeated. Below the record of Iohn Aldley Dunne's years and virtues ran this legend: 'Alsoe Ethyl hys wyfe, aetat 48, obitt Iune 2, 1621. Alsoe Ethyl, infant child of y above.' When the present Ethel was christened, Mr. Borge, her godfather, had objected to the name as bringing ill−luck with it. He founded himself on tombstone evidence, and pointed out the fact that four Ethels had died in maidenhood. His superstitions were derided; but Mr. Borge always protested 'he knowed ill 'ud come on it,' and was the more firmly fixed in his belief by the fact that the baby suffered from convulsions while teething. A pretty smart attack of croup and some extra trouble in regard to measles were currently held to have justified the Borgian vaticinations. But the baby grew to girlhood, and the girl became a young woman, without anything more terrible than those infant maladies encountered by the way.

Ethel Donne was nearly nineteen years of age, and a very charming and beautiful young woman. Her beauty was not of the kind you see in London drawing−rooms or at the opera, but much more robust and blooming and delicate. Her complexion bore looking at, and was admirably waterproof. Ill−natured young women, her compeers, said that her hair was 'carroty,' from which I desire you to argue that it was of the colour painters have loved to paint

In gloss and hue the chestnut when the husk
Divides three−fold to show the fruit within,

as Mr. Tennyson says. Her eyes were hazel and full of mirth and honesty. Her skin was of red rose and white; not the dead lily colour which poets have so often and so falsely feigned, but white rose with the faintest live blush in it. Her features were not those of a Greek statue, fortunately, but they were fairly regular. The dear little nose, in particular, was very daintily modelled, and her lips and teeth to speak of rubies and pearls is to desecrate the beauties of flesh and blood and ivory. To see her figure at its full advantage you should perhaps have beheld her in the act of hanging out the family washing to dry in that old garden, or with a hayrake in the meadows. To say that she was unaware of her manifold natural advantages would be to portray her as a very foolish young person. Shakespeare thought fit to put into the mouth of a fool the statement that there never was fair maid but made mouths in a glass; but it is probable that he himself believed it. For one prodigy of nature you can show me where a pretty young woman honestly thinks herself plain, I will undertake to find you five hundred natural−minded, lovable young women, who, being passably plain, think themselves pretty; and a very proper and kindly ordinance of nature this provision is. Let us think well of ourselves and be happy. The male animal has no right to conceit himself on the score of personal modesty. A very popular writer of essays, who is not beautiful, has made confession in print that he feels a pleasurable sensation in looking at his own reflection in a mirror. I may not have the courage to follow his bold example with a like confession.

But more than mere good sense, of which she had plenty, her own free nature saved her from the canker of self−consciousness, and she had a certain merry scorn of mere personal vanity. She was country−bred, but not unpolished, though unvarnished. She had a natural art in music, cultivated, not to perfection, but to a fair growth; and, being natural with her, it enabled her to accompany a singer with grace and fineness, and to sing a simple ballad in a way which even cultured listeners found attractive. Her secular music was mostly antiquated, and was made up chiefly of the songs of Purcell and Shield and Arne, with one or two of Haydn's canzonets. Her

knowledge of sacred music went little further than 'The Messiah,' 'The Creation,' and Mozart's 'Twelfth Mass' would carry her. She read French fairly well; but her knowledge of the literature of that language was confined to Lamartine's 'Heroes and heroines of the Revolution'and Volney's 'Ruins of Empire.' Notwithstanding the latter, she was orthodox. M. Volney, after the elegant rhapsodies with which he opens, was, indeed, for the most part Greek to her.

In household virtues she was a treasure, and was mistress of all the arts of the dairy. She made rare butter and the crispest, lightest pastry; and knew how, if called upon, to wash and bake, and even brew. I remember her mother's damson cheese, and they say that Ethel was her mother's mistress. In short, a charming girl, with rare housewifely qualities, and fit to make a prince a wife, if princes had the good luck to be allowed to choose, as we happy plebeians have.

It is not to be supposed for a moment that all these charms and virtues were allowed to lie unclaimed by the adventurous young manhood of the region. Lovers clustered around her like flies about a honeypot, else were she no fit heroine of mine. The Quarrymoor farm ran into three hundred acres, and every inch was freehold, and she the heiress of it. Why should she not be courted?

The parish church was so situate that there was a pleasant walk to it in summer time from three or four parishes in the neighbourhood, and gay young bachelors from several townships, with their sisters and sweethearts, would stroll out on peaceful Sunday evenings, after a four−o'clock tea following on a one−o'clock dinner, and save themselves from any sense of spending the day unfittingly by dropping in at the Old Church, and would then saunter home again in the calm dusk, refreshed by a glance at country green and a taste of country air. Ethel drilled the choir and played the wheezy organ, and had delight in this part of her life. She searched for voices far and near, and strove to impress their owners into her band, and by−and−by got up quite a respectable assemblage of singers. Then it was decided that the organ should be replaced you heard the bellows wheeze and rattle even when the instrument was in full blast; and it was settled between Ethel and the Vicar that, as a first step towards this consummation, there should be holden in the schoolroom a public *soirée*. This meant the traditional teafight, with the addition of ham sandwiches to the ordinary provisions, and a concert interspersed with readings afterwards. Ethel entered into the scheme with great fervour. The magnates of the immediate locality were impressed none of them very tremendous people; and Mrs. Hick gave a tray of cake, and Mrs. Hince a ham of her own curing, and Mrs. Warmington, of the Mount, six pounds of tea, and Mrs. Jones a batch of household bread, and somebody else a basket of dairy butter. The ladies who gave gifts had the right to preside at the tables, and when the time came they were gay with festive ribbons and sat above their cates with proprietorial smile. But before the time came Ethel had much to do in rehearsing the choir in part−songs culled from her own little *repertoire* 'Blow, Gentle Gales,' and 'Spotted Snakes,' and the like. The rehearsals were held in the schoolroom, and very pleasant they were with their mixture of fun and formality; but the foundress of the festival had her troubles, and chief among them was the want of a tenor who could take the high A natural without cracking on it. All the young gentlemen of the choir who sang tenor through their noses could get at it more or less by dint of choking; but she yearned for somebody who would not choke, and in the nick of time he came.

'Miss Donne,' said the Vicar one dusky evening, clamping noisily into the schoolroom, and beginning to speak as soon as he had passed the door; 'I have brought you a recruit. Allow me to introduce to you Mr. George Banks. Miss Donne, Mr. Banks.'

Ethel rose from her seat at the piano to receive him. The light was so dim that she could make out nothing but a tall and well−set figure Mr. George was a volunteer and a pair of pretty broad shoulders.

'Mr. Banks is a tenor, Miss Donne,' said the Vicar, 'and I have induced him to promise his assistance at our *soirée*.'

'I shall be most happy to be of service, I am sure,' said Mr. George Banks in a tenor voice of considerable sweetness. To Ethel's ear the tone had culture and refinement in it, and the speaking voice carried promise. It was softer and lighter than men's voices commonly are, but it was clear and round. The Vicar began to drag a form about the room and to light the gas, and Ethel saw before her a good−looking young fellow, with brown hair and eyes, a palish complexion, and a fair, sweeping moustache, which gave him perhaps a handsomer look than his features deserved. The moustache was silky and long, and the young man's brown hair was parted in the middle and carefully groomed. He was dressed quietly and in good taste, and bore her scrutiny without embarrassment. Ethel's first view was eminently favourable.

'You have music with you,' she said. 'Perhaps you will give us a solo at the *soirée?*'

'With very great pleasure,' he responded.

'I dare say, now,' thought the girl, 'that he can sing. They generally make such a fuss when they can't.' It turned out that Mr. Banks could sing nicely; not so well as he thought, perhaps, but he was pleasant to listen to, and that for an amateur tenor is something. The high A presented no difficulties to him. 'You will be a great accession to us, Mr. Banks,' said Ethel gratefully. 'I am very much obliged to you for coming.'

'Not at all,' protested Mr. Banks. But, walking homeward with Miss Donne and the Vicar, the artful youth drew out the fact that the lady had a soprano voice, and hinted at the preparation of a duet or two. The Vicar seconded him and Ethel felt a great desire to sing with somebody who really could sing. That was a pleasure she had never enjoyed; and Mr. Banks and the Vicar were, in brief, invited to the farmhouse, and by its hospitable mistress pressed to take supper. They consented; and whilst the meal was getting ready, Ethel and the new−comer tried over 'The Minute Gun at Sea,' and arranged for themselves a tenor and treble rendering of 'All's Well.' The Vicar was delighted, and his delight took a practical turn.

'Really, Miss Donne,' said the Vicar, 'we ought to raise the prices.'

It transpired at table that Mr. Banks had a four miles' walk before him, and everybody was quite sympathetic with him on that account. He declared that he really didn't mind it, and in fact he set out upon it in evident high good spirits. The young man had finessed for this meeting with some skill, and, hearing of the coming *soirée*, had induced a friend to mention him and his vocal powers to the Vicar, had unobtrusively thrown himself in that good man's way, and procured an easy invitation. He had seen Ethel once by chance a year before, and of set purpose many a time since then, and had longed to speak to her, but had never been able to approach her until now. He could see that he had made a favourable impression to begin with, and he resolved to improve it.

There were more rehearsals before the eventful night came and Mr. Banks, although much too wary to introduce any other men−singers, who might have turned out unpleasant, brought an ugly old fellow who fluted like an angel, and he threw himself into the musical preparations with so much ardour that Ethel was charmed with him. He was the most active and obliging young man she had encountered, and the frequency with which he contrived excuses for meeting her did credit to the fertility of his fancy. She found no fault with this, and thought it all natural enough. She took Mr. Banks for a musical enthusiast; and so he was, by a quibble. He was musical after a fashion, and he was enthusiastic in his admiration of himself and Miss Donne. He could not help thinking what a beautiful couple they would make.

The young man's forte was not personal modesty. 'Hang it all,' he had been known to plead, 'I haven't any sympathy with that confounded cant which tells a good−looking fellow that he ought to pretend to be unaware of his own advantages.' He broke out thus pretty often upon John Keen, his chum. 'I'm not an Adonis, I know.' 'No,' John would answer, 'you ain't old man.' 'But I should pass in a crowd,' Mr. Banks would flow on, silently contemning satire; 'and I should be an ass not to know it.' John was a long−haired young man, careless of his personal aspect and at feud with society. He made war against convention by smoking in the streets, and by

wearing a broad−brimmed felt and his shabbiest coat on Sundays. These habits and an open warfare with the Reverend Jabez Wallier of Zion, gave John a republican, communistic, free−thinking sort of reputation with the graver seniors of the town. George Banks and he had been at school together, and were companions still, with next to nothing in common. In an incautious moment Mr. Banks mentioned the approaching *soirée* and its date.

'I'll go to Quarrymoor with you,' said John Keen; and George who could not very well object to this, gave way to it with an ill grace. 'You don't mean to say,' said John, who had or affected the merest suspicion of the local drawl, 'that you're going to get into a claw−hammer coat for this business, do you?' George had been giving elaborate instructions to a Birmingham tailor about a new dress−suit which must be ready before Thursday.

'I'm not a barbarian,' said he, 'if you are. Of course I shall dress for it.' John had a dry and aggravating slow smile, which looked as if it meant something. It came into play now, and now, as always, affected his companion unpleasantly. 'What have you to grin at?' George asked, with some show of temper.

'What has anybody got to grin at on this filthy planet?' asked John; but he smiled nevertheless with a look of uncertain humour. George had an uneasy suspicion that his friend was smiling at him.

The evening came, and George appeared resplendent. Anxious as he was to meet Miss Donne, be was careful not to mar the *éclat* of his advent by too early an arrival, and only turned up when the tables had been cleared and put away and the seats arranged. Most of the natives had never seen a man in evening dress before, and they regarded him with critical wonder. After his first song a burly, red−faced man of genial aspect cried aloud, 'Three cheers for the mon i' the shirt−front!' and the ditty was loudly redemanded. George sang again with a readiness which established him as a popular favourite, and when Ethel and he appeared together the enthusiasm was tremendous. It was a great night for Quarrymoor. A local celebrity had written a poem for the occasion:

Good people all, I hope yo'm well,
An' as ye' an' your tay'll agree;
For my own part, I'n a täal to tell
About this heeur Swarree.

This composition ran into ninety verses, and the bard was so tickled with his own humour that now and again he laughed till the tears ran, and the audience roared with him and at him. He rhymed swarray with 'ham amid buns and tay'; he rhymed swarri with 'summer sky'; and in the last verse he well−nigh killed the Vicar by an evident but unfulfilled intention to make the much−tortured last syllable jingle with 'me and you.' The majority laughed because the act of laughter is catching, and because the example was set them by the gentlefolks. Otherwise they would have sat to see the word more knocked about even than it had been, conscious of a necessity for poetic licence in its handling. The bard was the hit of the evening; and an hour later, when he could trust himself, John Keen congratulated him upon his success. 'Well, mister,' said the local lion with a sort of proud humility, 'it beant everybody as can write poetry.' John went outside and sat upon a tombstone, and gave his heart to mirth.

Meantime Mr. Banks made large strides in the good graces of Miss Donne. I suppose you would not give much for a story which had no chronicle of love−making. I think it is Agur the son of Jakeh who, in reciting the words of wisdom which his mother taught him, expresses his wonder at 'the way of a man with a maid.' it was wonderful so long ago, and it is still wonderful. The literature of love−making is beyond computation, and the simple theme still pleases.

Chapter 8.

It befell that, after the soirée at Quarrymoor, Mr. George Banks began to profess an extraordinary interest in matters antiquarian, and to poke about at odd hours in the old church, copying brasses and making sketches of a

marble lord of the manor who lay on his back in a neglected corner of the building. John Keen, his chum, had a sort of double−barrelled profession, being both solicitor and mine surveyor; but his natural tastes were towards architecture, and it was to him that George was indebted for his new pursuit. John, having seen Ethel, followed George's example and fell in love with her. It came quite naturally to *him* to haunt the old church in the hope of seeing her, and George learned the lesson and availed himself of it. So the two young men used to dodge each other in a rather guilty way on leisure afternoons, and once or twice, with mutual ire and astonishment, met at the church.

I have already told you that George Bushell had inherited his brother Joseph's fortune. He throve mightily, and became a local magnate, signing himself J,P., and being much looked up to. He was a member of the Conservative Central Committee for the county, and had embarked in great mining speculations, and was in these days a staunch Churchman. In affairs ecclesiastical, political, and commercial he came into contact with the best sort of people, and was highly respected. If his money had betrayed him into any pretence of fashion, he would no doubt have been laughed at; but he behaved with much reticence and modesty, and people naturally spoke well of him. No repentances troubled him, and young Joe, his ill−starred nephew, had faded out of memory years ago. Amongst other enterprises of his, he had bought shares in a local bank, and had bought so largely that he might almost be said to have been the bank's proprietor, he held mines under all sorts of business conditions, and he employed some twenty or thirty clerks at his offices. These like everybody else in his pay, worked under his own supervision; and amongst them, and high in favour, was George Banks, who, of course, had he only known it, was George Bushell, and legal owner of the desks he sat at, the ledger he made entries in, and the vast estate upon which he was employed. Old Daniel, George's supposed father, had plenty of money, but he would not have the lad trained in idleness. The Saracen was but a little part of the old man's belongings, and George, being acknowledged heir to everything, was lordly with his fellow−clerks and flush of pocket money. His financial position went with other things to make him a favourite with his employer, and he had freedoms and advantages which his compeers envied.

On the Saturday afternoon which followed the Quarrymoor entertainment, George called upon his employer. Mr. Bushell, intensely respectable to begin with, had by this time grown imposing in appearance. Tie wore the high collars and the large stock of twenty years' earlier date, and his hair was silvery. His hands, though large with early labour, had grown soft and plump and white; and his black broadcloth dress, if staid and old−fashioned, was of the best material and cut. He affected some homeliness of custom, and amongst them he preserved the habit of smoking a long churchwarden clay. This one practice was of considerable value to him, for it lent him a certain patriarchal and unaffected look, and greenhorns said that it showed simplicity of character. The Wrongful Heir sat in dull dignity, and the Rightful Heir smirked before him with propitiatory smile.

'I have called, sir,' said the favoured clerk with suavity, 'to ask a favour. My father's affairs are growing a little too heavy for his hands, and he himself is getting old, sir, as you know, if you could spare me upon an occasional Wednesday afternoon, I could be of more service to him than I am at present.'

Mr. Banks,' said the usurper, 'no man can serve two masters.' Mr. Bushell was familiar with many texts out of Scripture, and most of the passages which stuck in his memory appeared to make for his advantage, so that he regarded the sacred volume with respect, as a storehouse of useful aphorism. But the clerk knew his way with him.

I am sure, sir,' he answered, 'that I am fully sensible of the favour I ask, and of course I know that it is not business−like. But I should be most happy if you would allow me to make up the deficiency I propose to create on other evenings. My father is jealous about entrusting his business to other hands, and his affairs are becoming considerable.'

Mr. Bushell, being well−to−do himself, naturally liked to have well−to−do people about him. He abhorred poverty, it wanted to borrow, which was bad; or to beg, which was worse; and it made itself disagreeable in many

ways. It presented facilities for being ground down, which could not be looked for in people in prosperous circumstances; but this mere amelioration left the main evils of it unchecked.

'I'll think about it, Mr. Banks,' said the usurper; and the Rightful Heir, having bowed and smirked himself away, walked to Quarrymoor attired in festal raiment. Three miles out he overtook John Keen, and on first sighting him was disposed to drop behind; but so slight a matter as the direction of the summer wind made that inconvenient. For John was lighting a pipe, and, in turning his back upon the wind to do it, he faced George. The young men met with a confused attempt at indifferent good−fellowship, and of course each thought the other abominably in the way.

'Lovely weather, isn't it?' said George.

'Admirable,' said John. There was a dry aggravating air of self−possession about this young man, even when he was least self−possessed. He said little at most times, but he always gave George an impression that he was thinking with cutting smartness.

In point of fact John inspired a feeling of something very like terror in George's mind.

'Where are you off to?' asked George with a great effort.

'I am going to make some sketches in Quarrymoor Church,' John answered. 'There are some stunning brasses there, too, and the pulpit's very interesting.' George sketched a little in a mechanical South Kensington manner, and had wasted the evenings of a year or two of his life at the Birmingham Art School; but he scarcely knew whether his companion was chaffing him or not. Ethel practised on the organ on Saturday afternoons, and George was bound to the church to listen to her, and a guilty conscience needs no accuser. This talk about an interesting pulpit sounded like satire under the circumstances; but George controlled himself, and said simply

'I'll come with you, if you don't mind.'

'Very glad, I am sure,' John responded hypocritically; and they went on in mutual distrust of each other. 'This dandified duffer,' thought John to himself, 'can't be sneaking after Miss Donne, can he? She's worth a million of him.' George, on the other hand, felt a sort of right over the young lady, and, like a lover, was ready to be jealous. Of course he acknowledged that his rights were as yet exceedingly vague; but they were there somehow, and he wasn't going to have that fellow Keen trampling on them.

Quarrymoor Church had a squat Norman tower of great antiquity, and its lines were too ugly to be made pleasant even by its clustering mosses and ivy. Yet it was pleasing to the eyes of these young men when once their ears had assured them that the shrine held their own divinity. Ethel was in the organ loft, improvising on the wheezy organ, unconscious of listeners. And if she had dreams which were not altogether in character with the place, I, for one, am not disposed to be very hard upon her. She was thinking of a young man with broad shoulders and a tenor voice, and the voice spoke to her even in the broken−winded, asthmatic music of the old organ. It was dusky up there, though the sun blazed hot and bright outside; and in the cool dimness of the place Ethel saw the eyes of the tenor−voiced young man, and thought them very tender and honest. In truth, their brown inclined a trifle too much to green, and they were something too near together, and had to the observant physiognomist a furtive and even frightened look. The rivals stole into the church on tiptoe, and John began to sketch the recumbent lord of the manor, George making a pretence of watching him; and both of them yearned a little over the wheezy voluntary, which, after all, was played by Love's own hands. They said not a word to each other for an hour, and just as the sketch was finished they heard Ethel closing the organ. Then a ridiculous tremor fell upon them, and the girl, coming in sight of them unexpectedly, shared it to the full; but, showing nothing of it, advanced and shook hands with both, and, leading the way to the porch, covered her own confusion by examining the drawing there to John's satisfaction and George's enragement. But Mr. Banks was too good a diplomatist to display his

anger openly, and explained suavely how his visit to the church was entirely due to Mr. Keen's artistic enthusiasm, how he was taking a walk and fell in with Mr. Keen, how Mr. Keen was going sketching, how he availed himself of that opportunity to take a closer look at the antiquities of which the Vicar had spoken, and how delighted he had been to listen to Miss Donne's playing.

'The poor old organ,' said Miss Donne, 'is in a sad condition.'

'Worst instrument I ever heard,' said clumsy, downright John. Ethel was hurt at this. You may pity an old friend broken by time and asthma, but you do not care to hear anybody speak bitterly of his infirmities. George had more tact, and caught exactly the right tone of half−affectionate regret.

'I dare say,' said he, 'that you won't like the new organ half so well as this.' Ethel looked at him almost with gratitude.

'How well he understands one!' she thought. 'O!' she said aloud, unwilling to be thought sentimental, 'it won't have the associations at first; but of course it will be a much finer instrument.'

'I beg your pardon,' said John, 'for pitching into the old organ. I forgot that it was a friend of yours. That makes every difference.' Ethel smiled at this, and John continued. 'I've a queer old square box of a piano that I learned to play on. I can't have it tuned because the wires would pull it off its legs if I did, and all the chords are loose. I like it, somehow, though.'

'That is precisely how I feel about the organ,' said Ethel, readily forgiving him.

'Confound the fellow!' said George to himself. '*He's* getting sentimental now!'

Miss Donne did not ask the young men to enter the farmhouse, but bade them good−bye at the gate, and they walked home together in rather an ill−humoured way. George betook himself to the Dudley Arms and sought the delights of a shilling pool an hour or two earlier than usual, and, being out of temper, played badly; and, playing badly, lost; and, losing, strove to recoup himself by bets. Losing in that direction also, he went home in a very savage condition, disposed to quarrel with anybody. Old Daniel, who closed his house at eleven o'clock, had gone to bed an hour ago; but Dinah was sitting up for her son, and on his entry she saw that he was sullen and out of temper. Indeed, George's tenor voice did not often make home musical.

'I've laid out a nice bit of supper for you, George,' said Dinah, quaking a little, but affecting not to see the lowering look upon his face.

'*I* don't want any supper,' said George, throwing himself moodily into an armchair, and diving both hands deep into his pockets.

'Won't you eat a bit, my dear?' asked Dinah.

'No,' said George, with undignified mockery; 'I won't eat a bit, my dear. Who the deuce asked you to sit up for me?'

Dinah returned no answer; and the young man, whose sulks were always a little young−womanish, felt a feminine sense of spite at her quietude. It angered him more than any retort would have done.

'Confound it!' he broke out, his tenor voice sounding in its petulance quite shrill and querulous, 'can't you leave a man alone? Sitting up to watch what time of night I come in, and spying on me when I go out! You can go to bed now, anyway.'

'Yes, dear,' said Dinah submissively, 'I will. But I wish you'd eat a bit.'

'Well, then,' snapped Miss Donne's lover, 'you'll have your wish for your trouble. Go to bed.'

The last straw breaks the camel's back, but, before that consummation can be arrived at, a good many straws must have been heaped up. Dinah's womanly patience had endured for four−and−twenty years, and through all that dreary time she had kept her secret. She had often so yearned to tell it to her son, that her whole soul had seemed to ache with the effort of repression, and every fibre of her body had thrilled with unsatisfied longing. But she had never been so near to the actual revelation as she was now.

Human affection, like everything else in the world, is intermittent, and has its ebbs and flows. The tide of motherly longing and unsatisfied desire of love had been running high all day in Dinah's heart. She did not cry easily; women who have endured real and lasting sorrows rarely do, for tears have a knack of wearing out their channel when they run too freely. But at George's last rebuff the water sprang to her eyes with a bitter little pang of actual physical pain, and with glistening eyes she laid a timid hand upon his shoulder.

'I wish you'd be a bit kinder with me George,' she said.

'Then, why the dickens don't you let a man alone?' responded the injured George.

The urgent affection in the mother's heart overflowed all bounds but one. She put her arms about her son's neck, and laid her check against his.

'You don't knew how I love you, my darling,' she said: 'do give me a little bit o' love back again, won't you?'

'Oh, be hanged!' said George.

Dinah withdrew her hands and stood up as if he had struck her. There was at least this one poor excuse for the son of the errant Joe, that he had no knowledge of the real relationship between Dinah and himself. Perhaps one other excuse he had may be reckoned a little more cogent. He was a cad through and through, and, being what he was, had no capacity for the understanding of any unselfish love; and, wanting that capacity, could scarcely guess his own power to wound. Let the student of human nature be honest, and strive to do justice to everybody. How far a cad is answerable for being a cad is a subtle and perplexing question. Only a fool would break a half−gallon jug for not holding a gallon.

'Why don't you get married?' said George; 'you've had chances enough. There's that fellow Hince has asked you three times already, and he's always hanging about the house now.'

Dinah stood silent. Mr. Hince was a butcher, of prosperous circumstances and more than middle age, and a second time widowed. Some time before the death of his second wife this gentleman had expressed his intention of making Dinah Mrs. Hince the third. So far as so gentle and affectionate a creature was able to hate anybody, Dinah hated the prosperous butcher.

'Why don't you marry him?' said George, newly aggrieved by the withdrawal of the caress which had offended him and by her silence; 'you'd better. I don't want to have you on my hands all my life long.'

'Good night, George,' said Dinah.

George was too surly to answer even so small an overture of peace as this. But the last word was precious to him, and he responded, 'Just you remember that!'

'Good night,' said Dinah meekly once more.

'Just you remember that!' her son repeated, and she withdrew to her own room.

This, and many a like scene which had gone before it, seemed to her self−accusing mind the fit and proper punishment of the deceit she had practised so many years ago. She was not clever enough to formulate it to herself; but she thought all punishment the natural outgrowth of crime, and her own girlish yielding to her lover's impetuous demands for a secret marriage had long since assumed criminal dimensions in her eyes. Dinah being thus summarily and triumphantly disposed of, it occurred to George that he did want his supper after all, and he sat down to the dish she had provided, and cleared it with a gusto rather increased than otherwise by the memory of the rebuff he had administered. As almost anybody who ever beguiled an evening by the consumption of alcoholic liquors knows, there is a midnight appetite which makes food singularly enjoyable, and George enjoyed his supper. He drank a glass or two of whisky after it, and went to bed, arising late in the morning to breakfast on brandy and soda. Being blessed with a good constitution to begin with, he freshened up on this unsubstantial diet, and, after a stroll, returned to the homely midday Sunday dinner, and played a decent knife and fork there. An hour after dinner, carefully groomed and dressed in excellent taste, he walked to Quarrymoor, and, encountering Ethel in the fields, greeted her in his best manner with a winning smile. The tenor voice was pleasant in the girl's ears, and she had no guess as to how querulous it might be. In the hours of courtship young people, for the most part, see only the best side of each other. I will not do Ethel the injustice to say that she had but one side to show; but at this time, as nearly always, the best side declared itself naturally and without effort. She thought very highly of her companion, and though not yet in love with him, she walked with a certain tremulous gaiety towards the boundaries of love's demesne, not altogether unconscious of the direction in which her steps were tending.

George himself, as becomes the male animal under such circumstances, had more pronounced and decided views with regard to his own intentions. When a man is young, he can fall in love with a pretty woman after a fashion, without developing any particular nobilities of sentiment. George was not uncultured. His taste in poetry was not the highest; but he had read a certain quantity of British verse, and knew, or thought he knew, the sentiments which were proper to entertain under the circumstances. The beauties of nature, for instance, came into his scheme of things, and he invited Miss Donne to listen to the strains of a skylark which made double holiday in the Sunday air, freer of smoke−wreaths than common; he stood with her upon the wooden bridge that crossed a small bickering stream, and asked her to guess in what key its murmured music ran. This inquiry quite charmed Ethel, seeming to indicate a love at once for nature and for art. When a young woman is disposed to think well of you, you need not be very clever for her to think you clever, or a pattern of sweet temper for her to think you amiable. There are not many things more pathetic than the trustful willingness of almost any girl to be led into a false estimate of character under such conditions. Titania can fall in love with Bottom the weaver, and give Oberon and Puck no pains to plot against her. She is happy if she wakes from her dream before the golden circle has bound the ass−headed clown and the fairy queen irrevocably together.

Love is an idolater, worshipping the poorest idol with the completest faith, gilding the base earth of which the image is compact until it looks like gold and taking it for gold. And the worst of it is that no wit or worth or wisdom can save any man or woman from this amazing folly. To have a statue of all imaginable excellences set up in your holy of holies, and to be afraid to scratch lest you should find the clay below the gilding! To have the ungilded original entering that sacred place and smashing the statue!

Perhaps, when she went into the fields that afternoon, Ethel was not altogether free of fancy that the young gentleman with the tenor voice and the brown eyes might, by good fortune, meet her. It is certain that when she encountered him the air had suddenly grown sunnier, and the quiet landscape brighter. She had offered George no hospitality on the previous day, not caring probably to make John Keen free of the farmhouse parlour; but when, after a long−drawn stroll, George offered to say 'Good−bye' at the gate, she asked him in, and he, without even a pretence of polite reluctance, accepted her invitation.

'Mother,' said Ethel, 'you remember Mr. Banks?'

Of course the old lady remembered him well, and he was received with much cordiality. There was something so particular in her mother's manner, though George did not see it, and was not intended to see it, that the girl blushed two or three times as the three sat together at the tea−table. George found himself, so to speak, in clover. The juicy, home−made bread, the firm, pale−golden butter, the fragrant tea, were each and all pleasant in their way. The young lady's manner was everything that could be hoped for; the mother was courteous and evidently pleased to see him; and he was enough in love with Ethel to find even her unassisted presence charming.

Tea being over, they had a little sacred music before church, and after the sacred music they walked to the ugly old Norman edifice together. After church two or three of the neighbours dropped in, and they had a little more sacred music, Mr. Banks being the central figure of the evening. Then came supper, and, by something like common consent, a seat was found for him next to Ethel's, and in the virgin's innocent heart arose and radiated those little electric flashes which begin with nearness when love begins. This Sunday evening was the precursor of many similarly spent; and George, in a tacit way, became recognised by the neighbourhood as Miss Donne's suitor.

On the Monday following this particular Sunday the Wrongful Heir turned up at his offices.

'I've been thinkin', Mr. Banks, about what you asked me o' Saturday,' said he. 'You can have your Wednesday afternoons, seein' as you want to attend to your father's business, and I shall expect you to give me an extra hour or two on Monday nights, private, at my own house. Will that suit you?'

The Rightful Heir, with ingratiatory smile, became fluent in acknowledgment. The arrangement would suit him admirably. It was understood that the said arrangement should be and remain in force until further orders. But I regret to say that old Daniel's business received no profit from it, for the holiday was invariably employed in a visit to Quarrymoor. The arrangement for Monday evening brought Rightful Heir and Wrongful Heir more close together than they had ever been before, and George got to know a good deal about his employer's private concerns. He could guess, with a fair approach to accuracy, how much the old man was worth; and he knew, with tolerable exactness, in what directions his money was invested. Old George found him very smart and apt, and felt himself relieved of much labour by the new arrangement. It was not in his nature to trust anybody very far: but he gave young George more of his confidence then he had ever given elsewhere, and the young man repaid him by a sleek and well−conditioned assiduity. Almost any sort of human arrangement is liable to grow out of its original bounds, and Mr. Banks in course of a month or two was not in the least surprised to find himself translated from his stool in the office to the chair of private secretary in Mr. Bushell's own house. This brought with it an increase of salary and an increase of freedom, and George began to make a considerable figure in the town. It was generally said that old Bushell, who had not a single creature belonging to him, might not improbably leave at least a slice of his vast fortune to young Banks. This kind of rumour is apt, in little country places, to bring about results more or less practical, and George's tenor voice was heard in drawing−rooms whose occupants were quite outside the 'Saracen's' homely sphere.

The summer had gone, and the harvest was over and ended. The fields at Quarrymoor Farm, lately thick with waving wheat and barley, looked threadbare and waste. Here and there a meagre covey rose from the stubble when a chance footstep crossed the lonelier fields. The trees were slowly firing towards the flush of beauty which heralds winter and their own bereavement. Love's little idyll had, of course, been writing itself out all this time line by line, and Ethel had learned many things. Mr. Banks had not yet formally proposed; but he had been very near it once or twice, and Ethel was quite content to wait, and to leave unspoiled that delicious maiden uncertainty which yet was certain. Love is a rare epicure.

Whilst George's tenor voice had been growing sweeter and sweeter for Ethel's ears, and she had been translating into him all the charm of her own nature, and, with no egotism, worshipping her own heart's reflection, John Keen

had been walking in the same path with George. There was an uneasy sense between the old companions that war was coming, and although the rivalry between them had never been openly declared as yet, it was none the less recognised. It broke out at last in an unexpected way. John's chronic war with the Reverend Jabez Wallier, of Zion, had reached an acute stage, and the young sinner had written rhymes about the parson. The Reverend Jabez had carried the war back into the enemy's country, and had published a pamphlet in which he had pointedly set forth his belief that John had the sign of the beast in his forehead. The young man's sense of humour being tickled, he wrote further verses, which to the Reverend Jabez really represented themselves as being the very versified voice of the pit. Even the average churchgoers were shocked; and John, to his own distaste, found himself on a sudden the hero of that section of the town he liked least of all. The Vicar of Quarrymoor loved a joke and hated a Dissenter, and one or two copies of John's verses having fallen into his hands, he disseminated them, with less judgment than might have been expected of him. Somehow, the knowledge of this pouring forth of John's muse got to Ethel's ears, and she was alarmed for George. That sweet−minded young man was orthodox, and had no sense of humour; and one can readily imagine the dread an innocent girl might feel lest a free−thinking firebrand of a fellow, who could publicly chaff a preacher, should communicate his baleful fires to her sweetheart. She warned George against him.

'He is an old and valued friend of mine,' said that good creature. He was very glad of a chance to throw John over and be rid of him; but if he did it for Ethel's sake, it would be something in his own favour. 'And I have not read the verses. It would be unjust to condemn him without a trial.'

That was obviously fair, and Ethel admitted it. She was a little afraid of John, apart from theological questions; for he came courting in a dogged manner, praising her to her face without disguise, and blurting out his admiration with a resolved shamefacedness which was hard to hear.

'I don't ask you to leave him unkindly,' said Ethel; and added, with blushing haste, 'I have no right to ask you anything but '

'You have a right to ask me anything,' said George, who was always in these days hovering on the brink of an actual declaration, and always shrinking back again. 'I will read the verses, and if I find them as bad as they have been represented, I shall not hesitate.'

There the question dropped; but when the rivals, successful and unsuccessful, next encountered each other, George opened fire upon his old companion. Whatever a man does, it is worth while to do it thoroughly; and George, being for the moment orthodox, surprised himself by the religious fervour of his own feelings. The interview took place in the street. John, with his shocking bad hat on the back of his head and his pipe in his mouth, lounged on to meet his rival, who was cap−à−pie in the latest devices of male fashion.

'I've been waiting for an opportunity to speak to you,' said George, with such a sensation as a man might feel if some important part of him were dissolving inside. True courage, it may be argued, consists in the facing of one's own fears. A man may behave with magnificent pluck though he *wants* to run away all the time.

'Ah!' said John, suspicious of the truth.

'I hope,' said George, 'that you will be able to deny the authorship of those blackguard verses addressed to Mr. Walker.' The versifier looked at him and gave him time to go on. 'They are attributed to you,' George added uncomfortably.

'Have you read 'em?' inquired the versifier.

'I regret to say I have,' responded George. If you examine this response with verbal subtlety, you will discover that it was not a lie. There was something in his rival's manner which gave the versifier an inkling of the truth.

'Never mind what you regret,' said John. 'Have you read 'em?'

'Yes,' said George, lying this time plump and clean, though against his conscience. 'Did you write them?'

'Hit Jabez where he lived, didn't they?' asked John elliptically. 'Yes, yes. I wrote 'em. What about 'em?'

'I regret,' said George, almost startled to notice how much his pious anger helped him, 'to learn that the popular accusation is based on truth. You will see that, after this, it is not very likely that we can know each other.'

'Clearly,' said John; and, dull as he was, the other felt the satire.

'Good day,' said George stiffly.

'Wait a bit,' said Keen; and for a second or two the young men faced each other in silence. 'Before we part, I've a word to say.' There was another pause. 'No, I won't say it now, because I mean it, and after what has happened you'd misunderstand me.'

'If you have anything to say,' said George, 'pray say it now. I shall certainly be unwilling to offer you another opportunity.'

'Very well,' said John, with the air of one who is too tired to be scornful. 'You and I know why we part.'

'We part,' said George, 'because of your indecent violation of things which I have been taught to consider sacred. I'm not a saint' John nodded with his customary dry smile, 'but there are some things I can't stand, and '

'J. K. at Quarrymoor is one of 'em,' said J. K. quietly. 'We both know.'

'I am at a loss to understand you,' returned George.

'Are you?' the other asked. 'I'm very glad of it, because it simplifies matters. We have but one quarrel, and only the *odium theologicum* divides us.'

'Let me know at once what you have to say,' demanded George, with some asperity.

'I'll say nothing worse than good−bye,' John answered; and the old companions parted. The condemned satirist pulled his shocking bad hat from the back of his head low upon his brows, and walked on.

'She'll marry that fellow,' he mused sadly and bitterly. 'It would have been of no use to warn him at any time, I suppose, and we should only have quarrelled outright if I had warned him now. I wonder if she had heard of me and the Reverend Jabez? Might have frightened her. I don't care much about public opinion, but I don't want her to think ill of me. Pooh! what does it matter what she thinks of me? If she can only think well of him! that's enough for me to pray for.' The young man went on until he came in front of the 'Dudley Arms,' and there somebody rounding the corner suddenly ran against him. It turned out to be the Reverend Jabez, who, without apology, hurried on his way. 'I beg your pardon, sir!' cried John with a smile as the parson scuttled along the High Street; but before the verse−writer had turned again the smile had faded, and he walked on with a melancholy countenance and a heavy heart. No man of five−and−twenty can endure with equanimity to be crossed in love. And least of all can any young gentleman endure to be thrown away for a rival whom he knows to be unworthy.

Chapter 9.

George Banks seems inclined, up to now, to turn out badly, as young gentlemen with the sweetest of tenor voices, the silkiest of moustaches, and the suavest manners, have unhappily done before him. The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table speaks of a Thomas who includes three Thomases the Thomas you know, the Thomas Thomas knows, and the Thomas God made. All men have their various sides, but the width of difference which can lie between a good woman's apprehension of her lover and the man's real nature is rarely equalled elsewhere. To Ethel, George was a hero; and when, after no more than a six months' courtship, he asked her to marry him, she consented, and thought herself the happiest and most honoured of women. There is probably a strong family likeness between one proposal of marriage and another, and it seems likely that there is no equally important movement made in life in which men's idiosyncrasies assert themselves less freely.

There had been great efforts made to fit up the new organ at Quarrymoor Church in time for the Christmas festival, and, the important work being finished, Ethel, one evening a fortnight before the sacred day, sent round a shock−headed farm boy to the bellows, drew out the stops, laid her hands upon the keys, and for the first time heard the new voice speak to her. It was quite an event in her life, and a score of the people amongst whom her simple days had been spent were there to share the pleasure of it. There had been finer organs built than this; but eloquence dwells in the heart of the hearer rather than in the voice of the speaker, and Miss Donne had a sort of right of ownership in the new instrument, and, though a more than commonly good musician, would have been charmed with one much poorer. As the music woke from the great square chest in which until now it had slumbered, it was like the awakening of a soul to life. And as the new soul, with widespread, slow−sounding majestic pinions, fanned its way towards heaven, the player's seemed to follow it, and to hover, clothed in sweetness, high above this mere earth, and its little cares and griefs and unheroic joys. But she had been no lover if George's soul had not seemed to hover side by side with hers, borne up by the storm−wind of the music. George was not in the organ−loft, though he had begged hard to be allowed to accompany her there. Nobody likes to be seen at a disadvantage. St. Cecilia seated before the organ−pipes with an angel looking at her makes a pretty picture, but the lady probably played in her own primitive days without the use of pedals. There is a good deal of ungraceful labour in playing an organ, and Ethel knew it, and gave George the benefit of her knowledge, compelling him to sit with the rest in the body of the church. Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, to soften rocks and rend the knotted oak. George Banks was an emotional person, with some knowledge of music and a considerable liking for it, and, over and beyond this, he was in love. He could lie upon occasion, and he could be ungenerous and ungracious with anybody who was too weak to punish him; but these faculties are not incompatible with the existence of the power to compass emotional pleasures. His soul also, or what passed for it, took an owl's flight after the dove−flight of Ethel's and the eagle−soaring of the music, and his love mixed with the organ tones and they with it, until his greenish−brown eyes were glistening with easy tears. He had time to be proud of this manifestation of a cultured and impressible nature before the music ceased, and was sorry that Ethel was not there to see the artistic moisture in his eyes. When she came down he told her of it, and praised the beauty of her playing. They walked home together, and nobody was stupid enough to try to come between them, or to distract the attention of either of the lovers from the other.

Anything was welcome at Quarrymoor Farm which gave an occasion for hospitality; and, as a matter of course, this trial of the new organ presented a capital opportunity. The maids had set out a supper−table in the old−fashioned parlour a noble piece of beef, a juicy ham, home−bred and home−cured, a saddle of mutton: all cold, but flanked by steaming dishes of hot potatoes, and supported by vast loaves of home−baked bread on trenchers, and foaming jugs of home−brewed ale. A meal for hungry people, on a night when the keen air made even lovers sharp−set in appetite. Uncle Borge was there, a wizened man in black; and Aunt Borge, a fat lady in blue, who sat down to supper in her bonnet, as a hint that her society might be looked for no longer than the meal should last; the Vicar was there, radiant; and Mr. Hick, the miller, an ardent politician; and Mrs. Hick, the miller's wife. In all, a dozen people sat down to that generous board; Ethel and George being side by side as usual.

'Now, Mr. Hick,' said Uncle Borge, 'what do you think about this here Conservative rehaction?'

'Why,' returned the miller, 'I think as it's of a piece wi' welly [well−nigh] everythin'.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Borge, 'do you, now?'

'Why, I remember,' said Mr. Hick, 'when the bread riots was on a' Bilston, when the flour was that bad as the bread 'ud run out o' th' ovens. The Toery party was i' power i' them days.'

'Was 'em?' asked Uncle Borge 'an' wheer was De Isreeayly then?'

'Well,' said the miller, 'I don't rightly know as he'd come up; not a lot.'

'No?'said Uncle Borge.

'He was somewheer about, I mek no doubt,' said Mr. Hick.

'Thee may'st bet thy head he was up to summat even a' them days.'

'Ah, to be sure!' said Uncle Borge, with the air of a man convinced by abstruse argument. A second supply of beef for Mr. Hick and of mutton for Uncle Borge arriving simultaneously, the discussion was allowed to slumber. The miller welcomed this diversion, not being so sure of the company as he would have been at the 'King's Arms' at Quarrymoor. The Vicar daunted him a little.

'Now, Miss Donne,' said Mr. Hick, raising his glass in the next pause, 'I mightn't see thee again not afore Christmas; an' so here's a merry Christmas an' a happy New Year to thee an' thine. Mrs. Donne, ma'am, I drink to you. My respects to *you*, sir,' to the Vicar; 'Missis,' to Mrs. Hick, 'my opinion o' you.'

'James'll allays tek a chance for a merry word,' said Mrs. Hick, apologetically, to the Vicar.

'And why not?' asked the Vicar. 'Mr. Hick, I follow your example, and drink to the general health of the whole table. Ladies and gentlemen, a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.' Everybody sipped in answer to this sentiment, and George, glass in hand, murmured in Ethel's ear,

'A happy New Year, Miss Donne.'

Ethel turned and answered, 'A happy New Year.'

She had caught his tone of voice, as sympathetic people often do, and she half whispered the words with a smile. He ventured on what he had never done before, and, first touching her hand beneath the table and finding it unwithdrawn, he clasped it in his own. She made a faint, a very faint effort to remove it: and he resisting ever so slightly, she let it rest for a brief second or two. After that she sat in a pleasant confusion, whilst Uncle Borge and Mr. Hick talked about the 'staät o' traäd' and kindred matters.

'Our Borge,' said the stout lady in blue, "ud sit an' talk all night if a body'd let him.' Then Uncle Borge took this as a signal to be gone, and arose in obedience to it. The other guests followed his example, but George dared to linger. Ethel had thrown a shawl about her head and had run out to the gate to repeat her wishes for a merry Christmas. The friendly voices burthened with the local drawl, came back, borne down the snow−covered lane on the clear air with a genial crispness in the tone, when George emerged in his great−coat from the house and intercepted Miss Donne's return. Perhaps Miss Donne was willing to have her return intercepted perhaps she had even run out of doors for a purpose of her own; how would the clumsy male creature make chances for the

utterance of his sentiments in this sort of case unless he were assisted?

'You'll wish me a merry Christmas, won't you, Miss Donne?' asked George.

'Yes,' said Ethel; 'a merry Christmas.'

'And a happy New Year?' the young man asked.

'I shall see you again before the New Year,' she answered.

'Won't you wish me a happy New Year?' he asked again. 'Won't you give me a happy New Year? the happiest new year I ever had in my life!' Ethel murmured an inaudible something she herself scarcely knew what. Bat she knew that by this time she was in George's arms, and that he was working with the fingers of one hand to free her face from the shawl which obscured it. When he had achieved that object he kissed her, and the tenor voice murmured at her ear, telling how long George had loved her and how dearly, and how it should he the one effort of his life to make her happy, and calling her his angel and his darling. It is quite a commonplace sort of matter to write about or to read about in a novel, and George did it all in the orthodox manner; but it is curious to notice how fresh it is when one meets with it outside books. With George it was perhaps more a matter of the youth of blood than a matter of the affections; but, as I have said already, some people do not find nobility of sentiment a necessary appurtenance to love, and he was at least more in earnest than he had ever been before, and meant all he said; and could not, indeed, find words to say a hundredth part enough. Ethel had no need of any words of her own just then. She could let her lover speak for both, and his words were sweeter than sweet. But at last and the whole thing lasted scarcely more than a minute George felt his kisses answered once, only once, and she was gone. He went homewards triumphing; and, what with his triumph and the clear exhilarating air, he felt so full of life and gladness that he must needs run at full speed every now and again, so that the four miles between himself and home were covered in forty minutes, and he reached the 'Saracen' bright and flushed, and looking for once in his life downright handsome. He greeted Dinah good−humouredly when he met her in one of the passages, and, pushing by, reached the little snuggery so unchanged, during this four−and−twenty years, that a picture of it drawn in the old days would still answer for it almost to a bottle and there found Daniel scorching his thin legs before a rousing fire, and with fat white hands feebly encouraging his digestive organs, as on the night when we first saw him.

'Father,' said the young man, throwing off his overcoat and turning his face away a little, 'I've news for you. I am engaged to be married.'

'Ah!' said the old man quietly. 'Can the young woman keep thee?'

'I hope to be able to keep the young lady,' George answered in affront.

'Engaäged to be married, beest thee?' asked Daniel. 'It's a bit sudden−like, ain't it, George, lad? Who is it? Maid or widder?'

'The lady is Miss Ethel Donne, of Quarrymoor Farm;' George answered.

'I thought as theer was summat a−tekin' thee out to Quarrymoor;' chuckled Daniel with an asthmatic wheeze. 'Donne? I knowin' the naäm, I thinkin'. Ah! John Donne, he was a farmer out theer. Is her a daughter of hisn?'

'Yes,' said George; 'Miss Donne lives at the farm. She is an only child.'

'I reckon her'll be pretty warm, than?' said Daniel.

'Her mother has only a life−interest,' said George complacently. 'The farm is a freehold of more than three hundred acres, and she will have other property besides.'

'Very well, then,' said Daniel, with another asthmatic chuckle, 'I'm ready to dance at the weddin'. I should like to live to nuss a grandchild o' mine, though I don't reckon on it. I'm a−gettin' to be very old, George. I'm a−gettin' main old. I'm three years i' front o' Jim Bonser, and they say as he's a−dyin'. Well, well, well! Tell Diner I want her.'

'Dinah; said George, 'your father wants you.'

'What is it, father?' asked Dinah, entering quietly.

'Your brother George is engaäged to be married,' said Daniel; 'what d'ye think o' that?'

Here, as always, Dinah's secret stared her in the face. If she could but have claimed George for her child, and have given him a mother's sympathy and a mother's congratulations!

'Who is it, George?' she asked tenderly. He answered more kindly than he had spoken to her for years.

'Miss Donne, at Quarrymoor.'

'The young lady who plays the organ at church?' cried Dinah. 'Why, George, she's the prettiest gell in all this part o' the country.'

'Isn't she?' said George.

'And such a good gell, too, from all I hear,' said motherly Dinah. 'Why, my dear, you are fortunate!'

'When be *you* agoin' off the hooks, Diner?' cried old Daniel 'I'm afeard, my gell, as you've overstayed your market.'

'Yes, father,' said poor Dinah, 'I've overstayed the market.'

'There's no pleasin' some folks,' said her father. 'You've had chance enough; but you've never seemed to tek a likin' to none on 'em, 'cept p'raps as it was young Joe Bushell, an' he's been dead, I count, these 'ears and 'ears.'

Dinah had never even heard the errant Joe's name since her mother's death, ten years ago and more. You may guess what a wound the ignorant words made. But she was used to endurance, and she gave no sign.

'If you'd ha' struck up wi' young Joe,' said Daniel, 'you'd ha' been main rich now. An' I shouldn't ha' sent you to bed wi' your husband naked, if you had ha' married. Joe'd ha' had everythin' as George's master's got, an' at one time I thought you'd mek a match on it.'

What a very patent secret the two young people's love−making must have been, after all!

Dinah kissed George, and congratulated him with all her heart. The young man for once accepted her caresses, and she went to bed almost happy, but full of such thoughts as you may fancy. George himself was too excited to sleep for some two or three hours after getting into bed, and lay tumbling in a way which, under the circumstances, might seem unnatural; but George had a variety of subjects to think about, and the cross−winds and cross−currents of thought tossed the mental barque about rather wildly. For one thing, he was of course going to reform; for, in spite of the airs he had taken with his old companion, he could not lie alone in the darkness of

the night thinking of Ethel, and fail to acknowledge that some small reforms in him were needed. To a conscience not over−tender, shilling pool may seem a sufficiently harmless entertainment, but one of George's vows was against its seductions. It was easy, by the aid of a little small betting, to lose a pound or two in an evening even at shilling pool; and when a man of limited income tests his resources in that way five evenings out of six, he bids fair to get into trouble. In fact, George had borrowed a good bit of money, say a hundred pounds, over and above the 'debts of honour;' and though old Daniel was well−to−do, George was not too sure of getting money from him except by a method which, in the light of his own connection with Miss Donne, seemed unworthy of him. An only son ought, of course, to be welcome to take from a well−to−do father a share of what will one day be his own, and the young man had acted upon this principle with some freedom in bygone small emergencies. There are some things a man must take a bold face with, if he desire to have his own way and live in peace; and conscience is one of them. George had been apt to deride the utterances of his inward monitor, accusing it of cant and over−susceptibility; but somehow the accusations seemed at this time to stick in his throat, and Ethel presided in a new court of conscience, and gave ruling against him on a hundred matters in which he had been apt to rule in his own favour. Well, he was going to be a new man and start afresh. It was unfair and injurious that, under the circumstances, he could not wipe the slate clean of the old record. His troubles were small enough. He was going to marry a wealthy wife, and would himself in due time inherit a nice little fortune. What has been done once may be done again, and George had borrowed already. To fill one hole he must dig another; and though the second hole must necessarily be a little larger than the first, it need scarcely be big enough to bury himself in.

Yet in a little while his debts worried him, and not without cause. Mr. Curtice, who was supposed to be a solicitor, and was a billiard−sharp, horse−chaunter, Jew usurer's tout, and so on, was a man who knew how to be exigent, and it was to him that George applied for help. Mr. Curtice was helpful first and exigent afterwards. George's life became a nuisance to him, The billiard−sharping solicitor dogged him with threats of opening proceedings; and, as most of us know by experience, folly looks extra foolish when threatened with detection, and mere peccadilloes in the dawn of exposure assume aspects mean and criminal. When, by way of miracle, we do see ourselves as others are likely to see us, we are rarely flattered. There was a way out of trouble which some people would have called mean; but after all, when George had looked at it long enough, he felt the path a just one, and took it. There are actions by no means reprehensible, for the performance of which one desires a clear field; and George, though he knew himself justified, wished for secrecy. His plan was simple he had resolved to antedate possession of a little portion of his own: he was going, in short, to rob his father. Now, that is an action about which many theories may be constructed, and in this case there were many excuses for it. Daniel had greatly more money than he wanted; George was his undisputed heir: and yet the old man was parsimonious. And whom is a high−spirited young fellow to rob if not his own father? In brief; George silenced everything within himself, except a voice which seemed to belong to Ethel and would not be stifled.

In Daniel's bedroom stood a great, solid mahogany chest of drawers, dark with age and much polishing. The five lower drawers occupied each the full width available, but the two topmost divided the space between them. The right−hand drawer at the top held Daniel's cash−box, and was always locked; but the left−hand drawer held nothing of value, and was always unsecured. When this left−hand drawer was taken clean out of the chest, a space was discovered (the mahogany partition rising only to half the needful height), through which any fairly slender hand might be introduced. Possibly some loose silver may have found a way of escape by this route aforetime. Anyway, George was familiar with the build of the furniture, and, being quite cornered, resolved upon the deed. Mr. Curtice had grown so noisy in his claim that the young man had made him an absolute promise for a certain Wednesday morning, and here came Tuesday night, and with it such courage as a coward can get out of desperation. The time was more than commonly favourable, for Daniel, to George's knowledge, had been keeping an unusually large sum in hand to meet an account which was to be called for on that very decisive Wednesday. Yet, when in the darkness of the night he crept from his own room to make the attempt he encountered an obstacle unlooked for, and at first sight fatal. The chamber door was locked.

Creeping quietly as a ghost, he tried the key of his own room and found it useless. Despair fell upon him for a while, and then out of it came new cunning and fresh resolve. At the back of the 'Saracen' was a long and narrow

garden, and beyond this garden lay a field; from the field led a little lane which ran at the back of a line of mean houses and ended in a dark by−street. George pulled on his boots, donned hat and coat, and, ostentatiously displaying himself in the bar, announced his intention of going out, and so swaggered away.

He plunged into the by−street, ran crouching down the lane, climbed the gate, slunk along the field, and in two minutes from the start stood in the 'Saracen's' garden. The new plan was but a bolder development of the first. He had intended that an open bedroom window with a ladder placed against it should lead to the suspicion of such an entry as he was about to make, and the ladder was in proper position already. He mounted it in the darkness, pulled a diamonded pane easily out of the soft and flexible leaden frame which held it, and, having thrown back the catch, opened the window and crawled through into the room. Though he shook like the hound he was, it took but a moment to whip out the left−hand drawer; but his sleeve−links and the cuff of his overcoat caught at the upper and lower carpentry of the partition; and he struggled in vain to pass his hand thus cumbered.

This brought delay, and the delay carried with it the beginning of a tragedy.

'Dinah,' said Daniel, comfortably roasting his legs at the snuggery fire, 'tek my keys an' fetch the cash−box.' One of the maids had asked for change.

Dinah went upstairs lightly; but a criminal person who at that second had laid his fingers on a cash−box in a corner difficult of access, heard the step and shook and sweated at it. His fingers, scrambling for a hold upon the box, played a sort of tattoo on the lid; but he clutched it, and drew it through the faulty partition; when with more noise or so it seemed than ever a key made, Dinah began to unlock the door. Clutching the box, George made for the window, and had already got his legs outside when Dinah opened the door, and, with a strange little cry, ran at him, and seized him by the shoulders. A thief was much more likely to be afraid of Dinah than she of a thief.

It was hard on George to be thus disturbed at such a moment. The hysteric rage which is the coward's courage rose in him, and, feeling the ladder firm beneath his feet at that instant, he raised the cash−box in both hands in act to strike. But in the mere second for which she had held him she had seen his face and read the truth. Before he could strike her she had fallen on the floor, and there she lay in a swoon, while George went shakily down the ladder, with failing knees, and ran, with the main bones drawn from the small of his back, along the garden; passed through the field, the lane, and the dark by−street, and, sweating and quaking and palpitating still, found himself by−and−by near a disused mine with the silence of the night about him. There, kneeling on the frosty grass, he set to work with a cold chisel, and, after barking his knuckles a little, succeeded in forcing the lid of the box. He had been in such a thievish fear and hurry until now that be never thought of the weight of the plunder, or collected his own thoughts so far as to guess how much he might have secured. Before the thing was done he had known how much be had expected to find; but now it came upon him with a dizzy sickness of remorse, and rebellion against his luck, that he had done the deed almost in vain. His thievish fingers he felt that they were thievish prowling round and round the box, found in all some two dozen coins and one piece of bank paper. It was too dark for him to tell the difference between gold and silver, but, weighing the coins nervously in his moist hand, he thought them too light for gold, and his heart sank. If Dinah should tell of him! It is characteristic of a coward to grow a little murderous under such conditions.

Dinah stayed so long upstairs that Daniel, having once or twice called to her and received no answer, unwillingly took himself from the sphere of grateful warmth in which he sat, and found her lying in a dead faint beneath the open window. He tugged in alarm at the bedroom bell, and was so perturbed by his daughter's condition that for a full half−hour he forgot to think about the message upon which he had sent her. Then came the discovery. The open window, the ladder set against it, the displaced drawer, the faulty partition all helped to tell the tale.

'It eea't much,' said Daniel, 'as the thief's got for his trouble, anyhow. Lucky for me, the sperit traveller called this arternoon!'

Dinah sat white and chill in the snuggery and listened to the talk and said nothing. It had been drawn from her that she had seen the thief.

'Should you know him again?' asked Daniel.

'I couldn't tell you who it was to save my life,' said poor Dinah, forced into prevarication; but after that she held her tongue, and her agitation was so plainly to be seen that Daniel and his guests forbore to trouble her further.

George threw the empty cash−box down the disused mine, and heard it go clanging with a thousand hollow echoes at the sides until it fell with a dull splash into the gathered water at the bottom of the shaft. Then he went to the 'Dudley Arms,' quaking still, but counterfeiting jollity, and overdoing it a little. A glass or two of brandy set him on his feet again, and he was able to look things in the face with open eyes. He was horribly afraid that Dinah might have recognised him; but the hurry and the darkness were in his favour, and he was in the bedroom so soon after having left the house by the front way, that even if she had thought the thief resembled him, she had probably dismissed the fancy. Then, neither she nor Daniel knew of his debts. However that might be, his coup had failed, and he had made but nine pounds towards the necessary hundred and eighty.

Chapter 10.

George naturally felt himself affronted by fate. When a high−spirited young man finds himself compelled by circumstances to do a mean thing, it is hard that his unwilling baseness should be of no avail to him. The bargain he had made was that for a little less than two hundred pounds he should become despicable. He had become despicable he knew it and felt it but he had been robbed of his bargain. He had been ready to be ashamed of himself for a full cash−box; it was additionally shameful to have to be ashamed for one that was nearly empty. His righteous anger even sustained him against the assaults of conscience. Indeed, he had other things to think about than the upbraidings of the inward voice.

There was Curtice's money to be paid. Curse Curtice! That, with all the changes rung upon it, was well enough as a momentary relief, but it brought no lasting balm to George's heart, it was nice to curse Curtice: it would have been delicious to maltreat him, if the thing could have been done safely; but then the creditor was a big man with a taste for boxing; and, even if it had been possible to thrash him, the debt would still remain unpaid, and George's signature at the bottom of the bill unobliterated. George confessed to himself in the form of Shylock's taunt to Gratiano: rage as he would, he could not rail the seal from off the bond. If only somebody else who hated Curtice as much as he did would run the risk of poisoning him! But there are some things altogether too desirable ever to come true.

Even at five−and−twenty a sleepless night results in pallor; and wrinkles, hitherto lying invisible upon the skin, as secret writing upon paper, start into life. The hollow clang of the empty cash−box as it beat from side to side of the mine, and the final splash it gave at the bottom, made no good sleeping−music. Daniel, in these late days of life, did not rise for breakfast, and on the fateful morning when the inconvenient Curtice was decisively to he met, even Dinah did not appear until George's meal was nearly over. When she entered the room it was plainly to be seen that she had also passed but a poor night. Of all the griefs she had suffered, this new one was the heaviest and the hardest to endure. She had been praying and crying all night, as women do, and she was sore perplexed. Could she do anything to save her child from the pit to which he seemed to be hastening? Dare she warn him? Dare she acknowledge her last night's recognition of the thief? Would such an acknowledgment serve to scare him from his evil courses, or would it drive him into recklessness? She would perhaps have dared to tell him of her knowledge, but that her shame and its anguish seemed too great already to hear increasing by a spoken admission of them.

George felt that it would appear odd in him if he made no allusion to an incident so unusual as a robbery at the 'Saracen.' But it was hard for him to find words which should sound commonplace, and harder still to speak them unconcernedly.

'I couldn't make head or tail of the governor's yarn last night, Dinah,' he said at last, having twice or thrice cleared his throat. 'Did you see the fellow?'

His back was half turned to her, and the newspaper he held was so arranged as to conceal his face. He knew the stroke a bold one it was so bold that his heart seemed to stop whilst he made it but nobody fights more pluckily than a coward in a corner, though his strokes are sometimes wild enough to damage himself rather than his adversary. Dinah gave no answer.

'Can't you hear?' asked George, rustling his newspaper angrily and turning his back fairly upon her. He felt that she was looking at him, and he heard her feet moving slowly on the sanded floor. 'Did you see the fellow? Hang it all! I suppose it hasn't quite frightened your wits away!' If he had but a chance to seem ill−tempered she might miss his agitation. 'Did you see him?'

'Yes,' said Dinah in a whisper. It would be difficult to tell in whose ears the whisper sounded more terrible his or hers.

'Should you' said George, with his back still turned to her, 'should you know him again?' He poured a cup of tea over the tablecloth as he asked the question. Before it was answered Dinah stood in front of him, and he could feel that she was looking at him still. 'What's come to you?' he asked, with a sickly pretence of contempt. 'Can't you speak?' He dared not raise his eyes. 'Should you know him again?'

'Yes,' said Dinah, and then for a second or two their eyes met, in spite of him.

He tried to ask, 'Who was it?' but his voice failed him. He tried to brave her look and his own quailing heart, but they bore him down, and he stirred at an empty cup and pretended to drink from it. Dinah began to cry, and, in the shame and grief which oppressed her, could think of nothing better than to run away. George's knees were so weak for a moment that he could not rise. To have failed and then to have been detected was unusually hard measure, and the detection made everything else look awkward. Dinah had not told so far, but the young man did not know how long he could count upon her forbearance. If his debts should become known at home, there would be a row of course, and Daniel Banks most assuredly would not pay them, though he might use a father's privilege, and be excessively disagreeable about them.

Curtice was lounging in the road when at last George left the door of the 'Saracen.'

'Good morning, Mr. Banks;' said Curtice, civilly enough to look at.

'When did I promise to pay you?' asked George, with intentionally offensive magnificence. 'I'm not the sort of fellow to cringe to a hound like this,' said George internally, 'simply because I owe him money.' And, to do him justice, he never cringed except where thrift might follow fawning. It was hopeless to cringe here, and he knew it.

'Twelve to−day,' said Curtice.

'Then don't bother me till twelve to−day,' said George, walking on.

'All right; said Curtice, quickening his step to keep alongside, 'I can't wait any longer, mind.'

'Don't trouble yourself,' returned the debtor, 'until you're asked to wait.'

'All right,' repeated Curtis, dropping a step behind. 'Twelve to−day at the Dudley. ' George marched on, and the creditor stopping to light a cigar murmured to himself his belief that he would get his money after all. But in the debtor's heart fear and desperation sat side by side, and altogether his emotions were unenviable. He had two hours and a half in which to find the sum required. Not to find it meant open shame, and nobody knew what of evil consequences beside. His employer was a man of notorious strictness, and his father was the last man in the world either to condone or remove the ground of offence.

When the Rightful Heir to old Joe Bushell's fortune reached the house of the Wrongful Heir who held the fortune, he found that his employer had been called away to London on urgent business, and had gone up by the night train, leaving behind him a letter of instructions. He would either be down again that night, or would forward fresh orders. George sat down before the fire to think, holding the letter in his hand. The kind of grief which had fallen upon him is noticeable for always occurring at the wrong time. There was a perfectly dark horse he knew of, which would infallibly have pulled him through this had it happened two months later. The dark horse was the deadest of all dead certainties, and was really to be relied upon. He stood already to win three hundred pounds upon this animal's achievements; and if by any means it were possible to keep Curtice off until the race was won, George was safe. But Curtice would only be held off by being paid an impossible condition.

The sight of means to do prompts to the deed. Young gentlemen, holding situations of trust, and finding themselves in unpleasant corners, have sometimes made a way of escape by the betrayal of their trust. 'George Bushell,' written in a laboured heavy hand, stared at George Banks (who was George Bushell without knowing it) from the paper he held in his hand. It was not a difficult signature to imitate. When George took up a sheet of note−paper and, laying it over the letter, set the two against a window−pane and traced the signature with a lead pencil, he did nobody any wrong. When, seating himself at the table, he elaborately painted in the clumsy up and down strokes in ink, he was still quite within the pale of the law. Despair made experiments, that was all. Forgery is a dangerous game to play, as any young gentleman of business cultivation knows. And yet George Bushell's business had drifted, bit by bit, so completely into the hands of George Banks, and the young fellow had so exclusive a control of things, that it might be easy to conceal it until the dark horse should have time to extricate him from his difficulties. And there was no denying that the imitation before him was complete enough to deceive a casual observer. Curtice could not be put off any longer. If Ethel were pressed, there was no reason why she should not marry him a month or two sooner than the date she was already willing to fix, and in that case old Daniel would come down pretty handsomely for house and furniture. Then, having ready money for house and furniture, it was possible to go in debt for them even if the dark horse failed, though that of course was nonsense.

The imitation of the signature was admirable. They were written with the same pen and the same ink and on the same sort of paper. George cut the two out and shook them in his hat, and found it a difficult thing to say which was his own and which his employer's, until he detected on the back of the imitation the trace the pencil had left in pressing upon the paper.

At twelve o'clock that day Mr. Curtice was paid. George had unwittingly signed his own name, and had illegally secured a little portion of the property to which he was legally entitled.

'In for a penny, in for a pound,' is a very good maxim in its way. Since the dark horse whose name by the way, was Erebus was good for three hundred pounds in the fulness of time, it was scarcely worth George's while to forge a cheque which was merely large enough to cover Curtice's claims. He impawned the whole of the dark horse's future earnings, and had something over a hundred pounds in hand. Curtice was discreet, and nobody except the people concerned had any knowledge of George's late indebtedness. At the Dudley Arms that evening the young man shone resplendent, and his luck took a turn which was nothing short of wonderful. There might be a way to wealth even in shilling pool, if a man could always win at it. George took his success as an omen of good fortune. His luck had turned. He needed some sort of consolation for the miseries which hung over him, though they only occasionally touched him. Dinah's secrecy never seemed certain for a moment, and for a dashing young man, whose social qualities and personal appearance were so widely admired, it was unpleasant to have to be

carefully civil to a sister who might in any moment of pique draw down ruin. It was not in him to understand how impossible such a betrayal would have looked to Dinah's eyes. The woman whose heart through all these dreary years had been faithful to the lover of her girlhood was in one hemisphere and he in another, mother and son though they were. If you ask me from whom George inherited his nature, I own that I cannot tell. For the lost Joe, though invertebrate, was a lad of good impulses and an honest and gentle nature, and George's mother was as loyal and true a creature as ever wore woman's shape. That says much, and is intended to say much. But every beast, as young Joe had years since told the Reverend Paul, acts after its own instinct and judges after its own nature, and George judged his mother by the only standard he had; and the result of his judgment made him tremble for his own safety.

It may have been some grace in him, it may have been the weather, it may have been the seductive force of shilling pool which held him from Ethel's presence for three or four days after the settlement of Curtice's account. But the Sunday afternoon being fine, he walked over to Quarrymoor, not unassailed by qualms of conscience. For there is something in the presence of a good woman with whom a man is in love, which seems almost to detect the past committal of any wrong by her lover. Even a little thing reproaches under such circumstances. I remember how guilty last night's game at loo used to look when I was first in love and met Beauty and Grace and Goodness in the chapel porch on a Sunday morning. To be in love makes the conscience tender, and love's pure eyes seem so to look through a man that he can scarcely think of hiding anything from them.

By this time Ethel was far enough advanced in love to run eagerly forward at the sight of George's broad−shouldered and well−knit figure, and met him at the gate. She was no more a mere receiver of caresses, but had learned quite easily to caress. And in her inmost heart she thought George the handsomest, the cleverest, the most modest, the most honourable of men. Oh, the pity of it, Iago! the pity of it!

On this particular Sunday she ran out to meet him at the gate, and they walked indoors together demurely enough. But once inside the dimly−lighted hall, George stooped down to kiss her, and she put both her arms about his neck and kissed him back again, with no pretence of coyness. Pretences of any sort were rather out of this young lady's way, and for some reason or no reason she was full that day of an unusual tenderness and gentle gaiety which made her face at once soft and arch, so that her lips moved gently with deep feeling and her eyes laughed at the same moment for innocent gladness of heart. A compound mood, which I am pleased to believe is not uncommon to good girls who are in love; and a mood in which even a plain woman would be downright delightful even to a dull lover.

There is no finer armour than egotism, but even egotism has crevices that a needle can be got through by chance or skill. George was well−protected, but for once he was wounded, and the needle pricked so deep and keen that the tears sprang into his eyes.

'I'm not worthy of you, my darling,' he whispered. 'I'm not worthy of the love you give me.'

He really meant it, and saw for a second or two how true it was. Love is a continual worker of miracles.

'George!' cried Ethel in a wounded voice. Who has the right to depreciate a woman's idol? Even the oracle himself is no oracle if he dare to tell her the truth about his own right to her worship. But of course his humility was beautiful, and of course she loved him the more for it, if that were possible.

'I don't believe,' said George, 'that any man would be worthy of your love.' The proposition set forth in this general manner became a compliment, fitly to be answered by a kiss, which meant amongst other things

'*I* am not worthy of *you*. You are worthy of a queen. And as for men in general, I believe you.'

In her mixed mood of gaiety and tenderness she charmed the young man from his self−accusing thoughts. They were never likely to abide long with him, and by−and−by, seeing how favourable the time was, he began to urge her about the hastening of the wedding−day. She resisted him he asked for reasons she had none to give and, in short, he won in a canter. They settled it between themselves with her mother's consent, they would be married in two months' time. At the tea−table George laid the new scheme before Mrs. Donne, who, apart from a vague opposition on the score of dresses to be made, had no objection to offer. She liked the young fellow, and thought that he and her daughter made a pretty pair. She had, besides, a strong dislike to lengthy waiting in a case like this where two young people who were old enough to do it had thoroughly made up their minds.

That night in church George turned things over in his mind. His employer was back again, and had displayed no more curiosity than common about the conduct of recent business. There would come an overhauling of the pass−book and so forth by−and−by, and George would have that in his own hands and would make his return for his employer's inspection. Nothing seemed less likely than discovery, if only the hole he had made could be filled up in the space of a month or so. To leave it open would be inevitably to tumble into it. But now, with the marriage definitely arranged, everything would go well, and he would never be fool enough to peril his safety again. Ethel on her marriage would surely come into possession of some little ready money, and old Daniel was certain to behave pretty handsomely. George had in his breast−pocket at that moment something over a hundred pounds in notes, and as be thought things over, staring at the Vicar in rapt attention to his own affairs, he decided that it would be well to put the money into safe keeping.

'Ethel,' he said, when, in the interval between church and supper, they sat alone in the parlour, 'I want you to do me a favour.'

'Yes?' said Ethel, smiling in anticipation.

'Put your hand into this pocket,' said George, holding his coat open, 'and see what you'll find there.'

Ethel did as she was told, and brought out a bundle of five−pound notes. Holding the bundle in her hand, she looked inquiry at her sweetheart.

I'm not an economical man by nature,' said the young man, 'but I've begun to save a little for an event you know of, and that's my first achievement.'

'What a sum of money!' said Ethel.

'Yes,' replied George, 'more than a hundred pounds. Now, that goes towards housekeeping.'

'Yes!' said Ethel, quite delightedly.

'At least,' explained the young man, with greater caution, 'that is what it's intended for at present. But I have embarked in a business transaction which may call for capital at any moment. Except for that, I am resolved not to touch it. Now, if I keep it myself I shan't keep it long, I know, for I am a dreadfully extravagant fellow.'

'You are too generous,' said Ethel.

'Well I am,' responded George, with the air a man generally puts on when admitting that sort of failing. 'But I want you to keep the money for me, so that it can only be used for one of two specific objects.'

'You want me to keep it for you?'

'Yes. If I bank it, I can go and draw it out when I like, and I don't want to be tempted. But if it's once in your hands, I can only draw it at actual need. You'll be my banker, won't you?'

'Suppose,' said Ethel, 'that it should be stolen?'

'Nonsense, my darling,' said George. 'Lock it in a drawer upstairs.'

'Oh,' said Ethel merrily, 'it would be easy for a burglar to put a ladder against the window and get into the room that way in the dark.' George said nothing. 'And suppose,' said Ethel, 'that I should just be running into the room at the time, and should be frightened out of my wits for ever. Wouldn't that be dreadful! Why, George, what's the matter? You are ill!'

'No,' said George. 'A little twinge. Nothing to speak of. There! I'm all right again.' But his cheeks, which commonly kept a remarkable bloom, all things considered, were chalky in their hue, and his stare was a little ghastly. Ethel's imagination could scarcely have led her to a theme less pleasant for her lover's ears. Yet, how was she to know that? Even George saw clearly that he had started at a shadow which he himself had thrown. 'Don't let anybody know about the money, Ethel,' he said, a second or two later. Her chance speech had made him timorous, and he began to fear lest a word about the trust he had reposed in her should lead to suspicion and detection. 'Let nobody know;' he urged; 'keep it a secret. Will you promise?'

'Yes,' she answered, somewhat surprised by his vehemence; 'I promise.'

'Run away upstairs with it,' said George, with an unsuccessful smile. 'Don't let it be seen.'

'He is nervous about me,' thought Ethel. She was sure that in his own behalf he was as bold as a lion; but it was evident that he could not even bear to think of danger approaching her. If that reflection should seem a little self−conscious on the girl's part, remember that she was in love. Of course it was sweet to think that even the thought of a possible danger for her could so move him. Love, as I have said already, is a rare epicure.

Ethel ran upstairs and locked the notes into an old−fashioned little cabinet which had a transparently undeceptive secret drawer. She kissed the bundle before she put it away not, you may be sure, because it was worth more than a hundred pounds. It was worth a great deal more than many hundred pounds to her, because she thought she saw in it the fruit of effort and glad self−denial for love's sake. Love had earned it, so she thought; love gave it; it was to help love to live gracefully. No miser ever hugged money so gladly, and no spendthrift ever thought less of its practical value. George was waiting below, and was feeling a good deal unhinged when she returned.

'My darling,' she said, 'you haven't been frightened by my silly speech about myself?'

'No, dear, no!' said he with an effort,

'It was very silly for me to hint at such a thing,' said Ethel. 'You won't like me to keep the money now.'

George with a coward's courage turned upon the situation, so to speak, and struck out at it.

'My dear, I confess that the suggestion alarmed me. Shall I tell you why? It's a very singular coincidence, but my sister was alarmed last week in the very way you indicated.' Ethel was astonished, and be related the incident with dramatic force. It was a good move, or so he told himself. Ethel and Dinah were growing companionable. His sweetheart would be sure to mention the story to Dinah, and she, learning that he had told it, would find her suspicions shaken by the very effrontery of the thing. And in any case Ethel would be still less inclined to believe any horrible future accusation against him, since he himself had voluntarily alluded to the tale.

Days went on, and Erebus came into the light and became a favourite. When George had backed the dark horse, he was going begging at thirty to one. Now it was a hard matter to get three to two against him. George felt that this turn of fortune was absolutely providential. But it happened one dull afternoon, when Mr. Bushell was prowling about amidst the fragments in the wastepaper basket, looking for a scrap small enough to light his pipe with, that he made a discovery. And here it may be noticed that people who commit offences against the law are constantly guilty of the most surprising stupidities. The least capable of the human race are forgers and murderers. They go about with an infantile simplicity to make avenues to detection. They leave trails behind them which even the police have not the ingenuity to miss. And Master George had positively left undestroyed the real signature from which he had made his first rough copy, and the copy itself. Slow George Bushell was about to burn his fingers by attempting to light one of these tiny scraps at the fire. The larger scraps were of no service or value, but it was part of his character to save useless things. As he was gingerly pushing the scrap of paper through the bars, he caught sight of the writing upon it, and, lifting it nearer to his eyes, read his own name. There was nothing very peculiar about it at first sight, but yet why should anybody have cut off his signature from the tail of a letter? And here was another bit of paper lying on the hearth−rug, which being picked up also proved to have his name written upon it, apparently by his own hand. Not quite suspicious yet, he turned them over, and after a minute's inspection he made the discovery George had made a little while before. One of the signatures had been traced with a pencil. The real signature, having been firmly pressed against the glass, bore no mark; but the other, lying on a softer surface, bore the impress clearly.

'Why,' said Mr. Bushel in his own wooden and deliberate manner, 'if somebody ain't been a'practisin' my autygraph!' His long clay pipe dropped from his fingers and broke in pieces on the fender, and at that moment, with premonitory tap at the door, his confidential secretary entered. The old man looked at him and arose slowly. His inexpressive countenance bore no greater mark of annoyance than almost any man might have shown at even so trifling an accident as the breaking of a pipe. 'I shall be out this afternoon, Mr. Banks,' he said, as he passed the unconscious George.

'Yes, sir,' said he in answer. 'About that thousand tons of Heathen? Can Dunn and Bollinger have it at the price?'

'Why, yes,' said Mr. Bushell, 'delivered at the wharf, mind you.'

'Very good, sir,' said George; and away went his employer to the bank, where he was closeted with the manager whilst the guilty youngster, not knowing what had befallen him, was leisurely apprising Messrs. Dunn and Bollinger of the fact that their price was accepted.

'You've kep' all my cheques, I suppose,' said Mr. Bushell; 'all as has been sent in this 'ear, anyhow?' The manager answered 'Yes,' and in a little while the cheques were produced.

'I never drawed this,' said Mr. Bushell, with unusual emphasis, laying a heavy hand flat on a draught in favour of 'Self' for three hundred pounds.

'It was presented in the ordinary course by Mr. Banks, sir,' said the manager.

'Was it?' asked the Wrongful Heir half jeeringly, half angrily. 'Look here!' And he unfolded the two crumpled bits of paper. The manager stared from him to them and from them to him. 'Here's somebody been a−practisin' my autygraph.'

'Dear me!' said the manager fatuously. He had, like other men, heard of forgeries, but they were outside the sphere of his experience until now.

'Ah!' said Mr. Bushell scoffingly, 'an' dear me, too. Three hundred pound! If it's young Banks, and it looks like it don't it? if it's him as I took such notice of an' took such a fancy to an' trusted . . . Why, damn it, it's beyond

believin' ain't it?'

'Very extraordinary indeed,' the manager responded. 'You can swear that you never signed this cheque, sir? The signature is remarkably well imitated.'

'Swear it!' said Mr. Bushell. 'I'd swear it on my dyin' bed.'

'We must proceed with caution, sir,' said the manager, beginning to relish this new mental flavour as he grew accustomed to it. No sport so enjoyable as man−hunting, when once you get your hand in. 'A false arrest would set the real criminal on his guard, and he might get clean off. We must be cautious, sir.'

'Cautious!' said the other, with a heavy jeer. 'Cautious, when I find these in young Banks's room, where nobody ever goes but him an' me!' He held the crumpled scraps in the manager's face. 'Cautious, when young Banks come to the bank himself an' drawed for it! He was cautious to some tune, he was. I'll caution him! You send for a policeman.'

One trifle and another had kept the guilty George from looking at the sporting news in that day's paper, but having finished his reply to Dunn and Bollinger, he sauntered out for the local journal, and returning leisurely, found on opening the sheet that Erebus was established as first favourite. In his rejoicing at this happy condition of affairs he arose and waltzed softly round the room, and snapped his fingers smiling. He had always felt so sure about Erebus that it was most flattering on the horse's part to come to the front in this way. He sat down beside the fire in the chair his employer was wont to use, and gave his mind to pleasant fancies. There was a sense of thanksgiving in his mind. And he was quite persuaded that he was never again to be such a fool as to run the risk of being mistaken for a criminal. For of course he had only been borrowing the money, and yet people are so stupid that discovery would have stamped him with indelible disgrace. As for the affair of the cash−box, that wore an altogether different complexion. Daniel did not want the money, and would not have really missed it even had the box been full; and after all, a son has some right to consideration at his father's hands, and if a father is miserly, a high−spirited young man has his remedy. But happily there would be no further need for transactions of either nature. People are opinionated and given to jumping at false conclusions. To have had the forgery detected would have been excessively unpleasant, and it was comforting to know that he could restore the money.

Rat−tat−tat−tat at the front door. Then the door was somewhat violently opened. It clung a little in moist weather, and opened with a shivering jar of bolts and chain. Nothing at all remarkable in it, but somehow George noticed it, and will remember it all his life. Mr. Bushell's voice, sounding bullying and angry, cried, 'Come this way.' George whipped out of his master's chair and into his own, and in one second was so deep sunk in business that he did not even look up at the Wrongful Heir's noisy entry.

'Officer!' said the Wrongful Heir, with something of an inclination towards melodrama 'Officer, do your duty.'

'I suppose you'll come quiet and take it easy? There won't be any need for these, eh?' A quiet, gentlemanly−looking man, the local inspector, was holding up a pair of brightly burnished handcuffs.

'Why,' said George with a sick frost inside him, 'what what do you mean?'

'Very sorry, Mr. Banks,' said the inspector, 'I wanted it done quietly out of consideration for you, and so I came myself. It's a charge of forgery. Three hundred pounds.' George lurched to his feet, and looked at the inspector in a ghastly agony and terror. 'Mr. Bushell brings the charge. I should advise you not to say anything. You can if you like, but it may be used against you on your trial.'

George said nothing, less because of the official advice than because he could not have spoken a word just then if one word could have proved it all a dream.

'That's right,' said the inspector genially. 'Nobody'll think anything of seeing you and me in the street together. This your hat? Come along.'

What a walk it was along the high street! What a nightmare the little formalities made in the room hung round with maps and cutlasses and handcuffs! What a sensation to remember when the official's gentle hand insinuated itself into George's pockets, and possessed itself of pen−knife and keys and purse and pocket−book! A corridor, a paved yard, a fustian−clad ruffian exercising there, who laughed and called him 'mate;' and then the cell. Lord Byron has told us that until the ear becomes more Irish and less nice, the sound of a pistol cocking at twelve paces is remarkable. The amazing old ladies who get into the papers on the strength of the fact that they have been two hundred times imprisoned for being drunk and disorderly may perhaps have grown used to another click which has a singular sound in the ear of a novice the click of a key in the lock of a police cell. But, nothing much less than their experience can take the sting out of it. The sound seemed to run a little icy needle of despair into the criminal's marrow.

And Erebus was first favourite, after all.

Chapter 11.

The English Law, being (at least in part) a civilised code, professes to deal with intentions as well as with actions. But before the law can deal with them, it is clear that the intentions must be pretty obvious. George had intended to pay back the money he had borrowed from his employer; but the intent was nowhere discoverable by the legal eye, and went for nothing. And yet Erebus was first favourite. Even a dull man may see how poignant an aggravation of the pain this was. If old Bushell had but kept quiet for a few more weeks, had been out of the way, had taken to his bed, had been blind anything the thing would have been over. For of course it was preposterous beyond the dreams of madness to suppose that a man in George's position intended to let a danger like this hang over him a minute longer than he could help it. It was more than incredible that any man should barter freedom, good name, love, the Saracen, and the acres of Quarrymoor for three hundred pounds. And it was wilder than ever to suppose it when the three hundred pounds were to be got so cheaply and so easily.

Even a worm will turn. If you hunt any creature too hard, it will do its strong or feeble best to rend you. It was surely too bad to brand a young man of George's prospects as a felon, simply because for a week or two he had borrowed from another man's abundance. George turned and stood at bay against the situation. He resolved that through thick and thin he would swear to the end that George Bushell had signed the cheque and sent him to the bank with it, and had trumped up this charge to ruin him. He would defy experts, ho would defy everybody. He swore to stand at bay, and if he fell, to fall with the look of a martyr. Perhaps perhaps his father or Ethel might believe him, and he need not lose everything.

I am afraid this young man will take a good deal of moulding before be becomes respectable.

The news of the arrest went through the town like wildfire; for George was a well−known figure, and his father one of the primeval citizens of the place, or so it seemed to modern fancies. Yet, far and wide as it travelled, the news halted at the door of the Saracen, and neither Daniel nor Dinah had yet heard it. That such a thing could be never entered the mind of Mr. William Bowker and his mates, the nightly frequenters of the Saracen's kitchen from time almost immemorial. Tummas Howl, very grey by this time, Aminadab, and Meshach, and Ebenezer, also grey, kept up the habits of middle age and youth, and (unless when engaged upon the 'night−shift') would have felt themselves homeless without the Saracen after working hours.

They had all heard the news, and met at the accustomed corner. For it is the habit in the Black Country to drop into a public−house though you have done it for a lifetime at the same hour every day as if you did it by accident, and William and his comrades were not superior to this transparent pretence.

'Well, chaps,' said one, 'this is a sad sort o' come−down for poor ode Dan'l, eeat it?'

'Ah,' said another, 'it's all that. It'll be the finishin' on him, I reckon.'

'It eeat to be took for settled,' said Mr. Bowker, 'as he's done it. Not till he's been afore the magistrate.'

'Course not,' they all assented.

'Gooin' to look in to−night?' asked Meshach.

'I think not,' Aminadab answered.

'Fellers! pleaded Mr. Bowker; 'be we gooin' to turn we backs on a friend cos he's i' trouble?'

'Teeat likely,' said Ebenezer, who commonly followed William's lead.

'For any part,' said Mr. Bowker, 'I'd sooner goo twice as often an' drink twice as much, to keep their sperits up a bit.'

'You'm i' the right, 'Willyum,' responded Ebenezer.

'Then come on, chaps,' said Friendship's champion. 'Tek no notice, and mek no differ. They'n like thee all the better for not seemin' to know as anythin's the matter.'

William's lieutenant followed his lead, and the rest followed the lieutenant.

Dinah met them in the passage as they entered, and had her word for each. 'Good night, William. Good night, Meshach,' and so forth. She had known them since she was a baby.

Since young Joe's departure, so many years ago, Dinah's manner had always been a little tinctured by sadness, but in such a way that people took it rather for gentleness and tenderness than for sorrow. But latterly, and with good reason, she had been plainly sorrowful and depressed, and to−night she was unusually mournful. George, her boy, the baby she bore, her consolation, her fear, and next her sorest trouble, had never dared to face her since the morning after her discovery of his theft. And now he was away from the house all day long, and kept away until it was closed at night. Only an hour ago Daniel had been storming about it, and vowing that he would get to the bottom of it, and the mother had broken into tears. The servant−girl who acted as kitchen waitress of an evening was engaged, and Dinah, who could scarce control her face from openly showing signs of heartbreak, served the men with her own hands.

'Eh, dear me,' said one when she had gone, leaving the ale upon the table, 'her takes it plucky, but it's bitter hard, poor creetur.'

'Yis,' said Mr. Bowker, with pretended cynicism 'trouble's bitter hard whenever it comes.'

'How's poor Dan'l takin' it, I wonder?' said Aminadab.

'Gorramity knows!' William answered, and rising left the room.

'He's a sharp−tongued un at times, Willyum is,' said Meshach, 'but he's a bit soft−hearted, too. I seed the tears in his eyes.'

'Well, thee know'st,' observed Tummas, who was the Nestor of the house, 'Dan'l was as good's a feyther to Willyum when he broke his arm a−tryin' to save young Tummas, my nevew.'

In point of fact, William felt the position so keenly that he could not bear to sit in the house. He walked into the sanded passage, and there stood Dinah. Everybody knows how foolish it seems in little things like this to he detected in the act of going about without a purpose, and Mr. Bowker, who had walked away for no other reason than to hide an emotion of which he was ashamed, at once feigned an object and walked briskly up the passage. As he passed Dinah, he cast a furtive swift glance at her, and saw that she was crying.

'Missis,' he said, pausing at once before her, and forgetting his own advice at the sight of her tears, 'perhaps yo'd just as soon as we shouldn't stop to−night. Say the word, an' I'll turn 'em out in a minute. Yo mote think as we bain't friendly becos we come tonight. We thought yo'd like it better to look as if nothin' had happened.'

'Happened!' cried Dinah. 'What has happened?'

The truth flashed upon the man in a second, and he stood speechless.

'What has happened?' Dinah again demanded.

'I niver thought,' said he, 'as it 'ud be my part to be the messenger o' shaäm an' sorrow i' *this* house. It's got to be known, however, soon or late.'

'What is it?' Dinah besought him with her hands upon her bosom. 'Tell me.'

'Your brother George is in prison,' he answered.

'No, no, no, William!' said poor Dinah, grasping him with feeble hands.

'God forgi' me,' said be, 'as I should be the one to tell you, but it's true. Bear it, missis, bear it, for the Lord's sake. It'll be the death o' Dan'l, I doubt.'

'Why? why?' cried Dinah, wringing her hands together, 'why is he put in prison?'

'He mightn't be guilty, mind you,' began William. But Dinah laid bands upon him and looked at him so that he had pity on her beseeching face and panting bosom, and struck the blow at once. 'He's charged with forgin' on his master for three hundred pound.'

How long does it take to grasp a state of things like this and to form a resolution? The streets were pitch−dark, except for a glimmering lamp or two, which indeed rather set the darkness off than relieved it, and it was raining drearily. Dinah dashed into the roadway so swiftly that William, who had looked away from her whilst he gave the evil tidings, saw nothing of her but a waving skirt as she went through the doorway. Fearing mischief, though of what sort he scarcely dared to guess, he ran out after her, and saw the waving skirt again as she ran round the corner. He remembered suddenly that the canal lay in that direction, and rushed after her at full speed. She was running like a mad creature when he came up with her and laid a restraining hand upon her shoulder.

'Don't stop me,' she panted. 'Let me go.'

'No missis, not there,' said William, pleading with her. 'Not there.'

'I must go,' she cried. 'It is the only chance to save him.'

She was going not only in the direction of the canal, but towards George Bushell's house, and he saw a part of her purpose at once.

'He's as hard,' said William, 'as the nether millstone.'

'I must go,' was all that Dinah answered, and he released her, but followed close at her elbow. They had scarcely gone twenty yards when he pulled his coat off and threw it over her shoulders, but she let it fall, and he ran on with her, disregarding it. Down the road she sped, going so swiftly that it put the man to his best pace to keep up with her, and crossing the canal bridge turned sharply to the right, and held on until she reached the gate of George Bushell's house. Whilst William rang the bell she pressed the palms of her hands against the gate twice or thrice, as if she made even to it the beginning of the appeal she had in her mind. A door was heard to open, and a step came crunching down the gravelled drive.

'Keep it in, missis,' said William, laying his hand again upon her shoulder. 'Go to him quiet like. It's the best way, I'm sure.'

'Yes, yes,' she answered, laying her hands again and again upon the gate, as if it were sensible to her prayer and could answer it.

Who's there?' asked a voice from within.

'I want to see Mr. Bushell,' said Dinah 'I must see him.' A sturdy woman opened the gate and answered,

'Is that you, Miss Banks? I'm afeerd it's no use your coming. He's as hard as hard. I niver seed him s'angry.'

'I must see him,' said Dinah. 'Let me in. Don't tell him I am here. I must see him.'

Her manner was still urgent, but bad on a sudden grown collected. Bootless as her errand might seem to others, she had a secret power in reserve, and began to feel its comfort. Perhaps the housekeeper felt something of the strange influence with which strong feeling in strong natures acts at times even upon the vulgarest hearts; or she may have been moved by some memory of Dinah's kindness in time of trouble. She risked something at least in granting Dinah's wish, hut she granted it.

'Come wi' me,' she said; and, leading the way swiftly into the hall, pointed to a door. 'In there,' she whispered, and whisked upstairs as a rabbit makes up−hill for his burrow.

Dinah turned the handle of the door and entered, leaving Mr. Bowker standing in his coaly shirt−sleeves in the hall. George Bushell was sitting by the fireside, pipe in mouth, looking woodenly respectable as of old. His face was flushed, but expressed the internal disturbance he felt in no other readable way. He was a temperate man as a rule, but on the strength of his secretary's unexpected defection from virtue he had been drinking. Whisky brings out a man's true nature, as for a minute or two you can see the real tones of an old picture by passing a sponge across it. He was naturally and bitterly indignant. He had helped to break four hearts to get his money, but he had never committed forgery, and of course he loathed the crime. He never knew how much until he found it practised on himself. And all this apart, he had liked George, and had done something to push him on in the world. He could never have been got to like anybody who was not of use to him, but George had been useful, and it had been pleasant to talk about his private secretary. The possession of a private secretary seemed to carry a sort of dignity with it, and a man naturally keeps his best regards for those people who are of advantage to him and reflect credit on him.

'Hillow!' he said, starting from his seat, and for the second time that day he dropped his long clay into the fender. 'What brings *you* here?'

Dinah's hair and face were wet with rain, and her dress was a little disordered. But she was something more than comely even under these conditions, and she had the great advantage of being a woman so that Mr. Bushell felt the brutality of this welcome as soon as he had uttered it.

'I have come,' said Dinah, 'to speak to you about George? She panted a little in her speech, but otherwise she seemed wonderfully collected. 'I have come to ask you not to appear against him.'

'I'm very *sorry* for you, Miss Banks,' said the Wrongful Heir, with natural and excusable surliness, 'but the law must tek it's course.'

'There is a reason for my asking it,' said Dinah. 'Believe me, there is a reason. You must not go against him.'

'The matter's out o' my hands,' returned Mr. Bushel, 'an' I've got no more to do with it. I'm sorry for the young man's relations, but he should ha' thought about them afore he did what he did. It's out of my power to move i' the matter, an' the law must tek its course.'

Saying this, he made a motion to leave the room, but Dinah set herself between him and the door.

'No,' she besought him. 'Let him go away and begin life again. If you knew what I could tell you, you would let him go.' Her hands, and her very body, besought him. 'Oh, let him go, Mr. Bushell. Let him go.'

Nobody's temper can last for ever, and it was hard to be pestered in this way after being robbed.

'I'll see him damn'd fust!' cried the Wrongful Heir, indignant at the monstrosity of the proposal. Dinah's life had been a sacrifice, and she could scarcely miss such a chance of self−torture for another's sake as the situation presented.

'Listen for a moment; she said, laying such a grip upon the lappel of his coat when he strove to pass her that he could not disengage himself without violence. 'You can't send your own flesh and blood to prison.'

'*My* flesh and blood!' said George Bushell 'Why, you're ravin'.'

'Listen to me,' said Dinah, clinging to him. 'He is your flesh and blood. He is your nephew Joseph's child.'

'What!' he said, falling back a step and drawing her with him.

'Before Joe went away,' she answered, speaking rapidly, 'him and me was married at Waston Church on a Whit−Sunday. George is our child, and if he had his rights he'd have more than half your money, Mr. Bushell. But when Joe went away I never spoke a word about it, and nobody but mother knew.'

'That's a poor sort of a lie, missis,' said the Wrongful Heir. But all the colour of his face had faded, and he trembled in Dinah's hands.

'It's as true as heaven!' she answered. 'I kept it secret up to now, an' robbed him of his money all the while, but I won't see him sent to prison. All his grandfather left is his by right, but he shall never know it, an' never ask you for a penny. Let him go!

Then she released him and fell upon her knees.

Young Joe's money had belonged to Uncle George so long that it had grown into him and become a part of him, no more to be taken away from him than heart or brains. And was it possible that now after a lapse of

four−and−twenty years his hold upon it could be threatened? Strange things happen sometimes; and it fell upon the dull conscience of the old schemer like a blow to remember that, after all, the wealth was wickedly gained, and might not prosper. For in his way he was orthodox, and like the devils, he believed, but he had never trembled until new. This might be God's vengeance on him. He was a respectable man, and he had believed in God, theoretically, all his life. Now, belief began to take a practical cast, and, as revolutions of opinion will, it shook him. But dull and slow as he was, and staggered as he was by this amazing story, he was not long in seeing the tremendous flaw in it.

'My brother Joseph,' he said slowly, with some tremor in his tones, 'was wu'th a quarter a million o' money when he died. Now, that's a deal o' money, an' my nevew Joseph was a rightful heir to it if he'd been alive. If you are his wife, how comes it you never said a word about it? Answer that.'

'He took the marriage lines away with him when he left home,' responded Dinah. 'I parted with him on a Sunday the day he hit Mr. Screed, and his mother ordered him out of house an' home and he promised me he'd send 'em, but I never heard a word of him again, and now beyond doubt he's been dead these years and years. But George is his child, Mr. Bushell, his lawful child. You've got all his money. Be content with that. Well never ask you for a penny, and his father'll pay you back the three hundred pounds. Let him go.'

He went untouched by her distress, for he had his own affairs to think of. He was never particularly accessible to other people's emotions, and now, if ever in his life, he was self−absorbed.

'You won't go against your own flesh and blood, Mr. Bushel!' said weeping Dinah, thinking that his silence gave a little hope.

He answered her out of his own nature.

'If you made a slip with my nevew Joseph, that's your lookout.' She was on her feet before him in a second. 'You hid your shame pretty cunning,' he went on, 'an' you'd best ha' kept it hid.' He was not a wise man, and he disbelieved the story simply because it sounded improbable. He was ready enough to believe that Dinah had tripped in her younger days, and that George Banks was his nephew's son, but he gave no credence to the story of the marriage and the lost 'lines.' At one moment he was on the edge of a question which might have wrecked his fortunes. The jeering query trembled on his tongue why not go to the church at which the marriage took place and get a copy of the entry there? But there was just a chance that the tale was true, and he held his tongue, asking himself if such simplicity was believable.

Dinah stood before him with eyes suddenly brightened, and a flush of colour on her cheek.

'I am your nevew Joseph's wedded wife,' she said. 'We was married at Waston Church last Whit−Sunday was five−and−twenty years. And George was our lawful−born child; and if everybody had their rights, he'd have his grandfather's money. I don't want that. I only ask you to let him go.'

'I don't believe a word o' your tale,' he said slowly. 'If you could ha' proved it, you'd ha' done that long an' long ago. Whoever he is, the law'll ha' to take it's course, an' if he was my own child, I'd do the same with him.'

'Will you take your three hundred pounds back again and let him go?' asked Dinah desperately.

It was a temptation to which his sense of public justice would have yielded before George was fairly in the hands of the police; but it was not to be thought of now. He knew nothing of the rules of criminal procedure, and believed himself already bound to carry on the prosecution.

'No,' he answered. 'He's committed a crime agen the law, an' he must suffer for it.'

'It shall be known,' said Dinah, growing more and more desperate as the failure of her mission became obvious. 'It shall be known as you know who he is. It shall be known far an' wide as you send your own flesh and blood to prison. I kept it hid all these years, but I don't care now, and I'll have my rights as Joseph Bushell's lawful wedded wife.' He turned a little pale, but said nothing. 'If I have to walk barefoot to the Queen herself,' said poor Dinah, weeping fast and speaking with a piteously broken voice, 'I'll do it. And if she makes a law o' purpose, she'll give me back my honest name and give my child his lawful rights.'

There might be something in it after all, he thought, she stuck so to her point. All the more reason then to fight the matter out, and clear the pretenders off the ground. Old Daniel would never face the shame of a trial for his son, real or reputed, and George himself would be in prison. A wooden man, as I have said of him already. A dull, slow, unperceptive, unimaginative man. And yet he saw as if in a drama acted before him Daniel's flight of shame, and George's committal, and the popular discredit of Dinah's story, and he answered her.

'You're a−threatenin', are you? Then leave my house. I know my dooty, an' I've done my dooty all my life, an' I shall do it now.' He flung the door wide open. 'Get out, you baggage! I' my young days you'd ha' had your legs i' the stocks for such a tale as you've brought to me.'

'Here, I say, Gaffer,' cried Mr. Bowker from the hall, 'draw it mild.'

'Hillo!' said the disciple of duty, peering at him savagely. 'Who's that? What do you do here?'

'I come along o' the lady,' answered William. 'That's what I do here. I tode her as yo' was a hard un, but I deea't expect to hear you go on i' that way.'

'Get out, the pair o' you!' shouted the old man wrathfully. 'I think you're i' my empl'y. Tek a minute's notice now an' leave it.'

'All right,' returned Mr. Bowker with sudden cheerfulness as of one who has received a gift, 'I've got the bag. Come along, missis,' he continued with a ludicrously sudden turn to notes of sympathy. 'I was afeard you'd mek nothin out o' him. He's known for what he is he is.'

His employer had the front door open.

'Get out!' he cried again. 'Bringin' a pack o' lies to me an' makin' yourself out no better than you should be! Get out!' He boiled by this time with virtuous indignation.

'Ah!' cried Dinah's ineffectual champion. 'Shut up! Be ashamed o' yourself. To talk to a woman i' trouble like that! Why, y'ode rip, wheer's your bowels?'

They were on the doorstep, and George Bushell slammed the door behind them fiercely.

'If I knowed, he growled, 'as it was true, I'd fight it every inch. It's all a pack o' lies, though a pack o' lies!'

'Oh, William.' cried Dinah, wringing her hands in the darkness and the rain, 'what *shall* I do?'

The tears were in the soft−hearted fellow's eyes again, but he could offer her no comfort.

Chapter 12.

George had not long to wait for an opportunity to vindicate himself. The petty sessions were held the morning after his arrest.

A prison couch is rarely luxurious, even though a man be blessed with that approving conscience which is popularly and mistakenly supposed to make him quite easy in his mind. It is easy to be virtuously indignant about a scoundrel and his doings, but harder, much harder, to understand him, to see things from his point of view, to comprehend his self−justifications, his excuses. To my mind, a scoundrel is much to be pitied for being a scoundrel. His detection and punishment are good things for him, and we who are virtuous may claim for his soul's good to see that the knots of the whip are drawn tight, and that a strong arm lays it on. But we are not without compassion as he writhes. It is hard measure. Could he have exercised an unbiassed judgment to begin with, he would probably have chosen another lot than this.

But our young criminal was not yet converted to the ways of wisdom. The rat who has made predatory excursions after your salad oil is not converted when the avenging terrier gets him into a corner. He squeals, and bites if he can, and dies with the rat pulses of him beating to the tune of despairing vengeance. George was very angry. He anathematised Bushel and Curtice and the spirit merchant whose half−chance call had so depleted the cash−box. Why did nobody come near him? Why was not his father here to offer bail until the morrow, and to show a little of that fatherly faith, which even if misplaced, was surely due to one whose guilt had not yet been proved? If they could not prove what he had done with the money, he tried to persuade himself that he might yet have a squeak for liberty. It was only Bushel's word against his, and he would face it out. In hours of extremity you see safety in any foolish trifle. There was no reason why Curtice should talk, and if he held his tongue it was a point in the prisoner's favour. Ethel's silence, of course, was certain. Not even feminine spite at being disgraced could make her false to him. The poor wretch did love her, after all, as well as he knew how to love, and he could not think as ill of her as he did of everybody else. If his best conceptions of her were shameful to her and they were he gave her his best, and it was love that created them. Ethel would be staunch to him, and would not betray him. If he were found guilty, she might send the money back secretly to George Bushell, but until then she would hold it for him, and keep a still tongue. He did not upbraid himself for being a villain and a fool, but he upbraided circumstance for the hard measure dealt out to him. Only to have quietly borrowed three hundred pounds, with the most upright of intentions, and to lose Ethel, the acres of Quarrymoor, home, good name, the Saracen, Daniel's quiet but substantial earnings, the punishment and the offence seemed unequal.

There was a wise man in the east whose constant prayer it was that he might see to−day with the eyes of to−morrow.

The inspector lent the prisoner brushes and other necessaries in the morning, and even gave him a clean shirt, taking George's in return. There was no news from the Saracen, and the prisoner dared not send there, believing his father's silence due to Dinah's betrayal of the truth in that unfortunate affair of the cash−box; or, at least having fear enough of the betrayal to keep him from making even the slightest appeal to home.

How long the night had seemed, and how slowly the shackled feet of the minutes crawled along in the morning! I have talked with an Englishman who was led out one frosty morning during the Carlist War to be shot, and who was standing at the head of the grave which had been dug for him, when he was released and set at liberty. Hs told me, I remember, that the only sensation he felt was one of absolute physical emptiness, as though the interior of his trunk were a scientific vacuum. He was a brave man too, and had distinguished himself under fire pretty often. There was something of that unpleasant sensation in the criminal's interior when at last a band was laid upon him and he was told to rise and mount a set of corkscrew steps which led from the waiting−chamber of justice into the hail itself. The hall of justice was small and shabby, and there were fifty or sixty people packed into it like herrings in a barrel. There were hundreds more outside eager for a look at *him*, doomed for the present to be disappointed. The prisoner was a good−looking young fellow, tall, straight, and broad−shouldered, scrupulously dressed and groomed. He smoothed his silky moustache nervously with his ringed hand, and stood squarely there at military ease. Nobody at first looking at him thought him likely to be guilty. The women who were squeezed in

with the other spectators were with him every one.

The proceedings were formal, and necessarily incomplete. George Bushell, sworn, made his statement denying the validity of the cheque and producing the crumpled scraps he had discovered. The bank manager, sworn, made his statement, and proved that the prisoner had himself cashed the cheque. He admitted that he had noticed nothing suspicious or peculiar in Mr. Banks's demeanour. Nothing.

Had the prisoner anything to say in answer to the charge? He need say nothing. Anything he did say would be taken down. The case could not be dealt with there, and would have to go for trial.

George answered in a voice which the local reporter called 'unmoved,' though to himself it sounded as if somebody else were speaking.

'I am perfectly innocent of the charge brought against me. I received the cheque from Mr. Bushell's own hands, and paid the money over to him on his return from London. I am at a loss to understand the accusation, unless it has bean brought forward with the diabolical intention of ruining an innocent man.

Suddenly a heart had found its way into the internal vacuum, and it beat madly at the prisoner's side. Could the people hear it? There was such a clamour of excited tongues when the prisoner had made this speech, that the officials ejected half a dozen of the spectators, and lodged them on the packed and crowded stairs before silence was restored.

'That is one of two things, Mr. Banks,' said the magistrate. 'It is either a very complete defence, or a very foolish one. If it is not true, nothing could tell more heavily against you than such a defence.'

'It is true,' said the prisoner, and nine out of ten believed him for the moment.

The case, said the magistrate, must be remanded until Wednesday. In the meantime the police would make all inquiry after the whereabouts of the notes in which the cheque had been paid. The bank manager had with him a memorandum of the notes, and, being again put into the box swore to its accuracy. The prisoner was removed, no bail being offered or demanded. The day's work was over, and the crowd dispersed. An hour later, the news flew through the town that more than half the notes were traced. Curtice the solicitor had paid them into the bank the day after that on which they had been drawn, and being interrogated, had declared that the prisoner had handed them to him in satisfaction of an account long overdue.

Even in the popular mind, impressed as it had been by the firmness of the prisoner's counter−accusation against his employer, George's position began to look fishy.

The Saracen stood all that day with bolted doors, shuttered windows, and down−drawn blinds. Dinah would have fain left the house on her own mission, but Daniel, who by this time knew the disgrace which had fallen upon him, had sternly forbidden her, and had indeed driven her to her room and locked her in there with unwonted imprecations.

I do not believe that there is any criminally−minded cur alive who would not deny himself his crime, if he could see the brood that it is sure to bear.

Even public gossip, which is irreverent enough, and even private spite, which is upon occasion cruel, spare something, and Ethel heard no word of the dreadful tidings of her lover's wicked.−ness. But the daily newspaper spares nobody, and in its columns she read the tale. And how, will you ask, did she accept the story? How should she accept it, but like the loyal and true−hearted maid she was, with passionate faith in her lover, and unmeasured defiance and scorn for his accuser! It never entered into her heart for a fraction of a second to believe him guilty.

Guilty? He her lover? The policeman who arrested him, the magistrate who committed him, the people who looked on and listened were sunk beneath the lowest reach of contemptuous indignation, not to know, not to see at a glance, that he was and must be innocent.

And so, not merely thinking him guiltless, but feeling as persuaded of his honour as if she herself had held it in her keeping, she turned about to see in what way she could be of service to him. She was quick to see and understand anything set before her, and though she was as ignorant of legal matters as most women are, it seemed strange to her that nobody should have spoken for him. Surely he should have had a lawyer to defend him, but the stupidities had only arrested him the day before, and were bent, apparently, on affording him as little chance as possible for the proof of his transparent innocence. The man of business who had made her father's will, and who still managed such small legal concerns as Mrs. Donne was afflicted with, lived thirty miles away, and she knew no other lawyer. Yes there was Mr. Keen, but she did not think well of Mr. Keen's spiritual prospects, and she had begged George to cease to associate with him. There were other lawyers to be had, and she could easily find them. But then came the question of money. She had heard it said emphatically that lawyers, above all men, demanded that their services should be paid for. That was Uncle Borge's verdict, and Uncle Borge was of a decidedly litigious character and had experience.

There was the money George had given her. For such a purpose as she had in mind it was surely righteous to use that. She took the bundle of notes from their hiding−place, slipped them into her bosom, dressed and set out upon her walk. The roads were miry, but the day was bright and clear, freshened with recent rains. Ethel was a good pedestrian, as a farmer's daughter should be, and the four miles were not much to her, animated by such a purpose as she bore.

At the edge of the town she encountered an undersized coaly man in very heavy and very dirty flannel. Any lady strange to the district might have been excused if the coaly man's exterior had deterred her from addressing him. But Ethel approached him without any thought of his appearance.

'Can you direct me to a lawyer's office?' she asked.

'Why, yis, miss,' said Mr. Bowker. 'There's Mr. Keen's office roun' the corner. It's nine or ten housen up, wi' a brass plaät o' the door.'

'Do you know another lawyer? 'she asked. She had an objection to consulting Mr. Keen.

Mr. Bowker did know of another lawyer, as it happened, and volunteered to show the way.

'I need not trouble you,' said the girl with a sort of sad graciousness.

'Trouble!' said Mr. Bowker, with great gallantry. 'It's no trouble to do a turn for a good−lookin' lady. This way, miss, if yo' please.'

Ethel followed perforce, and Mr. Bowker led her by intricate ways to the office of a Mr. Packmore, an elderly conveyancer, who had no more to do with criminal legalities than I have. But he was able to tell her that Mr. John Keen had undertaken the defence of the prisoner; and so fate seemed to push her towards Mr. John Keen in spite of herself. Mr. Bowker had waited outside, and now led her back again, declining her proffered gratuity.

'Pray take it,' said Ethel.

'No, miss, thank you,' answered William; 'you do't look the sort to want to mek a mon feel ashamed of himsen.'

Ethel withdrew the proffered form swiftly, with a little blush.

'I am very much obliged to you,' she said.

'Not a bit on it,' protested Mr. Bowker. 'I do't git the chance to tak a walk wi' a young lady every day. Let alone a nice−looking un,' he added, fearing lest the compliment might seem feebly expressed without that addendum.

Sad as she was, she could scarcely thank him with less than a smile. William grinned and ducked responsive.

Mr. Keen was at home and would receive Miss Donne. He rose when she entered, and pushed his long hair back with both hands, looking at her earnestly and with evident sadness.

'I think,' he began, 'that I can guess the object of your visit.'

'I am told,' she answered, 'that you are defending Mr. Banks.' John nodded miserably, and shifted his papers to and fro upon his desk. 'I did not know,' she went on, until this morning that any charge had been preferred against him. But I saw from the newspaper that he had no lawyer, and I came to engage one. Did he send for you?'

'No,' said John unwillingly, 'not exactly. We were old school−fellows, and his people seemed to desert him, and I thought '

His voice trailed of end he left the sentence unfinished.

'Thank you, Mr. Keen,' said Ethel, rising from her chair and impulsively holding out her hand. 'Any one who has known him can tell how ridiculous the accusation is.'

John took her hand in an embarrassed way, and with embarrassment released it.

'We must do our best,' he said, with a dismal attempt at cheerfulness.

'If I wanted an argument for his innocence of such a shameful crime,' said Ethel, reseating herself 'and I certainly don't want anything of the sort I have it with me now, Before a man commits a crime be must have a motive for it. George was saving money, and had a considerable sum in his possession at the very time when he is said to have forged this cheque.' She spoke with such an assured and quiet scorn that John Keen's heart ached for her. But he had his wits about him, too.

'Come,' he said, brightening a little, 'that is something in his favour, if we can prove it.' He knew his client pretty thoroughly, and thought him guilty, but there was a chance that his story of a conspiracy was true, after all, though the chance was certainly cue of the slenderest.

'I can prove it,' said Ethel quietly. She disliked this young man again, because he was not as certain of her lover's innocence as she was. 'You know already,' she went on, 'that Mr. Banks and I were engaged to be married.' That was a theme about which on common occasions Ethel would not have spoken to anybody except her mother and her lover, but she spoke of it now as a matter of course, aid with no confusion. John nodded again. Her pride in George and her certainty of him were troublesome to his spirit, for he himself was in love with her with all his heart, and it was bitter, to be sure, that she had so much to suffer. 'Looking forward to that,' she said, 'he gave me this money a hundred and ten pounds to keep for him.' She laid the bundle of notes upon the table, and John reached out for it. This cast a curious light upon the case, he thought; but when once he had unfolded the notes, he fell back in his official arm−chair and looked at her with so amazed and stricken a countenance that she arose to her feet and looked back at him as if his sorrow and surprise had been an epidemic, and she in a flash of time had caught it.

'Great heaven!' he gasped, and, rising, held out the notes at arm's length, 'Do you tell me, Miss Donne, that George Banks gave *you* these?'

'Yes,' she answered boldly, though amazed. He let them fall to the table, his arm dropped heavily to his side, and he fell back into his seat again limply; then rising on a sudden, he paced the room, and pulled at his long hair with both hands. At this she regarded Mm with increased wonder, following him with her eyes until, with a final wrench at his hair, he threw himself bodily into the seat he had just quitted, and glared at her like one distraught. 'What is it, Mr. Keen?' she asked, not without a tone of contempt in her voice.

'Miss Donne,' protested the young lawyer earnestly, 'my heart bleeds for you!' She faced him bravely, without a word, waiting for him. 'I must tell you what it will pain you terribly to know.'

'Tell me,' she said steadfastly, seeing that he faltered.

'This,' he said, taking up the bundle of notes from the table and dropping it again, 'was all that was wanted finally to prove his guilt. The villain!' he muttered, grinding his teeth and starting to his feet again.

'Explain yourself,' she answered, steadfast still. All colour had flown from her face except for one spot on either cheek, and her fine nostrils were a little dinted, but her eyes glittered with a light which under some circumstances would have looked dangerous.

'I would as soon be shot as do it,' said the miserable John; 'but it has to be done. These are the circumstances: Mr. Bushell charges the prisoner with forgery. The prisoner answers that he received the cheque from Mr. Bushell, cashed it for him at the bank, and paid the money into his hands. The people at the bank keep a register of the number of all notes paid out and received; they supply the police with a copy of that register in this particular case, and of course it becomes the duty of the police to trace the notes and see whose hands they pass through. Now, here' he handed her a slip of paper from a pigeon−hole in his desk 'here is a copy of the bank manager's memorandum. Look at the notes yourself, Miss Donne I hate myself for telling you! and you will see that you have had put into your innocent hands a portion of the forger's gains. And now the murder's out!'

The murder was out indeed. In the face of such evidence, faith was useless. There was no crevice, in the certainty which prisoned her, through which the loyalest doubt of love could struggle. Love's dream was over, and love's gilded idol lay shattered at her feet. The amazed contempt and scorn with which she had read the story of the accusation of her lover, the loyalty with which she would have clung to him against all the evidence the wide world could bring, lent a doubled and redoubled force to the blow which fell upon her. She would have taken him to her true breast, against the jeers of a universe, whilst she knew him to be true. For she had not merely thought him honest, believed him honest she *knew* him to be honest, as only love knows love; and after all, his truth was a lie, and the gift of his love a shame from which no years or tears could cleanse her.

I will not try beyond this to tell you how she suffered.

It was decided, before that terrible interview closed, that there was but one thing to be done with the knowledge John Keen had acquired to submit it to the authorities. And so on Wednesday the sight−seers at the police−court beheld the outside of as great a tragedy as ever a woman's heart played a part in. Curtice got up and told his tale, and the prisoner, pallid and desperate, gave him the lie.

Then Ethel Donne appeared in the witness−box, and the coward's heart stood still.

Dinah was in the court, resolved to tell her story to the magistrate. For Daniel, after his first rage, had fallen into lethargy, and had let her have her way, not even understanding the tale she told him with so many fawning, piteous caresses and such tears of heartbreak. John Keen, to the general surprise, had thrown up the case for the

defence, but sat there in court with a grey, hard face, and never once looked from the prisoner's eyes. This persistent regard drew a shifty glance now and again from George, but

John's aspect never changed. The angry loathing in it might have disconcerted even an honourable man.

Ethel, gently handled by the magistrate, told her story. What it cost to tell it can never be known. Dinah heard it, and began to hate her child.

'Have you any question to ask *this* witness, prisoner?' Thus Sir Sydney Cheston, magistrate.

The human rat in a corner shrieked.

'It's false! It's a vile conspiracy!'

There rose a cry of indignation from the little crowd in the packed court.

'The child I bore!' groaned Dinah. None heard the words but Ethel; for Dinah, as she spoke them, rose beside the witness−box and stretched out her arms as if to save the girl from this last and cruellest blow. Ethel turned to her embrace and fainted on that sheltering bosom.

Chapter 13.

Doubt is not incompatible with belief, after all. A man may believe a thing pretty firmly and yet have his misgivings about it. Old George believed that Dinah had lied to him, and having an interest in that belief, he gave it all the nourishment he had to give. But he felt like one who walks on unsafe ground, who cannot leave the place, and has no clue to the divination of the moment when the mine may burst. A sensation not wholly comfortable, as any successful schemer may believe.

The Rightful Heir was committed to take his trial, and the Wrongful Heir was bound over to appear against him. Ethel also was bound over to appear, and waited for the day with every hour a dull agony. It came at last, and Master George, following his own wise maxim of in for a penny in for a pound, stuck to his tale of a conspiracy. He was without defence, cross−examined no witnesses, but made his simple and despairing plaint to a jury convinced of his guilt and a judge whom his base protestations made angry. When Ethel had recovered from her swoon in the police court, her deposition was brought to her to be signed, and the intelligent and active officer whose duty it was to see that she signed it, guided her weak and shaking fingers with such result that her signature looked like that of Guy Fawkes after the rack. The judge had read the depositions and had seen the signature, and it had got somehow into the judicial mind that the prisoner was going to marry socially beneath him. When, therefore, the name of Ethel Donne was called aloud, and the girl stepped into the witness−box, his lordship was very strongly surprised and favourably impressed by her appearance. When she told anew the story of the false trust her lover had invested in her hands, the hardened official heart began to discern a tragedy unusually terrible even for his experience. George stuck to his colours, and proclaimed himself once more a maligned and persecuted character, the victim of an unheard−of conspiracy. The jury, without leaving the box, found him guilty, and his lordship (frostily remarking that if the prisoner had set up another sort of defence he might have been let off more lightly, in consideration of his youth, his social condition, and the good prospects he had ruined) sentenced him to two years' imprisonment. There was scarcely a lighter heart that day in Stafford town than old George's. The burden of fear which had lain upon him for weeks past fell away and left him free free at least for two years, and two years give time enough even for the slowest man to turn about in. And apart from that, Dinah's silence argued the whole thing a lie, so far as her story of the marriage was concerned. Beyond the marriage he had no need to trouble himself, and he began to dismiss even the remotest fear of that from his mind.

He dined at the Swan, took his way home by train, and for a day or two he lived on in the usual way, until a little incident led to a big one, and he began again to be terribly afraid much more afraid, indeed, than before.

It happened in this wise. His housekeeper brought him every week a list of the house expenses, and he had been in the habit of checking this to the last farthing with his own hand, even whilst he had resigned the almost entire care of his vast business concerns to the scoundrel who had at last forged his name. She brought in the list now a day or two after the trial, and George, sitting down to consider it, arrived at the conclusion that cheese, candles, tea, coffee, butter, and other articles of household use were going faster than they should do. He was in a more than commonly grudging humour, and there was a sum of two hundred pounds to be made up somehow by squeezing something or somebody. He rang for his housekeeper.

'Look here!' he said, when she reappeared in answer to his summons; 'I'm a−being robbed right an' left, I am. I shan't stand it, Mrs. Bullus, an' you'd better mek your mind up to that at once. Here's two pound of butter gone since last Saturday, an' a pound an' a half o' candles. An' as for tea an' coffee, why, you might swim in 'em, to look at these here accounts. Now, I've been done pretty smart a'ready, an' it's the fust time, an' it'll be the last mind what I'm a−tellin' you.'

'I'm sure, sir,' said Mrs. Bullus, in some wrath, 'as nobody's got cause to say a word again' me on that count. I've been a honest woman all my days, an' if you're sayin' anythin' again' me, you'll have to prove your words. For what though I'm poor, I ain't that speritless to endure it.'

George was getting to be querulous as he grew old, and that matter of the forgery had set his temper's teeth on edge sc thoroughly that small things jarred him.

'Dye call this here item right?' be asked, almost fiercely. 'Eight an' sixpence for tea an' coffee in a week for three people, an' one on 'em just fetched new out of the workus!'

Mr. Bushell's maid−of−all−work was but newly emancipated from the discipline of the Bastille, as they call the workhouse in those parts, and was therefore naturally supposed to be able to content herself on a moderate diet.

'Well, it does seem a large sum, sir,' the housekeeper admitted.

'Why, it couldn't ha' come about at all,' cried the old man, 'onless I was a−hem' robbed again. Where's that little hussey of a Jane? Fetch her here. I'll get at the bottom o' this one way or another.'

'Jane's gone up to Mrs. Bunch's to borrer a strainer. There ain't a si' fit to use in the wull house, an' that's as true as I'm a standin' here if I should never speak another word, and the Lord A'mighty knows it.'

It was Mrs. Bullus's favourite method of warfare to carry the fighting into the enemy's country in this wise whenever she and her master held a dispute together.

'Hold your tongue, woman,' said George savagely. 'An' when that little trollop comes in again Here, nivir mind waitin' for that. You come wi' me, and I'll have a look at her box now this minute, an' if I find anything theer as don't belong to her, I'll send her to Stafford Jail as sure as I'm alive. Come along.'

'Fie for shame, master,' said Mrs. Bullus. 'I wouldn't be that suspectious−like, not to have ivery hair o' my head hung wi' gold. That I wouldn't.'

'Come wi' me!' said her master, so angrily that, privileged as long service had seemed to make her, she dare answer him no further. George Bushell led the way, and the woman, with an expression of countenance which appeared to presage a jest of some sort, followed. The old man walked to the top of the house and entered a little

bare room in the attic. He glared round him in rage and amazement, seeing nothing but the bare walls and the floor, on which there was a great patch of wet corresponding to another patch in the plastered ceiling.

'Why, what's this?' he called to the housekeeper.

'This is the room Jane slep' in up till last We'nsday was a week,' the woman answered with much seriousness. 'But it's been a−rainin' so, an' the roof's that bad, her had to move her bed into the lumber room.'

'Why couldn't you ha' tode me that afore,' asked George, 'i'stead o' bringin' me a−trapesin' all the way up here?'

'You said, Come along of me, ' the housekeeper answered, and grinned broadly all over her Black Country countenance as her master, growling, led the way downstairs again. The room he next entered was half filled with odds and ends of furniture, broken chairs, crippled tables, and the like, and in one corner stood a high−shouldered wardrobe, which had once made part of the furniture of his brother Joseph's bedroom. When old Joe died, brother George had laid hands upon everything, even upon those things which were of no use to him. 'Keep a thing long enough, an' you'll find a use for it,' was one of George's constantly quoted aphorisms. But be had never dreamed of keeping this old wardrobe for such a use as at length he found in it.

It may go without saying that the dull schemer had long ceased to have any remorses about young Joe, or the method by which he himself had acquired young Joe's fortune. At a very little distance of time the cheque he had given to his nephew had begun in memory to communicate a sense of warmth to his heart, and he thought the gift an almost unexampled stroke of generosity. Lifeless things which had once belonged to the brother and sister whose hearts he helped to break were not likely to touch him very keenly at any time, and after these years were scarcely likely to remind him at all of their first owners. He was absolutely unaffected by them, and had no present memory of Joseph and Rebecca nor any thought about them.

'Turn the things out o' that theer box,' said George. 'I'll see who's a−thievin' i' my house.'

There was not much in the box, and if anything in it had been stolen, it had certainly not been from old George.

'This is a nice sort o' place to hide things in,' said he, whilst the housekeeper loosely tumbled the things back into the meagre box. He went, stepping gingerly between broken chairs and the other lumber with which the corner was filled, towards the wardrobe. The door had long since lost its handle, but he clawed it open, and rapped out a good round oath, for there at the bottom of the wardrobe lay a score or two of little packages, mere newspaper screws, and on these fell the man who had inherited a quarter of a million of money and had doubled it. Unfolding them one by one, he displayed their contents to the housekeeper with a suppressed severity of passion worthy of a loftier cause. In one was an ounce of cheese, in another a little bit of butter, in the third a table−spoonful of coffee, in a fourth a pinch or two of moist sugar. And as the owner of half a million sterling opened up to the housekeeper's vision this hidden stolen treasure, the peccant Jane, who had come into the house by the back way, bounced into the room and stood guiltily transfixed before the accusing eyes of her master.

'Mrs. Bullus,' said old George, regarding the criminal with Rhadamanthine severity, 'fetch a policeman.'

The wretched detected one fell upon her knees before him with a countenance of imploring agony.

'It was my mother as axed me to do it,' she declared.

'Fetch a policeman,' said George again, and Mrs. Bullus, with no intention of obeying, left the room. The master of the house went on opening the little packages, and spread them all out before the miserable Jane. 'This is wheer my household provisions has been a−going to, is it! Eh?' said he with withering sarcasm. 'How many shillin'−worths of my property have you stole? Answer me that this minute. Wheer's that policeman, Mrs. Bullus?'

'D'ye mind comin' here a minute, master?' asked the housekeeper, reappearing. George picked his way through the debris of the corner and joined the woman outside.

'You don't r'aly want me to fetch a pleeceman, do you?' she asked.

'Yis, I do,' said George; but no man is insensible to the feelings of other people, and be hastened to add: 'I want to gi'e the young madam a good fright.'

'Yes, sir,' said the housekeeper in a louder tone; 'the pleece−man'll be here in a minute.'

Old George went heavily back into the lumber−room. The criminal was in a condition of abject terror, boo−hooing on the floor. Her employer, disregarding her, passed once more to the wardrobe.

'Is there anythin' else you've hid here, you wicked gell?' be demanded, poking about in the darker corners. 'Why, what's this? Have you been a−tryin' to steal a coat o' mine?' The garment he had in his hand was none of his, as the glance of a moment told him. It was old and mildewed, and almost rotten in places, and it felt moist in his hand. A certain musty smell with which his nostrils had been acquainted ever since his entry to the room, seemed now to be chiefly traceable to this shabby and decayed old coat.

The blubbering little culprit was forgotten. George had heard the manner of his sister−in−law's death, and had been told of her last words.

It was Joseph's Coat.

He held the coat in his hand, and knew it almost at a glance. He walked into his own room with it, threw it into a chair, and stood staring at it for a full minute. There were few men less likely to be affected by the sight of any worthless relic such as this, but possibly it hit him as it did because it *was* such a trifle, and because he had found it after such a lapse of years. A greater thing arising sooner might have passed him by.

'It's made me feel moist all o'er,' said be, rubbing the palm of the hand in which he bad carried it against his own coat, to get rid of the feel of the discovered garment. 'Eh dear!' And he stared at the coat, and went off into reverie. 'I reckon,' he said after a time, 'as he's been dead these 'ears and 'ears. It feels as if he had been.'

He seemed reluctant to touch the coat again, for be put his hand out towards it once or twice, and drew it back. But laying bold of it at last, be took a step to the door, as if intending to return it to the place from which be bad taken it, but as be did so he stopped short, dropped the garment upon the table, and felt a part of it with his hand.

'Theer's somethin' i' the linin',' he said slowly. 'A bit o' paper o' some sort.' The lining was so old and rotten that he tore it open easily with his fingers, and there, sure enough, was a scrap of paper. George put on his glasses and looked at it. No change in face or attitude gave notice of the shock it brought him to read the little document he held. Yet it was nothing less than a copy of the certificate of marriage between Joseph Bushell, bachelor, and Dinah Banks, spinster.

Then, Dinah's story of the marriage had not been a lie, after all! Errant Joe had left a rightful heir behind him!

The first conscious and distinct feeling he had was one of relief that this discovery had not been made before George had proved himself unworthy. It is always pleasanter to escape from being a scoundrel than to be one, and now old George was armed in honesty for two years at least. For two years he could be honest and yet hold the money. Any question of becoming *dis*honest, and still holding the money might reasonably be deferred until the time came.

For two years he could be honest and yet hold the money. And yet he began to doubt that postulate. The money had never belonged to young George as yet, but it undoubtedly did belong now, and had belonged, ever since old Joe's death, to Dinah, young Joe's wedded wife. Well, there was some comfort there. She had voluntarily resigned it all this time, and had, indeed, when she sued for mercy for her son, expressly disowned all desire to claim it.

'Her don't want it,' mused old George. 'Said so with her own lips. It don't belong to him not till her's dead, an' if it belonged to him now he's a felon.' He could argue well on the side of justice, for he went on 'An' if he signed his own name, he didn't know it, an' it was a felonious intention. I've heard that on the bench many a time. What's to be looked at is the intention, it never was i' my mind for a minute to swindle anybody. I gave a hundred pound to my young nevew Joseph as I've never seen again from that day to this. If he'd ha' come again, an' ha' took every−thin', could I ha' said to him, Joseph, you owe me a hundred pound ? Now, could I? Could I ha' been that mean as to ha' said it?'

He felt magnanimously disdainful at the thought.

'Her must ha' been an uncommon foolish sort o' woman to ha' laid out of her money all these 'ears for want of a scrap like this,' said the considerate George with the certificate held between his plump thumb and finger. 'But sence her has laid out of it, an' why I'll '

He did not complete the sentence, but he took the poker in his disengaged hand, hollowed out the fire, put the certificate gently into the hollow, and beat down the glowing coals upon it. As he did so, his brother's latest action came into his mind. Not that the burning of the will had made any difference in his position, or could have done, any more than now the destruction of the marriage certificate made; but the two things somehow associated themselves together. The burning of the will had heralded in a tenancy of five−and−twenty years: the destruction of the certificate might, for anything he could tell, be as good an omen.

Whilst he still stood idly beating at the coals with the poker, a tap came to the door.

'Come in!' cried he, and the housekeeper entered.

'What am I to do along o' Jane, master?' she inquired.

Mr. Bushell had forgotten the peccant maid, but a flush of virtuous heat touched him at the mention of her.

'Mek the baggage pack her things up and be off at once,' he answered. 'I'll have no roguery i' *this* house, if I can help it.'

'Her's a−cryin' fit to split, master,' said the housekeeper. 'Her swears her mother set her on to it, and says her'll never do it again. I can allays keep a look on her.'

'Send her off',' said George.

'Her's afraid to go hum,' the housekeeper pleaded. 'Best let her stop, master. Her comes cheaper than a bigger gell would, an' I'll keep a look on her.

There was a consideration there which touched old George. Give him the benefit of the doubt, and say it was pity.

'I'll tek a day or two to think it over,' he responded, and the housekeeper was about to retire, when she saw the decayed and mildewed old coat lying on the table.

'Why, master,' she said, advancing towards it, 'whatever do you mean by keepin' a rag like that i' the parlour, a−makin' a litter?'

'Leave it alone,' cried George. 'I want it.' He was never unwilling to show a softer side to his nature, when he could do so inexpensively. 'That garmint,' he proceeded, 'is th' o'ny one thing as is left in the wull wide world of a poor nevew of mine. My eldest brother's o'ny son he was, an' that's his coat I just found. I'll keep it.'

'Why, that'd be young Mister Joseph as run away from hum when I was a gell,' said the housekeeper. 'More than twenty 'ear ago.'

'Five−an'−twenty,' said old George. 'Yes: I'll keep it. You go an' frighten that little trollop's life out. Tell her I'll ha' no mercy on her next time if ever her does such a thing again. I'll ha' nobody but upright folks i' my house, Mrs. Bullus.'

The housekeeper retired, and having soothed Jane with promises of a public hanging in case of any renewal of her peccadilloes, she mused upon her master.

'He's hard to get on 'wi',' she concluded, 'but I think he's main true at bottom. An' anyhow he does abhor a thief, an' so do I.'

Chapter 14.

If Master George Banks had known everything, he might have held himself from that disgusted cry against the treason of his sweetheart. It was that cry which sealed his mother's lips and kept the simple case of forgery from becoming in its way a *cause celèbre*. It is somewhat curious to reflect on what would have happened had Dinah declared her secret in open court. For I have not the slightest doubt that if George had heard the story, he would have struck out for this new ark of refuge, and would have sworn through thick and thin that be had been aware of his own identity all along. I was telling George's story over a pipe to a distinguished novelist, a friend of mine, last Saturday at a little convivial gathering, and the distinguished novelist who is also a barrister was a little puzzled at first sight to say what might have become of the prisoner had this revelation been made. He seemed firmly of opinion, however, that the onus would have lain upon old George, and that he would have found it very difficult indeed to prove that his grand−nephew had not known the truth. In any case, it would have altered the face of things. If my opinion is of any value on a point which is not altogether technical, I venture to offer it. Young George would still have been committed to take his trial at the assizes. Old George would have been bound over to appear against him. Bail would have been found for the criminal, a compromise about the fortune would have been arrived at, the old man would have forfeited his recognisances, and the younger scoundrel would have been shipped abroad somewhere with at least an ample supply of money in his pouch.

And all this would have come to a man who had already consented to be a cur, if he had only refrained from going still lower in creation's scale, and growing downwards into the similitude of a snake.

But when he cried out that Ethel also was in the lie against him, even Ms mother who had loved him so wiped him clean out

of her heart, and left him to his fate. It was hard to do, but it was yet more hard to have to do it. For she loved him yet, her son scamp and hound as he had proved still, he was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, and he was Joe's son, and she had borne him and bad gone in travail for him. There is but one divine thing in the world, and it is motherhood and the motherly nature, for they are one.

So he went on his way, cur−like enough, and left hearts behind him to bleed and suffer after the manner of his tribe.

Ethel, you will remember, fell into Dinah's arms at that cruel charge her lover brought against her. But she heard the words, and they came to mind again afterwards. 'The child I bore!' groaned poor Dinah as she rose, and Ethel's mind, too staggered and stunned to heed them at the time, recalled them later on.

Dinah was middle−aged, and had suffered a great deal already. *She* did not faint, having still somebody left to endure for, but she put Ethel into a four−wheeled hackney coach and saw her home. For Mrs. Donne had been so enraged at the whole thing that she refused to accompany her daughter on that terrible journey, or to have any part or lot in the matter. It is the way of women to show this curious injustice sometimes, by way of set−off to the amazing injustice which they often do themselves. The mother did not, as you may fancy, offer any very friendly welcome to the sister of the man who had so shamefully wrecked her household peace, and had left the first blot upon the house she had ever heard of amongst all its homely legends. To have had stolen money in the house and in her daughter's hands! You may easily believe it to have been very bitter to the yeoman's widow, who was honest, as all her forbears had been, to the backbone.

'We brought shame an' sorrow to this house; said Dinah sadly, when Ethel was put to bed and she was ready to go away again. 'But you won't forbid me to come and see her to−morrow, will you?'

There was something in Dinah's face which repressed the tart answer on Mrs. Donne's tongue.

'You're i' trouble as much as we be, my dear,' she answered 'worse trouble than we be an' I'm sorry for you i' my heart. Come, an' welcome.'

At this Dinah broke into tears, the first she had shed that heavy day.

'The shame ain't yourn, my poor dear creetur,' said the yeoman's widow, not more than its ourn. But I doubt me an' my poor gell'll be able to live here longer. An' I *did* hope to lay *my* bones i' Quarrymoor churchyard along of ourn's.'

'Ourn' 'ours' hers was the last John Audley Donne, the latest of a long and honourable race: and she also must needs weep a little to think that she and he might lie wide apart.

'Oh,' said Dinah, 'if you go away, let me come wi' you! No,' she said a second later, through her tears, 'I should keep your trouble an' your shame i' your minds, an' I'm best away. But if you'll let me, I'll look in to−morrow, an' see how she is, poor thing.'

'It's a sad house to ask anybody to come to, said Ethel's mother. 'But come if you will, an' welcome. How does your father bear it?

'It's broke his heart,' answered Dinah. 'He'll never hold his head up any more.'

If it seem strange that Mrs. Donne took George's guilt for granted so early, you may remember that she took her cue from his sister, as she and the rest of the world supposed Dinah to he. And Dinah had always the affair of the cash−box in her mind, and that left everything without need of proof.

The two women parted with a kiss.

'Yourn's a worse trouble than ourn,' said the yeoman's widow. 'God help you to bear it!'

'God bless you!' answered Dinah, and so went her way. The Saracen's doors were closed, the Saracen's affairs were wound up, within a week of the assize trial. Daniel held his head low for very shame, but on the aged a blow of this kind sometimes falls with comparative lightness. It is not experience alone which enables age to bear its troubles easily. The old beat has gone out of the pulse, the heart is dulled to pain. Daniel none the less would get away from the scene of this disgrace, and to him also it was a grief to lay his bones among strangers. But he could no longer endure to live where everybody had known him, and where an honest name had been his pride and boast so long.

Mrs. Donne's lawyer had news for her when she consulted him about the advisability of parting with the farm.

'I can find you a tenant in a week,' he answered her. 'But unless I'm mistaken, it won't be a farm much longer.'

'Not a farm!' cried Mrs. Donne. 'Why not? I couldn't abear to think of its bein' built over.'

'Well, you know, that's as you like, of course, but I dare say you have heard that coal has just been proved on the Hilly Piece, and that's as good as proving it at Quarrymoor, Mrs. Donne. And, in point of fact, the land'll be worth five or six times what it was directly the new pits gets well to work. Rent it out by all means, since you want to, but keep it in your own hands for a little time at least. If I'm not very much mistaken, there's a big fortune underneath, a bigger fortune than all the Donnes ever got out of the surface long as they farmed it!'

'Do you know of anybody as'll take it?' asked Mrs. Donne.

'Well, I'm not certain,' said the man of business, 'but Sir Sydney Cheston has got it into his head that he'd like to try his hand at farming, and he has commissioned me to look out for a farm for him. I shall make an offer of Quarrymoor, if you're agreeable.'

'Oh dear, yes,' said Mrs. Donne; 'I'm agreeable. And it'll be nicer to have a gentleman as won't mind laying a bit out on the land.'

'He'll be a good tenant,' said the lawyer. 'Old Sir Sydney left him wonderfully well−to−do, all things considered, and it's been a fortune to him to find coal on the Staffordshire property, of course. He can afford to spend a thousand or two on high farming if he wants to.'

'An' you think there's coal under Quarrymoor?' inquired Mrs. Donne.

'I know there is,' the lawyer answered; 'as well as if I had been there. Hold it for a year or two, Mrs. Donne, and there's a big fortune in it.'

This was news indeed, and now Ethel was really an heiress! It was surprising to see how poor young George was buffeted by the wings of the unattainable. He had this last blow yet to feel, but another, almost as severe, had already fallen.

It was four o'clock on the afternoon of his trial, and he was under the hands of a barber who wore a belt, and carried a bunch of keys at it. Another man, who also wore a belt with a bunch of keys at it, stood by the while.

'What's the news? 'asked the barber, as George's well−groomed locks fell beneath his shears.

'Well,' said the other; 'the news is, for one thing, as you owe me two and a tanner.'

'Oh,' said the barber−warder, suspending the action of the shears, 'and what might that be for?'

'I see a telegram message half an hour ago,' said the idle warder. 'Erebus is in first, my boy.'

'Well, I'm blowed!' responded the barber, pausing to look at his companion before he fell to work again. 'I'd ha' bet my shirt again' him.'

'Well, he's won, whatever you'd ha' bet,' said the idle warder with a little laugh. 'You'll see it for yourself in the morning papers.'

Now, this was cruel for George. 'What right has a felon to anything? And yet, he had fairly won the money which would have saved him, and his calculations had been sound after all, but for that one abominable accident which had tripped him up and maimed him for ever and for ever. When the prison chaplain talked to George about the enormity of his offence, he found him impenitent and stubborn; until the young man, though more than half by accident, adopted a wiser method, and assumed a virtue though he had it not, in consideration of the chaplain's influence.

Of course, neither Mrs. Donne nor Ethel were at this time much in the mood to enjoy an accession of fortune, immediate or remote. They were driven from home by shame, and had little care to think about monetary prosperities. Old Daniel was driven away also; and four people, who had seemed rooted to the soil they were born on, went away together and took one and the sane goal. Trouble had brought Dinah and Ethel close together, and had made them fast friends.

'You're sure, my dear,' said Dinah, 'that I sha'n't be a trouble to you if I come to live anywhere near you? I shall mind you of it every time you look at me.'

'I should like you to be with me,' Ethel answered steadily and gently. 'Let us go together, and never say a word about it any more.

And so the ugly thing was buried; but they thought about it, though they both kept silence. Daniel was willing to go anywhere, so long as he was but led out of the sight of eyes in whose gaze he had been familiar.

'I've never been a don at travellin',' said Daniel, 'an' I'm a bit mythered−like;' he meant, confused and mentally harassed. 'An' it feels cold out o' doors. Mayhap I've growed a bit nash wi' sittin' so much at the fireside. But I'm willin' to goo annywheer, Dinah, my gell, to be away from the Saracen. I niver thought to part wi' *him* till I come down stairs toes foremost. But nobody knows what'll happen. Nobody knows what'll happen.'

The old fellow was quite broken, and sat dull−eyed with his hands on his thin knees. He looked about him on the journey, with childlike curiosity, and made no observation but one. This was drawn from him when, after a distance of thirty miles had been travelled by rail, he saw the familiar skeleton frame above a coal−mine.

'It's been fields for ever so long,' said Daniel, 'and now we'm a−gettin' among the coal again.'

But before he was settled in his new home, he had to spend a day or two at the local hotel, a little countryfied house with a bowling−green behind it. He sat there in the snuggery most of his time beside the fire, and once or twice gave orders to which nobody attended, evidently imagining himself back at the Saracen.

'They'n gone an' changed the shelves an' the bottles, Dinah,' he complained; 'an' instead o' the clock hem' wheer it used to be, they'n stuck it up at my back, It nigh on breaks a man's neck to look an' see what time it is.'

'Never mind, dear,' said Dinah, reading these signs; 'we'll have everything right by an' by, An' then you'll be comfortable again, won't you?'

'You bide wi' me, my gell,' answered Daniel, 'an' you'll he all right. Eh?'

'Oh, yes,' said Dinah soothingly, thinking that the old man wandered. But he had something on his mind, though it was perhaps the last thing in the world that Dinah was likely to think of. The thing was on his mind, and yet was somehow not to be got at until on the second day, after sitting dull−eyed and silent for two or three hours, he suddenly arose and called loudly for Jane and Mary. Jane and Mary, late maids at the Saracen were miles away, but one of the young women of the house answered his call. He peered at her with a glance of no recognition at first, but in a while he grasped his own purpose, and hooking her towards him with a forefinger he asked:

'Theer's a lawyer i' the town, ain't theer?'

'Yes, sir,' said the girl; 'several.'

'Very well,' said Daniel; 'you send for one of 'em, d'yo hear. An' theer's a shillin' for you. Send a lad as can run sharp, and let him fetch the best lawyer i' the plaäs.' The girl took the shilling, but stood looking at him as if uncertain to obey. 'Don't you be afeard o' me,' Daniel wont on, seating himself by the fire once more. 'I want a lawyer. I ain't all I used to be, but I feel well an' bright to−day, an' I've got a lot o' business to do. Fatch a lawyer, an' let me do it whale theer's time.'

'Very well, sir,' said the girl; and going out, she despatched the messenger, a stable−boy, who, being impressed with a sense that the business was urgent, ran as if for a midwife, and alarmed a respectable elderly solicitor so much that he ran after the boy all the way back to the inn, to the great wonderment of the inhabitants who had never seen him run for forty years past.

The landlord was in the snuggery mounting guard as it were over Daniel, when the solicitor arrived.

'Be you a lawyer?' asked Daniel.

'Yes, sir, I am,' returned the newcomer, somewhat out of breath with his exertions.

'You can draw up a will all right? Eh?'

'Certainly.'

'So as theer can't be no manner o' doubt about it?'

'Certainly,' said the solicitor though, being a man of some experience, he saw the boldness of the assertion.

'Then I, Dan'l Banks, late o' the parish o' Bramwich, do give an bequeath everythin' of which I die possessed to my daughter Dinah.'

'You wish me to draw up a will to that effect?'

'Course I do,' returned Daniel petulantly. 'What else did I send for you for?'

'Do you wish me to specify the properties?' asked the solicitor.

'Does it matter?' asked Daniel. 'Can't I will 'em in a lump?'

'If you wish to do so, certainly.'

'Very well, then,' answered Daniel, 'put 'em in a lump. All to my daughter Dinah. An' look sharp about it, mister, for I'm a−gettin' on i' years, an' I do't feel much like wearin', I can tell you.'

The solicitor asked the necessary questions, took the necessary notes, and went his way. Next morning he brought the will, and read it over to the old man, who signed it. The landlord and the solicitor's clerk also signed it, Daniel paid the bill, and the thing was over.

'Now, you wouldn't ha' thought,' said Daniel addressing the landlord, 'as an ode mon like me, as has got maybe on'y a day or two to last, ud be sich a Gawby as to wait till now afore mekin' his will, would you?'

'Well,' said the landlord, who was of a curious turn, 'that depends on what you've got to leave, you know.'

'So it does, mate,' said Daniel, who saw his drift, and was equal to him. 'So it does.' But he could not resist the desire to say that Dinah would be pretty warm when he was gone pretty warm. Warmer than most, he added, warming with the theme. And indeed Damel had a good deal of property down in the old country in one form or another, and a balance at the bank, since the sale of the Saracen, the figures of which might have startled some people.

Of course the folk of a small country town like Wrethedale had their nine−days' wonder about the immigrants and strangers who had settled in their midst. Beyond the fact that they seethed fairly well−to−do plain people, little was learned of them for a time. The new settlers paid their way and went to church, and in a few weeks they were accepted as a fact, and the wonder at them faded out, as it had a right to do. As the weather grew finer and warmer, Dinah used to tempt her father out for a walk now and again, and the change of air and scene and life began to do the old man as much good as anything could hope to do at his time of life. There had been nothing in George's case to carry it beyond the sphere of the local papers, and here in this western town, a hundred miles as the crow flies from the scene of his crime, they felt safe from gossip and from any remembrance or knowledge of the undeserved shame which had fallen upon them.

Wrethedale was so much out of the general way, was such an old, settled, sober−sided sort of place, that it found a simple−minded wonder in things which would never have been noticed in a commonly−active place of its own size. It boasted three solicitors already, two of whom played cricket in the summer and rode to hounds in winter, and did and had no other earthly business. It was therefore certainly a little curious that in the space of some three months after the arrival of the two new households a fourth solicitor, unknown to anybody in the neighbourhood, should suddenly blossom out and burgeon in the High Street with all the glory of new wire blinds, a brass plate, and a lettered bell−pull. It struck Dinah as being curious that the name on the brass plate was John Keen. She had known a John Keen, solicitor and mine−surveyor, at home her son's friend, and the man she liked best amongst all the acquaintances George had made. Some of them, perhaps most of them, had been a little less than equivocal. Dinah knew nothing of the verses against the Reverend Jabez Wallier, and had a high opinion of one John Keen who was a solicitor. She was just solemnly wondering whether the John of Wrethedale had anything to do with the John of old days, when she met the John of old days plump in the market−place, and he raised his hat and held out his hand to her.

'Why, Miss Banks,' said John with an indefinable air of guilt upon him, 'this is a surprise indeed!'

'I should never ha' thought of seeing you here,' said simple Dinah. 'Is that your name up in the High Street, Mr. Keen?'

'Yes,' said John, still looking a little guilty, 'that's my name. Are you staying here, Miss Banks, in Wrethedale?'

'Yes,' said Dinah. 'Father an' me are living here.'

'Dear me!' said John, absolutely blushing at this third pretence, and looking guiltier than ever. 'That is singular. I have come to settle down here professionally.'

'Indeed!' said Dinah; 'I noticed the name as I came by.' She was casting about in her mind what to say or do. The wound was still open. Who could expect such a grief as she had suffered to heal in three months' time, or, for the matter of that, in three years? John was in the way, and yet she liked him, and was not sorry to see an old face, being a woman of strong local affections. She was naturally valorous, and was disposed to face this situation. 'Will you take me to your office, Mr. Keen?' she said suddenly. I want to speak to you.'

'Certainly,' said John; and led the way, wondering what Dinah's topic could be.

'I'm glad to see a face I used to know,' said Dinah, once within the office. 'But you can't fail to know why father an' me came here, Mr. Keen, and '

'Miss Banks,' said John, 'never say a word upon that question. I have more right to grieve for you than you are likely to be able to guess. But I know nothing of it now. If you will allow me, I will wipe it out of my mind here and now. From this minute forward I have forgotten all about it.'

'Thank you,' said Dinah tremulously. Her errand was already fulfilled, and they talked with some constraint on either side until she rose to go.

'I hope,' said John with another blush, which in Dinah's motherly eyes was not unbecoming, 'that you will let me come and see you now and then.'

Dinah would be glad to see him, so she said, at any time. She read him now like a book. And she waited for him to ask about Ethel; but John, who was under the impression that he was playing a difficult game with great wariness, and believed himself as inscrutable as the Sphinx, repressed his longings, and did not name her once. This silence forced Dinah's hand. She was only a woman after all.

'I suppose you know that Miss Donne is living here, as well?' she asked.

'I have heard as much,' said John with infinite dryness. 'I hope to be able to pay her my respects as an old acquaintance in a day or two.' Dinah's mild eyes seemed to him to pierce this transparent humbug through and through, as they did, but he could not yet wound her by saying one word about his own designs.

'Are business prospects good here, Mr. Keen?' asked Dinah.

'Well, that's rather hard to determine just at first,' said John courageously. 'What practice there is is likely to be of a good sort, I should say. They're county people and that sort of thing, you know, Miss Banks, in this neighbourhood. And one may as well get the best sort of practice as the worst, you know.'

Dinah said, 'Oh yes, of course,' to this, but she regarded John so seriously that he continued as if in self−defence

'I can afford to wait for a year or two, and I don't know that it matters much if I don't practice at all, except that I don't want to lead an idle life. And whatever there is to be done here will be of the best class, even if there's very little of it. Conveyancing,' said John, guiltily once more, beginning to droop beneath Dinah's gaze, 'is the sort of work I should prefer.'

Dinah said, 'Oh yes, of course,' again, and having wished him well, she shook hands and they parted. It was not, perhaps, altogether a strange thing that she cried when she got home, or that she knelt beside her bed long that afternoon in the quiet of her own chamber, for she saw that what had brought this honest young fellow here was

the hope of Ethel, or at worst the determination to try for her; and her own child had once won Ethel, and might have won her worthily, and have been blessed in her love, and she in his, if he had not been Ah me! if he had not been a villain.

I say again I do *not* believe that there is any criminally. minded cur in the whole world who would not forego his crime if he could but see the brood which it is sure to rear.

And oh! young Joe of five−and−twenty years since, young Joe no longer by this time, if anywhere extant, but middle−aged, and verging on the fifties and a little grey, if you could know the grief your folly planted, it would be a heavy thing to bear. A little courage, errant Joe, a little honour, and the tragedy which obscured so many lives had been averted. Is it of any use to point a moral nowadays? Do others' follies teach us? or others' wisdom? Or is even as the poet tells us our own experience of much sterling worth?

One of two things very soon became evident to John Keen, and, he had little heart to choose between them, though heart enough to face them ten times over. But either his move in coming to Wrethedale and setting up there had been made too soon, or it was a false move altogether. Ethel knew why he came what woman would not? and she was in no mind to be comforted for the loss of her own wounded self−respect, or the loss of her rascally lover. She felt and thought indignantly and with many a throb of that deep wound she carried, that her plighted husband was a felon, and at that hour in prison, and it was cruel to her way of thinking, and dishonouring to her, to suppose that she would ever look at another man again. She had loved, and though she had loved a scoundrel, she had loved him none the less, until she knew him as he was. And she had no possibilities of affection within her for any new creature of the male species. She hated and despised men at this period of her life with a great and majestic heartiness. Men were vicious and mean and cowardly. What the sacred bard said in his haste, Miss Donne confirmed at leisure. It was illogical, but shall we cry out against a nature so perverted? Are you logical when any dear and trusted friend has newly betrayed you? I am not. I have declaimed against the pretended affection of woman in my time, pretty eloquently as I have fancied. Lot the wounded heart speak for a moment as its agonies prompt it. Natures less fine than hers have been soured for life by lesser sorrows, and if I am not mistaken in her, she will grow back slowly to more than her first ripeness of sweet nature, and, probably enough, be happy wife and mother before we see her for the last time, with all these pains buried, though not forgotten.

But what have we to do with prophecy? Let us get back to the story.

'I'm not going to be beaten,' said John resolutely, when he had failed a dozen times at least in his efforts to meet Ethel. 'I came here in the hope that I should be able to make her a little bit happier, or, at all events, a little bit less miserable, poor little darling.' I can fancy what Ethel's scorn would have been could she have heard that phrase of affectionate commiseration from John's lips. 'I'll do it, somehow. What a chuckleheaded ass I am! Why, the poor girl hasn't even got an organ to play on Sundays. Here!' quoth John, rising pipe in mouth and clawing on his hat and coat, 'I'll see about that at once, anyhow.'

He saw about it to such effect that in less than a week he bad matured a plan and found a way to execute it. At Shareham Church, four miles from Wrethedale, there actually was an organ with nobody to play upon it since the rector's daughter had got married. But to ask Ethel to travel four miles twice every Sunday through the year hail, rain, or shine would have been preposterous. The organist at St. Stephen the Martyr at Wrethedale was an arrant duffer, and John, who had an ear for music, was wroth at him every Sunday, though he himself went to church for no loftier object than to look when be could at Miss Donne. So John scraped acquaintance with the rector at Shareham, expressed himself as being deeply interested in church music, got leave to try the organ, of which instrument he knew next to nothing, enthusiastically pronounced upon it, and offered at once to subscribe fifteen pounds per annum towards the expenses of a salaried organist. The rector jumped at the offer, and John almost swore him to secrecy, using such vehemence in his request that the rector thought him a sort of bashful saint. Then the young pretender incited the rector to offer the berth to the arrant duffer who tortured the churchgoers at

St. Stephen's, and the rector did it, setting another five to John's fifteen and making the pay twenty pounds a year. The arrant duffer also jumped, and went about inflated, thinking himself a pearl amongst organists. Next, the secret schemer told the vicar of St. Stephen's that he had a very angel of an organist in his congregation, and told Dinah also that the post of organist was vacant, and indeed there was no one left to play at all. So Ethel got one of the smaller longings of her soul, and the congregation within the Martyr's walls were no longer martyred as of old.

At first, when John went to church after completing this arrangement, he felt that he had cheated himself. Ethel was no longer in her old place to be furtively stared at. But be got the better of this grief in a while, and many a time the sound of the pealing organ poured peace into his heart and sacred joy; and to Ethel while she played it there was no longer any sorrow in the world, and she would leave the church radiant, and her sabbaths at least were filled with a tranquillity she had never hoped to taste again.

It came to her ears after a while that all this was John Keen's doing. Her pride prompted her to surrender her joy rather than owe it to him, but she had not the heart for this extreme measure. She contented herself with snubbing John, and he bore it with wonderful meekness.

Chapter 15.

The Saracen having fallen into new hands, assumed a new aspect and a new title. The real old Saracen, who for many a summer day had looked on the sunshiny street with bilious eyes, and on many a winter night had shrieked and creaked complainingly against the stormy weather, was taken down and relegated to a lumber room, and ultimately chopped up for firewood. For weeks the front of the house was obscured by scaffolding, and quite a little army of men were at work about it. Finally it came out with plate−glass windows and stuccoed front, with a great gilded sign which expressed it as the Saracen and Railway Hotel. Within, things were changed as much as without, and Meshach and Aminadab and the rest found it on its re−opening night no fit home for them and their memories, and so carried themselves elsewhere with a general feeling of being uprooted.

Prosperous George Bushell, pausing before the house one sunny morning, felt his heart lifted at the sight. The Saracen and Railway Hotel by Andrew Royce was nothing to him, except as a token of the removal of the Saracen by Daniel Banks, and the consequent removal of Daniel and his daughter. They had gone away, having made no sign, and he was once more safe in the possession of his fortune. The heiress had left him in undisputed possession of the field; and although be could not understand its why and wherefore, be appreciated the fact. He could scarcely resist the smile that strove to curve his features as he looked at the transformed structure

'Hullo! Bushell!' cried a voice, and he turned to face a middle−aged man sitting in a neat dog−cart, between the shafts of which stood a slashing−looking bay mare. The middle−aged man was loud of voice, florid of complexion, and cheery of aspect, and he wore an enormous beard of chestnut colour, laced, but only laced, with grey.

'Good mornin', Sir Sydney,' said old George as he turned.

'Fine growin' mornin' for the crops, isn't it?'

George had no interest in farming, but Sir Sydney Cheston had, having but recently taken Quarrymoor Farm upon his hands, as Mr. Bushell knew.

'Splendid weather,' said the Baronet. 'Going up to the court? Shall I give you a lift?'

'Why, thank you, Sir Sydney,' said George in his provincial slow drawl; 'I don't mind if I do ride. It's a goodish pace up theer.'

'So it is,' assented Sir Sydney; and the old fellow, moving heavily and deliberately as he poke, climbed into the dog−cart, and took his seat by the Baronet's side.

'Nobody iver expected to see me a−ridin' alongside of a baronet,' he said to himself, as the owner of the mare touched her lightly with his whip and set her going.

'Changes behind us, there,' said Cheston, nodding his head backwards.

'All things change i' this world,' said George. 'We've no abidin' city here.' His wooden gravity was quite enough to beguile a listener into the belief that he had at least some thought of what he was talking about.

'No, indeed!' shouted Cheston in his good−humoured noisy voice. 'The first time I ever saw the place was on the very day when your nephew Joe my old chum you know, Bushell knocked poor old Screed down and ran away from home. Gad! he must have been out of temper that day, for he knocked roe down too. I never told anybody of it before, but it's a fact, by George!'

'Ah, poor Joe−ziph,' said George, dividing the word again into two equally balanced syllables, and putting his company manner on generally. 'It was a blow to his parents which they didn't overget.'

'It wasn't a bad thing for you, Bushell,' said the Baronet, laughing. But the laugh fell into a sigh, half perhaps for his old chum Joe, but certainly at least half for his own lost youth. 'He was going out to the gold−diggings, I remember. I was the last man to shake hands with him in England, and I was quite hard hit because I couldn't go with him.'

'Was you now?' asked George.

'Gad, I was,' returned Cheston.

'Here's the High Street,' thought old George 'they can see as I'm a−ridin' along with a baronet;' and he looked sulky, which was his way of trying to look dignified.

'More changes!' cried Chest on, pointing with his whip. 'That was a private house, and they're turning it into a shop. The place is thriving.'

'Ah,' said George, who, in spite of his business habits, had a true countryman's interest in trifles. 'Young Keen the lawyer lived theer. Wheer's he moved to, I wonder?'

'Young Keen!' said the baronet; 'why, you don't half know the news, Bushell. He left weeks ago. He's gone to live in the same place with that poor little Miss Donne, and old Banks and his daughter. It's quite a migration. I think he was a bit sweet en the young lady. So was I: but I'm too old to think about that sort of thing nowadays. You and I have kept out of the trap pretty well, haven't we, Bushell?'

'I don't know as that's any comfort, when life's a−beginning' to close in, Sir Sydney,' said George. 'And so,' he thought, 'young lawyer Keen has followed old Banks and his gel, has he?' He turned it over slowly in his mind, and Cheston, for a wonder, was quiet for a minute. 'Are they at all familiar like?' he asked; 'the Banksias an' young lawyer Keen?'

'Why, you know nothing of what's going on in the town, Bushell,' said Cheston. 'That young scoundrel I committed to Stafford for you was young Ken's closest friend, and the youngster used to go and smoke with Banks twice or thrice a week, at one time. I believe, if Bank's girl had been a year or two younger, he'd have gone for her. Nice woman she was, Eli? I always used to pull up at the Saracen when I drove by, and get a glass of beer

from pretty Dinah. Ah, Bushell, she was a pretty girl five−and−twenty years ago when she and your poor nephew Joe were sweethearts.'

'Sweethearts, was they?' asked George. Internally he anathematised his nephew Joe, for he could scarcely help a little soreness at this reiterated mention of him. Did not five−and−twenty years give time enough to get a man buried and out of sight and done with?

'Sweethearts! I should think they were. It was about her he knocked me down, and it was about her that he floored poor old Screed. Screed wasn't a bad sort.'

'A godly person, Mr. Screed was,' said George. 'A very godly person.'

'Here we are!' said the Baronet, pulling up before the police station and leaping down. 'Take the trap to the Dudley, officer. Tell 'me to give the mare a good feed. Stop and see it done, will you. By−the−by, Bushell, remind me, when this licensing work's over, that I have something to say to you about business. That's why I pulled up for you; but I've such a head, I forgot all about it.'

George walked into the court with the Baronet still talking genially and loudly at his side, and partook of the great man's glory. For Sir Sydney Cheston was the greatest swell those parts could boast, and the old man, like the rest of us, loved to sit in the high places and be seen in good company. But all the while, as he sat on the bench, he gave his vote only as the better−conditioned of his neighbours gave theirs, and thought about the news he had heard. Young Keen a lawyer familiar with Dinah, had gone to live in the same parish to which she had retired. What was that for? Was there anything in it? anything that threatened himself?

Young Keen had begun to defend the prisoner, and had then suddenly resigned the case.

Was it law that young George had committed forgery anyhow, and must in any case suffer for it, and had Keen advised the mother to be quiet until his term of imprisonment was over? Mr. George Bushell was a wooden man and a man of considerable attainments in the way of ignorance. He was a Justice of the Peace, but there was nothing in that to prevent the very commonest point in the law from being a mystery to him. He was the fraudulent owner of a great fortune, and that of itself was enough to make him suspicious. Of course, he had no fear of any punishment beyond the loss of the fortune; but would not that be punishment enough? It is not punishable to commit an offence against the law when the offence is utterly beyond detection, and the certificate he had destroyed had been lost for twenty−five years before he found and destroyed it.

Why had young Keen followed Dinah Banks? 'I believe,' Sir Sydney had said, 'that if Banks's girl had been a year or two younger, he'd have gone for her.' That meant lawyer Keen. George saw no reason why a man of six−and−twenty should not marry a woman of three−and−forty if he set his mind that way; and if lawyer Keen knew of Dinah's claim, it might be worth his while to overlook the difference of a year or two and make a match of it.

Always putting two and two together in this clumsy and wandering way, but never by any chance making four of them, Mr. Bushell contrived to make himself signally uncomfortable. That there was something in young Keen's following of Dinah something beyond mere chance seemed certain. Then he remembered Cheston had said that Keen had been sweet on Miss Donne. She was there also. Now, if Keen courted Miss Donne lovers tell each other everything Dinah and Miss Donne were living alone in a townful of strangers women tell each other everything if the lawyer got hold of Dinah's story, he would know how futile her fears had been, and would set her on the track at once. Altogether, the mere fact of John Keen having followed the two women was full of peril for George's fortune; and somehow, in these late days, there had been a sort of revival of the memory of errant Joe which of itself left an uneasy sense of dread and expectancy on the old man's mind.

He got at everything by slow and roundabout mental processes; and at last he reached what seemed to him to be the real knot to be untied in this case. What was he to do in brief to keep young George out of the way when his time had expired and he was released from prison? It was pretty evident that, if the mother moved at all, it would be for her son's sake, and not for her own.

'There's some shaäm in it, I'm certain an' sure,' he said to himself. 'The child must ha' been born i' wedlock, but I reckon he came afore his time. It's that as made her keep her tongue betwixt her teeth all this time, an' now if her does anythin' at all, it'll be for the lad's sake.'

There were elements in the case which puzzled him, for he could neither comprehend how plain simplicity could sit down to suffer, nor how an honourable spirit could be so wounded as to resolve on keeping silence against itself rather than identify itself with dishonour. But when once the central idea had taken root in George's mind, it rose to such proportions as to overshadow everything else that grew there. He was as certain as he well could be that Dinah was not likely to move in her own behalf, and that if she moved at all, it would be to endow that scoundrel of a private secretary with a fortune to which he had no claim except from the accident of birth. If lawyer Keen got to know the story and that seemed only too probable he would wait for young George and give him the news in spite of Dinah's want of initiative. Then, how to get at the released criminal before anybody else could get at him?

And across the stupid schemer's brain there flashed a sudden jubilant ray.

The copy of the certificate was gone. It might not be a matter of any great difficulty to get rid of the original, and then to defy all possible attempts against his property. A happy thought, surely, and yet leading to all manner of unpleasant complications. Leading to dangers also. The ray seemed less jubilant.

The church at which Dinah and young Joe had so long since been wed was famous in local annals as the resort of runaway couples who wished to be married. It was but a mile or two from George's house, and he had known it from babyhood. The parson who had officiated at Dinah's wedding was dead, and the parish clerk had gone the same way. The marriage had been performed at Whitsuntide, at which festive season in old days some fifty or sixty unions were wont to be celebrated at Waston Church, oftener than not with much disreputable riot. Nobody would be likely to remember any one marriage particularly at this time of day, and the church certificate, as the old schemer thought, was its last and only record. Old George was not much of a novel−reader, but he *had* read somewhere of a guilty lord who had illegitimised his brother's children and seized their estate simply by tearing out the record of their father's marriage from the parish register kept in an old church. He saw how simple the process was, but he saw its dangers also. He was a slow and clumsy thinker, but he had that faculty of making dramatic pictures in his own mind of which I have already spoken, and he could never contemplate himself in the act of tearing out the register of his nephew's marriage without seeing a terrible vague hand approach his shoulder. This terrible vague hand affected him physically, and he used to get up and rub the part it threatened, walking about the while with a wry face, and hitching his shoulder to get rid of the uncomfortable feeling.

But needs must when the devil drives, and George felt himself demon−driver. Under certain conditions, life is not worth having; and the old man found the night and the day alike a burden to him. He reproached himself for cowardice over and over again, and at last, as often happens, he went with no inward increase of courage to the task. The guilty lord, he remembered, had made a burglarious entrance to the church, in 'The Secret of Glen Snassen,' in the dead of night, while a tempestuous wind shook at the casements and howled in the vaults. He had scarcely pluck enough for such an enterprise, and indeed burglary seemed unnecessary. A public omnibus passed the church every half−hour in the summertime, and one fine hot summer day he was set down at an hotel a hundred yards from the porch. He drank a glass of whisky to steady his nerves, and then walked into the street and strolled by the churchyard. The sexton was bobbing up and down in a half−made grave, and George, leaning his arms upon the mossy stones of the wall, accosted him.

'Are you sexton here?'

The man answered in the affirmative.

'Been here long? Eh?'

'Seven 'ear come Christmas,' said the sexton.

Old George's head began to swim, and his heart grew muffled on a sudden. A minute passed before he spoke again, and the sexton by that time was bobbing up and down in his grave once more.

'I wanted to find out,' said the melodramatist, when his voice and wits returned to him, 'about a wedding as took place here five and−twenty 'ear ago. There's a bit o' property dependin' on it.'

'Yes, sir,' said the sexton, scenting fees and pausing at his task.

'I can get the keys, sir, if you'd like to look at the register.'

'Very well,' said George pompously; 'I'll jine you i' the church in five minutes.'

'Very well, sir,' said the sexton; and having driven his spade into the clay, he took up his cap and jacket, and swung leisurely off to the vicarage. The melodramatic schemer also sauntered away, his inexpressive countenance showing nothing of his inward pains, though his head was swimming again, and the curious muffled feeling at the heart had returned. The road led half−way round the churchyard, as he knew, and then a by−way ran at the back, so that the burial−place was islanded, so to speak. He walked leisurely until he reached the main road again, and then, seeing the sexton in the act of unlocking the church−door, he quickened his pace a little, and felt such a tremor of dread at the porch that he dodged suddenly into the sacred building as though a bull had been behind him. The sexton, who was already halfway up the aisle, failed to notice this curious entry, but George felt the necessity of steadying himself, and made a resolute effort. The vague terrible hand, backed by a presence yet more vague and terrible, was behind him. What if young Keen should come to look for the register at that very hour and moment? Ugh! what a disagreeable fancy!

'What date?' asked the sexton.

'About '49 or '50,' said old George huskily. He had known that the task would be a hard one, but he found it harder than he feared. Yet, his wooden face showed nothing.

'What name, sir?'

'John Smith an' Mary Ann Thomas,' said the guilty one, speaking more huskily than before. 'Here, I'll look for it.'

He put on his gold−rimmed glasses, and drawing a book towards him, turned over the leaves one by one. They had a faint odour suggestive of long imprisonment from light and air which reminded him of the discovery of his nephew's coat. The sexton sat down at time other side of the vestry−table, with his arms upon it, and watched the search drowsily. The day was hot, and the sexton nodded once or twice, and, just as the old schemer had begun to hope that he might fall asleep, caught himself up with a great snatch, and became prematurely wide−awake.

'Dry work, eh, my man?' said George with husky pomposity.

'Yes, indeed, sir,' said the sexton.

The entries for 1849 were in one volume, and those for the year following in another. George had taken up the wrong volume, but he plodded through it to the end, and with a curious new tremor closed it and took up the other.

'A slow job, eh?' he said with a great effort.

'Yes, indeed, sir,' said the sexton, 'an' a dry 'un too, sir, as you say.'

'Yes,' said George, 'it's all that. Could you get me a glass o' water? An' maybe, after all that diggin', you wouldn't mind a glass o' beer yourself eh?'

'Thankee,' said the sexton, and old George, still turning over the leaves, drew a shilling from his pocket, and, without looking at the man, pushed it across the table. Now the sexton was a fairly honest, dutiful sort of fellow, and if the books had been old enough to have included an entry made before the great Registration Act came into being, he would probably have found strength equal to his day, and would have resisted his temptation. But he knew well enough that every entry these dusty old volumes held was snug and safe in Somerset House, there to be seen on payment of a shilling; and he felt, therefore, that there was no particular need to keep watch and ward over any respectable old party who wished to hunt out a certificate. And grave−digging on a hot summer's day is a thirsty occupation, and the sexton was dry. So he accepted the shilling with thanks, and having poured out a glass of rather stale water from the vicar's carafe, he put on his hat, and left ancient and uninstructed melodrama to its work.

Old George, with a dreadful feverish haste, raced through the leaves until he reached the date he sought for. There was quite a glut of marriages that day, and he turned over a score of leaves before he reached the document for which he was running so much risk, and which was, if he had only known it, so absolutely useless. He had come prepared, and slipping from his pocket a thin metal rule, and a specially sharpened pen−knife, he set the rule under the page, thrust it well up against the back of the volume, and at a single stroke of the keen blade severed the leaf. He folded it neatly, though he shook aguishly all the while, and put it in his pocket. Then he feigned to go on reading the certificates, that he might look natural when the sexton should return.

By−and−by he came, rubbing a hand across his lips.

'I can't find it,' said George, throwing himself back a little, and wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

'Is there any evidence as the parties was married here, sir? asked the sexton, feeling himself bound to show a little interest in consideration of the tip.

'It was allays took to be so,' said George.

'An' it's quite sure as they was married in '40 or '50?'

'If they was married at all,' said George. He was in a dreadful tremor inside, but he felt bound to keep the pretence going and to depart naturally.

'Is there much dependin' on it, sir?' asked the sexton, beginning to lock up the books.

'Two or three thousand,' said George, growing easier as the despoiled volume went out of sight.

'You'll ha' to try Somerset House, sir,' the man said, turning the key in the lock.

'What for?' asked George.

'Stifficate o' marriage,' said the sexton. 'All on 'em goes up to Somerset House, from every parish church in the land, sir.'

George's head began to swim again, and once more his heart felt muffled and stifled in its beat.

'Is all them,' he said stiffly and slowly, 'at Somerset House? all them as I've been lookin' at?'

'Yes, sir,' said the sexton, 'every one of 'em.'

'An' can anybody see 'em?'

'Oh yes, sir, any body. You'll ha' to pay a shillin', sir, that's all. Same as here, sir.'

George, with shaky fingers, drew forth the fee.

'I suppose,' he said with trebled desperation, 'as you take great care of 'em here, though, for all that?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the sexton, who was leading the way down the aisle by this time, swinging the keys in his hand. 'The law's very strict, sir. I b'lieve it's transportation for life if anybody destroys a leaf.'

George gave a husky little groan.

Chapter 16.

History repeats itself. Here was old George travelling in young George's footsteps, and going clumsily about to commit a useless crime.

It is only on a stage that a scoundrel, finding himself frustrated, can writhe and howl and shudder without attracting the attention of the bystanders. Whatever emotions he experienced, old George dared show nothing, and he marched deaf and blind into the sunshine, and walked straight on without knowing or caring whither his footsteps led him. By−and−by he began to clear a little, and then he went into a meadow and cursed his day not eloquently, but with thoroughness. He had always been a moral man on his own peculiar lines, but he had naturally listened, more or less unwillingly, to a good deal of bad language in his time, and now he felt his knowledge useful, and employed it to the full. If any stranger could have come suddenly upon this respectable, solid−looking old man, in spotless black broadcloth, hat of broadish brim, snow−white linen, and respectable grey whiskers, and could have heard his language, it might have startled him. But before old George had gone thrice through his stock of phrases he was literally without invention his head began to whirl, and his eyes saw nothing but a silvery mist with splashes in it of alternate ink and fire. More than anything else could have done his fear sobered him. He had been taking God's name in vain, horribly, and now perhaps he was going to die. More than once he had heard of sudden judgments.

He crept back into the road again and walked towards the town, a little bent and blanched. He was getting on in years, and these violent emotional exercises break an old man a good deal. A sturdy walker who had kept himself well in exercise all his life long, he was yet right glad of the passing omnibus, for somehow his legs seemed to−day to fail him, and his feet were heavy on the dusty road. The second certificate was burned that night as the first had been, though he felt no sense of triumph as he burned it, but only one of aching terror and remorseful rage.

Sitting by his lonely fireside for even in summer a fire is a necessity in the coal countries he drank pretty freely, and at last, with his pipe in his hands and his feet on the fender, he fell asleep. And as he slept he dreamed a

curious dream. He had gone forward in time, and it was the day when George Banks's term of imprisonment should expire. The dreamer was somehow invisible in a grey dream−mist, but in the same grey mist he saw a massive door, which he knew for the entrance to a prison, and about it were Ethel Donna, and Dinah, and young lawyer Keen. He knew, as people do in dreams, what brought them all there. They were waiting for the outcoming of the prisoner, and the prisoner was to come and claim his own. Old George, powerless and tongue−tied, waited in an agony for the door to open. After a long time it began to move, slowly, slowly, slowly, and when at last it stood wide, he knew, with an incredible revulsion of ease and joy, that the prisoner was lost, and that nobody in the prison had an idea of his whereabouts.

The revulsion awoke the dreamer, and he sat up dazed and miserable. He mixed a fifth or sixth stiff tumbler and drank it, for, like other men oppressed by care, lie was beginning to fly to that false and foolish solace. In time ho drowsed again, and the dream came back precisely as before, and again the revulsion of feeling awoke him. This time a dim little light of hope seemed to accompany his waking, and he struggled to get back to sleep to dream it over again. Everybody knows that if you dream a thing three times it is sure to come true. But though the dream haunted him whilst he waked, it fled him when he slept. The fire burned out, and he awoke chill and desolate to find the chimney−piece clock marking the unheard−of hour of half−past one. He went to bed oppressed by tears and remorses, and, tossing an aching head in the dark, tried to force sleep and the dream back again. But all at once, as he tossed and tumbled, a very sunbeam of intelligence seemed suddenly to warm and. light his mind, and he sat up and clasped his hands together. Then he sank back with a sigh of comfort.

He would make the dream prophetic! He would have it true!

Ay! and he saw his way to it. There was no hope of sleep for him that night, but as he lay and turned over his plan in his stiff−jointed mind, the clouded horizon seemed to lift more and more, peace came back to him or promised a return, at least and his hold upon his fortune grew sure again.

He was up with the first gleam of dawn, arranged his business, wrote a number of letters, packed a portmanteau, and started by the earliest train for London.

Everybody has heard of Messrs. Croesus Brothers. They are leviathan financiers, helping to make wars, helping, when it pays them, to keep peace, and as powerful in either direction as Schouvaloff or Bismarck. They make loans to empires, and count their profits by tens of thousands.

The junior partner, Sir Jonas Croesus, who had been a Cabinet minister, and was likely to take office again when the political wheel should turn, was a grey and worn−looking man, with a face of singular kindness and honesty. He was a Jew by descent, and by habit a Christian. He was probably meant by nature for a philanthropist, but he was a financier on a large scale to begin with, and latterly he had spent a dozen years or so in Parliament, in hot fight for office most of the time; and he had grown somewhat hardened. But though a Jew and a financier and a post−Cabinet minister, and as hard as nails in politics and business, he was a good−hearted creature, and was even something of a sentimentalist at bottom.

Croesus Brothers were old George's London agents, and he was known to them as a sound and reputable business man, whose affairs stood on a big basis. He had never come into personal contact with either of the partners, but he was known to them in advance, and he sent in his name with some certainty of being attended to.

'Sir Jonas will see you, sir,' said an elderly clerk, when Mr. Bushell had waited for a minute or two. George followed the clerk into a comfortable room where sat Sir Jonas at a knee−table with docketed papers on it, and an ivory mouth−pieced tube which ran into the floor. The country man of business was a little surprised, was even a little dashed, to see such trifling signs of work about. He had vaguely expected a tangled growth of tubes, a half−dozen telegraphic machines, and a disorderly well of papers Bank of England notes and acceptances from Rothschild.

'Day, sir,' said Sir Jonas, nodding him to a seat.

George needed more than this to help him out. He was here on an impudent enterprise, intending no less than to hoodwink this great financier, and make a cat's−paw of him; and when he saw the lofty grey head and the sagacious eyes of the man, he repented of his coming. Sir Jonas made pencil marks on various papers and looked at home. George cleared his throat, and the great man glanced at him.

'My arrand, Sir Jonas,' said the wooden George in his woodenest manner, 'is not what you may call strictly on business. I want a introduction to the Seckitary o' State for the Home Department.'

'Oh!' said Sir Jonas. 'Will you meet me at five this afternoon, at my house? In business hours I attend to business only. Day, Mr. Bushell. At five.'

Sir Jonas went on making pencil notes on papers, and old George retired. He felt abashed and defeated, though he told himself that it was ridiculous to suppose that such a man as Sir Jonas could devote his business hours to the discussion and furtherance of other people's private affairs. But he half−fancied his scheme pierced through already by the sagacious eyes of the great financier, and he went hot and cold, whilst beneath his black kid gloves his palms perspired. He shook himself out of these foolish fears, but they came back again, and he had no appetite for the solid old−English dinner to which he sat down at a Strand restaurant at two o'clock in the afternoon. In the course of many years of prosperity he had learned to appreciate claret, and he took a bottle of the best the place afforded, and felt a shade more comfortable. Then he smoked a long clay gravely and sipped coffee and read the papers until half−past four, and, having paid his reckoning, walked off solidly in the direction of Grosvenor Square, looking the picture of country commercial soundness and rectitude. He timed himself so as to reach Sir Jonas's house at five o'clock to the minute, and, being admitted, was ushered into a shady library which had a scent of cigar smoke about it perceptible even to a smoker. Enter Sir Jonas with a cigar between his lips, his waistcoat a little open, and his feet in beaded slippers.

'An introduction to the Home Secretary?' he said, as if renewing a conversation broken off half a minute before. 'May I know your object?'

'Why, yes,' said George with a slow woodenness which looked like hesitance. 'You may, Sir Jonas. I want to make an appeal to the clemency o' the Crown.'

'In whose behalf?'

'In the behalf of a young man named George Banks as was my private seckitary, Sir Jonas.'

'Yes? What are the circumstances?'

'He forged my name for three hunderd pounds,' said Old George, with a cold desperation which made itself heard in his voice and seen in his face. 'He was tried an' found guilty, an' he was sentenced to two 'ears' imprisonment.'

'How long since?'

'Six months ago.'

The wicked old schemer's voice quivered, and the great financier asked himself, 'A sentimentalist behind that mask of wood?' for being a sentimentalist himself, and a stern man of business into the bargain, he despised sentiment until it touched him.

'Have you any doubt about his guilt?' he asked.

'Not the least i' the world,' responded George. 'No he was guilty.' He saw how absurd it would be to attempt to forward his case by any doubt of young George's guilt. But his voice sounded miserable and reluctant when he admitted it.

'Are there extenuating circumstances?' asked Sir Jonas. 'You must have something to go on.'

'Perhaps,' said George, 'you'll be so good, Sir Jonas, as gi'e me a minute to tell all about it.'

'Certainly,' replied the great man. 'Be seated.'

Whilst old George slowly seated himself, Sir Jonas touched the spring blind and let a sudden flood of summer−light into the room. This disconcerted the visitor mightily, and his face was troubled.

'The fellow's in earnest,' thought Sir Jonas, and, seating himself, nodded at his visitor to signify attention. The sagacious eyes looked straight at George and discomfited him so that he was fain to hang his head, and a generally furtive aspect laid hold upon him, and his voice shook a little. All this told in his favour, for be seemed to the listener to be moved in behalf of the man whose cause be seemed to plead.

'He was a smart young feller,' he said shakily and huskily, 'an' he belonged to decent folks as was pretty well−to−do, he was a clerk i' my office, and I took a fancy to him an' promoted him to be my private seckitary. Then he got i' trouble with a money−lendin' feller of the name o' Curtice, and was very hard drove by him. At the time I prosecuted I didn't know as he expected to be able to replace the money in a week or two, but I've found out sence as he had a good prospect o' doin' so.'

This was a lie and a mere coincidence. Old George knew nothing of Erebus.

'He was tempted very hard, an' he expected to be able to pay back,' he went on, his furtive, shamefaced, hangdog look, and his husky voice making him almost eloquent to the financier's good heart. 'Of course, I'm not a−sayin' as that's an excuse, Sir Jonas; but look at what he lost. His father was well−to−do, an' now he'll cut him off. He was goin' to be married to a nice young gell as owned a freehold farm an' other property. An' all that aside, Sir Jonas, two 'ears must be allowed to be a very hot sentence for a first offence.'

'Who was the judge who tried the case?' asked Sir Jonas.

'Mr. Justice Wormould,' said old George.

'Wormould *is* severe,' said Sir Jonas 'undoubtedly severe. I have had my attention attracted to one or two cases in which, as it appeared to me, he leaned rather to the side of strict justice than of a mercy which might be wiser. But in this case, Mr. Bushell ' He paused and fidgeted. He wanted to shake old George by the hand, but he would not so have betrayed himself for the world.

'I wouldn't be so cruel,' said George, with renewed tremor as he approached the nucleus of his plot, 'as t' ask the Seckitary to throw the poor lad loose o' the world without a prospect. What I say is, let him have a chance. Now, I've got correspondents in Australia, Sir Jonas, an' my object is to give him a passage out, an' a letter of recommendation, tellin' the wull story plain an' straight' he saw that that touch was needful 'an' perhaps a hunderd pounds to begin again with.'

The great financier sprang from his chair and shook the country man of business by the hand.

'Mr. Bushell,' be said with warmth, 'rely upon my influence.'

Mr. Bushell's face went crimson and then went grey.

'I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure, Sir Jonas,' he said, more hoarsely than ever, and Sir Jonas gave a renewal of the grip before he dropped his hand. But old George had not yet reached the actual hub of the wheel of design, and detection was possible even now. It was a bold plan. He went on anxiously. 'Theer's still one thing, Sir Jonas, if you'll forgive my mention on it. I'm in a pretty big way o' business, an' I've got five−and−thirty clerks i' my empl'y, and three or four hunderd men. Now, if it got to be known as I'd took a step to free this young man, the consequences might be dangerous. As it is, he's took for a example, an' I mek no doubt he's talked about for such. Now, much as I wish it, I can't move i' this matter if it is to get into the papers an' be known fur an' wide.'

'Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame!' said Sir Jonas to himself. 'This man is a Christian! A gentleman at heart! A jewel of a fellow!' The jewel of a fellow waited with bitter anxiety and fear.

'Do you think,' he ventured to say after a pause, 'as that 'ud be possible?'

'I cannot say what view the Home Secretary may take of the matter, Mr. Bushell,' said Sir Jonas, walking up and down with his hands behind him, 'but I can at least promise that your benevolent scheme shall not suffer at my hands. If you will allow me, I will see the Secretary this evening. I shall meet him at the House, and will do my best to secure you an interview.'

'Thank you, Sir Jonas,' said old George.

'George Banks,' said Sir Jonas, bending above the table, pen in hand, and writing as he spoke. 'Private secretary to Mr. George Bushell. Tried for forgery before Mr. Justice Wormould. Where?'

'Stafford,' said George.

'When?' asked Sir Jonas as he wrote.

'First o' Febiwerry last,' George answered.

'Good.' Sir Jonas laid the sheet of note−paper upon a blotting~ pad, folded it, and set his hand upon it. 'You will excuse me now, Mr. Bushell. Where shall I write to you?'

'I shall stop i' town,' said George, 'until I've seen the Seckitary for the Home Department.' He named his hotel, and Sir Jonas, again shaking him warmly by the hand, escorted him to the door and saw him off in person.

'That dull old fellow is an honour to human nature,' said Sir Jonas.

'I didn't think,' said the dull old fellow as he walked away, 'as I should ha' got round him anythin' like so easy.'

Sir Jonas saw the Home Secretary that evening in the smoking−room of the House, and laid George Bushell's story before him. The official had that day been greatly tried by a circumstance which made him glad to be lenient. A man somewhere in the North of England had been found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. Strenuous efforts had been made to obtain a reprieve, and the Home Secretary had gone through a most unpleasant time. He had conscientiously examined the evidence; he made all reasonable inquiry; he would willingly have leaned to mercy's side had it been possible, but he was compelled in conscience to let the sentence take effect. The man had been hanged that morning, and had died protesting his innocence, and the Home Secretary had read his protest in the early editions of the evening papers. He was sure he had done his best to he just he believed the sentence deserved but, after all, there was a doubt in his mind the merest shadow, and yet enough.

The most impartial of judges and best of men are apt to be affected in this way.

'Wormould has a heavy hand,' he said, when he had heard the story through. 'But two years even for a first offence is not an unheard−of sentence.'

'I suppose not,' said Sir Jonas. 'But I wish you could see the man. And life is not so gracious a business that it is worth while to stifle anybody's generous impulses except on good reason.'

'No,' said the Secretary with a half−laugh. 'Except on good reason. This sort of thing is really not so rare as you seem to fancy. Prosecutors relent when they have gone too far, and think they can stop the judicial machine by laying a finger on the fly−wheel.'

'You figuring as the fly−wheel?' said Sir Jonas.

'Precisely,' the Secretary answered.

'Will you see the man? I shall take it as a personal favour.'

'If you put it in that way,' said the Secretary.

'Yes, I put it in that way,' said Sir Jonas.

'I'm horribly busy.'

'Busier than I am?' asked the great financier. The Secretary smiled.

'You have the man's address?'

'Of course,' said Sir Jonas. 'He is within a mile of us.

Come! the fight downstairs won't begin for a couple of hours. Shall I send for him now?'

'If you will.'

Sir Jonas addressed a brief note to George Bushell, Esq., and despatched a messenger by cab. Old George, when he came to think about it, had been comforted by his interview with Sir Jonas, and had taken a glass or two of whisky on the strength of it. When the messenger arrived with the note, he began to be afraid that he was scarcely fit to see a Home Secretary, or be seen by one; but, having sluiced his head and face with fair water, he felt better, and, joining the messenger, was driven to the Palace of Westminster.

Now, the Home Secretary as Sir William Harcourt knows is an important personage, and for any criminal person, with a possibility of penal servitude for life hanging over him, to approach so great a functionary with intent to make a cat's−paw of him, is an act of amazing boldness, possibly of amazing rashness, possibly of astounding folly. This consideration began to weigh heavily upon George's mind, and, when the Bude light became visible at the top of the great tower, its very rays seemed to pierce him as with darts of anguish. But he lacked the courage to run away, and, indeed, he stood condemned to go through with the business now. And why should anybody suspect him? Why should anybody look for an evil motive behind such a promise of benevolence? Who was likely to guess his relationship with the criminal? Vague, horrible fears that the Home Secretary might be personally acquainted with all the archives of Somerset House in detail assailed the miserable old schemer, and a hundred other fears, as foolish and as visionary, chilled bin to the marrow as he followed the messenger into the strange precincts of the House, where, for anything old George knew to the contrary, there

might be torture−chambers.

Sir Jonas, valuing time too highly to endure George's drawl, told the story for him, appealing to him now and then with a 'That is so, Mr. Bushell?'

'That is so,' George answered to each of these inquiries, and his heart seemed gradually to come back to him. But Sir Jonas did not insist on privacy, and George broke in with hang−dog furtive air, standing hat in hand in a corner of the smoking−room 'Theer's another thing, Sir Jonas, as you've forgot to mention.'

'What is that?'

'I can't move i' this matter at all, if anybody's to know as I had a hand in it, or if it's to get into the papers as the young man hasn't served his sentence.'

'Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame,' Sir Jonas whispered behind his hand.

'I've got thirty−five clerks i' my empl'y,' George went on, repeating his, argument of that afternoon, 'an' some hunderds o' workmen, an' it 'ad be a bad example. I should fear to set it.'

'Well said,' cried Sir Jonas.

The great official said urbanely that the case should have his best attention. The judge who tried the case must be consulted, and the Chaplain and governor of the gaol must report on the criminal's conduct and condition. The step suggested was a grave one, and must not be taken hastily. The proposal reflected the very greatest credit on Mr. Bushell's heart. And, in brief, it was plain even to old George himself that this most insolent and audacious of schemes was in a fair way to success.

He gave his home address, took a respectful leave, and went back to his hotel; elated, yet shuddering. If his motive should be discovered?

Yet, a man will willingly endure a great deal for a quarter of a million of money, and brother Joseph's quarter of a million had taken root in George's soul. He would rather have died than have surrendered it.

Every now and again it occurred to him that it might be that all the trouble he had taken, and the danger he had incurred, were unnecessary; but his fears goaded him, and the thinnest shadow of dreadful chance struck terror to his soul. He returned now to the Black Country, and was tried by the agony of the law's delay for three dreary weeks. At the end of that time he received an official note informing him that his prayer was granted, and that, except for the necessary publication through the ordinary official channels, which, of course, could not possibly be dispensed with, his desire for secrecy would be respected. The reservation stabbed him like a knife.

'Theer's nothing for it,' he said, sitting in his armchair and staring stupidly at the fire, 'but to get him out o' the country wi' a rush, an' so' ha' done wi' it.'

The official note enclosed an authorisation to visit the prisoner, and intimated besides that the revised term of the prisoner's durance would expire in a month's time within a day or two.

'I'll goo an' see him,' said George, 'this very day.' But, as he rose in blind haste to forward his scheme, that dreadful swimming in the head from which he had twice or thrice suffered came back upon him. He saw nothing but a silvery mist, with splashes in it of alternate ink and fire, and he sank into his seat and lost consciousness.

Chapter 17..

There was a pious warder in the gaol in which young George was confined, and one night, as he locked the prisoner up, he threw in a word in season.

'There's a worse prison than this, young man,' said the pious warder.

'What's that?' said the prisoner. He was a good deal reduced by prison diet, for one thing, and he was not too proud to speak to anybody. And besides, except the chaplain, nobody had ever offered him a civil word. So he answered quite briskly, and in a tone of interest, 'What's that?'

'Hell!' said the pious warder, and closed the door.

George, as this theological bullet struck him, leaped to his feet and cried out to the unhearing walls and the iron door, though he took care not to speak until the door was closed.

'Insolent cad!' Then, being weakened by prison diet for as yet he was new to its effects, and had not even begun to experience its tonic influence he sat down by his little bit of gaslight, and began to cry. The way of transgressors is hard, and he felt the hardship without fully recognising himself as a transgressor. He was ill−used. It was such a ridiculous absurdity to suppose that a man in his position, and with his prospects, should have meant to rob anybody of three hundred pounds. A fool as gross as ignorance made drunk could scarcely think it the idea was so monstrously and palpably absurd. And yet people actually did think it, and as a consequence he was here, condemned to two years' imprisonment, a felon, branded for life, lost, friendless, hopeless. And nobody pitied him, nobody thought how horribly unlucky he was; nobody guessed how honourable and high−minded he really was at bottom. If he wept under the burden of these reflections and the shock of the warder's insolence, what wonder?

Since his entry to the gaol he had been admirably subordinate, partly through policy, and perhaps a little because he was prone by nature to avoid resisting strong things. Here, authority, though calm, was strong enough to have cowed a much more pugnacious nature. George's valour was essentially discreet, and he made a model prisoner. The Chaplain had heard good reports of him, and, as luck would have it, he paid his first real visit to his new charge whilst George was crying. He had gone formally into his cell once before, and had dropped a text or two, but now he came prepared with all the weapons of gospel agriculture, to plough and sow and harrow the criminal's soul.

The door opened, and the forger sat with his head in his hands, weeping. The door closed again, and the Chaplain and the prisoner were alone. George knew him by his legs, and had no need to look up to recognise him. The Chaplain's were the only black broadcloth trousers in the prison.

'I am glad,' said the Chaplain, 'to find you softened by your chastisement.'

The prisoner's gorge arose, but he said nothing. Softened? Why should anybody be glad to find him softened, victim of injustice and ill−fortune as he was?

'The time already afforded you for reflection,' pursued the Chaplain, 'has been brief, and that which remains before you is long. I implore you to make good use of it.'

Now, there was a double insult, and George was quick to see and feel both edges of it.

'The object of punishment' so the Chaplain flowed on 'is twofold. In one aspect it is strictly punitive. In another it tends to reformation. Here you have time to consider your past misdeeds, and to make and strengthen holy resolutions for the future.'

'Canting hound!' said the prisoner to himself. 'What sort of resolutions would he make if he were here?'

But the Chaplain habitually set the weapons of gospel agriculture to work on stony ground, and would not have been much discouraged even if the prisoner had spoken his thoughts aloud. He went on, business−like, with truths trite enough, but no less true on that account, to set the enormity of the prisoner's offence before him. Then he told him how unhappy he was, and at this period in his harangue the hearer's tears fell fast. He told the miserable George how he had sacrificed the substance of happiness and prosperity for the mere shadow of a fleeting joy; and when George sobbed in answer the Chaplain warmed to his text and grew nearly eloquent. And the more eloquent the Chaplain grew, the more the criminal was affected; and the more the prisoner was affected, the more the Chaplain was stirred to effort. He was a thoroughly good man, pious and in earnest, and we all like an appreciative listener. The criminal cried at the exhortation, and the exhorter naturally felt well disposed to him, as you would feel to me if I laughed at your comic story, and shed tears at your strokes of narrative pathos, brother−novelist.

George himself began to think the Chaplain, within limits, an appreciative sort of man; and when, beneath the prisoner's tears and its own eloquence, the exhorting voice began to shake and to grow a little husky, the criminal murmured that he felt the value of sympathy, and would think of the good advice which had been given him.

The Chaplain in parting shook him by the hand and left a tract behind him. That sort of literature had never had any charms for the criminal until now, but anything is better than nothing, and he read the tract and took an interest in it, and read it so often, for sheer want of something better to do, that he knew it almost by rote when the good man next visited him. And if on future occasions he humbugged the Chaplain, he began by humbugging himself. Every man but the greatest has a little of the chameleon in him, and takes his colour from surroundings. Young curates coming up to town and meeting old college chums in bachelor chambers have been known in the course of a day or two to throw off something of the restraint of habitual piety, to drink bitter beer once again, and to take a bashful hand at six−penny napoleon. It is within living memory that the late Mr. Peace told the chaplain of the gaol within which he suffered the final penalty of the law that he Peace would show the Chaplain how a Christian could die. Impressionable human nature! not altogether deceived, nor more than nine−tenths deceiving.

And so, on a sudden, this young man became quite a model of Christian propriety. He forgave John Keen and all his other enemies; he admitted the justice of the sentence which had been passed upon him, and out of the depths of his regeneration he wrote a letter to Dinah, a letter so pious and edifying that the Chaplain consented to let it go, and, by the Governor's permission posted it with his own hands. In that epistle he set before his supposed sister the manner in which he had become converted from the error of his ways, and besought her also to seek the cleansing fountain in which he had been sanctified, Poor Dinah was spared the misery of reading this effusion. The local postmaster returned it to the gaol, marked in red ink, 'Gone. Left no address.'

No. 32, B Corridor, became a sort of model prisoner, and was in the main treated with great kindness. The pious warder even went so far as to supplement his rations against all rule with bottles of warm tea and wedges of pork pie, the which 32 of B corridor gratefully received and disposed of. And when at length, beneath the seal of official secrecy, the inquiries prompted by old George Bushell were made by the Home Department, the Governor and the Chaplain were both honestly pleased that a young fellow who showed such sincere desire for amendment seemed likely to have another chance in the world. Their reports were eminently favourable to the prisoner, who, as a matter of course, knew nothing of the negotiations.

The benevolent employer, awaking from his swoon, found himself chilled to the very marrow, and so weak that he could scarcely rise from his chair. For a while he was not sure that he had not fallen asleep after reading the

official letter; but as he grew clearer, he remembered that he had fallen suddenly back with an awful swimming in the head, and his fears once more got hold of him. Four−and−twenty years ago and more, so his dull conscience now recalled him to the truth, he had begun to plot against his nephew, only with the faintest hope that the plot might be successful. All these years Nemesis had slumbered, and now was upon him. He was going to be punished for his wickedness. These visitations frightened him, for they came in answer to his sins. Well, then, he would make all straight and right again would make full restitution when he died. In the meantime, surely, no Deity could be displeased by his benevolence to a young man who had so shamefully betrayed his trust. He would be good to young Banks, and free him from prison, and give him a new chance in the world, and money to start with, two hundred pounds instead of one an ample provision. And then he would make a new will, and in place of founding the great Bushell Hospital and Institute in its projected entirety, he would bequeath everything his brother Joseph had left behind him to Dinah, its rightful owner. Surely, thought the old sinner, tremulous now and full of fears, that was enough to do. Surely that put a new complexion on the matter, and made his plot pious. If his own conscience could not see a flaw in the new scheme, might he not believe or hope that the flaw went unseen? There was one thing about which he was absolutely certain. He had never meant to be a wicked man, and if circumstances tempted him too strongly to be resisted now, it was in his power to do justice at the end. Even in the meantime he was acting benevolently to the criminal George. He, at least, was not at present entitled to a penny of the money, and a year and a half of imprisonment lay before him, apart from the self−excusing, self−accusing old rascal's interference.

I am ashamed to have wasted so many words on so simple an analysis. Everybody knows how to cheat his conscience.

Tremulous still, and looking old and haggard, he began his preparations for his journey. He wrote and despatched instructions to the managing clerk at his offices, with respect to some hitherto unarranged affairs, filled a pocket flask with whisky as a guard against any new attack of faintness, and, walking to the railway station, was borne away. People who met him noticed his haggard, pallid looks, and said to one another that old Bushell was ageing fast and beginning to break up. He felt it himself, though he set down much of it to his late continuous anxiety, and looked forward to a rapid recovery when its cause should have disappeared.

The journey was not a lengthy one, and the sunlight was lying hot and white upon the main street of the country town when he reached it. But now a great reluctance to go near the gaol fell upon him, and he walked down the shady side of the road with new tremors and misgivings, all undefined, and probably the worse to bear on that account. He was unknown to the few unoccupied residents who gazed idly after him, but all faces looked suspicious to him in his timorous mood, and everybody seemed to know his errand. The sexton's statement oppressed him, and he felt what a very awkward thing it was for a man who had a possible sentence of transportation for life hanging over him to put his head inside a gaol. But the thing had to be done, and when the road was quite clear of observers, he advanced to the massive gate the very gate he had seen in his dream, though he had never beheld it with bodily eyes before and rang the bell. The echoes went clanging and tingling about the hollow courtyard, and a warder opened a side door and demanded to know his business.

'Tek my card in to the Governor,' said old George, with shaky pomposity. 'I'm the bearer of a letter from the Home Seckitary, and I want to see him.'

'Walk in, sir,' said the warder respectfully, and the visitor obeyed. How the startled echoes clanged and tingled through the hollow court when the warder slammed the solid little door!

The warder, having called a fellow official, gave him Mr. Bushell's card, with instructions to take it to the Governor; and then, inviting the visitor to be seated, mopped his forehead and said it was a roaster. Old George assented and looked at the ornaments on the wall, all of which were disagreeably suggestive of strong durance. After what seemed a long pause, heavy footsteps set the echoes going in the courtyard again, and the messenger reappeared..

'The Governor's compliments, sir, and will you walk this way.'

Out into the open yard, then through a heavy door which the warder unlocked into a corridor, then through another door into a lengthier corridor. All the doors, old George noticed with an uncomfortable creepiness in the region of the spine, closed with a snap behind and now, if the Secretary of State had pierced his plan from the first, how safe they had him! That was all nonsense, and he knew it, but he shivered at it. He was relieved when, having traversed the whole length of the gaol, they came upon another open, space, turfed and not paved this time, and beyond it the Governor's house, looking solid and prison−like, but still a little more cheerful and less terrible than the living grave behind.

The Governor was not in the least official in appearance a grey, elderly gentleman, with a cordial look and manner. He received his visitor with something more than courtesy, and shook−hands as if he were pleased to see him. The fact was that he had heard of old George's amazing goodness, and, being himself of a kindly nature, was much impressed by the story. It is not every day in the year that a man who has been so ill−repaid for the affection wasted on a *protégé* chooses to act in this Christian spirit of forgiveness.

'At present,' said the Governor, 'the young man is of course unprepared. Perhaps, Mr. Bushell, you would like to carry him the news of your own benevolence, eh?'

'I should like to see him, certainly,' said old George, ' an' maybe to say a solemn word to him. You see, Mister, what a mistake it 'ud be if he was to be let out impenitent after all.' He was so falling into the part, that he began to regard all sides of it quite naturally. Those fears of possible detection had been purely nervous, and bad not assailed his reason: or at least he told himself so, now, when he saw the Governor so friendly. 'They was all mere foolery, of course,' said he to himself.

'Well, you know, Mr. Bushell,' said the Governor with a half−laugh, 'a prisoner's penitence is a thing the quality of which it is very difficult to judge until you see it actually worn and tried outside. The devil was sick *you* know. And I dare say,' added the Governor, 'that while the sickness lasted, his penitence was real enough. That's the way with 'em here.'

'Ah!' said George, wondering what the man was talking about; 'so I should suppose. So I should suppose.'

'At the same time, I must tell you that the Chaplain thinks very favourably of the young man.'

'Ah?' said George. 'That's well. That's well.'

The schemer's hair was grey, his face was coming to be a good deal seamed and furrowed, it was pale just now, and had a worn look on it; immobile as the old rascal was, it was plainly to be seen that he had suffered. His dull, slow speech, his almost expressionless front, with only that look of late pain upon it, had more effect than could easily have been fancied. The man looked so simple and genuine, not at all like a schemer against his *protégé*. A woodenly benevolent, good, stupid, slow creature! There is even a mournful admiring tenderness, a tinge of pathos, in one's thoughts concerning him.

'Would you like to see the Chaplain?' asked the Governor.

'Well,' said George deliberately, 'I don't know as it mightn't be as well.'

'Or perhaps,' said the Governor, 'you'd like to see the young fellow himself first?'

'Well,' returned George, 'I don't know as I shouldn't. Yes; be added with a most involuntary sigh, 'I'll get that over.'

'Very well, Mr. Bushell. Come this way, if you please.'

George followed the Governor back into the gaol, and us he did so the nervous feelings he had been able to despise a few minutes ago returned upon him. It was not easy to despise them now. Suppose there should he something in them, after all! Old George in gaol precincts, with the knowledge of his own criminal acts within him, was not the man to be happy in his mind. A warder went before them unlocking the doors, and fastening them behind, and at last he and they came to Corridor B and then to door 32, and this being opened revealed the figure of a man at whom the benevolent intruder looked with no recognition. The Rightful Heir, with sleek cropped head and clean−shaven face, looked up and knew his late employer; but the young George was so altered by his prison dress, and by the prison shears and razor, that the old man might have looked at him for five minutes without guessing who he was. The prisoner sprang to his feet, and, with head a little bent, stood in attitude of attention.

'Banks,' said the Governor, 'this gentleman desires to speak to you. I hope that what he has to say will make a proper impression on you.'

Now, the prisoner was making rapid progress towards spiritual perfection. He had forgiven all his enemies, theoretically, and he had cultivated all his own evil passions out of himself. For a month or two past he had been quite saintly, and had taken the deepest interest in his own spiritual symptoms. Yet he did rile up a little at old George's intrusion, and as the intruder walked into his cell the criminal's newly−holy soul went bilious on a sudden. For he remembered yet he had never meant to swindle his employer he had only tried to borrow for a month or two without asking leave, and he had been very harshly treated. He had prayed to be able to forgive old George, but human nature is fallible, and when he saw him he had no forgiveness for him.

'Do you wish your interview to be absolutely private, Mr. Bushell?' asked the Governor, withdrawing him a little towards the door.

'I think I'd rather,' said old George slowly. He meant to finish there, but perhaps a shade of disapproval or disappointment in the Governor's face, perhaps a half−frightened desire to propitiate him, made him remould the phrase. 'I think I'd rather as you was with us.'

The Governor was a little curious, and the situation was interesting.

'I shall be most happy,' he returned. 'Wait there,' he said to the warder, 'until I tap the door, and then unlock it.'

He closed the cell−door with a snap, and old George started at it. It had a strange quick sound upon the ear, that click of a prison lock, as I have before noticed, and even an undetected criminal may very well jump a little at it. But disturbed as he was, he recognised his private secretary now, and began to string himself up for the work which lay before him.

'Mr. Banks,' he said with laboured deliberation, 'I've come to see you on a most important matter a matter as concerns you very deeply. You've had time, sence you was here, to think things over, an' I hope you've done it, an' as you've begun to see things in their proper light.'

The criminal with downward glance murmured to the effect that he hoped so and believed so. He was near the truth in one respect, though unconsciously for he loathed old George, and trembled with anger at the sight of him.

'I'm willin' to hope so, also,' said the Wrongful Heir, 'willin' an' eager. I'm glad to hear from the Governor of this gaol as the Chaplain believes as you're sincerely penitent.'

'I trust I am,' said the Rightful Heir.

'I'm here as your sincere friend, Mr. Banks,' the Wrongful Heir resumed. 'I dare say as you've thought many−a−time what an ill−judged thing it was you did, let alone the wickedness on it. I suppose, now, as you've found the punishment pretty heavy?'

'I have deserved it all, sir,' said detected criminality, playing to the Governor, but his inward speech was unreportable.

The undetected criminal flowed on.

'You've had time afore now to think o' what you've parted with through folly. Your chances was bright. You'd ha' been well−to−do an' respected now if it hadn't ha' been for that. You'd very like ha' been settled down an' married afore to−day, for I know what your prospects was.'

The detected criminal began to weep, for mingled rage and pity of himself. The undetected criminal continued.

'I'm glad to see as you feel your position that keen, Mr. Banks.'

Oh, the surging rage and self−pity in the little soul! A storm in a tea−cup! Ay, but the vessel trembled, and was like to break with it.

'I took a likin' to you from the first,' old George went on, encouraged by the effect of his own oratory, and somehow, in a dim sort of way, feeling himself wronged and magnanimous, 'an' you can't help allowin' as I did my best to push you for'ards. I was forced to prosecute, because it was a public dooty, but now you've been punished, an' I'm not desirous of no revenge upon you, not though I used to like you, an' you played me fause.'

What was this? the prisoner asked himself with a heart that fluttered in his breast, like a flag in the wind. What was it?

'So I've used my influence,' said the old scoundrel, 'with the 'Ome Seckitary, an' he's consented to redooce your sentence.'

The young scoundrel dropped on the side of his bed, which stood half−way retired in a niche in the wall. His head and the wall came pretty sharply in contact, or he would probably have fainted with amazement and the revulsion of his feeling towards old George. He could scarce believe his eyes and ears.

'Banks,' said the Governor, who was moved within by this strange interview, though he was too self−possessed to show it, 'I trust that never so long as you live you will allow the memory of this generous forgiveness to fade from your mind.'

The prisoner was too amazed and agitated to say a word.

'I allays liked you,' said old George, 'an' I allays took a interest in you. An' now I've empl'yed my influence along wi' my friend Sir Jonas Croesus,' this had, as it was meant to have, a certain weight with the Governor, 'an' I've had an interview along of the 'Ome Seckitary. In a month's time you'll be set free, an' then you must try an' see if you can't act wiser an' better.'

Young George slid from the bedside where he sat, and kneeling there buried his face in the cheap hard rug which made his counterpane, and wept anew. This forgiveness really broke him. It took him by surprise and by storm, and his sobs were torn up by the roots. He *had* been a scoundrel he confessed it inwardly, at last he *had* been a

fool, he acknowledged it. For a minute or two the burden of his new−born gratitude was hard to endure. The Governor was affected, and blew his nose repeatedly, waving a loud−coloured silk handkerchief about in a way which revealed, whilst it was meant to disguise, his inward agitation. Old George stood there wooden and cold, but even he was scarcely self−possessed, as you may easily conceive. But neither of his auditors yet knew how far the benevolent creature's kindliness had carried him, and his grand *coup* had yet to be made, so far as they were concerned.

'Now,' he continued, when the prisoner's sobs had grown less violent and the Governor had ceased to blow his nose, ' this country's about played out for you, Mr. Banks, or at least I'm very much afeard it is. But it 'ud be cruel i'stead o' bein' kind to turn you loose o' the world again without a prospict. Now, s'pose I give you another start i' the world, what do you say to goin' out t' Australia an' tryin' to begin afresh? I believe as you are penitent, an' I hope prosperous times 'll wait upon you theer. Now, what do you say t' Australia?'

What was young George likely to say to Australia under the circumstances? I was about to say that he jumped at the chance: in reality, he crawled at it, for he turned upon his knees and made at the undetected swindler as if to embrace his legs, and had not old George retired precipitately behind the Governor, he would have done it.

'God bless you, Mr. Bushell!' he cried m a voice shaky with many sobs. 'God bless you, sir! God bless you!'

'I say the same, sir, as this poor fellow here,' cried the Governor, with the silk handkerchief in full play again. 'Yes, sir. Damn it all, sir, I say the same! You are a worthy man, Mr. Bushell. I am proud, sir, to have met you.'

'Thank you,' said old George, woodenly, and the two shook hands, whilst the forgiven forger crawled back to his bedside and wept afresh. It was a moving scene, and the practical exponent of Christian charity, as he stood there, shook at the fancy

'If they was to find me out, after all!'

Chapter 18.

'I shall give you letters of introduction, Mr. Banks, to my old correspondents in Melbourne, in Australia,' said George. 'I'm afeard I shall have to tell the truth about you, because I don't rightly think as it 'ud be honorable to deceive 'em. I shall give you two hundred pound, an' a outfit, an' your passage money.'

The criminal was broken indeed at this, and even the Governor, if there had been anybody to look at him, would have been seen to be visibly affected.

'I trust an' hope,' continued George, 'that being thus provided, Mr. Banks, you'll ha' no more temptation to depart from the straight road. It's that alone as leads to prosperity an' happiness, an' I do hope you'll tek it.'

Whilst he spoke thus, old George's conscience twinged him faintly, but then he remembered that in his case the obstacle to honesty had been quite insuperable lately. And at the beginning he had never meant to swindle anybody. He had only helped his errant nephew, Joe, as he was now helping Joe's son and heir.

The criminal promised upon his knees, with tears and gaspings which almost made his speech inarticulate.

'This gentleman,' said old George, indicating the Governor, "ull let me know, an' let you know, when the release which has been given to you is to come about. I shall hope to meet you here, Mr. Banks, an' to accompany you on your journey, an' aboard ship I shall place the sum I've mentioned in your hands. I trust as you won't think as I'm a−tekin' undoo precautions, sir,' he added, appealing to the Governor.

'I think your whole scheme most praiseworthy and admirable, sir,' cried the Governor, 'since you are so good as to ask me my opinion of it.'

'Well, sir,' said George, his mission being now accomplished 'you'll let me know the date at which this young man's sentence 'll expire?'

'I can tell you that at once,' said the Governor, and as I am authorised to inform the prisoner, I may as well tell you here. This is the 29th. On the 28th of next month, being Monday, he will be discharged at noon.'

'I shall he here; said old George with cold desperation, 'to meet him.' He turned to the criminal and said 'Good−bye.' The youngster took his hand and kissed it, and wept above it with inarticulate gasps of benediction and thanksgiving, until his benefactor lost patience and took it away. The warder came in answer to the Governor's summons, and released them, and young George was left to his reflections. They were bitter, but sweetened by touches of gratitude and hope and new resolve. He would be a new man, and in that distant land to which he was bound he would lead a frugal, honourable, and industrious life. Mr. Bushell was right. England was played out for him, and he could never more hold his head up where people had known him. But in a new land he could take a fresh start, and nobody need know of his criminality. Thereabouts in his reflections a chill fear fell upon him. Mr. Bushell, his saviour and benefactor though he was, spoke of the need of telling his whole story to his agents in Melbourne. Would he, in that case, send the letter by post, or entrust it to his own hand? If it were entrusted to him, it would be easy to lose it; and with the upspringing of that defensive fancy in his mind, gratitude began to cool a little, and reflections about his own future to take the place of it. But the fit was so hot that it could not cool down all in a second, and before the young man could resolve to burke that letter in case it were entrusted to him, he was assailed by gust after gust of grateful emotion, and this condition lasted him for a week at least. Then he began to feel an amazing flutter about his approaching liberty. The prison barber had left off trimming and shaving him, and he used to feel his hair and rejoice to find it long enough to get a grip of. Looking−glasses have no part in gaol economy. Before his waiting month was out, his hair, which grew rapidly, was long enough not to look remarkable, and he knew that he was pale enough to pass for one who had had a recent fever. At the first blush of his new resolves be had determined, amongst other things, on a very strict adherence to veracity. He made up his mind that nothing in the world should tempt him to deviate by a hair's−breadth from the truth. But before long he began to see what hard measure that was. He mast lie a little. Necessity was laid upon him. How could he confess to anybody the real reason of his pallor, or account with accuracy for the shortness of his hair? That would be suicidal. He meant to be religions he really meant to be religious, and the best of Christians but did religion exact so rigid and even ridiculous a discipline? He thought not.

The Chaplain was often with him in these last days of his imprisonment; reading and praying with him, and doing his best to build up in the departing gaol−bird those principles of honour and justice the want of which had caned him there. He was not wholly excused from work, but he was gently treated, and the Governor, being interested in him, set him to do certain odd jobs about his garden, and relieved his own kindly feelings by giving his labourer an occasional surreptitious supply of bread−and−cheese and beer. Circumstances alter cases. Fancy George Banks finding bread−and−cheese and beer luxurious! Think of him accepting the patronising presentation of it, and being grateful!

He was less grateful, perhaps, for this slackening of his chains than he would have been without the assurance of approaching liberty, and in a while the torment and agony of hope left him no room to think of mere gratitude to anybody. Time had never so dragged on his hands as now; but howsoever long it seemed in coming, the hour came at last and with it the man. At stroke of noon on Monday the 28th, old George led young George through the prison gates and into the street, where a hack−coach awaited them and drove them to a distant railway station. The Chaplain had prayed with his departing guest that morning, and had given him much fervent advice. The Governor bade him 'Farewell' kindly and with hope. The dress in which he had been arrested was returned to him, and he was habited like himself once more.

He had wept anew with mingled feelings of all sorts at the parson's exhortations; and when his late employer came to relieve him, he felt amazingly affectionate towards him. The released convict felt that he loved old George. He looked at his unmeaning countenance, worn and strained and battered with the last six or seven months of misery; he looked at it through his tears, and venerated its owner. The good man he was the forgiving practical Christian, who did good to one who had despitefully used him! In brief, the poor cad was quite melted and broken upon this occasion, and vowed amendment with all his little heart and soul. The past scarified him his bygone hopes, his wasted chances; these make scourges for all of us at one time or another, and surely here was a time for a man's own hand to lay the lash on heavily.

'I can never repay you, sir, for your kindness,' said the young man brokenly as they drove away.

Old George had his own troubles, and their weight pressed sorely on him just then.

'Say no more about it,' he answered. 'Dry them eyes o' yourn, an' be a man, Mr. Banks.'

He was horribly afraid of being observed, not for any special reason, but in a general way. He was horribly afraid all round afraid of being followed and taken back, afraid of being met by somebody who might somehow know his relationship with the released prisoner, afraid that the sexton at Waston Church was just at that moment discovering the loss of the certificate. It was a nervous enterprise altogether for a man of old George's mental build. He wondered darkly within himself whether such an expedient had ever been hit upon before, and he wondered at himself for having hit upon it. Whatever he thought of was perplexed, and entangled so his mind with misgivings and fears. It was not unnatural that he should, under these unpleasant circumstances, begin to hate young George his companion. For it was as clear as day that, if that young scoundrel had not been a scoundrel, old George would never have experienced any of these troubles; Dinah would never have made her appeal to him, and he would never have known of his secretary's heirship to Joe Bushell. Yet, though he did begin to hate, he had his part to play, and his part was one of gentle friendship and kindly consideration. That was a *rôle* which be would have found difficult at any time, and now he felt it to be growing intolerable. George's tears gave him a chance for a partial outbreak.

'Mr. Banks,' he said severely, 'I'm a−beginnin' to regret a'ready as I took any trouble about you. You don't seem to have no sort of a man's heart in you. Be ayther a man or a mouse, will you? My Blessid! It's enough to turn your stomach to see a man a−goin' on so.'

Thus roughly adjured, George made an effort. He had been crying all day up till now, and it was not easy for him to subdue himself. He had read somewhere the words, 'It is a terrible thing when manhood weeps,' and he got some melodramatic comfort out of that reflection even whilst his tears were flowing. For, though a small creature, he was complex, and had room in him for all manner of conflicting ideas and feelings at the same time, so that he had cried partly because he really couldn't help it to begin With, and partly because it was the feeling thing to do, and showed that he had a sensitive and emotional organisation. His eyes and nose were red and swollen with tears, and his beard and moustache were as yet scrubby and stubble−like; so that old George, looking upon him, saw him in an aspect more and more unfavourable. The young villain had at least been personable, and now, confound him! he was growing positively repulsive to look at. And in spite of this, the elder scoundrel had to counterfeit some sort of interest and even of affectionate regard, for a day or two, until be could see him aboard ship for Melbourne, and have him safely dismissed the country.

Mr. Banks being reduced by his deliverer's admonition to an occasional gasp and snuffle of emotion, found in little time other things than his own emotions to think of. The question of the proposed letters of introduction occurred to him, and ha began to wonder afresh. Would they he entrusted to his hand or forwarded by the mail? If they were forwarded by the mail, would it not be better to escape the stigma they carried with them say, by a change of name, and by presenting himself in the search for employment elsewhere? Mr. Bushell had promised him two hundred pounds, and that, though not a fortune, was a good round sum of money to begin the world with.

If work were to be had at all, a man of his presence, his business capacity and experience, was bound to be able to get on, and it would be suicidal to set such a millstone about his own neck as the proclamation of himself as a released felon would be sure to hang there. He would go this once into the house of the idol he would be disingenuous in this respect only, and after that he would be good and true and honest. He had had a roughish time of it; he had lost almost everything in the world; but for his employer's amazing and unlooked−for benevolence, he had lost all; and he was not going to disregard such a lesson as he bad received; how was it possible that he could? But this particular new crime was necessary. He must promise whatever he was asked to promise, and then, being free, he must act for the best. After all, he would be only fulfilling his employer's desires of him, and doing his best to preserve an honest reputation. It was a pity to be thus forced and compelled into a course which he wished to loathe and abandon, and he was quite sure that, if the new baseness had not been necessary, he would never have dreamed of committing it. If a poor devil is forced to lie, how can he help lying? Everybody must admit the cogency of young George's reasoning.

The situation was singular: the young man chokeful of gratitude to the old man who was robbing him the old man passing as a benefactor to the man he was swindling on so large a scale. And the young fellow, in the middle of his gratitude and his good resolves, playing the devil with his own soul again; and his Christian benefactor looking at him and hating him like poison. Cabby, as he drove, little suspected what a load he carried, for neither of his fares looked like a released felon. Cabby's fancy was that the younger of his passengers had been to see a relative who had misconducted himself. So far as he the cabman knew, it was not a habit amongst the classes her Majesty holds in durance to weep on leaving gaol; they did not even weep on going into it, if they were people of average pluck. Then, the Chaplain had shaken hands with young George at the gate with a hearty 'Goodbye, Mr. Banks,' and both he and the Governor had raised their hats to old George when he parted from them. Like other people, the driver of the hack−carriage theorised, and when he had reached the railway station and had received his fare, he fell into talk with a railway porter, to whom he set forth how that pair was father an' son they wos, an' had been to the county gaol for to see a relation as was quodded theer, an' the young un be was that cut−up he'd been cryin' fit to bust hisself, an what a pity it was as men as had a chance in life should pitch it away voluntary−like, as a man might say. From which utterances on Cabby's part, I am disposed to think that, born in a less fortunate station of life, he might have given his imagination scope professionally, and have become a writer of fiction.

Half−a−crown and a hint to the guard found Mr. Bushell and his grateful protégé an empty compartment in a first−class carriage; and secured privacy all the way to Liverpool. On the journey the elder unfolded his scheme.

'I've wrote a'ready to Melbourne,' he said, 'an' I've told 'em as I'm a−sendin' you out theer to give you another chance.'

'Then,' said the rescued one to himself, 'I shall not go near your agents in Melbourne.' But he only looked at his employer with a meek and stricken air of grateful humbleness.

'I've put it for you as gentle as I could,' pursued old George, 'an' at the same time as strong as I could. I've told 'em it's my belief as you are to be relied upon, and I've given 'em my guarantee for five hunderd pound. So if you go wrong again, Mr. Banks, you'll be black indeed. You'd be a−robbin me' again, an' I don't think you'd find the heart to do that be as bad as you might after what I've done for you.'

At this George the younger wept afresh.

'I implore you to believe me, sir,' be answered. 'I would rather cut off my right hand than wrong you again by a farthing.' He meant it, but he did not mean to go near Messrs. Nally and Tulson, of Melbourne, for all that.

'I believe you,' said old George stolidly, 'or else I shouldn't be actin' as I am a−actin'. That you may be sure on, Mr. Banks, I repose implicit confidence in your future well−doin'.'

It crossed his mind grimly that it might be no bad thing for him if young George turned criminal again out there. He wished him nothing worse than a new detection and life's imprisonment. Hang him, the pestiferous thieving young Rightful Heir! It came natural to hate him.

'I shall find you a outfit,' said Mr. Bushell, 'as I've promised. I shall pay your passage out, an' I shall put two hunderd pound in your possession when you start, so as you'll have no 'casion to feel yourself tempted again. An' now, the world's afore you, Mr. Banks. Use it well, an it'll use you well.'

'How can I ever repay you, sir?' said the deeply−affected George.

'Stop that snivellin',' cried the old man angrily. 'Be a man, an' try to be worthy of my goodness to you.'

'I will, sir,' protested George; 'I will, indeed.'

'Do, then!' said the elder; and, after that, they continued their journey in silence for the most part.

The appearance of the released convict was so peculiar by reason of his tears, that on his arrival at Liverpool his benefactor bought a pair of dark glasses for him with shades at the sides, and insisted upon him wearing them to hide his eyes. The youngster submitted gratefully, for he felt nervous under the pressure of strange glances. He put himself under the hands of a barber, and when chin and cheeks were cleared of their stubble, he began to look presentable again. There was a suspicion of cold about his nose; one might have set down the swollen aspect of that feature and the pallor of his cheeks to influenza. The two criminals took a private sitting room and a double−bedded sleeping apartment at the hotel, and old George locked his companion in the bedroom whilst he himself went out to make inquiries respecting the sailing of a ship for Melbourne. Finding that a first−class steam−vessel started on the morrow calling at Queenstown only, and that there was still a state−room vacant, he secured young George's place, and then returning, released him, and took him out in the evening hurriedly to buy an outfit. For once in his life he disregarded money. He felt reckless, and forcing himself to assume an air and voice of kindliness, he gave the exile carte blanche.

'Get what you want an' get it good,' he said; and his young friend obeyed him. The outfitter kept one of those monstrous modern establishments at which you can buy anything, and would sell you a cradle or a coffin with equal willingness, and anything you might want in your journey out of one into the other. A tailor measured young George, and a man in the shirt department measured him, and a man in the boot and shoe department measured him, and the customer ordered freely as he would have done if the money to pay for them had been his own. For there was old George at his elbow:

'You'll want this, Mr. Banks, shan't you?'

'Do you think so, sir?' be would ask.

'Certainly. You must ha' that,' and so on, until the repentant wretched George's eyes were moist again behind his darkened glasses, and he had to blow the tear−swollen nose to hide his feelings.

Before bed−time a vast chest and two portmanteaus, crammed with articles of apparel, arrived at the hotel, and Mr. Bushell paid the bill presented and paid it, too, without even an inward murmur. The released felon wondered at his generosity, as well he might. It was unheard−of and almost beyond believing, though his own eyes saw it. Ah! what had he lost by making himself unworthy of the service of so good a master! It had been actually said in his hearing at one time that old Bushell would probably leave him a slice of his fortune, and he believed now that it most certainly would have been so. Yet, through it all, the elder's manner to the man on whom he heaped these coals of fire was cold and forced, and wooden beyond words. There was something puzzling in it, had old George's manner been natural; as it was, the situation was almost inexplicable. But the exile

was too content with his own astounding good fortune, and too full of gratitude and excitement, to puzzle himself at present over this singular problem.

The two slept in the same room, and the schemer kept zealous watch over his charge every moment until the hour for retiring. Then he locked the bedroom door and put the key beneath his own pillow, and the two began to undress slowly and awkwardly. Young George, valiant in his new resolves, knelt down at the bedside, and the respectable benevolent old villain could do no other than follow his example, and being in posture for worship, he tried to go through some form of prayer, but the words stuck hard, and his head whirled. How, he thought, if he died upon his knees, defying God in that awful and presumptuous way? and at the stroke of that sudden fear he rose and began to grope about in a twilight splashed with blots of ink and fire; until young George, having finished his devotions, rose and found his benefactor wandering with vague outstretched hands in the middle of the chamber, and in much alarm helped him to a chair.

'Are you ill, Mr. Bushel?' he asked.

'I bain't well, Mr. Banks,' murmured old George hoarsely; 'I'm very far from well.'

He would leave Dinah everything, and let her know her son's whereabouts. But he could not part with his money until 'till death do us part.' The phrase came into his mind and chilled him strangely. He was defrauding 'the widow and the fatherless.' That was another phrase which laid a chilly and discomforting finger on him. The Bible made *them* sacred, he fancied. If he died before that will was made and everything thus set straight again, he felt himself in peril. But the human conscience is conformable to reason, and after all he was acting very kindly to a man who had treated him very ill. And if young George got his money in the end, it would be more then he deserved.

Once in bed, old George applied himself to his pocket−flask in the darkness, and got some comfort out of it, though but little. One of his discomforts was that he dared not toss and tumble, since he dreaded to reveal his own uneasy soul. Nemesis comes upon us in odd ways at times. This may seem a small affair; but if you tried it through a night, you would find it mount into an agony. To lie there ill at ease, longing to move, restless, restless, and not to dare to move, to catch his breath and clutch the bedclothes with his weak sweating fingers, lest he should groan out aloud; and all the time to stare accusing conscience in the face, and the coarse hell that ignoble and ignorant natures fear hereafter was it a little thing? A hundred times that night the old scoundrel thought the game scarcely worth the candle. And yet, how could he give his money up to a man who was ignorant of the fact that he owned it, and who, besides, was already overwhelmed with gratitude!

Chapter 19.

Wrethedale on a Sunday, under the summer sunshine.

I have been reading Monsieur Taine this cold March morning, and his descriptions of the English climate have set me out of sorts. I long for a day of sunshine, and I am sick for the time being of my benevolent rogue and my rascally convert. Come with me into the country, to the little western town, whose very walls you will find Arcadian after London. Let us go into sunshine and honest company.

In the Church of St. Stephen the Martyr the windows were all open; so that, whilst the sleepy curate bleated in the pulpit, you beard the sheep answer him from the meadows; and the wind, warm and scented, brought with it the rustle of the waving sunlit shady trees outside. The day was broiling hot, the church was cool and had a pleasant earthy odour. Flecks of sunshine fell past the blinds and travelled slowly along the walls, watched by half−slumberous worshippers sweetly unheedful of the curate's voice and oblivious of the meaning or no−meaning of his drowsy periods.

A hot day, a cool shady church, a bleating voice that soothed and faltered not, a lullaby lulls, lulla, lullaby peace, peace, and deep tranquillity of soul.

Not asleep, nor yet awake, and only alive enough to be placid and at rest, sate old Daniel with his plump hands caressing his round waistcoat, and his spindle shanks supported by a hassock. Dinah by his side, with a sore heart soothed, not by the thrice−three−thousand−times−winnowed chaff of the bleating curate's discourse (an excellent young man the curate, a capital bat, but no orator), but tranquillised by the holy quiet of the place and time. For a little while, a heart at rest.

Not far away from the pew in which Daniel and Dinah sat, was young lawyer Keen, with his long hair in picturesque disorder and his grey eyes looking afar off through the curate's Geneva gown and the curate's body. When the curate's bleating murmur was cut short all on a sudden, John awoke with a start from his reverie, and the organ's voice was the voice of love to him. The hymn being sung and the benediction given, away scurried John to shake hands with old Daniel. Daniel would not attempt to go homewards without Dinah. Dinah would not attempt to go without Ethel, and the young man was wonderfully fond of the old one. Not that he was a hypocrite, more than ever so little; he really liked old Daniel, found him interesting and odd, as he had always found him; but perhaps he was a greater chum of Daniel's than he would have been if the old boy had been more separable from his daughter, and his daughter had been more separable from Miss Donne. For this young man was in love full fathom five, and though he professed to know his passion hopeless, he fed it so often as he could. Whilst he shook hands with Dinah and her father in the porch, he had a lover's ears for the voluntary Ethel played inside. He would fain have stayed within to listen to it peacefully, but was beset with fears lest for once Daniel should have persuaded Dinah to start without the organist.

'Good morning, Miss Banks,' said John, with the old air of guilt upon him.

'Good morning, Mr. Keen,' said Dinah, holding out her hand.

'How bin *you*, sir?' asked Daniel.

'How are you?' asked John in return.

Then the conversation languished, and lawyer Keen felt desperately guilty, under Dinah's gentle gaze.

'Lovely weather!' he said at last.

'Yes,' said Daniel. 'It's fine likely weather for the time o' year. It strikes a bit code to the bones, like, when you'm i' church though.'

'It does,' said John, catching at this conversational ark of safety. Aboard the theme he found footing until the organ ceased to sound, when he became silent again, and his guilty look returned. By−and−by Ethel emerged from the church to John's fancy an angelic presence. Nor yet so far away from an angelic presence in my own. Her eyes were like dove's eyes, as the old Hebrew lover said of his love's; her face as good and gentle as it well might be, a little pallid the lover's heart was piteous about the cause of the pallor at all times, when he saw her she came through a band of sunlight which lay across the porch, and the light glorified her beautiful hair and the creamy laces at her throat. John began to blush and tremble in the presence of this beautiful divinity of his.

'Good morning, dear,' said Ethel to Dinah.

'Good mornin', my darlin',' said motherly Dinah, with warm solicitous affection.

'Good morning, Miss Donne,' said the tremulous young lawyer, hat in hand. 'Good morning, Miss Banks; good morning, Mr. Banks.' And away he went, routed for the twentieth time, in spite of his resolve. That right to raise his hat and say 'Good morning' was all poor John got out of his lingering at the porch on Sundays. 'I haven't got the pluck of a mouse,' he said to himself reproachfully. 'Why can't I face her? Why can't I speak to her? Why do I look like a fool whenever she looks at me? Ah, poor thing!' pursued the unvaliant John, 'she's had such trouble, it would be a shame in me to trouble her further. And of course for years and years to come, whenever any fellow looks at her as if he cared for her, she'll think of that scoundrel of a Banks. Of course she will! And I shouldn't care for her if I thought she wouldn't. But I'm not going to be beaten. If any other fellow comes in, in the course of a year or two, any decent fellow that she can like and be happy with why ' John found that prospect unpleasant. A lover's thoughts are likely to be contradictory. The peculiarity about him is that, until he comes to look back at his own raptures and despondings, he regards them as filling up the most miserable time of his life. it is only when the time is over that he discovers how happy it was. My friend Mr. Francillon has put much philosophy into a nut−shell on this theme:

We doubted, quarrelled, tore ourselves asunder;
Faith mimicked falsehood, hope was like despair;
We doubt not, strive not; calmly now we wonder
Why we were happy, yet we know we were.

Then dawned no day but brought twelve hours of sadness;
Then fell no night but knew twelve hours of pain;
Now night brings rest, and day brings hope and gladness;
Yet could we only love and weep again!

John went to church with great regularity; and, if he wrote satiric verses on the bleating curate, forbore to give them publication. The people of Wrethedale found no fault in him. He was as well conducted a young man as any in the town, and walked with so much circumspection that even Ethel could see nothing in him to blame. And I may say here, that good and charming as she was, she regarded poor John with a very unreasoning dislike and distrust; and had momentary twinges of hatred over him, concerning which she rebuked and humbled herself continually. She had naturally a tender conscience and a vivacious temperament. Tenderness of conscience grew morbid under the hands of Thomas à Kempis, and her youth and trouble were sure guarantees for an occasional touch of anger in a woman of her complexion. You must understand that these contentions were inward, and that she rarely by any chance spoke an ill−natured word; but she used to feel mightily indignant at thousands of things which a year before would have passed her unnoticed, and having felt indignant invariably felt sinful afterwards, and read her dear à Kempis with passionate desire to equal or come near his spirit. A good girl with lofty spiritual longings and a heart that ached.

'Dinah,' she said with some severity, as John walked away into the sunlight of the street, 'I wish that young man would not speak to us.'

'Do you, dear?' said Dinah meekly. 'He was an old friend of ours.'

Oh the wound, the wound towards which every chance arrow struck anew in both of them! Ethel took Dinah's arm, and without a word or a glance, apology and pity flashed from each to each, for the two had learned to love and understand each other rarely.

'I likin' young Keen,' said Daniel; who, apart from the difference of sex and age, was of a coarser fibre. 'I wish my lad had took example by him. Eh, dear me!'

'Father,' said Dinah, warningly and beseechingly.

'Eh, dear me!' Daniel said again. It was little, but it was enough, and the two women's eyes brimmed over behind their veils.

Ethel, by special invitation, dined with Daniel and Dinah that day; and it need hardly be said that, after this reminder of their trouble, the table was quiet and the meal a sad one. It was easy to recover composure, but anything like vivacity would have seemed a crime and most unnatural, and not one of the three had the heart to be commonplace. So they ate in sadness and without appetite; and in a little while Daniel went upstairs for his nap.

'Sing me something, dear,' said Dinah; and Ethel sat down at the piano and sang hymns, until the elder woman put her arm about the singer's neck, and sliding suddenly down knelt at her feet, and dropped her head into Ethel's lap.

'Hush, hush! ' said Ethel, taking Dinah's head in both hands. 'What is it, dear? what is it?'

'Oh,' cried Dinah, 'I've been a wicked woman all my life: a wicked, false, deceiving woman!'

'Nonsense, dear!' said Ethel decisively. Then more gently. 'You mustn't talk so.' Then more gently still, 'What is it?'

'How can I tell you?' wept Dinah. 'Oh, my dear, it was all my wicked, wicked fault as he went wrong as he was tempted.'

'Why, how could that be?' asked Ethel, with soothing incredulity.

'Oh! If I'd ha' told the truth from the beginning, if I'd had the courage to face the neighbours and take my shame, he'd ha' had his rights he'd ha' had his rights I know he would!'

Ethel recalled the words which had fallen upon her fainting ears on the day of George's committal. 'The child I bore!' Had she not dreamed or misheard them after all? Was this thing true of Dinah? of Dinah, amongst all women in the world!

'Dinah!' she said, forcing the other's face upwards, and looking at her with an almost fierce anxiety; 'tell me what you mean, this minute.'

'He was my child! ' said Dinah. 'My mother passed him off as hers, but he was mine. An' I've gone through life with a lie i' my hand, an now it's found me out it's found me out.'

Ethel sat sternly amazed, and had nothing to say for a while. Dinah, thinking herself scorned, and wholly feeling that she deserved it, shrank slowly away and wept anew, holding her face in both hands.

And this was Dinah? thought Ethel; this was the woman she had so loved and pitied. For a second or two the thought was very nearly as terrible as anything she had yet endured. But as Dinah shrank away from her, the younger woman, with a sudden passionate impulse, cast herself upon her knees and snatched the sinner to her breast, and their tears mingled as they clung together, and Ethel rocked her to and fro as if Dinah had been a child.

'I don't care I' her heart cried out, 'I *will* love her. Whatever she has done, I will love her and hold to her.' The girl's heart ached anew with sudden pity. Then, as they knelt there, Dinah told her story; and it came out that the sinner was no sinner, after all. But when the tale was told, Ethel asked in amazement,

'But why, dear *why* shouldn't the neighbours have known?'

'I'd lost my lines, darlin',' said poor innocent Dinah.

'You silly woman!' cried Ethel; 'what difference could that make?'

'You don't understand; persisted Dinah. 'My weddin' lines.'

'Yes, yes,' said Ethel with tender impatience. 'What difference could it make? You could have got another copy from the church where you were married. The copy would be quite as good. You could get one now. You are a lawfully married woman, and you need never, never be ashamed.'

'I could get my lines now?' asked Dinah, with a face of wonder and dismay.

'Of course you could,' cried the other.

'At Waston Church?'

'Of course you could.'

'Oh, my dear, if I'd only ha' knowed it!' And Dinah wept afresh. 'If he'd had his rights, he'd never ha' bean tempted. Oh what a wicked, wicked foolish woman I have been! Ethel, my dear, forgive me for talkin' about him, because I know it hurts your heart as bad as it does mine. But, darlin', when his time's up, what is he to do? Oh dear, oh dear! He is my child, for all he's bean so wicked. I bore him, an' I nursed him, an' I used to suckle him on the sly at first, as long as ever I dared. What will he do when he comes out? What can he do? Can I get his rights for him? Could I get enough to keep him and send him away out of the country an' let him have a chance to be a good man again? Oh, could I, could I, darlin'?'

In the passion of this entreaty she fawned on Ethel and caressed her with imploring hands.

'Yes,' said Ethel, boldly; 'I am sure you could. Whatever would have come to your husband is lawfully yours.'

'An' nobody 'd think,' asked Dinah brokenly, 'I wasn't an honest woman?'

'Nobody!' Ethel answered again boldly. She scorned and hated young George now as well as ever she had loved him, for she had large capacities in that direction, and the one villain she had known had brought them into play. But though she believed that she would not have lifted a finger in his behalf, she could understand his mother's fears and longings, and her heart went with them. He was a scoundrel, but justice was justice; and even if he shared in the advantages of it, Dinah ought to have her right. 'And did Mr. Bushell know this before the trial?' she asked after a time spent in soothing Dinah.

'Yes. I went to him an' told him, but he pretended to misbelieve me. I went to the court o' purpose to tell the magistrate, an' I should ha' done it if George hadn't '

There she stopped, and Ethel kissed her with chilly lips.

'I'm sure he didn't really misbelieve me,' said Dinah. 'I could see he didn't. But he's a hard man, my dear, and he was afraid of loam' his money.' She paused again, and hung her head when she continued. 'He miscalled me very bad, my dear. He said he wouldn't believe a word o' my tale, and he told me' her voice faltered lower as she repeated old George's words of righteous anger 'that I ought to ha' had my legs in the stocks for bringin' such a story to him.'

'He dared to say that!' cried Ethel indignantly. 'Get your certificate at once, and take every penny of your husband's money from him.'

'If I could only get enough!' returned Dinah dejectedly. 'You know it's his rights, after all, and what belongs to him belongs to him whether he's been good or bad.' Ethel made no answer. Young George was a terrible theme for either of the women, but in Dinah's case conscience was at work. it is worth notice that what are called the torments of conscience assail the heat and leave the worst untouched.

Dinah found herself so pressed that she determined upon duty at any hazard. It was hard, after hiding so long, to make the revelation she was bound to make. But she had sacrificed herself all along, and she was bound to go on sacrificing herself to the end.

'Will you come with me to−morrow,' she whispered to Ethel, 'if I go to look for it?'

'Yes,' said Ethel, with an air of resolution.

So next day the two women practised a deceit on Daniel and Mrs. Donne, and under wicked cover of a pretended visit to the market town they took train towards their old home, and, reaching Waston Church after a four hours' journey, sought the vicar and made application for a copy of the certificate. The vicar despatched a messenger for the sexton, and that humble official conducted them to the church. His department appeared to be looking up, and he scented perpetual heir−money in this new craze for certificate−hunting. The sexton was one of those people with whom single instances make habits. Two swallows furnished ample evidence of summer.

The dusty old register was brought out again, and the entries for Whit−Sunday in the year eighteen hundred and fifty revealed the fact that thirty or forty couples had been united in Waston Church on that day, but the names of Joseph Bushell and Dinah Banks were not amongst them. Dinah and Ethel looked at each other in blank dismay.

'Is this the only register you keep?' asked Dinah, beginning to think that Ethel had been almost as ignorant as herself.

'Yes, ma'am,' said the sexton. 'That's the only one as is kep' here.'

Ethel, with a certain feeling of dizzy discomfiture, was turning over the half−dozen entries, rather to hide her own looks of dismay and to get time to think, than with a hope of finding anything. Suddenly she gave a sharp little cry.

'Dinah! Look here!'

Dinah came and saw nothing, but Ethel strained the pages open, and there, between the third and fourth entries for that Whit−Sunday, lay the root of the missing leaf. The eyes of the two searchers met with instantaneous recognition of the truth.

Ethel turned lawyer in a second.

'I suppose,' she said to the sexton, 'that very few people come to ask inquiries of this kind?'

'Not many, ma'am,' returned the sexton, with a tinge of sorrow. He suspected nothing, supposing the cry 'Look here!' meant no more than the discovery of what his visitors required.

'How many do you get in a year, now?' she asked.

'Well, ma'am,' returned the sexton, 'I've been here seven years, an' you an' this lady is the second parties as has been here.'

'Oh, indeed!' said she. 'Has nobody been here since Mr. Bushell came?'

'I don't know the party, ma'am,' returned the sexton, 'not by name.'

'He would be here, I fancy, about six months ago,' said Ethel. Dinah was looking on at this with a seared face, but Ethel was smiling and gracious, and the sexton thought her quite a nice young lady. Her manner was one of sweetened commonplace, and the man did not dream that she cared a copper to find out anything.

'Oh, no, ma'am,' said the sexton, 'not near as long as that. Only a few weeks back, ma'am?'

'And he didn't give you his name?'

'No, ma'am.'

'It was sure to be Mr. Bushell, darling,' with a warning pinch, Dinah still looking scared. 'Wasn't it?'

'It must have been,' said Dinah, in a frightened voice.

'What was the gentleman like?' asked Ethel, in a casual way.

'Why, he was a stoutish elderly party, ma'am,' returned the sexton; 'pretty tall an' stout, with grey whiskers; dressed in black clothes, ma'am.'

'Yea,' said Ethel graciously. 'Thank you.' The sexton touched his forelock again and again at her gratuity and her smile. 'Good−day,' she said sweetly.

'Good−day, ma'am,' said the sexton. 'Good−day, my lady;' and away they went to the sunny road, leaving the sexton to lock up the despoiled register and close the church.

'My dear,' said Dinah, clinging to Ethel's arm, and speaking half hysterically, 'he's stole it to rob him of his rights.'

'To rob you,' returned Ethel quietly. 'Let us go back and think over what is to be done.' Then decisively, 'We must see a lawyer.'

If young George had only played his cards in his defence with an indiscretion less pronounced, and had never made that unfortunate deposit of the stolen notes, Ethel would have believed in him all through. It was only the memory of these things which prevented the revival of faith; and even as matters stood, she began to believe in an indefinite way that the younger scoundrel had been trapped into being wicked by the elder. To hate sin and love the sinner is a Christian maxim, but Ethel coupled a detestation of the sinner with her loathing of the sin even while she confessed to herself that the mother's right must be respected. And the mother's right was clearly the right to care for her child to the end, and to do what she could to fence him round from harm and to shield him from temptation. And Ethel could bear less to think of him as sunk into hopeless degradation and compelled to crime, than to think of him as being undeservedly prosperous, and perhaps softened in that way to repentance. Her feelings and her conscience therefore went one way. 'Do good to them that despitefully use you' was a text which gave warranty enough for conscience, and her heart was wholly with Dinah, the full sadness of whose history she had so lately begun to comprehend.

The two conspiratresses salved their consciences that day by a brief halt at the market town, during which they made reckless purchases to account for their lengthened absence. They reached home dog−tired, Dinah quite broken by this latest difficulty, and Ethel roused to an almost heroic resolution. It is perhaps needful to explain, if only for the sake of a hasty reader who will not imagine more than he can help, how it came about that Dinah had

at last confessed her secret. Whilst her mother lived there had been somebody to share it with, and the burden was divided. From that time until her introduction to Ethel, Dinah had had but the merest casual everyday acquaintances; and if George had prospered, she would have been content to carry her secret to the end. But when the young fellow went so completely to the bad, and when the mother began to reflect upon his future, the weight became too dreadful, and a part of it must at any risk be thrown away. And apart from that, Dinah was desperate and at bay, facing circumstance with a tragic and heart−broken heroism of which only women are capable. The psychology of the case is simple. Her own sin of secrecy in respect to the marriage had resulted in her child's sin of dishonesty. You and I would not put it so, but it was inevitable that Dinah should fasten the two things together in that way. Her sin had led to sin, and she must make atonement. So the poor thing confessed, as the first step, to one she loved, and whom she had helped to injure. What Ethel could not achieve she did. She hated the sin, but she loved the sinner still. He had gone in her arms as a baby, she had kissed the rosy dimpled feet now so pierced with the thorns of evil ways. He was her child after all, though he were a thousand times wicked; and even now she would have borne his punishment for him, and have rejoiced to do it. Foolish, but like a mother, and perhaps not altogether to be condemned or lightly spoken of.

Chapter 20.

'Dinah,' said Ethel, next morning, 'did you ever ask Mr. Keen to tea?'

'No,' said Dinah, listlessly.

'Will you write and ask him?'

'Why, dear?'

'I want to meet him?

'Why, it was only o' Sunday last.; said Dinah, 'you wished he wouldn't speak to us.'

'Did I?' asked Miss Donne, disingenuously. 'Well, I want particularly to see him now, dear. Will you ask me to tea tomorrow and ask him to come also. Ask two or three of the people whom you know from the church, and have a little party.'

'Ethel!' said Dinah, reproachfully.

'My darling,' returned Ethel with an air of determination, 'we cannot stay at the point we have reached. We must go on. That wicked man must be punished for stealing the certificate, and you must have what belongs to you. Until we know what to do, we can do nothing.'

'But how will givin' a party help us to find out what to do?' asked Dinah.

'I will put a suppositious case to Mr. Keen,' said Ethel, losing a little of her colour as she spoke 'you find things like it in novels, dear and he will never for a moment guess that I am offering him a real case. You don't want your. secret to he made the common talk of the country, and we must manage it by ourselves. If we consulted a lawyer, you would have to tell hint everything, and that would be terrible. You know what those stupid men do. They get things into newspapers, and make everybody talk about them. Now, when we know what is the right course to take, we can do whatever must be done quite quietly.'

'But if you punish Mr. Bushell, people will have to know,' objected Dinah.

'Not if you only punish him by frightening him and taking your money from him. I believe they hang people for stealing from a church register. I am sure I have read that somewhere. And you don't want to do that.'

'Not for everythin' in the world,' cried Dinah.

'If you go to a lawyer,' said Ethel, confident in her superior knowledge, 'I am afraid they would hang him if they found him guilty. Of course he knows that, and when we know what to do we can frighten him, and make him give up everything he has of yours. It is right that you should have it. Let me write the notes of invitation. Shall we ask Miss Wade? Miss Banks presents her compliments to Miss Wade, and will be pleased to see her at tea to−morrow (Wednesday) afternoon at five o'clock. Shall we ask Mr. Gimble the organist at Shareham? Miss Banks presents, &c. Now to Mr. Keen.'

Dinah acquiesced in this programme with fear and trembling. Three young ladies and three young gentlemen were invited. Ethel promised to bring her mother, and the purchases from the market town were investigated. Most of them appeared to have been made with a view to this stroke of policy, now that the policy was revealed, and Dinah meekly and timidly submitted to Miss Donne's overwhelming generalship. On the morrow, with fluttering hearts, the conspiratresses met again, and shortly afterwards the guests began to arrive. The Reverend Walter Boyper, curate at St. Stephen the Martyr's; Miss Boyper, sister of the foregoing; Mr. Gimble, the 'arrant duffer' who before Miss Donne's time had played the organ at the Martyr's; Miss Wade, an elderly young lady of some private means, known to be a devout attendant at the services of the Martyr, and suspected of setting her cap at the bleating curate. All these came, but no John Keen. Mr. Keen was waited for and came not. Tea was served and finished and taken away. The curate sang

What the bee is to the floweret
when he seeks for honey dew,
What the bird is to the boweret,
That, my love, I'd be to you.

Miss Wade was understood to accept this as a delicate attention. Mr. Gimble, who was popularly accused of a hopeless passion for Miss Boyper, sang 'The Heart Bowed Down.' Miss Boyper in musical response declared that she would marry her own lad, her own lad, her own lad; that she would marry her own lad, for true of heart was she. Ethel sang two or three ballads, and Mrs. Donne with stiff country dignity sat with her hands crossed and her toes together, and was deliberately uncomfortable. No John Keen, and no word from him. Daniel, who was getting more frail every day, went to bed early; and the guests, taking this as a signal, began to leave. The summer dusk had settled into summer night, and Ethel had but lingered for a word or two of hope and encouragement to Dinah, when a rapid step came along the otherwise silent street, and paused before the door. Then the bell rang, and Dinah went herself to answer it.

'Is Miss Banks within?'

John Keen at last.

'Come in, Mr. Keen,' said Dinah tremulously; and John entered, fluent in apology.

'I have been away to Borton, Miss Banks,' said John, 'to a two−days' cricket match, and only found your note on my return ten minutes since. I ran up to say how very sorry I was to lose the opportunity your kind invitation gave me. I hope you have had a pleasant evening.'

'Quite a nice evening, thank you,' said Dinah, leading the way to the parlour. John with repeated excuses followed, and became on a sudden dumb at the sight of Miss Donne. That deceptive young woman arose with a smile, and shook hands with him. This was delicious, but so embarrassing, all things considered, as to be scarcely

bearable. He half recovered his voice in a while and murmured, 'Came to apologise and explain; sorry to miss the pleasure; trust to have another opportunity;' and then, being again routed, said 'good−night;' and turned to fly.

Ethel cast an appealing glance at Dinah.

'Pray don't think of going yet, Mr. Keen.' And she took his hat away and handed him a chair. John sat down in a miserable elysium, and Ethel began to talk to him. Mrs. Donne had some time since put a shawl over her head and walked into her own house next door, through the wicket−gate which connected the two back gardens; and the guests having departed, John and Ethel and Dinah were alone. Dinah took no share in the conversation, but sat and listened with mingled expectation and fear.

'By the way, Mr. Keen,' said Ethel rather abruptly, 'I want to make an appeal to your legal knowledge.'

'Yes,' said John.

'You read quite unbelievable things in books sometimes in novels, you know and the critics often laugh at books for the false ideas the writers have about law. Now, I want to know what would really be the punishment for stealing a certificate of marriage from a church register.'

'Well,' said John, 'I dare say a judge would make it depend very much upon the issues involved. I should fancy the punishment wouldn't in any case go under a couple of years, and it might under aggravated circumstances run up to twelve, fifteen, twenty.'

'So much?' asked Ethel with outward innocence. 'They wouldn't hang him?'

'Oh dear, no,' returned John.

The two women felt horribly guilty, and one looked it. Ethel tarried on her scheme with an excellence of mendacity for which nobody would have given her credit.

'And now, how would anybody really go about, in real life, to find a certificate that had been stolen?'

John was delighted to be questioned upon a topic of this sort.

'That depends,' he answered, 'on the date of the marriage. Nowadays, a man would be simply an ass for his trouble if he stole a church certificate of marriage.'

'Why?' asked Ethel almost too eagerly.

'Because,' said John, 'all the registrars' records are preserved at Somerset house. Suppose, now, that I wanted to prove a marriage, and some clumsy swindler stole the certificate, all I should have to do would be to go up to London, to Somerset house, and pay for a certificated copy of the register there kept.'

'That depends, you say, on the date of the marriage?' asked Ethel, as calmly as she could calmly enough for John to see nothing since he looked for nothing, but with enough disturbance to be seen by Dinah, who watched for it. Dinah's heart was well−nigh failing her.

'Well,' said John reflectively, 'any such crime would be quite futile if it attempted to hide a marriage which had taken place within the last thirty years. I am not certain that even earlier than that it might not be trouble wasted, but of the thirty years at least I am quite sure.'

Ethel looked across at Dinah, and that glance completed what the journey and the discovery of Monday, the suspense of Tuesday, and the disappointment of Wednesday had began and carried on. Dinah broke out crying. Ethel was by her side in an instant with consoling arms about her. John looked on helpless and astonished.

'Don't, dear, don't! Hush! hush! hush!'

'Oh my dear,' wept Dinah, 'no blessing 'll ever rest on anythin' got at i' that way. Oh my dear, it isn't right. I don't blame you, my dear, because I led you into it. You, as never spoke a word as wasn't true till now, an' me to lead you into such wicked make−believin'!'

'Hush! hush!' implored the exposed conspiratress.

John was more helpless and more astonished than before.

'What good,' sobbed Dinah, 'has ever come of my wicked hidin' of the truth? What good has ever come of it?'

'Control yourself,' whispered Ethel.

'My dear,' said Dinah, struggling to speak calmly, with indifferent success, 'it's been growin' on my mind for years an' years. It was 'wicked to hide it from Joe's father an' mother, an' it was wicked to hide it from mine. It's been a sin all along, an' now it's found me out. But I'll own the truth now, an' bear the blame, an' everybody shall know what a wicked woman I've been.'

John was more and more wonder−stricken.

'*You* a wicked woman, you suffering angel!' cried Ethel, folding Dinah's head to her bosom, and swaying it to and fro.

'I have been a wicked woman all along,' protested Dinah. 'But I'll lead nobody else into wickedness again. I'll tell the truth and bear the blame. Mr. Keen,' she said, lifting her tear−stained face from Ethel's bosom, 'I'll tell you everything, an' then you shall advise me for the best.'

'Not now; said John, recovering himself a little. 'Whatever you may have to tell me, Miss Banks, tell me at some future time, when you are less agitated and more mistress of yourself. I would very much rather' he went on in answer to the expression of her face 'I would very much rather not hear it now, whatever it may be. I should feel that your confidence had been surprised. Let me go away now, and if you see fit, send for me in the morning. If not,' he added rather vaguely 'let us forget all about it.'

Dinah would have laid hands upon him, and have told her story there and then, but Ethel held her firmly.

'Mr. Keen is quite right,' said Ethel; and John, with those approving words in his ears, made off. He was naturally much bewildered, although he, quite as strongly as Ethel, repudiated Dinah's self−accusations; and he slept none the more soundly for the curious scene he had witnessed.

Dinah after his departure exhibited an altogether new phase of character. She turned sullen and declined to listen to reason.

'I'll do what's right,' she said. 'Nothin' shall change me.'

'But, dear,' urged Ethel, 'we can get a copy of your marriage lines from Somerset House, now that we know they are there; and we can write to Mr. Bushell, or go to see him, and tell him what we know, and frighten him into

doing justice.'

'I'll do what's right,' Dinah sullenly declared. 'Nothin' shall change me.'

'By all means do what your conscience tells you; said Ethel, 'But it is surely not a matter of conscience with you to tell your private affairs to Mr. Keen.'

'I'll do what's right,' repeated Dinah. 'Nothin' shall change me.'

After this third declaration Ethel forebore to press her. Dinah, after all these years of self−repression, was in a mood to cry her secret from the house−tops, and she lay awake all night determining more and more to visit lawyer Keen in the morning and tell him everything. Whatever was done now should be done openly so she resolved. Merely to shield herself, she had let her child go without the knowledge of a mother's love; and she thought now, with what unavailing longing only a mother may rightly tell, how differently all might have gone had she been brave enough to own him as her own. She could see now that almost anybody could have enlightened her ignorance about her marriage lines; and if she could hut have used a mother's love and authority with the lad, she felt sure that he would have grown up to be a different creature. And since secrecy and deceit had brought things to their present evil pass, she would have no more of them. Let everything henceforth he open and above−board. Much as she felt herself shrink from public notice, she would rather that the whole world knew her story and talked about her, than have another secret to weigh her down, or endure the weight of the old one any longer.

Before Dinah could start with any hope of finding John Keen awake, Ethel came in again, and found the resolve of last night as strong as ever. All attempts to dissuade her were trouble thrown away, and in due time Dinah put on her things and went out, leaving Ethel behind, dissatisfied. Perhaps the dissatisfaction found root partly in the fact that John Keen was to he the recipient of Dinah's long−cherished secret, and that Ethel's own deceitful manoeuvre was to be exposed to him. She did not care greatly for Mr. Keen's opinion, hut she did not wish anybody to know that she could have found it in her nature to finesse and make pretences *in that treacherous way*. What would Mr. Keen think of her? How could he fail to see her as she was? a sly and cat−like creature who had every right to be ashamed of herself. Oh, how she had deceived him pretending that she had merely taken a case from a novel, while she questioned him with an air of indifference on an affair of such moment. And suppose lawyers took fees for advising people suppose he should fancy that she had attempted to defraud him of his fee!

When John came to hear the story, he was naturally a good deal astonished; but though he was a young man, he was accustomed to curious stories in the exercise of his profession, and he accepted this one with little sign of amazement. Dinah laid the case before him with trembling, and expected to be rebuked for all her wickedness; but the young lawyer faced it with a business air, and seemed to have no great belief in her surprising wickedness. He made notes clear and succinct in form, and bowed his visitor away with a manner somewhat preoccupied.

'I will let you know something about the matter in a day or two,' said John. 'It is not at all a complex case to deal with.'

Dinah felt as if she had been speaking to a statue, he took everything in so cool a way; but when she had gone, the lawyer threw his professional bearing aside, and travelled up and down his room, pausing every now and then with some exclamation of astonishment. He could afford to be astonished now that his new client was not looking at him; but he would not waste time about it.

'I shall have lots of time to wonder,' he said, 'as I go up to town.' With that reflection he began to pack; and on consulting a time−table, found himself in easy time for the London train. The railway station being at no great distance from his house, he himself carried his small portmanteau thither, and was whirled away to London;

arriving in time to drive straight to Somerset House, and secure a copy of the certificate of Dinah's marriage.

With this document in his possession he drove to Euston, booked for Birmingham, and before nightfall was settled in the smoky Midland capital. Thence he wrote to Dinah informing her of his first success, and in the morning he made for the country church in which the marriage had been solemnised. The sexton by this time was accustomed to the request John had to proffer. It was getting to be quite a usual and ordinary thing for strangers to turn up and pay him for a sight of the parish register. He received his new visitor, therefore, with calm satisfaction, and ushered him into the little vestry with the air of a man who is about his common business. John, with the certificated copy before him, turned to the missing page, and found there the root of the stolen leaf.

'Who cut out this page?' he asked quietly but suddenly, and fixed a penetrating eye upon the sexton.

'Eh?' said that small official. If he were guilty of any share in the matter, he was a cool hand indeed.

'A page has been stolen from this register,' said John, tapping at the book. 'It has been stolen within the last six or seven months.' It was easy to guess that. Whilst the marriage remained a secret, nobody was likely to steal the entry. 'Who has had access to this book since then?'

'Who's seen the book, d'ye mean?' asked the sexton. 'Why, two ladies as was here t'other day, and a gentleman as was here some weeks back.'

'Should you know the gentleman again?'

'Surely I should!' the man answered.

'Are you busy? Can you come with me if I pay you for your trouble for an hour or two?' John demanded.

'I ain't particular busy,' said the sexton. 'But what might you want me to do?'

'Wait a moment. Now try to remember very clearly. Did you leave that gentleman alone at all?'

'No, I didn't,' said the sexton stoutly. He saw a chance of being got into trouble, and he made his denial with considerable emphasis. To John Keen's perception he rather overdid it.

'What, not to get a glass of beer?' asked John, at a venture. He put that query to the sexton with a look so knowing that the poor man quailed, and capitulated surlily.

'Well, there ain't no harm in that, as far as I know.'

'We shall know more about that by−and−by,' said John. 'Don't try to deceive me any more.' Beneath the legal glance the sexton cowered. 'How long did you leave him alone with this register?'

'Why, not above a matter of five minutes.'

'You left a stranger alone with a church register for five minutes, did you?' asked John severely. 'Now, I am a lawyer, and unless you behave yourself to my satisfaction you may get into trouble, Are you busy to−day?'

'No, sir; not particular.'

'Then lock these things up and come with me.'

The man obeyed, but paused at the church porch to ask

'What might you want me to do, sir?'

'I want to see if you can recognise the man whom you left alone with the register.'

'I should know him among ten thousand,' said the sexton.

'I suppose,' said John, 'you know how to hold your tongue when it is to your own interest!' The sexton nodded gloomily. 'Then, until I authorise you to speak, be quiet, will you?' The man nodded gloomily again, and it was clear that he was perturbed. 'I shall pay you for your time and trouble,' said. John, relenting a little. 'And now come along!'

And John set out with the sexton beside him in pursuit of old George Bushell.

Chapter 21.

When dawn began to broaden through the blinds of the double−bedded room, old George, looking woefully worn and lined, sat up on his elbow and looked across at his *protégé*, who slumbered peacefully with his mouth open and his eyelids and nose still a little inflamed by the heat and salt of tears. Christian forgiveness and benevolence never wore a guise in which they looked less like themselves than they did in old George's case that morning. With his fluffy grey hair tumbled loose about his head, his eyes shrunken small, his wooden features puckered into corners and sharp edges, and his flannel night−gown opened at his throat, he sat and surveyed the object of his charity and shook his fist at him. The young man being evidently very sound asleep, the elder arose and began to dress with great quiet, having it in his mind to avoid a renewal of the terror of last night. lie dared not go upon his knees again just yet. In a mouth or two, perhaps, when his wickedness was less fresh upon him, he might try to pray, and might fairly expect to be excused, but not then. So he prowled about like an ugly and dishevelled ghost on tiptoe, and having washed and dressed with extreme quiet, he put on his hat, unlocked the bedroom door, and went out silently. Then, having closed the door behind him, he began to knock at it loudly with his knuckles, and hearing a sleepy 'Who's there?' he entered again.

'Good morning, sir,' said the other criminal shamefacedly.

'Good mornin', Mr. Banks,' answered the old man. 'It's time you was stirrin', ain't it?'

The youngster obediently got out of bed and dressed, fumbling unwontedly with his garments, and confused by the wooden watchfulness of his companion. When, in accordance with his own resolves and his promise to the chaplain, he knelt by his bedside, his thoughts were so full of a comfortless appreciation of the fact that Mr. Bushell was staring hard at the back of his head, that he did not even cast about for a form of words, but, having knelt for a decent space, arose and completed his toilet.

It was yet barely five o'clock, and there was nobody but themselves stirring in the hotel. Mr. Bushell finding time as heavy on his hands now as when he had lain tossing and tumbling in bed, naturally began to think the late estate better than the present, and regretted that he had awakened his charge so soon. He sat down by the window and pretended to read at a big hotel Bible which he took from the top of the chest of drawers, casting furtive glances at young George now and again. The released one sat constrainedly doing nothing, and wishing himself with all his soul at sea, and safely out of his benefactor's society. He had had no idea that Mr. Bushell was a man of such rigid religious practice as he seemed to be, but his beliefs in that gentleman were undergoing, or had indeed undergone, a remarkable change. Furtively he looked across at him and wondered. Where was there in his face a sign of that amazing tenderness he had shown? There was no such sign visible to the furtive watcher's eyes.

If there had been in young George's mind the faintest ground for any suspicion of an interested motive, he would have leapt to that standing−place at once, and have refused to take any other, however plausible it might appear. But there was nothing of the kind, and he was lost in amazement and gratitude, though, in the midst of all his thankfulness, he was growing more and more resolved about the Melbourne question. He pretended to himself to hold that question open, but he knew that he was quite decided, and that the expectant Nally and Tulson would look for him in vain. Yet he was full of good resolves, and was profoundly convinced of the necessity which lay upon him to be honest in the future. He was going to be more than honest he was going to he devout, but this one crooked step was necessary to enable hint to enter upon the straight path. Then, being once within it, he would never, never, never deviate any more.

Thus benefactor and *protégé* sat together, each busily engaged in the hoodwinking of his own soul, until the sound of footsteps in the corridors, the calling of voices and clapping of doors, bespoke the house alive again, and they adjourned to their private sitting−room together. There the old man ordered breakfast, and by way of maintaining his character, murmured a clumsy grace above it, which sounded, even in the repentant gaol−bird's ears, as though it were unhabitual. Breakfast, for which neither of the two had any great appetite, being finished, Mr. Bushell called for his bill and paid it, saw young George into a four−wheeler, and his luggage placed on top, and himself entering, was driven to the docks. On the way thither he drew out a fattish pocket−book, which young George had twice or thrice seen before, and producing from it a bundle of bank−notes, he began to thumb them carefully over, whilst the watcher's heart beat with a fluttering expectancy.

'Count them,' said the Christian benefactor, handing the bundle across.

Young George with nervous fingers told them off. Twenty ten−pound Bank of England notes. It was an amazing relief to have them m his hands, though, curious as it may seem, it was only then that the fear occurred to him that his benevolent rescuer might have remitted the money to Messrs. Nally and Tulson of Melbourne.

'What do you make 'em?' asked Mr. Bushell.

'Two hundred pounds, sir,' said the other tremblingly.

'Now don't let's have no moor snivellin',' said old George, rather brutally. He was afraid of being noticed, and at the bare thought of encountering anybody known to him he shivered, and a premonition of that dreadful swimming in the head came back upon him. 'Put 'em in your pocket,' he continued. 'Theer's what I promised you, an' now you're provided for.'

Young George obeyed like a man a dream. Even yet he was not used to it.

'Now, Mr. Banks,' said the old man, leaning forward and drawling loudly as the four−wheeler jolted along the cobbled pavement of the street, 'I want you to understand as that ain't the last help you'll receive from me if you deserve it. The world's afore you, an' I look to you to do well. You'll be wise to give all your past acquaintance in this country the go−by, and remind nobody of your crime. If I hear good accounts of you, I shall do my best to influence your father to overlook your offence, but you'll be wise not to attempt to write to him until I advise you. D'ye hear?'

'I will follow your advice, sir, in all things,' said young George faintly.

'Theer's nobody,' so the old man cogitated, 'as he's likely to write to, left i' the place.' Daniel had gone, no man seemed to know whither. John Keen had faded out of sight. So had Ethel and Dinah. And young George was certainly ignorant of their whereabouts? It might be as well to test that.

'You know as Mr. Banks has sold the Saracen, don't you?' he asked.

'I didn't know it, sir,' answered George with downcast eyes.

'Him an' your sister' he had boggled at the word, be had 'mother' so strongly in his mind 'an' the folks at Quarrymoor, have all gone away together, nobody knows wheer. But ' (remembering that this scarcely agreed with his promise) 'I shall try to find your father, and persuade him to soften to you a bit, if I hear good news of you.'

The young criminal began to think. If his father cut him off and that was likely enough, Dinah would inherit whatever there was. Dinah had always been very fond of him, and was not the sort of woman to cheat a brother of his rights, lie did her so much credit, and he began to see that there was hope, after all. *She* would not be influenced by Mr. Bushell, and it would be easy to find her. She could not have gone away and have left no trace behind..

The released convict did not weep any more, and his companion, though he was relieved by that fact, had upon him a contradictory feeling that the young man ought to have been moved anew by his last evidence of trust and kindness. The noise and bustle of the docks were a great trial to Mr. Bushell, for he saw in every stranger a possible acquaintance, and the danger of detection seemed imminent and terrible. He rushed young George aboard ship, therefore, and went down with him into the saloon, where he began to feel feverish with suspense and fear.

'I'll mek efforts,' he whispered behind his hand, 'to find out 'wheer your folks are, and theer's no manner of doubt I shall ha' found 'em afore you get to Melbourne.'

'It will be a long search, else,' said young George to himself drearily and with an inside reproach.

'If you want to write to them, send through me, an' I'll find means to for'ard your cause.'

'Thank you,' said young George chokily. 'Good−bye, old England!' he thought. He was going away a rescued felon, disgraced and disowned, and only (of all his friends) the man he had injured clung to him.

The steward approached.

'Better get ashore, now, Sir.'

'Good−bye,' said the old scoundrel, 'an' God bless you! You'll be met at Melbourne. They'll know the ship you're coming by.

'I shall send 'em a message by wire.'

'Good−bye, sir,' said the younger rogue.

Old George gave a limp hand to him, and hurried ashore. Dreading to be recognised, yet afraid to leave until he had seen the last of his *protégé*, lest even now some stroke of fortune should prevent him from going, he lingered on the quay. At eleven o'clock to the minute, the splendid ocean−going steamer began to move; slowly and heavily she forged ahead; and old George, seeing his young namesake now on deck, ran alongside puffing and panting until she cleared the dock−gate and steamed majestically down the river. There was a great crowd about him, and hats and handkerchiefs were waving on the steamer and on the quay, and land and water alike sent out a cheer. Hurrah and good−bye from quay to deck and deck to quay. Hurrah! Good−bye! Hurrah! In a while all went quiet, and old George walked away a free man. The certificate destroyed, the wicked Rightful Heir for ever banished, what had he to fear? He put that problem to himself a hundred times, and he always answered, 'Nothing,' though there was a dread within him which would not be appeased.

'What is theer for me to be afraid on? ' he asked himself, and always answered, 'Nothing.'

But the voice inside said, 'Everything. The whole world−wide chapter of accident. Any and every little wind of chance. Me your conscience!'

And as poor old George's evil fortune would have it, the very next Sunday morning, when he went to church, the incumbent at Trinity preached from this text:

'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

So Joe Bushell's son was following with a difference in the steps of his father, and leaving England and hearts he had made sore behind him. He was free free to go where he would, and carve out his fortune with the lessons of the past behind him. Whatever came to pass in the future, he would at least be honest. He went down from the saloon deck to the saloon, and asked for a small bottle of champagne, for he felt badly shaken and needed a reviver. After that he was not going to be extravagant, but he could afford five−shillings' worth of delight and self−gratulation after all he had endured. The wine, at his request, was poured into a big soda−water glass, and as he held it and watched the beaded bubbles winking at the brim, his heart sent up a bubble or two of joy to his eyes; and as he sipped, things looked dim and blurred to him, seen through those thin tears, he sipped his wine and thought. It was necessary to escape at Queenstown if he meant to evade Messrs. Nally and Tulson at all. Very well but was it necessary to sacrifice his luggage? That would be a pity, and would be ungrateful into the bargain. The two portmanteaus were in his state−room, but the big chest was on deck waiting to be lowered into the hold. He finished his wine, walked out, and looked at it. So far, it bore no distinguishing mark for in the rush and hurry of his preparations, the painting of name or initials had been forgotten. George thought that fortunate. 'George Banks' was not a good name to go through the world with, after what had happened to the holder of it; and though he was registered under that title in the list of the ship's passengers, he decided that this was the last time he would bear it, Whilst he stood looking dreamily at the chest and cogitating, a sailor precipitated his thoughts into sudden form for action by preparing to hale away the trunk towards the open hold.

'Steady, there!' said George. 'Don't stow that away yet.'

'Ain't this for Melbourne?' asked the man.

'I am not yet certain,' young George said, rehearsing this final necessary lie of his upon the seaman before trying it elsewhere, 'I am booked for Melbourne, but until I reach Queenstown I can not tell whether or not I shall have to forfeit my passage−money.'

'That's rather awkward, sir, ain't it?' said the man good humouredly.

'Yes,' said George condescendingly. 'How long do we stay at Queenstown?'

'Eight hours, sir,' the man answered.

'Dear me!' said George; 'no more than that? I may have to stay in Queenstown for the next ship. You had better leave it out.'

'I'll put it in last thing, sir,' said the man, 'so that you can get at it easy. But there's no name on it.'

In a pocket of the suit of clothes he wore the very suit in which he had been arrested George had a card−case, and producing this, he drew forth a card and saw the man tack it on to the chest. Then he marched away to find the captain. They were in the Irish Channel by this time, and having lovely weather and smooth water. The first bustle of departure was over, and the captain was at leisure to advise a first−class passenger.

'Just before leaving my hotel to come aboard this morning,' said George, 'I received a telegram instructing me to call at Queenstown, and in a certain eventuality to remain there to await new instructions. In case I have to stay and to follow by the next vessel, will it be competent for me to recover my passage−money or any part of it?'

'The company's agent will see about that at Queenstown,' said the captain. 'But,' with suave politeness, 'I trust you won't have to leave us?'

'I trust not,' said young George. 'How long do we stay at Queenstown?'

'Eight hours, sir,' said the captain.

'That,' said George, carrying on his comedy, and doing his best to make it look lifelike, 'is a very short time.'

'We move along, nowadays,' said the captain with a cheerful laugh.

'You do indeed,' said George. 'This is a very fine boat.'

'Anything else I can tell you?' asked the captain, finding himself summoned by his first officer.

'Nothing, thank you,' answered George, and so they parted mutually satisfied. 'A free man again! a free man again!' the champagne sang through all his pulses. A free man again, and not a soul to suspect him here. The lie had prospered. It sounded natural enough why should it not prosper? Who was to guess that he broke a compact with the only friend he had in all the world, by not going on to Melbourne? He talked to his fellow−passengers about it what a nuisance it was, this probability of his having to stay in Queenstown and they took an interest in the case, and had arguments about the probabilities and non−probabilities of a recovery of the passage−money, until George himself began to be interested in the matter too, and half−believed his own tale. He grew almost pathetic in his laments to a middle−aged lady with whom he fell into talk on the saloon−deck.

'I had hoped,' he said, 'to pick up health a little on the voyage. I have been longing for the sea for a month past.'

That was true enough, but the middle−aged lady would have been a little astonished if she had had shown to her the where and when of the longing.

'You do not enjoy good health?' said the lady.

'I do when I get it,' said George with chastened gaiety, and the lady was so complaisant as to smile. 'But I am only newly recovered from a fever. Had to shave my head; said George with quite a fine−gentleman manner, 'and strap me down. Imagined all sorts of horrors, don't you know, and was really dreadfully ill,'

With suchlike scraps of imaginative autobiography did our youthful traveller beguile time and the middle−aged lady until the call to dinner. He already felt himself again, and if his gaiety was sometimes a little tremulous, what else could be looked for in a man be pallid a poor fellow only recently recovered from a most prostrating illness? He declared on deck again in the evening that the sea−air was already doing him a world of good after the close confinement of his sick room; and probably it was. His regrets about the sacrifice of the voyage, even for a week or two, were almost affecting. He had such a longing for the sea, and had so looked forward to it, and now, poor thing, his hopes were dashed. It is certain that if he had continued the voyage as he began it, the ladies at least would have petted him prodigiously. A well−set broad−shouldered young fellow, with a handsome figure and a face by no means unhandsome, a pleasant tenor voice, a look and tone approaching to the look and tone of culture a released felon, yes, but once Ethel Donne's chosen husband. Quite a taking young person, and almost in hysteric spirits just then, as might have been predicted of him, considering the circumstances.

He went ashore at Queenstown, and came back with regret painted visibly upon his pale and interesting countenance. His instructions had not arrived, and he was compelled to stay behind until the despatch of the next vessel. People quite condoled with him, and said 'good−bye' in the friendliest and most regretful manner, considering the brevity of their acquaintance with him. His luggage was put ashore, and the captain gave him instructions as to the best way of going about to obtain a consideration for his lost passage−money in the next vessel of the same line, and even wrote a note introducing him to the Queenstown agent of the firm. The young gentleman tore his card from the top of his trunk and extracted the tacks. He had his portmanteaus painted with the initials 'G. C.,' and his big chest painted 'Mr. George Cheston.' He got cards engraved and printed with the name of Mr. George Cheston, and he shipped himself by the very earliest vessel to New York. And then, when be stood upon the vessel's deck and passed from Queenstown Harbour, he felt himself doubly free free of the old crime and folly, free of the name associated with it. The past was wiped out.

Ban, ban, caliban!
Have a new name and be a new man!

On the Atlantic voyage he made new friends under his new name the name was the best he could think of gentlemanly, but not too swellish, and represented, as we know, by an honourable family in his own district. His hair grew, his moustache was rapidly approaching its normal fascinating droop and curl, and his cheeks had recovered their colour, before the ship's look−out sighted Sandy Hook. And how about his spiritual condition? Well, perhaps that was not altogether satisfactory even to the young man himself. A certain number of lies were necessary, of course. Or rather, let us deal gently with him, and call them not lies, but visionary circumstances called into being by the exigencies of the case, and employed necessarily as a background and plot to stand on for the new figure which now filled the place of George Banks in the scheme of the world. Grant that, under the conditions in which he was placed, a strict veracity would have been quixotic, and that a little new colour was excusable. The mischief is that when a man turns artist in that direction, he loses his sense of strict necessity, and seldom pauses at its boundaries. In brief, young George's lies were more than equal to the circumstances, and, led away by his new name, he had gone so far as to ask one or two people to give him a look−up at his brother's place in Staffordshire Sir Sydney's place Worley Hall. 'Dear old Syd' so the good−natured youngster was satisfied to call him would be delighted to see any friend who had known him in America.

This newly−discovered relationship with a wealthy English baronet made it necessary, if only for the dignity of the family, that the traveller should put up at a first−rate hotel. One or two of his travelling comrades were doing the same thing, and advised him to follow in their steps. He was knocking about for his health, and thought of taking a run across the prairies, and seeing if he couldn't get picked up in that way. And so, fairly afloat on the pleasant rapids once again, he glided along quite gaily, with his laugh the briefest crackle of thorns, poor fool!

New York, like other places, is pleasant to men who have leisure and money. Our young friend engaged much in games of mingled chance and skill, and prospered so amazingly with the not very skilful but moneyed young Englishmen who had voyaged out with him, that his funds increased for the first month in spite of extravagances. But when at length they continued their travels and left him behind, he did begin to think seriously about making a living.

So many people already knew him in New York, that he could not possibly descend from his social pedestal in that city, and he felt that he must go farther afield. But whilst he considered what it would be best to do, he hung on at the big hotel, where he amused himself by night at pool on an English table, and pretty generally won at it. One evening, before the usual party had assembled, a grave−looking man of middle are strolled in, and asked for a drink and a cigar. Being provided, the grave−looking man sat down and smoked peacefully, and now and then sipped at his liquor through a straw. George had seen the new−corner at *table d'hôte*, but had never exchanged a word with him. The middle−aged man sat at one end of the table, and George at the other, and until now they had never encountered.

'It's a fine evening, sir,' said George in Ins pleasant tenor voice, as he lounged resplendent on a settee facing the grave man's seat.

'That is so, sir,' said the grave man.

'I suppose,' said the friendly George, 'that your climate is pretty severe here in the winter time.'

'Well, yes,' returned the other. 'That is so.'

George offered one or two other remarks of the same sort, and the two were gliding into talk, when some of the habitual pool−players came in and the game began. The grave man sat awhile and watched, until he had finished his drink and smoked out his cigar, when he arose and went away. Next afternoon George came across him again as he was leaning over the balcony with a cigar in his mouth and his hat tilted forward.

'Beautiful day,' said the young English aristocrat. The grave stranger tilted his hat back, nodded seriously at George, flicked the ash from the end of his cigar, and went on smoking. By−and−by he spoke.

'You are not long away from England, I believe, sir?'

'Not quite half a year,' said George. That day seven weeks he had said farewell to the Chaplain. But there was no need to tell the stranger *that*.

'I hope,' said the other with a singular mild gravity of face and voice, 'that you won't charge me with eaves−dropping, but I heard you talking last night with those young gentlemen at the billiard−table. You mentioned a place at home that I used to know very well when I was a lad.'

'Indeed?' said young George carelessly. He fluttered a little at this, and flourished a scented handkerchief about his face to hide a momentary confusion. 'You are an Englishman?'

'Yes,' said the stranger with the same mild gravity; 'a South Stafford man.'

'Indeed?' said George again, and blew his nose with violence.

'Excuse me for asking,' said the stranger, 'but I've been away now for a quarter of a century or thereabouts, and that's a long time. Has Worley Hall changed hands?'

'Oh dear, no,' answered George.

Excuse me for asking again,' pursued the strange?, 'but I heard you speaking of your place, Worley Hall in Staffordshire, and I didn't catch your name. Since the old place is in the same hands, I needn't ask it. You're a Cheston, of course.' There the stranger's mild gravity gave way to a smile, and the smile was pleasant and inviting.

'My name is Cheston,' said young George, with an approach to hauteur in his voice and manner.

'So Sydney got married, did he?' said the stranger.

'Sir Sydney is my brother,' replied young George.

'Eh?' said the stranger with a new smile. 'Did the old boy marry again? I beg your pardon. But I should have thought you too old for that.'

'My father remarried comparatively late in life,' said George, feeling very ill at ease under this examination.

'Now, I should have thought,' resumed his companion, regarding him with candid friendly eyes, 'that you were six−and−twenty at the least. And you can't be more than three−and−twenty, at that rate.'

'That is my age,' said George stiffly. Had he been the man he pretended to be, there was nothing in the stranger's manner at which he would or could have taken offence. Of course there are ways and ways of asking questions, but the grave man's way was provocative of trust, genial and frank, though always tinged, even when he smiled, with a look which no man ever wore whose life had not been crossed by some very considerable trouble.

'I dare say,' said the stranger, 'that you've heard Sir Sydney speak of me. He was the last man I shook hands with on leaving England. Allow me to offer you my card. My name's Bushell Joseph Bushell. Your brother and I were at school together, and were great chums years ago.'

George perforce took the proffered card and produced one of his own. 'Mr. George Cheston, Worley Hall, Staffordshire.' He felt singularly ill at ease, and would rather not have met an old friend of his brother's, though of course it was difficult to say so.

'Thank you,' said the newly−made acquaintance with tranquil heartiness, 'thank you. It does a man good to meet a face that comes out of the old country, You won't mind my asking you will you? come and dine with me to−night, quietly. We'll go to Delmonico's and have a room to ourselves, and a good dinner and a good talk. Will you?'

'Thanks,' said the impostor, 'I am pledged for to−night.'

'Well, say to−morrow night. Come to my room now, if you've nothing else to do, and have a smoke and a talk and a glass of wine. Do!'

There was nothing else to be done, and the long−lost Joe haled off his old chum's brother to his own sitting−room and there began to pump him. But first the impostor, desperately, feeling it needful to clear the ground a little for himself and to carry the thing off with a good air, put one or two questions to him.

'I think,' he said, crossing his legs negligently, and speaking with a society drawl, very well managed on the whole, 'that I have heard Syd speak of you. You're a nephew of old George Bushell's, the great mine proprietor?'

'He wasn't a great mine proprietor in my time,' said Joe, gravely smiling again, 'but he was my uncle. He's alive?'

'Oh yes,' said George, somewhat recovering his ease. 'I know the old boy well.'

'His brother Joe, my father,' asked Joe 'Is he alive?'

'No,' returned George, rather startled by this question. 'I've heard he died before I was born. You didn't know that?'

'No,' said the other gravely. 'I didn't know it.'

'You bolted?' said George, growing more and more inured to the situation.

'Yes,' said Joe Bushell. 'I ran away from home.'

'You lost a pot of money by it,' said George easily. 'I've heard Syd say that your governor left your Uncle George a quarter of a million.'

'So much as that?' said Joe quietly. 'Well, I'm glad Uncle George had it. He was a good old fellow was Uncle George.' He sighed inwardly and murmured to himself; 'Poor old dad!'

'Eh?' said George.

'Nothing. There are great changes in the place, I suppose?'

'Great changes. Town Hall and Free Library in the High Street. Two or three new banks. The place grows, sir, rapidly.'

'Ah! No doubt no doubt. Great changes great changes.'

His drooping head crushed his brown beard upon his breast, and his voice fell again into a murmur as he repeated, 'Great changes.'

Chapter 22.

There was a memory somewhere for Joe Bushel! in the face of his new acquaintance Mr. George Cheston, his old companion's younger brother a suggestion which touched him curiously, perplexing him the while. It was not a memory of Cheston, for the young man was not like Cheston in the least. Was it ? no Hang it! *What* was it? They could never have met before, of course, and yet Joe was certain that he had seen the face somewhere. The fact was that the young scoundrel was unworthily like his mother, and that it was his resemblance to her which at once attracted and puzzled his father. Joe felt, but could not trace the likeness could not identify it with anybody; but his heart warmed to the youngster.

'And so,' he said, 'my uncle's a great mine−owner, is he?'

'One of the richest men in the district,' said George, puffing away at one of his host's cigars. 'This is good tobacco.' He was not going to be over−interested in the conversation, having a general notion that a gentleman born and bred ought to be really interested in nothing which does not concern himself. Not to admire was all the art he knew.

'I suppose he's still a bachelor?'

'Quite superior to feminine blandishments, I fancy,' said George. 'One couldn't fancy him making love under any sort of circumstances.'

'No,' said Joe, lingering on the word. 'I suppose not. Has everybody quite given me up for dead on that side the water, do you know?' He put this question with a short laugh which had no merriment in it, whatever other feeling might be there.

'Well,' answered George, casting himself luxuriously back in his chair and blowing a lazy cloud, 'I'm almost inclined to think they have. Syd has, I know.'

'It was an odd old place, as I remember it,' said Joe after a little pause. 'There used to be a lot of queer buildings about gables and dormer windows, and so on. I suppose that's all changed?'

'Yes,' said George, his mind recurring to the Saracen, of whose altered condition he was of course unconscious. His companion struck his very thought.

'Their notions of an hotel in that part of the world used to be primitive,' said Joe, approaching the ground he wanted to get at with great caution. 'I suppose they haven't got to this pitch even yet?' waving his hand abroad as he spoke.

'Not exactly,' George replied.

'The Saracen's Head was one of the oldest of those places in my time,' said Joe with apparent carelessness. 'Do you know it?'

George was blowing his nose again, and looked up a little flushed, perhaps by the violence of the exertion.

'I beg pardon?'

'The Saracen's Head,' said Joe again. 'Is it standing yet?'

'The Saracen?' said George with counterfeited reverie. 'The Saracen?'

Joe helped him to the topographical lines, and added:

'Old Sir Sydney, your father, always pulled up there for a glass of home−brewed when he rode over to the petty sessions, Wednesdays and Saturdays.'

'Ah, yes! I know it now,' said George with a creditably realistic air of sudden remembrance. 'Syd calls there sometimes in the same way. Yes, yes. I know it. Of course.' Before he had become altogether too grand a young man, he had indeed served with his own hands that glass of home−brewed the genial baronet loved. He bore the unexpected turn the talk had taken with great *sang−froid*, after the first inquiry had been made and answered.

'I used to be there a good deal myself,' said Joe, 'when I was a youngster. They had the first billiard−table there that ever was introduced to that part of the world. Old Banks used to keep it Daniel Banks. I suppose he's gone too?'

'I fancy not,' said George. 'I believe he has retired. Some family troubles, I think I heard.'

He felt his coolness under fire to be creditable to him.

'Family troubles?' asked Joe.

'I don't know, I'm sure; George answered, yawning a little, as if the conversation bored him. But his companion was casting about in his mind how to get further, and the by−play was lost upon him.

'When I was a lad,' said Joe, hardening his heart for the leap, 'I used to think old Daniel's daughter the prettiest girl in the world. You don't know whom she married, do you?'

'Married?' said George, thrown off his guard for a second.

'Yes,' answered the other 'married.'

'You don't mean ? Confound it what's the woman's name? Dinah?'

'Yes, I do,' returned Joe. 'She married two−or three−and−twenty years ago.'

'I'll be hanged if she did,' said George with well−bred langour. 'She's an old maid.'

'What?' cried Joe. Then moderating his voice and manner, 'my uncle wrote and told me she was married, if I'm not mistaken.'

'Twasn't true, if he did,' said George, yawning outright this time.

'I think you must be mistaken,' said Joe. 'You must be.'

'Sure I'm not,' said George, casting his arms abroad and gaping lazily.

'But you scarcely remembered the house just now?'

'I remember it well enough now you call it to mind,' said George, recovering from his yawn. 'Syd used to call there, and he was a little sweet on Dinah, too, in a quiet sort of way. No harm in it, you know, for I believe she's always been a deuced good sort of woman religious, you know; that sort of thing.' And the aristocratic youth yawned again, stretching forth his arms with luxurious abandonment. Perhaps, had his companion had a reason for watching, he might have caught a tone of tremor in the young rascal's voice, and have thought the want of interest overdone.

'Not married!' said Joe in a bewildered way. 'Then why the deuce should my uncle George have said she was?'

'Made a mistake, I suppose,' said George, more languid and fine−gentlemanlike than ever. 'Tell you what makes me so sure about it. Day I left Liverpool I met old Bushell beg your pardon mean your uncle, you know and he told me, just as a scrap of local news, that old Banks had retired, and that he and Miss Banks what's her name? Dinah had gone away and left the place.'

Joe had *his* reasons for the disguise of emotion too. George, in his cunning, thought he saw it all. Joe Bushell and his sister would be contemporaries, and it was quite likely that young Joe had been in love with her. His uncle George had probably invented the fiction of the marriage to prevent young Joe from making a bad match. It was not easy for him to think that a man so forgiving and generous could have told the lie in order to secure a hold of young Joe's fortune. It came easy to him to think ill of people as a rule, but he could not yet think any great evil of his benefactor.

And as for Joe himself, he had cherished in his own heart so long the memory of Uncle George's ancient kindness that it was almost impossible to begin a new estimate of the man at this time of day. When he was friendless and alone, his uncle had sought him out and had given him a hundred pounds a generous gift a sum not lightly to be given away by anybody to a mere runaway young rascal of a nephew. Why should he have written to tell him that Dinah Banks had married?

'She was a very pretty girl,' said Joe, clearing his throat with difficulty. 'I should have thought she'd have had heaps of chances.'

'Ye−es,' returned George, rising and strolling to a window. 'I think I've heard so. But she's a middle−aged woman now, you know, and rather out of my line. I'm told Syd used rather to rave about her.'

Faithful to him! Faithful to him after all, through all these heavy years! It would have gone ill with errant Joe indeed, if there had been no heartache in the thought.

It is worth noticing, as a fact in the constitution of humanity at large, that whether I do my duty well or ill, or howsoever you do yours or leave it undone, we both alike expect the outer world to do *its* duty, to be faithful in the performance of its promises, and long−suffering in respect to injury, and generally to act up to a standard which we acknowledge to be beyond our reach. And, in like fashion, Joe had felt keenly at the time that Dinah might have waited a little longer. He acknowledged his own unworthiness with constant and deep abasement, but she might have been worthier. Out of that mood he had grown into excuses for her and explanations, and he had found a self−tormenting pleasure in thinking of her as a married woman with her family growing up about her, and himself a mere dim remembrance in her wind.

It had not all gone smoothly with the callow−whiskered, blue−eyed, foolish lad who left home in so undignified and unmanly a fashion so many years ago.

Nobody ever told a story completely not even a Chinese dramatist. For on every character in any story the influences of a whole world are pouring every day, and the most painstaking of chroniclers must let some things be taken for granted. I cannot do more than indicate young Joe's history here. If you want to appreciate the outer changes which have come upon him, think of the alterations time lies worked on any young fellow you may have known five−and−twenty years ago. A lithe figure grown set, a figure but an eagle's talon in the waist grown portly, a smooth face lined and bearded, an open brow corrugated, locks crisp and curled and golden turned to a darker shade and streaked with grey, and maybe a little thinned at top. Young Joe, whose folly was the fount and origin of this history, has lost his claim to the distinctive epithet, and is young no more.

I have never sought to conceal from myself my opinion of his conduct. He acted badly, criminally, like a fool. I know it. I admit it. But there are men whose failings we condone, whose follies we forgive, whose sins we pity. Let young Joe be of them. He was sinned against as well as sinning. Women who read this story will probably be hard upon him in their judgments and will be right, beyond a doubt. But many years of poverty and remorse are in themselves hard judgment on a man; and he had suffered, as you and I do when we misbehave ourselves; and had grown wiser and better, as you and I sometimes fail to do.

The long−errant Joe has sinned and suffered and amended. Let us take him back again to friendship.

The story of a wild, disjointed life such as he had lived most of these years of absence would hardly pay for telling here. He did a hundred things for a living, and throve at none of them, until he got a berth aboard a river steamer, and after two or three years became a river pilot. Then, having in the course of two or three years more saved a little money, he went westward to Frisco, and there started a store in partnership with another Englishman, who was loud at morning, noon, and night with denunciations of American dishonesty. When they had made a nice little pile together, this true−born Briton took advantage of a fever from which his partner suffered, and realising the whole estate, he fled, taking ship for Hong−Kong, and leaving Joe behind him, friendless, delirious with fever, and without one cent to chink against another. At this terrible juncture turned up a boarded ruffian, by name MacKane, who by way of giving his own life−history the lie, nursed the stranger through his fever, and saw him beck to health again. MacKane had money, and thought well to invest it. He trusted Joe at sight, after the curious manner of his kind, and the two started a store on the old lines Joe finding knowledge of the business, and MacKane providing the stock. The two throve amazingly in their business, and went in for land−jobbing with equal success. Then MacKane, who was a noble fellow but a confirmed rowdy, fell sick of a revolver bullet and died, bequeathing everything to his partner. And so from small things to big, and from big to bigger, progressed Joe Bushell, and he was now here in New York to arrange the sale of a considerable property in a western town on the great Pacific line; a man firmly established on a broad business bottom, and highly respected by all who knew him first for his dollars (dollars provide the shortest cut to judgment), and next for his sterling and blameless private character.

He had quite made up his mind to end his days in the country of his adoption, and was resigned to see England no more. But this most strange news of Dinah put all his resolutions out of joint. He could see now that be was in

reality a thousand times as criminal as he had thought himself, self−condemning as his thoughts had always been. Not happy, not forgetful, not married and comforted by the love of children, but living to a cold and long−since widowed middle age. Ah! that made a difference. He tried to picture her as she would be after so long a space; hut could do nothing but recall her as she said, 'No, Joe, no; you couldn't have the heart to leave me!' And then again: 'Go, and God bless you, my own dear, dear, ever dearest Joe!' And then again: 'Will you let me keep my marriage lines?' His last failure towards her! And then the waving hand, the tear−soiled face, the pretty figure in white muslin, and the demurely coquettish straw hat! He heard and saw again, though it was all so old and far away.

Meantime, as Joe sat unconsciously smoking, with the voice of his youth's wife in his ears and her form in his eyes, his visitor stood at the window congratulating himself, in spite of a faint conscientious qualm, on the success of his assumption of his character. It was an odd chance which had thrown him into the company of a relative of his late employer; but the association was not likely to last long, and might be turned to some advantage while it lasted. For Joe, though five−and−twenty years since a runaway from home, had now a look of solid and settled prosperity, and his being in this swell hotel at all argued him fairly well−to−do. These Bushels had a knack of making money; and this was one, so George argued naturally enough, would scarcely have spoken lightly of that lost quarter of a million, unless he himself had been well provided for. When a man is able to say of so vast a sum, 'I am glad somebody else has it,' because somebody else is a good fellow, it argues prosperity on his own part.

Joe, emerging from his reflections, broke in upon this reverie.

'When do you think of going back to England, Mr. Cheston?'

'Well, I am not at all decided,' said George, turning round upon him. 'I've been thinking of getting on for the prairies, or perhaps of seeing what sport the Dominion has to show.'

'What do you say to a run across to San Francisco?' asked Joe. 'I'm settled there, and I'm thinking of taking a run over to the old country after going home to set things straight. Will you come across with me? You'll get a good view of the continent, and we can make a stay here and there if you like. I am not in any hurry, and I'm so pleased at meeting a man from the old place that I shall really take it as a favour if you'll come.'

'Why, thank you,' said the impostor; 'you're very kind. I should like the journey amazingly.' The magnitude of the hotel bill had begun to frighten him. At the rate at which he was going, his resources would not last long.

So the thing was settled, and, whilst Joe waited for the arrangement of his business in New York, the two saw a good deal of each other. The prosperous trader was free with his money, and whatever they did together he paid for an arrangement which met George's views to a hair, though he made a conventional−propriety struggle in pretence of a desire to disturb it now and then. When Joe had known old Sir Sydney and his son, the family had not been wealthy, and he liked the young fellow none the less that he did not seem quite reckless in his expenditure. A man who took a liking for people readily, Joe soon bred a fancy for his companion, and was never weary of talking with him about the old place, and the people he had known. He gave the young man an insight into his own experiences, and told him candidly of his first hard struggles in the land of his adoption; and he played, in short, the part of guide, philosopher, and friend to him.

They had known each other for a fortnight or thereabouts, when Joe turned upon the youngster and said:

'Look here, Cheston. I can ask a favour of your brother's brother, I know, and I am going to do it.'

'Certainly,' said young George, not quite in comfort. Was Bushell not so well−to−do as he had thought him?

'I've told you already that I have an idea of running over to England. As you say, everybody no doubt thinks me dead and done for; but I want to have a look at the old place, and I don't want it to be talked about. You needn't tell anybody that you met me here when you go back again. You can tell Syd, if you like' he had fallen into George's way of speaking of his old friend 'and I think it's more than likely I shall call upon him. But when a fellow's been away as long as I have, there's a sort of shamefacedness about going back again, and I'd rather that nobody knew anything about it. I dare say it's a bit sentimental, but you won't say anything about me, will you?'

'Decidedly not, since yon wish me not to,' returned George.

'I'm not in a in a downright hurry,' Joe continued, 'and I have a good many things to see to before I can start.' He was curiously reluctant to go back, and yet he felt that he could not help himself. To return to Dinah and offer her the fag−end of his life seemed base and cruel. She thought him dead. Let her think him so. It would be brutal to disturb her peace again at this late hour. And, even if he went at all, he longed for some companionship, however slight, some living tie with the home he had deserted. 'Do you think we can manage to go back together?'

'In how long?' asked George.

'Well, when you like, in reason,' Joe answered. 'Say I shall be able to start in three months' time: would that suit you?'

'Yes, I think so,' said George. It would be easy to dodge the fellow at the finish, and three months was a lift, certainly. If he could only rely upon a part of it, it would be something. 'That will suit me very well.'

'We could go to Syd together,' Joe suggested.

'Yes, of course,' replied George, with an inside vacuum at the fancy.

Matters being thus arranged, and Joe's business being shortly afterwards prosperously settled, they paid their bills making a considerable inroad on George's reserves and took the cars. They broke the journey here and there, and made it last them three weeks from start to finish. From the hour of leaving New York, Joe took upon himself the part of host, and insisted upon paying for everything. George could scarcely disguise the shock to his feelings which the bill at the great hotel afforded; and Joe, observing his discomfiture at that moment, was resolute in not permitting him to spend a dollar anywhere upon their joint expenses. This was comfortable; but, like other conditions in life, George found that his association with Mr. Joseph Bushell had its drawbacks. Joe made him keep a diary of his journey for Sir Sydney's perusal, and was always badgering George to write to him, and giving him messages, and pledging him to pledge dear old Syd to secrecy. And at last, on reaching San Francisco, Joe took the matter into his own hands.

'I say, Cheston, about that letter you're always promising to write to Syd. Do it now, there's a good fellow. Come now, here's a pen, ink, and paper. We'll arrange what to say about our meeting, and about my going over to England.'

'Leave a fellow alone a little while after dinner,' said George.

'I notice,' said Joe seriously, 'that you're a dilatory fellow, Cheston. Now I mean it in a friendly way, I assure you that's bad. Procrastination is one of the worst habits a young fellow can form. Come, now.'

He stood with a pen in one hand inviting George to come forward, and after a moment's pause secured obedience.

'Here,' said George, taking the pen and seating himself, 'tell a fellow what to say.' He feigned a little touch of sulkiness to hide his embarrassment.

'Very well,' said Joe. 'Put down the date and all that; now, My dear Syd, or My dear Brother, or however you write to him.'

' My dear old Syd, ' said George, sulkily writing.

'Very well. My dear old Syd, I have the very strangest news to give you. I am writing this letter under the roof of an old schoolfellow and friend of yours, Joe Bushell. I found him out almost by accident in New York. I told him that you had long since given him up for dead and buried. He was awfully glad to see a face from the old country, and especially a brother of yours. He was immensely surprised to learn who I was, and had no idea that the governor had married a second time. He has prospered very much out here, and thinks of running over with me to England, so that you must expect to see us both together. You will remember the circumstances under which he left home, and will understand what I am now about to ask. Pray say nothing about his projected visit. He is just coming over to see old places and one old friend yourself. He does not intend to make himself known to anybody else. He desires me to put this to you with all needful strength, and of course in saying that I have said more than enough. He sends his most friendly regards. I will advise you of the probable time of our arrival. All that down?'

'Yes,' said George, 'it's all down.'

'Very well, now you can go on with your own affairs.'

'Oh, that's enough for a letter,' cried the young man with an air of disgusted fatigue; 'I hate letter−writing.'

'All right,' said Joe. 'Close up as soon as you like.'

'I am,' murmured George, scrawling away, ' my dear old Syd, your affectionate brother, George.

'Here's an envelope: address it,' said Joe, almost hilarious in manner. He was thinking of Dinah all the time, thinking with much bitter self−upbraiding, and it needed some bustle to keep his heart up.

' Sir Sydney Cheston, Bart., murmured George, as he dashed off the address in a sprawling and unclerkly hand, ' Worley Hall, Staffordshire, England. '

'That's right; said Joe, pulling at the bell. 'Post that at once,' he said, handing the letter to the maid who entered in answer to the summons. 'And now,' he cried, throwing himself into a chair and looking across at George, with a face of resolve, 'I'm bound to go. I wanted to go, and I couldn't make my mind up; and now I've done it, because a promise is a promise, and the thing's arranged.'

The actual writer of the letter was not quite at ease, but he consoled himself with the reflection that Sir Sydney Cheston's amazement in Staffordshire could not greatly affect him in the United States. George wasn't going back to England, if he knew it. He sat half listening to his host's anticipations and plans, halt−thinking out his own scheme for dropping his host at the right point. He was fully made up on that easily−decided question of going back to England. The fear of recognition was multiplied there a thousandfold; here it was minimised. And, besides that, America was undoubtedly a better place to get on in than England.

But, in spite of these excellent reasons for avoiding England, he was doomed to go there; and a chain of events, which may be very briefly summarised, dragged him thither with a force beyond all his powers of resistance. First link: in the absence of his host at business, young George went gambling. Second link: he lost, and was absolutely cleaned out. Third: he was compelled by Joe's discovery to admit the truth. Fourth: Joe paid for his passage by the cars to New York, and for his passage by the steamer to Liverpool; and detecting an extraordinary and inexplicable desire on the young man's part to cut and run, be watched him like a hen with one chicken, and

gave him no opportunity for escape.

So they landed in Liverpool together; and behold, whilst Joe was looking after the luggage, young George made a bolt with a solitary portmanteau, which belonged not to himself but to his host; and Joe, to his amazement and chagrin, was left to face Great Britain alone. He was both mortified and bewildered, for it did not yet occur to him that his chance acquaintance was a pretender. He decided at last that his old chum Cheston kept a tight band upon this younger brother, and that the lad was afraid to face him after his American extravagances.

'But he must have thought poorly of me,' said Joe, a little bitterly, 'to fancy that I should split upon him.'

Chapter 23.

The terrible text ate deep into old George's heart; but remorse is not penitence, and he suffered all the unholy pangs of the one, and had none of the blessed pains of the other. He was not even safe from detection; and it is possible that if he had been, the fires of conscience would have burned less dreadfully. He was getting to he old, and, what with his troubles and advancing age, he began to suffer pains and disabilities which were hard to hear. Eating and drinking used to be pleasant, and were so no longer. To a stupid man like old George it is hard to lose the pleasures of the table; much harder than for another who has sources of enjoyment outside the range of the coarser senses. He had been used to work hard and to sleep soundly, and now work had no relish and night no rest worth talking of. Altogether, his road was thorny and full of fears.

Things went on for two or three weeks in pretty much the old fashion, when one day, as he sat alone in his private room, pipe in month, staring at the fire, a knock came to the outer door, and a minute later his housekeeper followed her own tap, and came in with a visiting−card pinched between finger and thumb in a corner of her apron.

'A gentleman to see you, sir,' said Mrs. Bullus.

'Show him in,' said the old man, and took the card uninterestedly. It fell from his fingers as he read 'Mr. John Keen, Solicitor, Wrethedale.'

He groped darkly on the floor to recover it, and seemed to grope darkly in his own mind to discover a meaning for it. John Keen entered; and the old man, still feeling blindly for the card, looked up at him, with a face reddened by stooping, and lack−lustre eyes.

'Good day, Mr. Bushell,' said John, with formal politeness.

George ceased his blind search for the card and sat up, breathing somewhat thickly.

'Good day, Mr. Keen. Take a chair. To what am I indebted ?'

'I do not suppose you will find me a welcome visitor, Mr. Bushell, when you know my business. You may remember a statement made to you with regard to the identity of your late private secretary.'

'Eh?' said old George. 'Say that again!'

'On the day on which you gave George Banks into custody,' said John, slowly and distinctly, 'you received a visit from the lady who was supposed to be his sister.' Old George said nothing, not having it in him to say anything just then; but he glared at his visitor with fish−like eyes, in which there was no speculation. 'She told you the real nature of the relationship between them, and you professed to disbelieve her.'

'I said it was a pack o' lies,' said the miserable old rascal, 'an' I say so now.'

'Very well, Mr. Bushell,' said John, business−like. 'I am a lawyer, as you know. I am engaged by Mrs. Joseph Bushell to proceed against you for the recovery of her rights, and I am in a position to prove her claim. Here,' said John, producing a pocketbook and leisurely opening it, 'is a copy of the certificate of marriage between your nephew Joseph and Miss Dinah Banks, solemnised at Waston Church. Whatever property your brother Joseph possessed at his death was, in the absence of her husband, legally hers, and is still legally hers. There is no difficulty in the world, as to the completeness of the proof, and I should advise you to make a judicious surrender!'

'Oh!' said old George with a heavy jeer, though his heart was muffled and his head was whirling, 'you'd advise me to mek a judicious surrender, would you? That ain't cool at all, that ain't. Is it? Oh, dear me, no!'

'Mr. Bushell,' said John, copying a line from poor dear Sir Roger's torturer−in−chief, 'perhaps you would be surprised to hear that the original certificate of the marriage has been stolen from the register at Waston Church?' The old man's jaw dropped; he laid a hand on each arm of his chair, and made as if to rise; but his limbs refused to obey him, his face turned purple, and the veins in his temple stood out like cords. 'Excuse me for a moment,' said John, and, rising, he opened the door. 'Come this way,' he called to some one outside.

The sexton entered, twirling his hat in both hands, and looking amazingly uncomfortable.

'Is this the gentleman who came to Waston Church a week or two ago, and asked to look at the register of marriages?'

'That's the gentleman, sir,' said the sexton.

'Is this the gentleman who gave you a shilling to drink with? the gentleman whom you left alone in the vestry whilst you went out to get a pint of beer?'

'Yes, sir,' said the sexton; 'that's the gentleman, sir.'

'It's a pack o' lies!' cried the wretched old man, struggling to his feet. 'As sure as there's a heaven above us, I never set eyes o' the man afore in all my born days. I'll tek my oath on it.' A judgment? A sudden judgment from the Heaven be had invoked so wickedly? His head swam round and round; he felt with wandering hands for a support, and found none; there were splashes of alternate ink and fire in the silver mist which shut out everything about him; his muffled heart strove to beat as if the struggle would burst it. But he was desperate despite these fears. 'I swear it,' he stammered, groping blindly. 'It's a pack o' lies!'

He had only time once more to feel, with an access of his pains and terrors, that he had anew defied the threatened judgment, when down he went with a crash, striking the back of his head against the fender. John fell upon him, dragged him on to the hearthrug, tore off his stock, and, with one nervous effort, ripped his shirt open from collar to waistband. The old man had been drinking again; and the lawyer, seeing a carafe of water on the table, seized it, and began vigorously to splash at George's face.

'Ring the bell,' he said to the sexton. The man, who was horrified at the result of his identification of old George, fumbled at the bell−pull for nearly half a minute before he could command his trembling fingers, when he rang such a peal as brought the housekeeper in with a rush and an excited whirl of petticoats. 'Your master has fallen down in a fit,' said John, still dashing water into the unconscious face. 'Send for a doctor, without a minute's loss of time.'

Mrs. Bullus rushed from the room, screaming 'Jane!' and, the maid appearing, despatched her, with a flea in her ear. Jane fled weeping and breathless, and by good hap being recognised by the medical man was followed by him. For what with breathlessness and the terror and resentment inspired by the housekeeper's unprovoked assault upon her, the maid was speechless. The doctor appeared, somewhat winded, for he was a man of rather pursy habit, and unused to the display of pedestrian power.

'Hillo, Keen!' he gasped. 'You here? What's the matter?' He was kneeling by old George's unconscious figure before the question was answered.

'I brought him very disturbing private news,' said John, kneeling beside the surgeon and speaking in a low tone, 'and he has had a fit over it.'

'We must get him to bed,' said the surgeon; and by his orders a sheet was procured and with some difficulty got under old George's solidly made frame. John Keen lifted at one side and the sexton at the other. The surgeon took the patient's head and the housekeeper his legs, and in this order they stumbled up−stairs with him, and laid him down. Then all but the surgeon and the housekeeper waited without to know the skilled man's verdict, and by−and−by it came. Whether severe or slight the doctor was not yet certain; but there was concussion of the brain, and old George would see to no business, howsoever important, for a while to come.

'I suppose I needn't tell you,' said John to the sexton, 'that it will be a great deal wiser in you to hold your tongue than to talk about these things.'

'*I* shan't say nothink,' replied the sexton.

John had no other reason for secrecy than his desire to keep Dinah's name out of the public mouth; but his caution was not wasted on the sexton, who was more than a little timid as to the possible result of his own share in the matter. When once the young lawyer had written to Dinah, apprising her of Mr. Bushell's sudden illness and its result of delay, he found time hang heavily on his hands. He had no desire to encounter any of his old acquaintances just then, so he went into Birmingham, and putting up at an hotel there, awaited the doctor's decisive opinion on the case. He blamed himself for the precipitancy with which he had brought old George to bay, and told himself that he might much more reasonably have explained the evidence to him. In short, like other people, he felt wiser after the event than he had been before it.

Two or three days went by, and the doctor was not sanguine. Mr. Bushell had no relatives to consult and the medical man, acting on his own initiative, brought in a great physician from the neighbouring great town. The physician was no more sanguine than the surgeon; and, after lingering for a week, John went back to Wrethedale, leaving instructions with the surgeon to wire to him in case of any decisive alteration either way. Being arrived at home, he hastened to inform Dinah of his return, and she called upon him within an hour of her receipt of his message. He laid her marriage certificate in her hands, and explained the whole result of his journey. Dinah turned pale and shook a little as she read through the document, but she did not say much.

'It was a pity I didn't know o' this before, Mr. Keen.' That was all.

'A great pity,' said John, commiserating all her troubles. 'But there is no doubt of your legal title to the property, and no doubt that you will get it.'

She took the certificate home and showed it to Ethel, who kissed her for sole congratulation. It was not easy for Ethel to congratulate Dinah upon anything yet, though she read the mother's heart and sympathised with her. The days went on, and no decisive news came of old George's state. John learned that he had recovered partial consciousness, and that he seemed to have a half−memory of the fact that some trouble had befallen him. But out of this state, so the doctor's letters said, he had slipped back again into complete oblivion, and it was, and would

be for a long time to come, impossible to rouse him to the discussion of any affairs, howsoever important they might be. The doctor's letters, indeed, though cautiously expressed, seemed to lead to the conclusion that old George would never attend to business any more. In course of time that view was partly disproved, but for the present there was nothing to do but wait. The criminal's sentence had more than half its time to run, and before he could be freed it was ten to one the matter would be decided in some way.

So on that side affairs necessarily stood over. Far away in New York the released convict had encountered his father, and had gone away to San Francisco with him, and had returned to England against his will with him, and had finally deserted him at Liverpool before old George was fit to be spoken to, or had clearly recalled to mind the cause of the mischief which had come upon him.

Never in his life had Joe Bushell felt so forlorn as when he stood alone, after the lapse of more than five−and−twenty years, on English soil; not even when for the first time the sense of conscious loneliness descended on him aboard ship. There were resolves in him then, and high hope, and he was going, in spite of all failings and follies behind him, to be a man, and to make a home for Dinah. And how had he fulfilled the promise? how clung to the hope? Bitter questions, that brought sad answers in an echo How?

He had made a fortune; not so much as he had left behind, not a fourth part so much, perhaps, yet still a fair handful of money: and of what use was it to him? He ought to have known better than to believe in that story of Dinah's marriage. He ought to have returned to England he ought never to have left home he ought to have acted like a man, and not like a cad and a coward.

There are few of us who have not played the fool, few of us who have nothing to confess, nothing of which to be absolved by devout penitence, nothing to have scourged out of us by human forgiveness. But there are not many of us who for a quarter of a century have crushed a heart that ought to have been happy. And Joe was a good−hearted fellow, kindly and gentle, always ready to do a kindness, and never, in spite of youth's hot blood, willing to damage anybody. He had begged pardon of the Reverend Paul in his heart a thousand times, and of his old chum Cheston. And as for Dinah, she had been to him, notwithstanding her light forgetfulness, something quite outside the sphere of common things and common people. He had never fallen in love again, and had lived apart from her in such chastity as few men very few have a right to boast of. There was some selfish comfort there, perhaps. If he could get a sight of her, only for a moment, and could breathe to his own heart the words, 'I have been as faithful ell these years to your remembrance as you have been to mine,' it might have something of a balm in it for the sore future which he saw before him. But, look at it as he might, life seemed a poor business. Tragedy, and folly, end common place! Commonplace, folly, and tragedy!

So he stood like an alien on English ground, and wished himself back in his Western home again. Yet, being where he was, he must go on and fulfil his purpose. He wrote from an hotel in Liverpool that night to Cheston, saying nothing yet of Master George's desertion of him, and without waiting for an answer, he started.

I have left you to fancy Sir Sydney Cheston's sensations on reading the letter of his *soi−disant* brother. Cheston's imagination, never very vivid, left him helpless at this time, and he was at first unable to conceive any possible circumstances under which it could have been written.

'What the dickens ?' he began, and stopped again, feeling like the famous American unequal to the occasion. 'Who the deuce ?' he began again, and again he failed. 'Why in the name of !' There was nothing big enough to conjure with in a case like this. It was the most bewildering and amazing thing he had ever met with in his lifetime. 'My dear old Syd!' and 'your affectionate brother, George!' The audacity of the confounded thing! Who ever heard the like? And all on a sudden he leaped at something very like the truth. Was Joe Bushell alive after all, and had he met some impostor out there who was trading on a good name, and who professed to be a brother of his? Weeks went by, and he heard no more of the matter until he received Joe's letter, when he instantly end impetuously wired to Liverpool and followed his telegram. But his old friend had started before the telegram was

despatched, and the two had a day at cross purposes. The returned exile, leaving his traps at a Birmingham hotel, drove over to his friend's house, and learned from the butler that Sir Sydney had gone to Liverpool. Cheston about the same time found that Joe had left his hotel and had taken train for Birmingham. There was nothing for either of them but to turn back again, Joe leaving his temporary address in the butler's hands.

Everything leads to something, and the baronet's impetuous rush hastened matters in relation to this history. John Keen was staying in the same hotel with the returned wanderer. Neither of them had ever seen the other, and neither had the thinnest ghost of an idea of the other's importance to him. John had received intelligence of a revival in old George, and was bent on taking advantage of it, if that were possible.

The two were alone, at the fall of a dismal and rainy evening, seated at extreme distance from each other in a big coffee−room, when in burst a man who glared round in the dusk of the place and went out again.

'I beg pardon,' said the stranger, rising and advancing a step towards John Keen. 'Can you tell me if that was Sir Sydney Cheston?'

'It was,' said John; and the stranger made a dash after the baronet.

'Chesten!' he shouted down the corridor.

Back came the impetuous Cheston.

'Who's that?'

'Don't you know me?' asked the wanderer.

'Let's have a look at you,' cried the baronet, dragging him to a window. 'By gad, it is you, after all! Bushell, old man, I'm glad to see you. Confound it all, I am glad. Why, Joe, old boy, we'd given you up for dead this five−and−twenty years. Where have you sprung from? Got a private room? I should have known you anywhere! anywhere! You're deuced little changed deuced little. Have you dined? Where's the bell? Well, I am glad to see you.'

Shaking hands the while, Cheston shouted this welcome at top of his cheery voice. Joe's eyes were a little dim and his throat was husky.

'It does a fellow's heart good,' said Joe, 'to see an old face again. How are you?'

All this was in John Keen's hearing, and the young lawyer sat like one petrified. Here, then, was the wicked wanderer back again! John had his theories, like other people; and, from the moment when Dinah had completed her story, he had made up his mind about errant Joe. There was no doubt in his mind that young George got the black patch in his heart from his father. A better woman than Dinah, John confessed that he had never known. He would and could believe no ill of her; but he had a great faith in breed, and he believed that out of an honest father and mother came honest children, and no other. Thus Dinah being in John's eyes a paragon of womanly virtues, and her son being an arrant rascal, it was necessary to suppose that the lad inherited his villany from his father. And the father had undoubtedly been a bad lot. He had left his wife widowed all this time, had never written to her, never troubled his head about her, and, after inveigling her into a secret marriage to begin with, he had with low cunning carried away her marriage lines, and left her to bear the burden of a most undeserved and bitter shame.

So John Keen, when the first shock of amazement was over, made no ado about the matter, but, rising in cold wrath, he walked quietly along the room and tapped Joe on the shoulder.

'Forgive me, Sir Sydney, for interrupting this meeting with au old friend.'

'Hillo, Keen!' said Cheston. 'Didn't see you. How are you? See you in an hour or two. I'm engaged just now.'

'One moment,' said John. 'Are you,' turning to Joe, 'the son of Joseph Bushell and the nephew of George Bushell?'

'I am,' said Joe, speaking somewhat hardly, since he recognised hostility in the questioner's tone.

'You ran away from home in eighteen−fifty?'

'I did; said Joe. 'What then?'

'I have something for your private ear, sir, which I will trouble you to listen to at your earliest convenience.'

Cheston stared from one to the other.

'May I ask you who you are, and what your business is?' inquired Joe, taking measure of his man through the dusk of the rainy evening.

'My name is John Keen, and I am a solicitor. I reside at Wrethedale, the town to which (as perhaps you know) Daniel Banks and his daughter Dinah have retired.'

'Cheston,' said Joe, looking a little grey, 'there's something in this something that I ought to know at once. You know this gentleman?' indicated John.

'Perfectly,' said the troubled Cheston, still staring from one to the other. 'But what the dickens is it all about, Bushell?'

'That I have to learn,' Joe answered. 'Wait a moment.' He crossed the room, rung the bell, and returned. 'How long,' he demanded of John, 'will it take you to make your communication?'

'Ten minutes,' said John in answer.

'Very well,' said Joe: and at that moment the waiter entered. 'Waiter, show this gentleman to a private room,' pointing to Cheston. 'And, Cheston, you'll order dinner, won't you? Let it be a good one,' he said with ill−assumed vivacity. 'Here! We'll leave it with the waiter. Get the best dinner you can as soon as you can. You'll excuse me for ten minutes, won't you?'

'Certainly,' said the Baronet, with his welcome and jollity somehow chilled within him. 'I'll go into the smoking−room. You'll find me there.'

'Very good,' said Joe. 'Dinner for two in a private room. Have a fire and make things cheerful. Plenty of candles. No gas. And get a good dinner, and be sharp about it. Now, sir, I am at your service. This way, if you please.'

John followed, and Joe led the way into his bedroom. There he lit the gas, started a cigar, motioned John to a chair, and waited for him. He read enmity in the young man's manner, and was at a loss at present for the ground of it.

'A few months back,' began John, 'I was made the repository of a secret. A lady for whom I entertain a profound respect came to me, and on very weighty grounds confessed that the name she bore was not her own, and that she was not, as everybody who knew her supposed her to be, a single woman, but had long been married, and that the

young man who passed as her brother was her son.'

Joe's cigar went out, and he arose with a trembling hand to relight it. John went on.

'The lady's husband had deserted her it is no business of mine to express an opinion on the case, and I will deal only with the facts a few months after marriage, and had promised, on their parting, to send her the certificate of their marriage. He never sent it. She was ignorant of the world, and knew nothing of the law. She believed that the want of the certificate illegitimised her child and annulled her marriage. Her mother shared in that belief and entered into a pious fraud with her by which, as they both supposed, the lady's honour would be saved. The child was bred as the child of his grandparents, and was brought up in ignorance of his father's existence.'

Joe's cigar was out again, but he made no effort to relight it.

'In time the boy's grandmother supposed by all except her daughter to be his mother died, and his mother, unable to claim or exert more than a sister's influence end authority, endured supreme unhappiness. The boy went to the bad, not at once, but gradually. He is at this hour ' Incensed as he was against the deserter of his wife, John needed all his heart to launch the blow. Joe's fictitious gaiety about the dinner had hardened him, and his knowledge of the bitter and undeserved agonies poor Dinah had endured, made the loyal−hearted young lawyer almost pitiless to the man before him. And yet, Joe was not like an unfeeling scoundrel; and if ever a bronzed and handsome face looked troubled in the world, so did the face John looked at. Yet it was his clear duty to tell the tale at once, and bring this man home to a sense of his responsibilities. So he tried back and struck straight out. After a lengthy pause 'He is, at this hour in prison for forgery!'

'My God!' cried Joe with a groan. This was his first news of the birth of his son, and it need scarcely be said that it was terrible. The agony in his voice hit the lawyer hard; but he went on sternly, spurred by his partisanship for the suffering woman and his anger at the husband's base neglect.

'He was engaged,' said John, 'as Mr. George Bushell's private secretary, and he signed the name George Bushell to a cheque for three hundred pounds. Had he known it, he was legally entitled to the name, and his mother was entitled to the money.'

'Did he know it?' Joe asked almost wildly. There was a gleam of light there.

'No,' answered John. 'He did not know it. But when the news of his arrest came to his mother's ears, she made an appeal to the prosecutor. She laid bare to him the secret of the prisoner's birth, and implored him not to send one of his own flesh and blood to prison and disgrace. He drove her from his house insultingly, and refused credence to her story. The young man was tried, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Eleven months of that term, or nearly, have yet to expire.'

'My God!' Joe groaned again, and burst on a sudden into weeping so wild and passionate that John was dumb before him. The punishment had come home, then home. He he deserved it all, and more than all; and yet it was not his to bear, but hers. He *had* loved her, he *had* loved her. And this was what the white accusing unaccusing face had meant as it haunted his memory all these years. The little, innocent, gay maid harmless, as harmless as a dove, as unfitted to fight the world as a dove to fight with hawks and he had left her to this terrible fate! Incredible cruelty and baseness!

The storm raged itself out at last, and he arose from his knees.

'Tell me,' he said brokenly, 'whatever else there is to tell.'

John spoke again, but in a changed voice.

'Your wife confided her secret to one living creature only a young lady to whom your son was engaged to be married before the discovery of his crime.'

The listener groaned anew, and once more John paused.

'Go on,' said Joe; 'go on.'

'Her friend advised her that the loss of the certificate was no bar to her right to whatever property her husband's father had died possessed of; and for the sake of her son to save him from future temptation and misery she determined to attempt to establish her claim. As a first step she went to Waston Church, and discovered that the register of her marriage had been abstracted.'

'Abstracted?'

'Abstracted; stolen. Suspicion fell upon Mr. George Bushell, as the only person who had known the secret of the marriage, and the only person except your wife and son who was interested in it. It was discovered that he had been to the church to examine the register that he had sent out the sexton with a gift of a shilling to get a drink of beer and I confronted him with the sexton. Before he had fairly heard the charge, he cried out that he had never seen the man before, and fell down in a fit, from the effects of which he has not yet recovered. His illness has stayed proceedings on our part, and your arrival may alter the complexion of things altogether. Mrs. Bushell, your wife, is strongly averse to any prosecution of Mr. George Bushell, and I do not think that any legal proceedings would have been necessary, in any case. As a matter of fact, we had hold enough upon him without having recourse to the law.'

'My father,' said Joe, looking up with an awful face, 'made no will.'

'He made no will, and in your absence his brother inherited everything. That has been a matter of common talk ever since I can remember.'

'And my son is in gaol?'

'Yes.'

'Mr. Keen!'

'Yes.'

'Do me a favour. Dine with Cheston. Tell him everything. The people tell me he is a magistrate. You can advise together. Are there any means of mitigating the sentence? We might compel my uncle to join in an appeal to the authorities. Talk it over with Cheston. I will join you in an hour or two. Will you do this?'

'I will do what I can,' said John.

Joe opened the door, and John Keen walked out of the room. His opinion of the runaway husband was not yet changed, but it was shaken. And whilst he dined with Sir Sydney, and to that genial man's amazement, told the tale in full, Joe was kneeling in his own chamber, weeping, with such repentant and atoning tears as most men God be thanked for it! have never had the need to shed.

Chapter 24.

I have said before, though without any special originality, that even a worm will turn. Young George found his companion's watchful and friendly benevolence intolerable. Escape became a necessity, and he fled. He was conscious of some meanness in it, and he knew that his promises of an amended life had scarcely been fulfilled. But then, all along, circumstances had been against him. The change of destination and the change of name had been essentials, and ,who could have foreseen the dangers they carried in their train? Not he. There was no comfort in the rogue's reflections on the reception Sir Sydney Cheston would be likely to give his guest, or on the questions which would be asked, and the answers which would perforce be given. For young George was one of those who liked to stand well in the general opinion, and he was keenly sensitive to opinions adverse to himself even when he was out of the way of them. To do him full justice, he thought what an ass he had been to gamble. Euchre and poker were not his form; he knew next to nothing about them; and if ever he played again at any game of mingled chance and skill, it should not be in a game in which he was a learner. And now, to get away from that importunate companion of his, he had been compelled to sacrifice his luggage, and had secured in exchange for it only a single portmanteau, the contents of which would probably be useless to him.

A day or two before the voyage ended, George had approached his travelling companion.

'I say, Bushell,' he had said, with a certain air of graceful regret and reluctance, 'you've acted like a brick to me, and I'm quite ashamed, you know, to ask you for anything more. But old Syd is a pretty tough customer for a younger brother to deal with, and if I have to go to him for coin directly I get home I shall have a wigging. I don't mind that so much, but he's a good fellow is Syd, and I don't want to vex him. Would you mind letting me have a tenner, just to be able to sport a little money in front of him till I can square myself again?'

'Of course, of course,' said Joe; and produced a hundred−dollar bill, which George got cashed by the steward. So that, in spite of extravagances, he was not quite forlorn when he bolted from Joe's overwhelming benevolence.

He did not care about going to any first−rate hostel here, lest Joe should find him again; and so he went to a third−or fourth−rate house, and lay there *perdu* for a time until the coast should be clear. Then he took train for Newcastle, and hung about for a day or two, making faint efforts to obtain employment. These were attended with such ill results, in the way of inquiry after references and the like, that he gave them up in disdain. His little stock of money dwindled and dwindled. He was in debt at the house he stayed at beyond his means of paying, end, being unreasonably bothered for his bill, he took a high tone with the landlord, and assured him with a lofty air that he was troubling the wrong sort of man, that the remittances he expected would inevitably reach him on the morrow, and that he young George would never again use the landlord's house in any future visits he might make to the town. The landlord half suspicious, but half imposed on consented to wait yet another day; and young George, surmising that in all probability the remittances were already at the bank, whilst his letters had been somehow delayed, went out to see, and forgot to go back again. Joe Bushell's portmanteau and its contents scarcely paid the landlord; hut they consoled him partly, and young George went upon his way. From Newcastle−on−Tyne to Durham, to begin with. Whilst his money lasted, he was not the man to deny himself; so he ate a fair dinner, and even indulged in the luxury of a bottle of wine. Then, on the morrow, he discharged his bill, seeing no way to leave the house without having first gone through that ceremony, and, being nearly cleaned out by this time and in a mood of some depression, he marched out of the town on foot. In a while, the weather clearing and the sun shining out with gaiety, his mood also cleared, and he went along with a sense of exhilaration. He fed at a little wayside public−house, and left the people impressed with the grandeur of his manners and his affability. He wandered on, without aim or prospect, sometimes in absurd good spirits, sometimes gloomy. Days went by, and his last copper was gone; his shirt−cuffs and collar had grown more than equivocal in aspect; his beard had effected a stubbly growth; his clothes seemed all the worse for their good origin, in their dustiness and seediness: his boots began to give way, and he was sinking fast into an abject look which suited his condition. But as yet no very terrible physical troubles had been encountered. The weather was

mild and fine unusually so for the season of the year; and be wandered on in a dull contentment, crossed only now and then with a sense of the coming miseries and the wickedness and folly of the past. He was really hungry, for the first time in his life: and nearing a town, ho retired behind a haystack, took off his waistcoat, rolled it up into a bundle, buttoned his coat, and ran the waistcoat in at mine uncle's. It realised two shillings; and on this he supped, slept, and breakfasted. In the next town an old slop−seller make a bargain with him four shillings and a patched workman's suit for coat and trousers, a cloth cap and a shilling for his bat. The five shillings lasted him a day, and he went on aimless and at ease. A day later he landed at the workhouse.

Now, this was something of a blow for him; but he got a certain mental luxury out of it, notwithstanding. When he walked into the police station, he was pleased at the look of inquiry his demand for workhouse relief extorted from the accustomed official at the desk. It was a tribute to his gentility. Many a gentleman had come to this condition before. Why not again in his case? He felt a certain stoicism, too, which seemed to do him credit under the circumstances. There was that curious self−deceptive sense in him which is perhaps only the property of the born pretender; and it was so distinct that he felt an absolute pride in flaunting before the accustomed official eyes the poverty of one so evidently cultured and well−bred. He was audience as well as dramatist and player, and the situation was certainly singular.

Yet, when he had answered the official inquiries, had received his ticket, and got into the street again, he seemed to feel that everybody knew he was going to the workhouse, and he found that sensation oppressive. The policeman had directed him thither, and the road was plain enough; but he dodged about bystreets to avoid observation until he lost the way, and had to ask anew to be directed. He chose to put the question to an old woman; and she in answer raised her hands and said, 'Eh, dear me!' before she gave him the information he needed. That pleased him too, though it was not altogether pleasant. He was evidently a gentleman, or the old woman would not have been astonished.

I have felt over and over again a sort of baseness in telling this young man's story. Can a writer, any more than other people, touch pitch and not be defiled? But let me task your impatience and control my own a little further. I shall have pointed a moral with him before I have done, though he may scarcely have served to adorn a tale.

The gates of the workhouse were vast and prison−like, and they reminded him of recent experiences. After some looking up and down, he found an iron bell−pull and tugged at it with a result so astounding in the way of noise that he was borne down by the exigence of his own summons, and felt abashed when an angry porter came out of a small door round a projecting buttress, and demanded with some asperity to know what the row was about. George tendered his ticket almost with meekness; but when the porter made further objections to the disturbance of workhouse tranquillity, the reduced nobleman began to take a haughty air with him.

'I beg your pardon, I am sure; said George, in the most aristocratic−sounding drawl he could command. 'This is my first experience in this line. I shall probably learn bettah by−and−by.'

'Let me see,' said the porter, with his head on one side and his hands in his pockets. 'When was you here last? Jannywerry, I think. Yes; it was Jannywerry.'

George surveyed this vulgarly suspicious person with calm scorn, answered his questions with all possible brevity, and followed him into the casual ward like Charles the First on his way to execution so tranquil his contempt, so resigned his martyrdom.

In the casual ward were already a dozen wayfarers, sitting listlessly on benches near the wall. They looked up when the new−comer entered, and looked down again; and never a word they said, until the porter had disappeared, when one began to sing an unrefined ditty of Moll and Meg, unmeet for ladies. Now, our young nobleman, *Astrea redux*, had never been particular to a shade of morals in a song until now; but be spoke out, after a while, with a very effective drawl

'Don't you think you might sing that blackguard song to yourself, if you *must* sing it?'

They all looked up again at this interruption, and the singer was palpably discomfited.

'I quite agree with you, sir,' said a broken−looking, dirty grey man in a corner. 'I've seen better days myself, and I feel that sort of thing offensive.'

'It ain't quite the thing,' said another; and a confirmatory murmur ran about the place.

'The gentleman'll get used to it bymeby,' said one sturdy tramp.

'I respectfully venture to hope that I shall not,' returned the aristocrat of the tramp ward; and again there was a weary murmur of approval.

At this juncture the porter returned, followed by a professional pauper, who, being a professional, bad a natural disdain for amateurs, and treated them with lofty hauteur as he handed round blocks of dry bread, and tin cans of a tepid liquid which smelt of rancid bacon.

'If things goes on like this,' said the sturdy tramp, smelling at the liquid with a distasteful look, 'I shall smash another lamp or two, or rip my togs up, or do summat, an' get another month. They feeds you ten times as well in quod as they does when you're on the spike.'

'And pray what may the spike be?' asked George with a mighty condescending air.

'Why, this is the spike, my noble sportsman,' said the sturdy tramp; 'an' quod's the shop where they cut your 'air for nothin'. Never been there, I s'pose?'

'Don't take any notice of him, sir,' said the dirty grey man. 'Them as was born in a pigsty can put up with dirty litter, but I've seen better days myself, and it's easy to see that you're a cut above this.'

'Ye−es; returned George, 'I hope that's tolerably apparent. This is my first experience.'

'You needn't be so blooming proud about it,' said the sturdy tramp, who alone of the room's occupants seemed unabashed by George's tone and aspect. 'It's no partic'lar credit to be here.'

To this the fallen nobleman answered only by a glance of calm disdain, at which the sturdy tramp chuckled with ostentatious merriment. George, being really hungry, ate his bread, but eschewed the rancid−smelling liquid, and the dirty grey man, seeing this, begged leave to appropriate it.

'It's warm an' it's wet,' said the dirty man; 'an' that's about all you can say for it. But it is a comfort, too, when a cove's as cold inside as I am.'

In this particular workhouse the ordeal by water, made famous some years ago by the Amateur Casual, was not practised, but the tramps were all bundled to bed immediately after supper, in a common room like an ill−favoured barrack. George turned up his nose at the tumbled herden which did duty for linen, and, but for the interference of the professional pauper who saw them all to bed would honestly have preferred to sleep in his clothes. Perforce be accepted the professional's dictum, and undressed; and having, in pursuance of the pauper's orders, rolled his clothes into a bundle with the shirt outside, he got into bed and lay there in the early darkness, indisposed to sleep, and compelled for a while to face his own reflections. He was not so miserable as he deserved to be, and his chief misery sprang from a Litter resentment to the world, which even now seemed to his own mind to have used him ill. Naturally, with young George self−preservation was the first law of nature; and now that

things bad come with him to this low ebb, it was full time to think of means for taking the tide again. His father and Dinah were well−to−do, and it was a shame that he should beg his bread whilst people of his own flesh and blood lived in comfort. Yet, they were lost to him. It was impossible for him to go to his old home, to face his late employer, or run the risk of being seen by people who had known him; and how to trace his relatives by any other means he could not tell. Tired of turning over fruitless projects in his mind, be fell asleep, and did not awake until the clanging of a great bell mingled with his dreams, and last night's professional pauper turned up again to awaken the amateur contingent. Then he dressed, and presently, to his huge disgust, found himself face to face with a big pile of stones, on a raised stone bench, with instructions from the porter to see that he broke that heap up nice and small. 'Like this,' said the porter, producing a sample handful. George went to work reluctantly and clumsily, and hammered with small result upon the stones, but much to the damage of his bands and the stiffening of his muscles. After five hours' labour his work was criticised by the porter, who expressed unqualified disapproval of it in regard both to quality and quantity, but forbore to detain him for the completion of his task. George, with a certain meek grandeur, accepted and consumed his morning's rations, washed in a bucket of water which everybody used in turn, and took his way into the streets of the town. The dirty grey man crawled alongside.

'Which way do you think of going?' he asked.

'I don't know,' said George haughtily. 'Not yours.'

'I know the line along between here and Chester,' said the grey man, unabashed by this rebuff; 'and I can put you up to the coves to go to. A bloke as can patter like you can ought to make a tidy thing of it if he's only along with somebody as knows the line.'

George capitulated.

'Where are you going?'

The man laid down his route, and the two started in partnership. Their luck varied. The dirty grey man had not boasted in vain, for he knew the road and its inhabitants; but it was not always that George's tale succeeded in melting the heart of his listener. This nicely assorted pair kept, however, from the workhouse, and there fell upon the younger wanderer's spirit a sort of dull contentment in the life to which he had fallen. He told his tale so often that the true story became mythical and the lie looked true.

But after a long spell of wandering there came upon the companions a time of famine. The old vagrant got out of the line he knew, and in one or two cases mendicancy became dangerous, and they made their way out of some towns double−quick, lest the police should be set upon their heels. Workhouse fare and workhouse labour day after day, and wretched weather from town to town, until the fallen grandee grew sick and desperate. They crawled along, skirting the borders of the principality, until within a four days' journey of the town of Borton, and at that point young George's piteous aspect and tenor−sounding voice of culture drew a shilling from a charitable maltster. With that shilling George bought, amongst other things, a sheet of letter−paper, an envelope, and a stamp, and in the sickness and misery of his heart found pluck enough to write to John Keen, his old comrade.

'I have nothing to say in excuse for myself,' he wrote; 'not a word to advance in extenuation. But I can have deserved no more than I have endured, bad as I have been, and I beg you for pity's sake to let me know the address of my father and my sister, that I may write to them for a little money to go abroad with and begin life anew. I am destitute, so destitute that I have not eaten a decent meal for a month. My feet are bare, my clothes in rags. I have suffered so much for my wrong−doing that even an enemy would pity me if he could see me. I shall walk on from here to Borton, and shall arrive there in four days. How I shall live for that four days God knows, but I am compelled to move about from place to place to get workhouse shelter and a casual tramp's poor fare. I implore you to keep this communication secret from everybody, and not to deny my request. Ill as I have

behaved, I am sure my own people will not leave me to die in this horrible slow way. I am not worthy to sign myself your friend.

'Your wretched companion in happier days,

'George Banks.

'P.S. Address me at the post−office at Borton.'

Of course it was in the nature of the man that he should water this epistle with his tears, and that he should accept them as a good sign in himself and their palpable marks upon the paper as a likely means to move his old companion. He posted the letter, and trudged along in brighter weather. With the prospect of a possible and even probable post−office order from John Keen in his mind, he picked a quarrel with his dirty grey comrade and parted from him, not feeling inclined to share any portion of his gains.

He was trudging along with bent head and sore feet towards the close of his second day of the new hope which sprang from his letter, and was approaching the little country town where lay his refuge for the night. The sun was sinking, the sky was filled with mellow, tranquil light, the upper clouds were golden and the lower all alive with rosy blushes. The town lay before him and below him at a distance of perhaps a mile, its slated roofs shining after a passing shower like silver. As he stood wearily, sick in body, broken and wobegone, with thin tears in his eyes, staring before him at the valley and the little town, a lady came round the corner of the road and walked leisurely towards him without a glance. But as she approached him there broke from his lips such an inarticulate cry, and he shrank on a sudden in such an attitude of shame and terror, that she turned in surprise to look at him, and stood still. Slowly he lifted his face, haggard and bearded, weather−stained and way−soiled, and the sudden flash of terror and amazement in the lady's eyes told him that, in spite of all the changes which had come upon him, he was known.

The little town a mile away was Wrethedale, and the girl was Ethel Donne.

Chapter 25.

Joe had many things to think of, some about which to remodel his opinions. There was that Uncle George of his, who for so long had figured in his thoughts as a sort of wooden angel, and who now disproved his own desert of praise, and established himself as a quite melodramatic old rascal. It was hard for the returned wanderer to take the kindly, generous, stupid old Uncle George off his pedestal, and set up in his place the cunning, greedy, wicked figure he now began to know. And then Joe had felt himself a little aggrieved by Dinah's marriage, and he had used his grief as a set−off against his own misdoing; whilst after all Dinah had been true, and his falsehood was multiplied a thousand thousand times. Uncle George had his share in that to answer for. For a while, when he began to think of it, Joe was resolved to have no mercy upon Uncle George, who really had been, within limits, a very wicked old man. But softening thoughts in a little time came to the prodigal's mind. He himself had more need of mercy than even that bowelless old man. Joe had never thought much of George's head, though he had revered his heart, and it began now to seem natural to him that his uncle should have gone wrong under great temptation. And surely the sudden temptation to keep so vast a sum as that which drew on old George was a difficult thing to resist.

'Should I have come home?' Joe asked himself. 'Should I have behaved better if Uncle George had never told that lie about Dinah? The news that I owned the money might have brought me home again, but the thought of Dinah failed to do it.'

He did himself less than justice, as was natural, and was hard upon himself in his own thoughts, as he had a right to be.

More than the hour or two he had specified to John Keen had gone by. It was nearly midnight and he still sat absorbed in his own thoughts and memories, when the young lawyer ventured hack again and knocked at his bedroom door. Joe appeared in the doorway with troubled face and disordered hair.

'It is getting late,' said John. 'Sir Sydney Cheston would be glad to see you.'

'Very well,' said Joe, coming out upon the corridor.

John led the way to the private room in which Cheston and he had spent the evening, and when the baronet saw his old chum's face he arose in solicitude, and crossed the chamber to meet him.

'This has been bad news, Bushell,' he said as he took Joe's hand. ' I have been telling Keen here that there must have been some powerful motive at work to keep you away all these years. I shan't press you to reveal it.'

'There was only one thing,' Joe answered. 'My uncle wrote to me telling me that my wife had married two years after I left home, and I couldn't came hack after that you know. I lived in that belief until I met your brother George by chance in New York, and he told me the truth.'

'What is this?' cried Cheston. 'This about a brother of mine. I never had a brother George!'

'What?' asked Joe in amazement. 'He said he was your brother. He said your father married again. Here,' cried Joe excitedly, pulling out his pocket−book, 'here is his card.'

Sir Sydney took the proffered card and read

'*Mr. George Cheston, Worley Hall, Staffordshire*.'

'This a queer start,' said the bewildered reader, staring strickenly at Joe, whilst Joe, with as much surprise, stared back at him. 'What was he like?'

'You got his letter?' asked Joe. 'I saw him write it, and I sent my own servant to the post with it.'

'I got a letter,' returned Cheston, 'but who the dickens wrote it is more than I know, and more than I can guess.'

Joe suddenly seized Cheston by the arm.

'Was the news he gave me about Dinah about my wife was that true?'

'What news?' demanded Cheston.

'That she had never married again.'

'Yes. That was true. I've known her ever since you went away ever since the day you knocked me down about her.'

The matter was not so serious to Cheston as it was to Joe, and the good−natured baronet could afford an amused smile to that remembrance. Joe sat down, his brown beard crushed against his breast, and stared at the fire.

'It is easy enough,' said Cheston, laying a hand on Joe's shoulder, 'to see why old Bushell wrote that lie to you. I'm afraid that respectable old party has been a bad lot all along. Did he know of your marriage?'

'No,' the other answered. 'He couldn't even guess it. He might have seen from my asking after her in my letters that I was fond of her,' he added simply.

'And invented the tale to prevent you from coming back again to look after her? Perhaps, Mr. Keen,' said Cheston, turning round, 'the devil is less black than he is painted.'

John nodded but said nothing. He had learned the story of Joe's departure, partly from Dinah and partly from Cheston, and he began to be able to see that the runaway was nut necessarily a hardened villain to begin with; at least he seemed properly sensible of his wickedness and folly now, and he was in terrible trouble through it all. John could scarcely maintain his hold upon that angry scorn which he desired to feel. He confessed that, howsoever deserved the bitterness might he, the wanderer had a bitter home−coming.

'Who *the* devil,' Cheston broke out after a little silence, 'could that fellow have been who gave you this confounded card?'

'I don't know,' said Joe wearily. 'I met him at an hotel. He used to talk about dear old Syd, and he knew my Uncle George,and and Dinah, and old Banks. He came back with me as far as Liverpool, and then he bolted. Why, I've got his luggage here now!' be cried, suddenly recalling that fact. 'It has his name painted on it. Two portmanteaus and a big chest. He was a good−looking fellow, and if he wasn't a gentleman, he was a very good imitation of one. There was no humbug about his knowing the country−side, any way.'

'And did he talk about me?' asked Cheston.

'Of course,' Joe answered. 'When I first heard him speaking he was asking some young Englishmen to pay him a visit at his place at home Worley Hall, in Staffordshire. It was that which made me speak to him.'

'I shall be glad to welcome any friends of his,' said Sir Sydney somewhat grimly. 'Deuced glad. I shall be glad to welcome him if he should call with a horsewhip!'

'Cheston,' said Joe, rising and pacing up and down the room, 'this is all trivial, and we can talk about it afterwards to our heart's content. Advise me. What am I to do?'

'About young Banks?'

'About my son! Yes.'

'Keen tells me,' said Cheston, 'that you said something about obtaining a mitigation of the sentence, and compelling your uncle to join in the appeal. There's something in that. You don't doubt the story of his relationship to you?'

Doubt Dinah? No. That was beyond him. He had no doubt of Dinah; but he looked at John Keen.

'I think the thing,' said John, 'as clear as day. I would as leave doubt my own senses as Miss Banks as Mrs. Joseph Bushell.'

'If the boy is hers,' said Joe, 'the boy is mine.'

'Do you intend to return to her?' asked Cheston.

'Great heaven, Cheston!' Joe exclaimed. 'What can you think me? Go back to her now, after leaving her alone and broken−hearted all these years? Go back to her, and give her the extra misery of knowing that I was alive all this time! No. I'm not the man she loved and married. No. She wouldn't know me if she saw me. Give her definite news that I'm dead, and let me find this unhappy lad of mine and take him away with me back to the West, and teach him to be honest, and leave him enough to keep him so. I can do that much good at last, perhaps.'

He spoke with difficulty, but in so simple and direct a way, and with a repentance and mournfulness so real and apparent, that for a minute they left him unanswered.

'His mother; said John after this pause, 'would not be content to lose him so. At least I think not.'

'It's a terrible business, Bushell,' said Cheston, laying both his hands on Joe's shoulders. 'Make the best of it. Go back to your wife, declare yourself, promise to do the best you can for the lad make whatever atonement for your past mistakes you can.'

'No,' the prodigal answered. 'I can't do that. I can't be so mean as to go back again and offer her the mere fag−end of a life. No, no!'

'Fag−end of life be hanged!' cried Cheston. 'I'm a young fellow yet, and we're of an age within a month or two. You've happy years, before you, man alive! Do your duty Joe, and earn 'em, and have 'em and enjoy 'em!'

'You don't understand,' said Joe, returning Cheston's friendly gaze mournfully. 'I couldn't quite tell you myself what brought me over, but I know what I want now.'

'What do you want?'

'To spare her all I can. Everybody has believed me dead for years. It would only bring her a new trouble to know that I was alive.'

'Suppose that, believing you dead, she should be induced to marry again! Eh? And suppose that when the step was taken any accident should reveal the fact that you were still living? Would that be sparing her?'

'Don't urge me now,' said Joe hesitatingly. 'Give me time to think. And think for me. I am only certain of one thing. Whatever seems best for her comfort and peace of mind I shall try to do.'

There was no doubting that he meant this, and Cheston was compelled for the time to let the subject fall.

'And now,' Joe resumed, 'I can go to−morrow to my Uncle George, and frighten him into making enough over to Dinah to satisfy her heart's best wishes if money could do it.'

'I am afraid that if he saw you just at present the shock would kill him,' said John Keen.

'What *can* we do?' Joe cried. 'Does my boy know who he is yet?'

'No,' from both of them.

'I'll go and see him,' said Joe, forcing himself against an awful inward terror and reluctance. 'We can appeal to the Government to mitigate his sentence. You'll help me, Cheston?'

'I don't think I'd try to see him at first,' urged Sir Sydney. 'I'll help you any way I can with all my heart and all my might. We might appeal, though there were circumstances Yes; we might appeal.'

'What circumstances? There was nothing worse than I know?'

'Well,' said Cheston, reluctantly, 'his defence was his worst condemnation, Bushell, and that's a fact. He swore it was all a plot to ruin him, and he gave his sweetheart a part of the money in bank−notes, and when she came into the box he sung out that she was in the plot with the rest, and the poor girl fainted. It made people angry you know, and it increased the prejudice against him.'

At this renewal of his memories the baronet walked abruptly to the other end of the room, and there, under his breath, he let out a curse against the criminal, and then returned. Joe stood dejectedly looking at the floor.

'What can we do?' he asked again. 'Has anybody seen him since ?'

'No,' said John, 'I think not. Old Daniel his grandfather was so cut up by it that he sold the Saracen and went away to Wrethedale. I had some trouble,' he continued, with something of the old hang−dog air upon him, 'in finding out where he had gone, for he communicated with nobody, and left the place quite suddenly.'

'Cheston,' said Joe doggedly, 'I shall go and see him. It's clear he has been a scoundrel. So have I, and there's a pair of us. Like father, like son. If I'd have stayed at home and done my duty he'd never have been tempted.' John recalled Dinah's words, for Joe was thinking Dinah's thoughts. 'I'll begin to do my duty now, please God!' Joe said humbly, 'and I'll go and see him tomorrow. You're a magistrate, Cheston. How can I set about it?'

'I can help you if you are bent upon it,' said his old companion. 'I am visiting justice for the county. Shall I go with you?'

'Will you?' asked Joe. 'Thank you.'

They all fell into silence, until after a long pause John arose and said good−night. Sir Sydney at this arose also.

'You'll want to be alone a little while, Joe? Eh?'

'Yes,' said Joe. 'I shall see you again, Mr. Keen. You will keep my confidence in the meantime until it is decided what to do.'

'Certainly; John replied, and went his way, his old prejudices against Joe Bushell and his new prejudices in his favour fighting each other.

'You're set on going to−morrow, Bushell?' asked Cheston.

'Yes. You'll come with me?'

'If you wish it.'

'I do wish it.'

'I will come. Good−night.'

'Good−night.'

Joe was alone again with his own thoughts. Ah in his case too to have seen to−day with to−morrow's eyes. There is no wisdom hike that. But which of us has it? If he could have foreseen! But he had at least begun to lean in these hate days the one lesson which in itself comprises most human wisdom worth the having and that is that

in any complexity and all complexities of human life the thing to do is not that which hooks easiest or most clever, but that which is most honest. Patiently to find out the right thing to do and then to do it seemed all the hope left him in the world. And there are some of us who go along in high feather who have hopes less bright than this.

It seemed to the home−coming prodigal's conscience the clearest of duties to see this unknown fallen son of his without delay, and without delay to set to work for his amendment. He lay awake planning fur this newly−found child, whom he had never seen and who was a felon. He wept awful tears about him and the hapless mother so long deserted. Whatever he had suffered in the past and remorse had for many a year been busy with him was nothing to this last punishment, and the healing but terrible fire of it lay in this that he who had most deserved to suffer had suffered nothing.

'I have wired; said Cheston when he met Joe in the morning, 'to say to the Governor that I am leaving here by the 10.15, and that I particularly desire to see him. I have asked him to meet me at the railway station. He knows me very well, and I have no doubt he will oblige me by coming.'

Joe said 'Thank you,' and no more.

They breakfasted in silence, and in silence set out upon their journey. Cheston read the 'Times,' and Joe communed with his own thoughts. The baronet's surmise was right, and the Governor of the jail was at the station to meet the train.

'I am immensely obliged to you,' said Cheston, shaking him by the hand with hearty cordiality. 'Will you walk up with us?'

'We are all happy to oblige Sir Sydney Cheston,' said the Governor.

'This is my friend Mr. Bushell,' said Cheston. The Governor bowed and made way for the two to pass through the station door. Cheston, drawing one arm through the Governor's and another through Joe's, went on: 'We are deeply interested in one of the prisoners under your charge, one George Banks.'

'George Banks,' said the Governor, 'is not under nay charge any longer, Sir Sydney.'

'How's that?' asked Cheston, stopping short in his walk.

'Well,' said the official smilingly, 'I suppose your interest a friendly one?'

'It is assuredly,' Joe answered.

'In that case you will be pleased to hear that his sentence was some time ago commuted by the influence of a most warm−hearted friend, who exerted himself with the Secretary for the Home Department, procured the young fellow's release, and sent him out to Melbourne.'

The two friends, standing in the roadway with the Governor between them, looked across at each other in amazement, and the Governor himself, naturally pleased to have produced such an effect so easily, smiled as he gazed from one to the other. Cheston was the first to recover.

'Who was the benefactor?'

'Well, Sir Sydney,' returned the Governor, still smiling, 'but that I am forbid to tell the secrets of my prison−house I could a tale unfold. Ha! ha! ha!' He was again naturally pleased at having fallen on so apt a quotation. 'The fact

is,' he added, 'that I am in a measure bound to reticence. The young man's friend was one of those people very rare in my experience who do good by stealth and blush to find it fame.' The Governor was again delighted with himself at having found so apt a quotation, and again he showed it. 'He asked me,' continued the smiling official, 'in terms which I can scarcely disregard, not to reveal his share in that meritorious enterprise. I believe, gentlemen, that for once I have seen a practical Christian, and that practical Christian was the man whose influence released young Banks from prison.'

He spoke with pleased warmth upon this topic, but looking from Joe's face to Sir Sydney's and from Sir Sydney's face to Joe's, he read no answering smile.

'I assure you, sir,' said Joe, with a gravity before which the Governor's smile died away, 'and Sir Sydney Cheston will assure you, that we are here upon an enterprise of no common importance. It is vital to me to know this young man's whereabouts. If you will give me the name of the man who did this good deed, I pledge you my word of honour that I can and will exculpate you to him, and could and would if you had been sworn to secrecy a hundred times.'

'I don't think it is possible; said Cheston, 'to exaggerate the importance of my friend's request, either as regards himself or young Banks. Melbourne's a wide word. The young fellow may have gone anywhere from Melbourne, and we might chase him in vain for years.'

'It can injure nobody,' Joe broke in again, 'to let me know who has anticipated me. My purpose,' he added, 'in coming here was to set afoot a plan for the mitigation of his sentence. Will you help me to find him?'

'It's for the young fellow's good,' chimed in Sir Sydney and between the two the Governor hauled down the flag of resistance, and in the act struck the pair dumb.

'Well, gentlemen, under the circumstances I suppose I am justified; at least I feel so. The gentleman who procured young Banks's release, who fitted him out for the world anew, who gave him a free passage to Melbourne and two hundred pounds to begin the world again with, was' he paused to give effect to his announcement 'his original prosecutor, Mr. George Bushell.'

To say that his hearers were astonished is to say nothing. The Governor had intended a surprise, but seeing dimly that the effect he had produced multiplied his hopes by a million or thereabouts, he also became amazed, as a man might, who, suddenly closing a door to startle you, should find that he had slammed the house down. Cheston and Joe could only stare in blank wonder, and the Governor, discomfited without knowing why, looked helplessly from one to the other. At last Cheston burst into almost hysteric laughter, stamping to and fro about the street.

'I beg your pardon,' he gasped after a minute or two, holding Joe's arm and looking at him through tears of laughter. 'I wouldn't wound you, Joe; I couldn't help it.'

'The villain!' cried Joe, finding his tongue.

'The amazing old serpent!' said Cheston, gasping still. 'Machiavelli was a fool to him.'

Chapter 26.

Old George, propped up with pillows, sat in a big armchair in that room in which young George had once upon a time signed his own name without knowing it. His face was palled and puffy, his lips had fallen to a vacuous looseness, and his eyes were dull and fish−like. His white hands wandered feebly about the rug which lay over his knees, and his whole look was that of a broken man. His housekeeper stood by him with jelly in a tea−cup, and

fed him with a spoon until the old man turned his head away like a fretful baby.

'Tek a bit more, master,' said the housekeeper.

'Is theer anythin' wrong with it?' asked old George, moving his lips, with a doubtful air. 'I've been a good master to you, Mrs. Bullus, this many 'ears. I don't think you'd do me harm now.'

'Law bless you, master, how yo' do talk,' said Mrs. Bullus. 'Tek your vittles like a sensible old man, now. Do. Theer, that's right. Why, it's the very best o' cawves'−foot jelly, as I made myself.'

She smacked her lips with a relishing air, and old George again consented to be fed. The last spoonful had just been administered, when there came a knock at the front door, and the housekeeper, hastening to answer it, dropped a series of bobbing curtseys.

'Good morning,' said Sir Sydney Cheston, in tones subdued from those he commonly used. 'How is your master?'

'He's mendin', sir,' returned the housekeeper, still bobbing at the baronet, as though the sight of him set an uncontrollable spring in motion; 'but his poor yed's bad, an' he seems a bit childish−like.'

'Do you think he'd know me?' asked Sir Sydney. 'Would it do him any harm to see me?'

'Oh, he seems to know folks just as well as ever, sir; said the housekeeper; 'but please speak very quiet to him, sir. He's all o'er nerves, like.'

'Yes, I will; answered Cheston, entering on tiptoe. 'This the room? Thank you.' He advanced gently towards the patient and sat down beside him. 'Well, Mr. Bushell, you're getting better, eh?' George looked at him vaguely. There was no speculation in the orbs that he did glare withal. 'You know me, don't you?'

'How d'ye do, sir?' said the patient, nodding at him feebly.

'You know *me?*' his visitor repeated, tapping himself on the waistcoat with a forefinger ' Sir Sydney Cheston, you know, eh?'

The old man again nodded feebly, and chuckled with exceeding faintness.

'I've rode,' he answered, 'along of a baronet afore to−day.'

'So you have, Bushell,' said Cheston, 'so you have.' He surveyed the old man with much discomfiture; but whilst he did so George's eyes lit up a little, and he put out a shaking hand.

'I'm proud to see you here, Sir Sydney,' he quavered.

'That's well, that's well,' said Cheston, shaking bands with him. 'You're getting better, eh? You'll be able to see to business again by−and−by, eh?'

'In a day or two in a day or two,' quavered old George; but to his visitor's mind it looked unlikely. 'I'm proud to see you here,' the patient repeated, 'but I've allays been well thought on by the local nobility an' gentry, an' I'll tell you why. I've knowed my station, an' I've been a man as allays tried to do my dooty.'

'Yes, yes,' Cheston answered, with outward heartiness, and at this juncture the doctor arrived. After a brief examination of the patient he retired, taking Sir Sydney with him.

'What do you think of the case, doctor?'

'Well, Sir Sydney, it's a case of considerable difficulty. Sometimes I think he may recover mental soundness as well as bodily health, and sometimes I think he may not. We must leave all that to time.'

'You think he may recover bodily health?' asked Cheston.

'Yes,' said the other. 'He is in a fair way; but his mental strength returns slowly, and he has relapses.'

'Um,' said Cheston, standing beside the doctor's carriage. 'Look here! I've some very particular and important business with him.'

'Impossible to attend to it, Sir Sydney, I assure you, for weeks to come, at least.'

'Very well, then,' said Sir Sydney; 'I won't allude to it for weeks to come. I won't allude to it until you give me leave, but what I want to ask is this: Will it facilitate matters if I call on him now and then, and let him get used to me before I broach what I have to say to him? Now I've given you my word that I won't hint at the thing until you give me leave.'

'I beg your pardon, Sir Sydney,' said the doctor, turning with a foot on the carriage step, 'but has the business anything to do with that which gave him the first shock? Do you know?'

'It is the same,' replied Cheston, 'but he doesn't associate me with it. *Entre nous*, it's a great deal more important than his getting better can be to anybody; but unluckily it can't be done without his getting better.'

He left the doctor to think over that enigma, and went back to the hotel in Birmingham to join Joe Bushell and John Keen. His visit to old George had come about as the result of a consultation, and he had been fixed upon to spy out the condition of affairs for reasons plain enough. A return of the long−lost nephew might have killed the old rogue outright, and John Keen's presence was but too likely to upset him again, whilst no suspicion could attach to a visit from the baronet. Cheston gave his news.

'It's no use starting on a wild−goose chase to Melbourne,' said Joe. 'We can see the old man's hand too plainly now to think of that.'

'Why?' asked John Keen.

'Don t you see that my uncle's object was to get the boy out of the way? Do you think he would be likely to tell the Governor of the gaol the real place to which he persuaded him to go?'

'What shall you do?' asked Cheston.

'What can I do? returned Joe. 'There is nothing to do but to wait.'

'And where shall you wait?' his friend demanded. 'Come and stay with me.'

'No,' returned the exile; 'I don't want to be known. Ill stay where I am at present, and lie close.'

The baronet pressed him, but he would not yield, and at last he confessed his purpose.

'The fact is, I'm trying to make my mind up to go to Wrethedale and ' He broke down, and turned away; but recovering himself m a moment, he addressed John: 'I suppose there's an hotel there?'

'Yes,' said John.

'We might make a casual acquaintance when I get there, Mr. Keen, if you don't mind,' said Joe; 'but I should be glad if you wouldn't know me just at first. I am surrounded by difficulties. Let me know what to do before I act decisively. You will do your best for me here, I know, Cheston.'

'Rely on that,' his friend answered, with a firm shake−hands, and after a little further talk they parted. Sir Sydney was to watch old George, and to report on his fitness for approach when the time came. The report was to be made to the lawyer, and not to Joe, who was to figure in Wrethedale as an idle stranger until he could decide upon his own line of action, or events decided for him. Cheston went home, and in the evening the young lawyer and the returned wanderer took train together.

'Mr. Keen,' said Joe, as they sat alone in the railway carriage, 'on my own best showing you have no reason to think well of me, but I want you to be my friend. You see my wife sometimes?'

'Yes,' said John. 'I have known her all my life.'

'Did she strike you as a happy woman before this trouble came?' poor Joe asked.

'No,' said John. 'She always seemed to me, even when I was a lad, a woman who had seen trouble. She never complained of anything, but there was always a sort of gentle sadness about her.'

Joe nodded sorrowfully and fell a−thinking.

Wherever this wanderer had gone men had somehow liked him and believed in him. His handsome face, the saddened good−fellowship of his look, his ways, genial and gentle, had enlisted the hearts of men and women. John felt tempted to like him, but had reason for not yielding him friendship on a sudden. Yet it was indisputable that the sternness with which be had thought of Joe from the time at which he had first heard of him had vanished. He blamed, but he pitied as much as he blamed. He felt impelled to a liking which might be larger than his pity. It had seemed natural to picture the lost husband as an altogether empty and self−satisfied creature, who, having gratified the freak of a month, was willing to go away and let a woman suffer for his sake for a lifetime; but it was not easy to believe in that picture in the presence of the original it libelled.

The two reached Wrethedale, and by mutual consent parted like strangers on the platform. Joe had packed but a small portmanteau for the journey, and, taking this in hand, he walked into the main street of the old−fashioned town, and cast about for a place to stay in. In a little time he chanced upon an inn, and entering, demanded supper and a bed. He sent the meal away almost untasted, and rambled about the streets looking up at the lights in the houses, and wondering whether Dinah lived in this house or in that. He roamed till bedtime through the quiet ways of the town, scarcely meeting a human creature. When he slept it was to dream all night of things that had happened years ago, and in his dreams at least the time from his leaving England until his return was blotted out, and he was young again.

After breakfast next morning he rambled out with a cigar in his mouth, and was conscious of the fact that he created a sensation in the rear of many curtained windows. There were not many people in the street, but as he sauntered slowly on he was aware of an old, old man, with spindle legs and a rotund waistcoat, who pottered along the cobbled footway, supported on one side by a handsome young woman, and on the other by a walking−stick. The old fellow looked up at stalwart Joe as he went by, and the idle stranger made a guess at his identity. Feigning to check himself in his walk as if he had just remembered something, Joe turned back and passed the pair with a lively step, without looking at either of them. In a hundred yards he came to a tobacconist's shop, and entered. Whilst he stood there fingering and pricing unsmokeable cigars, rightly called 'weeds' by the Wrethedale youth who bought them, he kept an eye upon the street, and when the old man and the handsome girl

went by, he said to the shopman:

'That's an old fellow, now.'

'Yes, sir,' said the shopman.

'Your oldest inhabitant, I should say,' continued Joe, fishing with simple cunning.

'No sir,' returned the man. 'Not as there's many older folks in the town neither. But the old gentleman's a new resident here, sir.'

'Indeed,' said Joe; and not seeing his way to any further questioning, he bought half−a−dozen of the unsmokeables, and went out with a polite 'Good morning.'

Youth and age were thirty or forty yards away when Joe, who had prolonged his business as much as possible, emerged from the tobacconist's shop. He followed slowly, lingering to stare in at shop windows, where there was nothing in particular to attract his gaze, and pausing sometimes to look at the front of an old house covered with timber, and hanging somewhat over the street. By these devices he accommodated his pace to that of the pair in front, and every now and then he sent a glance in their direction. All these years had made such changes that he could not be quite certain, but he thought he recognised old Daniel. But who was the handsome girl, and what could have brought old Daniel into association with one who looked so far removed from him? Joe was almost sure of Daniel, and the more he watched him, the more clearly he seemed to see the old gait and the old figure, altered as they were. The town High Street is not very long, and slowly as they went they soon came to the end of the shops, and reached a little range of semi−detached villas. At the gate of one of these paused the pair whose steps Joe was watching, and the girl gently helped the old fellow to mount to the gravelled pathway. Saunter as slowly as he could, they were only half−way up this pathway when Joe came level with them. The door of the house opened, and a voice spoke.

'Well, father, how do you feel after your walk?'

'I'm a bit fagged, Diner,' piped Daniel in his hoarse and shaky treble.

Joe looked and knew her, and sauntered by. with a head suddenly averted. There had been no need of the spoken name. There had been scarcely need for a sight of the face. The voice he remembered so well sounded unchanged in his ears. She looked her age his passing glance swiftly taken as it was, had told him that and yet how little altered by the years she seemed! As she had spoken to her father she had smiled, and Joe thought he might have seen the smile for the last time yesterday, it seemed so much the same.

As he walked away with his head a little drooping, all the past unrolled himself before him like a panorama. He had resigned himself years ago to believe that his father and mother were dead, and at rest from the trouble he had caused them, and he knew now, and had known always, that when their grey hairs reached the grave, he had hurried their going. He had never been hardhearted, never the man to sin with impunity, and his folly and wickedness had been with him always, though never so heavily as now. There was no extenuation for himself in his own mind, no blame for anybody but Joe Bushell.

He knew nothing of the topography of the place, of course, but he struck into the fields on the right−hand side of the road, and making a long *detour* reached the far end of the town in a walk of three or four hours. It did not seem easy to pass the house again, and when he bad reached the inn, he was tied to his chamber until twilight fell. But then the longing of his heart drove him to the semi−detached villa, and he walked up and down in the dark before the gate, and heard a voice singing in the front room where a lamp was lighted. Where he stood he could hear the words quite clearly. 'Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee.' The musical

setting was not such as would satisfy a student of the modern school, but it did the immortal words no tong in the listener's ears, and the voice that sang was sweet and true. A great artist might do the words more wrong than this simple liquid voice could do them. The voice was not that of Joe's wife as he knew, hut it came from the house she lived in, and it seemed to his heart to breathe her longing and faithfulness. He pushed open the gate, and, like Arden in Tennyson's story, he crept up the pathway and peeped through the window, at a little crevice of light between the casement and the blind. There he saw at the piano the girl who had given her arm to Daniel in the street that morning, and in a corner of the room Daniel himself looking frail, very old, and remarkably uninterested. Dinah sat behind the lamp, and the watcher could make out nothing of her until she arose and moved to the piano, where she laid a hand upon the musician's shoulder and spoke to her. Then Joe had a complete view of her face and looked his fill at it, till a step in the roadway startled him and he crouched low; trusting to be unseen. As it happened, however, the owner of the footstep paused before the low wall, vaulted it noiselessly, dropping on the grass, and, advancing swiftly on tiptoe, touched Joe on the shoulder as he rose to meet the new−comer.

'I guessed it might be you,' said John Keen in a whisper, 'but I was not sure, and I was bound to see.'

Joe nodded and went on tiptoe down the gravelled pathway. John followed, and when they reached the road the younger man took the other's arm; they walked together for some distance without speaking, with their backs turned to the town.

'How did you find out the house?' John asked in a low tone. Something which he was not careful to analyse made him speak softly, as one does by instinct in a church.

'I saw old Daniel go in this morning,' answered Joe, and again they walked in silence for a time. 'Mr. Keen,' said Joe after that pause, 'I shall go hack in the morning, and see Cheston. Advise me in the meantime. Can we do anything?'

'I have been thinking,' John returned. 'There is a friend of mine in Melbourne who was at school with me and with your son. He knows nothing of what has happened, and I might wire to him to see if he could tell us anything of George.'

'Do anything that suggests itself,' said Joe, hopelessly. 'There need be no care about money in the matter. By the way' he felt it absurd to affect to speak in that casual fashion, and yet he could not help it 'are they well−to−do?' giving his head a backward nod.

'Your wife and her father?' John asked him.

'Daniel Banks is almost wealthy.'

'I was thinking,' Joe explained, 'that she might find money useful if we could have found a way to give it her.'

'She does not want for money; answered John, speaking brusquely.

'Well,' Joe resumed, 'I shall go back to−morrow. if there is anything to say write to Cheston. He will let me know. There's nothing uncommon in my name, but if anybody heard it and associated it with me down there, it would be troublesome.'

'Mr. Bushell,' said John, stopping short in the dark road, and speaking like one who chooses his words carefully: 'I have no right to interfere in your affairs. When I first heard of your marriage and your disappearance I thought ill of you, but since I met you I have changed my opinions partly. I say again, I have no right to interfere in your affairs: and still I do so. You can stop me by a word.' He paused, but Joe said nothing. 'I have persuaded myself

that your chief anxiety now is to do everything that can be done to rectify the wrongs you once did unthinkingly, or carelessly, and in the folly of youth.'

'Not unthinkingly nor carelessly,' said Joe to himself, though not a word escaped his lips; 'but with my eyes open, and knowing that I was a villain all along.'

'If I am right in thinking as I do.' said John, after waiting vainly for an answer, 'I have one question to put to you.' He paused again.

'Go on.'

'If it could be shown to you that in the circumstances of the case it is your clear duty to acknowledge yourself to your wife, and to associate yourself with her in the endeavour to recover your own, would you do it?'

'I have only one duty left,' said Joe.

'And that is ?'

'To do the best thing for her happiness. Understand me. To go back to her would be a pain and a humiliation. But I am not afraid of the pain and humiliation. I am afraid of adding to the unhappiness she has already suffered. I have been dead in her fancy for many years past, and whatever grief I cost her is done with long ago. If she finds that after all I have been alive and have still kept away why should I revive a trouble which has been dead this twenty years?'

'I have known your wife,' said John, 'ever since I was a little fellow eight or nine years old, when George and I first went to school together. I know how blameless and gentle a life she has lived, and I know partly how unhappy she has been. And if I am not a greater ass than ever lived before, she is as truly attached to you still as she was when you went away.'

'To my memory. Not to me,' Joe answered with a heaving breast. 'I was two−and−twenty then; I am over eight−and−forty now. I'm not the man she loved. I'm not the man she knew.'

'Mr. Bushell,' said the young lawyer, clearing his voice of a slight huskiness before he spoke, 'if I had not been forced (against my will) to believe you after all a man with a good heart, a man who desires to make reparation for a wrong of such old standing, I would as soon bite my tongue off as speak one word to bring you two together. I don't remember my mother, sir, and I never had a sister of my own, and your wife, in a way, took the place they might have filled in my fancy when I was a lad, and there are not many people in the world whose welfare is so dear to me. I believe you are an honest fellow, sir, in spite of what happened so many years since, and if you can find it in your heart to be good to her in the future, and to spend your life, as you ought to spend it, in consoling her for all that she has undergone and suffered, I know you ought to do it. I am a young man, Mr. Bushell, and under other circumstances I hope I should speak with less confidence and more reserve. Perhaps it might seem to fit my age and yours better if I held my tongue altogether; but I am fond of your wife, sir, and I respect her as highly as anybody in the world, and that is all the excuse I have to offer.'

'You need offer no excuse,' Joe replied huskily. 'You have not said a word that I can find fault with. You have spoken as a man ought to speak.'

'I have some knowledge,' John resumed, with a new hesitation in his tone at first, 'of the young lady to whom your wife first gave her confidence. I know enough of her to be sure that if the secret of your presence in this country were entrusted to her it would be kept, sacredly, and as a trust of honour. With that knowledge in her power she could be relied upon I am sure of it to approach your wife and ascertain her feeling, and I could rely upon her to

conduct the matter with so much tact that no suspicion would be excited.'

John's admiration of Ethel and his belief in her had no bounds which it is worth while here to attempt to discover; but the returned exile could hardly be expected to share his faith in her. He said nothing, but even through the darkness John felt his distrust and hurried on.

'You will not forget your own contention, Mr. Bushell, that for many years your wife has had good reason to believe you dead. It will not be easy except on direct evidence to persuade her that you are still alive. It cannot be easy for her to suspect the truth if the talk concerning you is led by a woman she loves, and is led naturally and without haste.'

'Give me time to think,' said Joe.

'I will ask you one more question, Mr. Bushell,' John continued. 'Are you convinced in your own mind that if your presence would be hailed by her, as I believe it would be, as a help and a solace, that you could surrender yourself to *be* a help and solace to her? If you are uncertain of yourself in that respect, I will not press you by another word.'

'Mr. Keen,' Joe answered with a broken voice, 'if I could undo the wrong I did I would lay down my life, though that is saying little. If I could lighten the burden she has to hear by but ever so little I would make any sacrifice that might be offered me. I don't speak unthinkingly or melodramatically in saying so; I mean it from my soul. But I will lay no new burden on her. How could I after all that she has suffered?'

'If she were glad to take you back again?' John pressed him still. 'If you knew that it would lighten the weight she has to bear to have you back? It is no light thing in itself to sink to an unloved and lonely age. Even if George were found and provided for and sent away, do you think she would be happy, and in no need of comfort? Is she in no need of comfort now?'

'What comfort is it in my power to bring her? A runaway nearly six−and−twenty years back, never since heard of. No, no, no. You tempt me to act on my own selfish longings, not to heal her wounds, poor thing.'

His voice was but half audible, and regrets and longings, and new−born hopes that hardly dared to hope, and fears that slew them as they lifted their weak heads, made a strange tumult in his heart.

There was no make−believe in the husky voice. True men are quick to read such things, and John knew the sincerity of every word the other spoke. There was little passion in the phrases used, but the man was true and meant it all, and more. And this conviction could only spur the younger. It is something to an ingenious youngster, whom the world has not yet chilled, to think that be can bring two sore hearts to peace and healing.

'Will you let me try to help you, Mr. Bushell?' he pleaded.

'Not in the way you propose,' said Joe, lifting his head in the darkness. 'There is too much danger to her peace in it.'

'In any other way?' John pressed him.

'In any way that helps her,' Joe responded, 'but in no way that endangers her peace of mind. I trust you, Mr. Keen. I am compelled to trust you, but I could do it willingly without that. I have confidence in you.'

'You shall not find it misplaced,' said John.

'I am sure of it,' replied Joe. 'In the meantime I dare stay here no longer. Wire to Melbourne and let me know the result of your inquiries. Place at the cable office at this end whatever sum may be needed for a full reply. I will go back with you now and lay money in your hands for that purpose. Wherever it is necessary to spend money in this inquiry, spend it without fear. For my own part I can do nothing better than go back and watch for my uncle George's recovery.'

The lawyer saw that it was useless just then to press him further. Joe laid plenteous funds at his disposal, and next day he disappeared from Wrethedale as he had arrived a figure for a minute's gossip, but beyond that unnoticed and unknown.

Chapter 27.

So Dinah's longing heart went on unsatisfied in the old way, and was fed by little food of earthly hope or comfort. She had never resigned herself to forget Joe, but he was dead or beyond all earthly chance of meeting any more, and there were no new sorrows possible on that count. So far Joe was right. Had her son been what he should have been, Dinah, in spite of the great trouble of her youth, would have been a fairly happy woman. The deepest wounds heal at last if they do not kill before the healing process can begin.

Now I am not the first historian by many who has found himself involved in chronological difficulties, and like others I can only rely upon my reader's patience and discernment. When I had had young George eight or nine weeks in England, and had at last left him face to face with Ethel, I was compelled to go back to the hour of his arrival to show what his father had been doing in the meantime.

The two, meeting in this way, stood rooted each before the other. A cur, so caught, would have had the manliness to put his tail between his legs and run, but the tramp was incapable of even so much resolution as would command a flight. In the girl's mind fear and amazement, and hate and wrath, and pity, made a jumble of all thought, and left her also helpless. She had of course believed him still under lock and key, but, though she could scarce believe their evidence, her eyes told her he was here. And being here, what could have brought him but one thing? and that one thing the desire to make an appeal to Dinah. Perhaps he had made an escape from prison. That indeed seemed the only solution of the mystery of his presence there, and, if it were so, he was proscribed and hunted.

As was natural, the noble nature recovered from the shock of this encounter whilst the abject one was yet stunned.

'How do you come here?' she asked; 'have you escaped?'

His knees shook and he stared at. her, until he hung his head before her glance and began to weep again.

'Have you escaped?' she repeated, breathlessly.

'No,' the wretched creature answered. 'I was released. But I can get nothing to do, and I am starving.'

She sent her hand hastily to the pocket of her dress and found her purse there. Glancing into it she saw two or three pieces of gold and a little heap of silver. His face seemed to have a dreadful fascination for her and to draw her towards him. She advanced little by little with the purse in her outstretched hand.

'Here,' she said, and dropping it into the hand he held out to receive it she recoiled, looking at him still with her hazel eyes widened to a glance of horror.

'I don't deserve it,' the tramp moaned and snuffled unmanlike through his tears. 'I don't deserve it.'

'Why are you here?' she asked. The sight of him was a terror and a horror to her, but what could she do? 'You shall not show yourself to Dinah whilst you look like that. You would kill her!'

This hit him like a blow and stopped his tears for a second or two. He stole a glance at her and dropped his eyes shiftily.

'Is she here?' he found courage to ask.

'Go,' she answered him, 'and write to me at the Post Office so that I can get the letter in the morning. Tell me where you are that I can send an answer. But don't stay in the town.'

'What is the name of the town?' he made shift to ask.

She told him and repeated her bidding.

'Go. Buy some clothes, and write to me to−night.'

With that she turned from him and fairly ran down bill towards the town, but nearing the houses she dropped her veil and composed her gait. When she reached her own room she locked herself in and struggled in silence through an attack of hysteria, and then descended, pale, and with a glittering light in her eyes.

'Why, our Ethel,' cried her mother, 'what's happened to you? You look as if you'd seen a ghost.'

Ethel tried to laugh at this, with such ill success that in spite of resolution hysteria began again.

'What happened to you?' the mother cried anew, when after a minute or so Ethel had recovered herself.

Ethel's conscience would not tolerate a lie, but she could not tell the whole truth.

'I was frightened,' she said, 'and I ran.'

'You frightened?' cried her mother. The good woman had never heard of such a thing before, for Ethel was not of the female tribe who squeal at spiders, and experience in the presence of a mouse such terrors as might once have seized the people of Herculaneum. 'What frightened you?'

'I met a tramp,' said Ethel faintly.

'Why, was he rude to you?' cried the old woman.

'No,' answered Ethel, unable to tell all. 'It was a lonely place and he begged, that was all.'

'You mustn't take them ramblin' walks abroad, my love,' said her mother solicitously. 'It ain't fit for maids to go about alone. You should ha' somebody with you.'

All the evening long she harped upon the theme, and would scarce release Ethel from the house in the morning until she received assurance that nothing more was meant than a walk along the High Street.

The girl approached the Post Office with some inward reluctance. It would not be nice for anybody to think that she received letters there without her mother's knowledge even that the postmaster should think it was anything but pleasant to her. And there by ill−fortune was young lawyer Keen talking with the official when Ethel entered. It was more and more awkward to ask for the letter in his presence, but, giving him a cold little bow, she passed to

the counter.

'Have you a letter for me, addressed here?'

'Yes, Miss.'

The postmaster produced it. John saw that it was addressed in a male handwriting, and thought no more about it for the time. Ethel with another cold little bow responded to his renewed salute, and went home with her letter. When she came to read it she discovered that the writer had wept all over it, and it was so splashed and blotched as to be decipherable only after difficulty. In some matters heart is taste. The hapless young man began this letter 'My lost love, lost for ever!' with a note of admiration scored in after the final letter, as if he had been writing for the printers. A shiver of disgust ran through the girl's frame as she read this exordium. The writer went on to say (as in the letter addressed to John Keen) that he offered no excuses, feeling conscious that he had none to offer adding that he knew he was unworthy of her at which the reader crawled afresh but that his sins had entailed a terrible punishment. He threw in one or two phrases of Scripture 'I have sinned before heaven and against Thee,' and 'My punishment is greater than I can bear' and he wound up by saying that he had re−attired himself, was staying at Borton, at the sign of the Hare and Hounds, in Wedge Street, and remained for ever her miserable and unworthy George. Then came a postscript, in which he stated that he had expended almost all the money she had so generously given him, and expressed in fitting terms that form of gratitude which has been defined as a sense of favours to come.

As for love's idol, that was long since broken, and the worshipper was still sorely wounded by the shards. But in women's hearth sometimes, in spite of any and all wrong−doing on the part of the idol's original, there lingers a tenderness for what he was or seemed to be in the days when the poor image was first modelled, and gilded with the gold of the devotee's own nature. And in spite of Ethel's hatred and contempt there had lingered until now a certain starved and hungry sentiment (which would have been faith if it could) in favour of a lost George whom she had known to be manly and honest, and indeed filled with all noble qualities, only a little while ago. But whatever tendrils of the heart sought to reach and touch the past, the brutal egotism and vile unconscious insolence of this epistle blighted them for ever.

She folded up the sheet of blotted and tear−soiled paper, put it in its envelope, walked into the garden, passed through the wicket gate into Dinah's small territory, and so into the house. She had not slept all night, but her eyes shone with an unusual brilliance and her cheeks were flushed with clear colour. Dinah, who was in the hack kitchen, superintending her little west−country maid, kissed Ethel in a preoccupied way, and noticed nothing unusual in her aspect for a minute. But by−and−by, attracted by her silence, she turned, and saw at a glance that the girl's whole nature was in some way strongly stirred.

'Come into the sittin' room, my dear,' she said gently, and moved away, Ethel following.

Daniel sat in the front kitchen with his feet on the steel fender and patted the girl's hand in answer to the passing kiss she gave him. The kiss was warmer and tenderer than usual, for they were all knit together by the same sorrow, she thought.

'Dinah,' said Ethel, 'I have brought you news which you will be relieved to hear.' Dinah began to tremble, and the girl put her arms about her. 'They are not going to keep your son in prison all the time they said.'

Dinah stood free of her embraces, looking at her.

'If it would be any comfort to you, you can see him.'

'Where?' said Dinah, 'where? When are they going to let him free again?'

'Can you bear to be told, dear?' asked Ethel. 'They have let him out already.'

Dinah clasped her hands and slipped into a seat, though but for Ethel's arms guiding her she would have fallen to the floor. She arose with shaking knees and trembling hands.

'Where is he? Let me go to him. Let me see him. Where is he?'

'You can see him to−day, dear, if you will. He is at Borton, at the Hare and Hounds, in Wedge Street.'

'Ethel, my dear; said Dinah, 'I must go and see him. He is my child for all he's been so wicked. I must go and see him.'

'Yes, darling, yes,' Ethel answered. 'You must go. You will go to−day?'

'Yes, yes, yes,' declared Dinah, with trembling eagerness. She seemed to think that some apology was due to Ethel, for she clung to her and repeated that he was her child he was her child after all. And, to tell the truth, the poor thing's soul was rent between

her horror of her child and the blind yet holy instinct of motherhood which drew her to him in spite of his wickedness. She shared to the full all Ethel's loathing of the crimes they had steeled even her heart against him for an hour but she remembered all her own maternal pangs and fears, and his father's far−off kisses and embraces; sacred sacred enough to sanctify even him. And so the mother's instinct drew her to his side, willing to share his shame and bear his burthen.

She was so agitated as was natural that she was compelled to leave to Ethel all arrangements for the journey, which, though brief enough, could scarcely be performed impromptu. There was money to be got for the prodigal, and this was only to be obtained from Daniel, whose natural tight−fistedness increased with age. Ethel explained that Dinah was going to Borton and wanted money.

'Her's allays agooin' to Borton,' moaned Daniel, 'an' her's allays a wantin' money.'

But he surrendered his keys to Ethel after his customary grumble and sent her upstairs for his cash−box, having first removed with infinite fumbling the particular key which opened it.

'That'll be enough for her,' said Daniel, producing a half−sovereign.

'Not at all,' said Ethel disdainfully. Patience with small vices was not her pet virtue.

'What's her want it for?' piped Daniel in obstinate remonstrance. 'I baint agooin' to ha' my money throwed about wasteful. No, no.'

'Mr. Banks; said Ethel decisively, 'you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Dinah never asks you for a penny unless she really wants it.'

'Well, what's her want, an' what's her want it for? ' he asked.

'She wants five pounds,' said Ethel.

'Eh?' cried the old fellow in dismay. 'Five pound? Her'd like me to die i' the workus, I believe!'

'Never mind, Mr. Banks,' said Ethel; 'I can borrow the money from my mother, I dare say.'

'Rubbidge!' said Daniel. 'My gell's beholden to nobody.'

And with long−drawn reluctance he produced a five−pound note, and having smoothed it with affectionate fingers, and rustled it near his ear with finger and thumb, and held it half−a−dozen times against the light to admire the water−mark, he surrendered it. There was nobody in the world but Ethel who would have succeeded on such terms with him, but he was in some dread of her as being 'a cut over' his own kind of folks, and he was more obedient to her than to anybody else. He was going downwards fast into that second childhood which is robbed of all the graces of the first, and owns nothing endearing but its helplessness, and the memory of what its manhood was, perhaps.

Then there was the time−table to be consulted, and, since Dinah was going, Daniel's dinner must be arranged for next door. These and other little duties of a like sort Ethel took upon herself, and although there is nothing *per se* heroic in getting a five−pound note out of the fingers of a miserly old man, or in making arrangements for the old man's dinner, there have been achievements chronicled in very glowing language which have deserved less praise than these simple doings merited under the circumstances. For the girl's heart was burning all the time, and every wound her base lover had given her was throbbing with new agony. She gave no sign, and that is woman's heroism.

When Dinah reached the market town she found Wedge Street opening off the market−place, which was alive with stalls and rustic dealers, a street very broad at its upper end and very narrow at its lower, where it closed in with the Hare and Hounds, which seemed to have been drawn up across it to block the thoroughfare. As fate willed it, she had no need to make inquiries after her son, for just as she crossed the threshold he appeared in the passage, and they saw each other.

'Come with me,' she said, tremblingly. 'We can't talk here.'

They walked up the street and along one side of the market square, into the town High Street, and on for half a mile until there were fields on either side, and there was no one near. Then they turned into a narrow little lane, and there the mother threw her arms about the criminal's neck and lifted up her voice and wept. I will not say that the tears that filled his eyes were altogether base and unworthy at that moment. Some touch of truth was on him after all, and he felt ashamed of himself. As Dinah hugged him close to her breast and clung to him, the old barriers which had so long held back the words gave way.

'My child, my George, my son my own child!'

The wretched George standing there like a lay figure to be hugged, and not having in him, as yet, the immeasurable insolence to pretend any love to Dinah in return, was smitten by these words as by a hammer. And, of course, the one interpretation he put on them was that Dinah's mind had somehow become unsettled, and that she was not answerable for what she was saying. That one idea which had been in her mind from the hour when first she had heard of her boy's arrest was uppermost now.

'You were wicked, George,' she sobbed as she kissed him, and he braced himself to receive her reproaches with propriety; 'but it was all my wicked fault as you was tempted. If I'd ha' been brave an' good, an' let you had your rights, you'd ha' been a good lad, I know you would I know you would, my dear.'

It was evident to George's mind that Dinah was very mad indeed. Her words meant nothing to him.

'And oh!' cried Dinah in an agony of tears and caresses, 'I never told you as I was your mother, and of course you never growed up to love me like a child would ha' done.'

Really it was getting time for sanity to interfere. The shock of these extraordinary notions had for the moment driven George's humilities out of him. He struggled from her embraces, though she clung to him hard, and standing at arm's length he spoke

'Dinah, what are you talking about? Are you mad?'

'No, darlin', no,' she answered. 'Oh, George, forgive me. I've been a wicked woman.'

In the pain of her self−accusation she threw herself upon her knees before him, and in that attitude she told her story. It sounded incredible at first, and he held for a minute or two his first opinion that Dinah had gone mad. But as she went on with the tale, and came to her interview with old George, and his refusal to believe her, and as the listener's mind grasped the fact that if the tale were true his mother owned a full half of George Bushell's fortune, such a light poured over everything old George had said and done and seemed that doubt was impossible. Under that sudden beam of light old George's one intelligible motive stood revealed, and a truth which needed no holstering was corroborated a half−minute later by the few and hurried words in which the agonised mother told of the theft of the certificate. The whole tale was told so swiftly, and was so broken by the narrator's sobs, and so tangled by the listener's sideway guesses here and there, that half the details miscarried on their way to his intelligence, but the main truth of it stood like a pyramid, dominant and unshakable. He saw it and his bead whirled, and he gasped at it. The felon of little more than half a year ago, the penniless and starving tramp of yesterday, was the rightful heir to a quarter of a million of money! He had known everybody had known how much old Joe Bushell had been worth when he died. Dinah knelt at his feet, clinging to his knees and pleading with him, and he never heard her.

'Say you forgive me, dear; say you forgive me! Oh, I have been a wicked, wicked woman; but only say you forgive me, darlin'! Say you forgive me!'

He did not answer by a word. A quarter of a million of money, and he the rightful heir to it! That amazing vision shut everything else from sight. The pleading mother struggled from her knees and clasped him once more to her bosom.

'Say you forgive me, darlin'! Say you forgive me!'

'Yes, yes,' he answered, with his old fretful impatience. The news had shaken him into himself again. He began to see that in place of being a sinner he had all this time been sinned against most deeply. Swindled! Juggled into penitence and tears by the man who strove to rob him of so vast a sum! His wrath rose above even his amazement.

'I can't expect you to love me all at once,' his mother pleaded. 'I can't expect it when rye been so wicked, but you will love me a bit, my darlin', won't you? when you've had time. Won't you? Won't you?'

'Yes, yes,' he said again impatiently, scarcely knowing what he answered to.

'You shall have your rights, George,' said unhappy Dinah, fawning on him heart−brokenly. She had no blame for him that he did not answer her caresses and her words of endearment. It was her fault that he had been robbed not of a fortune merely, but of a mother. How could she hope that he would love her all at once? 'I've got my lines now, darlin',' she wept to him. 'I've brought 'em with me to show you, so as you shouldn't misbelieve me.' She drew the paper from her bosom, and he looked at it, mechanically at first, but then with understanding.

Every pulse in his body and every current of his little soul turned one way, and for once in his life he threw off every tatter of pretence and humbug, and spoke the truth as he saw it.

'My God, Dinah!' he cried aloud, 'you HAVE been a fool, to be sure!'

Chapter 28.

It was true enough to Dinah's ears and heart, and only failed of truth in not being harsh enough. Yes, he had a right to reproach her. If she had not been wicked he would never have been tempted, and she saddled herself with the weight of his misdoings.

As for George, he had been surprised into candour, and he had time to be sorry for it before either of them spoke again. It would be very foolish to kill the fowl of the golden eggs before a single golden egg was laid. And apart from that, he was a criminal himself, and knew that it was proper for him to be lowly in demeanour. If you will look at it, the young man's position was embarrassing. Dinah could scarcely expect to have the truth thrown at her in this rough and ready way, and yet she could scarcely expect that George would throw himself at once into her arms, and accept her proclamation of relationship with filial rapture.

I suppose I have told enough of this young man's story to establish pretty clearly the fact that he was in King Solomon's sense at least a fool. But he was clear−headed enough to comprehend the situation by a single motion of the mind, a motion swift and complex. Intellect and wisdom are no synonyms, and the lad had brains enough. He held good cards. How many tricks could he carry?

Dinah was crying passionately at his righteous rebuke, and was struggling passionately to repress her tears. George took time to think.

'I didn't know, my darlin',' she sobbed at last. 'It was my ignorance as did it. I wouldn't ha' robbed you of a farthin' o' your rights, no, not to be Queen of England, if I'd only known.'

'I beg your pardon for having spoken so,' said George in answer. So keen a young man could not fail to see that as long as Dinah lived she must hold the purse−strings.

'I've brought a bit o' money with me now, dear,' said the tearful mother; 'as much as I could get father to let me have. But you'll be able to do on it for a bit, an' I must get you some more.'

She drew out her little purse and emptied it, and the young man accepted the gift with as good a grace as he could summon. It would not do to show too much impatience at first, though the idea of offering the rightful heir to a quarter of a million an advance so miserably inadequate was preposterous enough to have made any man angry. He said 'Thank you,' and stood with the money in one hand and his mother's certificate of marriage in the other. A. little sense of shamefacedness touched him. The action of pocketing the gift bade fair to interfere with his martyrdom.

As he stood thus looking downward, a little sick from late privation, later excess, and the emotion of the last hour, his eyes fell upon the written words 'Joseph Bushell.' A new sensation sent a tide of crimson to his face, both hands went suddenly up to hide it, and he groaned and actually cowered. For like a flash of lightning there crossed him for the first time the memory of the insane and pretentious lies he had told his father in America. And with that curdling remembrance came the fear that his father would seek out his mother, and would be brought face to face with him. That thought, I am rejoiced to believe, could have been nothing less than horrible. It was certain in the cowering criminal's mind that Cheston would long since have exploded the pretence, and Joseph Bushell would probably be looking somewhat eagerly for the man who had deceived him. Now, George could see why the middle−aged stranger in the New York Hotel had enquired after Dinah Banks and had played about his memories of the Saracen. Now he could see why that supreme old villain, George Bushell had written to say that Dinah had married, and he could see too why his father had resolved on returning to England after so long an exile. Everything was clear as noon−day, and nothing was clearer than this that in spite of the wrongs that had been done him by his mother, he was not a martyr to his father's eyes or likely to look like one. And terrible fancy!

only too probably to he realised would not his father claim his own from George Bushell the elder, and would not he, George Bushell the younger, he left scornfully and contemptuously in the cold as payment for the poor fraud he had practised? it was no wonder when all this rushed upon him in one sickening torrent of dismay and shame, that he blushed and hid his face and groaned.

To Dinah the whole thing looked like repentance, and more than ever her motherly, tender, self−accusing heart yearned over the scamp before her, and she threw her arms about him and wept above Mm, with team of agony and holy joy, and covered with hungry kisses the hands that hid his face.

'Try to be good, my dear. Try to be sorry, an' God'll forgive you, my poor sufferin' child. That's right my darlin'! cry a bit. it'll ease your heart, my poor dear darlin' George.'

And clinging to him still, she began to pray in broken murmurs for forgiveness for herself and him; and holy heroism and base vice ashamed mingled their tears together.

Whatever joy the angels feel over a sinner turned from the evil of his ways, was hers in that moment, and it atoned for much. There was no thought in her mind that the world owed her an atonement, and so, the blessing coining as a gift, and not claimed as a desert, was multiplied a thousand times in sweetness. It *is* more blessed to give than to receive. She gave forgiveness.

Dinah was safe anyhow, even if the newly−discovered father should appear again and intervene. So ran the rascal's thoughts. It was his part now to crook the pregnant hinges of the knee where thrift might follow fawning. It was not easy to be affectionate to Dinah all at once, even though she had proclaimed herself his mother, and not his sister. But it was little trouble to receive her caresses, since the mere endurance of them bade fair to be profitable.

What with hope and fear and rage and wonder and the sickness of privation and excess, he was in a condition pitiable to behold. Dinah, feeding her life−long hunger upon her own avowal of motherhood, translated penitence into him and affection, and all worthy shame and trembling honest hopes, and loved him for the attributes her own fancy gave him. In his mind, the first shock of remembrance being over, there remained a sensation of singular discomfort, which was yet not without an element of relief. If he had made an enemy, he had a friend, and it was likely that the forgery alone would have been enough to disgust his father. Dinah would help him to get abroad again, perhaps, before the much deceived father could get hold of him. Some of the yarns the San Francisco host had told of his own past life had dealt with rough and tumble fighting here and there, and Joseph Bushell, though he had made no boast of the part he had taken in such enforced frays as he had mentioned, had worn a look whilst he spoke of them which seemed to betoken a certain joy in battle. He was a big broad−shouldered fellow, and could probably have broken young George across his knee like a dry stick. George confessed within himself that he had given provocation, and in case of his father's appearance on the scene he was prepared to run and trust to Dinah's generosity for supplies.

'You'd best stay in the same place for a bit, my dear,' said his mother wiping her eyes, and speaking still with a sobbing catch in her voice, 'an' I'll get more money an' send it to you. I don't know what father'll say when he knows, an' I doubt he'll be hard at first.'

George answered nothing, but took advantage of his search for a pocket−handkerchief to slip her gift into his pocket, and with his eyes hidden, stretched forth the copy of the marriage certificate towards his mother. She took it from him and folded it, and at that moment the noise of a horse's feet disturbed them both. They turned towards the town, walking slowly, and a horseman passed them without notice. Even so slight an incident helped to restore their self−possession, and Dinah a minute later kissed him tenderly and bade him good−bye for the time being. He returned her caress for the first time since he had been a mere lad, and the mother's heart stored up that mercenary kiss and counted it in his favour. She dropped her veil and walked away without looking back again, and George

strolled about the lanes to wear off the traces of his discomposure before returning to the town. Apart from his father, his troubles at last seemed over, but there was enough of doubt in the case to keep his heart in a continual flutter.

Now, being ignorant of John Keen's change of residence, our young rascal had addressed his letter to the old home town, and the postmaster there had forwarded it, so that on the day of Dinah's encounter with her son the lawyer had received the unexpected and astounding news of the lost prisoner's presence in England. With the letter in his pocket−book, he took train for the midland capital, and there found Joseph Bushell at his hotel in mournful consultation with Cheston.

'Read that, Mr. Bushell,' he said laying down the epistle before him.

'What is it?' asked Joe, taking it up. 'Hillo!' he exclaimed as his eye fell upon the superscription, 'this is uncommonly like the fist of that *soi−distant* brother of yours, Cheston.'

'Eh?' cried the Baronet. 'Nonsense! You don't say so? What's he got to say for himself?'

'The letter is from your son, Mr. Bushell,' said John Keen gravely. 'I received it to−day. To−morrow he will call at the Post−Office at Borton for an answer. Before answering it I consult you. Pray read it.'

Joe read it, and his face grew white. With bent head and gaze fixed upon the floor he pushed it across to Cheston.

'What do you make of it? 'he asked after a pause.

'I'll tell you what I make of it,' shouted Cheston, rising and striking the table with a heavy hand. 'That thundering old rascal of an uncle of yours never gave the lad a penny after all, but got him free and turned him loose. Gave him the slip, the old fox, I'll bet a thousand pounds!'

We shall see,' Joe answered, still staring at the floor. After a while he lifted his pale face and looked at Keen. 'Will you go to Borton with me to meet him?'

'Most willingly,' said John.

'Will you start now? By the next train?'

'Certainly.'

'I am using you very cavalierly, old friend,' said Joe with a pitiable forced smile at Cheston; 'asking you here to dinner and then running away from you in this fashion.'

'You don't want an army with you,' returned Cheston, 'or I'd volunteer. I wish you success, and if I can do anything for you here or anywhere, command me.'

'No,' Joe answered. 'I don't think you can do anything.'

It was plain that his thoughts were far away from his speech, and Cheston, taking Joe's right hand in both his own, shook it with great heartiness, and left his old friend and the young lawyer to themselves.

'I believe, Mr. Keen,' said Joe miserably enough, 'that the writer of this letter is the young man I met in America the man who pretended to be Cheston's brother. The handwritings are alike, and the young fellow I met was intimately acquainted with the district, and knew all the people.'

'I suppose that if you saw a photograph you would know,' said John.

'Certainly,' Joe returned.

'If you will go on to Borton,' John continued, 'I will stop at Wrethedale. and join you an hour or two later, bringing a photograph with me. You don't know the town, I suppose?'

'No,' said Joe. 'I was never there in my life.'

'You had better put up at the Hare and Hounds in Wedge Street,' said John. 'A very quiet quaint old house, not the best in the town, but opposite the Post−office, and convenient for our purpose. I will join you there.'

Joe had little heart for converse outside the theme that filled his mind, and but little heart indeed to speak of that more than seemed needful. So the journey was made quietly, and from the little station at Wrethedale Joe travelled on alone. He went to the house to which he had been directed, carrying his own portmanteau, and asked for a bedroom. The rosy chambermaid led him up a flight of old oak steps, and along a corridor full of traps in the way of descending and ascending stairs, and finally landed him in a queer three−cornered room with an outlook on the garden.

'Anything to eat, sir?' asked the rosy chambermaid.

'Not yet,' said the guest, and being left alone, he opened the window, lit a cigar, and began to smoke sadly. He had kept his son's letter to John Keen, and he now read it over and over again. It was terrible to think that the crime and folly which had brought his son to the pass therein described were chiefly traceable to him, and yet he could scarce do otherwise than think so. It was natural in him to accuse himself for all. 'I am destitute,' so he read: 'my feet are bare, my clothes in rags . . . I am compelled to move about from place to place to get workhouse shelter and a casual tramp's poor fare.' How was Joe to say that his son had deserved to suffer in this way? Give everybody his deserts and would he escape whipping?

He sat thinking thus, and bearing a heavy punishment for the misdoing of his youth until John Keen rejoined him.

'Have you brought the photograph?' Joe asked, recognising John in the darkness.

'Yes. Wait a minute whilst I light a candle. Is that the man?'

That was the man sure enough. Not an ill−looking man either, by any means. A young man who held his head aloft rather haughtily, and who imposed upon the beholder with a certain pretence of being a great deal handsomer than he really was, as is the way with some people.

'Yes,' said Joe. 'This is the man who called himself George Cheston when I met him in the States.'

'It is my old schoolfellow and companion George Banks,' said John; 'your son, George Bushell.'

The unhappy father nodded and set down the photograph.

'He mustn't see me in the morning until you have him safely,' he said after a long pause. 'He might want to run away from me again. He has been a bad lot, Mr. Keen, but I must do the best I can with him. I'll fasten a weekly allowance on him in such a way that be can't forestall it, and that will keep him honest in money matters.'

'You'll have some dinner, Mr. Bushel?' asked John.

'Yes,' said Joe. 'You'd better order it. Have you got a room?'

'Not yet,' John answered, pulling at the bell. 'I'll see about one now.'

The rosy chambermaid appearing, the young lawyer went away with her to see after his room and order dinner, and Joe smoked on by the light of his solitary candle, staring at the photograph and failing to read in it any sign of the wickedness its original had shown. After a lapse of half an hour or so, John returned and found him thus employed.

'Dinner is ready,' said he. 'Shall we go down?'

Joe assented and John led the way. The coffee−room was a good−sized oblong chamber panelled with old oak and dimly illuminated by a dozen candles. One guest was there before them, a young man dressed in a cheap−looking tweed suit which fitted him none too well. He was standing at the fire regarding a sporting print above the mantelpiece, and his beck was turned to the newcomers. Without moving his head he addressed the waitress, who in clean white apron and cap was going round the table, touching the knives and forks.

'I say,' said the young man in the tweed suit, 'bring me another bottle of that claret, and take the chill off it this time, will you? You can take it into the billiard−room, and you can let me have one or two of your best cigars at the same time.'

There was nothing very amazing in the speech just cited, but at the very first words of it the new−corners started, and stared with wondering eyes upon each other.

'Your dinner, gentlemen,' said the neat waitress.

Joe nodded, and she bustled from the room.

'Stand by the door,' Joe whispered, and John with a backward step felt for the key and turned it in the lock.

Joe walked swiftly up the room and at the very second when the young man m the tweed suit turned round at the noise of the shooting bolt he laid a hand like a vice upon each arm and said,

'So, Mr. Cheston.'

The merest shadow of an attempt to free himself showed the young man that fight was out of the question. But if force could not avail him, was it not possible that finesse might serve? Perhaps Joseph Bushell might be 'bluffed' into the belief that he had been led away by an astonishing likeness.

'Sir,' he returned therefore, with an indignant drawing up of his figure, 'you have the advantage of me.'

'George, my lad,' said Joe grimly, 'if you lie to me, or attempt to lie to me again, I'll break every bone in your body.'

Since he had known of his son's existence he had pictured many meetings with him, but none like this.

'So you're destitute, are you?' Joe went on; 'your feet are bare your clothes in rags. You move about from place to place to get workhouse shelter and a casual tramp's poor fare! Whom have you robbed now? Who is your last quarry? Keen,' he cried with an almost hysteric bitterness, 'look at this fellow. This forger and impostor, and liar, who knows neither of us. Shouldn't I be a happy man to come home after six and twenty years of exile and find a son like this!'

And having said this, he was moved by an impulse which I will not characterise. He swung the impostor round and kicked him into a corner of the room, where he lay in a heap, guarding his head with his arms; and Joe towered over him with a rage amounting to pure anguish in his heart.

'If I had met this hound in trouble,' he began and there his own accusing conscience staggered him so that he had nothing more to say, but he ground his teeth and clenched his hands in a miserable compound of remorse and anger. George gathered himself into smaller compass in his corner, and eyed his assailant with watchful tremor. John put himself between assailant and assailed, but did it in a casual and unostentatious way.

'If I had met him in trouble,' Joe began again. 'If I had seen him as I expected to see him, I could have had some kindliness for him, and some forgiveness for him.' He made a motion of despair and misery, and John, not reading it rightly, gave a brisk step forward. 'I shan't hit him again,' cried Joe, observing this sign. 'Stand up, you melancholy dog, stand up!'

The melancholy dog, with furtive fear in his eyes, stood up.

'Now,' said his father, 'if I find you trying to deceive me again, I'll hand you over to the police for the trick you played me in the States, and thrash you within an inch of your life before I do it. Will you oblige me, Mr. Keen, by unlocking the door? There is someone knocking at it. Sit down, sir.'

George, with his fears still furtively peeping from his eyes, sat down, and John unlocked the door. The neat maid, a trifle scared, looked round and announced that the claret was in the billiard−room.

'The gentleman is engaged for the present,' said John blandly. 'Will you kindly bring it here?'

The girl obeyed, and during her brief absence not a word was spoken. She looked from one to the other when she brought in the wine, and reminded John that the soup was cooling.

'Thank you,' said John, still bland and suave. 'We are engaged just now. We have business with this gentleman. You can send up the dinner when I ring for it. In the meantime let us have this room to ourselves.'

The girl disappeared, and John locked the door again, but pausing with the key in his hand, he asked,

'Would you like to be alone, Mr. Bushell?'

'No,' Joe answered. 'Come here. Now, sir,' turning upon George, 'I am going to have the truth out of you by hook or by crook. What brings you here? What have you been doing since you gave me the slip at Liverpool.'

George showed no disposition to begin, but at a threatening movement on the questioner's part he opened his narrative.

'I went to Newcastle−on−Tyne,' he said, 'and tried to get employment. But everybody wanted a certificate of character and I couldn't give one. Then I went to Durham, and there it was the same. So I had to sell my things.'

'Mine,' thought Joe, remembering the stolen portmanteau, but he said nothing.

'And I didn't know where my people were,' pursued the criminal, 'and I had to wander about the country. I wrote at last to Mr. Keen when I was nearly dying, but last night I got to a place called Wrethedale, about five and twenty miles from here, and '

There he began to weep again.

'Well?' said Joe, sternly.

'I met a lady,' piped the weeping George, 'a lady I used to know, before ' He drew forth a pink−edged cheap handkerchief and sobbed into it. 'Mr. Keen knows her. She gave me nearly four pounds, and I bought some clothes. I was in rags,' he protested, 'I was really. And I was nearly dying. Mr. Keen can ask her if I wasn't.'

'You have had a pretty good dinner,' said Joe, glancing at the *debris* on the table, and you can afford your two bottles of claret to it. And a chateau wine, as I am alive!' he cried, laying a hand on the mourning George's second bottle. Now, you didn't come here from Wrethedale and buy those clothes and pay a day's hotel bill on this scale out of nearly four pounds. Where did you get the rest of the money from?'

No answer.

'Or are you going to rob the hotel people?'

'No,' cried George. 'I have money to pay them. Dinah has been here to−day.' This was addressed to John Keen, and left both his hearers under the impression that the scamp was still ignorant of his parentage. But Joe took that bull by the horns, resolved to have no more mysteries or misunderstandings than it seemed unavoidable to leave.

'Do you know that you are related to me?' he asked, sickening at the question even as he put it.

'Yes,' said the other, still sobbing into the cheap handkerchief.

'Do you know the nature of the relationship?' Joe asked again.

'Yes,' snuffled George under his breath.

'Who told you?' Joe demanded.

'Dinah told me,' said George, avoiding his father's eye and directing the answer to John Keen.

'Did she tell you of her own relationship to you?'

'Yes.'

'When did she tell you these things?'

'This morning.'

'You are my son,' said Joe. 'God help me and forgive me. And I will deal by you as best I can as well as you will let me. Let me see signs of amendment in you, or it will not be well for you. I shall not be ready to read the signs too easily, and you shall not look for a life of idleness and good−for−nothing luxury at my hands. I have left my duty undone, and I owe many atonements, even to you.' It cost him a good deal to confess as much, but he was bent on doing his duty now, and this seemed part of it. 'But you are one who will need a tight hand, and you shall have it. And now, you can go to your room. I have no fear of your running away, for you are not too proud a dog to eat dirty puddings, and you see your way already to getting a little money out of me when you can work up a fit of penitence.'

Under these scathing words George did begin to feel a little cur−like, and he had to admit that he had done something to deserve them. But even here appearances were wretchedly against him, and he felt it as a keen misfortune that he should have been rehabilitated before his newly−discovered father chanced upon him. A single

day of luxury was dearly purchased at the price he had paid for it.

He crept from the room with his head hanging, and when he reached his own chamber he began to cast about in his mind for the best and wisest course to adopt with this muscular and outspoken father. Would it pay to run away to begin with, refusing his aid on the ground that he was unworthy to receive it, and so wording a penitent letter that it might indicate a clue to his whereabouts, without seeming to do so. He even began to sketch the half−projected letter in his mind. He recalled a sentence from the parable of the Prodigal Son which bade fair to come in with good effect. He would be quite heart−brokenly penitent, and yet display a lingering touch of magnanimity. It would look a little worthier in him to admit his unworthiness. And you must understand that in the nature of this young man though all this was as clearly outlined in intention as I have made it seem it was not altogether hollow and insincere. While he wept for shame and humiliation, he was thinking that his weeping at all was a manly sign in him, and he knew the while that if he wrote that letter he would let new tears fall on it, and he looked for a certain effect that way. Yet, even for him, penitence meant something more than the misery of being detected. Of course a man who really knew how to repent could never have been guilty of young George's particular crimes. A man who has the power to repent nobly may sin much, but hardly in that way. No lion, however degenerate, takes to weaving spider's webs. George's penitence was like his offences, as yours and mine are.

As he sat, half resolving in his uncourageous soul to do this thing and seem a little better than he was in his own eyes and his father's, a tap came to the door, and John Keen entered.

'Your father has deputed me to speak to you about a matter of Importance,' said John. 'He wishes you distinctly to understand that any hopes of his assistance you may entertain will depend upon your obedience in this matter. Your mother is not yet aware of his presence in England. She does not even know that he is still alive, and until he can see his way more clearly than he can at present he desires that she shall hear nothing of him. I suppose I may tell him that you respect his wish? You will see your mother again in a little time. Will you undertake remembering what hangs upon it to drop no hint of your father's presence in England to drop no hint of your having ever seen him anywhere?'

'Yes; said George; 'I promise faithfully. Keen,' he added, rising and breaking into tears anew, '*you* won't believe that I wrote you that letter and pretended to be starving when I wasn't. I give you my word of honour it was true.'

'I see no reason to doubt you; said John somewhat coldly. He could hardly fail to remember that this good young man had quarrelled with him on the ground that he was not moral enough for the good young man to know him any longer. 'I may take your promise?'

'Yes,' said George, and the messenger turned to leave. 'Keen,' cried the criminal, 'I know I've acted like a blackguard, but I'm not so bad as people think me. I never meant to stick to that money, and I won enough on Erebus to put it back. And I haven't I haven't I haven't a friend in the world!'

And so, once more, the young man mistook self−pity for repentance.

Chapter 29.

Joe left Borton next morning, but before he did so he had another interview with his son.

'Understand,' said Joe, 'that I mean to do my best by you. And understand that the best I can do for you seems to me to set your nose to the grindstone and keep it there. Mr. Keen will find you employment, and everything you hope from me will depend upon the way in which you conduct yourself. You will have the manliness to tell your mother that you need no further help from her, and that you are resolved to work out by yourself an atonement for

your own misdeeds. If you accept one penny−piece from her you forfeit all claim on me. Try to be a man,' said Joe with a shaky voice. 'Try to be honest. And so good−bye, sir. When I can shake hands with you without feeling soiled by it, I will.'

Having made arrangements with the lawyer for the furtherance of his ideas concerning young George, Joe started back for his hotel, and on his lonely journey he set himself to unravel the tangled strands of the net which held him. He had made up his mind not to reveal himself to Dinah, and being all along in a mood to do penance, be held hard to his resolve held the harder for his own strong inclination to go against it. There was an intense longing in his heart to comfort her, and there was a dreadful fear that the proclamation of himself would but bring a new sorrow to her. He put by that frying problem for the time, as he had done before, not yet being able to solve it. And then he set to work to think about Uncle George. It was beyond doubt that Uncle George had been a rascal, but then who was Joe Bushell that he should judge anybody, or be severe beyond necessity even with so bad an old man as his benevolent relative had proved?

'Why should one scoundrel venture to be hard upon another? Joe asked himself. 'He's been a bad lot but so have I.'

He would have justice and no more. Even if old George got better it was impossible that he should fight the case. There were too many dangers in it. And if he died there would be an end of everything so far as he was concerned, for Dinah could claim the money. Yet there would be a necessity for exposure there, and Dinah had kept her secret so long and so closely that even for her child's sake Joe could see that it would be hard to proclaim it to the world. There was one thing which seemed possible for the returned exile to do. If old George should recover the use of his intellect, though only for a day, Joe had power enough over him to compel him on any way he chose. He could compel him to make surrender to Dinah and to keep his secret. Such a hold as Joe had upon him no man could afford to disregard or defy. And out of this reflection arose a plan, and out of this plan arose in turn the incidents which closed the romance of Joe's story.

Once arrived in Birmingham, he had a horse saddled, and rode over to his old chum Cheston.

'Cheston,' he broke out at once on meeting him, 'I want to be constantly in the neighbourhood of my uncle George. I want to be the first to know of his getting better, and if he needs any persuasion when the time comes, I want to be on the spot to give it.'

'He'll want no persuasion,' said Cheston. 'The sword hangs by a hair, and he'll be precious hasty in getting from under it.'

'He might recover his senses and then die in a day or two before anything was done,' urged Joe. 'Then there would be a disputed will, and no end to the publicity of the case.'

'The doctor thinks that he'll live to be moderately strong again,' said Cheston.

'Leave me to my own plan,' said Joe with something of his youthful obstinacy. 'I want to watch him, I want to be near him to lend a helping hand to my wife's case if it should be needed. And I want you to give me a berth of some sort.'

'Eh?' said the Baronet.

'I don't want a salary,' said Joe, misunderstanding the cause of his friend's astonishment; 'I want something to do, just to prevent my being in the neighbourhood from looking odd. My name is Jones,' he went on with a faint unmirthful grin. 'It runs in the family to take aliases. I am an *employé* of Sir Sydney Cheston's. I do anything which allows me to live in the parish unnoticed and unobserved. Nobody will know me. Give me my way,

Cheston. And I'll tell you what it is besides. I want to see the old place and some of the old faces, if there are any left. I'm number sixteen at the hotel. There's no name on my luggage. Not a soul knows me except yourself and young Keen, and that wretched boy of mine. Let me have my way.'

'Well,' said the Baronet, half laughing and half puzzled, 'what can you do? Do you know anything about mines? You used to, but things are changed a good deal, and it's a long time ago.'

'I worked in a coal mine in the Dominion,' said Joe; 'but that's twenty years since.'

'You could do a little fancy inspecting, perhaps. Or, let me see. Bowker is a reliable man, and young Gavan broke his leg last week. Yes, that'll do. Gavan was managing man at a new pit of mine called The Buzzard. I don't know why they call it so, so don't ask me. Gavan broke his leg, and Bowker, his subordinate, has been carrying on the work. Now you might take Gavan's place. Leave Bowker alone pretty much, you know, and take his advice about things. He's a thoroughly practical man, one of the old rough sort, but a very decent fellow.'

'All right,' said Joe; 'I'll undertake to be worth what I draw from you, and no more. Can you send my horse hack and drive me over?'

'What!' cried Cheston with a merry laugh. 'Drive a mere mine manager! Me! Well, I don't mind giving you a lift. I'll order the dog−cart.'

Every yard they drove had at one time been familiar to young Joe Bushell, and middle−aged Joe Bushel remembered the way well. After a mile or two they passed the very field in which young Joe had first kissed Dinah and told her how fond of her he was. Poor Dinah! The kiss had been a betrayal, though he had not meant it so. A mile or two later came George Bushell's house, and a little farther on the Saracen, all stuccoed and bedizened with plate glass and gilt lettering. Then before long the dog−cart turned into a lumpy lane and began to jolt and roll in a threatening manner, and in a while, rounding an artificial hill of mine refuse, they came in sight of the tall stack of the Buzzard and the raw red brick−work of the Buzzard's offices.

A miner came forward to hold the Baronet's horse.

'This way, Mr. Jones, if you please,' cried Cheston with a broad grin. 'Ah! that's you, Mr. Bowker. I wish to speak to you. Come into the offices.'

Joe took a look at Mr. Bowker and gave a little start beholding him. Mr. Bowker, in spite of the years which intervened between the present and Joe's knowledge of him, was still recognisable as one who had done odd work for Joe's father in his youth. Mr. Bowker, for his part, looked at Joe, but with no unusual regard.

'Mr. Bowker,' said Sir Sydney, taking a seat on a rough−hewn stool in the office, 'this is Mr. Jones, who will take Gavan's place for the time being.'

'Very well, sir,' said Mr. Bowker, regarding the new−comer with no particular favour.

'I have given him instructions,' said Sir Sydney with preternatural gravity, belied by a twinkle in his eye as he looked at Joe, 'not to disturb any arrangements on which you may have attempted up to this time, and I hope you'll get on well together.'

'I hope so too,' returned Mr. Bowker, with an unfavouring glance at Joe's watch−chain and his well−cut though unassuming garments of dark tweed.

'You'll want lodgings, Mr. Jones,' said Cheston with his eyes twinkling and his face a mask of gravity.

'Yes, I suppose so,' said Joe.

Mr. Bowker turned sheer round and stared at him. Then he turned again and caught the twinkle in the Baronet's eye.

'Your naäm's no more Jones than mine is,' he cried. 'Why it's young master Joseph! Lord, love me! I ought to ha' knowed you in a glawnce, like. Why, bless my soul, I am glad to see thee. But when I heerd thee spake I knowed thee. Shaäk honds, ode mon, shaäk honds!'

Joe shook hands heartily, but he turned a moment later to Cheston, and looked at him with a somewhat rueful smile.

'So much for my plot,' he said. 'William,' he added, turning to the beaming Mr. Bowker, 'I didn't expect you to know me.'

'Lord love thee,' said William, 'I should ha' knowed thee anywheer!'

'So *I* said, Bushell,' cried the Baronet. 'So I said.'

'I don't want it to be known that I'm back again,' said Joe. Mr. Bowker's eyes opened wide at this, but be said nothing. 'My uncle is very ill, as I daresay you know,' he continued, 'and I don't want him to know that I am here at present.'

'I see,' said William briskly. 'Th' ode fox has had your feyther's money, an' now he'll ha' to turn it up, I reckon. Hewray!'

'You seem to bear him no good will?' said Joe.

'Not me! Why, he gi'en me the sack at a minute's notice,' said William; 'an' all for tekin' the part of a woman as was i' trouble, as he was a blackguardin'. You remember her! Miss Banks. Her brother was took up for forgin' ode Bushell's naäm, en' her went to him to beg him off, and he miscalled her all o'er the plaas. An' I ups an' spakes to him. Shut up! I says, Yo'de rip, I says, wheer's your bowels?', An' he turns o' me, and he says, tek a minute's notice, he says, an' leave my empl'y, he says. Oh, he's a bitter hard un, he is. Well, send I may live! I bin glad to see thee, Master Joseph, real righteous right−down glad, an' that's the trewth.'

In the new handshaking that ensued Joe threw in a little extra pressure for Dinah's defender.

'I wanted to stop in the neighbourhood, William,' be said, reluctant to abandon his plan. 'And I didn't want to be known. Do you think anybody else would know me?'

'Well, I doubt they would,' said William reflectively. 'But theer ain't a lot o' th' ode uns left not now. Not one on 'em works here. Yo' might live i' my cottage if yo're i' want o' lodgin's, an' welcome. And yo' could tek to wearin' a pair o' blew glasses. Dr. Hodgetts he's took to em, an' I went by wi'out knowin' him on'y yesterday. They are a real mazin' disguise blew glasses.'

'Well, I won't try the blue glasses,' said Joe, 'but I'll stop and take my chance.' There was more in his resolve than he expressed. What if he *were* known, and the general knowledge brought him back to Dinah? He feared; but might he not make her happy after all? Ah! if once she took him back again he would so surround her with observances of love and tenderness that he would half atone No, no! that was impossible. But he would try to make her happy for the future if they came together again. 'I'll have no alias, Cheston,' he cried suddenly. 'It would look base to be detected under such a disguise. But I'll stay here and take my chance. Bushel is a common

name enough. 'I can trust you, William?'

'I shan't breathe a synnable,' said staunch William, 'till you gien me leave.'

'Now Joe, old man,' said Cheston, with a friendly hand on his shoulder, 'I call this a step in the right direction.'

'I hope it will prove so,' answered Joe.

And so at his own proper cost the returned exile lived in Mr. Bowker's cottage. He bought coarser tweeds and a billycock hat, and fiddled about the mine, making journeys into the bowels of the earth at times, and holding grave consultations with Mr. Bowker as to the progress of the work in hand. Long years of business habits had left upon him the necessity for occupation, and he began by−and−by to take a real interest in the work. The rapidity with which he revived old knowledge and mastered new impressed Mr. Bowker greatly, but Joe kept his eye upon the real business he had in hand, and was keen after news of old George. He found, in the bar parlour of the Dudley Arms of an evening, a generation who knew him not. Two or three oldsters were there whom he had faintly known in his early days, and when he heard their names he could cal them to remembrance, but none of them made any guess as to his identity. He was extremely silent and reserved amongst them, smoking his pipe and sitting behind his 'Times' as he listened to their talk. Old George's illness was a common topic, and old George's doctor was a nightly guest; so that such news as was to be had, he got at without the risk of questioning. A week or two of immunity from recognition seemed to make him safe.

In the meantime Jokn Keen had found employment at Borton for young George, and sent news that the criminal was buckling to with a will, and promised all sorts of amendment. What the heir−presumptive to a quarter of a million thought of working as a clerk at five−and−thirty shillings a week, and living on that sum, was not to be got at, but it is certain that for the time being he bore it well, and news reached his father that he bad strenuously refused Dinah's proffered aid, in accordance with instructions.

After two or three weeks of waiting, there came news of a decisive change in old George's condition, and Joe learned that in the course of a few days it was possible that the old man might be allowed to look at business once again. He sent the news to John Keen, and John came down on the strength of it and saw the doctor, who denied him access to the sick man for the present, but undertook to pave the way for him.

The frustrated schemer had been groping in his mind in a dim and feeble way, and had at length discovered the mental chamber in which, hidden under all manner of rubbish and debris, lay the remembrance of the lawyer's visit, and his own denial of his crime. And when the doctor set before him the fact that Mr. Keen was again in the neighbourhood waiting to see him, the old fellow, with a sort of inward earthquake, recognised the folly and madness of resistance. He had sinned in vain, and his sin had found him out. He had given a hundred pounds to Joseph that was something. It soothed his heart a little to think of that one generous deed, the only one he could recall, though he tried bard to remind himself of his own virtues as a set−off to the account an offended God certainly held against him. The pangs of affrighted conscience were terrible to him, but these alone might have been fought down. There was no fighting young Keen and the evidence of the sexton, or if there were, he was broken and no longer had the pluck for it.

These miseries retarded recovery, but body and mind obstinately insisted on getting stronger, and he bad to see John Keen at last. The old man's skin was of the colour of the film which gathers on stale unbaked bread, and his eyes were fishy and watery. His mouth was drawn down purselike at the corners, and the inner ends of his eyebrows were drawn upwards, so that he wore a mask expressive of feeble misery. John had expected a change in him, but was yet surprised to see him look so wretched.

'I've been a thinkin' over the news as you give me, Mr. Keen,' he said in quavering tones, 'an' if you prove your case I'm willin' to do justice. But five an' twenty thousand pound is a large sum to part with on anythin' but good

evidence.'

'Mr. Bushel,' said John gravely, 'I beg you not to try to deceive me, or to force me into measures which I should regret.'

'Well, forty thousand's a good round sum,' said old George.

'Pray understand, Mr. Bushell,' said John quietly, 'that we cannot content ourselves with anything less than the restoration of the whole of your brother Joseph's fortune. Let me tell you what we know. I shall tell you nothing I am not in a position to prove. You purposely widened the quarrel between your nephew Joseph and his parents. You withheld from him all knowledge of his father's death, and you wrote to him, when you had held for a year the fortune which belonged to him, saying that his wife had married again, and so prevented his return to England.'

Old George's mouth opened, and his fishy eyes widened with a look so ghastly that the lawyer paused. The unbaked pie−crust complexion changed to a deep crimson, and changed again to a dull leaden colour, and for a minute or two John feared that his listener would succumb to the news. He rose and mixed a tumbler of wine and water and held it to the old man's lips. By−and−by the patient recovered, and returned to his former aspect. 'Must I go on and distress you with the memory of these misdeeds?' John asked. 'We know everything. We have been in communication with the Governor of the gaol. Your late private secretary is again in England. Why should you bring misery and disgrace upon yourself by resisting us?'

'I bain't a−resistin' anybody,' said old George feebly and miserably. 'I'm willin' to do justice. A hundred thousand pound's a lot 'o money, but I'm willin' to do justice.'

'You are not near the amount yet, Mr. Bushell,' John returned.

'The title−deeds of all the landed property of which your brother Joseph died possessed, and the papers relating to his funded properties, are still in existence. When we come to business we shall be able to refresh your memory.'

The wretched defeated old schemer groaned.

'The houses was good for nothin', an' was all sold at a loss,' he protested. 'The money's all mixed up along o' mine. I bain't agooin' to be made a pauper on. Mind that, now.'

But this feeble spark of resistance died out when John answered him:

'I am sorry to say, Mr. Bushell, that you have not deserved any merciful consideration at our hands. I shall accept no compromise.'

'Am I agooin' to be made a pauper on?' quavered the wretched old George. 'Answer me that, Mr. Keen. Am I agooin' to be made a pauper on.'

'You must be thankful, Mr. Bushell,' John responded, 'that we do not take criminal measures against you. Be glad that your wickedness is to be punished so lightly.'

'My brother Joseph meant to leave a lot of his money to me,' cried George tremulously. 'He allays said so, an' he made a will an' did it. Am I agooin' to be robbed o' that ?'

'Mr. Bushel,' said John, 'we will take back every penny−piece of which you wrongfully possessed yourself. Thank us, when you come to reason again, that we do no more. We have been merciful to you, and we desire to be

merciful still, but so far as your brother Joseph's fortune is concerned we shall insist upon strict justice. May I see your lawyer now?'

'No,' cried George feebly; 'I'll deal with him myself. You come here at twelve to−morrow, an' I'll have him here. I bain't strong enough to do no more talkin' to−day. I'm tired.'

'Very good, Mr. Bushel,' said John. 'At twelve to−morrow.'

The young lawyer took his way, not without some pity for the broken schemer. He wrote that afternoon two accounts of his interview, despatching one to Joe and the other to Dinah, and on the morrow at midday he presented himself anew at Old George's house. Mr. Packmore, that elderly conveyancer who had once on a time recommended Ethel to John Keen', services, had not yet arrived, and George was alone.

'Mr. Keen,' he said in a stronger voice than that of yesterday. 'if I'm agooin' to do justice, it's fair as I should come off wi' no disgrace.'

'That depends upon yourself, Mr. Bushell,' John answered. 'It is not necessary for Mr. Packmore to know more than the mere fact: that I can prove Dinah Banks's marriage to Joseph Bushell.'

But when Mr. Packmore came he turned out to be a very hard conveyancer indeed, and by no means willing to believe that his client was ready to surrender so huge a slice of his great fortune. In his opinion as up to that time advised the case ought to be fought, if only for the sake of securing a complete proof. But finding that his client objected most savagely and obstinately to any fight being made, he gave in.

'Very well, Mr. Bushell,' he said at last with quiet desperation. 'I'll go over to Waston Church as a mere matter of form, anyway, and look at the original entry.'

'Yo' do anythin' of the sort, if you dare,' cried old George in a half frenzy.

The elderly lawyer looked at him in amazement, and confided to John Keen his opinion that really Mr. Bushell was not in a fit condition to transact business, just at present.

'On our side,' John answered, 'we cannot admit of any delay. Mr. Bushell is fully persuaded of the validity of our claim, and wishes to do justice.'

'It's an odd business,' said the conveyancer, 'and one that I have no stomach for.' They were outside the house by this time. 'You have some hold upon him, Mr. Keen something I don't know of.'

'Mr. Packmore,' said John, with infinite dryness, 'I am at your service in this matter whenever you choose. In the interest of all parties I think we had better get it over quickly.'

The two legal gentlemen met again next day, and the elder looked extremely grave.

'Mr. Keen,' he said, 'I *have* been to Waston Church, and there is no certificate of a marriage there between Joseph Bushel and Dinah Banks.'

'You had better communicate that discovery to your client, Mr. Packmore,' said John. 'This is a certified copy of the original register.' He produced the document from his pocket−book, and again placed it in the conveyancer's hands

'Well, the original is not at Waston,' said the lawyer, half angrily.

'I know it isn't,' John returned.

'Great Heaven!' cried Mr. Packmore, recoiling as the fancy struck him. 'Has Mr. Bushell been tampering ? Under the seal of professional confidence, now!'

'I can only refer you again to Mr. Bushell,' John answered. 'The reasons which actuate him to an unconditional surrender are cogent enough, no doubt, if you can arrive at them.'

'Quite right to be discreet, Mr. Keen; said the elder. 'But 1 wont and can't accept the responsibility of so vast a transfer without knowing more than I know at present.'

The business was broken off for an hour or two, whilst old George's lawyer applied the forensic thumbscrew to his client, and after a tough time of it squeezed the truth out of him. Then he came back and relieved himself by a quotation.

'There are more things in heaven and earth, Mr. Keen,' said he, 'than are dreamt of in our philosophy. I should never have thought it. So respected and with one foot in the grave.'

'He has explained the absence of the certificate?' asked John.

'To my amazement,' the conveyancer answered.

There was no more hinting at delay, and John wrote two other letters, one to Joe and one to Dinah, announcing that the business was practically at an end. Old George, by his lawyer's advice, prepared to sell up everything and to retire from business, as the only way by which the enormous diminution of his capital could be hidden from the public eye.

Chapter 30.

John Keen found busier employment through the unexpected revelation Dinah had made to him than he had ever expected to find in Wrethedale. But howsoever busy he might be, there were intervals in which he found time enough to think upon one inexhaustible theme, and that theme, naturally enough for a lover, was the inexpressible charms of Miss Ethel Donne. Perhaps the young man had been in love before, but if he had been, he contrived to forget all about it. There was but one woman in the world and she less a woman than an angel. Getting at John's thoughts, one would conceive that there never had been any human creature of such perfections, and never again would be. 'There is none like her none! Nor shall there be till our summers have deceased.' It is the proper belief of a lover and comes natural to him.

It is not to be said that the young man had or, being a lover, needed any very distinct opportunities of close observation on which to base the glorious theorem which he never wearied of propounding. 'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view. But to worship a good woman is surely worth an honest man's while. To be able in married life to recognise no disillusion, but only a gradual toning down of colour that is inevitable, and like many inevitable things, a blessing one must have made a better choice and be a better man than the average. But here is a fine−natured, honest−hearted, loyal young fellow in love with a good and charming girl, and if only the girl could be brought to be in love with him, I could find it in my heart to join their hands, with the best hope for their future, and to say, 'Bless you, my children! Bless you!' Playwrights and novelists are the most inveterate of matchmakers.

John's especial disadvantage was that Ethel knew his condition. Had he always disguised it, she could have looked upon him with greater favour, but now his very attachment made it difficult for her even to like him. Hardly a

year and a half had gone by since the man she loved had proved himself a scoundrel, and she had loved him, dearly. John felt his case no more hopeful on account of young George's reappearance, though he knew Ethel's change of feeling towards her late lover well enough. But that reappearance had opened a wound which time had not yet healed, and her truer lover knew it.

Sometimes in his consultations with Dinah, Ethel was present, and she was aware of all that went on on that side. Her courage, her faithfulness to friendship, her self−possession, all seemed more than human in John's eyes, and there are no words for his pity and admiration. If only the young lawyer would or could have hidden the too−evident signs of feeling which every look afforded, Ethel, under these new circumstances, might have liked him well enough, but as it was, she fought him off by a chill abruptness of demeanour altogether unnatural in her, and John, full of warmth as he was within, became frozen on approaching her, except for his eyes, which did her continual homage.

But it is a long lane indeed which has no turning, and the relationship of these two young people underwent a sudden change. Joe had been thinking over the young lawyer's scheme for sounding Dinah's feelings concerning him, and as affairs grew day by day more urgent, and less and less within his own control, the plan began, out of his sheer desperation, to commend itself to him. So that, one evening when John called upon him under cover of the darkness at Mr. Bowker's cottage, the bewildered husband and father capitulated.

'Who is the young lady?' he asked, after reminding John of the hint he himself had given.

'She is a Miss Donne,' answered the young fellow blushing.

They sat in Joe's bedroom by the light of a single tallow candle, and the blush passed unnoticed.

'The girl,' said Joe, 'to whom George was engaged to be married?'

'The same; John answered. 'I can pledge myself to her discretion and to her self−command. And she is so devoted to your wife, sir, that she would do anything for her sake. I want to ask you again to remember how easy the task will be. It seems to me that a very bold hint would be needed before your wife would suspect the meaning of the inquiries.'

'Since I have been living here,' said Joe, sitting with both elbows on the table, and staring at the feeble flame of the candle, with his head between his hands, 'I have learned a good deal about them both my wife and my son. He ruled her and even bullied her at times. Now she's going to be wealthy, and she'll want the control of the lad, and I don't see how I can keep a hold upon him. I don't want to neglect my duty any longer. I could take him with me to the West perhaps, but she'd break her heart to lose him without knowing why; and if she knew why, you can see that all the mischief which could come of my declaring myself would be done, and any chance of good to her in it would be missed. Now, if I could go back to her, and acknowledge myself, and then undertake the care of the lad, and, if need be, go away again and let her see him at times, and know of his well−doing '

The speaker's voice, though he tried hard to steady it, became so shaky that he had to pause and leave his sentence unfinished.

'Yon authorise me then,' said John, 'as a first step, to tell Miss Donne the whole story?'

'I am at a deadlock, now,' Joe answered. 'I've seen that it was coming. I must either go away, and let her suffer anew at the hands of that unhappy lad, and suffer she will, unless there is somebody to control him, or I must make myself known to her. But,' he added suddenly with a shrinking of the heart, 'don't let Miss Donne go too far. Let me know, to begin with, whether my going back will be the larger of the two evils. I can well believe it might be.'

'Rely upon it,' said John, 'that all discretion shall be used.'

Joe was fain to be content and to wait, while John went back to the little western village, and set his scheme in motion, Of course it was charming for John to have such a chance of approaching Ethel, and of course it was terrible to him to have to take it. He began by writing a letter:

'Dear Miss Donne'(he felt ridiculously inclined to set down the first word in capitals) 'I have a secret which most nearly concerns the happiness of your friend Mrs. Joseph Bushell. I believe it's the one thing in the world she most desires to learn. May I presume to ask your assistance and advice? Yours most respectfully,

John Keen.

'P.S. I must beg of you not to drop a hint of this at present to Mrs. Bushell.'

In answer to this brief and somewhat misleading epistle, came sit answer delivered by the hands of Mrs. Donne's little maid−servant. Miss Donne would be obliged if Mr. Keen would call at seven o'clock that evening.

At seven o'clock that evening Mr. Keen called. Ethel sat in the small front parlour to receive him, and, except for the maidservant, was alone in the house, Mrs. Donne having providentially accepted an invitation to tea. When the girl arose and offered her hand, a most unprofessional flutter started in John's heart, but outwardly he was as cool as a cucumber.

'What is your secret, Mr. Keen?' asked Ethel.

'The secret is not mine, Miss Donne, though I am master of it,' John answered. 'If it belonged to me I would offer it, if I offered it at all, without reservation and without conditions. But I am compelled to ask you, in the first place, to promise that you will not reveal it to Mrs. Bushell without the sanction of the person who is with her most interested in it.'

'I promise that,' the girl answered.

'Then,' said John, 'my secret is simply this: her husband is in England.'

Ethel rose and fronted him with her hands clenched, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkling with anger and surprise.

'That man is still alive?' she asked.

'Before you judge him,' returned John, 'let me tell his story. It will not take long. Mr. George Bushell, of whose rascalities you know a little, but not much, was his nephew's only correspondent. He left the runaway in ignorance of his parents' death and stuck to the money they left behind them. That you knew or partly knew already. But he wrote in answer to his nephew's particular inquiries about Miss Dinah Banks, that Dinah Banks had married. Joseph Bushell believed his wife faithless to him and stayed away, until after all these years he learned by a mere accident that this was false, and came over to make inquiries.'

'And how does all that concern Dinah's happiness, Mr. Keen?' asked Ethel. 'The man has heard that she is going to have the fortune he threw away, and now he comes back to live upon her.'

'On the contrary,' said John, 'he has amassed a fortune of his own. He has been in England for some months, and at any moment might have claimed the fortune for himself, but has given his best influence to securing it for her.'

'He has been away from her for six−and−twenty years now; cried Ethel with supreme contempt. 'Let him go away again.'

'Miss Donne,' said the young fellow, warmed on the suffering Joe's behalf, 'you misjudge the man. His wife has not suffered alone. He has endured with her, and he has had great sorrows to bear since his return. When I first met him I had no sympathy with him, but I have learned to know him since then, and I believe that his wife ought to know that he is here. She is not an old woman, and when she has this fortune she will find suitors in plenty. That is inevitable. Suppose she should marry again' (he inwardly blessed Sir Sydney Cheston for having put that argument into his hands) 'and suppose that afterwards the discovery should be made. That would be horrible, and none of us who have the secret could permit it to happen, but we should have then to say what we know now; and how could we accept the responsibility of having kept it back from her? She ought to know it.'

'Do you wish me to break the news to her?' asked Ethel.

'No,' cried John, perceiving suddenly that his argument had altogether overshot the mark. 'Personally, I long to see them together, because I believe that she would be happier after his return than she has ever been since I have known her, but he forbids the immediate revelation of the secret.'

'If he forbids it ' Ethel began contemptuously.

'There is a reason,' said John. 'And this is where I beg your help. His old friend Sir Sydney Cheston has done his best to persuade him to return, and I have exhausted all my arguments in the same behalf.'

'It is a pity to have spent so much good persuasion on such an object, Mr. Keen,' said Ethel.

'But he will only return,' John went on steadfastly, 'on one condition.'

'And that is?' inquired Miss Donne with lofty scorn.

'That his declaration of himself will bring no new unhappiness on her.' Ethel was silent. 'All this time he has been robbed of his fortune, and swindled of his right to a happy married life.'

'He left her voluntarily,' said Ethel hotly.

'And was kept from her by a villanous fraud, Miss Donne. But this is all he has to say through me: that if his declaration of himself can smooth away any troubles she has yet to face, he will declare himself. If it could only add to her unhappiness, he will go away again. Have pity for him, and for your friend, Miss Donne. He asks nothing but the knowledge of his duty. He only waits to know where duty seems to lie.'

'How can I help him?' asked Ethel, still scornful. From the first hour of her hearing Dinah's story she had hated and despised the runaway husband, and she was not going to change her mind on a sudden. It had been clear all along that he had been a good−for−nothing fellow. Why should she help to surrender Dinah to him again?

'You could help him by finding out whether his wife still cares for him, and whether she would be glad to have him back; John urged gently, refusing to be beaten down by her contempt for Joe.

'Of course she cares for him! Why else has she kept single all her life, but because she cared for him! That is the way with women,' cried the girl, trembling with anger and her championship for the woman she loved. 'They love the wretches who use them so shamefully, and pine after them all their life long. Glad to have him back again? Yes, poor weak thing! I know that well enough, Mr. Keen. But I will have no hand in the plot to bring him back, and I have no thanks for yon who come here to ask me to take an office so ignoble. I will not trap my friend into a

confession which would bring that man back again. I love her well enough to deny her wishes there.'

She spoke quietly enough, but with flaming cheeks and sparkling eyes, and an utterance unusually rapid.

'You mistake, Miss Dunne,' said the young lawyer firmly. It was hard for him to have strengthened the poor opinion she had always held of him, or seemed to hold. 'I came to ask you to perform an act of the truest friendship, and I would rather die than ask you to do anything which would not become you as you are. Forgive me! There are troubles before Mrs. Bushell unless she has her husband's help to fight them as great, I fear, as any she has encountered yet, terrible as they have been. The man is not what you believe him, but, I pledge myself for him, a true man, with a kindly, honest heart. He has been hideously defrauded Think of it, Miss Donne. For three−and−twenty years he lived in the belief that the wife of his youth had been false to him, and for half the time he was struggling with hardship and poverty, whilst that old villain who had deluded him and robbed him fattened on his fortune. He does not claim the fortune now. Does that say nothing in his favour? I believe with all my heart and soul,' cried John, in a great heat of friendly championship himself by this time, 'that the one thought he has, the one desire he has, is to spend his whole life in atoning to his wife for the sorrows she has borne. And if I believed one tittle less than that I would never have taken up his cause.'

'Mr. Keen,' said Ethel, 'I do you justice enough to believe that you are in earnest, and that he has imposed upon you.'

'If you could but see the man,' said John.

'I do not think my opinion of him at all likely to change,' answered Ethel quietly. 'And I certainly think that since he has stayed away so long he can do nothing better or more generous or kindly than to stay away for good Dinah will never want to marry again, and Mr. Joseph Bushell has done as much harm as any one man has a right to do. Let him go back to wherever he came from, and take his secret with him, and leave his wife in peace. If he should come here I should certainly advise Dinah most strongly to give him his fortune and let him go.'

'I am sorry to find you against me in this matter,' said John, and he went away sorrowful.

But before he was half−way down the darkened village street a thought struck him and brought him to a standstill.

'Bravo!' he cried, 'the very ticket!' And with that vulgar exclamation he turned and walked briskly back again. This time he rang the bell at Dinah's house, and being admitted, gave the first shove to his new scheme.

'I have called to say,' he began, 'that everything is now ready for the transfer of your husband's property to your hands. I shall be greatly obliged if you can make it convenient to come down to Birmingham, where Mr. Packmore (who is engaged on the other side) and I can lay the necessary documents before you.'

'I don't want to go down there if I can help it, Mr. Keen,' said Dinah piteously.

'I'm afraid I must ask you to do it,' said John, cruel only to be kind. 'You need not go farther than Birmingham.'

He knew partly how Dinah dreaded a return to the place she had left in such unearned shame.

'If I must come,' said Dinah quietly, 'I must come.' It was all for the child for whom she had suffered so much. And now that he was beginning to act so nobly, and to struggle for himself, he was ten times more than ever worthy of any suffering she might endure. For the young man had told her, making the best of a bargain he thought unpleasant, that he meant to be a man in future, and had declined her assistance with an air of martyr−like magnanimity inexpressibly affecting.

'I daresay,' said John with much innocence, 'you could persuade Miss Donne to accompany you. We shall not want to keep you more than a day or two.'

'Make the time as short as you can, Mr. Keen; said Dinah. 'When shall you want me to be ready?'

'Consult your own convenience,' cried John, 'but make it as soon as you like. It will be best to have the business over; he added cheerily.

'Yes,' Dinah answered. 'I'll speak to her about it, and I'll let you know to−morrow, Mr. Keen.'

On that understanding John went away, and the first result of this small ruse of his was that Ethel and Dinah and he all travelled down to the Midland capital together on the following afternoon. Old Daniel was quite beyond the understanding of any part of the story by this time, and Mrs. Donne knew no more of it than that her neighbour had come in suddenly for a great fortune which ought to have been hers long ago. She was not a mercenary woman, but she made no objection to her daughter's friendship with Dinah under these circumstances. John had guessed, and as events proved had guessed rightly, that if Dinah visited the old country at all it would be in Ethel's company. Half his plan was accomplished, and now he had but to bring Ethel and Joe together to complete his scheme. For, after the manner of impetuous youth, he was persuaded that Ethel could no more fail to recognise the manliness of Joe's character than he had done. If she could but see the man, as he had said to her! If she could but hear his wishes from his own lips, and see how real and. how in earnest he was, she would surely consent to help him. And nobody, I am assured, will be likely to think any the worse of the young man for his generous efforts in behalf of such a cause. Joe by this time had fairly taken John's affections captive, and John was ready to swear by him as the honestest and most injured man in Great Britain. It is a fine thing to be young and to have these impetuous beliefs in human probity. They are often thrown away, but for once they bade fair to be expended on a good object.

When John had once got Ethel so near, he set to work to get her nearer still, but found. unlooked−for difficulties in the way. Perhaps she misunderstood the purpose of that persistence with which he dodged her, and suspected an interest more personal to himself than that which really animated him. But at last, avoid him as she might, he caught her in a corridor of the hotel.

'Miss Donne,' he murmured, as she sought to pass him with a mere bow, 'I have something of the utmost urgency to say to you.' She could do nothing less than pause, without being downright rude to him. 'I am most glad you came here, for I think it forwards one of the dearest wishes I have in the world. Joseph Bushell is within five miles of us. Will you see him and judge him for yourself? For Dinah's sake,' he pleaded. 'Think how much hangs upon your judgment: it commits you to nothing. Will you see him?'

Ethel was a woman after all, albeit a very charming one. And being a woman, she could scarcely be insensible to the young fellow's disinterested earnestness, or to the flattery which so simply told her that the course of two lives depended on her judgment. I do not desire to lay too much stress upon the last. The appeal, 'For Dinah's sake,' might have been enough to shake down any little barrier of unwillingness. Perhaps, too, she was a trifle curious to see the man.

'Dinah must not know of it,' she answered. 'And I do not see how I can leave her.'

'If you will give me an hour after she has gone to bed to−night,' urged John, 'Mr. Bushell shall be here.'

'Very well,' she answered, 'I will see him.'

John, elated, and supposing all troubles over, made his swiftest way to Mr. Bowker's cottage, and despatched a messenger to the Buzzard, who returned with Joe. The young fellow found it a somewhat delicate thing to tell him

that be was to go and be examined by a lady he had never seen, with a view to ascertain his fitness to be trusted with his own wife. But he blurted it out at last.

'Miss Donne is very much opposed to you, but I want you to see her yourself'

Joe assented with a readiness which surprised his companion, but the truth of the matter was that Joe's heart was growing hungrier and hungrier, and his scruples were beginning to be as nothing in his way. He was almost ready at moments to start off and throw himself upon Dinah's mercy without preliminaries. He had written half a ream of letters to her, and destroyed them as he wrote them, one by one.

So when darkness fell, the two went into town together, and Joe stayed at another hotel while John went on to spy out the land before him. Dinah retired early, and John darted away for her husband, brought him up in a cab within five minutes, and led him to the sitting−room where Ethel sat to receive them. It was not a small thing for Joe to enter the house in which his wife was sleeping, even though he were sure of not being discovered by her; to be so near to her, and yet to be sundered from her by the barrier of those six−and−twenty years of absence. He bore the impress of his emotions in his face, and it was natural for a moment he should wish that he had not undertaken the venture.

Ethel rose to John's introduction of the new−comer, gave him a formal bow and signed him to a seat. The first thing that crossed her was that Dinah would never (in the mere worthless, conventional sense of the word) be a lady, though she had the essentials of ladyhood (which are perhaps, after all, included in womanliness), whilst the man before her had at least the aspect of a gentleman. Even that, in her prejudiced mind, went against him. He would think Dinah's accent vulgar, and despise her homely ways and thoughts.

'I am obliged to you,' said Joe in the simple manly way habitual and natural to him, 'for having consented to meet me. Mr. Keen tells me that you are very much opposed to me, and I should have expected that. You know the facts of the case up to a certain point, and I need not trouble you by repeating them.'

He paused, and Ethel inclined her head. It was not easy to make way against her resolute coldness but he went on.

'If I say anything which gives you pain I can only ask you to forgive me. When my son and I encountered each other in New York I learned that my wife had never married again, and that my uncle's letter to that effect had held a cruel lie he didn't know how cruel. Perhaps you know Mr. Bushell's handwriting?' he asked, drawing a book of memoranda from his breast pocket. 'There is his letter. I thought it advisable to bring it.'

Ethel glanced through the letter, which was yellow with age and much worn at the edges of the folds. 'There has been a gaish' (probably gayish) 'wedding here last week, when Dinah Banks was married at the Old Church. I am sorry to hear as you are nott doing well and being busy at this time no more from your affectionate uncle, George Bushell.' So it closed.

'Did you keep this letter, Mr. Bushell, with a view to any such contingency as this?' asked Ethel.

'No,' said Joe, with a simple, sad surprise. 'I never thought at that time of coming back to England. It was years after that before I could have paid the passage−money.'

He folded up the letter, returned it to his pocket−book and went on.

'That was the last line I ever had from England. Perhaps that was why I kept it. When my unhappy lad met me m America he was travelling under an assumed name and I didn't guess who he was. But I resolved on coming back to England in consequence of the news he gave me. When I landed here I scarcely knew what I wanted to do, but I learned from Mr. Keen, here, everything my wife had suffered in my absence. I learned for the first time that I

had a son, and I heard what had become of him. I went with Sir Sydney Cheston to the place where he was confined, and I found that he had been released by the intervention of my uncle George.'

This was news to Ethel, and it amazed her, but she said nothing, and gave no sign.

'Shortly after this my son wrote to Mr. Keen for assistance in discovering Dinah, giving an address at Borton. We went to see him together, and I recognised him as the man who had met me in New York, and had passed himself off as the brother of my old friend, Sir Sydney Cheston.'

He saw how bitterly all this distressed Ethel, but he was too careful to spare her to apologise, and she bore it bravely. He went on.

'My wife, for her son's sake, has compelled my uncle George to surrender my father's fortune, and she is wealthy. What hold have I upon a son who has already proved himself unworthy of her? Can I leave her, knowing him as I do, to bear the burden he will lay upon her? I have feared that my return might seem a greater evil in her eyes than even that. I have been afraid that after such an absence my return might seem the most terrible thing that could happen to her. Perhaps if the news were broken to her gently, and if she knew that I had no further object than to help her in leading that poor lad to wiser ways, and that I made no demands upon her, and had no wish to fetter her freedom or control her slightest wish as God knows I haven't! she might consent to see me once, and let me take the part I want to take. Will you sound her first, Miss Donne?' he asked hurrying along to hide the shaking of his voice. 'Not letting her guess at first that I am here or alive at all. Can you do that for me? And if my home−coming should seem too hard for her, I must find another way. Will you help me?'

'Mr. Bushell,' said Ethel, breaking her silence for the second time and speaking in a voice unlike her own,' I value your wife very highly, and I can do nothing to disturb her peace. She has suffered as few women have suffered. If you desire nothing more than you have said '

'Nothing 'Joe cried earnestly. 'Nothing!'

'I will consent to help you so far as this: I will speak to your wife of a problematical return, and will find out for you whether she would be likely to rejoice or grieve at it, and I will let you know.'

There was a diplomatic movement here which I hope nobody will think sinful. Ethel knew well enough already that there was no one thing in the world which could so rejoice Dinah's widowed heart as the news of Joe's return. For, when once the secret had been confessed, Dinah's constant speech went back to him, as of one long since dead, indeed, but always to be loved and held in pious memory to the end. But the girl could not yet bring herself to confess as much to the returned exile. Still there was with her, as there had been with John Keen in his first interview with the wanderer, a feeling which warred with her preconceived notions of the man.

'Will you answer me one or two questions, Mr. Bushell?' she asked suddenly.

'If I can,' he answered.

'How long was it after your departure from England before you received that letter?' she asked, pointing to the pocket−book which still lay on the table.

'Two years,' said Joe hanging his head and crushing his beard against his breast.

'What kept you silent all that time?'

'Shame,' he answered, lifting his head as he spoke and dropping it again. 'I promised to go away and make a home for her. I failed; I scarcely made a living for myself. I promised to send her the certificate of her marriage, and I couldn't find it. And so I put off writing for a while, and then put it off for a while longer, and at last was afraid to write at all. After a month or two I made sure that she would think me dead, and when uncle George's letter came I was certain that she did so.'

It was a poor excuse, and Ethel thought so. Joe had always thought it shameful, and was not likely to change his opinion now, when the weight of unavailing repentance had been laid upon him so heavily. It was clear that, whatever he had to bear he had himself made his burden. 'You have made your bed,' says the harsh common−sense proverb, speaking the harsh common−sense of the world: 'lie upon it.' But it is no easier to lie upon it because the briars between the sheets were put there by your own hands. 'Nobody can have any pity for him,' says popular opinion; 'he brought it upon himself.' Nay still pity him, perhaps the more that he can soften the pangs of suffering by the balm of no forgiveness.

Chapter 31.

So Joe went his way again and waited. Conveyancer Packmore and John Keen were in conference for a few hours with Dinah, and except for some merest formalities of law, the like of which any able young lawyer might readily invent if he desired it, the property of long errant Joe was at last in his wife's hands. John had his reasons for delay. There was surely a method of keeping Dinah in Joe's neighbourhood, since there was no method of getting Joe to keep in Dinah's. The young fellow consulted Sir Sydney Cheston, and found the Baronet inclined to adopt impetuous action.

'A man might think,' said Sir Sydney, 'that the whole business was being carried out on the story−book principle, with an absolute necessity for filling three volumes out of it. The man wants to go back to his wife. There's no mortal doubt that she would be most happy to have him back. We want to see the whole thing settled and done with, and two good people happy; and yet we all go philandering about in this ridiculous and uncertain way. Let's bring 'em together, say who's who, and have done with it. They'd settle matters in five minutes, and their friends could go home and dine in peace.'

'I wish with all my heart it could be done,' said John. 'Shall we make a final representation to Mr. Bushell and try to persuade him to some definite action? He is waiting now, though, to hear what Miss Donne says.'

'My dear fellow,' cried Cheston, 'it doesn't matter what Mrs. Donne says. Bushell *must* be on the spot to control that rascal of a son of his infernally unlucky that he should be such a rascal isn't it? and it's Quixotic to talk about leaving a fortune such as his behind him. Why, that young blackguard would break his mother's heart and be off with the money in a year. In short,' said Cheston, decisively, 'if Joe won't move, I'll tell his wife he's here, and bring her over to him.'

But John, who naturally attached great weight to Ethel's desires in the matte; though he dissented from her estimate of Joe, fought against this rough−and−ready method. He advanced Joe's own expressed desire to remain unknown; he represented how they had both pledged their honour not to reveal his secret; and, in brief, he left the Baronet convinced, and out of temper, as men convinced against their will are apt to be.

Before this, by some means or other, the story of the late transfer of old Joe's property to his lost son's wife was in everybody's mouth. Whether Mrs. Bullus had listened, or Conveyancer Packmore had leaked, which seems improbable, or Cheston had been indiscreet, nobody seemed to know; but the secret was no secret, and the bidden marriage of so long ago was common talk. But there was no hint of old George's criminality in the gossip, nor of Dinah's real relationship to young George; though, by the way, it was settled once by a learned legal tribunal, according to Lawrence Sterne, I fancy, that a mother and her son are not related to each other. Dinah knew that

her business was known, and shrank within herself and longed to get away. The local papers had paragraphs and 'leaderettes' about it, exalting that magnanimous morality on old George's part which forbade him from fighting the case.

'I suppose,' said the Baronet, still a little out of humour, 'that there can't be any objection to my calling on Miss Donne? I might see Mrs. Bushell, and I might learn if anything had been done.'

'Pray be discreet,' said John.

'I'll he discreet enough,' Cheston answered brusquely. 'But somebody must move in the matter, and if nobody else will, I will.'

'Miss Donne may not yet have had time to carry out her promise,' urged John.

'Then she'll have to find time,' said the other, not being in love with the young lady, 'and do it pretty quickly.'

Sir Sydney Cheston got into his carriage instead of the usual dog−cart, lit his meerschaum, and drove, unattended, as was his wont, to the hotel in which Dinah and Miss Donne were quartered. This lonely drive, which lasted an hour, gave the noisy good−hearted gentleman a chance to think, and he was no sooner arrived than he put his thoughts into practice.

'They'll say all manner of things,' said he to himself. 'They'll say I want to marry a publican's daughter because she's got a quarter of a million of money; and a very good reason that would be if I wanted to do it. They'll find out all on a sudden that they always noticed a tendency in me to make friends with moneyed people. I always worshipped the mammon of unrighteousness they'll say at Wesley Chapel. Let 'em say what they like. A good conscience, Syd, my boy! Eh?'

He sent in his card and was received, and fell to talking with Miss Donne in his own boisterous way, and suddenly blurted out an invitation to Worley Hall, which took both women by surprise. They declined with thanks, looking at each other, but the refusal was feeble. Sir Sydney was a baronet and very much looked up to in those parts, and they had both been inclined to regard him as a man who had his own way in all things; and, indeed, he had in most.

'My sister will take care of you both, and you know, Miss Banks beg your pardon very ridiculous, Mrs. Bushell, for I was just going to speak of your husband; poor Joe was my dearest chum once upon a time; and, in short, ladies, I ant here with a' purpose, and I'm not in a humour to take a refusal, and I shall be more hurt than I can say if I meet one.'

He actually took things into his own hands; rang the belt, demanded the manager, informed him that the ladies were going to stay with him at Worley Hall, and instructed him to send their belongings after them. He lunched with them by his own invitation, and carried them triumphantly away with him, having prepared his sister by a telegraphic message. They had no more power against him than they might have against a whirlwind, and they submitted with inward tremors.

'You see, Miss Donne,' said Cheston at his earliest opportunity, 'that the people about here are saying all manner of unworthy things about your friend, Mrs. Bushell. Now, let me hear 'em saying anything about a guest of mine!'

Errant Joe's wife, lifted suddenly into fame, was naturally found no better than she should be. Curious, how impossible it is to have one's name public property and escape lies.

Ethel shrewdly suspected his real purpose, but dared not say so. She began to see that she was not to have her own way without interruption, or at least began to guess as much, and she trembled anew for Dinah, yet could say nothing to prepare her. Both the younger and the elder woman were ill at ease in their new quarters, though for diverse reasons. Dinah was oppressed by the majesty of the place, and found no joy at being waited on at dinner by liveried menials who brought her strange dishes. Sir Sydney's maiden sister was kind and curious, but Dinah had no heart to talk of her own affairs to anybody but Ethel. Elderly Miss Cheston pronounced enthusiastically upon Miss Donne, whom she had always admired, though hitherto chiefly at a distance.

'Not at all countryfied,' said Miss Cheston to her brother; 'not rustic in the beast. Quite a lady. No *mauvaise honte* about her.'

To this Sir Sydney agreed with a pre−occupied air, being engaged with the ripening of his own benevolent plans. His sister, who was perforce acquainted with them, thought it all deliciously romantic, and waited for the *denouement* with much anxiety.

'You'll keep a still tongue till it's all over, Dorothea,' said Sir Sydney.

'My dear Sydney,' said the maiden sister, 'can you doubt me?'

Cheston made no answer to this appeal, but went back to his plotting.

At that moment Ethel and Dinah were closeted together, and the younger woman, fancying that she saw the inevitable coming, led the talk to the topic the widowed wife moat loved. Dinah told the old story over again: how tried Joe had been, and how valiantly he had gone away, and how he had never again been heard of. A. few tears fell, but the story was ancient now.

'It's very strange to think of, Dinah,' said Ethel, steeling herself. 'If he were alive and you were to meet, you might not know each other.'

Dinah disbelieved, She saw the fresh−coloured youngster in the garments of six−and−twenty years ago, his long hair worn in the fashion of that bygone day, the callow bit of whisker on his cheek, his clear front, his blue eyes. Time made no difference to him. She would know him, yes, amongst ten thousand! She said so as she wiped her eyes, and took up her lacework again.

'He would be changed,' persisted Ethel. 'We all change in less than six−and−twenty years, dear. If he were still alive, and if you saw him, you would not know him. If you and I parted to−day and met no more for all that time, do you think you would know me. I should be an old woman.'

Dinah shook her head with a mild showery smile.

'A woman doesn't forget her husband, my dear,' she answered. 'No, no. And the father of her child and all. You don't know what it is, my darlin'.'

'I wonder how it would feel, Dinah,' said Ethel, 'if one were married, and one's husband went away and came back again after so long an absence.'

'Why, what makes you talk of that?' cried Dinah.

'I was always fanciful,' answered Ethel. 'But don't you think it would be terrible rather than happy, after such a time?'

'No,' said Dinah. 'Not if he was to come back cold from his grave, poor thing. Do you think anything could make Joe terrible to me, my dear? I've laid awake many an' many a time, prayin' to see his poor ghost, if it wasn't wicked to ask such a thing. You'll think me a foolish woman perhaps, my dear,' continued Dinah with a smile more tearful than before, 'but if I knowed he'd stay away o' purpose, an' was alive now anywhere, I'd march there barefoot an' ask him to let me see him now an' then. I think it's God as puts such feelings in a woman's heart when she marries a man and has childern by him. I don't think anybody else has such thoughts.

'Dinah,' cried Ethel, throwing her arms about her friend's neck, 'you are the best woman in the world.'

'No,' my dear, answered Dinah, kissing her. 'If you marry and have children, you'll know what I mean.'

There was surely no need to probe Dinah's heart further than this, and it was only too clear that when errant Joe came back again his wife would have forgiveness and a welcome for him. But Ethel vowed inwardly and with a grand flush of anticipatory wrath when the man came back and misbehaved himself, he should repent any suffering he might bring to Dinah. He should suffer in return, and should be ashamed of himself, if any possibility of shame lay in him.

It was night−time when this conversation was begun, and it was late when the talk to which it led was over. Dinah dreamed of Joe that night, and saw him as he used to be, and at the close of the dream she awoke.

'Not know you, my life's darlin'!' she cried to herself reaching out her arms in the darkness. 'Always yours, Joe; always yours!'

And so, with no guess that the life−long truant was so near, she wept herself back to her dreams again. Sleep, faithful lover sleep, and dream happily! Live a little while in the past, and be glad in it

Early in the morning, Cheston, with his brown beard blowing back in the free air and his shoulders squared resolutely, turned the slashing bay mare in the direction of the Buzzard, and made good speed to Mr. Bowker's cottage. Joe was at the mine, and the Baronet, leaving his horse in the care of Mr. Bowker's eldest son, walked off to find him. Seeing him at the pit's mouth in company with one or two miners, he called him and led the way into the offices.

'I suppose,' he said with a laugh, 'that now this business is over you've no desire to keep on mining. Eh?'

'I don't know,' said Joe a little drearily, 'it's interesting work rather.'

'Pooh!' said the Baronet. 'I've come over to take you back with me. You've had enough of this. The reason for which you came here exists no longer.'

'Cheston!' said Joe, paling somewhat as he spoke. 'You mean well, but you mustn't trap me. I know who is staying at Worley Hall with you!'

'The deuce you do!' cried Cheston, his countenance falling.

'Young Keen went over to see her last night,' said Joe, 'and they told him at the hotel where they had gone to. No, Cheston, let things take their course for a while, and give me time to think.'

'Now, look here, Joe,' said Cheston, laying both hands on his old chum's shoulders and shaking him to and fro a little, 'there's something in the Bible about the kisses of an enemy being deceitful, and the wounds of a friend faithful. It's a true word if ever one was written. How about that lad of yours? Are you going to let him play the devil with his mother's heart and your fortune, or are you going to step forward like a man, and say, Here am I,

Joe Bushell, come to life again, and going to try to do my duty, and keep things square! Now, which is it to be, Joe? Tell me.'

'I have a present hold upon the lad, Cheston,' urged Joe. 'I have told him that if he misbehaves himself I won't stand by and see it. I could go in and stop any extravagances of his with a word.'

'Listen to me, now,' cried the Baronet grimly. 'If Mahomet won't come to the mountain, the mountain will have to travel to Mahomet. If you won't come to your wife, your wife shall come to you.'

'Have a little patience with me,' said Joe. 'I don't want to distress her. Let me hear what Miss Bonne says before we do anything.'

'Hang Miss Donne!' said Cheston ungallantly. 'No,' he added laughing, 'don't hang Miss Donne. She is a very charming young woman, and a good one, or I'm no judge of characters. But now will you come? Yes or no?'

'Not until I know that my coming mayn't be a downright horror to her, Cheston. Not until she's prepared a little '

'And half dies of expecting you before she sees you,' interjected Cheston, laying his hands on Joe's shoulders again, and once more rocking him to and fro. 'The wounds of a friend are faithful. Remember that, if I hurt you, old man. You're the same irresolute Joe Bushell as of old. The same irresolute Joe Bushell who couldn't find it in his heart to confess that he was married the same Joe who meant every day to write to his wife confessing his failure to find a home for her, and always put off the writing till he never wrote at all. Not a bad Joe Bushell, not by any means; an honest fellow, with a good heart, but irresolute, irresolute, irresolute.'

'Yes, Cheston,' answered Joe; 'but not irresolute now, if I know my heart at all. I'm slow in finding where duty lies. The way's perplexed. I want to go back, Cheston. I want to make up, if I only could, for a little of what she's suffered. But I must think of her, and think of her only.'

'Well, Joe,' returned Cheston, gripping him more warmly still by the shoulders, as Joe stood with bent head to hide the tears that dripped slowly through his beard to the earthen floor, 'you must let your friends act as mediaries, and hasten things a little. That's all. I won't press you for the present. Good−bye, old man, and keep a good heart. You'll be together, and be happy yet, the pair of you, I hope and trust. She's a dear woman, Joe a dear good woman!'

'Yes,' said Joe; 'I know it.'

Cheston shook him by the shoulders once again, and left him there. As he marched towards his dog−cart he muttered a great oath to his beard.

'I'll bring that foolish fellow and his wife together before the sun goes down.'

He filled his meerschaum, stepped into Mr. Bowker's cottage for a light, charming Mrs. Bowker's heart with noisy affabilities, threw half−a−crown to Bowker the younger, mounted the dog−cart, touched up the slashing mare, and drove away. The first thing he did on reaching home was to find his sister. He threw himself into a chair and faced her with an air of gloomy determination.

'What is the matter, Sydney?' cried the elderly spinster.

'You'll keep your mouth shut, Dorothea, about what I'm going to tell you?' he demanded.

'Really, Sydney,' she declared, 'you grow quite horrid. What a dreadful phrase! What is it?'

'Promise!' he asked, and she promised. 'That fellow won't come!'

'Dear me!' said Miss Cheston; 'I thought he was so eager to be reconciled to his wife.'

'So he is, but he's got some maggot in his head about her having learned to hate him during his absence, and about the shock of his return being terrible to her. You know where he is? Very well. Did you ever go down a coal mine?'

'What a question! You know I never did.'

'Well, don't you think it rather an odd thing that a lady living all her life in this part of the country has never been down a coal mine? Don't you want to go down a coal mine?'

'Certainly not,' replied the lady.

'Not if you could persuade Miss Donne and Mrs. Bushel to want to go down a coal mine too? Not if we went to the Buzzard, and in place of going down I just walked into the offices with Mrs. Bushell and said, Excuse me, madam, but this is your husband. Fight it out between you!

'Wouldn't that be too sudden, Sydney?'

'Won't the news be sudden whenever it comes?' her brother asked. 'Now, will you help me? Will you want to go down a coal mine when we're at luncheon, and persuade the others to come with us?'

'Oh,' said the spinster, 'you begin it, Sydney.'

'Very well,' said the Baronet. 'I'll begin it. Back me up, and we'll have this mournful business over, and take to piping and gaiety again.'

So, being foiled on one side, the obstinate Baronet made the new approach, and opened his batteries at luncheon.

'Dorothea,' he began, 'I don't believe you've ever been down a coal mine.'

'I never have,' responded Dorothea; adding untruthfully, but according to programme, 'I should like it of all things.'

'Have you ever been down a coal mine, Mrs. Bushell? No? Nor you Miss Donne? How singular! What do you say, Dorothea? If your guests would like to go, I'm thinking of going down my new mine, the Buzzard, this afternoon. It's quite clean, and perfectly safe.'

The deceitful Dorothea, animated by the best intentions, quite sparkled with delight over the prospect. The spirit of adventure and daring awoke in Ethel's heart, and *she* would like to go of all things. Dinah turned a little pale at the idea, and shook her head, but, being of a yielding nature, was overruled, and consented. She would like it very much she said, only she was a little timid. But she would be glad to see what a mine was like, if Sir Sydney Cheston was sure there was no danger.

'I shall lead you into no danger, Mrs. Bushell,' cried Sir Sydney jovially. 'Have no fear.'

So the thing being settled, the women retired after luncheon to put on their plainest sad least spoilable clothes, and when they were dressed Sir Sydney led the way to the carriage and drove off with them, bearing in his heart a resolution the like of which would not be unbefitting in the leader of a storming party. Dorothea was fluttering, as

any middle−aged tender−hearted maiden lady would have a right to flutter under such circumstances as she found herself in. Ethel, for the first time for many a long week, was gay at heart again. The sense of adventure, for there was just a spice of danger about her thoughts of the expedition, brightened and revived her, acting like a spiritual tonic of a strongish sort. Dinah, innocent motive−power of the whole movement, was somewhat nervous, but would not show it. The road on which they travelled had for her the memories it had for Joe a few weeks earlier, and the young figure with the long light hair worn in the fashion of 1850, and the blue eyes and the callow bit of sprouting whisker, went with her all the way. They passed the Saracen (she had dropped her veil a mile before), and she saw it changed and unlike itself. The new face it wore chilled her, curiously.

The genial and noisy Baronet was so obviously changed by the way that Ethel began to suspect him. But she could say nothing and do nothing, and her suspicion, after all, was only a vague fear, and had no ground to go upon.

The carriage turned by−and−by into the lumpy lane, and there Dinah, who sat behind, sighted John Keen talking with a bearded stiff−set stranger whose face was partly turned away. John caught sight of her at the same time, and the bearded stranger stepped through a gap in the hedge and disappeared. Sir Sydney Cheston used evil language, inwardly, and lashed his horses so that they sprang, and elicited a squeak of fright from Miss Dorothea. For the vanished figure was Joe Bushel's, and a word of John's, as Sir Sydney guessed, had set him off.

'Hillo, Keen!' cried Cheston, jerking his horses up viciously, 'who was that you were talking to?'

'Your manager at the Buzzard, Sir Sydney,' John responded, refusing to be drawn into the Baronet's plot, and indeed in his own mind gravely disallowing it all merit.

'Where's he gone to?' growled the Baronet angrily. 'Can't you get him to come back, Keen? Follow him, there's a good fellow.'

John obeyed, but after ten minutes' absence rejoined Sir Sydney at the mouth of the mine. He took him aside.

'It's of no use, Sir Sydney. He will not startle her. He is afraid of shocking her really afraid. Do him justice. Try to bring it about in a quieter way.'

'Hang it all,' Cheston grumbled, heartily savage at his failure. 'I've brought 'em all here on a fool's errand, pretending to take 'em down the mine. Confound the mine!'

'Well,' said John bluntly, 'that's better than bringing them with no reason at all, sir. Take them down, Sir Sydney, and then take them home again, and let us be content to wait a little. Your friend will yield, if not to your pressure, to the persuasion of his own heart, by−and−by.'

'Dorothea,' called Cheston, 'come here.' His sister obeyed his summons. 'That fellow's seen us and bolted,' he said bitterly; 'and now I shall either have to confess that I've brought you on a fool's errand, or you'll *have* to go down, though I don't think you're very hungry for it.'

'I don't want to go, Sydney,' said Miss Dorothea.

'Well, stop where you are,' said Cheston with brotherly brutality. 'I'm not going to look like a fool, in addition to being one. I shall go down, and take Miss Donne and Mrs. Bushell with me.'

'Can I be of use?' cried John. In the exercise of that double−barrelled profession of his, John had surveyed the Buzzard, and knew his depths as well as any man alive. He said as much, being eager to attach himself to Miss Donne's party and Miss Donne.

'You'll spoil your broadcloth,' said the Baronet.

'Oh,' said John, 'I'll borrow a jacket and a cap;' and with that he ran off, returning a minute later in an unbrimmed felt hat for all the world like a great basin inverted, and a new jacket of white flannel lined with carpeting of a brilliant pattern. Ethel turned away to laugh at him in private, and John was delighted to see her sparkling once again, even at his own expense.

Mr. Bowker was on the bank−side, and came down to make the necessary preparations. it is the custom in that part of the world not to use a cage but an open skip to descend in. The skip is a mere square of boards, suspended from the chain which lowers it by a big inverted letter U of iron. When the womenfolk saw this doubtful means of descent and the yawning cavernous black of the wine below it, a tremor ran through them.

'All right, ladies,' said Mr. Bowker, observing this. 'Do't yo' be afeard. I'll fix the lot on you as right as a trivet.'

A sort of sliding door being pushed across the mouth of the mine, the skip was lowered and allowed to rest upon it. The ladies with renewed tremors stepped forward and took their places, Cheston and Keen accompanying without tremors, the Baronet still sulky from the disappointment he had suffered, the young lawyer quite beaming at the splendid treat fortune had thrown into his way. Miss Cheston, Ethel, and Dinah were provided with chains, which being passed securely round the waist and firmly attached to the inverted iron U, seemed at least to do away with all danger of falling off. Cheston and John stood at opposite corners of the square.

'Ready?' cried coaly Mr. Bowker.

'Wait a bit; cried the Baronet in answer. 'Run up to the Dudley" while we're down and order half−a−dozen of champagne. We shall want a glass of wine when we come up. Eh, ladies? Now− we're ready.'

Coaly William gave the signal. The skip was hoisted, with a general inclination on the part of the feminine contingent to squeal and hold on with ridiculous tightness the latter impulse obeyed, the former resisted. Then, at a vigorous push of coaly William's foot, away went the sliding door, the black chasm yawned, and the skip dropped like a stone, with a motion so smooth and unshaken that the gleaming walls on either side seemed to shoot up past it, and the travellers themselves to hang stock still. In a while the walls began to mount less quickly, then softly ceased to mount at all, and the ladies were aware of a black cavern with an immense fire on the floor of it. John was off first, and assisted in unbinding Miss Donne and helping her down to firm earth. Happy John! full of knowledge and able to answer all inquiries. Inquiries came in on all sides as to what was this and that and the other, and John was concisely fluent in reply, conscious that he sounded businesslike and manly in his goddess's ears. Further into the bowels of the earth the heat sweltering Miss Dorothea's maiden susceptibilities shocked by the sight of coaly males, who lay or knelt pecking at the coal, naked to the waist, in gloomy side avenues. By−and−by the way began to be damp, began to be damper, began to run in a little stream an inch deep.

'Place used to be as dry as a chip, Sir Sydney,' said John.

'I've always heard so,' answered the Baronet with unwonted ill−humour in his tones. 'Why the dickens couldn't somebody have told us the place was in this state? The ladies will catch their death.'

'Oh dear no,' protested the ladies, interested now, and their fears vanishing.

Water two inches deep, and deepening apparently ladies hesitating Sir Sydney refusing under the circumstances to go a step farther.

'It's quite dry yonder,' said John, pointing a few yards ahead. 'They've come upon a spring here, I suppose.'

'Here,' meant a side−working to the right, where, as a few farther steps made manifest, a solitary personage sat pecking at the wall, pipe in mouth, and working by a naked candle.

'Hillo, my man,' cried John, 'where's your lamp?'

'Oi lint um, sorr,' said the solitary personage in accents sufficiently Milesian, and went on pecking.

He sat upon a lump of coal in the middle of a space as high and twice as wide as an ordinary room door, and the water ran between his outspread feet and round his improvised stool likes bubbling brooklet.

'Where's all that water coming from?' asked John.

'Here,' answered Paddy, with an unusually decisive blow of his pick.

As if he had struck another rock such as that which Moses touched in the wilderness, the water, as he drew away the pick point, sprang out in a stream as thick as a man's thumb, and spurted three or four yards.

'Stop that!' cried John, almost wildly. 'Come out. Do you hear?'

The man heard, but he struck the face of coal again, and thin time the water spouted out thick as a man's arm.

'You madman!' John yelled, and, turning, he seized Ethel by the waist, and fairly lifted her, and rushed up the steep incline of the dry floor bearing her in his arms. As he ran, he turned and shouted, 'This way for your lives!'

The women rushed towards him terror−stricken, not knowing why. But John's eyes had seen the whole surface of the wall in that side avenue quiver, and he knew the ground of his own fears. Before they could ask a question, before he had even set Ethel fairly on her feet, the wall, now twenty yards below them, broke, and with a swishing sweep and a roar the imprisoned waters leapt sheer against the further wall, and poured up and down the warn pathway of the mine.

'Run!' shouted John. 'This way!'

He snatched his precious burden to his arms again, and tore uphill. The mounting water had him to the waist; Cheston, with one arm round Dinah and another round his sister, came up behind. It was well for both men in that desperate race for life and death that they were strong and fleet, and well for all that one of them knew the place so thoroughly.

The water ceased to pursue them, and ebbed from waist to knee and from knee to ankle until again they stood upon dry ground. There were Davy lamps twinkling on the wall at either side where they paused, and they could see the water pouring back again to find the lower levels after its first wild rush.

'What does this mean?' cried the Baronet panting.

'There was an old working on the north,' John answered with sobbing breath, as he set his burden down, 'an old abandoned working disused this eighty years. It must have filled with water and that poor wretch broke into it.'

'Can we get back when the rush is over?'

'No,' said John, staring at the water twenty yards away, now heaving sullenly, but no longer ebbing. 'At this point we stand fifty feet above the level of the bottom of the shaft. There are fifty feet of water in the shaft therefore. We are prisoners for a day or two.'

Miss Dorothea clasped her hands and fainted, and the others looked upon each other in the thick dusk with awful faces.

Chapter 32.

Above, spring sunshine and the world unconscious (even the local world as yet unconscious) of disaster; below, terror and widespread death.

Joe Bushell, with mingled emotions, had betaken himself to the great Midland capital and there wandered desolate about the streets, cigar in mouth, staring in at shop windows. It was not a manly−looking part to play, this dodging and evading of a woman who had loved him, and to whom he had solemnly sworn in the hearing of God and man to be faithful. It seemed certain that Dinah would misconstrue it if she heard of it, and would set it down to his own blackguard and dastardly fear of meeting her. Better end it all and let her know that he was still in the flesh and waiting for her forgiveness or her scorn, as it might be, and at least desiring nothing but her happiness. He prayed for guidance, poor Joe, as he wandered lonely, elbowed out of the way of busy men, and staring vacantly into shop windows; and at last it seemed as if a voice of guidance came. He turned into an hotel, demanded a private room and writing materials, and painfully and slowly indited a letter to Miss Donne, beseeching her to prepare Dinah carefully for the news, and finally to show that letter to her. He set down all his desires his wish to leave Dinah in perfect freedom if she chose it so; his wish to help her in the government of their erring son; his wish that the fortune she had become possessed of should remain exclusively her own; his content to do whatever she desired. He set down also in plain uncompromising words the story of his own base neglect of his promises, and offered no extenuation for it. lie begged pardon humbly for the past, and he protested, in words that moved him as he set them down, his single and entire devotion to her will from that time forward.

The writing of this letter was a long and painful business, and it was more than dusk when he paced into the street with it, and dropped it, feeling as if he dropped his heart with it, into the gaping little mouth of zinc at the general post office. He had addressed it to Miss Donne, care of Sir Sydney Cheston, Worley Hall, Staffordshire, and as he walked the streets he speculated on the time of its arrival, and wished it there, and wished it recalled, or written otherwise, as you may fancy of him.

The streets were all alive with gaslight, and the people were pushing by him to the theatre, when a dirty little fellow, fluttering a sheaf of news sheets, came dancing by, piping, 'Awful mining disaster. A hundred miners imprisoned.' Then, as the lad danced along, Joe heard his shrill tones sound the name of 'Sir Sydney Cheston.' With a horrible foreboding in his heart he dashed after the lad, thrust a shilling into one hand, snatched a paper from the other, and with the damp sheet shaking in his fingers, he pushed to a shop window and read the news. He read through it almost at a glance, and his heart fairly sickened within him. 'Sir Sydney Cheston,' so ran one paragraph of the curt telegraph message, 'was accompanied by his only sister and by Mrs. Bushell and Miss Donne, guests at Worley Hall, with whom the unfortunate Baronet was on a visit of pleasure to the mine.'

He stood a minute, understanding well enough, but numbed and incapable of action. Then, a cab passing, he hailed it, and leapt in, and gave the man directions.

'An extra pound,' he cried, 'if you're there under the half−hour. Drive your hardest.'

The cabman had heard the news it was all over the district and in type in London news offices by this time and half to win his pound and half because he had caught something of that amazing flash which passes from man to man sometimes, he flogged his horse along at a furious speed, and once on the level, unobstructed country road, put him fairly at a gallop, and kept him at it, until the blazing, smoky cressets round the Buzzard's mouth came into sight, revealing a sea of faces, and the horse began to stumble dangerously in the uneven lane. Joe thrust a couple of sovereigns into the driver's hand, and dashed from the cab, fighting his way like a madman through the

crowd. Men and women at the sight of his face made way for him, and called for others to make way.

'Mek way theer,' cried the hoarse Black Country voices, 'cossent see the mon's got somebody DOWN?'

When once that cry began the crowd parted for him and made way.

Bowker was at the mouth of the mine, his face pale below its coal−dust, and his lips set firmly. He was ordering here and there, quietly and with self−possession.

'Your wife's down, Master Joseph,' he said, when Joe laid a hand upon his arm. They had talked of Dinah many times since the coaly little man had pierced the disguise of Joe's alias. 'And the gaffer, an' his sister, an' young Keen, an' Miss Donne, as used to belong to Quarrymoor. Hode up, an' be a mon, Master Joseph. There's a lad o' mine down, too.'

'What are you doing?' asked Joe with forced calmness.

'I sent for the fire−engines to help pump,' said William, 'but the hose ain't long enough, not to come near the water.'

'I'll wire to Birmingham, London, anywhere, for every foot that can be had for money,' said Joe.

'Right! ' cried William. 'Yo' can leave me here. I'll leave no stone unturned.'

Joe was off again, the crowd once more dividing for him. The cabman was still where he had left him, breathing his horse. Joe mounted again and was driven to the local fire office, then, having made inquiries, to the telegraph office, whence in a minute or two were despatched winged messages for succour here and there. Next he raced back to the scene of the disaster, there only to stand still and taste the horrible nausea of waiting, whilst the engines clanked, and the vast pumping bucket dropped like a stone, or came up (with every inch of steel rope that bore it vibrating like a living conscious nerve) to vomit its hundreds of gallons, and stone−like, fall again.

It was in his mind all the while that his coming back had led Dinah here. It was in his mind that the letter of that afternoon was too hate written. A day earlier it would have saved her.

There was nothing to be done but wait. The huge bucket went up and down, the engineman drove his fiery steed as he had never driven it before.

'What depth of water, William?' asked Joe with desperate quiet.

'Fifty−two feet, we reckon,' returned William. 'What area does it cover?'

'Young Wilki'son the surveyor's i' the office wi' the plans answered William. 'He's mekin' his calculations. We shall know directly.'

In a while the surveyor came with his report: so many thousand cubic feet of water in the mine, so many hundred feet being lifted by the means at present at disposal. Result irrefragable and terrible two hundred and thirty−two hours' work before them, and by that time hope all over.

No. There came answering messages from London, from Birmingham, from Manchester. Hose of specified size with brass screws and jointings as indicated, on the way, enough to serve half−a−dozen engines.

'I am sorry to tell you, sir,' says a grave man (manager of a great neighbouring factory), speaking sorrowfully when Joe had read out the last of these telegrams to William, 'that fire−engines will be of no service.'

'No service? 'cried Joe, horror−stricken. 'Why not?'

'How are the pumps to suck water at such a distance?

This query fell like a blow on all who heard it.

'You must fill your hose with water to make it draw; and to fill it you would have to fill the mine. Every spot you poured would run through.'

Horrible, but convincing. Nature has but one set of laws for all sets of human circumstances. The man who had dealt this blow had turned sadly to leave the place, when Joe seized him by the arm.,

'Stop!' He half thought he knew him. 'You are an engineer?'

'Yes. A bit of one.'

'Come with me to the offices, and for Heaven's sake tell me if there's anything in a scheme I have.'

They pushed through the crowd in silence, and once within the office, Joe, with a trembling hand, drew a pencil from his pocket, and taking a sheet of paper, made two parallel perpendicular lines upon it.

'Take that,' he said, 'as representing the hose.'

'Yes,' said the other nodding.

Joe drew a line across the other two in the middle and one at the base.

'Take this as representing the water−line, and this the bottom of the shaft.'

'Yes,' said the manager again.

'Take this as representing a brass case,' continued Joe, scoring two lines across the bottom of the imaginary hose. 'Suppose the case fixed firmly by a screw. Suppose it filled with gunpowder enough to blast it an electric wire attached the whole thing lowered the tube filled with water the pumps ready '

'There's something in that, maybe,' said the manager with Scotch caution. 'But, ah 'm as ignorant of hydraulics as a baby. Anyway, we'll test it. Come away wi' me this minute.'

So for one hour at least there was something else to do than wait. The two men rushed together to the great factory where the Scotchman held command, and the manager's hands drew the plans for the powder case, hands of skilled artisans were set to work at it, hammers rang on anvil, and red sparks flew, and the thing was done with incredible rapidity and deftness.

'We shall want more than one,' said Joe; 'how many engines can we get?'

'One steam, three or four manuals,' responded the manager. 'Mon,' he added, 'you've a head on you.'

'My wife's in the mine,' said Joe, as if that explained it all.

'Ay, ay,' said the Scotchman quietly. 'Make five or six o' they things,' he added to his foreman, 'and get water−tight wrappings for them all. I'll take this with me. Send a man to the High Street for the fire−engine, an' if they say it's of no service, tell them they're mightily mistaken, an' we'll make it of service. And now, sir, to wire for every fire−engine we can get.'

Messengers who had waited at railway stations for the expected hose, came with it lumbering in waggons in the dead of night. Crowds of men harnessed to great ropes dragged at manual engines in the dead of night along the lumpy lane, and haled them to the pit's mouth. Deft mechanics, despatched from the great capital of ingenious industry close by, set up their electric machine, uncoiled their wire, and fixed their insulators. The vast crowd (ten thousand people gathered there, and lingering an hour after midnight to watch if this new hope availed anything) pressed round in close serried phalanx till all was ready. A score of brawny hands were on the pump−shafts the tube was lowered and filled the wire gone with it the finger of a deft artisan pressed the little ivory button that awoke the spark.

'Pump!' roared the engineer, and up and down went the pump−shafts, swift and steady.

'Does it draw?' from lip to lip. 'For God's sake, does it draw?'

'It draws! Hurrah! It draws!'

The crowd cheered wildly, but in a second or two the clank of the pump−shafts ceased, and an ominous silence spread about from the shaft of the mine, as though it radiated from a centre. The ignorant experiment had failed, as it was bound to do. Nature has but one set of laws for all sets of human circumstances, no hopes can touch her or despairs move her.

Joe and Bowker, each with his hands clenched on the pumping−shaft, stared across the body of the engine at each other in mute despair. The far−off outer circles of the crowd were still cheering, when, by one consent, the volunteer workers let fall their hands and turned away. The scattered cheers died off, and there was dead silence, and then a murmur, and the news of the failure went through the crowd and silence fell again. Joe sat down upon a great coil of the useless tubing with hanging head and useless hands depending between his knees. The Scotch manager tapped him on the shoulder.

'We had better be doing something than nothing,' he said quietly. 'Heaven alone knows how long it will take to do it, but we must just try to dig them out from the workings of the old Bowler, yonder.'

Joe made no answer, until the Scotchman seized and shook him by the shoulder.

'No giving way man,' he urged, 'whilst there's even a bit of a chance left.'

'Not while there's a chance,' said Joe, like a man in a dream.

The, Scotchman, passing an arm through his, led him to the offices of the mine, where sat the young surveyor, poring over the plans.

'Where's the nearest point,' asked the factory manager, 'between the Buzzard and the old Bowler?'

'Here,' answered the other, laying a finger on the plan before him.

'Ay,' said the Scotchman, bending down, 'and what's the distance?'

'Sixty yards,' said the surveyor, laying a little rule across the plan, and checking his calculation.

The engineer shook his head.

'There's small hope of getting through that in time.'

'None whatever,' said the other, and rising, folded up the plan and laid it by.

The three stood quite silent for a minute, when the engineer, with a swift gesture, took the other by the arm.

'Who dialled the old Bowler?' he demanded.

'I did.'

'And young Keen,' said the engineer, 'dialled the Buzzard. Now tell me one thing on your soul.' He seized the plan and opened it with nervous haste. 'Did you ever allow for the variation of the needle?'

The other looked at him doubtfully, as not understanding.

'No,' he said.

'Do you know what lam talking about?' cried the Scotchman.

'No,' said the other again.

'Then there's a chance. Young Keen and I had a talk about that very matter years ago, and he told me he always made strict allowance for that same variation. Now, if that be so, the plan lies, and the two workings are nearer each other than anybody guesses. The Buzzard working keeps straight on, and the Bowler, running by the right of it, has always got a tendency towards the right, and that gives us a start of God knows how many yards. We must get at them through the Bowler. It's Sir Sydney's own mine, and if it wasn't there'd be no man such a villain as to throw an obstacle in the way of work like this. Come away with me this minute.'

At the mere prospect of work to do, Joe rose with a new look on his face, and the three men left the offices at a run, the Scotchman leading.

'I want volunteers; cried Joe wildly, and in answer to the cry the whole crowd swayed round him.

'Steady,' said the engineer. 'Working miners only. We can do with no others.' And from his knowledge of the men he began to call out a list of names of those about him. 'How many can work at once?' he asked, turning to the engineer.

'I'll take a dozen down to start with,' said the other, 'and send up for as many more as we can find room for.'

Joe set himself at the young surveyor's side, marched with him to the edge of the shaft of the neighbouring mine, and descended with the first batch. The surveyor indicated the place at which the work should be begun, and in as little time as it takes to tell it, the men were stripped, and at it.

Not only the intense and absorbing hope of saving life, but the element of uncertainty which beset the enterprise, inspired the workers with almost superhuman vigour. There was not a man there who did not in his own mind so exaggerate the difference of the accurate and inaccurate methods of measurements that he hoped at every stroke of the pick to break in on the imprisoned party, and this ever−present hope remained, though deferred for hours, and then again deferred. And amongst all the workers none wrought with such a passion of despair and hope as Joe himself. Morning dawned, party had relieved party, and the work had gone on for many hours without a

pause, before his hands, wearied to helplessness let fall the pick, and even then he sat in the level beyond the workmen, and watched how every stroke told, until in his wild impatience at the slowness of the work's progress, he could, but that he restrained himself, have risen to tear at the wall which imprisoned Dinah, with his finger nails. His first mad burst of labour had so worn and spent him that his hands hung powerless at his sides, and when a friendly miner brought him food and drink he could not reach out a finger towards either of them. Food he refused, but he drank greedily from the cup held to his lips, and sat on there, watching, as relay after relay of men relieved each other, and the black tunnel yawned deeper and deeper, and the wall of its far−end melted slowly.

Every now and then when the 'shot' was prepared, the men, retiring from the coming explosion, forced him gently away, but he always came back and took his old seat, and watched with the old impatient hunger.

But a new thought struck Joe at last, and he was away to the telegraph office again, the Scotchman at his side, to wire to London for a diver, to hold communication with the prisoners if might be, and if it might be, to carry them provisions. Joe had a scheme of lowering barrels filled with food, wine, candles, and lamps, and loaded to make them sink to the foot of the shaft. He would have a chain lashed to each barrel, and the diver should carry the chains, and the prisoners tug up the barrels and provisions themselves, and have hope again, and some comfort whilst they waited for deliverance.

'Don't be too sanguine, sir,' said his new−found friend; 'I'm sorely afraid of the gas.'

'What gas?' cried Joe.

In those old workings (the manager told him sorrowfully), from which, the water broke, there was a terrible chance that there were hollows which the springs had not filled up. If that were so, there would be bred from the stagnant water, in the womb of earth, gases fatal to life: these gases would follow the water, spread into the new workings into which the flood had broken, and slowly but surely choke every living creature there.

'That is almost our greatest fear,' he added; 'and it was best that you should know it.'

'I might have known it,' groaned Joe, 'if I had only thought about it.'

'Young Keen knew those old workings,' said the engineer., 'but he's *down*, too, and I doubt if anybody else knows much about them. The shaft's not overbuilt, I know, and that's some comfort. It depends, ye see, on the way the workings run. If they run away upward from the foot of the shaft, as they do in the Buzzard yon, there'll be gas there, because the bottom of the shaft would fill with water first; but if they run down or pretty level, the gradual flow of water would push the air out, and leave none behind to get foul and choke poor fellows' lives out o' them.'

'Pray Heaven they may run downwards!' said Joe.

'Amen!' said his companion, though he added, 'its past praying about, for the ways were made eighty years ago. We'll just have to wait and see, ma poor friend.'

Meantime, how did it fare with the imprisoned?

There were drowned bodies floating in the dark caverns there, none could yet tell how many. The survivors numbered sixty−seven, all told the three women, their two companions, and sixty−two miners. These last, when the news of the peril reached them, came trooping down with their lamps, a doleful crowd, and lolled about by the edge of the water, talking in hoarse murmurs with each other. This went on for hours.

'Men,' said John Keen at last, standing on a truck and speaking in a loud firm voice, 'listen to me. You know me, most of you, and you know I know my business, and you'll take my advice. You know where this water came

from?'

'Yes,' answered two or three. 'It must ha' come from th' ode workin's.'

'It comes from the old workings of the Sill Pit. Do you know what will follow it when they begin to pump it down?'

'Choke damp,' said one voice.

'Choke damp,' John Keen repeated. 'Then what chance have we?'

'None but i' God's mercy i' the next world,' said the man who had answered last.

'Yes,' said John, 'one chance in this world. A chance to build an air−tight wall of coal here. A chance to wait until they can clear the mine of water and gas and set us free again.'

'That's a poor chance,' said one. 'It's a chance o' lingerin' till we're dyin' o' starvation, Mr. Keen, an' I, for one, says Lie down an' go to sleep, an' let the gas come up, an' have it o'er an' done wi'. '

'I say No to that!' cried John Keen. 'I say that whilst we have these ladies with us, it's our business to do all we can for them. I say, besides, that no man has a right to throw away the life God gave him, or to lay it down if he can help it until God calls him. Who says with me?'

'I do' and 'I do' here and there among the crowd, but for the most part the men were dumb and despairing.

'Then let us set to work like men,' cried John descending. 'Three men to the front with spades. I want every inch of mud that we can get to fill up the chinks of the wall. We can beat earth and slack up with the water there. And then coal for the wall. Work, lads, and trust in God.'

'Right, Mr. Keen,' said one old grey−bearded man. 'Let's ask a 'word o' blessing on the work.'

'Pray *while* you work, Gibbons,' said John, who knew the old fellow as a Methodist local preacher of signal piety. 'We can't afford to waste a minute.'

'There's no time wasted i' praying God,' said the old man, and lifted a hand for silence. The men bowed and bared their heads. 'Lord, spare us,' he prayed hoarsely, 'to see our wives an' our little 'uns once more if it be Thy holy will; an' if not, prepare us to see Thy face. And we ask it for the Lord's sake. Amen!'

'Amen!' here and there hoarsely answered from the crowd.

'I've a hand in this work, lads,' cried Cheston. 'God helps them that help themselves. That's Scripture, Gibbons, eh?

'No, Sir Sydney,' said the old man; 'it's a good word, but it ain't between the boards o' the Bible.'

Stirred by example, the more despairing took heart and set to work with the rest. The barrier against death rose higher and higher, and while the work went on it was noticed that all on a sudden the water began palpably to ebb.

'They are pumping amazingly up there,' said John Keen. 'Work, lads, work, for life or death!'

All was order and quiet, no man interfering with another, but all working in concert. And the wall was three feet thick, and as solid as mud and coal could make it. They were closing it in at the roof, and men with spades were busy plastering the inner side, when all at once a portion of the upper surface gave way, a hundredweight of coal rolled down, and a human figure with it. There was one piercing shriek as they came to earth together then a heart−rending groan and quiet.

'It's Mister Keen, lads,' said old Gibbons. 'Steady there. Don't drag at the poor lad i' that way! Pull the coal off first.'

'Never mind me,' said John faintly. 'Put me in the truck there and get along. For God's sake, save the women!'

'Ay, ay!' said one, and two or three lifted him gently.

'Set me where I can see the work,' said John valiantly, and fainted.

The rough fellows left him to the women, and went back to their fight with death. In a while their work was complete, the last cranny stopped, the inner surface of their wall of salvation as smooth as the top of a table.

I have forborne to tell you of the women's thoughts, and I still forbear, for I desire to have no reader who has not heart enough to guess how terrible they might be. They had sat in quiet at least until now, and had made no outward moan. The words which had been spoken in their hearing, the work which had been done before them, told, too clearly for misunderstanding, the nature of their peril, and they bore it in quiet. Sir Sydney, in his shirt sleeves, and all begrimed with coal dust and sweat, had paused once or twice with an unvarying formula.

'We'll cheat the devil yet, my dears,' said the Baronet sturdily. And indeed in Sir Sydney Cheston's mind there was present very visibly a battle with the actual Enemy in his own abode of darkness, and he spoke with no profanity or levity.

John's swoon faded into sleep, and sleep broke into a painful yet delicious dream. He was lying somewhere in the dark at rest, after some awful toil, and suddenly Ethel's face appeared before him with a heavenly light about it. And she reached out a hand and touched him, and the touch was agony. Yet it was her hand and the touch was meant for kindness.

'Ethel,' he murmured. 'My love! Ethel!'

He awoke, and her face was indeed bent over him.

'Did I hurt you?' she asked softly. 'Pray be still, I will hurt you as little as possible.'

His arm was broken, and his ribs were crushed, and the women during his swoon had cut away the cloth from his wounds, and with fragments torn from their own dresses were binding them to stop their bleeding. Some of the men stood round the truck, and the light from one of their closed lamps fell softly and dimly upon Ethel's face. John looked up to her once with his dark eyes filmed with pain, and yet with a glance of ineffable love in them. If he died, he thought, he died to save her. A thrill of passionate hope went through him. If he were her sacrifice accepted. The hope became a prayer. Great dangers and great love breed such, hopes and prayers in great hearts. He prayed with all his soul to die for her if his life might be taken for hers, and he swooned again.

Ethel had heard his words, and they had not fallen upon her ears alone. There was no revelation for her in the random 'My love' born of a dream of ecstacy and agony. She had known that this gallant−hearted lad had loved her, long and long ago it seemed, before she herself had altogether learned to love a scoundrel, and she had fixed her heart upon the clay and had despised the gold. Well, there was her destiny. She had not known. He was brave,

this wounded young fellow, undaunted in the face of death, full of resource when men used to peril had given up the cause of life in despair. And in the girl's mind, there was no hope of escape none! The man loved her. Was that a crime, that she had treated him so coldly for it?

She and Dinah and Miss Cheston bound his wounds, and the miners brought their heavy flannel jackets and laid them out so as to make a couch as comfortable as might be. Some of the men had tea with them, carried in the tin bottles miners use, and these by general consent were stored up for the sufferer. As for the rest of them, they could wait. Cheston's watch was going still it was his habit to wind it in the morning and it marked seven o'clock. They had been fifteen hours in the mine already, then, and so far nobody had thought of sleep. The lamps died out, and one of the men set off in the darkness for a store of candles kept in a stable in the upper workings.

'Only one light at a time,' said Sir Sydney; and the little dim lamp was set upon a ledge in the wall, and twinkled there duskily, scarcely making darkness visible.

The men, worn out, sat down or lay about the coaly floor here and there, and slept. The heat was sweltering. Sir Sydney, having seen to the women, took his seat by John Keen, and waited and watched there in company with his own thoughts. So for many hours there was silence, and if any man awoke, he had no desire to speak to his neighbour, but turned and strove to get to sleep again.

This was the goal, then, to which Cheston's good−natured impetuosity had led him, and not him only.

'I meant it for the best,' he said bitterly a thousand times, but the repetition was not of much comfort to him.

John stirred uneasily and moaned every now and then, and the watchful Baronet moistened his lips with cold tea from one of the tin bottles. The time went slowly, as if on leaden wings. Cheston would rise on tiptoe every half−hour or thereabouts and look at his watch by the one glimmering Davy lamp, and every time he did so he set it to his ear believing it had stopped. But while his thoughts galloped, time seemed to stand still, and every half−hour was like a day. At last, when some six or seven dreary hours had slipped away, he also fell asleep, and once or twice the wounded man moaned in vain. Ethel hearing him, arose, and set the cold tea to his lips. He clutched the bottle greedily, and would have drained it but for her interposing hand. She re−arranged the rough flannel garments on which he lay, making his couch easier, and again he knew her, and she seemed to hang above him like a pitying and ministering angel.

'Can I do anything more for you, Mr. Keen?' she asked, seeing that his eyes followed her with a look of intelligence.

'Thank you,' he answered faintly. 'Nothing more.'

The girl sat by the side of the truck, with one hand upon the edge of it. When she had sat thus a long time and had grown absorbed in thought, she was startled by a soft cold pressure, and looking hastily round, she saw that John had struggled up on his sound arm, had bent over and was kissing her hand. She rose and laid him gently down again.

'Lie still,' she said, 'or you will hurt yourself.' She could not find it in her heart to offer any severer rebuke than this.

Chapter 33.

Mr. George Bushell, the younger, sitting at his desk one bright soft spring afternoon, earning as lightly as he could some fraction of the weekly five−and−thirty shillings, was startled by the sudden advent of a stranger who

demanded him by name. The stranger turned out to be one of Sir Sydney Cheston's clerks, and was charged with a message from young George's father; a message to the effect that young George must at once betake himself to Staffordshire under circumstances of great urgency. An ice−taloned pang as Mr. Carlyle once wrote *à propos* of Balaam ran through brain and pericardium, but the young man dared not disobey. It was in his mind that he was to be confronted with Sir Sydney, who would beyond doubt remember him, and he was terrified at the bare thought of the encounter. George's employer made some faint opposition to his going, but the messenger assured him of the gravity of the occasion, and, acting on instructions, gave no explanation to the youngster. The time spent in the journey was full of uncomfortable reflections and sensations, but George had no stomach for questioning his new companion, and the clerk himself, being of a solid and stolid business mind, offered no remark from start to finish. Even the dreariest journeys come to an end, and at last young George's journey terminated in the presence of his father on the bank of the Buzzard, crowded still by thousands of spectators.

'There has been an accident here,' said Joe quietly; 'have you read of it in the newspapers?'

'No,' said George.

Joe told the story.

'All that can be done,' he added, 'we are doing. I thought it best that you should be here.'

Young George could scarcely tell why. Dinah's danger concerned him very nearly, and although he was not a sympathetic young man, he felt horrified at the story. He had never disliked Dinah, actively, and it was certainly awful that she should be placed in such a position. Her peril was in part his own, for it she should not be recovered, what shield or hope had he? This terrible father of his might keep him at clerkship all his life, and on the least pretence leave all his money to a charity, to a friend, to a wife perhaps. So that, taking it altogether, young George experienced and displayed as much grief as could be expected of him.

Among other aids for which Joe had called, the diver came from London, and made a descent, but speedily returned with discouraging news. The mouth of the working had fallen in, and there was no possible passage at present. The women, wives and daughters of the imprisoned miners, who sat in the hovels about the top of the shaft, maintained the quiet characteristic of their kind in such times of peril. They refused to eat, for there is a superstition among them that to take food seals the fate of their dear ones below. All of them sat in silence with their shawls drawn over their heads, and waited with a patience heart−wringing to look at.

'Thee sha'st have him back, Selina, if it's i' mon's power to do it; said William Bowker to his wife whenever he passed her, and he always went back to the work with renewed passion and vigour after these words of cheer.

Some feeble power to grasp returning to Joe's hands, he was down the mine again, and for a while insisted on being allowed to take a place once more, but seeing by−and−by how weak his strokes were, and recognising the fact that he filled the place of a better man, he fell back sadly, and was fain to content himself once more with watching. Whenever he could do it without interrupting the work he paced the tunnel, measuring it by his strides, and always came back, groaning over the slowness of its progress. The Scotch engineer begged him again and again to rest, even though the man who gave the advice recognised the impossibility of it. But at last, when the work had been prosecuted for fifty hours, a 'shot' was fired, and the men rushing back to renew their labour, started a cheer, for lo! the wall was down. Joe ran to join them at this cheering sound, but before he had reached the end of the tunnel the men fell back upon him and bore him away with them, and for a while recoiled slowly backwards, step by step, and turning, ran to the foot of the shaft, bearing him amongst them, struggling and imploring.

'It's all over, master,' said one man sadly, 'the place is full o' choke damp.'

They all ascended to the mouth of the mine and told the mournful news.

In the mind of every man and woman there it made an end of hope. The women began to eat, moistening their food with tears, and by ones, and twos, and threes, they stole away to their homes.

'It's all o'er, Master Joseph,' said Bowker.

'Yes,' said Joe, 'it's all over.'

A cloud was round him, and he felt himself a murderer. But though hope had gone, labour could not yet be relaxed. The gas became so dense in the shaft, that when a cage of fire was lowered into it an iron framework holding more than a hundredweight of glowing coal the light went out as completely and as suddenly as if it had been dipped in water. Even for this last sad contingency the workers were prepared, and the task of clearing the mine was carried on as swiftly as if hope still reigned in every bosom. The manner of the clearing was simple and (all things considered) rapid. At the edge of the shaft was set up a revolving fan, and running from this was a wide tube of iron, not unlike a stove−pipe. After travelling straight for a yard, the pipe took a sudden bend and dipped into the shaft. The fan being set in motion forced a fierce current of wind through the tube, and in a few minutes the topmost section of the shaft was sufficiently ventilated to permit of a man being sent down to attach a second length of tubing to the first. This in its turn prepared for the attachment of a third, and that of a fourth, and so hour by hour the tube crept slowly downward, each length being secured by a holdfast driven firmly into the wall, and all the junctures being smeared with clay. The crowd had long since melted, and it was midnight when the foot of the shaft was reached, and men in relays could be set to carry the ventilating tube farther, and step by step the devilish gas was fought out of the mine, and hopeless morning dawned. Joe, despairing and self−accusing, found the tremendous physical strain of the labour a relief to him. He could not think much or even feel much yet. Four sleepless nights and days laid their hand of heaviness upon his heart, and he felt only a wretched numbness. His despair and his self−accusations seemed to lie in wait for him hereafter, and in the meantime he worked as madly to get at Dinah's dead body as he had worked while hope remained with him.

There was a dreary drizzle falling when he ascended the shaft with his rough mining companions, and left the work to a new relay of men below. Young George had, of course, long since known the end. He was sorry for Dinah; he was as grieved about Ethel as it was in him to be grieved about anything, and he had taken his turn at work, not altogether without manliness and courage. Joe had some sore−hearted hope of him.

'You had better lie down and get a little sleep; said George to his father, as they stood in the drizzle together at the mouth of the shaft; and Joe, without a word of answer, walked into one of the hovels and lay down. He tossed to and fro for half−an−hour, courting sleep in vain, in spite of his fatigue and the enormous labours of the past few days. He seemed to hear the voice which shook Macbeth

Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more.'

The horror of his thoughts, his unavailing repentance, the memory of his errors, were so heavy upon him that he rose again, and walking once more to the head of the shaft, demanded to be lowered.

'May I go with you?' asked George.

Human motives are complex things, and there was probably some real human pity and repentance in the young man's heart when he made this request.

'As you like,' his father answered. The two went down together, without another word, and after a while came in sight of the last relay, with Bowker in command. The men were at work at a great heap of debris, which when Joe had left it had completely blocked up the roadway, and they had so reduced it that by this time there was ample

space for a man to climb over. The air was heavy, and the lamps were burning dimly.

'Theer's damp beyond still, Master Joseph,' said Bowker.

'Ay,' said Joe quietly. 'How much higher do you think the water rose?'

'Theer's a sort of a sudden lift, like, here,' returned William. 'The poor things 'ad tek refuge a bit farther on. We shall light on some on 'em when this is down.' He pointed to the mound in front.

Joe, turning away, pushed through the men, climbed up the heap of rubbish, and waved his glimmering lamp to and fro in the darkness, striving to make oat what lay beyond. Suddenly ho cried out in a wild voice which made every man there turn to look at him.

'Bowker! Come here!' William scrambled up to his side. 'What's that?' cried Joe, pointing eagerly through the darkness.

'Gi' me a lamp theer! 'William called to one of the men below.

The two fell rather than scrambled down the slimy inner side of the bank, and advanced a yard or two.

'Send I may live,' gasped William, 'they've builded a wall again' the damp. That's young Keen's doin', I lay my life. Zakiel,' he roared, 'bring a peck here!'

He dashed back to meet the man who brought the pick, snatched it from his hand at the summit of the mound, dashed back again, and waving Joe aside, struck blow after blow upon the wall with the energy of a madman, and then ceasing suddenly, he set his ear against the coal and listened.

'Stop work theer,' he yelled a second later. 'Still as death every mon among ye.'

All sounds of labour ceased, and a death−like silence, broken only by a heavy breathing here and there fell upon the place. Joe followed his companion's example, and set his ear to the coal wall.

Tap! tap! tap! upon the wall within.

'Lads,' roared the little man in a voice like a hoarse trumpet, 'theer's some on 'em alive! This way.'

Joe caught the pick from Bowker's hand and drove it deep into an interstice between two huge lumps of coal, and tugged so, wildly that the shaft of the tool broke, and he reeled against the side of the working. But there were hearts behind as willing as his own, and arms as strong. The miners charged the heap of rubbish with a gasping cheer, and fell upon the wall of salvation as men in desperate battle fall upon a foe.

'David; said Bowker, laying his hand upon one man's shoulder, 'goo up an' bring down every mon theer. Get the trolley−line cleared all along.'

'Right, gaffer,' answered David, and sped away.

'Yo' heerd 'em tap, mister?' asked one coal−blackened giant as he worked.

'Stop, all of you!' cried Joe.

They ceased, and in the sudden silence they could hear the sound of a score of picks beating at the other side. At that glad token they raised a cheer, and fell upon the wall again like drilled furies, until a dim light shone through.

'Who's that?' one of the rescuers shouted.

'Ebenezer Howl,' said a voice inside.

'How many on you?' cried Bowker.

'Sixty−seven,' said Ebonezer Howl.

'That's my feyther,' said another voice. 'Is that Bill Bowker?'

'Me, lad. God bless thee!' William answered, with the tears channelling his dusky face.

'Cheston! 'called Joe.

'Right!' answered the Baronet's voice.

'Set to it!' Bowker cried. 'Get 'em out o' this!'

The work began again on both sides, and in a little while a breach was made. By some sort of common consent for by this time every rough fellow there knew his story Joe Bushell was the first man allowed to climb through. Cheston grasped him by the hand. Neither could say more than 'God bless you!' but the words expressed their own meaning, and were spoken from the heart.

'This way,' said Cheston, after a moment's pause.

The men had torn the lamp open, and by this time the whole remaining store of candles burned dimly in the foul and abominable air. Almost every man held a light, and Joe could see the face and figure he had last seen at Wrethedale. He ran forward and seized Dinah by the hands.

'Dinah,' he said, 'do you know me?'

She answered not a word, but rose gasping, and looked wildly at him, he holding her by both hands.

'You know me, Dinah?'

She drew her hands away, and casting both arms about his neck, and calling on his name, she fainted. Joe bore her to the foot of the shaft −he would allow no hands but his own to touch her and they were carried swiftly to the open light of day. The message despatched half−an−hour ago had flown far already, and all about the fields were hurried figures making for the mine, and any hurried figure seen from a mile away wending in that direction was taken as a signal, as in such cases it always is, so that the whole district far and wide was wakened to a mad mingling of hope and wonder, and a thousand men and women were on their way to the Buzzard's mouth from every point of the compass. When Joe appeared bearing his burden in his arms, there were perhaps a hundred people gathered round the shaft, and from them rose a roar of questioning.

'Alive?'

The tears were streaming down Joe's cheeks, and he answered in a broken voice,

'Alive!'

They cheered like mad things, and far and near about the fields arose answering shouts of cheering. A hundred hands were stretched to offer help, but Joe laid his blessed burden down unaided and knelt beside it.

'How many down, mister?' asked one old woman, touching him on the shoulder; 'how many?'

'Sixty−seven,' Joe answered.

'Alive?'

'Alive and well,' thank God, said Joe.

The hearers shouted with wild cheer on cheer, answering voices came from the rainy fields, hurrying steps quickened to a headlong race, the crowd swelled and gathered with mad hurrahings, the news was asked by each new−comer, and told again with hush shouts of triumph and delight. Men who were strangers to each other, rough fellows unused to the melting mood, shook hands with tears. Women embraced each other, or knelt in thanksgiving. Workers in neighbouring factories cast down their tools and ran, shouting the news of rescue right and left, and the crowd grew as if by magic, until the surging mob rose high about the mound, and every place of vantage was flooded by the human wave.

Ethel, bravely as she had borne herself through the long night of danger and famine, fainted when she heard the news of rescue, and she and Dorothea were brought to the light unconscious of the maddening cheers which hailed them. Then came John Keen muttering rapidly in the delirium of fever, and at the sight of his pale face and prone bandaged figure the crowd forbore to cheer. But the cheering began again with the next batch, and went on with increase as the crowd grew vaster.

By−and−by, amongst the rescued came a patriarch, Aminadab Hick by name, who had a place in this chronicle once before, though but a slight one. Dinah's mother bade him good−night six−and−twenty years before this, and he was an old man by this time. His imprisonment and the want of food and water, had been almost too much for him, yet a touch of native valour and humour brightened his heart as he reached the surface and saw Heaven's blessed light again.

It was noticeable that the patriarch was bare−footed when brought to bank. He was so reduced that it was needful for one man to take him by the legs and another by the shoulders to bear him through the crowd. Sighting a local cobbler there, he called out to him feebly, with a quavering chuckle

'Bill! Bill Dyson!'

'Hillo!' said the local cobbler.

'Got that theer pair o' boots I give you a order for, done yet?' asked the patriarch.

'No,' said the cobbler.

'Look sharp about 'em then,' said the patriarch, pointing to his feet. 'I shall want 'em pretty soon. I have eaten my old 'uns.'

There was a great guffaw of laughter, in which the prostrate patriarch joined feebly as he was borne away. His daughter was waiting for him in the crowd, and they were crying and blessing each other tenderly a minute later. And every time the skip ascended with its load of rescued men there were such scenes as you may fancy. Mothers

and children met husbands and fathers; sisters welcomed brothers; sweethearts, a little coy, perhaps, before, this awful danger came, cast off all coyness now, and met their lovers with fast−falling tears and clinging kisses and twining arms, and heart joined heart no more to be divided. With the last batch came Cheston, pale and grimed, but sturdy, and waved a cheer to the roaring crowd, who made at him and took him shoulder−high, and patrolled with him in mad fashion about the mound, until it occurred to some of the more collected spirits that after a four days' fast a substantial man like Sir Sydney might naturally wish for something more solid than the mere breath of popular applause. Food and wines and restoratives of all sorts were there in plenty, provided in the first hopeful days, and by−and−by the Baronet was on his legs with a steaming jorum of beef−tea in his hands.

'Your health, lads,' he said in his cheerful voice, nodding round before he drank. 'God bless you!'

The Baronet's carriage and horses had been quartered close by, and a hurried message being now despatched for them, they came.

The men would fain have taken out the horses, and dragged Cheston and his party home in triumph, but he forbade them.

'Think of the women, my lads,' he shouted. 'They want rest and quiet.'

At this appeal the crowd forbore. There were a thousand things to be done, and no man for the moment with a head worth a straw upon his shoulders. Young George stood clumsily in the inner circle, not knowing what to do, yet longing to do something to be of service, or to look as if he were of service; something to break through the cloud which rested upon him. Why had he not been the first to discover the wall which had kept the prisoners hi safety? Or why, since chance went against him there, had he not seized a pick and made his way through first of all? He would, willingly have done something to redeem himself, if he had only seen his way to it, and the way had not been dangerous over and above the reasonable. As it was, he could only stand there, a little hangdog in his looks, known to everybody about him as a convicted felon, and shunning everybody's eyes. And the girl who had been his plighted wife was lying in a dead swoon within six yards of him, and he had no right to go near her. Hands coarsened with habitual labour had brought her here; hands foul enough with mire and coal dust, but cleaner than his after all, and worthier to touch her. There was his old friend and companion lying wounded and unconscious. He would do something after all.

He pushed forward, and in doing so accidentally thrust against William Bowker.

'Bowker,' said George with hangdog looks, 'poor Mr. Keen looks very ill. Where can we get him to? What is the nearest place?'

'Nothin' nearer than my cottage,' said William readily. 'We'll tek him theer. Get that door off its hinges, lads.'

Half−a−dozen men ran to obey the order, and the door being unshipped, John was laid upon it, and borne gently across the field, the crowd making way. George, with hangdog air, went on in front, commanding and entreating in shame−stricken fashion, and on reaching the cottage door opened it for the bearers, and gave one of the men the only half−crown he had to run for a doctor. The man started off, and George stayed with his whilom rival, old friend, and enemy, but before the doctor came he had other and less welcome visitors.

Sir Sydney Cheston was for putting his sister and Ethel and Dinah into the carriages and driving off with them at once, as they were, but this rash counsel was overruled. When Dinah recovered she saw above her her husband's face, and Joe was holding a teaspoonful of brandy and water to her lips. Seeing her partially recovered, Joe called for beef−tea, and Dinah lay back, crying feebly, hut with infinite happiness and contentment sipping at the spoon he held to her lips. One of the miners' sisters had already taken Miss Donne in hand, and was pouring sherry by the teaspoonful through her pale lips, and by−and−by the girl revived and Sat up. Cheston's attentions restored his

sister, and in a little while the women became collected enough to observe the great crowd of eager−eyed people watching them, and modesty taking alarm, they rose and begged to be taken away.

'Not yet, my darlin',' said the woman who had charge of Ethel. 'Come into th' offices, ladies, an' pick a bit o' somethin' gradual like, my dears, an' get your stren'ths up.'

So they went into the offices, and mixed feeble tears with sherry and beef−tea, and sipped the compound, until Ethel, who had hitherto been more than half−dazed, even since her recovery from her swoon, demanded to be informed of the condition of Mr. Keen.

'He saved all our lives,' she said. 'Where is he?'

For the moment nobody knew, but a word of inquiry traced him, and after a space of half−an−hour or so, Cheston gave his arm to his sister, and led the way, Joe following with Dinah on his arm, and Ethel supported by the gallant Bowker in the rear. The women were all three terribly bedragged and dirty, and Mrs. Bowker dashed about for water and towels, brushes and soap, and helped them at their toilet. They had not starved altogether during their imprisonment, for some of the men who had food with them, had voluntarily surrendered it for the women. The fare was coarse and unaccustomed, but after the first day hunger drove them to it, and they had enough to save them from actual famine. But the stress and strain of emotions during that long night a night of ninety hours, which dragged like ninety years had left them so haggard and woe−begone in aspect, that they looked near death's door.

George was in the kitchen by John Keen's side when they passed through the tiny front parlour and went upstairs, and peeping through a chink in the door he saw them. He was more than half−inclined to run away, but he bethought himself, and resolved to be seen in the act of doing something helpful. So he shamefacedly sat by the side of John Keen, and was there when his father and Cheston entered. Whilst the two stood looking at the patient and talking in quiet tones about him, the doctor came, and pronounced the case serious.

'Get the best men in England to see him, Holmes,' said the Baronet. 'I'd rather spend my last penny than lose him. He saved us all.'

The doctor did what was to be done for the time being, and then mounted the stairs to attend the women. Mrs. Bowker was haranguing in shrill reproof of their desire to go away.

'Why, it's six mile if it's a foot,' cried Mrs. Bowker, 'an' it 'ud just be mere murderin' madness to think on it. You lie down o' this bed, an' theer's room for two i' th' other room, an' have a nice long sleep, an' a good meal when you're rested. An' here's the doctor, an' I'll bet a pound he says as I say.'

'I certainly say as you say, Mrs. Bowker,' observed the doctor, glancing round. 'Ladies, I forbid you to attempt even so short a journey without rest. A little composing draught for each of you a little sleep and I trust to avoid all evil consequences.'

Mr. Bowker at this moment was busily transferring a bed from a neighbour's house, with the neighbour's readily given help, and this was set up in the parlour, and John Keen with infinite tenderness comfortably undressed and settled in it. The women obeyed the doctor's orders. Cheston, unwilling to leave them, took a great draught of wine, and cast himself upon the kitchen sofa and fell asleep there. Joe threw himself upon the rough rug before the fire, with a rolled−up coat for a pillow, and lay wakeful for a long while with his heart full of gratitude and tenderness and resolve. But in a while he also fell asleep, and being utterly worn out by four nights and days of mental agony and bodily labour, he lay like a log, and no dreams visited him. The tenant of the cottage, with his wife and their recovered son, betook themselves to the brew−house, and having made a roaring fire there, lay down upon the floor and slept also.

Nine worn−out people slumbered in the house and one kept watch, until under the soothing influence of the opiate the doctor had administered, John Keen's sleep became as profound as that of the rest; and young George walked on tiptoe out of the house, and lit his pipe, and rambled across the field, by this time deserted. Where ten thousand cheering, weeping, half−mad men and women had stood two hours ago, not a creature was to be seen. He had peeped round the side of the house to be sure that the coast was clear, and being satisfied of it, he walked on with bent head and looked at his prospects with a failing heart. Lifting his eyes he saw the house of his old employer some quarter of a mile away and this bringing George Bushell the elder into his mind, he cursed him with great ardour, and roamed on again.

'The old villain!' so thought and said the young one. 'He knew who I was all the time, and kept me out of my money, and sent me to prison like a felon, and Curse him! It's too much for a man to bear to think of.' He stopped to kick a clod of earth savagely, and, then roamed on again. Having once got old George m his mind, it was not easy to let him out, and having him there, it was not in human nature, so he said, to hold back from cursing him. The mine offices were empty, and he entered one of them and sat down moodily, tracing out, as he had done a thousand times already, old George's villanies. 'The infernal old hypocrite!' cried the young man aloud. He had naturally a great loathing of the old man's crimes, and felt as righteous an anger at them as any morally spotless man could feel, and his anger being of the sort which demands to be flogged, he rose up from the seat he had taken, and travelling rapidly up and down the room, he gave such comminatory eloquence as he bad full swing until he was in the mind to have taken the wicked old George by the throat, with full intent to choke the rascally old life out of him.

Turning suddenly in his vengeful promenade and muttering to himself, he actually thought for one second that he beheld an apparition; for there in the doorway stood old George, leaning on a couple of walking sticks, and peering with a purblind look into the room. The old man's house overlooked the scene of action. He had heard the news of the rescue, had watched the crowd disperse, and seeing the carriage driven away again, supposed everybody gone.

'Who's there?' he quavered, peering into the half gloom of the place with purblind look. 'I can't see nothin' close at hand, without glasses,' he murmured, and having transferred his right hand stick to his left hand, he began to fumble at the pocket of his overcoat, and after a time found his glasses, and with shaky fingers set them astride his nose, the two walking−sticks rattling in his left hand as he did it. It was amazing how much less righteously indignant the younger rascal felt, finding himself thus unexpectedly in presence of the old one. But he glared at old George, and old George, able to make him out now, glared at him, with each of his hands quavering on his unsteady walking−sticks, and his jaw quite fallen.

'Why?' said old George at last. 'Why why what's this? Eh?'

His tone was that of a man awestruck. Young George took heart at it.

'I met my father and returned to England,' said he, not lying in words but only in intent a thing that soothed his conscience greatly 'and I know now how to value your Christian kindness, sir.'

The emphasis on 'Christian' was a memory of Miss Bateman's 'Leah.'

'I'd ha' acted well by you if you'd ha' deserved it,' said the old man, in a loud quavering voice. 'But you was a bad lot.'

'I think; said young George, 'that *you* have very little right to reproach me, sir. And let me tell you, that if it had not been for my influence But I need waste no words about that. Let me pass, sir. We two can have little to say to each other.'

'I'd ha' acted well by you,' old George repeated, 'if you'd ha' deserved it.'

'Do you suppose,' asked the martyred young George disdainfully 'were you ever able to pretend to yourself that you supposed I meant to steal that three hundred pounds?'

'Meant to steal it? Why, you stole it.'

'I never stole a marriage certificate,' returned the younger. I never '

'What!' cried the old man trembling from head to foot. 'You speak them words again, an' I'll mek you prove 'em. You viper. What was you ever born for but to bring trouble? I give my nevew Joseph a hunderd pounds to run away from home wi', an' he comes back an' robs me underhanded, an' leaves me to find out as he's back again, by accident. If it hadn't ha' been for me you'd ha' been a−lyin' in jail this minute. You stingin' viper! You come an' talk to me! I'll settle you. You ever speak a word to me again, you jail−bird, you, an' I'll break every bone i' your skin. I've a mind to do it now.'

And old George did indeed stagger at the martyr with such a paralytic rage that George the younger incontinently got out of the building and replied from without.

'I don't want to hurt you,' he said, 'and you had better keep your distance, Mr. Bushel.'

'Let me get at you,' quavered old George, 'an' I'll be the death on you.'

'The thing would be more likely to go the other way,' young George replied, retreating. 'But I'm not going to fight with a man who has both feet in the grave.'

'Yah, you coward!' snarled old George. 'Stand still, you dog, an' I'll flog your life out.'

'Lay a hand on me,' shouted young George, retreating still, 'and you'll be sorry for it.'

'You've got a bold tongue enough,' said the other, pausing and panting and shaking one of his paralytic sticks, 'but you tek uncommon good care to be out o' reach.'

'I'm not going to allow myself to be struck by a man on whom I can't retaliate without dishonour,' said young George, pausing likewise.

This statement so affected the old man that he stood shaking both his sticks in the air in a rage altogether impotent, and ground imprecations between his teeth.

'They call you a respectable man still,' cried young George, warming with the recollection of his wrongs, 'and I am a felon. But what right have you to speak a word of reproach to me? You! Why I never heard of such a villain.'

How much further young George's candour and indignation might have carried him cannot be known, for his hearer began to stagger and to grope feebly in the air, and to see again before him that awful mist with the splashes of red and black in it. He was surely going to die this time. The hand of Heaven's vengeance was again upon him, and he had hut a second left in which to make confession.

'Yes, yes,' he cried trembling and quavering. 'I've been a villain. I've gone again' the laws o' God an' man. But I've straightened everythin,' an' I didn't fight the case as I might ha' done, an' ha' cost my nevew Joseph a mint o' money, an' perhaps ha' won it after all.'

Was Heaven appeased, he wondered, by this confession. The awful mist began to clear away, and he could see again.

'I'm a old man,' he muttered, 'an' I ain't long for this world. Not long. An' I'll mek up for what I done as was wrong. I'll mek up for it, if I ain't drove too hard.'

Young George was silent, being more than a little frightened by the old man's looks, and the sudden change in him.

'Don't you be too hard o' me,' said old George tremulously. 'I don't know how I'm a−going to get hum,' and he began to whimper. 'You help me hum, Mr. Banks, an' I'll mek up for everythin'. I'll mek up for it, if I ain't drove too hard. You help me hum, Mr. Banks.'

Young George, still a little in dread of the old man's sticks, and keenly watchful lest all this should be a *ruse*, approached him gingerly and took him by the arm. The poor old rascal was shaking like a leaf, and clutched weakly at his late private secretary. Considering the circumstances, the position was a curious one. The youngster, resolving to leave hum at the end of the lane, and so to run no risk of being seen in this anomalous position, helped him on, and the other turned slowly over in that clouded and stiff−jointed mind of his the conviction that it was useless and dangerous to try to evade the powers of Heaven any longer. And being altogether crushed and broken by the assaults of accusing conscience, and filled with superstitious fears of what might happen unless he made some sort of atonement, he hit upon a plan, and groaned over it, so terrible did it seem, and yet resolved upon it. Some dim mingling of texts about doing good to them that despite−fully use you, and denying your own wishes crucifying the desires that was it helped to the formation of this remarkable and dreadful resolution. The Bushell Hospital and Institution must go by the board, and he would divide his money equally all that was left of it between the man he had injured and the man who had robbed him, between Joe Bushell and this rascal of a late private secretary. It was a dreadful thing to think of, and the mere notion of it tugged at his very heartstrings, but surely, surely, it was all the more likely to be accepted on that account.

'Can you get along alone now, sir?' asked George the younger at the bottom of the lane.

'I think I can,' said George the elder, leaning on both his sticks again. 'Don't you be too hard o' me, Mr. Banks, an' I'll mek up to you for all the harm I tried to do you.'

With that he tottered away, leaving his late *employ* smitten with bewilderment.

Chapter 34.

The day waned, a dreary wind blew up the clouds from the leaden horizon, the clouds discharged themselves in a miserable drizzling fall, but the sleepers in Bowker's house lay still and slept, with breathings light or heavy. Just as night was falling, Ethel's dreams carried her into the mine once more, and after long ages of waiting there, she heard a scraping and rasping at the wall, and with a great shock of hope became suddenly awake. The noise resolved itself into the stirring of a fire below, and as she listened she could hear another sound which she was not slow to interpret the sound, namely, of John Keen's voice in rapid undertoned speech. She arranged her hair and dress, and unwilling to disturb Dinah, who still slumbered, she opened the door with extreme quiet, and descended the steps which led directly into the kitchen. Silently as she went, the one wakeful inmate of the kitchen heard her and looked up. She saw his face in the firelight, and paused for a moment on the stairs, but recovering her self−possession, held on her way, and without a word, or a sign that she noticed George's presence, she passed him, and opening the door, looked out upon the wildly driving clouds and the bleak, darkened country.

Perhaps it was a part of what little good there was in him that young George, when he thought of Ethel, felt at his wickedest and least worthy. The thought of nobody else had such power to reproach him. And now, in spite of the sense of injury he had been nursing for the past two or three hours until the glowing coals had blazed with clear resentment, her presence suddenly put out the fire of wrath, and left him with a sick coldness at the heart. Ethel stood outside in the open door, raged at by sudden gusts of wind and beaten by storms of rain, but not heeding them or knowing of them. It could scarcely fail to strike young George that he was in the way. It did so strike him, and he seized his hat and made for the road, but Ethel standing in the middle of the doorway, he found it necessary to speak to her.

'Miss Donne,' said young George shakily, and she turned. 'I can only be a trouble to you if I stay. I have been watching poor Keen, but I shall not be wanted any longer now.'

She made room for him to pass, and as she did so he read rightly the shrinking of her figure to avoid the merest touch of contact of her garments with his. She had loved him, as he knew, most dearly, and now she loathed him so. That was his hideous ill−fortune not his own fault at all? something seemed to ask within. His fault! he could but answer Had he not been a villain all along? Had he ever been worthy to touch her, to be near her, to look at her? Was it any wonder that she hated him? He was hot, and cold, and sick, and dizzy all at once, as he thought of the scene in the magistrate's office. But for that he would not have seemed to himself quite so much of a hound as now. He had nowhere to go to, and no money, and he was ashamed to show himself in the town, and certain that no one there would trust him for the value of one penny−piece after what had happened. So he wandered up and down outside the house in the rain, waiting till the rest should awake and go away, when he might make an appeal to his father and draw some small supplies. He had no hope of generosity in that quarter, and the future looked hard to him. He wove old George's promise into the tissue of his thoughts, and it helped him to the design of some curious patterns, but under existing circumstances the contemplation of the texture, howsoever its shifting patterns varied, gave him little comfort.

Meanwhile Ethel lit a candle, and shading it carefully from the sick man's face, sat down to watch. John was murmuring, though he still slept, and again and again she heard her own name. Sometimes he spoke of her, and sometimes to her, but there was nothing else in all his thoughts than her and her safety. He was still in the mine waiting for rescue, and once he opened his eyes, struggled into a half upright posture, and, unconscious of the hands that controlled him called loudly for her.

'She's dead!' he cried. 'You're hiding it from me. She's dead.'

'No, no,' said Ethel, trying to soothe him. 'Don't you know me, Mr. Keen!"

He cried out again that she was dead, but by−and−by, being altogether weak and helpless, he permitted her to set him down and arrange his clothes and pillows, and after some few more cries and murmurings, which were all for her, he fell asleep. She sat watching him; his pale face, heavy eyelids, and tumbled curls of long hair looking ghostly in the shadow where he lay, and her whole heart was filled with a pitying admiration. Such a gallant, ready fellow he had been. So unobtrusively devoted, plotting in

that quiet Wrethedale life to make her happy, and never permitting himself to be seen in it; loving her so all the time, and never saying a word of it lest he should hurt her. To think of these things was to travel anew upon the beginning of a road you thought the road of folly, Ethel, and had vowed never again to set foot in. Ah! who knows of these things, or how they come? A longing to set foot in that road again? Scarcely as yet. But such a pity in her heart, and such a faith in the real manly honesty and truth of this poor wounded youngster as by−and−by may grow to that. And you shall not think my favourite maid unmaidenly, or sudden in having even made so small a step backwards towards love's demesne of glamour. To have waited four days and nights in face of death beside this true man who dearly loved her, and to have him chiefly to think of all the while, and him to nurse and soothe, and to hear him ever and always in his greatest pain and his most awful dreams calling on her name, to admire his

courage and resource and hear them praised by all around, and to pity him with all her heart, was an education likely to move her swiftly if she moved at all.

She had sat for a long time watching and thinking, when a movement in the upper room and on the stairs attracted her attention, and Dinah appeared.

'Where is he?' whispered Dinah, blushing and trembling like a girl.

'I don't know,' answered Ethel in the same cautious tone, 'but there is someone in the next room. Listen. You can hear breathing.'

They listened, and heard the steady coming and going of a deep breath. Dinah crept to the door, and noiselessly opening it, looked in. The little parlour faced westward, and through the curtained windows she could see a great jagged line of pale yellow where the sun had gone down and the clouds were slowly severing, and in this faint and uncertain light, this line of pale yellow reflected into the room, she could just distinguish Joe's figure from that of Cheston. She knelt down by his side, and looked at him with hungry heart and eyes, and yearned to throw herself upon his bosom and clasp him in her arms. She knew the story of his wanderings now, as well as Ethel and Sir Sydney knew it. She knew old George's wicked tale of her second marriage, and somehow to Dinah's mind the two first years during which errant Joe had been silent were as nothing. She stooped and kissed his hand and let a tear fall upon it, but the sleeper never stirred. For those in danger there had been some little rest, for people do sleep in the face of death, and sleep calmly with blissful innocent dreams at times, but for him, since the first news came until a few hours ago, there had been no possibility of slumber. Seeing how wrapped in sleep he was, Dinah took courage and kissed his hand again, and since yielding to the impulse made it stronger, she slid her arm beneath his head and kissed his cheek very softly, and nestled down beside him, watching him until in the fast−gathering darkness his face was lost and she could only fancy it.

But after half an hour she rose and stole silently back to Ethel.

'Is there any news of *him*, my dear? Forgive me asking Have you heard of him?'

'Yes,' said Ethel, whispering. 'He was here an hour or two ago. He went out when I came down.'

The mother's right was indisputable. Dinah could not be blamed for loving the child of her own body, but Ethel had yet to take herself to task for a half−inclination to think the love unreasonable. The very thought of young George grated on every nerve in her soul, and yet she knew, though with fear and self−reproach, that she was beginning to be happy again. The why and wherefore of this new contentment she either did not know or would not for a second acknowledge to herself.

Dinah passed like a ghost to the rearward door and looked out into the night. In a little while she heard a footstep, and as it came nearer she fluttered out into the darkness to meet it.

'Is that you, George?' she asked.

'Yes,' he answered.

'Oh, George,' she cried, 'what are you out here for?'

'I couldn't stop in the house,' he answered doggedly. 'To remind everybody '

He broke off abruptly and was silent.

'You're wet through,' said Dinah, laying her hands upon him. 'Don't wait here, my dear. Go somewhere and get a change of clothes, and '

'I can't get anything,' George answered bitterly. 'I haven't got a penny in the world, and who would trust me?'

'Oh, George,' said Dinah, 'I've plenty of money now. Mr. Keen sent me some money the day before we went down the pit, and I've got it with me. Here. Go to the hotel we stayed at in Birmingham, an' have a glass of somethin' warm afore you start. An' let us know where you are, an' O George, George! do try to be a good lad now. Won't you, my darlin' won't you? an' with God's blessin' we'll be happy after all. Try to be a good lad again. Do, dear, do.'

She was embracing him again with tears, heedless of his rain−soaked garments.

'I'll try,' said the wretched George, weeping also. 'I don't deserve your goodness. The best thing I could do for everybody would be to make a hole in the water somewhere, and rid the world of such a burden.'

There was even in the young man's mind a remote idea in favour of carrying this programme into execution, though there was probably little hope of the remote idea coming nearer. But it terrified Dinah.

'No, no, George,' she broke out, clinging to him.

'I'm a disgrace to everybody,' said George weeping. 'I'm in everybody's way.'

'No, George, no,' cried Dinah, and she clung to him still, and extorted from him solemn promises that he would live and be good; and at last, with an aching heart, she let him go, and watched his figure as it melted from her sight in the darkness.

She waited in the night a little while after this to compose herself, and then returned. Ethel was still keeping watch by John Keen, and all the sleepers in the little house were sound. The two women found themselves food and made tea, moving noiselessly. It was midnight when Cheston awoke with a great yawn, and stumbled sleepily in to speak to them, but Joe still slept on, and Dinah, going to look at him, had terrible tremors about his never waking any more, until his regular heavy breathing reassured her. At one in the morning the Bowker family appeared, Mr. Bowker coming first in search for lucifer matches, the brewhouse fire having long since gone out.

'Let him sleep, mister,' said William. 'He's never closed a eye till this arternoon sence we heerd the news, an' that's more'n four nights and days ago.'

Having gone away to light the fire, he returned, and at Sir Sydney's invitation, sat down. They talked in low voices in consideration of the patient, who was by this time sound asleep again, and there was little mystery in the story left before they had done with

it. William had been told of uncle George's gift of a hundred pounds to Joe, and the narration of it softened all hearts to the hard old man, lie could not have begun to plot evil then, they thought, and could only have yielded to a sudden temptation. Mrs. Bowker made more tea, and bringing it into the kitchen with her own bands, pressed it upon them; and in the growing twilight they sat sipping together until a sound arose in the next room as of stretching and yawning, and a minute later Joe was amongst them. It was curious, and to everybody there a little touching, to notice the extreme diffidence with which the long−divided pair met each other. But by common consent room was made for Joe to sit next to Dinah, and by−and−by, as the others sat and talked, it was noticed that the silent two had stolen each a hand towards the other's, and thus in the chill growing twilight and the flickering light of the fire, they sat handed, looking at each other now and then, but quite wordless. It was broad daylight, though chill and dark even then, so lowering was the weather, when Miss Dorothea descended, and one

of the younger branches of the house of Bowker being despatched for the Baronet's carriage, returned with it in the space of half−an−hour in triumph side by side with the coachman.

'I can get a cab and follow you afterwards,' said Ethel, 'but until the doctor arrives I shall stay with Mr. Keen.'

Nobody ventured to offer any remonstrance except Cheston, k who murmured something about being in Mr. Bowker's way.

'Not a bit of it, mister,' cried William. 'It meks the hearth brighter like to see her theer. A' my missis,' added Mr. Bowker, turning upon her, 'is as willin' as willin', but her's never been used to nursin' sick gentlefolks, an' it'll be as well to ha' one of his own sort along of him till the doctor's seen him again an' gi'en me orders about him.'

So they drove away in such uplifted silent thanksgiving of heart as no words of mine can tell, and Ethel was left behind with her wounded lover, whom she had not yet learned to love. Young Bowker called his mother and father from the room.

'Leave 'em to 'emsens,' he said. 'Whether he'll live or die theer's no sayin', but all the while as we was down nothin' 'ud satisfy him but he must have her settin' next to him, an' he ho'din' her hand an' talkin' to her.'

'Does her care for him?' asked Mrs. Bowker.

'I do' know,' her son answered; 'but he cares for her. An' all the time he's been in the fever he's been a−callin' out, Ethel, my love, and Ethel, my darlin', and sayin', I'm glad to die for you. Wasn't it her as was engaged to young Banks?'

'Yis, yis,' said his father. 'But young Keen's worth a hunderd million on him, an' p'raps her's a−findin' that out. Leave 'em to 'emsens.'

Ethel, unconscious of the interest she excited, sat on still until the doctor came. No improvement yet. Had the patient been anyhow excited? No, they told him; he had even slept nearly the whole of the time since yesterday's visit.

'I am sorry to tell you,' said the doctor to Miss Donne, 'that I don't like the look of things at all. I shall act on Sir Sydney's instructions and call in a first−rate man from Birmingham.'

'Do all you can,' Ethel implored him. 'He saved all our lives.'

'What can be done shall be done,' answered the doctor; and with that he went away.

'He saved our lives,' said Ethel to Mrs. Bowker. 'Will you let me stay here till we hear the news till the other doctor comes?'

'Stay?' said that good woman, 'an' welcome!'

So Ethel stayed, and the great local man arriving, gave a more decided and more favourable opinion than his country colleague.

With care and attention the patient would probably recover. But the case was grave. The great man having delivered his verdict, went away again, promising to return on the morrow, and still Ethel waited. The lesser light of science, a sound reliable man of the old school, called twice or thrice during the day and found her always at her post. She sent a special messenger to Dinah explaining her purposes, and Dinah reading between the lines

could not fail to think of George and the happiness and honour he had sacrificed. In brief, Ethel stayed beneath Mr. Bowker's roof one week, and Sir Sydney made calls upon her twice with Joe, and twice with Dinah. Before that time had expired John had recovered consciousness, and was believed to be fairly out of danger.

On the last night of Ethel's stay an interview occurred between John and her which probably accelerated her departure. The Bowker family were bivouacked in the parlour, feeling singularly abroad and un−at−home there, and Ethel and John were alone in the kitchen. The invalid lay in his improvised bed, propped up with pillows, his redundant curls all shorn, his eyes remarkably hollow, and his cheeks remarkably thin and pale. Ethel was preparing beef−tea for him, and his eyes, looking supernaturally large, followed her about the place with a pleased languor. When at last she brought it to him, he took the hand that held the cup, and showed no disposition to relinquish it. A very little violence would have released the hand, but who could be violent with an invalid, especially with an invalid whose valour and foresight had just saved so many lives.

'You are very kind to me,' John murmured, holding the hand and the cup together in such a way that it was difficult to let the cup go without spilling its contents.

'We have reason to be grateful to you, Mr. Keen,' said Ethel. 'All of us. We owe you our lives.'

'I owe you mine in turn,' said John, holding the hand a little tighter. 'I knew you were about me all the while. Even when I was delirious I seemed to know it. I should have died without you. You don't mind my loving you?' demanded the unconventional young man.

Now, what possible answer could a young woman make to a question of that sort?

'I couldn't help it,' John continued. 'I loved you before I had known you a week. I wonder any fellow who ever saw you cares to look at another woman.'

'You are weak, Mr. Keen,' said Ethel, striving gently to release her hand. 'You must not excite yourself by talking.'

She moved her disengaged hand to the tea−cup to steady it in the struggle, and the insolent invalid absolutely took that also, and being really near a physical collapse, closed his eyes and dropped his head, but held on to the hands.

'Let me give you your beef−tea,' said Ethel.

'If you won't go away afterwards,' said John.

'I will stay,' Ethel answered, and he released her, and for a while lay like one comatose, to her great dismay. But in a little time he rallied, and submitted to be fed with a spoon, and was extremely orderly and quiet until Ethel made a movement as if to rise.

'No,' said John feebly, and with one of the thin hands that lay outside the counterpane he caught one of hers, and taking it to his lips he mumbled it there feebly. 'Let me cheat myself for a day or so till I get stronger,' he said. 'Don't think ill of me. I'm very weak at present. I shall know better by−and−by.'

And he fell to kissing the hand so passionately that Ethel withdrew it straightway in fear for him, and half by virginal instinct.

'Forgive me; said John humbly, and she pitied him so that she gave him the hand back again, and he closed both his upon it, and lay quite still in a sort of prostrated rapture.

'I shall be sorry to get well again,' quoth John after a pause.

'Why, Mr. Keen?' asked Ethel.

'I shall leave this fool's paradise when I'm better,' said John, with a tear born of weakness in each eye. 'I'd rather die like this than live to part from you.'

She said nothing but turned and looked at him with a mournful pitying tenderness. He looked back at her straight into her eyes.

'I love you,' he said in a half−whisper, his lips scarcely moving. 'I love you. I *do* love you!'

And Ethel never knew how it happened, but his eyes seemed in some strange way to thaw her to him, and she stooped slowly over him and kissed him on the lips. John threw an arm about her neck and kissed her back again, with a vigour surprising in a man who had so lately had so many bones broken. She struggled gently to be free of him, being half afraid of him and wholly afraid of herself; but

'Let me die like this,' said John, and lying back again fell into a placid sleep.

When she was assured that he really was asleep the girl kissed him again. And it is remarkable that she was not yet sure she loved him. Only he was so handsome and so brave and good, and he had suffered so much, and she had such a pity for him and such an admiration.

But when in the course of two or three hours the invalid awoke, and of his own initiative desired beef−tea, he was absolutely beyond control, and insisted on kissing her fingers every time they approached his lips. And at last this shy young man's insolence reached to such a pitch, encouraged doubtless by her non−resistance, that he said:

'Ethel, kiss me.' And so overcome was Miss Donne by this command that she obeyed him. 'You won't send me away when I get better, will you?' asked John. 'You'll get to like me a bit, won't you? You'll let me go on loving you?'

'Yes,' she whispered.

And in this unexampled fashion was a modest, reticent, good girl, within little more than the space of two years, brought to be in love with two men, and to confess it to them both. She was angry at herself; she thought it unmaidenly; she called herself shallow−hearted, and even shed some secret tears over the phantom of that lost rascal George, who did still at times revisit the glimpse of the moon.

'You are getting stronger now, Mr. Keen,' said Miss Donne, 'and I shall come and see you sometimes, but I must go back to Dinah in the morning.'

'No,' said John.

'Yes, Mr. Keen; said Ethel. 'I must go.'

'Call me John,' said the young man who had always until now been so shy and reticent. Ethel obeyed him, in a whisper. Then, having secured that point, John besought her to stay a little longer, but in that respect she was adamant. But she promised to see him every day, and they took tender farewell of each other; Ethel still distrustful and uncertain of herself', and full of maidenly shame at being so cheaply captured. She had vowed never to care for any man again, and yet he bad suffered so, and was so good, and loved her so dearly. She did not quite love him yet, but only took pity on him, and John seemed tolerably contented with it. The doctors fairly stared at him next day, be made so much advance.

The youngest Bowker had been sent for a cab, and Ethel had gone away before either of the doctors came. She went straight, of course, to Cheston's house, and the Baronet came out to receive her as the cab drove up the avenue.

'And how is the patient?' he asked.

'Better,' returned Ethel, 'much better. How is Mrs. Bushell, Sir Sydney?'

A shade came across the genial Baronet's face.

'Miss. Donne,' he answered, 'I don't know what to make of things in that quarter at all. You had better see her yourself.'

'What is the matter?' cried Ethel in alarm.

'Lunacy's the matter, according to the best of my belief,' said Cheston testily, though he laughed a second later. 'Go and see her.'

Ethel ran upstairs to Dinah's room, and found her sitting there alone, looking pale and dejected.

'Where is your husband, Dinah?' asked the girl when the first greetings were over.

'He's staying at the hotel in Birmingham,' said Dinah with tremulous lips. 'He's very kind and good, my dear, and he writes me beautiful letters, and he's been here twice to see me, but ' Dinah suppressed with effort an inclination to cry, and Ethel said indignantly,

'Dinah, he ought to be ashamed of himself. Give up thinking about him, my dear.'

'No, no,' said Dinah. 'You don't understand.'

'I don't indeed,' responded Ethel.

Chapter 35.

'My Dear Wife.'

Thus far Joseph Bushell, with a sheet of letter−paper otherwise blank before him. Joe sat in his own room in the Birmingham hotel and bit disconsolately at the feather of his pen. A letter of Dinah's lay before him, and whenever he took it up and looked at it, as be did often, a swelling arose in his throat, and he found it necessary to get up and pace about the room a little to recover himself. The gist of Dinah's letter was simply this. Let the past bury its dead, I am your faithful and loving wife now just as much as when you went away. Don't desert me again, or you will break my heart. The letter said these things over and over again, but it contrived to say little more.

'She must know something more of me,' said Joe, pacing up and down the room, 'before I can ask her to accept me again as her life companion. She ought to be sure of me. And I feel,' he murmured to the walls, 'I feel as if we ought to be married again, as if a return to her were somehow an attack upon her purity. We ought to be married again. It isn't bigamy, I suppose,' said Joe with a wretched little grin, 'to be married twice to one's own wife. I suppose it's legal. Cheston says young Keen is getting strong again. I'll go and ask young Keen's advice.'

So he shoved all his papers, loose and crumpled, into a writing−desk, locked them up, took his bat, and set out upon his journey. The day was bright and cheerful after recent rains, and a spring−like feeling was in the air. Nobody is entirely insensible to such influences, and they were strong on Joe Bushell as he walked sturdily on again in the month of spring. Spring came again and seemed to bring some promise of a new spring of life for Dinah and for him. In spite of all the self−accusations he had written to her, in spite of the self−accusing things he had said to her, Dinah would and could see nothing in Joe's prolonged absence but the result of Uncle George's wickedness.

'If you'd ha' been fortunate, Joe,' she had said to him, 'and had made enough to keep me afore he wrote that wicked letter, wouldn't you ha' sent for me, or come back to me?'

And he had been compelled to answer 'Yes,' though he strove to inculpate himself by showing that he had acted like a feel and like a coward, to all of which Dinah lent an unbelieving ear. And the more Joe accused himself, the mere eager Dinah was to believe the best of him; and the worst things he said of himself; the better man she thought him. For lie could but tell her that, wickedly and basely as he bad acted, be had been true to her in heart and life, and that was enough for Dinah. A hard and cruel Ste, with old George as the controller of it had come between them; that was all, and she had no blame for Joe. Not even now, when his scruples were again dividing them, and when she would have taken him back with her whole heart and soul, could she blame him. Fate was hard and always had been hard, but Joe was not to blame, 'Commend me to my kind lord,' said Desdemona with her dying breath; and if Joe Bushell bad turned Othelloish in act and fancy, Dinah would probably have had no harsher farewell for him. This is in the nature of women sometimes, and if it leads to misery it breeds happiness as well, such happiness perhaps as a heart otherwise put together can never know, or do more than dream of.

As Joe walked on his spirits rose higher and higher. He had no fear of his own faith for the future. Whatever happened he would be true to Dinah, and would guard her so gently that tile end of her life should be sweet to her. Only, a little pause, for the sake of the delicacy of his own thoughts about her, seemed necessary; a new courtship they had been so long apart a new ceremonial of some sort to bring them together again, to~ renew a tie so strained and weakened by the lapse of time that it felt to him a thing broken and faded almost into nothing.

The road he took led him for some four and a half miles over the ground he had travelled when he walked to catch the London train at almost the beginning of this story, and the way was changed, as he was. There were new landmarks on the road, as there were new landmarks in his history, and many of the old ones were clean gone, as in his history likewise. And since he walked now, not in the old direction, but retracing those youthful steps, this special journey seemed to have a special promise in it, as if it were only now that he was really coming back again to love and duty.

It is not at all an unusual thing for two or even three people to come to a resolution on the same day, and almost at the very moment when Joe resolved upon a visit to John Keen, old George Bushell set out upon a visit to the convalescent lawyer. And the history of old George's visit was briefly this: The hand of Heaven in judgment had seemed to his wicked superstitious old soul to weigh so heavily upon him, and the way of disarming its vengeance seemed so clear, that within a day or two of his interview with his whilom private secretary, he had sent a note to Mr. Packmore, questing that gentleman's presence at a settled hour. At the settled hour Mr. Packmore came, and learned that he had been sent for to alter George's will, and learning, further, in what direction the alteration was proposed, was greatly disturbed, and became so doubtful of old George's sanity that he refused, after a lengthy squabble, to have anything to do with the matter.

'My money's mine, ain't it?' asked old George of his stubborn counsellor.

'And my reputation is mine, sir,' returned Mr. Packmore stiffly. 'And my professional probity is mine, sir. And I will have nothing to do with a scheme which seems to me, sir, to be no less than crackbrained.'

'I didn't send for you o' purpose to he insulted, Packmore,' said old George, with a dignity more wooden even than of old. 'An' I'll tell you what. You send me all the business dockyments you got o' mine, an' send your bill in, an' I'll send a cheque an' ha' done wi' yon. Talk to me about hem' crackbrained! 'he quavered, getting on his legs and shaking both his sticks at the conveyancer; 'I'm as sound i' my mind as iver I was, thank God, an' *I* know what I'm adoin'. But I don't want no unwillin' service, an' I don't want no reflections on my intellec', thank you. An' you can get out o' my house, an' send my dockyments at your earliest convenience.'

Mr. Packmore at this had bowed with exceeding stiffness and retired. And now old George, after new cogitations, had bethought him of John Keen, who knew the whole story (which it was not easy to tell to Mr. Packmore), and who would know his reasons, and would make his will in this amended fashion without misgiving. He let the time slip by, however, until falling into a state of querulous rage with Mrs. Bullus one day, he felt a recurrence of his old pains and terrors, and went off headlong on his two sticks to seek the lawyer.

'Is Mr. Keen well enough to see a body?' he asked of Mrs. Bowker.

'He's a−sittin' up a−readin',' said that estimable woman, who for reasons of her own had no affection for old George, and answered him somewhat scornfully.

'Is he well enough to see a body?' demanded George again.

'I'll ask him,' returned Mrs. Bowker disappearing. 'You can come in,' she said ungraciously when she returned; and old George, entering, found himself face to face with the lawyer, who was sitting up in bed in the parlour, propped with pillows, and looking like a rakish ghost in a smoking cap, which set so much to the side of his head that it totally obscured one ear. The smoking−cap had fitted him once upon a time, but now that his locks were so closely shorn it was. ridiculously too big for him.

'Be you well enough to do a minute or two's talk on important business, Mr. Keen?' asked old George.

'Yes,' said John, 'I think so. Take a seat.'

Mrs. Bowker slammed the door and went out, repenting herself a moment later on account of the invalid. Old George began to unfold his purpose slowly.

'Mr. Keen,' he said, 'I'm come to you because you know everythin' appertainin' to me an' my lung−lost nevew, Joseph, an' my late private seckitary, knowed beforetime as George Banks.'

'Yes,' said John.

'It's been o' my mind,' said old George, 'as I might ha' acted straighter than I did, an' what I did as was wrong I want to mek up for.'

'Yes,' said John again.

'I'm a−gettin' main old now,' Gorge renewed, 'an' I feel as if I wa'n't lung for this world. And I want to do right afore I leave it.'

'I am very glad to hear you speak in this way, Mr. Bushell,' said John, in whom his recent illness and danger had left many grave thoughts behind them. 'Your coming here,' be added, seeing that old George paused nervously, 'seems to indicate that I can be of use to you. Can I?'

'Yes,' returned old George. 'But gi' me time; gi' me time.' He sat for a moment or two, with a hand on either stick quavering there. 'I allays meant to be respectable an' a God−fearin' man. And I gien my nevew Joseph a hunderd pound to run away wi', an' I've niver been hard not over an' above wi' the poor. An' what wrong−doin' I fell into, Mr. Keen, I have been sore punished for, an' I want to mek things straight again, an' die wi' a clean conscience.' There he paused again and looked up at John with an uncertain glance easily abashed. 'I'm a−goin',' he continued, 'to have a noo will made, I am, an' I'm a−goin' to leave everythin' equal divided betwixt my nevew Joseph an' my late private seckitary, knowed beforehand as George Banks. Everythin' equal divided betwixt them two.'

There was a something in old George's manner, which John construed rightly as conveying an expectation that he would be surprised at this and would applaud it as a moral action.

'I had always heard,' said John, 'that it was your intention to found an institute and hospital. That was never made a secret.'

It never had been, and that fact made it none the easier for old George to satisfy affrighted conscience and angry Heaven.

'Such was my intention, Mr. Keen,' said he, 'but I'm now bended on another course, so to speak. Will you carry out them theer instructions?'

'Certainly, Mr. Bushell,' returned John. 'Assuredly, if you wish it so. Do you attach any conditions?'

'No,' said old George, 'no conditions. Divided equal betwixt 'em,' with a heavy sigh; 'that's all. Folks'll talk, I count, but I've got my peace to mek wi' Them Above, Mr. Keen, an' I'm a gettin' main old, an' I ain't been all I should ha' been, an' I'm a good deal broke wi' trouble, an' I don't look to last lung.'

'I believe, Mr. Bushel,' said John, 'that you are trying to do what seems to you to be a duty, and I can understand how hard it is. But you will have the sympathy of all who understand your motives; and as for those who don't, what matter?'

'Ah,' said old George, 'what matter, indeed. These things is betwixt a loan and his conscience. I don't want to hurry you, for it's plain to be seen as you're still sickly. But as soon as you can, Mr. Keen, as soon as you can.'

Oh! George, when John really came to look at him and in his own mind to contrast him with what he had been, was wonderfully changed and pitifully broken, insomuch that the wrong−doer extracted a sharp twinge of pity from the honest man.

'It's the meanest proverb ever put in print,' thought John to himself, 'but it's true for all that Honesty *is* the best policy.'

Old George did not seem to have anything to add to the instructions he had already given, but he sat with somewhat stertorous breathing, and hooked at the pattern of the gaudy carpet, pushing one of his shaky sticks about it as if he followed the design. He had not sat thus silent for a minute when a tap came to the door.

'I'm a−going now, Mr. Keen,' said George, 'an' I can open your door for you. Good−bye. You send word to me when you're ready, will you?'

John promised, and the old fellow crawled forward leaning on his two sticks, and shufflingly set both of them in one hand whilst he opened the door. And there before him stood a bearded man of middle age whom he did not know. But the bearded man knew him, and to his terror and amazement said very quietly

'My uncle George.'

Uncle George showing no sign of any inclination to move, the new−comer passed him and closed the door. Then, with his hands in his jacket pockets, he turned and confronted uncle George, and looked at him up and down.

'Be you my nevew Joseph?' asked George in his shaky voice. He knew it well enough now, though be had not recognised him at first.

Joe could not trust himself as yet to say a word in the presence of this old traitor. There were too many terrible thoughts revived by the sight of him, and too great a spirit of natural vengeance stirred to make speech seem safe.

'I'm a−tryin' to put everythin' straight again, as I set crooked, Joseph,' said George, his eyes sinking before his nephew's gaze. 'I own I acted bad towards yen, but I've been punished for it heavy. Heavy, Joseph. An' I'm a−tryin' wi' God's help to straighten things out a hit.'

'We're a very pretty family,' said Joe with great bitterness, speaking to himself. 'I can see that you're better, Keen,' he continued in a changed voice, turning towards John, 'I had something to say to you. I'll call again when you are disengaged.'

'I'm a−goin' now,' quavered uncle George. 'I've been a−tryin to straighten things, Joseph. You ask lawyer Keen if I ain't been a−tryin' to straighten things.'

Joe made no response to this, and uncle George began to fumble at the door again. He shook so, and went about the simple business in such a helpless fashion, that Joe turned the handle for him.

'Thank you, Joseph,' said the old fellow, turning his fishy eyes upon him shiftily. 'I meant well by you at the beginnin'. I give you a hunderd pound to run away wi', an' I meant well by you at the beginnin'. But I was tempted sudden, Joseph, and I've been a bad man, I'm afeard. But I'm a−trying to set things straight again.'

Joe said nothing, and uncle George with much difficulty made off. His nephew closed the door behind him.

'Is that the first time you've seen him since you left England? asked John.

Joe nodded gravely, and drew up a chair to the bedside.

'When do you think you'll be about again, Keen?' be asked after a pause.

'Well,' said John, 'I want to get up now, and feel quite equal to it, but the doctors won't have it. I suppose they're right,' he added with a sigh.

'You know what we all owe you,' said Joe.

'You know what we all owe *you*,' returned John.

'Keen,' said Joe suddenly, 'I want to speak to you upon a delicate matter. My wife and I are absolutely reconciled.'

'I am heartily glad of it,' answered John. 'heartily glad.'

'But we are still divided by a by a sentiment, I suppose I must call it. We have been so long apart. Is a second marriage a legal possibility?

A possibility,' said John, ' yes. But not a necessity.'

'If a possibility,' answered Joe, 'certainly a necessity.'

'As satisfying the sentiment you spoke of?'

'Yes.'

'If you feel the necessity, you might get a clergyman to read the service through; dispensing with the purely legal formalities.'

'Yes,' said Joe. 'They are not needed, of course.'

'Not at all.'

A knock at the inner door made an interruption here, and Mrs. Bowker entered. Mrs. Bowker was sorry to interrupt, but Mr. Keen must have beef−tea and toast at this juncture, punctually at midday.

There's this clock a−strikin',' said Mrs. Bowker in great triumph, as indicating her own precision of obedience to the doctors orders.

Mr. Keen was of opinion that he could help himself with perfect ease, but Mrs. Bowker would not bear of it, and insisted upon feeding the patient with her own hands. So John being comfortably tucked into a clean towel, a little coarse in material but of snowy whiteness, was fed with provoking slowness by his hostess. Mrs. Bowker was of opinion that the measures taken with the rescued were still necessary, and so made great pauses between each spoonful, and took eager observations of the patient, as if in expectation of asphyxial symptoms.

'Let me drink it up,' said John. 'I want to talk with Mr. Bushell.'

'Health's o' more importance than any amount o' talkin', an' I'm sure Mr. Bushell don't want to see you a−gorgin' yourself to talk to *him*,' said Mrs. Bowker.

Joe laughed and said, 'Certainly not,' and the slow process went en. When in the course of a half−hour it was finished, Mr. Keen's hands and face must be sponged with luke−warm water, and his beard combed and brushed to make him presentable to the doctor.

'An' somebody else as we knowin' on eh, Mr. Keen?' said the hostess knowingly.

At this sally John blushed and laughed, and the round of wheels being heard at that moment, Mrs. Bowker laughed triumphantly, whisked to the door and opened it, and a minute later admitted Ethel. The girl came in beaming, but stopped abort at the sight of Joe, and gave him a frozen little nod.

'I'll call again, Keen,' said Joe, shaking hands with the patient. 'I'll look in again this afternoon.'

'Do,' said John heartily, but perhaps not sorry to be alone with Ethel. 'I shall be glad to see you.'

Joe bowed to Ethel (who responded by another frozen little nod)) and went his way.

'My darling!' cried John they had got on far by this time 'you do him less than justice.'

'Why,' cried Ethel, with a flush of warm indignation, 'does the worthless fellow stand shilly−shallying here when the best woman in the world is waiting and breaking her heart for him, and he knows it?'

John admired her all the mere, if that were possible, for this outbreak, but he said only:

'Shall I tell you why?'

'If there is a reason,' said Ethel a little disdainful still, 'I should like to hear it.'

'There is a reason,' answered John. 'They have been so long apart that he feels some sort of formal ratification of their old union necessary before they begin life together again. He wants some new solemnity between them to piece the tie so long broken.'

'They are man and wife,' cried Ethel.

'Legally, of course, they are,' John answered, patting one of her hands with his. 'But you can understand the sense of division which has come upon him. Think more gently of him, darling. Think of what we owe him.'

'It was you who saved us all,' she protested.

'You would have found my help worth very little,' John said gravely, 'if it had not been for his.'

'Is he going back to Dinah?'

'Yes. But I have a scheme in my own mind which I am going to propose to him when he comes this afternoon.'

'What is it?'

'It depends on you.'

'On me?'

'On you.'

'What is it?' she asked again.

John, leaning nearer on his pillows, whispered his scheme to her. She heard him out, and answered, 'No.'

'Not for Dinah's sake as well as mine?' pleaded John, who evidently set great store by this scheme of his.

'No,' she said again, but in a way which was scarcely negative.

'It is the very thing,' said John with cheerful emphasis, 'the very thing.' And with those wiles which happy lovers use he pressed his case until at last she yielded.

'May I tell him?'

'I suppose he must know,' she answered with a pleasant confusion.

'I suppose so,' said John, with a look of exultation on his face. 'Will you wait till he returns and take the news to Dinah?'

'Yes' she answered; and he, opening his arms for her, she arose, and stooped and kissed him. The eyes of both were moist with the dew of happiness as they sat and looked at each other, a moment later, hand in hand.

'Do you know, John,' she said after a blissful pause, 'I am almost sorry for that wicked old man, hard as he has been.'

'Old Bushell?' asked John.

'Yes. I should have been earlier here this morning if I had not met him upon the way. Sir Sydney's coachman was very near driving over him upon the road, and he seemed quite helpless. He knew the coachman, and asked if he would drive him home, and said he felt quite unable to walk. Of course I asked him to get into the carriage, but the man and I had to help him. I wanted to leave him there and walk on, but he was evidently so ill that I was afraid to do it. So we took him home and waited until the doctor came. And whilst I waited he told me what he had been out for. I really think he wants to do what seems to be his duty now. It seems only the other day since he was a stout healthy man, and now what a wreck he is! He cried in quite a pitiful way whilst he was talking, and he seemed to cling to me so, because I pitied him and spoke kindly to him. He begged me so hard to go and see him again that I couldn't help promising. I had meant to call again this afternoon, but I must lose no time in carrying back this news to Dinah.'

There she blushed a little, and drooped the hazel eyes into which John looked so proudly and so fondly.

'Yes,' said John, 'he's nearly broken. He's been a terrible old rogue, but he has suffered for it. It was like parting with his soul to lose the money he had held so long.'

'I don't think he can live long, John. I asked him to see a clergyman, but he said No, no. You come an' talk about good things to me. You'll do me more good than a parson. '

'So you will,' said John.

And there again, as happy lovers will, and as they have a right to, they fell to talking of their own affairs. Joe meantime rambled lonely, but not downhearted now, and gave God thanks humbly, and with deep penitence and lofty longings towards the future. In two hours' time he returned to the cottage, and finding Ethel still there would have retired again, but John forbade him, and called him in. Then, Ethel having joined Mrs. Bowker in the kitchen, John summoned his visitor to the seat she had vacated.

'Bushell,' he said, 'congratulate me. I am going to be married.'

'I congratulate you with all my heart,' said Joe; and added, 'When?'

'As soon as I am well enough, and everything can be arranged.' He laughed weakly in his joy and triumph and held out a hand; Joe grasped it, and he continued, 'The one creature dearest in the world to your wife next to you is my wife that is to be.'

'I know as much,' said Joe.

'And Ethel has consented to this haste,' said John, 'on condition that you take our wedding−day as yours.'

Joe bent his head, and bringing up a second hand to the young lawyer's, gripped it hard in both of his without a word.

'That contents you?'

'Yes.'

'Call Ethel,' said John, dropping back upon his pillows with a tired but happy look.

Joe obeyed.

'It is settled, my darling,' said John. 'Ride away and tell Dinah.'

'May I come with you?' asked Joe, blushing like a schoolboy, but looking in her face with candid eyes.

'Come,' answered Ethel brightly, 'and secure her consent yourself.'

Chapter 36.

'Let me go first,' said Ethel, as she and Joe drove up the avenue at Worley Hall together,' and make her ready for you.' And Joe assenting, she left him with Sir Sydney in the library whilst she ran away to find Dinah. 'My darling,' she said, throwing both arms about her friend's neck, 'I have such news for you.' Dinah was not eager to ask the news, but Ethel whispered to her, 'My dear, your husband is here and is waiting to see you. No, don't run away yet. I have something else to tell you.'

She had yielded to John's solicitations, and in her new−found happiness that seemed an easy thing to do. But now she had to recall the fact, never very easy to forget, that she and Dinah's son had once been affianced lovers, and not so long ago. And yet Dinah knew as well as she did how much she was indebted to her new lover; by what singular bonds of pity and gratitude she had found herself tied to him.

'Dinah, I am going to be married.'

'Yes, darlin',' said Dinah; 'to Mr. Keen?'

'Yes. We are going to be married directly he gets well again. And so are you.' Dinah looked helpless at this extraordinary statement, and Ethel explained it. 'My dear, I have seen more of your husband to−day than I ever saw of him before, and I begin to like him and believe in him a little. And now that I know why he has been staying away from you, I esteem his reason for it, hard as it seemed at first.' She told the reason. 'And now, Dinah,' she said gaily, 'your old sweetheart has come a−courting again.' But there the gaiety suddenly broke down, and the two women had a cry together, though they were very tender and joyful tears that fell.

Then in a little while Dinah descended to meet Joe, and waited for him in a small drawing−mom looking on the garden. Ethel went to the library, and having returned with him, fled, and left the two together.

'You know why I have been waiting, Dinah?'

'Yes, Joe.'

'And you will take me back again?'

'Joe! My own husband!'

They embraced and kissed each other, and sat there talking for hours, until Sir Sydney came in and roused them. Then, the evening being fine and bright, they walked in the garden together after dinner, like lovers, with their arms stolen shyly round each other, in dusky walks where none could see them, and at night, with a tender

farewell Joe went away to the town again, but only to return next day and sit and talk the day out alone with Dinah, and wander about the gardens in the evening again with an arm wound lover−like about her waist as they wandered in dusky walks unnoticed. And then again farewell for the night. A singular courtship, but full of a complete forgiveness on the one side and a complete penitence on the other, and bidding fair to lead if ever courtship led yet to a happy union. Sometimes these lovers talked of their unhappy son, and planned for his future, and he was the only blot upon their hopes of happiness.

'Could you bear, my dear,' asked Joe, 'to leave England and go abroad with him and me to some place where our whole story is unknown, where he would have a new chance of amendment?'

'Anywhere with you an' him, Joe,' answered Dinah. 'Anywhere.'

'I'll talk it over with him,' said Joe; '1 think it best. Here the memory of the past may weigh him down and keep him hard and sullen. And perhaps, my dear, between prosperity and our watchfulness and affection he may mend.'

'Don't be too hard upon him, in your mind, Joe,' said Dinah, pleadingly.

'I have no right to be hard in my thoughts on any man,' Joe answered sadly.

'He was never a bad lad,' said poor Dinah, 'till he got into that money−lending lawyer's hands and was tempted beyond his strength.'

'Then we will go abroad together, and try for the best?'

'Yes, dearest. Anywhere with you and him,' said Dinah, and the thing was settled.

So next day Joe sought his son and found him. Dinah's purse had contained no less than fifty pounds, and the young gentleman was once more in clover. He was living in a highly respectable hotel in private rooms, had already set up another suit of clothes, and on his father's unexpected entry to his sitting−room was seated with his heels upon the low chimney−piece with a cigar in his mouth and a sporting paper in his hands. Beholding the newcomer, he arose embarrassed, and murmured something about waiting for instructions, and not knowing what to do without them.

'I am here to give you instructions,' said his father. 'For God's sake, man, go on smoking, and don't try to hide your cigar from me. Your mother and I,' he continued in a changed tone, 'are going to the colonies, where our curious story will be unknown. We think it better that you should accompany us. I have been talking things over with your mother, and I want to treat you kindly and to be your friend. There will he no temptations in the life before you unless you make them. Try to mend, my lad: try to mend your life and your mother's heart together. She has been unhappy in both of us. Let us try together to make atonement. You shall hear no more reproaches as to your past so long as you behave reasonably and give no cause for new offence. And I will try to do my duty by you, and will be as kind and good a father as you will let me be. Will you come with us?'

'Yes, sir,' said young George with bent head.

'What money have you?'

'My mother gave me this,' answered George, producing his purse and spreading its contents upon the table.

'You are not happy here, are you? So near the ?' he paused, and George's head bent lower.

'No, sir. I had rather be elsewhere.'

'Go to Southampton and await us there. When you want money write to me, not to your mother. To attempt to draw one penny from her without my knowledge is to forfeit my protection and your own prospects. And that I hope is my last threat to you. Shake hands. Good−bye. Keep watch upon yourself and try to be a decent fellow henceforward. Good−bye.'

And he was gone.

'I *will* try,' cried the wretched young George, when left alone. 'I will be a decent sort of fellow.'

Joe went back to Dinah and told her all he had said and undertaken, and the quaintly tender courtship went on again. They planned, like common lovers, for their future life, and like common lovers looked forward to their wedding−day. Sometimes they went to see John Keen, and day by day they found him growing stronger. Sir Sydney pressed for the wedding to take place from his house, but Mrs. Donne was too shy to present herself there, and Daniel had no other nurse than her, and seemed likely very soon to be in want of no nurse at all. He had no memory of anything and no knowledge of what went on about him, missed nobody, sank swiftly, swiftly to his final setting, poor old earthly luminary, who had kept hearts warm in his time.

Ethel had redeemed her promise to call upon old George, and at his request had read the Bible to him; the broken and defeated old rascal taking his breakage and defeat for penitence, as other people have done. He was harmless now to everybody, quite a scotched snake, and was gentle and forbearing even with Mrs. Bullus. When John was well enough to get out to him, he called with a draft of the will, and having read it, bethought him of the housekeeper.

'She has been a good servant, Mr. Bushell,' he ventured to say.

'I forgot her. I forgot her,' said old George eagerly. 'Put her down for summat handsome. Fifty pound a year payable from the estate. That's handsome, ain't it, eh? I want to do right by everybody. I'm afraid I've been a hard man in my time, Mr. Keen. I want to straighten everythin' out afore I go. Is theer anythin' else as you can think on, eh?'

John himself was weak yet, and the journey to old George's threw him back a day or two. He lived on at Bowker's cottage, and declared stoutly that he would only leave it to be married, a declaration highly approved of by the coaly William and his wife.

It used to be a curious sight, and not without its pathetic side, to see Ethel and old George together, she reading and he listening, for all the world as if he were a child again.

'Good words; bain't 'em, Miss Donne?' old George would say. 'I wish I'd ha' paid more heed to em' when I was younger.'

He failed and broke so rapidly, and was so conscious of it, that he asked the doctor one day in Ethel's presence

'Now you tell me straight out, and don't you be afeard to speak the truth, because I have made my peace with Them Above, an' I'm ready when my time comes How long do you gi'e me? How many days?

'Come, come,' said the doctor, 'you mustn't talk in this way.'

'But I must talk i' this way,' old George protested. 'How many days?'

'That is in other hands than ours,' said the doctor. 'I can't say.'

'Shall I iver get off o' this here bed again alive?' The doctor was silent. 'That's enough. My dear, I should like to see my nevew Joseph an' his wife, an' mek my peace wi' em, if they'll he that good.'

'They will come, if you desire it, I am sure.'

'Write a note and send a cab with it,' he answered, and almost immediately he fell asleep.

'Is he as near the end as he believes?' asked Ethel.

'I am afraid,' said the doctor, 'that it is but a question of a few hours.'

Ethel wrote the note and sent it away, and in less than two hours the cab returned bearing Joe and Dinah.

'That's them,' cried the old man, who was awakened by the sound of wheels. 'That's my nevew Joseph.'

'Yes,' said. Ethel, looking from the window. 'They are here.'

'She went out to meet them, and prepare them for the change in old George's condition. They entered softly and stood by his bedside.

'Nevew Joseph; said Uncle George, 'you can forgive a dyin' man as asks for your forgiveness?'

'We are all too much in need of one another's mercy,' said Joe gently. 'Whatever wrongs you did me, I forgive.'

'An' you, missis?' said Uncle George looking up at Dinah.

'Oh yes, poor soul, with all my heart,' she said.

'Theer's more than you know on to forgive,' said George feebly. 'You see that theer mahogany chest o' drawers, my dear' addressing Ethel.

'Yes.'

'I' the left−hand little drawer you'll find a bunch o' keys.' She found them. 'The biggest on 'em opens that theer wardrobe.'

'Yes.' She opened it, and stood awaiting him.

'Do you see an old light overcoat a hanging' up?' he demanded huskily from the bed.

'Yes,' she said again.

'Bring it to me.' She brought it, a decayed and mildewed garment of a light fine cloth, lined with a faded watered silk and having a blotched and faded collar of the same.

'It was my nevew Joseph's coat,' he said, reaching out a feeble hand for it. 'I found it 'ears and 'ears after he'd gone away, after you come to me, missis.' Dinah nodded to signify that she understood. 'Theer was a certificate o' your marriage in the linin', an' I found that an' I burned it, God forgi'e me. Yes, I burned it, Joseph. That was my wicked crime.'

'God forgive you for it,' said Joe.

'God forgive you for it as I do; said Dinah.

'That's my last confession,' said old George. He had been speaking with feebler and still feebler breath all through, and now it seemed to fail him. 'You do forgive me? Both of you?'

'With all my heart; said Joe.

'And you too, missis?'

'Poor dyin' fellow−creature, yes; cried Dinah weeping. 'With all my heart.'

'Stay till it's all o'er wi' me,' old George besought Ethel, and she promised.

But there was not long to stay, for almost as she spoke he gave one long, long sigh and never breathed again. There was nobody to grieve greatly at his going, but the women were a good deal moved for the moment. Joe attended the funeral, and John Keen, who was by this time well enough to attend without danger, read the will in the presence of a few witnesses, who all heard it with amazement. Young George was apprised of his fortune and came up from Southampton to see about it. And since I am in something of a hurry to be rid of young George, and have for the most part done with his adventures, I may as well anticipate a little and dismiss him here. In a certain Australian weekly journal I saw a case the other day in which a youngster was reported as having undergone his preliminary trial before the magisterial bench on a charge of forgery. And the magistrate, who behaved apparently with a long−winded dignity and had a good deal of the talking to himself, bore the name of George Bushell. George is highly respected, keeps a carriage and good horses, and is, I am told, likely enough to be married one of these early days. This is a world in which singular awards are sometimes made, and is not governed always on the plan of the fictionist, who has it in his power to bless the good with wealth and happiness and to beat the evil to rescue Marguerite and find a warm corner for Mephistopheles. But the way of the world is ordered otherwise, and it is not only the magnanimous, the gentle, and the good who prosper in it.

And now there rises over Wrethedale town that sun of early summer whose happy lot it is to look on youth and beauty wedded to worth and love. A charming morning, and the birds all wild with mirth. Sir Sydney Cheston rises betimes from his bed in the little hotel, and bedecks himself as gaily as if he were the bridegroom, for it is his to give the bride away, and this being his first experience in that line, and the bride and bridegroom being both special favourites of his, he is anxious to do justice to the part. John Keen s up betimes also in the next room, and Sir Sydney hears him singing, a little crow−like, for John is no great vocalist, but blyther than lark or linnet. Miss Donne and Mrs. Donne are also up betimes, and what with the plaiting of hair and putting on of apparel, and the kissing and crying which ensue at intervals, find their hands full. Joe, sitting in *his* room in the little hotel, can hear John's strident melody, and feels his heart go out to the young fellow, yet can scarce help a touch of sadness to think his own son should have lost the prize, and so well deserved to lose it. But he counts himself, all in all, the most blessed of men, the least deserving and most gently dealt with, and his heart is full. Dinah, in her own little house, makes breakfast ready for old Daniel, and feeds him, and tucks him comfortably in his great armchair, and then goes in to assist at Ethel's decoration she, too, with some sad thoughts amidst all her gladness and her thankfulness.

In due time John goes down to the church alone, and kicks his heels about in the vestry, regarding his hat with some disfavour, and as a blot upon the day. For John's redundant locks had not yet fully grown again, and the hat to its owner's mind looked pinched and small. Sir Sydney had scouted the idea of being married in a wide−awake as altogether heathen and unheard of, and the present article is John's first possession in the conventional stove−pipe form. In a while, quietly and afoot, and with no bridal−veil, comes Ethel on Sir Sydney's arm, her mother following, and Joe and Dinah bringing up the rear.

Joe and Dinah halted at the porch.

'Have you the ring, my darling?' Joe asked, and Dinah slid from her finger the wedding−ring young Joe had placed there so many years before.

They entered the church together and sat down in a dark old−fashioned pew beneath the gallery. A tender rain of tears fell from Dinah's eyes, and Joe sat silent, with bent head. They waited thus for a while, until Dinah stole her hand into his and he stooped and kissed it.

A little later came the sound of footsteps, and a voice was heard

'I require and charge you both, as ye shall answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed '

And as the voice began the two in the dark old−fashioned pew knelt down together. Again the voice:

'Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?' And when the voice had ceased, John Keen answered with a solemn gladness in his tone, 'I will,' and Joe Bushell, kneeling in the darkened pew, whispered 'I will.'

Then came the question to the woman, and Ethel and Dinah answered, each from her place, 'I will.'

The murmured voices came solemnly down the aisle, and found an answer at the end of the old church.

'I take thee to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance, and thereto I plight thee my troth.'

The tears of both fell fast as they knelt in the darkened pew together, and their arms were about each other's necks. The murmured voices sounded fainter down the aisle, and found yet a fainter echo at the end.

'I take thee to my wedded husband,' and so through, with tears and tender embraces, how glad and yet regretful.

The voices sounded fuller in the aisle, and Joe took the old pledge of truth, so ill−fulfilled, and passed it upon Dinah's finger.

'With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, with all my worldly goods I thee endow.'

And so they knelt with tears, and silent kisses and embraces, until the voices ceased, the last footstep died away, and the silence was broken only by their whispers.

'At last! at last!' she said, 'my own true husband. Mine again. Mine! mine!'

'Yes,' he answered from his soul. 'Yours, Dinah. Yours for ever'